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## **Rationalizing the Trends and Trajectories of India's Maritime Strategy by 2035**

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to analyze the changing trends in the strategic dynamics of Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It employs qualitative research method and analytical techniques relying on data mainly collected from secondary sources. The changes in the geostrategic environment are taking place as a result of India's rapid naval modernization by 2035. These trends and trajectories are explained through the lens of Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of sea power. The Indian Ocean connects Asia and Africa with significantly important ports with a huge maritime traffic of around 100,000 vessels per annum and out of which around one third is the cargo ships. The oil flow from the Persian Gulf region has augmented the global importance of this oil route because the per annum oil flow is more than one trillion US dollars. The region is under great influence from China and the United States also not reluctant to the gradually changing strategic equation. India is indeed one of the largest littoral countries in the IOR. New Delhi is giving maximum focus to the modernization of maritime strategy. Whereas, in the pursuit of becoming a regional strongman has started rapid modernizing of the navy and transforming it into a steadfast force to counter China and to hover Pakistan.

**Keywords:** India, China, Pakistan, Indian Ocean Region, maritime strategy, choke-point, sea power

### **INTRODUCTION**

The naval modernization is every nation's predominant plan for utilizing its naval capabilities for the expansion of vital national interests and ascendancy since ages. The countries set certain policies, objectives and strategize certain plans to expand their national ambitions. However, almost 125 years ago a famous naval officer and maritime strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan emphasized the significance of sea power during wartime. Sir Julian Corbett theoretically endorsed the theory by deliberating the strategy of establishing the control of sea in conflict situations. It is

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proposed in the strategy that the country controlling the strategic choke points can dominate the situation. In the past, the strategies of war have not necessarily been deliberated separately from the traditional political and foreign policy context. However, the conceptualization of strategy was thoughtfully deliberated after the works of Carl von Clausewitz and Antonio Henri Jomini, nevertheless their works did not mainly focus on maritime strategy (Bartholomees, 2012) rather they covered other strategies and doctrines.

India is militarily the world's fourth strongest country after the United States, Russia and China. It is surprising to recognize that India has such a fragmented society, poverty, economic deprivation and traumatized socio-political environment and it has managed to emerge as the fourth largest military powerhouse in the globe. It has developed a robust military capability as it is in the pursuit to augment its geopolitical role in the region and at the global arena.

New Delhi is investing significantly in its weapon industry to modernize its naval capabilities. This investment is not only confined to technology and number games but to strategic games as well. In this connection, they are going through the transformation stage to increase their strategic role in the IOR after 2035. This version can be testified from the gradually increasing the number of their naval fleet which includes indigenously built aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, advanced destroyers, frigates and corvettes, advanced surveillance system, UAVs and radar systems and their strategic partnership with the littoral countries which increases their expansion of reach across the IOR and beyond.

In pursuant to India's this new wave of doctrinal transformation and India modernization of its military doctrines in envy for changing the deterrence stability of South Asia. India's aspirations have changed the strategic discourse of the entire region. The country attaining weapons, equipment and strategic capabilities more than its credible defense is explained in the context of offensive realism. It imitates that the country aspires to supersede others in the offensive military capabilities. The theory falls under the offensive realism of John J. Mearsheimer and realist approach of Chankya Kautliya, Hans J. Morgenthau, Hobbes and Machiavelli.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

C. Raja Mohan (2012) in his book titled *Samundra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* states that both China and India are upcoming major maritime powers in the region. Both countries are expanding their naval muscles for securing their gradually increasing maritime interests. Both countries are focused on the Indo-Pacific for the expansion of their maritime trade and strategic interests. The book title *Samundra Manthan* or "to churn the ocean" refers to a fiction from ancient Hindu mythology that the strategic rivalry between the two neighbours i.e., China and India have shifted from high mountains of Himalyas into deep blue sea Indo-Pacific. The book intends to justify and rationalize the modern Indo-China maritime rivalry into historical and mythological manner.

Ian Hall (2014) in his book titled *the Engagement of India: Strategies and Responses* states that different states like China attempted to influence India with their opposite strategic and foreign policy agendas, but even after that they remained unable to influence. India did not deviate from its strategic ambition. The attempt for deviation was aimed to change India's foreign policy discourse and they pursued a transformation its maritime strategy. India remained curious to engage in diplomacy and foreign policy decision making to maximize its positive role in the regional and

international arena. This book explores the strategies which attract different countries to engage in relationship with India, an emerging major power in the region (Hall, 2014).

The book titled *Indian Navy Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* co-write by James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara (2009) investigates and provides a systematic understanding of India's maritime traditions with special reference to western strategic and military thought. The book develops a thoughtful approach in explaining that how some major powers of Europe planned a strategy to navigate and develop strong naval capabilities during the Age of Discovery while the rest of the world deserted the seas. The book investigates how the Indian Navy will develop itself in the coming years and how New Delhi intend to craft a naval doctrine and its sea capabilities and the way it will use of force capability. Moreover, the major grounds of this book are focused on the historical, traditional and cultural dimensions of Indian maritime strategy (Holmes, Winner, & Yoshihara, 2009).

The book titled *India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security* co-write by Anil Mukherjee and C. Raja Mohan (2015), investigates and explores the rapidly growing strategic significance of Indian Navy. The book provides a thoughtful discourse on the rapidly changing Indian maritime alignments with special reference to its military and defence diplomacy with the other regional countries. The impact of India's naval modernization on global security and its options for consistently changing strategic possibilities, the internal and external dimensions of Indian maritime strategic future is in a dynamic flux (Mukherjee & Mohan, 2015).

Geoffrey F. Gresh (2020) in his famous book titled "To Rule Eurasia's Waves: The Great Power Competition at Sea" states that the Eurasia's rapidly emerging powers like China, Russia and India are progressively more focused towards new maritime geographies, trade routes and expansionism. The maritime routes passing through this region are economically and strategically very important and play a pivotal role in the geopolitical economy of the region. Moreover, the maritime Eurasia has a number of very important maritime check points which play a significant role as an energy corridor. The importance of this region is to a degree that it challenges the US and Europe's dominance in the Atlantic world (Gresh, 2020).

Saji Abraham (2015) in the book titled *China's Role in the Indian Ocean: its Implications on India's National Security* argues that India is located at the "area of instability", this is due to the reason that the most of the nation in the neighbourhood has suffering from economic discrepancies. The book also provides a comprehensive account of recent modernization of China's military capabilities with special focus to its strategy of power projection. It also provides an understanding of Indian naval interests and the strategies and methodologies employed by the Chinese policy makers for the strategic encirclement of India (Abraham, 2015).

Harsh V. Pant (2016) in his book titled *the Rise of the Indian Navy* argues that the India is using its military power especially the naval capabilities as an important tool for regional and international diplomacy. The Indian strategists and naval thinkers have started considering navy as an important tool of India's modern diplomacy and foreign policy decision making. This book covers detailed account of issues relating to India's security and maritime domain, furthermore, it also causes and impact of Indian naval capability in the region. Harsh V. Pant has deep analytical understanding of India's strategic thinking and its implication in the security politics of this region (Pant, 2016).

The book titled *Deep Currents and Rising Tides: The Indian Ocean and International Security* co-written by John Garofano and Andrea J. Dew (2013) argues that the Indian Ocean Region is at the spotlight of new geostrategic great games. This region has become a pivot of new geostrategic rivalry not only among the major powers of this region but the USA, Europe and Russia are also part of this competition. The aspects of this struggle and security issues are very diverse. The problems relating to piracy, political antagonism and extremism, threats relating to seaborne trade, nuclear arms race and bilateral conflict between China and India fall in the exclusive domain of this region's security politics (Garofano & Dew, 2013).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This theory is theoretically based on the theory of Sea-power expounded by famous American Scholar and naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan. He developed this theory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century which has significantly influenced the geopolitics, strategy and naval doctrine of United States. He argued that a nation's geopolitical power and strength is directly dependent on its naval capabilities. He stated that a country who rules the ways will rule the world. a country which controls the sea routes and controls the strategic chokepoints can disrupt its enemies from free trade and economic viability. The command of the seas is possible by capturing the strategic choke points and increasing the number of naval bases through alliances.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is based on qualitative investigation and discourse analysis research methodology is employed to understand the changing geostrategic landscape of IOR and beyond. This exploratory research is primarily based on secondary resources including relevant books, published research articles, news articles and published reports on focusing different aspects of India's maritime strategy. Its expansion of maritime doctrine, partnership with littoral countries and strategic engagement with major powers like Japan, Russia and the United States. Their impact in the IOR region and beyond and how these developments can change the security paradigm of the region.

### **MAINTAINING HEGEMONY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION AND BEYOND**

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is strategically important and significant trade route of the world. It is one of the most important energy corridors and the strategically imperative chokepoints of the world are present there. These are used as energy transit routes. The IOR has geostrategic importance due to its close proximity with the world's most important chokepoints including Bab-e-Mandeb, Strait of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz. Bab-e-Mandeb is the point that connects Africa, Asia and Suez Canal. The most of the goods and commodities are moved from Asia to Europe through this particular route. The "Strait of Malacca" is a place that connects Southeast Asia with Northeast Asia and due to consistent conflict in this area and the place is called as "Malacca Dilemma" (Shaikh, 2024). This is due to the reason China is an emerging economic power and China is increasingly depending on sea-lanes of communication for foreign trade. In this regard, Strait of Malacca is the place from where the majority of the transportation of energy and goods is taking place.

Indian maritime strategy is driven from a number of key factors including geopolitical considerations, economic imperatives, energy security and technological advancements. It has

strategic rivalry with China that it considers an archrival that hinder rapidly expanding Indian influence in the IOR and beyond. Indian Ocean's strategic positioning and its accessibility to Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf and Africa brings this region into the limelight and keeps it relevant to geopolitics of the world. Indian traditional maritime strategic thinking has evolved during the past two decades. They have reoriented their maritime dimensions and making their navy more tilt towards expansion. Initially, India focused on dominating the entire South Asian region by its military capabilities. In the twenty first century, the strategic landscape of IOR has changed due to the emergence of China, Pakistan, Japan and ASEAN. Although Pakistan's current naval capabilities are based only on averting and defensive, however China is a serious threat for India. However, India's strategic position and peninsula character gives it a preponderant level of influence on the region.

The Indian elites sees India's objective of becoming the great power is directly linked and connected to its maritime strategy. It is believed that a strong navy is vital for the exaltation of India's status as a great power. The political elites have commented on the matter at different occasions. The former Foreign Minister of India, Mr. Parnab Mukherjee stated: "after nearly a millennia of inward and landward focus, we are once again turning our gaze towards outwards and seawards, which is the natural director of view for a nation seeking to re-establish itself, not simply as continental power, but even more so as a maritime power, and consequently as one that is of significance on the world stage" (Mukherjee, 2007).

India intends to achieve its supremacy and hegemony in the Indian Ocean Region. It has the largest population among other nations on the IOR, vide geographical space, strong military capabilities and a big economy by which India is rapidly advancing in the geopolitical space. India wants to utilize its geostrategic location, tangible and non-tangible factors to achieve the major power status in the IOR. The Indian political and military elites thinks that India ought to be the only major power of the IOR. They think that India ought to be the sole authority of Indian Ocean as Ocean and the state share the same nomenclature. Moreover, a century old American Naval Officer and Strategy theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan stated that whoever controlled the Indian Ocean Region will control the entire Asia. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing its practical manifestation in a way that all the major countries of the world including India itself is in the pursuit of dominating the IOR (Hussain, 2024)

A maritime power truly means a political, military and economic power that can influence others in the strategic affairs of the region. In the pursuit of making Indian navy, a strong force in the Indian Ocean has increased its budget. The Indian naval budget increased from 2001-2005 by 5%, whereas from 2006-2009 it increased by 10%. If we compare this increase from 11% to 18% from 1990 to 2008. It is a huge increase in the annual budget that changed the entire force structure and its weapon capabilities. In 2008, the Indian navy has announced the commissioning of around 3 aircraft carriers, 160 ships and 400 naval aircrafts by 2022 to turn Indian navy into a stronger force in the blue waters (Maqsood, 2017).

### **Countering the Increasing Influence of China**

China was a regional power and now in the twenty first century it is swiftly increasing as a great power of the world. The emergence of China to that status is relevant to India and other countries

of the region whose national interests are linked to IOR. They have different political ideologies, strategic perceptions, aspirations and foreign policy objectives that are assumed in the light of their national interests. Both countries are sharing a huge portion of their land border and using IOR for different purposes. Indo-China war of 1962 is a significant event in their foreign relations and it would be inappropriate to characterize the relations by avoiding this even. However, the entirety of these relations is not based on this episode, however this conflict and later the recent Sino-Indian border skirmishes in the Ladakh region have cast the shadow in the entire region. The Chinese forces pushed the Indian forces back to their theaters and captured their claimed area. In the backdrop of these hot pursuits, the Indian Ocean Region became the second theatre of war. The gravity and pace of this conflict is considerably increased after the incident of 9/11 and epic modernization of maritime strategy. China started give much importance to the PLA (Navy) and ensured its naval presence in the IOR.

The military presence provides China an edge in the security driven situation and it provides a stake in the decision-making. In 2014, China responded quickly and strongly during a crisis and emergency emerged in Male and in Maldives. It provided required assistance swiftly to deal with the situation. China provided a huge amount of financial assistance to provide infrastructural upgrade, the excessive lending raises questions that whether Maldives will be in a position to repay the debt or fall completely in the Chinese control. The political advantage in their policies will be increased as China intends to develop “a string of pearls” a chain of China’s military installation in the region and Maldives will be an important camp (Kumar & Stanzel, 2018). Although previously India has played as peacekeeper in Maldives during the presidency of Abdullah Yameen. China has quickly and swiftly provided its technical assistance, crew to Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 crisis that was planned to fly from Kuala Lumpur international airport, Malaysia to its planned destination at Beijing Capital international airport, China. However, it was accidentally fallen down in the Indian Ocean (Kelly, 2023). In 2015, China has evacuated 225 citizens of its own and foreign nationals from Yemen during the Saudi led “Operation Decisive Storm” which led the country into political instability and turmoil (Panda, 2015).

China has gradually provided a key aspect of establishing its commitment to physical presence. The physical military presence provides China a credible role to perform in the region and influence the geopolitics. The military presence and strategic positioning shall provide China an edge to operate and sustain in the region. Beijing has been eyeing the islands sprawled across the sea-lanes and lines of communication to African in the western Indian Ocean: The Seychelles, Comoros, Mauritius and Madagascar (Mohan, 2022). China intended to deepen its diplomatic relations with these nations to lay their feet in the Indian Ocean. Although China has a long presence in the Comoros, since it has developed its military base in Comoros, a strategically important country of Indian Ocean Region. In fact, in 1975, China was the first to recognize this country to establish its footnotes in Indian Ocean.

Although China is recognized as a new player in the IOR, however, it is gradually increasing its interest and presence in the ocean. China has developed strong economic and strategic relations with the coastal countries that trade from IOR. China’s IOR centric geo-strategy and focus can be understood from its relations with the littoral countries. It has opened an embassy in each of the six countries of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) including Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles,



Madagascar and Comoros (Baruah, 2023). However, the other world powers do not have any embassies or diplomatic relations with those countries. It reflects that China want to be more relevant and engaged in the countries located on the IOR.

### **India Changed its Strategy from using the Seas to Securing the Seas**

During October 2015, India published its latest naval doctrine titled as “Ensuring Secure Seas: India’s Maritime Security Strategy.” This naval doctrine or strategy is a revised version of India’s previous naval strategy which was titled as “Freedom to Use the Seas and was published back in 2007 (Baruah, 2015). Now the title of latest Indian naval doctrine itself reflects that India has advanced the scope of its naval strategy and aimed to expand it to next level. They want to dominate the region by making the Indian Ocean as India’s Ocean. The geostrategic realities of this region have been changed in the past decades and new factors have taken place. China has rapidly emerged and western attention towards the IOR as energy corridor has increased the global factors in the foreign policy and strategic decision-making. India’s revised maritime strategy meets with the modern needs of its maritime interest; it shall provide India a status of net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond. The infrastructure modernization reflects that Indian aspire to attain the status of net security provider in IOR (Bhattacharya, 2024).

The changing maritime strategy and paradigm shift in South Asia is compelling India to reorganize its naval doctrine and secure its naval interests by making strong decisions. This time India has formulated a comprehensive strategy which encompasses almost all the required procedures India shall adopt in pursuit of its vital maritime objectives. It also provides an explicit picture which reflects India’s futuristic vision for this IOR. There can be three main points can be derived from this strategy.

First, accepting the word “Indo-Pacific” at governmental level in their maritime security strategy. Although the term has numerous disparities and distinctions; however, the terms refer to the western pacific and Indian Ocean (Bhatia, 2023). The region that is at the spotlight of global geo-strategy and reflects the signs of emerging theater of war. The referred concept has also been recognized and referred in their strategic discussions and documents of other regional countries including Australia, United States, Japan and member countries of ASEAN. This is due to the reason that the world focus has been shifted from Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific and its significance as an energy corridor has compelled the regional as well as global powers to engage in the new power game in the IOR. New Delhi is obstinately focused and eagerly expanding its strategy in the IOR to increase its strategic role. Wherein, the other regional countries including Australia, Japan, Indonesia and some other ASEAN countries observe eager attitude of India in its expansionist designs. Although they are concerned about Indian intentions but due to India’s huge, size and rapidly expanding maritime strategy are unable to ignore its significance and relevance in the region.

Second, India’s primary and secondary areas of interests are gradually expanding. India in its previous naval doctrine have elaborated its primary and secondary areas of interests that are changed in the later documents (Baruah, 2015). This is aimed to ensure expanded role of Indian navy in the IOR. The far-flung areas like Red Sea were previously pronounced as secondary area of interest for Indian maritime strategy, however, in the new strategy it has become the primary area

of interest. Moreover, the other littoral regions of Africa and Suez Canal especially the Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden were previously described as secondary areas of interest whereas, now they are classified as primary areas of focus. Furthermore, the South China Sea, Mediterranean Sea and littoral regions of western Africa are now claimed as secondary areas of interests. While on one side, India is countering China in the IOR but even then it has avoided unnecessary engagement in the South China Sea and its reluctance in that region compelled ASEAN friends to show discomfort on its policy.

Thirdly, the first two points leads to the third and the most important point that India is doing everything to attain its status as a net security provider in the IOR (Mishra, 2024). The Indian maritime doctrine outlines that how India shall play all these roles as mentor, enforcer and counter. The doctrine does not provide details of what net security provider can be assumed and how this status shall be attained and in how much time. However, it is sure that India being a maritime country and force capability. It can influence other countries and help in maintain a credible, stable and peaceful environment by dominating them strategically.

### **Nuclear Triad and India's Second-Strike Capability**

The second-strike capability can be attained through sea based launching system and, in this regard, nuclear submarines are considered as the most survivable leg of nuclear triad / arsenal. The conventional submarines have limited endurance due to refueling and charging of their batteries. However, the nuclear submarines are equipped with a small nuclear reactor within their power generating system, less noise and can ensure long endurance. During mission, they are less traceable and very difficult to be intercepted. The nuclear power submarines and the ballistic missile attack submarines both are lethal weapons with enhanced strategic and tactical capabilities. The triangular nuclear arms race between China, India and Pakistan are bringing the IOR into the threshold of nuclear conflict (Bashir, 2022).

In the South Asia, the nuclear dimension of maritime strategy is a new phenomenon and it has followed the same path of reactive strategy as the land based nuclear program. China's stepping into the IOR has activated the Indian policy makers to follow the suite. China commissioned a strong and modernized naval force in the IOR and India perceived it as a threat for its expansionist designs. Because of its nuclear deterrence calculations, it started rapid modernization and Indian nuclear program has managed to attain a significant pace in the past three decades. However, during the past two decades the momentum is accelerated and the recent developments indicate that by 2035 it will reach its peak.

In the increased Chinese naval presence, the definition of strategic stability for India is maintaining nuclear deterrence in the Indian Ocean Region that will also provide India with an opportunity to develop sea-based second-strike capability. Whereas, Pakistan's definition of security is envisaged in the concept of minimum credible deterrence vis-à-vis India. The nuclear arming of IOR reflects that in future any level of maritime conflict and adventurism can be turned into a full-scale nuclear escalation, since armed forces of all the three countries are equipped with nuclear weapons. India has launched four Arihant class submarines to Indian Navy for its operational presence in the IOR. The *INS Arighat*, nuclear submarine of the same class was commissioned in 2020 just two months after the Sino-India territorial standoff in the Doklam Plateau. The Chinese military engineers



attempted to build a road near China and Bhutan border, which was interrupted by the Indian Army on request of Bhutan government. Chinese attempted to deepen its presence on the strategically significant border areas. The INS Arihant can carry 12 SLBMs with a range of 700 kilometers, whereas *INS Arighat* can carry 24 K15 missiles, which can target neither Beijing nor Islamabad. Therefore, they started manufacturing and arming the upgraded versions with modified target range, for instance, K-4 is said to have a range of 3,500 km, K-5 SLBM with a range of 5,000 km and K-6 with a reported range of 8,000 km (Afzal, 2020).

Chinese government decided to counter Indian influence by providing two diesel electrical attack submarines to Bangladesh and helping in developing a dock in Sri Lanka and in other neighbouring countries to maintain credible deterrence from Indian interventions. Moreover, China agreed to provide eight new diesel electric submarines to Pakistan and they are expected to be commissioned in Pakistan Navy by 2028. This increased “submarine diplomacy” by the Chinese government is due to India and its engagement with United States and other IOR nations for defense purposes.

### **INDIA’S EVOLVING MARITIME STRATEGY (2004-2015)**

China’s continuous rise and modernization of its military especially the naval capabilities are changing the strategic balance in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean Region. China is focused on those areas due to US intervention and want to secure its trade routes. However, China is rapidly renovating strategy and naval presence in India’s areas of interest has perceived New Delhi that it can halt in flexing its muscle in the region. India is focused on growing and flexing its muscle in the region and ensure its status as regional strongman. India has explicitly worked on moving out from foreign influence and gradually become the striving strongman in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond.

#### **First Maritime Doctrine (2004), “Freedom of use of Seas-Indian Maritime Strategy”**

In 2004, India has published its first maritime strategy. The primary objective of formulation of this naval doctrine was to ensure the security of its sea. India is essentially a maritime nation and it has a coastline of around 7500 Km. Moreover, due to its massive foreign trade flowing through its water compelled India to develop a comprehensive doctrine ensuring the “Freedom of use of Seas-Indian Maritime Military Strategy”. This strategy enabled India to focus on bringing Indian Ocean Region (IOR) on increasing focus of Indian policy makers (Singh & Sen, 2024). Likewise, it enabled the Indian policy makers to observe that IOR can be used strategically not only to increase the volume of trade but also it is used as a trade route of global trade. It affects and influence the geopolitics regionally and as well as globally. The dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century has further brought this route into the limelight and global attention. The doctrine remained essentially confined to India’s commitment to securing the seas for trade and merchant activities. It proposed maritime cooperation among the littoral countries for promoting regional stability through close connectivity.

#### **Second Maritime Doctrine (2007), “the Constable”**

The second model of Indian Maritime modernization describes India’s increased role in the IOR as “the Constable”. Holmes, Winner and Yoshihara have offered a historical and systematic analysis of how many countries have either renounced the seas or reduced their role in the waters, however

India has gradually resumed its naval focus (Holmes, Winner, & Yoshihara, 2009). They have described the maritime strategy with its special focus on both China and India.

India has formally moved into the “policeman” or “Constable” mode when it adopted new Naval Doctrine in 2009, it called “Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian maritime security strategy”. They replace the word doctrine with strategy and proclaimed to secure the waters in the Indian Ocean. It means now India was in the pursuit of securing the waters instead of only using them as defined in their previous naval doctrine. The doctrine was comparatively a more thoughtful document that described India future policies and plans. Therein, the waters adjacent to the Indian territory and seaports were pronounced as India’s primary areas of interest, whereas, the extensive and far-flung areas adjacent to Australia, Africa and middle east were marked as areas of secondary interests. It is clearly understandable that the presence of Indian navy in the marked areas shall be subject to its strategic significance.

### **Third Maritime Doctrine (2015), “a Striving Strongman” in IOR and Beyond**

The third model or level of maritime strategy is “the strongman” status in the region. A striving strongman, who never let any external navy to control its waters and influence its national interests under any circumstance. It ensures in maintaining its writ in the primary areas of interests with all due obligation. The doctrine ensures India to counter balance and pose a threat to the stronger opponents like China. At the previous two stages of naval doctrine only allowed India to maintain surveillance, security and continue its regular trade in through the Indian Ocean Region, whereas the strategic role was very limited to be played in the region. It was simply a constructive and limited arrangement to keep the things going on. However, now India becomes comparatively in a better position to not only play a strategic role in the region but also to change the entire strategic dynamics in its interests. India’s status has moved from “using the seas” to “securing the seas” level. Furthermore, by this India will attain credible second-strike capability during nuclear war. India has commissioned nuclear submarines in the IOR and also increased the numbers of their Aircraft Carriers.

### **PROJECT SAGAR: SECURITY AND GROWTH FOR ALL IN THE REGION**

The project SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) is India’s project aimed to provide assistance to the countries of IOR for regional integration and connectivity. The project was launched in May 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic that drastically impacted the world.

### **SAGAR: Vision, Concept, Policy and Doctrine**

Regional integration is the primary objective and key concept of the project Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). The fractious and stubborn maritime relations among nations of Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific are the nature of international geopolitics today. China is focused on seas for its maritime trade in the Indo-Pacific. The strategic evolution is not confined to a one country, rather it engages other regional nations including ASEAN countries and Japan which has also shifted its maritime posture from post-World War two era and begun engaging strategically. Russia is also realigning itself to engage strongly to safeguard its strategic interests and act more affectively in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, it has joined strategic coalition with China for its future endeavors and this doctrinal transformation reflects Russia’s doctrinal transformation. Indonesia

has started enforcing its maritime capabilities by forming 'maritime axes' with the regional countries and advocated strongly on regional integration within the members of ASEAN. Iran is also hitting hard for regional engagement and employed effective diplomacy for establishing strong relations at multilateral levels. There are various regional factors has enhanced Iran's strategic position in the IOR and Red Sea.

Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR) is India's maritime policy, doctrine to engage with the countries on the Indian Ocean Region for economic, and diplomatic relations. The policy is another important step for regional integration and engagement in the recent years. In 2015, the policy was first introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in June 2018 in a multilateral economic summit held in Singapore. PM Narendra Modi claimed that India is eager to encompass the region of Indo-Pacific that is stretched from Asia to the shores of Africa and the shores of America are included. Narendra Modi has given special focus to strengthen the Navy for their expansionist designs. In pursuit of doing so India has also commissioned an advanced destroyer INS Imphal of Visakhapatnam class.

The basic concept of initiating this project is to get an advantage of maritime or blue economy. The blue economy can serve as a strategy for the neighbouring countries to counter the economic challenges that they are facing. It can help in developing more intense connectivity and mutual relations. The more connectivity can also ensure tackling the challenges like disasters, piracy issues, human trafficking and drugs smuggling. The joint strategy can help in a better way to meetup the required tasks. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China started its CPEC initiative and started engaging with the neighbouring countries on its politics of ports. China started constructing and modernizing ports of the countries of Indian Ocean Region to influence the region and to manage its huge economy. In this connection, it has introduced string of pearls strategy and India wanted to counter this strategy by developing its own bilateral and multilateral relations with other nations of Indian Ocean.

### **Main Factors of SAGAR**

The SAGAR initiative gives India the central character and most essential role in the program. India has a big economy, largest population and strong naval power. It makes India not only the most capable maritime force that can deploy aircraft carriers, conventional and nuclear deterrent force in the Indian Ocean Region. The main factors emerging from SAGAR are as follows.

#### ***Security***

India has an extensive coastline extending over 6500 kilo-meters through which the terrorists responsible for the 26/11 Mumbai attacks were infiltrated. Therefore, the maritime security of India starts from its own coastlines. India has installed Coastline Surveillance Network (CSN) by deploying multiple sensors at key locations to increase monitor its coastlines. In 2012, India has approved an Information Management and Analysis Center (IMAC) and was later operationalized in 2014 at Gurugram Air Force Station to monitor India's Coastline and island territories (Sen, 2020).

In 2017, the government has founded Island Development Agency (IDA) as an apex body to assess and take steps for the development of islands. The IDA has recently reviewed concept development and plans for the development of nine islands on Japan's government aid approximately ₹265, four at Andaman and Nicobar whereas five at Lakshadweep i.e., Minicoy, Bangaram, Thinnakara,

Cheriyam and Suheli (Baruah, 2021). India is also planning to develop airports in Nicobar to attract tourism in the island and to increase its connectivity to the rest of the world.

The Indian navy presently operates more than 140 warships and 250 fighter aircrafts to maintain its strategic authority not only to its immediate coasts but also to the entire extend of Indian Ocean Region. The Indian maritime perspective plan (2022-2027) shows that India is likely to strengthening its maritime posture by attaining the numbers of its warships to 175 and advanced aircrafts to 320 by 2027 (Pandit, 2018). India wants to increase its footprints in the Indian Ocean Region to ensure the security and to win the confidence regional states which has joined SAGAR project.

### ***Capacity Building***

India has established several institutions and organizations like Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme aimed for training the professionals of regional countries. ITEC is a huge project and covers more than 158 countries in the developing world like countries of Asia, Africa, Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America and other Caribbean nations. The program provides relevant trainings pertaining to the needs of those nations including vocational, professional and technological trainings. Although the program is not only limited to address the training related to the SAGAR project. However, this project has truly been benefitted from it. In 2018, India has provided 1000 special slots to Maldives for such trainings with specialized budget.

The diplomats are trained under Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and security personals are trained under Indian Academies. The diplomats of other closely connected nations also do benefit from these institutes by attending relevant courses and workshops. The Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) has been undertaken several trainings for emergency sea operations of other countries like Malaysia and Mauritius for the subject exercise.

### ***Collective Action***

A framework of collective action in the particular situation of conflict and emergency is important for the systematic handling of the emergency. The absence of a forum for collective action results in a security dilemma and challenging situation for the entire region or the stakeholders. The IOR lacks in an availability of a robust mechanism to handle such stimulating situation. The region is strategically of high value; however, it does not have a significant security paradigm to ensure its safety. India is backing regional initiatives including Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to ensure collective action. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is also an example of such initiatives. The project SAGAR has contributed a lot in the maritime governance in the IOR and has successfully provided a substantial policy option for security of the entire region (Schottli, 2019).

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is a regional regime that primarily ensures security measures and serves as an instrument of peace and security of the region. It is an intergovernmental organization established in 1997 with its main office in Mauritius. The IORA was originated during an official visit of the late president Nelson Mandela of South Africa to India in 1995, where he said: "The natural urge of the facts of the history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic cooperation..." (Mandela, 1997).

The IONS is a voluntary initiative for multilateral cooperation among the nations whose shores are washed by the Indian Ocean. This offers an open forum for the discussion of regional issues among the littoral nations. It facilitates the flow of information among the nations that can be beneficial in maintaining the security in the broader perspective. Their collective dialogue also helps in finding the common resolution for the regional issues. In 2018, the 10 anniversary of IONS was celebrated and in the program speech, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi pronounced IONS as a catalyst for SAGAR and its in-line with India's "Act East" policy. The program is aimed to mutually benefit from the Indian Ocean and facilitate each other. The program signified the geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean and its centrality in the politics.

BIMSTEC is a new regional economic corridor and an international organization of South Asian and Southeast Asian nations. In 1997, a new regional organization under the name BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) was formed. Later in 1998, the group was renamed as BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation). In 1998, Nepal became observer and in 2004, Nepal and Bhutan both became full members of the organization. India is vigorously working on such organizations to increase regional connectivity and economic integration for its strategic objectives, however avoiding Pakistan (Nizamani, 2022).

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is also an important aspect of collective action. All the equipment, strategies and practices that ensures the maritime domain awareness for a country is mandatory for the collective action. The sharing of intelligence is good for security of the entire region. It helps in resisting and repelling the foreign interventions before they could bring any harm.

### ***Sustainable Development***

All the coastal nations face several different challenges and work to sort out the challenges pertaining to sustainable development. India is working to ensure two aspects of sustainable development; one is controlling climate change and protection from natural disasters. In 2004, India has installed the Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) to sustain the minimum loss in any case of emergency. It became operationally functional since 2007 and is currently operated by the Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) at Hyderabad.

### ***Maritime Engagement***

In the twenty first century, the Indian Ocean Region has become a significant theatre of maritime engagement due to its unique geostrategic significance, proximity with the great powers and other regional and international implications. The region is rapidly becoming an important stage of geostrategic struggle. In the pursuit of increasing its influence in the region, India has broadened its strategic goals, presence and naval exercises in the IOR and beyond. Currently, India conducts almost twenty naval exercises annually with the littoral countries to keep its navy in a state of readiness. These exercises help in creating an atmosphere of trust among the friendly nations and like-minded navies.

Indian Coastal Guards (ICG) also conducts naval exercises for mobilization in a war-like situations or to tackle the maritime threats. The ICG mostly undertake these exercises with Japan and other

regional countries for naval drills (J, 2024). These naval drills are carried out under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two countries back in 2006. These MoUs include high profile visits, trainings, joint exercises, courses and participation in the seminars arranged for maritime awareness among the people.

India has a mutual logistics agreement for the procurement of military equipment and weapons with USA, France, Indonesia, Singapore and Republic of Korea. It has further extended its agreements with Australia, United Kingdom and Russia for further support and supplies of that equipment.

### ***Regional Connectivity***

The new dynamics for the strategic quest are emerging because the countries are regionally connecting with each other and forming alliances. Several economic corridors are emerging by the different regions of the world. All the countries are trying to increase their regional power by connecting with each other for economic integration. The CPEC and ASEAN are examples of this regional integration; it empowers the multilateral economic and political relations of the states. The Indian perception of regional connectivity is somewhat different from the Chinese one, whenever India sees regional connectivity for economic relations, in fact it wants to look outwards. Furthermore, this approach is not confined to the economic gains rather it aims for the strategic gains.

The Sagarmala Project is an example of Indian attempt for regional connectivity. This project is for the advancement in the logistic sector of the country. The idea is envisaged in unlocking and opening the potential coastal waterways, roads, railways, constructing Coastal Economic Zones (CEZ), developing industrial areas for the future perspectives. This is one of the heaviest projects of Indian government that entails 8.5 trillion Indian rupees equal to US\$ 140 billion (G, 2023).

India has further explained its foreign policies priorities by neighbor-hood first policy. India wants to engage with its immediate littoral neighbors for economic integration. The main purpose of this regional economic integration is to increase the economic potential and expansion of influence.

India's Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) is an initiative that is functioning in collaboration with Japan. The agreement was signed between India, Japan and some African countries. AAGC's research and support unit is established in New Delhi, which comprises Research and Information System for developing Countries (RIS), Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and Institute of Developing Economics-Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO) (Chaturvedi, Prakash, & Dash, 2020). AAGC is completely a sea-based economic corridor unlike the OBOR that is both a sea and land based economic project.

### **PROJECT MAUSAM**

The project MAUSAM is Modi administration's foreign policy initiative aimed to connect the littoral countries of Indian Ocean Region using the common trade route for over centuries. The word "Mosam" is derived from the regional dialect of Monsoon winds that were used by the ancient sailors and mariners to travel in the ocean.



**MAUSAM; Vision, Concept, Policy and Doctrine**

The project MAUSAM is India's socio-cultural and economic initiative that is designed to establish economic integration among the regional countries. The term "Mousam" means season or weather, the same word is being used in the Arabic language as well to denote the same meaning. The season signifies the particular season in which the littoral countries of Indian Ocean had historically were connected with each other for trade and travel. It was a maritime cultural connectivity of around 39 countries of IOR. It reveals the economic, political, religious, cultural and strategic interaction of these countries through ages. Therefore, the fundamental objective of reactivating this project is on one side to increase the understand the regional culture and to reassert the regional connectivity in the broader perspective. However, in the strategic context it is aimed to counter OBOR of China and connect with other coastal countries.

This project is purposed to achieve few objectives. Firstly, it aims to revive the historical cultural connections that have been renounced over the period. The project will give the regional countries a more sense of connectivity and relativeness; moreover, it will increase the cooperation among the nations and minimize the conflicts.

Secondly, it wants to reactivate the historical archeological sites on the Indian Ocean Region because the regional countries possess common historical and archeological sites that have been renounced in the modern times. India is developing and reconstructing its archeological sites for the tourism and increase the scope of intermixing.

Finally, it also wants to reestablish cross-national world heritage nomination. It will advocate for flourishing the historical trade and tourism routes in the Indian Ocean Region that have been used for centuries. However, they are less active and used. It will sustain not only the cultural heritage but also ensure the sustainable economic development in the region.

**Indo-Pacific Strategy Entails Security for India**

The Indo-Pacific strategic alignment and this construct has attained considerable traction in the past two decades. The Indo-Pacific region accounts for more than 65 percent of global GDP, and half of all global trade passes through the waters of these two oceans (De, 2021). The Indo-Pacific strategy is remarkably persuasive and almost all the major powers of this region have employed a strategy to safeguard their national interests and spelled out doctrinal transformation in their engagement on the affairs. These regional architects are reshaping and remapping the entire region as per their own calculations. The regional and international tilt towards the Indo-Pacific raises new concerns for India and its expansionist designs. It leads to a new phenomenal change that not only changes the strategic realignment but have also paved its way towards a new power struggle. This is due to the reason that the Indian Ocean washes the shores of two big countries with huge industrial and economic authority equipped with strong military powers. Furthermore, the gravity of industrial revolution has gradually shifted from Europe to America and later it reached to Asia. The industrial revolution is swiftly bringing change in the paradigm shift due to the reason that since 1980s Asia has outperformed Europe in many fields. The economic powers are rapidly emerging on the shores of Indian Ocean and outnumbering the ocean with trade ships to America, Europe, Africa and Middle East.

Although the main objective of this project is claimed as a cultural and enhanced social engagement, however, the strategic dimensions reflect that India want to curtail CPEC and other socio-economic expansions of Chinese policies. Because Chinese OBOR initiatives is aimed to engage the countries of IOR and establish strong economic and strategic relations with them.

Consequently, it is outlining its strategy to counter Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by providing soft loans, introducing developing projects in the littoral countries of Indian Ocean. They are developing capacity building and even reactivating the historical trade routes under project MOUSAM that would help the countries across the continent. These robust development projects and cooperation agendas are not confined to economic or trade rather are strategically advantageous for India. Indian Minister for External Affairs has answered to a Lok Sabha during a session that until 2019, 254 projects aggregating nearly \$4.70 million have been completed while 194 projects worth nearly \$19 billion are under implementation phase (Chaudhury, 2019). These include around 94 different development projects in five immediate neighbors. India is also working on other tactical options like trilateral strategic partnership among India, Japan and US-Australia to counter increasing Chinese influence in the South Asia and Southeast Asia.

### **THE AMRIT KAAL VISION 2047: THE CONCEPT AND STRATEGY**

In 2022, on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has introduced the new naval strategy with titled “Amrit Kaal Vision 2047” for the next 25 years. The vision envisioned for the dawn of new India in the coming 25 years. This project aimed to fragment all the aspects of Indian economy with the objective to advance its infrastructure, economy, military capability and technology to win the trust of the whole world. It’s a comprehensive project to foster and strengthen India’s position at the global stage. India has long-term economic and maritime security aims which they can significantly achieve through this project. The word “Amrita Kaal” means “the Era of Elixir” or it originates from Vedic astrology and symbolizes “the Golden Era” (Kl, 2023).

In 2023-2024, the first budget for this project is allocated. The industrial sector of India shall get higher attention by the government of India to increase the volume and potency for the future needs. India is currently world’s fifth largest economy trailing only USA, China, Japan and Germany and its GDP is \$3.4 trillion. According to Indian Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, the economy shall reach \$5 trillion by Financial Year 2028 and expected to reach \$30 trillion by 2047 (Jayaswal, 2024). The states shall be provided easy loans from the federal government for modernizing the industrial capabilities and the infrastructural modernization to meet these targets. The states with the coastlines are provided special lean under this budget for leveraging their strengths to overcome this challenge. The “Panch Pran” or five fundamentals of Amrit Kaal are described as follows (“New India in Amrit Kaal,” 2023).

1. The goal of developing India
2. Elimination of any trace of the colonial mindset
3. Honor
4. Pride in our roots
5. Development of unity

The Amrit Kaal is a scientific spirit and reinforcement of scientific temper to the economy of the country. The strategy aims to drive India out from the colonial mindset and follow the path envisaged for freedom from the colonial mindset. The expansion of Indian jingoism is aimed to drive the nation to the path of pride and honor which eliminates any trace of colonial mindset. The project is inching forward towards its completion and maturation. The Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, a subsidiary of the Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, that focusses on enhancing ports' capacity and promoting inland water transport and coastal shipping with a proposed investment of Rs.80 lakh crore. The Amriat Kaal is aimed to increase India's indigenous naval shipbuilding industry; acquisition of India's advanced Naval platforms, maritime surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and development of advanced submarines for the futuristic perspective. It provides a push to India's naval doctrine and modernization agenda in a robust manner.

## CONCLUSION

India is striving hard to increase its maritime role in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond. New Delhi is modernizing its naval capabilities to emerge as an important competitor in the Indo-Pacific region, which has been an important theater of Sino-US rivalry for the last few decades. The regional security environment will further change due to recent Indo-China border skirmishes which have not only changed the geostrategic discourse of the region but has also changed its pace and momentum. Furthermore, Chinese Politics of Ports is perceived as a maritime encirclement of India. In this connection, New Delhi intends to adopt a counter strategy which retains its status as a striving strongman in the IOR. The changing conventional asymmetry is further increased after India's rapid campaign of naval modernization. India is bolstering its military strength by a multilateral strategic alliance under project SAGAR. It further engages socio-cultural and economically with the littoral nation under project MOSAM by economic collaboration. One the other hand, India has recently unveiled a mega project named as Amrit Kaal and its maritime aspect is envisaged in the significant expansion of its naval capabilities in the coming years. This changing strategic situation raises concerns for Pakistan and compels it to pursue an effective naval doctrine to safeguard its vital maritime interests. It should steadfastly collaborate with friendly nations and expand its naval arsenal and engage in alliances for ensuring its security in the future.

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