



India's Maritime Security Strategy Towards a Rule Based Order

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Abstract

The concept of maritime security is related to maritime issues related to national security of the countries. Maritime security implies protection of a nation's sovereignty at sea. Owing to expanded scope, it now encompasses maritime terrorism, marine pollution, illegal fishing, natural disasters, maritime safety and smuggling of drugs, arms and ammunitions. In the present scenario, maritime security is a buzzword in International Relations. Maritime security was an overlooked field till last decade. The research in this field is relatively inadequate. Moreover, research on the challenges and strategies of the maritime security is still inadequate. Thus, this paper is attempted to focus on the challenges of maritime security arrangements and the strategies to address the challenges. The challenges such as environmental degradation, maritime terrorism, illegal trafficking and oceanic disasters were analysed in the paper. The scope of the paper is to cover the security challenges in Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. The submission identifies the maritime threats and examines maritime-security governance. It argues that despite, discontent with China, India ought to engage with China and ASEAN nations to reduce conflicting situations. The paper strongly argues for formulation of national Maritime Security Policy (MSP) for security of the country. This study is qualitative in nature analysing the secondary information available at various sources.

Keywords: coastal security, maritime security, maritime terrorism, littorals, naval power

The Context

The maritime security is the enforcement of national laws in the maritime zones to provide security. Maritime security denotes protection of vessels from enemies and anti-national forces. The maritime operation protects the country from piracy, robbery, terrorism and illegal trafficking of goods

and people. The marine security includes marine resources and deployment of naval forces in the Indian Ocean (Singh 2020). India is now keen on maritime security to ensure sustainable economic development. Realising the importance, in 2014, the United Kingdom, the European Union launched maritime security strategy as one of the key components of NATO (Bueger 2015). Maritime security can ensure commercial activities and open-market. Maritime security protects economy and drives global economy as well. Very often marine is used for cargo transportation and cargos can be used by criminal elements. Thus, proper inspection of the cargo is carried out and illegal and criminal activities are prevented. As India is surrounded by oceans on three sides, India must examine the maritime dimensions of country's security. India's maritime security provides full-fledged and complete security to the country. Moreover, a comprehensive maritime doctrine is essential for the country. Contextualising the situation, the objective of the study is to analyse the challenges of maritime security issues in India. However, the three specific objectives are to (a) identify the maritime challenges specifically with reference to China's aggressive role (b) analyse the security challenges in Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea (c) promote cooperative mechanisms to mitigate maritime security-concerns.

India's Maritime Security Challenges

Maritime security gained prominence after 1991 with the onset of globalization and its concomitant maritime dimension. Around seventy-eight per cent of global trade is handled by maritime transport (Kumar 2016). India is besieged with manifold security challenges such as piracy, terrorism, illegal transportation of goods and smuggling activities. Despite constraints, the island chains of Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep provide the opportunity to dominate in the Indian Ocean. These lanes carry commercial ships, naval ships and drugtraffickers' ships. India's own



strategic interest lies beyond its immediate proximity. The Maritime Security Strategy 2015 classifies primary interest as maritime challenge. The failure of state security generates challenges such as piracy, terrorism, military conflict and all leading to external interventions. The faulty oceanic governance has caused pollution, diminution of fishing stocks and damage to marine biology. All these are essential components of maritime security. Further, three major aspects of the civil maritime sectors are ports, shipping industry and shipbuilding (India Strategic, 2013). The geostrategic factors are linked with maritime conflicts between nation states, environmental threats and maritime terrorism (Khan 2021). Maritime pollution and frequent disasters are emerging as renewed threats. The high winds and heavy rains draw the debris of coastal areas toward the ocean polluting at sea. Oil related environmental disasters at sea affect the trade, bring losses to marine economy and posing threat to the marine ecology. Similarly, the human factors have caused the natural disasters and pandemics. All these growths have impacted the security at sea and littoral regions. Notwithstanding these challenges, Indian Ocean provides an opportunity for India to achieve the high sustainable growth by utilising the high potential of ocean economy. Against this backdrop, India's naval power has to maintain country's security while sustaining economic activities in the ocean. The following is an attempt to identify the key challenges of India's maritime security.

Aggressive Role of China in Oceans

Although, India has many maritime security challenges, the country's main strategic challenge emanates from China. The maritime dimension is a relatively new factor within Sino-Indian relation. China has ushered String of Pearls to encircle India. This is network of Chinese military and commercial facilities around India which extend from Chinese mainland to Port Sudan from the Horn of Africa.

China has aggressively shown its dominance in the South China Sea. Thus the issues of rules-based security are back in the focus. China's island-building programme in the South China Sea, violating the international law, has created tensions in Southeast Asia and Chinese ships are operating near Australia (Singh 2016). China has commenced Maritime Silk Road (MSR) project to address China's Malacca Dilemma. It is a sea route between the Middle East and East Asia. It being the shortest route, reduces the time and cost of transportation

among Asia, Middle East and Europe. It is an important waterway for bulk cargo shipment. India can encroach on and control navigation through the Malacca Strait. India is concerned about the infrastructure projects that would bring Myanmar into China's fold, erection of Chinese surveillance stations and other naval facilities on Coco islands (Avuthu 2015).

The Indian Ocean littoral requires huge investment for raising the basic infrastructure and China is capable to build the infrastructures in this region. Even India had requested Chinese investments into its infrastructure projects. India should take advantage of present market crisis in China and bolster its 'Make in India' initiative to spread its influence in Indian Ocean. China's Spice Route initiative is a geo-political ambition of China in the Indian Ocean. Since the Indian Ocean countries are more oriented towards India due to historical, cultural and economic challenges, India should strive to sway the Indian Ocean countries into its fold.

Moreover, China's modernization of its navy has pushed the Asian states into a reactive mode. Thus Indian Ocean countries are expanding their naval fleets (Naval News 2020) to counter Chinese dominance.

India's Hesitant Naval Force

In order to contain China, India needs a strong navy for country's maritime security. In reality, the navy's biggest challenge is replacing ageing ships and obsolete equipment. This envisages procurement of about 150-170 ships and submarines and 250-300 aircrafts (India Strategic 2013). The over reliance on foreign countries for weapon procurement is a challenge in maritime security. Developing weapons for indigenously built warships will be another challenge for the Indian Navy.

Piracy in Sea

The piracy has severely impacted the commercial shipping in Indian Oceans in 2011 (Insurance Journal 2012). Modern piracy is the manifestation of underlying socio-political problems. The solution to piracy requires a multi-pronged approach to tackle the problem. The problem of piracy originating from Somalia in the Horn of Africa has eased due to intense global pressure. Contrarily, the scene off Indonesia and Straits of Malacca seem to be deteriorating. Out of 162 piracy attacks in 2019, 64 occurred in the Gulf of Guinea of Nigeria (Simon 2020). In the recent



years, due to patrolling by Indian Ocean countries, piracy has subsided remarkably. The cooperation undertaken by Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia combated piracy in the coast of Somalia and Indian Ocean. The operation such as Eye in the Sky and Malacca strait patrols deserve cooperation from India, United States and Japan (Lutz et.al 2013). Piracy will severely affect the shipping trade unless tackled effectively.

Maritime Terrorism

The maritime dimension of terrorism drew attention during the Mumbai terror attacks of 26/11. Due to the lack of stability in the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula has emerged as hub of terrorism. Piracy, illicit trade, and terrorism are posing security threats (Steele 2017). Previously, the maritime terrorism was neglected by governments and security agencies alike. Presently, the terrorists are using the sea route for the nefarious terror activities. Curbing terrorism, Indian Navy carried out Container Security Initiative (CSI) and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) efforts as coastal security measure (Singh 2019). Maritime terrorism has often been financed by narcotic trades. Evidence suggests that piracy, terrorism, drugs trafficking, human smuggling operate in tandem. Since terrorism is transnational in nature, regional cooperation is needed to deal with such issue.

Maritime terrorism is guided by ideological and political interests. Terrorists target Strait of Malacca as maximum sea transport activities carried there. It is the important trade route between the Far East, the Gulf States and Europe (Ltz et al, 2003). The security services must fight terrorist groups and commence Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) research to shore up the operational security.

Indo-Pacific Maritime Crime

Many of the armed gangs linked to radical Jihadi extremist groups Abu Sayyaf are involved in maritime crime. Indian naval forces have countered such gang through initiatives such as intense patrolling and information sharing through ReCAAP. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) and the Information Fusion Centre in Singapore and Delhi have undertaken inter-governmental agreements at regional level.

Black marketing of drugs and wildlife products in Indo-Pacific maritime zone are a source of concern. Synthetic drug production in Myanmar and Thailand and transportation of these drugs to Asian markets through maritime space is worrying

the maritime security. However, government has improved maritime electronic surveillance to curb the illegal trades.

Maritime Security in Bay of Bengal

Bay of Bengal provides maritime security and governance challenges (Bensenn 2020). It maintains balance of power, connectivity and security impact on regional stability. China's increased activity in the Bay of Bengal and partnering with Bangladesh and Myanmar is definitely a source of concern. India can promote the naval coordination with these countries and wean away them from China's fold.

Way Forward

India's response against maritime challenges has been multipronged and based on international cooperation. But the hurdles are continuing such as distrustful littorals, opposing national priorities and differing maritime capacities. In this context, the experts argue that India should counter China strongly in the maritime domain. Thus, there is a need for a comprehensive maritime doctrine for India. The following is an attempt to identify certain strategies to mitigate the challenges of maritime security.

Establishment of Maritime Advisory Board

Although India has maritime assets, the challenges and opportunities are immense. The country urgently needs a multi-disciplinary maritime advisory body to conceptualize a vision and monitor activities in the maritime domain. The board should develop an overarching Maritime Security Policy and integrate with India's Maritime Strategy. This synergy can benefit India's economy and reinforce maritime security.

Establishment of SAGAR Panchayat

The concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) stresses equitable stake holding in the Indian Ocean. In the East Asia Summit 2019 in Bangkok, Prime Minister Modi proposed "Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative Partnerships." It aimed to strengthen maritime security, marine resources, maritime trade, disaster prevention and management (MEA 2020). It can shape a cluster of Indo-Pacific nations into a SAGAR Panchayat.

Develop Blue-water Naval Capabilities

Viewing India's stakes in Indian Ocean, develop blue-water naval capabilities is essential. This is



a maritime force capable of operating globally in the deep water of open oceans (BMD 2004). Besides, developing indigenous naval capacity, there is a need to develop three aircraft carrier groups to operate in Indian Ocean. Since 2007 the navy has increased its presence in the Persian Gulf (Suri 2016).

Engagement of QUAD in Indian Ocean

Maritime security is high on QUAD's agenda. This grouping can be expanded by including ASEAN nations. India should work on Intelligence-sharing and freedom of navigation with these countries.

Mainstream Maritime Security in India's Foreign Policy

Maritime security and related issues are important elements of India's foreign policy. Nearly ninety percent of world trade is transported across the oceans. Therefore, no nation can ignore the maritime dimension of its foreign policy. The conflicts between nation states bordering the sea coast can be resolved by state interventions. Economic and political instabilities in the littoral states are affecting the trade and shipping activities. Natural disasters are impacting on mercantile trade. The threats such as piracy and terrorism at sea, have threatened strategic and economic interests of nations. Such threats are impacting foreign policies. India's foreign policy must encompass maritime security issues for Australia and European countries operating in Indian Ocean.

Strengthen Maritime Relations with IORA

Indian Ocean Rim Association is an inter-governmental organization to strengthen the regional cooperation within the Indian Ocean through its 23 member states and ten dialogue partners. Indian Ocean countries have undertaken White Shipping Agreements and strengthen Information Fusion Centre to enhance domain awareness (MEA 2017). IORA is addressing maritime security strategy in the Indian Ocean through international cooperation in security and governance (IORA 2021). However, as IORA activities have increased, the technical and financial support of member states are crucial. IORA member states should strengthen the cooperation in disaster risk management and blue economy. Further the coordination between BIMSTEC and IORA should be augmented to deliver on the core mandate of IORA. Viewing the vulnerability of China in Indian Ocean, China is willing to work with India to contribute to the security of the regional littorals (Suri 2017). China must be included in the IORA under

conditions of respect for rule of law by all nations.

Enhance Interoperability with ASEAN Indo-Pacific Countries

The cooperation enhancement between navies comprises of two aspects. First, enhance interoperability while undertake joint operations. Second, assist in maritime capacity building. Towards this, India must enhance interoperability and maritime ties with Indo-pacific and ASEAN nations. Containing Chinese influence in Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, deployments of surface ships and submarines in the region is also desirable (Ghosh 2016). This will also counter the Chinese policy String of Pearls.

As such, the Indian Navy has discarded isolationistic policy to develop close naval relations with other littorals in the region. An analysis of Indian Navy reveals that its engagement pattern with US is purely based on equity principle although USA feels superiority. India must develop naval capacity and interoperability. Similarly, Indian Navy must seek naval technology cooperation with Japan and Australia and augment the efforts of indigenous productions. Further, India must continue its engagement with Bangladesh and Vietnam to strengthen their maritime forces (Ghosh 2015). Indian Navy has already started Malabar exercises in this regard. Again, INDRA Navy is a military exercise conducted by India and Russia since 2003 and *Milan*, a multilateral naval exercise, is organized by the Indian Navy.

Collaboration Required

Maritime security requires close coordination between civilian and military authorities. Toward this, India, Japan and China coordinated the maritime security efforts in the Gulf of Aden (Atlanta 2016). International collaboration on maritime issues is on dilemma because of two reasons. First maritime force provides limited freedom to other nations due to security issues. Second, simultaneously, countries need collaboration to fight threat to maritime security. Despite the dilemma, the collaboration can be enhanced by various measures such as (a) maritime laws should be reviewed considering the threats in the deep sea, (b) both the naval and private security agencies should be engaged in patrolling, (c) both the police and security services should combat with international criminals and pirates (d) enemy nations should be prevented to use terrorism as a strategic maritime security (e) coastal community and



fisherman should be engaged as watchdog to report unlawful activities in the coastlines.

In the last many decades, the country has generated tons of data on maritime security issues. Government of India must use artificial intelligence networks to analyze ocean data and develop maritime strategy (Times of India, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The rise of India and China in Indian Oceans is an important shift in the maritime security. This new pattern will require India to focus on maritime security. China would be less interested to follow a regional code that would cover all maritime operations. However, China might consider a bilateral or multilateral agreement with India, ASEAN and South Asian nations that would establish regional rules. The agreement promotes cooperation in coastal zone management, sea-based resource exploration (MEA 2003). Certainly, at the present scenario of hostile environment, a regional agreement on maritime rules seems a distant possibility. India's pressing need is to improve maritime interoperability. The Indian Navy would need to scale up its operations to monitor the developments in Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, accepting a framework of maritime security would require greater operational engagement and collaboration among the maritime agencies. Dealing with China and QUAD countries in the maritime domain will require both cooperation and discouragement.

China believes India is an obstacle to its ambition of predominance at the global and Asian level. Thus, China continuously shows a confrontational attitude with India. India can shatter Chinese hegemony if India partners with the US specifically focused in the maritime domain. In all probability, the next strategic battle will be fought in the High Sea. Thus, India has high naval ambition to induct forty ships in the ten years ahead (TOI 2021a). This is feasible if the shipbuilding practices are changed. Quick approvals and higher budgetary allocation for the naval projects must be undertaken.

Owing to China's growing economic power, the smaller countries will be attracted towards. Thus QUAD in the present form cannot deter China. China has to attract the ASEAN and Indo Pacific countries to join its fold. This will be feasible if USA and its allies provide substantial benefits to ASEAN nations. Although NATO wants to counter China, NATO has little to offer to smaller nations in terms of economic supports (TOI 2021b)

Undoubtedly, India is faced with a dilemma on maritime rules. One way, it supports, the freedom of navigation, flying of aero planes on international waters and peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea. On the other, India has reservations about the United States' freedom of navigation patrols near the Chinese held Spratly and Parcel Islands. Although, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) permits passage through territorial waters of another state if required by navigation. Entry of foreign naval ships through territorial waters of another country is a challenge to sovereignty (Singh 2016). Thus, such passage of foreign ships must be announced and watched by the stakeholder nation. At the end, a consensus based orderly regime by all stakeholder nations shall ensure rule of law at sea.

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