

India's Strategy for Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Protecting the Seas

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Abstract:

India views the Indian Ocean as more than simply a body of water; it is a vital entry point. The Indian Ocean is the third-largest of the world's oceans, covering an area of 68.56 million square meters and accounting for 20 percent of the planet's surface. India's maritime security region has relied heavily on the Indian Ocean for centuries. For two reasons, maritime security has become more vital in modern times; first, 90% of India's foreign commerce is transported by water; second, India's national security is increasingly dependent on maritime protection because of the liberal international economic system of globalization. In recent years, naval and military activities have focused on controlling and managing sea lines of communication. As a result of the Mumbai Terror Attack in 2008 and the growing Blue Water Navy of China in India's neighbourhood, our maritime security and administration over the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) need a complete evaluation and reflection of our national security strategy. A small effort is being made in this article to study and evaluate India's maritime security strategy and its diplomatic aspects to revamp India's more comprehensive national security and safeguard its seaborne commerce and economic operations.

Key Words: Maritime policy, Marine Security, National Security, Sea strength.

Introduction:

The broader notion of national security is where the idea of marine security began. As a result, the concept of national security is highly influenced by the state's activities and the many realms of their security, physical and intangible. Even though security has been described in various ways, the two definitions supplied by the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs and Barry Buzan are universally accepted as the most accurate explanations of security. Let's get into further depth about them ^[1].

For a country to be considered secure, the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs says, "it must be certain that it is free to pursue its growth and advancement without fear of military invasion, political pressures, or economic coercion." Defending one's own identification and operational integrity in the face of what one perceives as hostile change is central to Barry Buzan's definition of "security." According to the criteria above, the bottom line of security is survival, existence, and statism. Surviving in the face of external challenges to a state's independence necessitates a high priority on state security ^[2].

The notion of national security has dominated the philosophical vocabulary of international relations and the affairs of States in the modern era because of the quest for freedom and existence in the face of threats from the outside. The significance of national security has

become even greater and more complicated due to globalization and the openness of international commerce. In light of the globalization of commerce and transnational threats to nations, the current topic of maritime security must be seen in the context of national security^[3]. To appreciate the intertwined nature of maritime security and national security, it is necessary to examine India's maritime policy in light of future sea threats. Several factors contribute to the importance of maritime security in India's overall national security framework, including its origin and ideology.

Marine Security:

It's a term that refers to challenges related to the seas or oceans that significantly impact a country's security. Its scope is so vast that any activities taking place in the sea comes within the perspective of maritime security. However, it covers a wide range of activities, including seaborne commerce. It encompasses all activities and trade-ins around water and its resources, including managing marine and non-marine life, establishing maritime borders, and deploying armed forces to keep the seas safe^[4].

What are the dangers to the Maritime environment? In recent years, maritime security risks have taken on a new and demanding form, partly due to a rise in sea-related activities, both disruptive and progressive. Growth in commercial activity across the seas has led to a dramatic increase in the importance and reliability of Sea Lines of Communication as a means of communication. Indeed, the seas have long served as a significant conduit for exchanging ideas, syncretised philosophy, and commerce in commodities and services. Still, with contemporary state systems based on the Westphalian model, the seas have become more of a means of communication, reducing global commercial and economic activity to a single force that necessitates a more significant focus on maritime security^[5]. Additionally, from a disruptive perspective of piracy, sea crimes, non-state actors' asymmetric threats, poaching, resource security, and environmental threats, as well as the Mumbai terror attack in 2008, the states have been forced to place maritime security at the top of their national security agendas because of the rising threat of terrorism through the seas^[6].

As a result, national security along the coasts is no less at risk from a strategic standpoint. Some countries' development of advanced blue water navies and strategic competition to control and administer sea lines of communication have alarmed others, prompting them to follow suit and develop a formidable maritime security strategy to secure the seas and protect the state's core national interests^[7].

Literature Overview:

In 2015, India developed a marine security policy termed "Ensuring Secure Seas" because of the inescapable relevance of maritime security on all fronts, from commerce to terrorism^[8]. Securing the Indian Ocean from both state and non-state actors is a top priority, and the country's blue sea Navy helps it preserve its maritime supremacy in the area. However, there is a lot of discussion about the construction of blue water fleets to safeguard the seas regarding nautical challenges surrounding maritime security. Many regard this as a defence against sabotage. In contrast, others see it as a defence against unlawful activities like terrorism and illegal activities like piracy and trafficking. In contrast, still, others see it as a defence of territorial waters and sea lanes. Even though India has developed an inclusive and holistic approach to meet its maritime security issues, a comprehensive analysis of maritime

security in three criteria like general maritime strategy, India's maritime strategy, and the Indian Ocean Region and India would help to develop a larger perspective on India's maritime security strategy and the significance of Indian Ocean within it.

'His Sea power strategy' is commonly alluded to by governments when developing foreign policy, and Alfred Thayer Mahan is regarded as the founder of strategic maritime assessment. Regarding foreign policy, Mahan believes that "maritime strategy is crucial in both times of war and peace and should be regarded significant by persons engaged in the development of foreign policy since it increases a nation's total sea strength"^[9].

According to Mahan's^[10] book "The Influence of Sea power on History 1660-1783," Sea power has affected European and American history. It is proof of the economic endeavour of a nation along the sea routes of communication^[11]. The six inherent characteristics of a country, according to Mahan, are "to strengthen and expand its dominance and control over the seas both negatively and positively: geographical position, physical conformation, the extent of territory, 'number of inhabitants, character of the people, and character of the government.'" The Indian navy and foreign policy specialists cite the Mahan maritime security theory extensively. While Mahan's contribution to the Seapower strategy is unparalleled, retired lieutenant Ben Armstrong's study sheds light on modern sea power plans. For example, "strategic military strategies have to be aligned with the political and economic reality of the country, while also deploying the nation's fleet in peacetime with attention given to the necessity of war strategy. As Benjamin Armstrong noted, a nation's Navy is the most critical aspect in today's globalized economy that relies heavily on seaborne commerce."^[12]

The founder of naval strategic theory, Sir Julian Corbett, has gone even further in asserting victory from the sea in opposition to Mahan's claim that a naval battle can only be won on land. While agreeing with Mahan on numerous points, Corbett maintains that a "nation's grand strategy cannot be looked at from naval operation alone; the state should carefully establish what role the fleet will play regarding the army since victory cannot be determined by naval action alone."^[13]

A wide range of books and articles on India's maritime policy emphasizes the relevance of the Indian Ocean to India's national security. A special note should be made of the works of Commander Sibapada Rath. The rapid globalization at the end of the 20th century explains India's pursuit of naval expansion. In contrast, the growth of India's overseas trade and the increasing globalization of their markets warrant an increase in maritime trade defense, according to Commander Rath, a staunch supporter of the Mahanian thesis. It was suggested that India's naval modernization was an inevitable by-product of peaceful maritime trade^[14].

On the other hand, Mohan Raja C (2012)^[15] advocates for India's naval expansion in his *Samudra Manthan* by saying, "if India wants to become a vital actor in world peace and security, it must possess the desire and capacity to participate on a global scale." Indian navy modernization is a significant concern for C.Rajamohan, as China's maritime influence increases in the Indian Ocean region. In his book *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (2010), Robert Kaplan^[16] claims that the Indian Ocean includes significant oil shipping routes and major navigational chokepoints for international trade –

the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, Hormuz, and Malacca. Indian Ocean commerce accounts for 40% of seaborne trade and 50% of the world's commercial fleet capacity," he adds ^[17].

Indian naval strategy in the Indian Ocean is a counter-strategy to Chinese policy in Asia, according to Admiral Menon. He says that China would not be able to dominate the Indian Ocean as it did in the South China Sea due to India's naval readiness. According to Holmes and Yoshihara, India's primary maritime interest is to ensure national security, which is not limited to just protecting the coastline and the Island territories, but also safeguarding our interests in the (exclusive economic zones) as well as protecting our trade, which is conducive to the rapid economic growth of the country' Bimal Patel, Aruna Kumar Malik, and Willaim Nunes argued in 2017 that the Indian Ocean is a hotspot of conflict by major Asian nations to dominate the String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean. Look East Policy, renamed Act East, refers to China's plan to control and dominate the Indian Ocean marine lines of communication. It is an effort to enhance ASEAN and SAARC ties to establish an Indo-centric security policy for the Indian Ocean littoral nations. To simplify international commerce and strengthen the country's security from numerous threats, Sugandha 2008 emphasized the need to ensure maritime border security ^[18].

It was possible to get a more comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical rivalry in the Indian Ocean and the growth of the competing countries' maritime strategies by looking at the available literature. Geopolitics and Indian maritime security strategy will be examined in this article to comprehend better and analyze Indian maritime security policy, which is aimed at counterbalancing China's maritime presence in the area.

The Indian Ocean's Geopolitics:

As the third-largest body of water in the world, it is the Indian Ocean. One-third of the world's inhabitants live in the ocean, which borders 36 coastal nations and 14 neighboring hinterland states and has a population of 2.5 billion people. In addition to its immense expanse and large population, the ocean has served as an essential system of sea lanes for international commerce. 80% of the world's seaborne commerce travels through this area. The Strait of Hormuz, Malacca, and Bab el Mandeb are significant maritime chokepoints in the Ocean. Even in geopolitics, the Indian Ocean is important since it serves as a focal point in a much larger region of the Indian Ocean (IOR). Although the area is rich in natural resources, it has also been the source of much of the world's poverty and conflict. The Indian Ocean region is home to 11 of the world's 20 most unstable nations, according to the 2011 Failed State Index. Poverty, inadequate infrastructure, human trafficking, and terrorism are prevalent in the area. Smuggling and piracy on the high seas have brought the area to the world's attention in recent decades ^[19]. The engagement and interaction of various regional organizations such as the G-20, G-77, ASEAN, SAARC, and the Arab League are other critical factors that have elevated the IOR to global prominence. A strategic struggle in the IOR has arisen due to China's expanding interests in the area and its large-scale regional activities, which has resulted in strategic and counter-strategic policy formulations. Indian Ocean maritime security has evolved due to many factors, including climate change, a shift in the global theatre to Asia-Pacific, the emergence of the Chinese navy and its String of Pearls strategy, and India's inherent vulnerability ^[20].

The Purpose of having Sea Power:

When Hedley Bull inquired about the rationale of sea power, Mahan's theory of sea power provided a solid foundation for the response. Since no other transportation methods over land are as simple and inexpensive as ships, "the sea is a huge highway for the prosperity of the state." Trade and commerce are protected by ensuring products' safe transit along trading routes. Secondly, naval forces may be used to capture trading stations, colonies, and bases all over the globe^[21].

Hedley Bull [22] also referred to two essential issues concerning sea power. "Some governments use sea power to install strategic weapons systems at sea or conduct countermeasures against the strategic weapon system of their opponents, he said. Second, states aim to deploy military force at sea to obtain or extend their part of the sea's riches or safeguard it against the dangers of the others. It indicates that water has always been a significant power source, even though a new awareness and knowledge of the sea emerged in the twentieth century.

In what ways do countries utilize Sea Power?

The ability to control the oceans has been a determining factor in the world's most powerful nations from time immemorial. Due to their strength in the oceans, all major colonial powers expanded their empires around the globe and gained colonies. Still, this theory of state supremacy based on naval dominance is relevant today. When defending themselves against their rivals, governments used to block each other's choke points to secure their maritime superiority in the past. The String of Pearls of China strategy is used by governments today to assert their dominance in the Oceans. To safeguard their primary national interests at sea while also ensuring their territory security by resisting threats from other powers, all countries have evolved specific tactics to preserve their national interests at sea and their welfare measures^[23].

Challenges Facing the Maritime Sector:

Littoral nations are abundant in India's Indian Ocean, which is generally considered the centre of maritime civilization. It's a dynamic ocean with critical geopolitical implications for the nations in the area and beyond afield. In reality, Mahan's claim that "whoever dominates the Indian Ocean would govern Asia, the future of the globe will be determined on its seas" establishes the ocean's importance^[24]. Seaborne commerce and transportation, as well as energy and fisheries, are just some of the daily activities in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean became a concern for the security and stability of its littoral governments due to globalization and liberalization of international commerce with the concomitant increase of terrorism, maritime crimes, piracy, and smuggling operations. Piracy, Terrorism, maritime crimes, smuggling, and other sea-related calamities have all contributed to the development of several national security threats in the region, which are covered in detail in the following paragraphs.

Piracy:

Piracy has been on the rise in the Indian Ocean in recent years. Trade and political issues in a given area dictate what kind of piracy is taking place in that area and what kind of piracy is taking place there. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden, on the Somalian coasts, has been a significant

issue for many years. Despite this, naval patrols and cooperative efforts with international organizations have reduced crime to some degree but have not eliminated it.

Maritime Terrorism:

Concerns about maritime terrorism have been raised since Pakistani terrorist cells carried out the Mumbai assault in 2008 using the Sea lines of communication. A maritime assault on some other country raised the alarm for national security concerns. It necessitated the modernization of the Navy to counter such a threat in the future, no matter what its objective may have been^[25].

Marine Crime and Nano-terrorism:

Terrorism and drug smuggling go hand-in-hand throughout the world. Plenty of evidence points to the usage of narcotics and drugs as a source of funding for terrorist organizations. Many boats and trawlers carrying cocaine, heroin, and other narcotics from Pakistan and Afghanistan have been intercepted by the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean.

What India fears most is China's "String of Pearls" strategy, which aims to offset India's naval presence in the Indian Ocean by creating naval facilities in Bangladesh and Myanmar as well as in Sri Lanka and Pakistan as a result of economic infiltration. Despite India's naval superiority in the Indian Ocean, her economic inability to exert influence on the littoral nations is a significant problem for India. As a result of China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean, India has to work with the littoral nations and other major countries like Japan, Australia, and the United States to ensure the security of the Indian Ocean^[26].

The Maritime Strategy of India:

Even though the Indian Ocean was probably the earliest marine trade platform, predating the Greeks, Romans, and Carthaginians, a lack of documentation has left it almost undocumented. Indian maritime dominance is undeniable based on its long history of civilization, cultural dispersion throughout the oceans, and commercial activity in the Mediterranean and Pacific. Panikkar (1945)^[27] Prakash, Arun (2013)^[28] historical report provides proof of India's horary marine operations long before the rest of the world had heard of them. They claim that "The Indian Ocean, not the Mediterranean or the Aegean Sea, was the site of the world's earliest oceanic sailing activity because of its ancient civilization and reliable Monsoon wind patterns. The ancient Hindus could build sturdy ocean-going ships, and they were familiar with using a magnetic compass for precise navigation. Millions of years before Columbus and Magellan set sail, and the Indian Ocean had become a highway of economic and cultural traffics," they write.

Indian maritime ties to Southeast Asia date back to the Mauryan Empire in the 4th century BC. Evidence from civilization links with those nations, then known as Suvarnabhumi, demonstrates India's long history of marine trade. Cultural artefacts, commerce routes, and regular human interaction explain India's historically unrivalled maritime ties to Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the maritime ties to the area have weakened over time for reasons that remain unclear, and India was left barefoot in the IOR throughout the colonial era.^[29]

In contemporary times, the presence of foreign powers like China and its strategy of the string of pearls to entice India's weak maritime neighbours to restrict India in its backyard — the Indian Ocean Region has led to discussions in India's policy circles to come up with a

maritime strategy to safeguard the seas and preserve India's fundamental national interests. The Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) issued a well-documented strategic blueprint with broad outlines of India's maritime policy titled "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" in 2015. This plan is founded on the two fundamental ideas of converting India from the Brown Economy to the Blue Economy and comprehensive maritime security. It pledges to reconcile India's domestic legal framework with international legal obligations regarding marine regulations.

India's primary maritime interests are protected and preserved via the formulation of this strategic doctrine, which focuses on EEZs and continental shelves, two territorial maritime border concerns. Despite the importance of security in both zones, the most pressing issue is the safety of the country's vital national interests at sea, such as its geo-economic objectives. John Mearsheimer has done a great job of explaining how a country's relative power position influences its foreign policy decisions. A country's capability determines its goals and, in turn, determines its policy options. India's policy decisions in the Indian Ocean are no exception. An interests-based approach to India's maritime strategy has been adopted to protect its maritime core interests underpinned by strategic thinking, policy-making, and operational research and training to recognize the regional priority and accordingly shape the capability to exercise its naval objectives in the Indian Ocean region. On the other hand, strategic doctrine must be able to address marine safety concerns while establishing a positive feedback loop. Even though India has a plethora of marine expertise and resources, the country must establish a regional maritime domain to gather data and intelligence and create a policy framework focused on building capacity^[30].

There's a long way to go still:

To be relevant in the future, one must learn from one's failures in the past. Those who grasp this concept have a brighter outlook on life. This also holds in terms of strategy. To portray itself as an unstoppable maritime force in the Indian Ocean area, India must overcome its previous challenges and turn its weaknesses into strengths. The problem is that India cannot do so compared to the United States and China. India must develop a maritime policy based on the following principles if it plays an essential role in the IOR and safeguards its vital national interests on the high seas. The following are examples:

1. Space has been militarised extensively.
2. Through military supremacy, the military may rule and administrate the undersea realm.
3. Using cutting-edge technology to bridge the gap between the virtual and physical worlds
4. Nanotechnology is widely used.
5. Robotics and Artificial Intelligence use in a broad range of applications.
6. Operational use of unmanned, automated, or semiautomatic vessels.
7. Design and construction of Amphibian-inspired fighter aircraft.
8. The use of supersonic, hypersonic, and glide vehicles.
9. Interagency cooperation in the brown seas to demonstrate the capacity.

Conclusion:

“Who controls the past controls the future; that controls the present controls the past,” wrote Enteen, G. M. (1984). In other words, if a nation refuses to learn from its mistakes, it will fail. The Chinese attack in the Indian Ocean region awoke India from its sleep as a country with a long history of neglecting its beautiful civilization possibilities and the Kautilya thesis of statecraft. Even though India has a long history of maritime strategy, China’s String of Pearls design poses an overwhelming threat to its immediate neighbour. India must modernize its navy and reinforce it with superior weaponry to defend the seas and promote its maritime aspirations in its backyard, the Indian Ocean Region.

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