

The Emerging Geo-Strategic Perspective in Indian Ocean and India's Relationship with its South Asian Neighbors

Vineeta Kumari Awasthi

Assistant Professor,

Department of Political Science, Kr. R.C.M College, Manipuri, Uttar Pradesh India.

Abstract:

Indian Ocean is the world's third largest ocean, the only one bearing a country's name. It extends about 75mn kms and consists of vital sea lanes and some of the Asia's largest flourishing economies in its rim. It is bounded by Japan and Australia in the East, Africa in the west and Asia in the north and Antarctica in the south. The Indian Ocean alone comprises of about 20 percent of earth's water surface and numerous scattered small islands like Comoros, Seychelles, Maldives, Mauritius, Cocos, Diego Garcia, Lakshadweep, Andaman Nicobar and bigger islands like Sri Lanka and Madagascar which are strategically bigger players. The connectivity to extra regional countries and access to the Indian ocean can only be possible through the seven major maritime choke points - Strait of Malacca, the Cape of Good Hope, Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, the Suez canal, the 'Sunda strait' and the 'Lombok strait'. India has a considerable Geo-strategic interest in Indian Ocean, India's interest in that the presence of the extra-regional forces is minimized so that Indian Ocean littoral countries can pursue their developmental programmes in a co-operative regional framework. In order to safeguard the maritime interests, to build geo-strategic potential in the region, India has to develop into major maritime power in the region. How could India strengthen its power among the rising influences of dominant powers in the region and how could India accomplish its maritime and naval strategy by changing contours towards its ocean policy. The present paper discuss on the Emerging Geo-Strategic Perspective in Indian Ocean and India's Relationship with its South Asian Neighbor countries

Keywords: Geo-strategic interest, Indian Ocean, maritime interests, region, and development

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Introduction:

Indian Ocean region is a major medium for global trade, source of mineral resources and trawling. As India is the densely populated country in the region and as a Geo-political keystone, today the region matters more than before. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his talk in 2015 which was conducted in Mauritius, declared that “India is at the crossroads of the Indian ocean and the region is at the top of our policy priorities” The Indian ocean predetermines the footprint of India's culture with diversified religions, customs, traditions, and goods widening from India to African, West Asia and Asia's southeastward countries (Brewstar, D, 2014)

India's Importance in Indian Ocean:

India for trade and commerce is heavily dependent on sea, for instance nearly 95 percentage of trade happens through Indian Ocean. India's maritime exports such as fishing, aqua culture industries, mineral resource extraction growing its importance in the engagement with Indian Ocean. Apart from trade, India's maritime growth there were strong security dimensions which includes smuggling, illegal fishing, human trafficking, piracy, terrorism, proliferation of weapons are major concerns which proves a major threat to India's trade and commerce (Chatterjee, A. 2014)

Despite these concerns, remarkably active role of India in the region through several humanitarian, disaster management and mitigation operations which had been focusing on saving and helping the Indian citizens as well as citizens of many other countries from conflicted zones are under process.

India's strategy in the Indian Ocean region which is changing contours for strengthening its position in the region through its policy formulations. Recently, India's policy priorities have began to re-evaluate from continental considerations towards its ocean policy in achieving its objectives. This will require its investments in enhanced international co-operation, confidence- building measures greater transparency and trade, further investments in capacity in the region (Hornat, J. 2015).

Indian Ocean is important strategically for three reasons:

- It's Geo-strategically location which is at the junction of global trade through which it connects the major international economic routes of North Atlantic and Asia-Pacific.
- It's vast drainage basin which is home to huge population by creating opportunities which accounts for high rates of growth economically around Indian Ocean Rim countries

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- Indian Ocean is abundant in its raw materials, fishing, aquaculture industries, and mineral deposits with nodules consisting of cobalt, nickel, ferrous and on the sea bed containing sizeable quantities of manganese, copper zinc, gold etc., which has grown its world's trade creating challenges of security, exploitation of minerals, increasing commercial interest at an alarming rate.

Review of Literature:

David Scott's article (2013): *India's Aspirations and Strategy for the Indian Ocean - Securing the Waves?* In this article he focuses upon high aspirations which include strategic discourse, pre-eminence leadership as enunciated by strategic thinkers and politicians. He also discusses six fold strategies for securing India's own position against growing influence of China which poses a challenge in the Indian Ocean.

Dhruva Jaishankar's article (2016): *Indian Ocean region: A pivot for India's growth* In this paper the author assessed Indian ocean's important to India. He even discussed about challenges to security, India's shared interests and its dynamic role in humanitarian aid, assistance, and disaster management and rescue operations.

Jan Hornet's article (2014): *The power triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States*, in this article the author presented the interaction between three major participants which poses security challenges to Asia's future. He emphasized on the emergence of balance of power system and its implications in the Indian Ocean with contrary to Organ ski's 'power transition theory'.

Smruti S. pattnaik's article (2016): *Indian Ocean in the Emerging Geo- Strategic Context: Examining India's Relations with its Maritime South Asian Neighbors* in this article the author scrutinizes the progress of India's approach to the growing China's presence in the Indian Ocean. The author even discusses India's policies, strategies and the future tools towards South Asian maritime littorals and their responses towards the emerging geopolitical context.

Arnab Dasgupta's paper: *India's strategy in the Indian Ocean region: A Critical Aspect of India's Energy Security* in this paper the author identifies the India's strategic imperatives and the critical aspect of India's energy security and the of Indian Ocean maritime supplies in the region.

Koh Swee Lean Collin's article (2018): *China-India Rivalry at Sea: Capability, Trends and Challenges* in this paper the author focuses on features of Sino-Indian rivalry, maritime

dimensions, naval buildups and deployments in the Indian ocean region. This article also discusses the challenges being posed by China through its active deployment, infrastructure development through building ports and naval bases by encircling India through 'string of pearls' and its role in expanding blue water naval capabilities.

Balijit Singh Mann's article (2018): *Changing dynamics of India's Indian Ocean policy* in this journal the author substantiates four hypothesis which explains the changing dynamics of India's ocean policy under which the change in conception of sea, and shift in its strategy of economic development.

Gurpeet S. khurana's article (2017): *India's Maritime Strategy: Context and Subtext* In this article the author analyses the salient changes in Maritime strategic outlook of India and its crucial role in shaping the geopolitics, economic and security strategy promulgated by Indian navy.

Vivek Mishra's article (2019): *India-US maritime cooperation: Crossing the rubicon* In this article analyses the various steps in maritime collaboration between United States and India and seeks to emphasize the rationale of such cooperation between the two countries and justifies the maritime cooperation, bilateral cooperation and analyses the Chinese presence in the region, non- traditional threats, domain awareness and balance of power.

Statement of the Problem

Security as a multidimensional concept covers all types of threats that are posed to the states by non-state actors or by enemy states. For every country security is the top most priority in its policy making. In the policy framing process, the security concerns include border security, economic security and human security. Among all these territorial security holds the major importance. Since from Independence, security has become a very sensitive issue for India, especially from its bordering countries. India has been facing the strategically issues in the Indian Ocean region because Indian policy makers have not paid much attention towards Indian maritime perspectives and towards Indian ocean. Major problems to India in Indian Ocean region is caused by super power nations and China. The main cause of insecurity to India is China's expansionist policy i.e., string of pearls and by this China has been expanding its influence in the region and establishing relations with the littoral countries to counter their India's influence in the region. By this India's concerns towards its maritime security and naval strategy has been increasing in present times.

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Significance of the Study:

Unlike the major two oceans i.e., the Pacific and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean is different in many ways. The Geo-strategy of Indian Ocean region says one of the important determinants is that the whole Indian ocean's littoral is covered by developing countries except Australia and South Africa. By this it says that Indian Ocean is the only ocean where non littoral countries have a strong military presence than that of littoral countries. As such super power nations to fulfill their interests in the region have increased the rivalry among them. This situation poses harm to India's maritime security and raises the concerns in the region. The study is an attempt to examine the India's foreign policy viewpoint towards the Indian Ocean and to study the impact of rivalries among the nations on Indian policies. The study will also provide a new outlook to how India has to strengthen its naval strategy in positioning itself in the region by countering the power triangle countries.

Objective:

To present paper study on India's aspirations and the changing contours of Indian Ocean strategy and the rising influence of non-littoral countries in the region and India's response towards their strategies and also to examine the India's relation with littoral countries in the region of Indianocean in order to strengthen its position

Methodology:

The present study has been done with the using of both historical and contemporary sources. The present work is mainly descriptive using both the primary and secondary sources which includes newspaper reports, reviews of books, articles in journals and extensively from web sources.

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis of the study is to analyse the India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region through its ocean policy. In recent past New Delhi began to engage with major powers and littoral countries to pursue its policy of engagement to strengthen its security, maritime safety and sustainable development and to promote geopolitical interests and the economy in the Indian Ocean. Thus the importance and priorities of Indian Ocean indicates a close alignment among the world interests.

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The aspirations of India in Indian ocean region has been notably increasing , that the Indian navy has a well defined aspirations in the Indian ocean and are being assisted by the government. India's maritime strategy is primarily naval- focused, for such a consular role, a constabulary role and a benevolent strategically role is vitally important. India's strategy which is hoping to strengthen its array against the appraised growing external presence in the region through soft balancing and six fold strategy of strengthening its infrastructure, active maritime diplomacy, increasing its naval expenditure, increasing its naval capacity, keeping the choke points open and exercising in the Indian ocean.

Aspirations of India in the Indian Ocean region:

The Indian navy's Endeavour to come up with its own naval doctrine and maritime strategy, anyhow accepted extensively but has a potential shortcoming due to the lack of a national security document that set forth ambitions, objectives and impressive strategy from the national government. Indeed there are wider set of debates on whether India has a Grand strategy at all. The naval strategy of Indian ocean which was backed by Indian government, in which consensus were appreciable over India's aspirations, rather than the questions remain over the effectiveness and influence on maritime strategy to realize such naval objectives (Jaishankar, D. 2016). Thus India's assumptions are nurtured by geopolitical considerations which stress the virtues enjoyed by Indian Territory in the Indian ocean region. India recognizes officially the naval strategic imperatives of India's foreign policy or of international relations. Since Independence there were different approaches towards policy of Indian Ocean region, but almost all Prime Ministers of India neglected maritime policy of Indian ocean region as they were mainly concerned about land borders. In 2003, in combined services conference, Indian former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee stated that 'The strategic thinking of our security environment has to be extended across Indian Ocean horizons from 'Persian Gulf to Straits of Malacca'. India's geostrategic location and its natural ability ensure India to perform a leadership role in maintaining tranquility and reliability in the Indian Ocean region (Collin, K. S. 2018).

In order to fulfill such ambitions of transcendence in the Indian Ocean region and to converge the four security apprehensions such as piracy disruption, terrorist intrusion, challenges from Pakistan, and China's growing dominance. To counter these insecurities India have six fold strategy which consists of : first is to increase the naval expenditure of India, second is to strengthen its presence by developing its infrastructure, Third is to

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enhance its naval capabilities, fourth is to upgrade its maritime diplomacy which includes the deployment of increased naval reserves around Indian ocean. Fifth is conducting naval drilling with extra regional actors unilaterally, bilaterally and multilaterally. Sixth is as a part of cooperation, safeguarding the strategic chokepoints in the Indian Ocean and keeping them open to extra-regional territories (Dasgupta, A. 2018).

Naval Spending:

To achieve the greater capabilities, there is the necessary financial requirement of spending allocations, but there is a question of government's decisions through budgetary allocation, a matter of strategy and a matter of what to consider as prominent and develop, a matter of what to neglect and de-emphasis. Noticeably the naval spending was neglected in the initial years of Independent India. When BJP came to power in 1998 it introduced the strong defence policies, expanded the budget share in defence absolutely and reversed this neglect of allocation in budget. Further the defence budget as a share of naval spending has been increased. Thus the increased defence budget to pursue the set forth goals allocated the Indian navy with enough resources which was stated in the 'Maritime Military Strategy of 2007' (K. M. Pannikar. 1951).

Moreover in terms of India's military expenditure now being used for maritime purposes, which is visible that maritime expenditure of India is significantly greater than the expenditure of all other Indian Ocean littoral states. Comparatively the spending strategy of India is less impressive than other extra-regional territories namely United States and People Republic of China. From SIPRI of 2012, states that the defence budget of India increased 18 percent, which reduced the gap of India-China naval expenditure to some extent rather than marking India's superiority. US spends 4.7 percent of its GDP on their military, where as India and China estimated to be spending around 2 percent of their GDP on military expenditure, but China's GDP is three times the GDP of India, which enables the greater military spending of China. To meet up with china's naval expenditure, India has to expand its share of allocation to defence from its GDP or India needs to rise its growth rate in terms of economy. Besides its naval budget, India has advantageous features in the Indian Ocean is its geographical location, increased spending, allocations for infrastructure construction and purchasing manufacturing assets.

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Importance of choke points:

India's prominent realm of interests in the Indian ocean includes the strategic choke points namely the strait of Hormuz, the strait of Malacca, the Cape of Good Hope, and the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. India's naval strategy is to keep the choke points open both through deterrence and cooperative maritime security measures. In cooperation with the states surrounding the choke points, India has achieved active deployment in these waters through which India achieved its maritime strategy.

With respect to the Strait of Malacca, the location of Andaman and Nicobar islands provided India with direct access and inherent control over this choke point. India has strengthened its position at this choke point through assuaging relations with the countries Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore which surrounds the strait and by conducting joint naval exercises and deploying Indian navy in the strait area. India's regular deployment in the South China Sea, have also brought India down the Strait of Malacca.

In respect of the Strait of Hormuz, noticeably the intimate relations of India with Oman have developed military relations between the countries, which show directly on the choke point. Since 2003, the defence agreements between these countries which mainly deal with joint exercises, training and maritime security cooperation. Since 1999, the Indian navy on a regular basis have been conducting collaborations through the Strait of Hormuz into the Gulf. Further which was rightly interpreted by Chinese sources that 'Indian efforts to use its navy to protrude its power outside its littoral'? Inside the Gulf, India had got into security agreement with Qatar, involving intelligence sharing, maritime security, and its resolution to maintain Qatar's situation in the near future.

Further as a systematic part of its strategic outreach with respect to the Strait of Bab-el-mandeb, the Indian Navy has extended its deployment beyond the Red sea. The piracy attacks off the Somali coast made India to establish the presence of warships in the Gulf of Aden alongside with the concerned countries in 2008. Thus the presence of Indian navy in the waters surrounding the choke points became prominent.

Lastly with regards to the Cape of Good Hope, India established its relations related to military cooperation with South Africa under Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2000. India even conducted naval drills with South African coasts in India's interests and capabilities and even overlaid the bilateral exercises and trilateral exercises such as IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa). Thus all the India's naval activities around all the choke points establish the

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ability and capability to keep the choke points open but it did not helped to establish unilateral control of India at these points.

Presence of Extra-Regional Powers:

The existence of extra-regional powers in the Indian Ocean raises the question of 'How do they influence India's aspirations?' To the major extent it is true, and the external major powers are United Kingdom, United States, China, Russia and France. Among these extra-regional powers neither Russia, France nor, Britain was unable to strengthen their dominance in Indian Ocean region. Though India has friendly relations with Britain and Russia through joint naval exercises such as 'Konkan' and 'Indra' Indian Ocean exercises respectively, but Britain's role in the ocean region became insignificant and Russia's role became intermittent. France became an inhabitant power in Southern Indian Ocean with the presence of overseas department on Reunion as well as on some barren islands, and has naval exercise links and defence acquisitions but its naval presence in the Indian ocean is secondary rather than primary. Therefore the France position is declining and is unable to strengthen its dominance in the region (Mann, B. S. 2017).

The biggest great power challenge to India is the growing Chinese presences in the Indian Ocean region. Geo-strategically China's presence in the Indian Ocean region consists of geo-economic purposes which includes energy and security and for geopolitical purposes and mainly to restrain the India's aspirations to be a dominant role. The important part of India's maritime strategy in Indian Ocean region is countering the aspirations of China. Naval diplomats stated that, 'On the military front, to counter the growing Chinese footprints in the Indian ocean region must include minimizing the military gap through internal stabilization and by external counterbalancing which is combined with maritime diplomacy of the littoral states in the Indian ocean region, hence it is the best strategy to deal with China'. Despite China's substantial naval capabilities and maritime expenditure, India enjoys immense geographical advantages in the Indian Ocean and can concentrate its forces far better than China and India can consider its regional superiority over China. Chinese emerging dominance in the Indian ocean by encircling India through 'String of pearls' poses security concerns to India but India by its geographical advantage can easily cut them to its extended lines. For further countering China's dominance and enhancing India's influence, India have used institutional mechanism by obstructing China's participation in "Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)" which was set up in 2008. Thus for India, China is not a super power concern in the Indian Ocean (Mohan, C. R. 2015)

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Instead the other major power present in Indian Ocean is United States which can reshape the events of Indian Ocean as its military presence in Bahrain, Diego Garcia and Western Australia. Nevertheless US welcomed India for taking up the responsibility of ensuring security and accepted India's growing dominance in the Indian Ocean. Though the United States and the India never had mutual interests in curtailing terrorism, in ending up piracy and restraining China's dominance. As China disturbs the maritime balance in the Indian Ocean, in response to it India and United States were drawing closer togetherness by soft balancing as a part of its broader strategy against China (Khurana G. S. 2008).

Summary and Conclusion:

India's strategy of increasing naval spending, improving capabilities and deployment of those capabilities, increasing naval exercises actively and keeping choke points open, aspirations of security, pre-eminence and dominant role are notable to some extent in reaching those aspirations but rivalries in intra-services, corruption, piracy, terrorism and some hesitance are still apparent for India. How to deal with the uncertainties of China in and around Indian Ocean are also tangible. Though there is deficit of co-ordination and cohesion in maritime strategy, India's Naval doctrines and appropriate maritime strategies are being realized to pursue India's security concerns and its objectives in Indian ocean region.

The paper one lays its emphasis on India's strategy in Indian Ocean region and Indian ocean basin as a geopolitical keystone is very prominent to India. India's strategy is closely to global priorities to secure the region from non-state actors, heightened military competition, catastrophic disasters and preserving the ocean for shared resources. In order to achieve these objectives India will require further investments in enhanced institutional cooperation, investments in capacity, confidence building measures and greater transparency. But the question remains on how these institutions will address many challenges in the region and its adequacies. The paper which analyses power rivalry and the growing concerns of security in the Indian Ocean The competition in the Indian Ocean region to become the dominant power forced India to pay more focus on its maritime strategy. India's outlook is established on the model of collaborative framework of security and illustrates its efforts on building long term partnership with its maritime neighbors and to overcome the trust deficit. The significant factor in India's Indian Ocean strategy is its cooperation with South Asian maritime neighbors provides a greater opportunity of cooperation and would also mould its naval strategy and role as a net security provider in the Indian ocean region. India security

concerns had been shifted from continental security to maritime security and naval approach from coast-centrist to ocean- centrist. In fact of defending the presence of extra-territorial powers in the region, New Delhi started to engage with them through bilateral or multilateral exercises.

To sum up India's aspirations to become a major power in Indian Ocean region, it have to face challenges and apprehensions raised by regional rivalries in the region. One of the major concerns in the Indian Ocean region is the growing Chinese supremacy through its OBOR or maritime silk route initiative, a multidimensional route and 'string of pearls' which encircles India by developing ports poses insecurity to India. Though India has robust naval doctrines, and allocated maritime budget and collaborations with US and its maritime South Asian neighbors it requires a well established institutional mechanism and pragmatic change in its ocean policy is necessary. India's maritime policy should go beyond Act East policy and bilateral, multilateral naval agreements. Here SAGAR (security and growth for all in the region) can be considered as one of magnificent policy of Indian Ocean region by which there are chances of fulfilling India's objectives in the Indian Ocean region.

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