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Session II: Maritime Security

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India's Maritime Security

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Introduction

There is a strong element of continuity; *(In)*security continues to plague the seas and figures prominently in the strategic calculus of countries who use the seas for economic growth. The contemporary discourse on maritime *(In)*security is focussed at three levels; first, at the state level, there are issues relating to maritime boundaries, exclusive economic zones and freedom of navigation as enshrined in the 1982 Law of the Sea, balance of power and spheres of influence, naval build and arms race, and issues of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Second, there are a number of threats and challenges at sea which emanate from non-state actors such as terrorism, piracy, drug smuggling, gun running and human smuggling. At the third level, issues of natural disasters, sea level rise, and environmental pollution confront the international community.

Many of the above threats and challenges are transnational in nature and require multilateral approaches for solutions and responses. These have attracted international attention and prominently figure in statements and speeches by the political leaderships across the globe, during discussions in multilateral forums, and appear frequently on the agenda of international organisations such as the United Nations who announce a number of conventions and pass resolutions. At the national level, these threats and challenges have been incorporated in the national security strategy documents and are addressed through operational doctrines. The international community and various stakeholders too has responded firmly to these threats and challenges through a number of political, diplomatic, security, legal and financial initiatives with positive results.

India is an important Indian Ocean state and the constants of geography (coastline of 7516 kilometers and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.01 two million square kilometers) bestow it with a number of advantages. - nearly 66 per cent of the world's oil and gas, 50 per cent of container traffic; and 33 per cent of cargo traffic pass close to India's waters through the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. While these provide a number of opportunities for India to build its maritime potential, there are a number of challenges that confront India. In this context, this paper attempts to highlight India's response to some of the above issues.

First Level

At the first level, India's (*In*)security arises from the presence of a large number of navies in the Indian Ocean region (IOR); the United States, European Union, and Asian powers such as China, Japan and Korea who have forward deployed the navies in support of strategic, security and economic interests. In the coercive format, these are structured for forward presence, access and expeditionary operations and are perceived as challenging the regional security order and curtailing 'strategic autonomy' to pursue national interests. For some countries, extra regional forces bring images of centuries of colonial occupation and subjugation by the western powers. Most of these countries have undertaken modernization and acquired new military-technological capabilities in the form of diesel-electric submarines, anti-ship cruise missile systems and rapid reaction forces which further add to the competition. In the functional-operational format, these forces are engaged in counter terrorism and anti-piracy operations which have provided the rationale for the continued deployment.

At another level, different interpretation of the law of the sea, understanding of freedom of navigation and the right of innocent passage, scientific and naval activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), movement of nuclear propelled and nuclear weapons carrying platforms at sea, shipment of nuclear wastes through EEZ, legitimate movement of cargo over the seas result in mistrust and suspicion. These have led India building capabilities to protect its strategic and economic interests and ensure robust anti-access capabilities.

However, the forward presence is also viewed positively by India and is considered useful for promoting naval operational diplomacy in the form of joint naval patrols, interoperability through naval exercises, sharing of maritime intelligence, developing humanitarian relief mission formats, capacity building, search and rescue arrangements, response mechanisms to accidents and pollution at sea, etc. It is important to mention that there have been positive spin offs through these interactions for India resulting in new capabilities, common missions, joint doctrines, operational compatibility and technological enhancement. In essence, for India, the Indian Ocean region is an arena of competition and cooperation.

Second Level

India's maritime security is also challenged by asymmetric threats. The attacks on USS Cole and MV Limburg off Yemen by the Al Qaeda, the 2008 Mumbai attacks by the Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and the 2014 attempt on Pakistan Navy ship by the Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) loom large in Indian's

maritime security conundrum. More recently, incidents like the ‘suspicious boat’ incident off Porbandar in December 2014, seizure of a boat carrying 20 Kg of Heroin (estimated value of US \$ 200 million) in April 2015 off Gujarat Coast originating from Pakistan, and the reports that there is a nexus between drug lords in Pakistan and traffickers in Thailand have made India’s maritime security a complex issue.

As far as piracy is concerned, Somali pirates were successful in reaching shores of Maldives and in the vicinity of Lakshadweep Islands thereby exposing the weaknesses of surveillance systems which necessitated greater response from the Indian maritime security agencies through operational support and surveillance capacity building. Since 2008, the Indian Navy continuously deployed two to three ships for anti-piracy duties and also to escort merchant shipping through the IRTC, which is jointly conducted by the navies of China, Japan, South Korea. India also provided operational and material support to Indian Ocean island states (Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka) to fight piracy. In this context, the killing of two Indian fishermen in 2012, by the Italian Marines onboard M/V *Enrica Lexie*, off the Kerala Coast, and the detention of MV *Seaman Guard Ohio*, employed for PMSC duties off Tuticorin 2013, are other issues of concern for Indian maritime security agencies.

It is fair to say that the Somali pirates have gone home, but the fourth version of Best Management Practices (BMP 4), released in August 2011, continues to include large sea areas in the Arabian Sea including waters close to Indian shores as High Risk Area (HRA)¹ causing economic pressures on the international, intra-regional and coastal shipping destined for Indian ports including since these vessels invite extra insurance premium and higher crew remunerations. Also, additional insurance costs are also levied on the offshore platforms and the support vessels servicing these as they are located/operate in the HRA. India has been urging the IMO to shift the eastern limits of the HRA westwards as it entails “exorbitant hike in insurance premiums of vessels bound for zones with enhanced risk”.

WMD proliferation through the Indian Ocean is also of concern to India. India has cooperated to prevent rogue states and non-state actors from acquiring WMD. In 1999, the Indian custom authorities impounded a North Korean vessel *M V Ku Wol San* at Kandla Port for carrying equipment for production of tactical surface to surface missiles which were suspected to be bound for Pakistan or Libya.² Although India has

¹ HRA is decided by the international underwriters, i.e., the Joint War Committee (JWC) and Joint Hull Committee (JHC) at London.

² “Indian agencies to investigate North Korean ship's entry”, *The Economic Times*, August 9, 2009.

not endorsed the 2003 Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), it is a strong believer in the prevention of WMD proliferation.

Third Level

The Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal are experiencing the adverse effects of climate change. There are fears of increased frequency and intensity of extreme events such as tropical storms, cyclones, and floods in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea littoral spaces. India has been at the forefront in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations and deployed several naval assets to respond to crisis. In the aftermath of the 26 December 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy engaged in rescue and relief missions alongside those from the US, Japan and Australia. In subsequent years, the Indian Navy was again tasked to respond to Cyclone 'Sidr' in Bangladesh in 2007, Cyclone 'Nargis' in Myanmar in May 2008, and in 2014 the navy responded to Cyclone Hudhud in the Bay of Bengal.

Likewise, there are signs of rising sea level, receding coastline, and high salinity in India's coastal areas. These natural phenomenon have severe implications for livelihoods' of coastal communities. There are also fears that climate change would result in mass human displacement from the island states which has direct impact on the maritime political economy and adversarial consequences for maritime infrastructure. In this context, Maldives and Bangladesh are good examples and it is believed that it would result in climate refugees who would arrive on Indian shores as illegal migrants.

Cooperative Agenda

India is an active member of several international and regional arrangements for maritime cooperation at both government and non-government levels. It is member of Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus, Association for Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC), South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP), as an observer in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), Regional Cooperation Agreement On Combating Piracy And Armed Robbery Against Ships In Asia (ReCAAP). At another level, the Indian Navy conducts events such as MILAN,

Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), International Fleet Reviews (IFR), symposiums, seminars and conferences as part of its engagement in naval diplomacy.

At the functional-operational levels, the Indian Navy's Military Maritime Strategy identifies Indian Ocean as the primary area of interest. The Indian Navy engages in furthering national foreign policy objectives through participation in UN supported global commitments, provide water front security to states, render relief during disasters, conduct joint exercises and anti-piracy patrols for preserving order at sea, thus contributing to international efforts aimed at enhancing maritime safety and security in the oceans.

The Indian Navy has successfully deployed its assets to respond to different crisis in 'waters far away from home' and for building maritime bridges through operational engagements and capacity building. In the future, the Indian navy can be expected to continue to support a variety of missions involving international cooperation such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, counter terrorism, anti-piracy and also preventing illegal migration.

Conclusion

India possesses significant maritime and naval capabilities to safeguard sovereignty and protect national interests. It is acquiring a number of surface and sub-surface platforms capable of long range sustained operations supported by manned and unmanned aviation capabilities. At another level, maritime and naval cooperation provides India ambient conditions to develop a broad and substantive agenda for building mutual trust and confidence, and in some cases translate into strategic partnerships. These initiatives are particularly significant for protecting maritime interests. In that context, the Indian navy has developed closer relations with several like-minded states across the globe and these have resulted in 'maritime bridges'.