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INDIAN OCEAN MARITIME SECURITY A VIEWPOINT FROM INDIA

Sushil Kumar Singh
Research Scholar at University of Allahabad in Department of Defence and Strategic Studies

ABSTRACT

For a maritime nation like India, the idea of maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and specifically the way it is approached have a long history. The colonial era is where the present Indian Navy got its start. But it is the post-colonial age, which spans independence, the Cold War imperatives, the interim phase following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and today's strategic alliances, that has contributed to shaping the Indian perspective on marine security. This article examines how these adjustments and difficulties have impacted India's understanding of maritime security in the IOR.

India's involvement in marine security is frequently viewed as having a long history. The Indian rulers only realised the importance of the sea after it was too late, according to K.M. Panikkar. [1] Panikkar explains the requirements that the Indian Navy had to meet, including the need to become more symbolic as the Royal Indian Navy, become a force capable of handling coastal tasks, and establish a naval tradition.[2] In their article on the Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-First Century, Holmes, Winner, and Yoshihara referred to history as an imperfect predictor of the future, difficult to understand, influential, and fourthly, interactive. Even if these four points can be agreed upon, historical considerations have guided Indian maritime thought, from the preservation of Royal Naval traditions—which are still largely observed today—through the progression of Indian maritime thinking from a coastal preponderance to a blue water navy. This evolution underlines the departure from a continental perspective that was largely prompted by the decline in British dominance, which led to a quick fall in the level of maritime security that the British supplied in the Indian Ocean following World War II and the entry of other powers.

Following World War II, the British, realising their declining influence and authority in the region, allegedly persuaded the US to invade the area even though the US had no important interests there. However, the Cold War made sure that the US-Soviet rivalry's subset of the Indian Ocean conflict remained the main emphasis. With the conclusion of the Cold War, the region became a more tranquil environment with the emergence of new powers and the emergence of new dynamics. The persistent tensions in the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea, which could have an impact on the wider region, pose a threat to the trade, economy, and freedom of navigation that are the driving forces behind these dynamics. These modifications have had an impact on the maritime domain of the Indian Ocean region's security-related issues (IOR).

This essay examines how these adjustments and difficulties have impacted India's stance on maritime security in the IOR, as well as how India has developed its response strategy.

PERIOD AFTER INDEPENDENCE AND COLD WAR

A region's marine security may be constrained by history and geography, or alternatively, it may be set free to operate in an unrestricted environment. Prior to World War II, in the context of the Indian Ocean, the maritime security issue was primarily influenced by the British colonial mindset and focused on India as the maritime hub of its Indian subcontinent-ruled territories, countries that were primarily connected to India by sea. England viewed this "British Lake" as its territory, using it to first dominate the area, then to link it to London, and last to link it to the Far East. Up until the entry of Japan into the Indian Ocean during World War II, British dominance in the region largely went unchallenged. This showed how completely dependent India's security was on maritime dominance. "Along with capturing the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Japanese also blasted the Indian port of Visakhapatnam on the country's east coast and halted commercial shipping in the Bay of Bengal. Additionally, Japanese submarines were assaulting shipping in the Mozambique Channel in April 1942, sinking Royal Navy ships off Colombo and Trincomalee. Indians became considerably more conscious of their nation-vulnerability state's to seaborne threats as a result of World War II."

A committee was established in the late 1940s to investigate the planning needs of the Indian Armed Forces. The committee's reports were based on three presumptions:

- Japan would lose the war.
- The main powers in the east would be the USSR and the USA.

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- Up until the arrival of Imperial Forces, China and India would have enough forces to defeat a minor power and hold out against a great one.

It is significant that the committee, or perhaps it chose to disregard the idea of independence, did not account for the potential of an independent India and did not foresee the subsequent partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The report also discussed concerns that Russia would exert influence on India and described China as a long-term threat. According to G.M. Hiranandani, these anxieties revealed in the British Government's volumes covering top-secret and secret correspondence before 1947 laid the groundwork for developments in the Indian Ocean and the Anglo-American mentality in the latter half of the 20th century. In addition, Hiranandani highlights other factors that led to Anglo-American strategic anxiety:

- Russian invasion threat after the British leave.
- If India left the Commonwealth and became more open to Russian influence, there would be implications for Imperial Defense.
- Possibility of assisting Pakistan in fending off Russian and Indian threats.
- If Russia took control of India, communication with Australia and New Zealand would be cut off.
- The impact of India leaving the British Commonwealth Defense System.

At this moment, the US entered the region despite having no significant interests, as the British had before reportedly done. The British Foreign Office sent British experts, such as Sir Olaf Caroe, a former governor of the strategically important Northwest Frontier Province, to persuade the State Department of the value of Pakistan as the core of Western defence in the strategic Persian Gulf region and the southern bowels of the Soviet empire.

India experienced a new continental crisis as a result of the marking of its borders after gaining independence because it was surrounded by an aggressive Pakistan in the west and east and hemmed in by a China with expanding ambitions in the north. India was forced to consider its own protection. According to Pannikar, it is difficult to conceive that China will ignore her naval interests in the future. She is in an even better position than Japan because her bases reach as far south as Hainan. However, the early 1990s saw a clear emergence of Chinese maritime ambitions.

These challenges served as the conceptual foundation for India's first Naval Plan papers and strategy up until the end of the Cold War. The first Naval Plan documents after independence envisioned the Navy's role as being to "safeguard her shipping on the high seas from interference in war; to ensure that supplies can both reach and leave India by sea in all circumstances; to keep open her ports and coastal shipping routes; to prevent any enemy landing on her shores; and to support the Army in any operations that may be required in furtherance of the national policy."

The original plan called for two light fleet carriers, three cruisers, eight destroyers, four submarines, and smaller ships as needed for auxiliary and training purposes throughout a ten-year period. The 1947–1948 conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir and the continental attitude, however, prevented the Plan from being put into action. The Indian Navy possessed a number of significant warships by 1961.

The absence of submarine acquisition and actual numbers in relation to the maritime area within India's direct jurisdiction slightly weakens the argument, even if it was seen to be a balanced force at the time. Budgetary restrictions and the priority placed on acquiring ships to counteract Pakistan's aggression in the years following the 1965 war caused the procurement of submarines to be postponed. From 1967 through 1969, the Indian Navy received its first four Russian-built submarines. First, due to the British being unable to extend credit due to a difficult financial situation; second, due to the Indonesian naval incursions into the Nicobar Islands; and third, due to a Pakistani incursion into Kutch in April 1965 that led to the 1965 War. This decision to purchase submarines, and then ships, from Russia was made. The Soviet Union was the only country willing to meet the Navy's growing demands, which were prompted by recommendations made following the Sino-Indian War of 1962 that the Navy should have a fleet with a force level of 138 ships in both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. The Indian Navy might be seen as possessing a balanced force with these purchases to address both the security needs of the IOR and the nation as a whole.

After 1945, the Cold War made sure that the US-Soviet rivalry's subgroup in the Indian Ocean remained the main topic of attention. The West's perception of India as a Soviet ally further constrained Indian maritime discourse to developments in the Indian Ocean. The 1971 war, in which the Indian Navy was decisively deployed with creative concepts, may have been the event that first brought India's maritime capabilities to international attention. However, it wasn't until after the operations in the Somalia from 1992 to 1994 and the 1988 Maldives mission that India's Navy was acknowledged as a stabilising force in the area. This was supported by the following information:

- The US-Pakistan relationship as a sine curve.
- That majority of India's neighbours were friendly to it and was regarded by them as a strong ally and a stable country.
- India had no hegemonic goals because it only offered assistance when requested.

AFTER THE COLD WAR ERA

The four main characteristics, or ways in which the sea has been used, namely the resources it contained, utility as a means of transportation and trade, importance as a means of exchanging information, and as a source of power and dominance, can be used to summarise the sea's past and ongoing contributions to human development.

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The end of the Cold War and subsequent economic boom, particularly in China and India (which also started liberalising its economy), led to a shift in attention to the Indian Ocean region as a location with significant Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and maritime trade protection, both of which were primarily related to the flow of oil. The emphasis shifted from protecting maritime trade and shipping to establishing a secure maritime environment that prioritised control of SLOCs for the exploitation of marine resources in the area. "Security of infrastructure and other assets in the maritime zones and the littoral associated to the extraction, transit, and reception of indigenous energy resources" was another consideration for littoral nations like India.

The nationalism, economic development, and cultural awakening of the littorals in the early 1990s also sparked a new process, which in turn sparked the emergence of regional organisations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). These organisations are vulnerable to the power struggles of both local and international parties. Although the member countries have altered their alliances and positions since 1991, colonisation and the Cold War's enduring impacts have prevented these regional contacts from developing into powerful regional organisations. As a result, non-traditional problems have gradually taken precedence over the danger of international conflict. So perhaps it seems sense to call the Indian Ocean a "Sea of Uncertainty."

India established the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in 2008 with a chair shift occurring every two years in an effort to reduce the current divide between the IOR littoral states. 35 fleets from the area were brought together on this platform to promote cooperation through ongoing discussions and consultations, with a gathering every two years to exchange views. A consistent set of ideas to improve marine security in the region have developed thanks to the vision articulated during the Symposium. This programme needs the ongoing support of all members because it has the ability to do a lot to clear up misperceptions and tensions between countries bordering the Indian Ocean. This programme has strengthened regional countries' collaboration and understanding, along with the exercises India holds with other IOR littoral states. India took on the issue of changing its strategy to strike a balance between a world dominated by the US and a multipolar environment at the end of the Cold War. Therefore,

India's grand strategy focused on two significant but seemingly incompatible goals. By pursuing a new partnership with Washington, it hopes to reduce the vulnerabilities it perceives in a unipolar world dominated by the United States. The other goal is to advance the creation of a multipolar world with India as one of the poles.

However, following the 2005 signing of the civil nuclear agreement, relations between the US and India have improved. India is frequently regarded as a powerful regional force with a friendly attitude. Its anticipated role as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and as a lynchpin in the US pivot to Asia is well suited by these universally recognised qualities. Chuck Hagel highlighted this function in his 2013 Shangri-La Dialogue speech when he said:

With increased trade and transit between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, India's role as a stabilising force is becoming more and more significant. The United States views India's attempts to strengthen its military prowess as a welcome addition to regional stability.

India has the above-mentioned importance due to its central location in the IOR, which overlooks the SLOCs, and its close vicinity to the IOR's choke points, particularly the Malacca Straits, Straits of Hormuz, and Gulf of Aden. Despite the fact that India uses a variety of ships and equipment, the Malabar series of exercises has helped India and the US achieve a high level of maritime interoperability over the years. The amount of military equipment that India buys from the US has been constantly increasing. The acquisition of assets such as P-81 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, C-17 transport aircraft, and C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft placed India as one of the largest customers of American weaponry in the previous ten years, despite the slight deterioration in relations caused by the US's rejection of the F-16IN aircraft it offered for the Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) deal. India has purchased $10 billion worth of military hardware from the US since 2003. 26 The purchase of AH64 Apache attack helicopters, CH-47 Chinook heavy lift helicopters, and M-777 light howitzers is now the subject of discussions. Following the third bilateral meeting between US President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on September 27, 2013, US-India relations are now prepared to advance to a new stage of defence technology transfer, collaborative research, co-development, and co-production.

However, relations between China and Pakistan as well as those between the US and Pakistan have an impact on the aforementioned interactions. Although the US-Pakistan relationship has been on a "sine curve," the US's earlier overtures to Pakistan have affected those relationships and will likely continue to do so in the near future. It is obvious that Pakistan would be necessary for the US's exit from Afghanistan, particularly for marine movement. The Obama Administration's request for $1.162 billion for the fiscal year 2014, which began on October 10, 2013,28 ($857 million for civilian assistance and $305 million for security assistance), may be a step in that direction. The US will need to exercise prudence while providing this kind of aid because India will be holding elections in 2014.

Defense ties between Pakistan and China were established after the US cut off arms shipments to both Pakistan and India during the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Pakistan, which was most negatively impacted, contacted China and was given more than 200 tanks and 100 military planes. By the early 1980s, it was well known that China was the source of roughly 65% of Pakistan's aircraft and 75% of its tanks due to an increase in the supply of conventional armaments from China. According to SIPRI, 55% of Chinese arms exports in 2012 were to Pakistan.

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Nuclear weapons and related technology also became more prevalent in the flow of conventional weapons. China gave Pakistan a nuclear bomb design that could be delivered by tactical aircraft in the middle of the 1980s. Additionally, it gave Pakistan crucial parts needed to launch a nuclear weapon. The region views the provision of nuclear technology as being particularly crucial and delicate, especially in light of the 1999 Kargil battle, which was fought in the shadow of nuclear weapons. Despite without showing any assistance for Pakistan, China could use the tense situation to thwart Indian efforts to fortify its land boundaries and improve and extend its marine capabilities and capacity. Pakistan regards China as a counterbalance to both India and the US; it believes both US and Indian efforts to achieve dominance over the Indian Ocean region are increasing as a result of their respective self-assumed geopolitical rights to do so. The increased number of joint drills between the two countries is a sign of a strengthening alliance to challenge US-India hegemony in the IOR.

This activity Shaheen 2, a follow-up to Shaheen 1, which was held in Pakistan in March 2011, was a combined air force exercise between Pakistan and China that took place in September 2013 in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Pakistan has suggested annual marine drills beginning in 2014, with the first one planned for the Arabian Sea. It's interesting to note that the anticipated drills line up with China's new strategic submarine's JL-2 missile installation's initial sea trials. The strategic scenario would be drastically changed by the inclusion of these submarines in the planned exercises. Given the similarity caused by the supply of assets from China and the co-production of weapons, China might use Pakistani ports and bases as "semi-military" bases to expand its maritime, aeronautical, and military footprint. The strategically located Gwadar port, which China has once more taken control of, looks out over the Straits of Hormuz. China would benefit from using this port by gaining reciprocity with regard to the Malacca Straits as well as increased operational freedom in the Arabian Sea. An alternative to India's Malabar series of exercises and a way to test India's marine capabilities and competence could be seen in the institutionalisation of these exercises and the potential use of ports as semi-military facilities.

Thus, the US was the only major "friend" in the region that could counteract the expanding Chinese presence, and the US-India cooperation may have resulted from rising Chinese ambitions. A presence with ambitions that now extend into the maritime sphere and are affecting India's interests outside of its traditionally defined borders as well as within the IOR. India may no longer be seen to be "Pak centric," but rather "Sino challenged." The fact that China is present in the Indian Ocean and the dispute over the land border, which have polarised thinking about strategy, will dictate, albeit with a reduced continental outlook, that the greatest threat to India's security will continue to be the jehadi terrorism, with Pakistan serving as its epicentre. This is primarily due to the influence of history and geography. As a result, it is important to look more closely at the long-standing Sino-Indian competition as well as China's entry into the Indian Ocean since "the primacy of the "ocean" in the region's affairs is further highlighted by the fact that difficulties on land always find a reflection at sea." According to New Delhi, China is entering the Indian Ocean from both the north and the east via the Strait of Malacca. Acc"rding"to Indians, Beijing's ongoing continental challenges are anot"er factor in modern Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean. This strategy, which has undertones of a "Mackinder-Mahanian" combo, could weaken India's marine vision because China seems to be pressuring India to constantly examine its land borders. For instance, the 19-kilometer invasion of Chinese troops into Ladakh in Depsang and the ensuing three-week stalemate (April–May 2013) warrant notice due to the location inland from the boundary and the length of the standoff, and are indicative of this reality.

The timing of the assault could not have been better. First of all, Li Keqiang, the Premier of China, was about to visit India at the time. His first stop on his first trip abroad was to be New Delhi. Second, it lined up with a declared cut in India's defence spending. Two things stand out in particular in this regard: First, the defence budget as a share of total central government spending (CGE) is the lowest in India's history as an independent country, and second, the defence budget as a share of GDP is at its lowest level in 50 years, since 1962–1963, when it was 2.32 percent. As a result, the evolving situation may put pressure on the US to reconsider the security dilemma in the Indian Ocean and step up its presence there. Its rebalancing approach toward the Asia-Pacific region, in particular its presence in the South China Sea and East China Sea regions, may be significantly impacted by this. Perhaps because of this, the US is interacting with the island states in the area, where China has a noticeable presence. As an example, consider the recently reported Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and the Maldives to establish a "cost free border control system." A Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was also reportedly signed, however the US denied establishing a military base there, and the Maldives said it had not yet decided whether to do so. It is important to note that the construction of a US military base could have a significant impact on US-Indian relations in two ways: first, India has consistently opposed the construction of foreign military bases in the Indian Ocean region, and second, and perhaps more significantly, it would lessen India's perceived role as a net provider of security in the area. The order on the sequester that US President Barack Obama signed is another matter that can have an impact on the US presence here. Even while it is too early to calculate the overall impact, it could undoubtedly lead to a reduction in important aspects like operations, training, and maintenance. According to Admiral Jonathon Greenert, the US Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), "If sequestration-level reductions persist in the years after FY 2014, the Navy of 2020 would not be able to execute the missions described in our defence strategy, the Defence Strategic Guidance," in a blog post from September 27, 2013.

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As a result, it appears that maritime security in the Indian Ocean will soon enter a new phase as the US considers internal budget balance as well as asset positioning and utilisation rates. In parallel, India is also updating its navy with new ships, aircraft carriers, and nuclear-powered submarines, including ones that were constructed in-house, in order to adapt to the changing maritime security environment.

CONCLUSION

The colonial era and Cold War influences and strategic thought processes have shaped and influenced India's perspective on maritime security in the Indian Ocean. India's marine strategic vision has been influenced by factors such as the existence of extraregional countries, international ties, and the predominately unresolved border disputes. India's outlook has also changed as a result of the post-Cold War era, China's entry, and the US's current posture in the area. The perception of India as a net security provider may be diminished by any expansion of US influence and a change in strategy toward countries where both an Indian presence already exists and where Chinese interest is rising. The Indian Ocean may change from a region of relative peace to one marked by fierce competition and conflict as a result of the various problems. The option that could preserve the "peaceful" aspect of the Indian Ocean security discussion is therefore the resolution of border disputes and the creation of a cooperative security system comprising both regional and extra-regional entities.

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