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From Chokepoint to Catalyst: The Red Sea Crisis and India's Strategic Maritime Recalibration

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Abstract

The Red Sea crisis, marked by Houthi-led attacks on commercial shipping and heightened geopolitical tensions, has disrupted global maritime trade and exposed critical vulnerabilities in India's external trade and energy supply chains. With nearly 80% of its Europe-bound exports and a substantial portion of its oil imports relying on this corridor, India faces strategic and economic challenges that demand urgent recalibration.

This paper explores how the crisis has impacted India's maritime trade, shipping logistics, and diplomatic engagements. It highlights India's strategic response through naval deployments under Operation Sankalp and its emphasis on the SAGAR doctrine, aimed at ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region. Simultaneously, it assesses the economic fallout on India's exports, MSMEs, and logistics, as well as emerging alternatives like transshipment diversification and participation in corridors such as IMEC.

India's careful diplomatic balancing between West Asian powers and its pursuit of strategic autonomy are also examined in the context of regional cooperation and global maritime norms. The Red Sea crisis, while disruptive, has catalyzed India's strategic evolution—transforming it from a vulnerable trading nation to a proactive maritime actor navigating complex geopolitical waters.

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected global economy, the world's maritime trade routes serve as the arteries of commerce, energy transport, and strategic influence. One of the most geopolitically sensitive among them is the **Red Sea corridor**, which connects the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea through the **Suez Canal**, facilitating over **12% of global maritime trade** (UNCTAD, 2023). In recent years, the Red Sea has become a focal point of escalating tensions, primarily due to the Houthi rebel attacks on commercial shipping, regional power struggles involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Israel, and an increasing militarization of maritime zones. This crisis has had wide-ranging consequences for the global economy—but for India, it presents an especially complex challenge at the intersection of trade, energy, maritime security, and diplomacy.

India's dependence on the Red Sea for trade and energy is deep-rooted and growing. Nearly **80% of India's exports to Europe** pass through this corridor, as does a significant portion of its oil imports from the Middle East (VIF, 2024). The **Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**, a narrow chokepoint at the southern end of the Red Sea, is particularly crucial and equally vulnerable. Recent incidents, including missile and drone attacks on commercial vessels, have triggered a surge in shipping insurance premiums and forced many ships to reroute via the **Cape of Good Hope**, adding up to three weeks of transit time and exponentially higher costs (Economic Times, 2024). For India—heavily reliant on time-sensitive exports like pharmaceuticals, textiles, and petrochemicals—these delays directly strain businesses, disrupt supply chains, and challenge trade competitiveness, especially for **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** already operating with thin profit margins (Financial Express, 2024).

In response, India has taken a robust strategic stance. Since 2019, under **Operation Sankalp**, the **Indian Navy** has deployed warships to escort merchant vessels through volatile maritime regions including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (Indian Navy, 2023). These efforts are reinforced by aerial surveillance using **P-8I aircraft**, enhancing India's real-time maritime domain awareness (MDA). This military preparedness aligns with India's broader **SAGAR doctrine** (Security and Growth for All in the Region), through which the country positions itself as a "net security provider" in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** (MEA, 2020). The Indian Navy's presence in this critical corridor signals New Delhi's commitment to maritime stability—not just to protect its own commercial interests, but to contribute to global shipping security.

Diplomatically, the Red Sea crisis places India in a uniquely delicate position. On one side, India enjoys strong partnerships with **Saudi Arabia**, the **United Arab Emirates**, and **Egypt**—all key stakeholders in Red Sea security. On the other, India has maintained historically cordial ties with **Iran**, whose political and logistical backing of the Houthi rebels adds a layer of complexity to the crisis. India's careful navigation of this geopolitical terrain—balancing neutrality, sovereignty, and strategic interest—has been evident in its non-aligned stance at multilateral forums, including the **United Nations**, while quietly strengthening regional dialogues through defense and maritime diplomacy (ORF, 2024). This measured response highlights India's intent to act as a stabilizing force without becoming entangled in ideological or bloc-based conflicts.

The human dimension of the crisis is also significant. India is one of the largest providers of maritime labor, with over **200,000 Indian nationals** employed as merchant seafarers globally (DG Shipping, 2023). The threat to their safety has prompted advisories from the **Ministry of External Affairs**, coordinated naval patrols, and growing calls for more robust legal and financial protection mechanisms. These disruptions emphasize the broader vulnerabilities in India's maritime ecosystem, where infrastructure and policy need to catch up with geopolitical realities.

Economically, the crisis has exposed critical fault lines in India's supply chain management. Data from August 2024 show that **India's overall merchandise exports contracted by 9.3%**, with **petroleum product exports** alone dropping by over 37% due to shipping disruptions (ET, 2024). This downturn reflects the broader consequences of India's over-dependence on a single maritime route. As a result, Indian exporters are now increasingly looking at **alternate transshipment hubs** like **Colombo**, **Jebel Ali**, and even strengthening internal logistics routes through ports like **Mundra** and **Chennai**. These shifts represent not just reactive contingency planning, but also an inflection point for long-term trade strategy.

Literature Review

The Red Sea's growing strategic significance has received increased scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in the context of maritime chokepoints and geopolitical rivalries. Scholars such as Notteboom, Haralambides, and Cullinane (2024) have analyzed the Red Sea crisis within the broader framework of global shipping and logistics networks, identifying how conflicts around critical maritime passages like the Bab-el-Mandeb and Suez Canal reverberate across global value chains. Their study in *Maritime Economics & Logistics* highlights that rerouting ships due to the Red Sea conflict has not only increased operational costs but also restructured global maritime schedules, stressing the urgency for alternative trade routes and resilient port infrastructure.

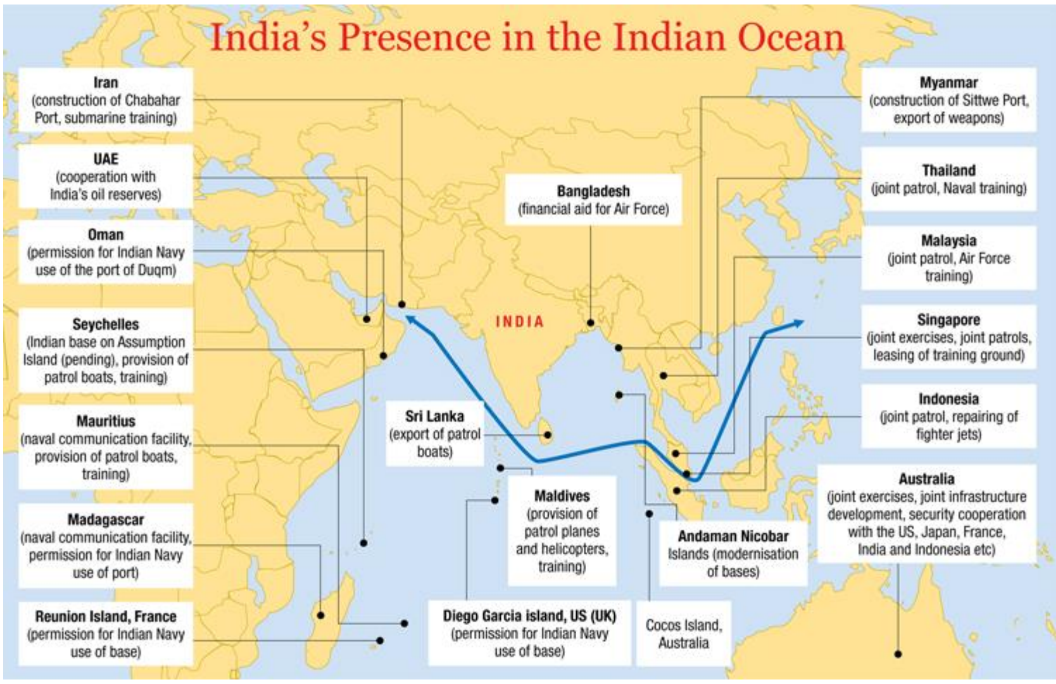
In the Indian context, literature on maritime security has emphasized India's evolving doctrine as a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean Region. Kumar and Raghavan (2023) explore India's Indo-Pacific strategy, outlining how naval deployments under frameworks like SAGAR reflect both power projection and regional cooperation. They note that India's role has shifted from defensive patrolling to proactive multilateral coordination, especially under Operation Sankalp and its increasing engagement with entities like the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). This aligns with the arguments of Sarkar, Gupta, and Jagtap (2025), who employ transport geography models to evaluate the trade vulnerabilities faced by India due to regional maritime disruptions.

From an economic standpoint, Mahajan and Dubey (2024) offer a simulation-based analysis of trade shocks, applying inoperability input-output modeling to Indian export sectors affected by the Red Sea crisis. Their findings in the *Journal of Asian Economics* underscore the asymmetric impact on MSMEs, especially those engaged in time-sensitive exports like pharmaceuticals and textiles. Their work is supported by earlier infrastructure modeling frameworks proposed by Haimes and Santos (2004), who argue that maritime interdependencies require preemptive policy buffers rather than reactive logistical measures.

In the policy sphere, think tanks like the Observer Research Foundation (Bhandari, 2024) and Vivekananda International Foundation (Bisen, 2024) have emphasized the need for strategic diversification, both in energy routes and maritime partnerships. These reports argue for deeper regional connectivity via initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), which are viewed as long-term correctives to India's overdependence on chokepoints like the Red Sea. Meanwhile, commentary from international institutions such as the OECD (Merk & Teodoro, 2024) and the World Bank (Bogetić & Zhao, 2024) draws attention to the cascading macroeconomic effects of shipping disruptions on emerging economies like India, suggesting stronger global cooperation frameworks.

Despite this growing body of work, there remains a research gap in assessing how India's maritime strategy and domestic logistics policies are evolving in tandem. Much of the current literature either focuses on naval doctrines or trade disruption separately, without integrating them within a holistic national security and economic resilience framework. This article seeks to address that gap by analyzing India’s multifaceted response—strategic, economic, and diplomatic—to the Red Sea crisis as a case study in integrated maritime governance.

India’s Strategic Response and Maritime Diplomacy Amid the Red Sea Crisis



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The ongoing instability in the Red Sea—exacerbated by Houthi rebel attacks on commercial vessels—has compelled India to adopt a robust maritime and diplomatic strategy to safeguard its economic and geopolitical interests. Central to India’s maritime response is Operation Sankalp, initiated by the Indian Navy in June 2019, to ensure the safe passage of Indian-flagged merchant vessels through vulnerable sea lanes such as the Gulf of Aden, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Since the escalation of the crisis in late 2023, India has intensified its presence by dep loying frontline warships like INS Kolkata and INS Chennai, alongside P-8I Poseidon surveillance aircraft, to escort commercial convoys and deter hostile threats (Indian Navy Annual Report, 2023).

India’s proactive maritime stance aligns with its SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region), introduced in 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. SAGAR envisions India as a “net security provider” in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and embodies its commitment to collective maritime security, regional cooperation, and capacity-building. Through persistent naval patrols, enhanced maritime domain awareness, and hydrographic assistance to littoral states, India has strengthened its strategic footprint across chokepoints like the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal (Vivekananda International Foundation, 2024). The Indian Navy’s increased coordination with multilateral mechanisms such as the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in Bahrain underscores its resolve to work with like-minded nations while retaining strategic independence. These joint initiatives serve both as a deterrent to non-state maritime threats and as a reaffirmation of India’s dedication to preserving freedom of navigation in international waters (VIF Strategic Report, 2024).

However, India's strategic approach extends beyond naval deployments. It reflects a carefully calibrated alignment of military readiness with diplomatic restraint, avoiding entanglement in great power rivalries or regional conflicts. India has eschewed participation in Western-led military coalitions in the Red Sea while simultaneously ramping up its independent naval presence—highlighting its preference for strategic autonomy within a rules-based maritime order (Firstpost, 2024).

Diplomatically, India has adopted a balancing strategy with key regional players on both shores of the Red Sea—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Djibouti, and Iran—all of whom are vital to India's energy security and trade connectivity. India has managed to maintain cordial ties with Iran, particularly through continued investment in the Chabahar Port and regional connectivity to Central Asia, despite growing international tensions. Simultaneously, its engagements with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have intensified, driven by shared energy interests and security cooperation. During the height of maritime disruptions, India leveraged these ties to ensure minimal impact on energy shipments and to coordinate regional responses (The Hindu, 2024).

India has also taken a multilateral diplomatic route, advocating for freedom of navigation, adherence to international maritime law, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. At the United Nations, India refrained from assigning blame while reinforcing the need for maritime stability, aligning with broader international concerns. Its active participation in the UN Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) reflects its preference for institutional engagement over unilateral or coercive measures (IDSA Policy Brief, 2024).

This dual-track strategy—combining maritime assertiveness with multilateral diplomacy—underscores India's evolving role as a responsible regional maritime power and a voice for the Global South. By maintaining neutrality in volatile power dynamics and promoting cooperative security measures, India has ensured the safety of its commercial fleet and diaspora, protected vital energy routes, and reinforced its identity as a non-aligned yet assertive actor in the Indian Ocean Region.

Economic Impact on India

The Red Sea crisis has introduced serious volatility into India's economic ecosystem, primarily due to its deep reliance on maritime trade for both imports and exports. The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal form critical segments of India's supply chain connectivity to Europe, Africa, and parts of West Asia. As the world's **third-largest oil importer** and a growing export-driven economy, India has witnessed direct repercussions in the form of inflated shipping costs, trade delays, declining exports, and pressure on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Oil Imports and Energy Security

India imports more than 85% of its crude oil, much of it from West Asia. The Red Sea serves as a key transit route for these imports. Following the escalation in attacks on vessels by the Houthi rebels and increased war-risk surcharges, Indian refiners were forced to reroute shipments around the **Cape of Good Hope**, adding 14–20 days to delivery schedules. According to **Reuters (2024)**, India's oil imports surged to **5.2 million barrels per day in January 2024**, partially due to backlog and rescheduled cargoes delayed by Red Sea disruptions.

Freight costs for oil tankers from the Gulf to India rose by **35–40%**, and marine war-risk insurance premiums increased by 15–20% during peak crisis months. Fertilizer imports also faced shipment delays and elevated freight rates, especially for urea and potash consignments from Gulf countries and Egypt. **CRISIL (2024)** notes that the net landed cost of fertilizer imports rose by **₹400–₹600 per metric tonne** in early 2024 due to shipping uncertainties and detours.

Freight Delays, Rerouting, and Insurance Hikes

A critical outcome of the Red Sea instability has been the rerouting of container ships via the Cape of God Hope. This longer route added not only shipping time but also fuel and labor costs. Data compiled by **GTRI (Global Trade Research Initiative)** and **CRISIL** reflects how freight charges surged dramatically in Q1 of 2024.

Table 1: Logistics and Insurance Indicators – India–Europe Routes (Jan–Feb 2024)

Indicator	Pre-Crisis (Nov 2023)	During Crisis (Feb 2024)	% Change
Shipping Time (India to EU)	18–20 days	35–40 days	+80–100%
Average Freight Cost (per 40-ft box)	$500–$600	$3,000–$4,000	+500–600%
Marine Insurance Premiums (avg)	Standard rate	+15–20% war-risk surcharge	New cost factor

Source: CRISIL Research; GTRI Trade Bulletin (Feb 2024)

Major shipping lines like Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd temporarily suspended Red Sea transits, and the increased load on southern routes also created backlogs at ports like Colombo and Jebel Ali, indirectly impacting India's east and west coast container flows.

Export Contraction and Sectoral Impact

The Ministry of Commerce reported that India's **merchandise exports contracted by 9.3% in August 2024**, reflecting disruptions across oil, chemical, and manufacturing segments. The **petroleum product export** category declined by **37.6%** YoY—an indication of both falling demand and logistical bottlenecks ([Economic Times, 2024]; [Ministry of Commerce, Monthly Trade Report, Aug 2024]).

Table 2: India's Export Performance Snapshot (August 2024)

Category	**August 2023**	**August 2024**	**YoY % Change**
Total Exports	$38.27 billion	$34.7 billion	–9.3%
Petroleum Products	$9.54 billion	$5.95 billion	–37.6%
Trade Deficit	$21.0 billion	$29.65 billion	Widened
Share via Red Sea Routes	~40% of exports	Majorly impacted	Disrupted

Source: Ministry of Commerce, DGFT; Economic Times Trade Review (Sep 2024)

Notably, the steep decline in petroleum exports is directly attributable to delayed shipments and higher shipping costs in Red Sea-bound routes. Pharmaceutical and textile sectors also reported delays of up to 3 weeks in deliveries to European clients, leading to buyer cancellations and contract penalties.

Impact on MSMEs and Small Exporters

Among the worst hit by these disruptions are India's MSMEs, which account for **approximately 45% of India's exports**. Smaller exporters are more sensitive to increases in freight charges, warehousing delays, and payment lags. A joint survey conducted by **FIEO (Federation of Indian Export Organisations)** and

CRISIL SME Ratings in February 2024 found that **58% of small exporters** reported revenue loss directly attributable to shipment rerouting and buyer contract renegotiations.

Table 3: Impact on MSMEs (Survey Data, Feb 2024)

Parameter	% Affected MSMEs
Experienced higher freight cost	78%
Shipment delays > 2 weeks	64%
Lost or renegotiated contracts	42%
Facing working capital stress	55%
Considering switching to air freight	18%

Source: CRISIL SME Monitor; FIEO Quarterly Exporter Sentiment Survey (Q1 2024)

The rising burden on working capital has led to reduced order volumes, increased reliance on trade credit, and in some cases, layoffs in export-focused SMEs—particularly in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal.

Emerging Alternatives and Strategic Adjustments

As the Red Sea crisis continues to disrupt global maritime trade, India has begun undertaking a strategic recalibration of its supply chains and maritime dependencies. The protracted nature of attacks on commercial vessels and increased naval activity near chokepoints such as the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait has compelled India to examine both short-term adjustments and long-term structural alternatives to safeguard trade flows, energy security, and economic growth. The result is a multi-pronged response involving a shift to alternate transshipment hubs, energy route diversification, investment in domestic port infrastructure, and deeper engagement with regional connectivity initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC).

Alternate Ports & Transshipment Strategy

In the immediate term, India has increasingly leaned on alternate transshipment hubs such as Colombo in Sri Lanka, Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates, and key Indian ports including Mundra, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), and Vizhinjam. The crisis exposed India’s vulnerability due to over-reliance on Suez-bound traffic, prompting exporters and logistics firms to reroute volumes through these relatively safer corridors. The Colombo Port—just 31 nautical miles from India's southern coast—recorded an 18% increase in Indian container throughput in Q1 2024, compared to the previous quarter, according to the Shipping Ministry. Likewise, Jebel Ali Port, known for its advanced connectivity and logistics infrastructure, has emerged as a key node for Indian shipments destined for Europe and North Africa.

Simultaneously, Indian ports are scaling up infrastructure to reduce dependency on foreign transshipment hubs. Mundra Port, India’s largest privately operated port, is undergoing berth expansions and improved hinterland connectivity. The newly constructed Vizhinjam International Seaport in Kerala is being positioned as a future container transshipment hub capable of handling mega vessels, potentially lessening the need for Indian cargo to route through ports like Colombo or Singapore. JNPT in Navi Mumbai is investing in digitized logistics, customs automation, and freight corridor linkages to minimize dwell time. These moves reflect a broader strategy to "re-shore" logistics operations and build domestic redundancy against external geopolitical shocks (NITI Aayog Logistics Performance Report, 2024).

Energy Diversification Measures

Beyond port realignment, India is actively pursuing energy route diversification as a national security imperative. With over 60% of India's oil imports previously traversing the Red Sea and Suez Canal, the current crisis exposed risks to pricing and delivery schedules. In response, India has begun diversifying its crude sourcing—importing more from the Americas, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. Trade data indicates that crude oil imports from Brazil and the U.S. increased by over 30% between December 2023 and February 2024, driven by rerouting and Middle East shipment delays (Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, 2024). Although these routes involve longer delivery times, they mitigate strategic overdependence on any one region. Parallelly, India is investing in expanding its strategic petroleum reserves in Padur and Mangalore to insulate against future supply disruptions.

India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

Source: Bradley Arant Boult Cummings

To complement these shifts, India has scaled up participation in regional and intercontinental connectivity initiatives, most notably the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Launched at the G20 Summit in 2023, IMEC envisions a multi-modal corridor linking Mumbai to Europe via the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. Combining rail freight, port upgrades, and digital connectivity, IMEC offers a credible long-term alternative to the Suez-dominated maritime path. For India, this initiative promises faster, more secure access to European markets while aligning with like-minded partners amid global supply chain realignment (G20 Delhi Declaration, 2023).

One of IMEC's defining strengths is its land-sea integration model. Freight originating from Indian ports would be offloaded in the UAE, move by rail through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Israeli ports like Haifa, and then reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. This structure is expected to reduce transit times by up to eight days compared to the Suez route and cut logistical costs by 30–40%, depending on cargo type (Observer Research Foundation, 2024). The initiative also resonates with India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision by deepening its footprint across maritime and continental trade networks.

Private Sector Adaptation & Policy Frameworks

Alongside state-led initiatives, India's private sector has demonstrated notable adaptability. Logistics startups have introduced real-time cargo tracking, route optimization software, and flexible insurance solutions tailored for high-risk maritime zones. Insurance companies have collaborated with the Directorate General of Shipping to develop seafarer protection packages and specialized war-risk coverage for vessels operating in conflict-prone waters. These innovations reflect a growing ecosystem of maritime resilience and risk intelligence within India's trade architecture (CRISIL Maritime Sector Review, 2024).
At the policy level, targeted government schemes and institutional reforms are being expedited. The Sagarmala Programme—India's flagship port modernization strategy—has been fast-tracked to cover more coastal economic zones and support multimodal transport integration. The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan is also being operationalized to harmonize infrastructure development, logistics planning, and digital tracking across ministries. Together, these frameworks aim to make India's logistics and port infrastructure more shock-resistant and future-ready in the face of regional disruptions like the Red Sea crisis.

Lessons and Policy Recommendations

The Red Sea crisis has served as a geopolitical stress test for India's maritime security, trade resilience, and economic preparedness. While India's tactical responses were swift—deploying naval assets, issuing diplomatic advisories, and engaging with key allies—the crisis has also revealed deep structural dependencies and policy gaps. In a world where maritime threats can disrupt billions in trade within days, India must now translate its reactive successes into long-term systemic strategies. Key policy lessons revolve around strengthening logistics flexibility, expanding maritime security frameworks, regional diplomacy, and targeted economic support for the most vulnerable.
The foremost lesson has been the importance of **resilient and diversified supply chains**. The crisis exposed the fragility of over-reliance on the Red Sea–Suez Canal corridor, through which nearly 40% of India's Europe-bound cargo flows. Diversification must go beyond alternative ports; it must also include multimodal inland corridors, flexible warehousing capacity, and digital logistics platforms to enable rerouting in real time. India's **PM Gati Shakti Master Plan**, which integrates road, rail, port, and air logistics under a digital dashboard, should prioritize trade-critical nodes like Mundra, Chennai, and Vizhinjam for redundancy planning (NITI Aayog Logistics Vision 2024). Additionally, greater investment in inland waterways and dry ports can ensure that maritime shocks don't cripple entire export ecosystems.
A second strategic priority is the **expansion of India's naval presence and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** architecture. While Operation Sankalp ensured tactical security in high-risk zones, the broader challenge lies in persistent surveillance and early warning capabilities across the Indian Ocean. India's MDA framework, built on platforms like the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), should be enhanced with real-time satellite feeds, AI-based vessel tracking, and integration with regional coast guard networks (Ministry of Defence Annual Report, 2023). Moreover, the Navy's strategic footprint must extend deeper into the Western Indian Ocean through more bilateral access agreements with ports in Djibouti, Oman, and Mauritius. These would allow for quicker refueling, maintenance, and rotational deployments during crises.
India must also deepen **strategic cooperation with its Indo-Pacific and West Asian partners**. The crisis illustrated the limitations of working in isolation. The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a US-led multilateral naval coalition operating in the Red Sea, could serve as a model for future coordination—

even if India participates in such frameworks selectively. India's existing logistics support agreements with **France, Singapore, and Australia** could be expanded to include **Saudi Arabia, UAE**, and **Egypt**, enabling greater synergy between naval operations and regional diplomacy. On the diplomatic front, India can also consider reviving its proposal for a **Maritime Security Architecture for the Indian Ocean Region (MSA-IOR)** through forums like IORA or BIMSTEC, which can act as a collective response platform for piracy, blockades, and other non-traditional threats (ORF Maritime Strategy Report, 2024).
As previously discussed, MSMEs—constituting 45% of exports—bore the brunt of freight cost hikes and shipment delays. Addressing their liquidity and risk exposure is central to any long-term resilience planFirst, the government should expand schemes like **Interest Equalisation on Pre- and Post-Shipment Credit**, with higher coverage for MSMEs exposed to volatile routes like the Red Sea. Second, India's **Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC)** should enhance its credit insurance products to cover delays and contract breaches caused by geopolitical disruptions. This will help smaller firms negotiate better payment terms with foreign buyers and remain competitive despite rising freight and insurance costs (Ministry of Commerce Export Strategy Review, 2024).
Importantly, the crisis also highlighted the need for **domestic capacity building**. More than 60% of Indian ports still rely on manual processing for customs, which increases vulnerability during rerouting or crisis-time operations. Therefore, port digitalization—already underway in JNPT and Mundra—must be extended to mid-tier ports in the east and south coasts. The **Digital Port Ecosystem (DPE)**, if scaled effectively, can automate documentation, reduce corruption, and ensure transparency in crisis response scenarios.
Ultimately, the Red Sea crisis must be seen not only as a disruption but also as a catalyst. For India, it presents an opportunity to cement its identity as a maritime power with strategic autonomy. Building resilience will require a shift from tactical firefighting to structural foresight—ensuring that India's global ambitions are backed by secure, diversified, and shock-resistant trade corridors.

Conclusion

The Red Sea crisis has emerged as a powerful reminder of the vulnerabilities embedded within the global maritime trade system and the pressing need for nations like India to recalibrate their strategic and economic posture. As a rapidly growing economy with deep stakes in the Indo-Pacific and West Asian corridors, India's experience of this crisis has highlighted the multidimensional challenges of ensuring secure trade flows, safeguarding seafarers, and maintaining regional influence without compromising strategic autonomy.
India's response—ranging from naval deployments under Operation Sankalp to the pursuit of alternative transshipment hubs and energy corridors—reflects an evolving maritime maturity. The integration of doctrinal frameworks like SAGAR with diplomatic engagement and multilateral cooperation underscores India's intent to be a stabilizing force in a turbulent region. At the same time, the economic impact on exports, freight, and particularly MSMEs has revealed the need for more robust institutional support, ranging from credit insurance to port infrastructure digitalization.
Moving forward, India must treat the Red Sea crisis not as an isolated disruption but as a structural inflection point. Strategic diversification of trade routes, expanded maritime domain awareness, and deeper regional partnerships will be critical. Equally, the support ecosystem for small exporters must be strengthened to enhance resilience against future shocks. If these lessons are institutionalized, India can

emerge from this crisis not just more secure, but better positioned as a global maritime power and an indispensable actor in regional stability and economic connectivity.

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