5. Maritime Strategy

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Introduction

India is the only country with an entire ocean named after it,with one of the most favourable maritime geographies on the planet. It is, indeed, central and preponderant in the Indian Ocean, in a unique fashion, not replicated by any other nation in any other oceanic setting. Yet, it has never been a sea power in the classic sense, for which it has suffered great penalties and opportunity costs.

Not only does it occupy geographic dominance right in the middle of this vast maritime domain, it is the only nation and littoral entity in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which has been bestowed with the size, natural resources, agricultural fertility, benign climate and large population, to be able to influence the region as a whole. Ever since antiquity, India has, indeed, done so through cultural, commercial and civilisational outreach and interaction across the seas, both to its west and east. It has, however, not ever accumulated the currency of sea power.

If one were to now add independent India's rising economic and military power to its natural bounty, and observe the rapidly growing strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, it would become evident to all but the seriously geopolitically challenged, that only India is pivotally placed to provide the stability required in the increasingly busy and vital seaways of the Indian Ocean, now referred to as the world's inter-state freeway and primary freight corridor. This provides Rising India with great opportunities, and it is, therefore, imperative that it evolves a maritime strategy which is acceptable to, and supported by, all shades of the domestic political spectrum.

Moreover, if geography is, indeed, destiny, and the basis for geopolitical analysis and geostrategic planning, then India must surely be considered an island, hemmed in as it is by the mostly inhospitable and impassable mountains, deserts and jungles to its north, northwest and northeast. Even in the age of trans-continental aviation, India's main intercourse with the world is from its

peninsular south, home to a 7,500 km coastline, lapped by the warm, eternally navigable waters of the Indian Ocean. This circumstance is only underlined by the fact that 90 percent of modern India's trade by volume, and 80 percent of its imported hydrocarbon energy requirements are seaborne.

Providence does, indeed, appear to be beckoning India seaward, but it remains to be seen whether its polity will seize the opportunity offered by the dynamics of geography and contemporary geoeconomics, as a springboard to prosperity, security and influence. Centuries of sea-blindness, and continentally obsessed power-plays, may yet rob India of its manifest maritime destiny.

Certainly, the Navy's share of the defence budget is not yet in consonance with the recent emergence of an articulated maritime vision at the apex levels of government, and does not yet lend assurance to the existence of a coherent maritime strategy. The success of even a well-crafted strategy undoubtedly requires,and is proportional to, the resolve and means devoted to it. At the national level, this would translate into political will, bipartisan support, and not least, the requisite sustained funding.

The formulation of any strategy presupposes the identification of achievable objectives after a realistic and thorough assessment of the environment in which such objectives are sought to be realised, including a survey of own capabilities. Clearly then, we must begin by reflecting on the maritime environment, and identify India's aspirations and goals in the oceanic domain, before we dwell on what its maritime strategy should be. Needless to say, such a strategy must be comprehensive, addressing both threats and interests, and subsuming both security and prosperity.

The Oceanic Cradle

Any examination of India's maritime strategic environment would have to consider, albeit briefly, the fundamental characteristics of the maritime dimension as relevant to New Delhi's interests. This would include the attributes and trends inherent in the oceans themselves; the unique features and increasing geopolitical and geoeconomic centrality of the Indian Ocean in the global sweepstakes; India's maritime experience; and the nature of sea power in the maritime battle space.

The Oceans

Whilst most are conversant with the fact that the oceans cover 70 percent of the Earth's surface, not many draw the inference that this allows all actors, from

nation-states to criminals, to legally access almost the entire planet should they possess the maritime means to do so.

The seas are the last great 'commons' of mankind, free for all to use, and belonging to no state or entity. Even the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS), permits all manner of vessels, from warships to sailing boats, freedom of navigation in all waters, including the right of innocent passage even in the territorial seas of all coastal states . Certainly ,the demarcation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) for coastal states does not inhibit manoeuvre and navigation for vessels, including warships, in the same waters.

As a consequence, maritime forces can legally roam the planet at will, unlike ground and air forces, whose deployment is subject to, and limited by, sovereign borders, foreign territory and air spaces. This global access lies at the heart of sea power for those who acquire the capacity to wield it. History has recorded, and strategists have accepted, that a nation cannot be a great power without being a maritime power. It is, therefore, only appropriate that China's naval strategy to address the US, is called "Anti-Access, Area Denial", or A2AD.

Of course, the oceans are now increasingly also critical for trade and transportation in a globalised world, and are vital for geoeconomic advantage: 80 percent of global trade by volume traverses the seas.Moreover, the same Sea Lanes of Communication, or SLOCs, which carry goods and cargo, are also the energy lifelines for many nations, and, particularly, for India, China and Japan. Oil and gas pipelines, whether overland or undersea, simply cannot match the volumes of crude and refined products which can be transported by super tankers, and that too with greater safety and less cost.

Not least, the oceans are a treasure trove of living and non-living resources,and a major factor for food security,mineral sourcing/ mining, and, may be, as an antidote for water scarcity. This is inevitably leading to greater maritime conflict, and what can only be termed as increasing 'territorialisation' of the seas, as most tellingly witnessed in the South China Sea, and also in the spate of maritime boundary claims and disputes. Thus, the increasingly contested and vast oceanic spaces have progressively occupied strategic centre-stage in recent times, and the 21st century has been aptly described as the "century of the seas".

It is abundantly clear that the world is more interconnected and interdependent than ever before in human history. The entwined globalised economy, exponentially increased maritime trade, the internet and instant

communications, quick and reliable intercontinental transportation, space-based imagery and location, and even long-range precision munitions, to name but a few factors, have served to shrink the planet to a point where one can now imagine humanity as a string of communities living on the shores of one big ocean – the Great Commons if you will.

Humanity's prosperity, security and perhaps very survival are increasingly intertwined with the oceans. It is no surprise to observe that all coastal states, large and small, are a seen to be engaged in hectic maritime capacity- building, inclusive of Navies, ports, fishing fleets, constabulary forces , and merchant shipping.

The Indian Ocean

The third largest oceanic realm on the planet, spread over approximately 70 million sq km, and containing about 20 percent of the Earth's water, the Indian Ocean is the least accessible of all the oceans. It is landlocked to the north, and has entry restricted from the east and west through a few narrow straits. The western approach to the ocean is through the Suez Canal and Red Sea, and the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, between Arabia and the Horn of Africa. The only other way into the Indian Ocean from the west is all the way around the Cape of Good Hope in southernmost Africa. Similarly, the eastern approaches into the Indian Ocean are limited to a few straits in the Indonesian archipelago, principally the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok, or, again, all the way around Australia. Even the entry and exit into the Indian Ocean's most strategic waterway, the oil- rich Persian Gulf, is restricted through the Strait of Hormuz.

These natural "choke points" are so termed because they squeeze maritime traffic into a narrow channel, during which passage, all ships and vessels are extremely vulnerable to detection, identification and interdiction by a whole variety of actors, ranging from warships to pirates. Conversely, these choke points can be easily blocked by sinking even a few—sometimes a single— ship inside it, which can impede safe navigation for weeks, and conceivably months.

It would be obvious that this geography lends itself to military action on shipping from sea, air and even land by anyone possessing the means to do so. Thus, critical cargo, including shipments of oil, armaments, ammunition and food supplies,can be prevented from reaching their recipients, which in itself has the potential to sway the outcome of conflicts, besides the short and long-term effects on economies, and on social order which can be severely impacted by shortages of commodities. This same geography makes it relatively simpler

to impose sanctions or naval blockades on the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region(IOR).

Providence has also deemed it fit to place the world's largest reserves of oil and gas within the IOR geography, as also rich mineral resources. On the other hand, a large number of Asian, African and island nations of the IOR are amongst the poorest in the world, and the entire region is comparatively underdeveloped,but densely populated. Consequently, the Indian Ocean and its littoral invite considerable interest from extra-regional powers, keen to source raw materials, develop markets and invest in infrastructure and industry.

However, the IOR littoral is also prone to political instability, widespread violence,internecine conflict, and corrupt elites, all of which make it susceptible to manipulation and exploitation, as may be evinced from the success of Beijing's yuan diplomacy in recent years, and the rise of entities now termed as NIPCs, or Newly Indebted Poor Countries.

In addition to the inherent characteristics of the IOR as outlined above, two recent developments have served to make it of intense strategic concern to the world at large. Firstly, as economic power is shifting eastward, the Indian Ocean has become the centre of gravity of the East-West trade flow, on which the economies of even nations far from the region, such as of those in Europe, increasingly depend. The Indian Ocean is now referred to as the world's primary freight corridor – the global inter-state highway, as it were.

It is important to note that a significant percentage of the goods and materials that transit the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean have both extra-regional origin and destination—from west of Suez to east of Malacca, and vice versa. Furthermore, there is the huge dependency of the economies of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea on the resources and markets of the Indian Ocean Region, which has led to the advent of the Indo-Pacific maritime construct.

Secondly, the IOR is the epicentre of radical Islam, with the attendant phenomenon of extremist terrorism,and thereby the focus of the Global War on Terror. It is also the nerve-centre of the scourge of piracy, which reared its ugly face in the first decade of the millennium, and threatened the shipping of all nations. As a consequence, the Indian Ocean has witnessed considerable extra- regional naval presence and activity, ostensibly to address these two threats.

India and the Ocean

Clearly then, India's 'tough' neighbourhood is not restricted to its land frontiers,

but is also to be found in the waters that surround it, and demands a coherent maritime strategy to counter the many possible threats from the seaward, as well as to safeguard and further its considerable maritime interests.

India and the Indian Ocean are entwined by the word 'central' in many ways. India is certainly central to the Indian Ocean in more ways than its undoubtedly overwhelming geographical centrality, such as the central role it has to, and must, play for the security of the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean,as also for the stability of the IOR as a whole —succinctly defined by the phrase 'net security provider'. The Indian Ocean itself is now central to global trade, thereby becoming the centre of gravity of the world economy. It is also central to India's economy, prosperity and security, which fact must become central to Indian strategic thought .

India's maritime heritage has essentially been one of trade undertaken by many of its communities through the ages. Ease of accessibility to the open waters of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Southern Ocean, coupled with native entrepreneurial energy and relative stability, ensured trade and civilisational interaction from East Africa to Southeast Asia from ancient times. The seas even provided links to the Levant and the Roman Empire through the short overland routes from the northern Red Sea and the western Persian Gulf, well before the Suez Canal provided access to the Mediterranean.

However, except in a few coastal pockets, maritime military power was conspicuously absent, as was the spur of conquest. In addition, there was no central political authority in the Indian subcontinent for most of its pre-British history. Consequently, there was little impetus given to maritime strategy, and for the two-odd centuries before independence, India's oceanic defence and protection of trade was outsourced to the Royal Navy.

The first half-century of India as a nation-state was devoted to building up maritime capability incrementally in both the military and civil domains. Despite the dearth of maritime awareness amongst both the polity and the lay public, it has built up the world's seventh largest Navy which is a professional three-dimensional blue-water force, and is embarked on building nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers indigenously. India continues to make steady progress in the civil maritime sector, with increasing private sector participation in ports, ship-building, ship maintenance and maritime logistics. Preliminary attempts to formulate a broad maritime strategy were observed only after the end of the Cold War, and oceanic awareness and maritime discourse within India's strategic community comprises only a very recent phenomenon.

Sea Power and Navies

Sea power is sometimes academically defined as the comprehensive capability of a nation in the maritime arena, inclusive of Navies, port facilities, the merchant marine, shipbuilding facilities, fishing fleet, and so on. The term, however, traditionally also denotes the capability of a nation to wage war at sea, and achieve naval supremacy and military advantage over its rivals in the Westphalian framework. For the purposes of this paper, it shall be used in the latter context.

It is axiomatic that nations that possess and wield power at sea, can hypothetically exercise it over the entire planet, since the seas, which as yet belong to no one, cover most of the Earth's surface in a seamlessly connected continuum, thus, providing legal worldwide access. Put another way, no nation can be a great power, or even a regional power without being a maritime power, capable of sustained military action far from the homeland. History has starkly underlined that the destinies of nations and their Navies are indeed inextricably linked, as can be observed from the rise and decline of Spain, Portugal, Britain and Russia in tandem with their sea power.

The Pax Americana imposed by the hyper-power of the United States after the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, however imperfect it may be, has been principally brought about by the overwhelming global supremacy of the US Navy, much as Pax Britannica was enforced by the Royal Navy in the 19th century. This unipolar status-quo is now also being principally challenged by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and China's rapidly burgeoning sea power.

Technology has only multiplied the military advantages conferred by sea power. In the modern era of precision guided, long range munitions, Navies now have the ability to attack the land, not only in the littoral, but also in the deep hinterland, from what may be described as neutral territory. Similarly, the vastness and relative opaqueness of the ocean makes the stealthy ballistic nuclear submarine the most survivable, potent, feared and effective component of the strategic nuclear triad.

On the other hand, however strong a nation may be at sea, it is impossible for anyone to be in command of all the sea, all the time. The ocean is simply too vast and the sea cannot be partitioned, occupied or fenced. It can only be utilised towards furthering objectives. Sea power may be, thus, be succinctly defined as the capability to use the seas for one's advantage and interests, whilst denying the same to adversaries.

The natural condition or state of the sea is 'uncontrolled', and any control must be established by naval forces on, above, and under, the surface of the sea. These forces can then conduct the full range of naval operations within, and from, this controlled area. The concept of 'sea control', which has primacy over all other broader naval objectives , is the attainment of a dominating condition, which is, however, intrinsically limited in both time and space. It is sought to be achieved only in a particular area of the sea, for a specific period, and for a defined purpose. Sea control does not entail conquering or seizing parts of the sea, but just attaining reasonably unopposed supremacy in some part of it, for some time.

However, controlling the sea is a demanding proposition in terms of both force levels and operational effort, and can only be exercised by large blue water Navies. Sea-denial is less expensive, but no nation can become a maritime power only through denying the sea to opposing or rival powers. It must have the wherewithal to use the sea by exercising sea control when and where necessary – in other words, an aspiring great or regional power must possess a strong Navy.

Though Armies and Air Forces also have distinct diplomatic and power-projection roles , the unique attributes of naval forces, which constantly operate in a virtually borderless international domain,make them an ideal instrument of state policy during both peace and crises. The term 'gunboat diplomacy',though broadly used to convey the coercive power of naval forces deployed in an area of interest, does not even remotely capture the range of missions and diplomatic signalling to which warships can be put to use.

Exploiting the access afforded by the sea and the inherent freedom of navigation,naval forces have the mobility to move hundreds of miles every day, unimpeded by terrain or third-party agreements. This enables Navies to quickly respond from over the horizon, and they can be just as easily withdrawn, disappearing over the horizon without the stigma of retreat. Naval forces are logistically self-sufficient for long periods of time, and can provide sustained reach in distant theatres, along with considerable lift capacity of men, armaments and material, if so required.

Warships are extremely versatile and can change their posture and demeanour from benign to malign, and vice versa,almost instantly – such as switching from a full-fledged combat mission to disaster relief, or evacuation operations. They can be multiple-tasked, and rapidly retasked. By suitable manoeuvre and selective visibility, they can convey a host of well-calibrated

signals across the spectrum of political, diplomatic and military action. A much understated attribute of warships is their ability to 'poise' in an area of interest or theatre of operations. They can remain on station for protracted periods of time. This can signal resolve, coerce an adversary, or reassure an ally.

In sum, warships poising in any area, offer the national leadership an abundance of political and military options at short notice. This also allows for significant leverage on operations ashore and on land forces, through manoeuvre, feint and forays. Navies are, therefore, perfectly suited to the modern world, in which industrial era, formal declared wars are being replaced by a conflict-ridden 'long peace', in which powers, great and small, use their military power more for deterrence, coercion and influence to contain armed conflict.

However, Navies are expensive forces and call for financial, technological and organisational muscle and acumen. They demand large committed outlays to build, maintain and operate. Only economically strong nations can afford reasonably potent Navies.

Moreover, naval platforms have exceedingly long lead times for construction and fitting out, with literally hundreds of systems, from weapons and sensors to diverse equipment for various requirements such as ammunition magazines to nuclear fallout-proof ventilation, to sewage treatment plants. Further, warships and submarines require extremely skilled and technologically savvy manpower, who must be extensively trained for long durations to operate, maintain and repair high-tech systems, out at sea, and far from support.

Put simply,all Navies require sustained and assured funding for acquisition, procurement and training, long before the platform or asset materialises as a fighting unit. There are no quick fixes, and certainly no immediate political returns. It would, therefore, not be far off the mark to say that only ambitious nations with visionary, far-seeing leaders can create and sustain a strong Navy, which will always remain a prerequisite, and the prime instrument, of sea power.

Emergent Strategic Imperatives

Besides taking note of the characteristics of the oceans in general, those of the Indian Ocean in particular, India's place in the regional maritime order, and the attributes of sea power and Navies, any maritime strategy would need to take cognisance of emerging geopolitical and geoeconomic developments,trends and drivers, at both the global and regional levels. A quick glance at the most impacting of these is undertaken in the succeeding paragraphs.

Global Trends

To begin with, the promise of a post-Cold War new world order, has degenerated into global disorder, and the 'end of history'promised by Fukuyama is nowhere in sight. Geopolitical tensions have risen anew in all quadrants of the globe.The international stage is now peopled by a variety of state and non-state actors, including a somewhat fatigued and possibly isolationist superpower, a rising China and India, a declining Europe, an aggressive Russia, a convulsed Islamic world, and, of course, terrorists,pirates, fundamentalists, radicals, ideologues and diverse bizarre groupings of many hues. Conflict will remain endemic, and will almost certainly be witnessed at sea.

We are also beginning to discern the contours of a great new struggle between the Eurasian 'heartland' represented by the China-Russia combine,and the US-led prevailing world order instituted by the victorious West after World War II. This development can perhaps also be viewed as a conflict for supremacy between a more authoritarian,continental order, and a liberally inclined maritime framework . Mackinder versus Mahan, if you will, except that the Eurasian bloc is also heavily investing in maritime capacity.

In such circumstances, conflict at sea is,once again, more than likely.

Galloping technology, and severe technological disruption are causing anxiety and uncertainty, and rapidly changing conventional military, economic and social structures, from the nature of work to the nature of war. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics in tandem with advances in biological, nano and energy storage promise to make the world unrecognisable every coming decade, as witnessed in the information revolution begun barely ten years ago by the advent of the smartphone. There are enough pointers indicating the possibility of a totally transparent, instantly targetable, unmanned battle space, which would certainly cause a revolution in maritime affairs, and must be taken cognisance of by maritime strategists.

The Indo-Pacific

Though all the oceans are connected, the Indian Ocean and West Pacific have the greatest connectivity if measured in terms of shipping traffic and volume. This phenomenon has many drivers. Firstly, the economies of the developed countries of the West Pacific, principally China,Japan and South Korea, are highly dependent on the flow of hydrocarbons from their reservoirs in West Asia, and increasingly from Africa. Secondly, the same economies require both the resources available in the IOR, as well as the markets in the same region

for their finished products. Thirdly, there is a huge amount of trade between the West Pacific economies and Europe, all of which transits the Indian Ocean. Fourthly, there has been an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and, consequently, in trade and shipping from the many developing and emerging economies of the IOR itself, with India as the prime example. Last, but not least, there has been a major increase in transit of military vessels, including warships,submarines and intelligence ships, as China, the US, and many other regional and extra-regional nations step up their naval capacity and activity.

For all these reasons, the waters of the IOR and the West Pacific clearly comprise one maritime super-region, and can no longer be geostrategically separated. The major implication of this reality is that the nations of the IOR cannot ignore geopolitical and geoeconomic developments in the West Pacific, and vice versa. Events in either ocean can, and will, affect the economies and security concerns in the other.

China

The rapid rise and assertive posture of China has doubtless been the development with the greatest geopolitical impact over the last decade. Ever since the PLAN ventured into the IOR in 2008 for anti-piracy operations, and more so since President Xi assumed the mantle of the Great Helmsman in 2012, Beijing has introduced a militaristic flavour into its interaction in what is now termed as the Indo-Pacific, stretching all the way from the east coast of Africa, to the seas of the West Pacific. It has greatly accelerated its military and maritime build-up in terms of platforms, technology, infrastructure and equipment.

Besides its shenanigans in the South and East China Seas, Beijing has vigorously increased its naval deployment, mainly in the IOR, but also in the Mediterranean , the Atlantic/ Baltic and the South Pacific. It has simultaneously and aggressively pursued its objective for bases or 'places', or the 'string of pearls' if you will, essentially to facilitate distant operations. It has gained key maritime footholds in Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyakpyu in Myanmar, Gwadar and Karachi in Pakistan, Gadhoo in the Maldives and, of course, its first overseas base in Djibouti. China is also actively seeking port facilities in Duqm in Oman, Chabahar in Iran, and many more in East Africa and in the island nations of the IOR.

The maritime aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a gigantic connectivity construct, with distinct geopolitical ramifications, will undoubtedly enhance China's strategic profile in the IOR, as will its financial and technical

aid and support to a host of infrastructure projects throughout the IOR littoral and islands.

Given its increasing capability, it should not be long before Beijing fields an aircraft carrier task force, and may be even a permanently stationed Indian Ocean fleet, in the waters to the west of Malacca. In short, China will certainly pose a strategic challenge for India in the foreseeable future. New Delhi will need a maritime strategy to balance and limit Chinese power in the region, or suffer irrelevance and economic loss in its immediate neighbourhood, in addition to the increasing military threat from the sea.

US Policy and Posture

American foreign policy can now be best summed up by the term unpredictable. This condition is not only a result of President Trump's personality, but has also been brought about by the US beginning to review and recalibrate the fundamental tenets and articles of faith that have created and sustained the liberal, globalised post-World War II world order. This includes its alliances, its military pacts and international institutions such as the UN.

There is far too much churning at the moment, but for our purposes, three things can be gleaned. Firstly, US military spending and capability is going to increase, leading to a 350-ship Navy, as now projected. Secondly, the US is not going to fight shy of the China-Russia challenge. Its National Security Strategy (NSS) of December 2017, and National Defence Strategy (NDS) of January 2018 squarely articulate and address this challenge. Lastly, despite earlier statements and indications, the US is unlikely to pivot away from Afghanistan and West Asia in a hurry, as its interests go far beyond just oil and terror. We can conclude that substantial US Navy presence in the IOR will continue for the immediate future.

Pakistan

Mostly dismissed as a sea-denial Navy, Pakistan's conventional naval strength, specially in tandem with the facilities being developed by the PLAN in Karachi Gwadar and elsewhere, is not something that can be ignored as insignificant in the light of the Chinese threat. Islamabad is focussing on modernising the weapons on its ships and submarines, with special emphasis on cruise missiles, including for land attack. The Indian coastal cities and even those near the coast would almost certainly be targeted from the sea. It also continues to focus on its maritime air strike capability and reconnaissance assets.

In the recent past, the Pakistan Navy has contracted for eight Yuan class air-independent propulsion submarines from China. By the mid-2020s, this acquisition itself could alter the undersea balance of power in the Arabian Sea. Controlled by a new Very Low Frequency (VLF) facility to communicate with submerged submarines, this force level would pose a serious threat to both merchant ships and men-of-war in the relatively constricted waters of the north Arabian Sea.

Looking West

Whilst most economic opportunity and perhaps some potential conflict appears to lie mnemonic east of Malacca, there is much to be concerned about in the waters to the west of India. West Asia and the Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) region continue to harbour conflict, insecurity, instability and many shades of violence, with no light yet at the end of the tunnel.

The region is wracked by long ongoing conflicts and discord between the Israelis and Arabs, between Shias and Sunnis, between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and violence is afoot in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan, with the Taliban, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al Qaeda and Pakistan/ ISI , all fishing in troubled waters.

Despite the decreasing heft of oil , the region continues to be the playground of the Great Game, with the active military presence of almost all extra- regional powers, including the US, France,China, Russia, the UK and even Australia.

The US Central Command, and its Fifth Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain, along with coalition partners , have been policing the northwest Indian Ocean, including the Persian Gulf and the approaches to Hormuz, ever since the first Kuwait War in 1990. Should, for any reason the US pivot, rebalance, or draw-down away from the quagmire ofWest Asia, it would lead to the emergence of a power vacuum in the region. Though unlikely in the near term, this eventuality could happen due to a combination of increasing isolationism, loss of strategic interest and public support , self-sufficiency in energy, and superpower fatigue.

Were this to come about, it would be of the utmost concern to India, given its massive interests in the region, principally for its energy security, along with its extensive diaspora, considerable commercial and business linkages, and increasing investments. Nature and geopolitics both abhor a vacuum, and New Delhi needs to fully comprehend the effects of the vacuum being filled by inimical powers. Any such scenario is now exacerbated by the emergence of Chinese naval power in this area, centred in Gwadar.

Looking East

The eastern part of the IOR, that is the Bay of Bengal, fortuitously remains – as yet – a relative oasis of calm, sandwiched between the turbulent Arabian Sea, and the equally choppy waters of the South China Sea. It would clearly be in India's interest that this status quo prevails. Towards this end, New Delhi has sagaciously resolved its maritime boundary dispute with Dhaka, and has stepped up its maritime engagements with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. It has also given greater impetus to the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) construct, as well as to connectivity projects in the region, and is a strong advocate of a peaceful Bay of Bengal community.

Efforts to keep the Bay of Bengal free of extra-regional warships and submarines may be difficult in the wake of the Chinese multi-sectoral engagement with, and largesse to, the littoral states, including military hardware and submarines. Given that these nations are adjacent to the Chinese hinterland and Yunnan province, it is unlikely that China will reduce efforts to expand its influence in, and connectivity to, the Bay of Bengal.

Looking South

The island nations of the Indian Ocean as well as the southeastern coast of Africa are rapidly gaining strategic significance as maritime listening logistics and staging posts, and as a corridor to Africa's resources and markets. There has also been the discovery of substantial gas fields and the certainty of rich natural resources in the EEZs , which would need to be developed by suitable international ventures.

In the event of a closure of the Suez Canal – a possibility which can result from many scenarios – the southern route around South Africa would regain strategic significance overnight, and the security of the Mozambique Channel would be vital to many national interests. Strong US and French military presence in the Southern Ocean adds to its geopolitical importance, and calls for a southward seaward gaze, in addition to its looking east and west.

Multipolar and Multilateral Maritime Response

China's assertive rise is of concern to many countries other than India. Besides, in the US and Japan, China's activities, and reluctance to play by the rules, has caused disquiet amongst its neighbours in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and even in the many recipients of its largesse in the Indo-Pacific, Africa and Central Asia.

Increasingly, small groups of nations – 'mini-laterals' – are replacing large unwieldy multilateral arrangements to advance common geopolitical objectives. There is no gainsaying that in the vast maritime canvas of the Indo-Pacific, geopolitical dynamics will be shaped by the actions and interactions of five maritime powers: the US, India, Japan, Australia and China. This may be described as the Quad plus one ! With Indonesia playing a greater role, with its self-image as the global maritime fulcrum, one could even say Quint plus one !

The 'Maritime Security' Bandwagon

There is much confusion about the increasingly ubiquitous term 'maritime security', even in strategic circles. In popular usage, it is used rather ambiguously, and has no precise meaning which is universally acceptable. To some, it covers all measures to address the entire gamut of threats at, or from, the sea, including those emergent from traditional state-to-state conflict.

The term has essentially arisen from the insecurity perceived by almost all nations in regard to the safety of their shipping and trade, and thereby to the health of their economies and energy lifelines. Since the ocean is vast, and most maritime forces small and limited in their range of effective capability, there is a desire for collective action to deal with this insecurity. The threat is , by and large, from non-state entities, which can impact shipping, ports, coasts and littoral regions.

However, it is now being mostly perceived to denote means to tackle non-traditional threats, mostly emanating from non-state, non-military actors. These include terrorists ,pirates and criminals of many hues, engaged in a wide range of activities such as human and migrant trafficking, narcotics, gun running and so on. It also includes poachers in the EEZ, and the whole business of Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Some have also deemed it fit to include the security requirements of nebulous 'blue economies' – another somewhat ambiguous term in the maritime lexicon.

Towards the ends of maritime security, there is much discourse on instituting suitable regional and sub-regional 'architectures' and organisations to further the security in the maritime domain. Large and small groupings of nations are in the process of establishing or strengthening such initiatives, in addition to the global ambit of the UN through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS). There are many who advocate that the Indian Ocean Rim Association or IORA

should morph into a security organisation, even though the forum of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is active. Search bodies are then inclined to issue a whole gamut of guidelines and codes of conduct for the members, adding to the maze of regulations instituted in recent times.

It is yet to be seen if such architectures will succeed in restricting the activities of those states or private groups that wish to ignore the tenets and principles of international law, or remain impotent talk-shops. There is, however, no harm in these bodies discussing relevant issues as a guide for policy-makers and practitioners. Eventually, most threats impacting on maritime security have to be addressed by the use of appropriate force by individual or collective action by the maritime forces of the concerned nations, even if it is to provide cover to political and social efforts. The success in curbing and almost eliminating the threat of piracy emanating from Somalia by individual and coalition Navies is a case in point.

For the purposes of this paper, maritime security is defined as that which addresses non-traditional, non-military threats, and, thus, only marginally impacts the crafting of a traditional Westphalian geopolitical maritime strategy. After all, the security of ports, coastlines offshore installations and assets in the Maritime Zones of India (MZI) requires coordinated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and not any crafted strategy. Rather, adequate constabulary, institutional capacity, clear-cut organisation, necessary legislation and maritime governance are the tools required to obtain enduring maritime security in the above defined sense of the term.

Objectives

A short list of strategic objectives that any maritime strategy for India must consider could be as under:

- Safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation from maritime threats to the same.
- Preserving strategic autonomy and freedom of action to the maximum extent possible in all areas of strategic maritime interest, and the Indo-Pacific in particular.
- Protecting Indian shipping and trade during its passage on the high seas and the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs).
- Ensuring the integrity and continuity of India's energy lifelines, critically dependent on the safe arrival of oil and gas being carried by tankers and other vessels from their reservoirs.

- Influencing and shaping both the IOR region as a whole, and the maritime battle space in particular, by means of the requisite presence, visibility, and projection of India's sea power and capability.
- Obtaining geoeconomic advantage through positive and noted perception of India's resolve, capability and ambitious intent, in regard to furthering its prosperity, by appropriate flag-showing, wherever and whenever required.
- Reinforcing India's civilisationally benign credentials, not by abjuring the military instrument, but by using it as a force for the good, as a net security provider, and for humanitarian and disaster relief, including for evacuation operations, on distant shores.
- Achieving nuclear deterrence by credible undersea second-strike capability.
- Reassuring India's vast diaspora, neighbours and allies about India's maritime capability, and its underlying objective as being a 'force for the common good', and a harbinger of stability
- Neutralising China's IOR influence and coercive power by exceeding Beijing's naval deployment and visible presence in the region.
- Attracting maritime partners to act in unison and cooperation for common strategic and operational objectives.
- Deterring adversaries, opponents and enemies from embarking on any maritime adventure inimical to India or its interests.
- Furthering the entire breadth of India's multifarious and vital interests in the Indo-Pacific, by the classical use of sea power.

India's Maritime Strategy

The vast and international nature of the maritime domain demands an assertive strategy to address maritime threats , interests and opportunities, across a very broad spectrum of human activity. For example, any maritime strategy should include plans to harness energy from the power of wave and wind, and to obtain maximum oceanographic and hydrographic data in respect of areas of maritime interest. For the purposes of this paper, however, the suggested strategy is confined to the traditional 'military- economic-diplomatic' dimensions.

Maritime Capacity Building

India's foremost strategy in the maritime arena must be to build maritime capacity and capability that is appropriate for the large breadth of its geopolitical and geoeconomic threats, interests,opportunities, and not the least, ambitions. As underlined earlier, this requires vision and a long-term

view, along with substantial and sustained funding in both military and civil sectors of the maritime domain. This would include the force levels, manpower and infrastructure requirements of the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Police.

For strategic reasons, if not for economic ones, successive governments must increasingly draw in private investment to fund the civil maritime sector, be it in ports, shipbuilding, warehousing, international/ coastal shipping, and so on; focussing only on land acquisition, demarcation and the connectivity framework for private projects to bloom. If governments persist giving centre-stage to mostly public ownership and investment, then it would clearly be short of funds for the military sector, in which it cannot delegate responsibilities of complete ownership, and operational accountability.

Suffice to say, neither the force levels nor the monies allocated to the Indian Navy, are adequate for addressing the strategic maritime scenario unfolding in the seas around India. Naval force levels have remained static and even declined in some areas,and there are major operational voids. These inadequacies have been highlighted persistently to successive governments over the last two decades. Whilst there has been slow progress in some areas, naval operations are multi-dimensional in nature, and would suffer greatly if there is a major shortage in specific sectors, such as submarines, helicopters or minesweepers.

As a pointer, the US Constitution, written over two centuries ago, states that the US would 'raise' an Army whenever required, but 'maintain' a Navy. This was no bias for the Navy, but only underlined the fact that Navies cannot be raised or equipped at short notice. In addition to long design and construction periods , training of personnel is time- consuming.

On the other hand, marine constabulary forces such as the Indian Coast Guard and the marine police of the coastal states, have been given enhanced funding , hardware, manpower and attention since the Mumbai attacks in 2008. It must be ensured that this bounty is not frittered away on the induction of literally hundreds of low-end platforms for patrol purposes. The emphasis has to shift, as it has in the developed countries, to precise interdiction on the basis of precise intelligence and surveillance inputs, rather than on the conduct of mostly fruitless and expensive patrolling.

During hostilities, Coast Guard assets would integrate with the Navy, and be tasked for operations suitable to their capability and training.

In a similar manner to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), however, there is an inclination to over-militarise and duplicate functions. This is detrimental for effective maritime operations, due to diffused command and control arrangements. There is now a proposal to raise a central marine police force. This will only exacerbate the confusion and lack of coordination by virtue of a plethora of organisations operating in the same amorphous medium.

Maritime capacity building must not degenerate into just raising additional forces, resulting in a scramble for scarce funds, merely for turf and competitive asset building, without an eye on the strategic objectives and utility.

Shipbuilding and the Defence Industrial Base

Not only does India have the dubious distinction of being the world's largest importer of armaments, it is entirely dependent on the goodwill and support of its sources of supply during crises or hostilities, and vulnerable to inflationary prices at all times. It is important to continue underlining this stark fact as a strategic vulnerability, and any maritime strategy would be essentially impotent in the absence of a vibrant shipbuilding and armaments industry which can provide the platforms, weapons, sensors, ordnance,equipment, and repair support necessary for distant and effective maritime operations.

Despite inordinate delays in production, bloated workforces, perennial issues of accountability, and tardy decision-making, with the consequent time and cost overruns in the warship-building process, India has made substantial advances in building military platforms, specially in so far as the hull and ship systems are concerned. It also possesses integration skills of a very high order. All this is ,however, negated by the inability of India's defence industry to develop, design and manufacture weapons and sensors of the requisite technology, quality and ruggedness, the *sine qua non* for sea power, since combat effectiveness at sea is as demanding and unforgiving on material as it is on manpower.

There is enough clarity of thought in many governmental and industrial quarters on the steps which need to be taken to facilitate the enthusiastic entry of the private sector into the defence business. However, incremental progress is hampered and reversed by powerful sections within the polity with a vested or ideological interest in the status quo. The subject of India's defence industrial base is clearly outside the purview of this paper, but suffice to say that should the Indian genius not find a way to transform its military industrial capacity, it is unlikely that any strategy, however brilliant, would succeed.

Sustained Forward Deployment

The time has come for India's maritime strategy to be based on the singular principle of sustained forward deployment in India's areas of maritime interest. Both geopolitical dynamics, and India's extensive range of interests demand that its sea power be deployed, and be visible, in a gapless fashion, especially in the vital waterways and important choke points. Anything less will not do justice to the strategic imperatives and objectives listed in the earlier sections. The only alternative would be to scale down aspirations and ambitions, and even then one would not be able to guarantee the security of the coast and of the littoral from attack by long range munitions from enemy surface or sub-surface platforms operating in the deep.

Sustained deployment on distant stations requires three ingredients. Firstly, sufficient force levels to be able to seamlessly relieve already deployed units on station, without sacrificing the seaward defence of the homeland and home waters. Secondly, the manpower and maintenance wherewithal to sustain the required operational tempo, which will be vastly increased because of the demands of this strategy. Lastly, the availability of sufficient fleet support ships, fuelling tankers and friendly operational turnaround ports in the area of interest.

If India is to really meet the strategic objectives listed above, it has little choice but to be present-in-theatre and ready to bring sea power to bear in the increasingly fractious waters in its strategic neighbourhood.

Capability Building

In addition to capacity, India's maritime strategy needs to build capability in two specific areas – anti-submarine warfare and expeditionary operations. While India does possess a balanced three-dimensional Navy, it needs to strengthen its prowess in these functionalities, so as to obtain an assured and larger footprint in the area of New Delhi's maritime interest, which today is synonymous with the Indo-Pacific.

Even small nations are now adding submarines to their arsenals, and China, of course, is deploying nuclear submarines in the IOR. Pakistan is substantially revamping its submarine arm, and it will not be long before we see the advent of Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs) in the Indian Ocean. The submarine threat is no longer restricted to shipping, but envelops the littoral, with Vital Areas (VAs), Vital Points (VPs) and coastal population centres as more than likely targets. Moreover with the likely introduction of nuclear attack

submarines or SSNs into the fray, the Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) threat to Indian warships and shipping will increase manifold. The fleet's ability to achieve sea control in distant areas would also require a substantial focus on ASW. Investment in new technologies and methodologies such as underwater seabed sensors, will need to be made.

India's aspirations and responsibilities in the IOR virtually demand that it develop basic 'out-of-area' capabilities. The Navy's sealift capability is an attribute which must be exploited to create a potent and expeditionary force-in-being. Further, distant sealift operations must be practised and honed to be able to support any initial deployment of airlifted or airborne troops.

Present amphibious capability must be strengthened, and joint structures for the same need to be evolved for the required degree of rapid response capability in terms of not just amphibious operations, but also the provision of follow-up troops and material.

Proactive and Offensive Doctrine

Historically, Navies have not defended the homeland by passively patrolling coastlines. They do so by venturing deep into the ocean, seeking out the enemy and destroying him, by bringing him to battle.

This requires a proactive and offensive mindset, which must be translated into doctrine and strategy. This is an even more important requirement in the age of long-range conventional missiles with considerable destructive power, wherein these munitions can be launched from hundreds of miles away from the coast.

Successful offensive action requires training, practice and frequent war-gaming all the way up to the politico-military interface, for the development of operational plans and procedures, to be brought into play when approved under specific circumstances. Put simply, India's maritime strategy must incorporate a proactive offensive stance if it is to deter conflict, and yet shape and lead the regional geopolitical space.

Maritime Domain Awareness

The maritime battle space is now more transparent than ever before. Surveillance of the vast ocean areas is now concurrently undertaken from space, aircraft, drones, coastal and offshore radars, Vessel Traffic Movement System (VTMS), ships at sea, AIS and LRIT inputs, undersea sensors, white shipping information-sharing, and analysis of electronic and radio emissions.

All this data is collated, and deconflicted to obtain a common operating picture for the purposes of maritime domain awareness. Access to the complete picture may be restricted, based on the nature and identity of the user organisation.

However, this increasingly definite awareness of the maritime domain cuts both ways, and surface warfare doctrines have to increasingly factor in the possibility of own positions and movements being compromised and known to the adversary. On the other hand ,this can be used to advantage by drawing out the enemy and forcing an encounter under favourable tactical conditions.

Strategy West

Most naval analysts would agree that the Indian Navy's presence in the energy critical region comprising the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Gulf of Eden, needs to be enhanced by having a squadron of warships, if not a flotilla ,operating on station more or less around the year. Towards this end, India needs to extend and strengthen its ties with Oman, Iran and Yemen in particular so as to be able to utilise operational turnaround facilities in Salalah, Duqm,Aden and Chabahar on an assured basis.

Such a force would need to be relieved on station after deployment of three to four months, returning to home-base for maintenance and recuperation thereafter. It would clearly need an integral tanker for underway replenishment of fuel at sea, as also a dedicated fleet support ship vital for other logistical support should operational turnaround ports not be available for whatsoever reason. Whilst on station, ships of the squadron must continually make port calls, and exercise with the local Navies for interoperability, signalling friendship and reassurance, and improving awareness of local conditions.

Strategy East

In the thus far, relatively placid waters of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea,India's strategic lynchpins are, of course, the providentially located Andaman and Nicobar Islands, dominating the approaches to the Malacca Strait. They have immense strategic value, with the inherent wherewithal to become India's most significant maritime trump card.

To be of strategic use, however , they must not only become an impregnable gateway to all comers into the IOR, but also be turned into a launching pad and staging post for distant operations in all waters eastward of them. Both these capabilities must be perceptible to foes and friends alike. Though the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) is primarily a maritime theatre, it benefits

greatly from the permanent basing of Army and Air Force assets, which add to its latent expeditionary potential.

The capabilities of the ANC have been significantly improved by the recent induction of a second floating dry dock. This would be a force-multiplier, as would be the commissioning of a full-fledged Naval Air Station in the Nicobars, for basing and staging through the P8I LRMP and other such surveillance and interdiction aircraft. In due course, the islands must, of course, be able to support the forward deployment of both conventional and nuclear submarines.

Other than that, India must use all diplomatic means necessary to convince Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in particular, and also Thailand and Indonesia against the inherent negativities to their own security and economies from any undue militarisation of the Bay of Bengal. This will happen if the installations created for supporting their imported platforms, including submarines from China, are increasingly used as repair and turnaround facilities for PLAN warships and submarines operating in the Bay of Bengal.

These countries will only be convinced of the logic of India's position if it is conveyed from a position of strength and with sincerity, building abiding belief in these nations about India's capability, support and benign intentions, and their experience with New Delhi in respect of other negotiations which impinge on good neighbourly relations.

It would be evident, that India's maritime Strategy East would require the continued expansion of infrastructure facilities on the eastern seaboard, principally at Visakhapatnam but also at Chennai and the approaches to the Hooghly .

Strategy South

India must actively participate in the considerable maritime activity being undertaken by France and other members of the European Union (EU) around the east coast of Africa and the island nations of the south Indian Ocean. New Delhi must aspire for full membership of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

India and France have a healthy maritime relationship, which should be strengthened to mutual benefit.

One of India's marked successes over the last decade has been its engagement with the countries of the African east coast. Naval ships have increasingly and routinely visited ports and bases in Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa. Besides the manifold increase in knowledge of the operational

environment along the waters of this vital continent, such engagement has established military ties and visibility. With India's economic energy and commercial interests thriving in Africa, this maritime connect must be kept alive.

New Delhi's seaward gaze to the south must also clearly take in the island nations of the IOR: Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Both the Navy and the Coast Guard have a robust relationship with all these countries, that are also being courted by China and other extra-regional powers. India, however,has cultural, historical and ethnic linkages with all of them, and provided it makes good on its assistance intent, without inordinate delays, there is no reason why these island nations would not be amongst India's most reliable supporters in the IOR. Their cooperation would be of immense help in enhancing surveillance inputs for common shared security, by making available suitable enclaves for supporting Indian assets.

Engagement

At the heart of the maritime strategy of any regional power lies a thrust on 'engagement'. This is a broad term which includes presence and visibility; military diplomacy, goodwill port visits and showing the flag; maritime exercises, cooperation and assistance; coordinated patrolling and surveillance; and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) whenever required. It requires active participation in regional multilateral fora, specifically in the IORA, IONS and IOC.

In fact, the much-in-focus quadrilateral or Quad, is basically as yet a minilateral maritime engagement process involving four nations, which may evolve into something larger, but essentially underlines engagement between like-minded nations, such as for Freedom of Navigation (FON) in the Indo-Pacific.

Maritime engagement must also utilise India's considerable soft power, and initiatives such as SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region – and Project Mausum are steps in this direction.

All the international activity directed towards maritime security as defined above , would broadly fall into the category of multinational engagement for maritime governance and law enforcement. India, as a prospective net security provider, must take the lead in the provision of maritime security, in terms of sharing information, assets and processes.

Strategic Deterrence

Last, but not least, India's maritime strategy has to encompass multifarious requirements of strategic deterrence. Suffice to say, this involves major investments in technology, infrastructure and processes.

Conclusion

Both maritime threats and opportunities abound, and for all powers in the making, an effective and imaginative maritime strategy is, indeed, the need of the hour. For India, positioned where it is economically and militarily, it is indeed an imperative.

Maritime strategy cannot be formulated and instituted by the Navy or even the Ministry of Defence. It is a whole of government activity which involves more than five ministries, and a host of ancillary organisations in a major way. Clearly, it has to be driven top-down, with a clear vision regarding India's maritime strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Maritime strategy affects India's relations with other nations on a daily basis, be it in peace, crisis or conflict. It is the most impactful of all strategies on the international canvas, and has a huge economic dimension. The extreme challenges of the maritime domain, and the long-term major investments required to institute an effective maritime strategy, make such a venture either a non-starter, or a disjointed sporadic effort for most nations, except those that have the ambition, means and resolve. Whilst India possesses the first two in adequate quantity, it needs to work on the third: resolve.

It would be appropriate to end this paper by relating a supposedly real-life encounter between our early apex leadership, and a senior officer of the fledgling Indian Navy. When asked how large and strong India's Navy should be, given the always scarce financial resources, and the nature of naval outlays, the Admiral apparently stated,"The Indian Navy must be strong enough to ensure that those who wish to operate in the Indian Ocean can do so only in cooperation, and never in conflict, with it."That statement holds good to this day, and should be the foundational objective for crafting India's maritime strategy.