

1. Needed S Cohesive Indo-Pacific Framework

Context:

- Last year at the IISS Shangri-La dialogue, Prime Minister outlined India's conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific as a geographic continuum stretching from the east coast of Africa to the shores of America.
- India's definition includes the western Indian Ocean, while the US perceives the Indo-Pacific as a containment strategy region extending from the shores of America to the west coast of India.

Why Indo-pacific Framework should include western Indian Ocean?

- Substantial volumes of maritime trade and shipping lanes pass-through the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR). Strategic choke points **like the Strait of Hormuz** act as a conduit for oil markets in the Middle East to Asia, Europe, and North America.
- It is estimated that **around one-fifth of the world's oil is shipped through the Strait of Hormuz**. The recent tensions in the Strait have the potential to significantly undermine global energy security.
- Given its arterial role in the global oil and natural gas trade, **the Exclusion of that Region** from the Indo-Pacific geopolitical construct could **compromise the objective of ensuring free and open sea lines of Communication**.
- Besides energy security, **Middle Eastern states** like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar **are home to Indian Diaspora – with significant political, economic, and Strategic Interest**.
- Therefore, India, which aims to play a leading role in global affairs, couldn't afford to discount the Middle East/West Asia from the Indo-Pacific strategic calculus.
- For the US, the extension of the Indo-Pacific framework to the region could help arrest its waning influence in the Middle East.

China's Inroads into Africa:

- East African littoral states have acquired salience in the global matrix; **Africa is poised to be the Next Growth Frontier**. China replaced the US as Africa's largest trading partner in 2009, which currently stands at more than \$200 billion.
- Militarily, China has constructed a naval base in Djibouti overlooking the Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb – the fourth most important choke-point for oil and Natural Gas.

- **The Horn of Africa – usually the epicentre of protracted armed conflicts** – is increasingly becoming the ground for assertion by Middle Eastern states. Any spill over of Middle Eastern rivalry could lead to slippage in political stability of the Horn of African states.
- This could affect the shipping routes along the Red Sea coast and the Gulf of Aden. Therefore, the application of rule of law under the aegis of the Indo-Pacific framework is quintessential for the region. These analyses argue for the extension of the Indo-Pacific framework to the Western Indian Ocean Region.

An Issue of Concern:

- The current US Indo-Pacific Command (USIPACOM) excludes Western Indian Ocean littorals like Pakistan from its sphere of influence, a concerning issue to India.
- Similarly, the exiting from the P5 nuclear deal by the Trump administration has not only affected India's energy security but also its pet project, **the Chabahar Port, the location of which serves as a gateway to Afghanistan and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which could significantly contribute to the advancement of the Indo-Pacific Framework.**

Way Forward:

- The possibility of the US, Australia, and France joining the **Indo-Japan-Asia-Africa Growth Corridor** could be contemplated.
- It has the potential to provide robust material and normative foundation to the Indo-Pacific framework, ensuring security and growth for all in the region.
- It is pertinent to note that sustained economic growth over two decades and investment in weapon systems have facilitated India's ascendance in the hierarchy of international politics, bestowing upon it substantial capability to diffuse its own idea in the strategic space.
- This necessitates a need for a coherent Indo-Pacific framework to harmonise the competing conceptualisations.