

THE INDIAN NAVY – A KEY SECURITY PARTNER IN THE IOR

by

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Introduction

The Indian Ocean comprises a surface area of 70,560,000 sq km (19.8% of the water on the Earth's surface) and is the third largest oceanic region in the world. The defining feature of the Indian Ocean, unlike the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, is the fact that it is a land-locked ocean, 'walled' by the roof of Asia to its north, Africa to its west, Southeast Asia and Australia to its east and Antarctica to its south¹. Being a relatively young ocean (the Indian Ocean basin is only 80 million years old), the ocean and its littorals house a treasure trove of mineral and living resources, most of which are yet to be tapped.

Home to over 2.5 billion people (one third of the globe's population), whose average age is under 30², the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral comprises over two dozen countries, the majority of which are in the developing category, and also include a few failed and failing states. Coastal and offshore resources and maritime trade are the principal means of livelihood for many countries in the region. For most countries also, security threats can only come over the seas. Being a vast and complex region, it should be kept in mind that any framework that may be employed to examine its security aspects is fraught with problems³, as there is no alliance or platform on which security issues common to the entire region can be dealt with, or any single parameter that may be employed to examine its security framework. If there *is* a common factor, it is the quintessential maritime nature of this region, which impacts every key issue, whether it is energy, trade security, combating piracy or terrorism. India, being the predominant resident power in the region, has an immense individual stake in the stability and security of the IOR. Because of its democratic credentials and adherence to a rules-based world order, as also the capability and credibility of its maritime forces, is looked upon by other littorals as a reliable and preferred maritime security provider and partner in the region.

¹ "Limits of Oceans and Seas, 3rd Edition", *International Hydrographic Organisation*, 1953, <https://epic.awi.de/id/eprint/29772/1/IHO1953a.pdf>, 22.

² Craig Jeffery, "Why the Indian Ocean region might soon play a lead role in world affairs", Australia-India Institute, 15 January 2019, <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/blog/why-the-indian-ocean-might-soon-play-a-lead-role-in-world-affairs/>, accessed 16 February 2022.

³ GVC Naidu, "Future of Institutionalism in the Asia-Pacific", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXIII, No. 11, IDSA, February 2000, 1957-1969.

The Strategic Security Environment in the IOR

The strategic importance of the IOR stems from the fact, that apart from its indigenous mineral and non-mineral wealth, it is a critical throughway for transportation of crude, LPG, various commodities and finished goods between the manufacturing hubs in East, Southeast and South Asia, and their markets in the west coast of the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle-East. As per UNCTAD figures, around 80% of global trade by volume and 70% by value, worth an estimated US\$ 18.8 trillion, was carried by sea in 2019⁴, reflecting the dependence of nations on the seas. Of this, over 80% of the world's maritime oil trade⁵ and over 60% of all global trade transits through the waters of the Indian Ocean⁶ and in 2020, over 145,000 ships operated in, or through the Indian Ocean⁷, transporting oil and other raw materials, consumer goods, food and electronic products. The geography of the Indian Ocean dictates that access to the ocean is possible only through a number of choke points, principal among them being the Cape of Good Hope, the Suez Canal, the Babel-Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, and the straits of Malacca and Sunda. It is not inconceivable for malign state and non-state actors to block or disrupt these choke points, thereby adversely impacting energy security and economic well-being across the globe. India's strategic geographic location, astride the major sea-lanes of the world, points to the crucial relevance of its role in ensuring security and stability, and thereby the free flow of oil and commerce in the IOR.

A scan of the Indian Ocean littoral shows, that with the exception of a few countries, all the others are afflicted with one or more of the ailments of poverty, backwardness, fundamentalism, terrorism or internal insurgency. Many countries are also either ruled by military dictatorships or by authoritarian regimes. Having been dominated by colonial powers from the 16th century to the mid-20th century, the region also has a number of unresolved land and maritime boundary disputes, most of which are a legacy of its colonial past. Not surprisingly, most of the major conflicts since the end of the Cold War have also taken place in or around the IOR. Currently, two of these conflicts have spilt over to the maritime domain – the ongoing civil war in Yemen, which has had consequential impact in the Red Sea; and tensions between Iran and the West, which have had a substantial impact on the Gulf.

⁴ "Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade - 2020", UNCTAD, Geneva 2021, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctab2020d4_en.pdf, accessed 12 February 2022, 5.

⁵ Craig Jeffery, "The Indian Ocean Region May Soon Play a Lead Role in World Affairs", *The Wire*, 16 January 2019, <https://thewire.in/world/the-indian-ocean-region-may-soon-play-a-lead-role-in-world-affairs>, accessed 17 February 2022.

⁶ Author's estimate based on "Review of Maritime Transport 2021", UNCTAD, 2021, <https://review-maritime-transport-2021>, accessed 17 February 2022.

⁷ "Annual Report 2020 – Information Fusion Centre- Indian Ocean Region, *Indian Navy*, 2021, https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/ifc-ior/IFC_IOR_ANNUAL%20REPORT%202020.pdf, accessed 12 February 2022, 16.

It is also a harsh fact that the epicentre of global terrorism lies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has a maritime manifestation, as unfortunately seen in the 26/11 attacks carried out by Pakistan-backed terrorists in Mumbai in 2008. This Low Intensity Maritime Conflict waged by non-state entities, conjoined with other global menaces, such as drug trafficking, gun-running and people trafficking, is an evil alliance that infests the world. In recent years, the seizure of various types of drugs originating from the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle, which flank the Indian sub-continent, and which are mainly transported to markets across the globe by sea, has been on the increase, with over 400 seizures of varying quantities reported in 2020⁸. Drugs worth US\$189 million were seized by CTF 150 in 2021 alone⁹, largely originating from the Makran coast. If to this are added the figures of drug seizures by the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and other Indian maritime agencies, which amounted to almost INR 28,000 Crore (equivalent to over US\$3.5 billion) in 2021¹⁰, and if it is estimated that only a fraction of the drugs trafficked are apprehended, the extent of the problem can be gauged. It has also been estimated by India's Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) that over 70% of the total drug trafficking is being conducted through maritime routes¹¹.

To counter these and other trans-national crimes, such as poaching, the Indian Navy has been engaged in joint patrols along our maritime boundaries with Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Bangladesh. The Indian Ocean has also been witness to the scourge of modern-day piracy, which emerged in the Gulf of Aden from the failed state of Somalia in the late 1990s, and by 2010 had spread across a large part of the Western Indian Ocean. The employment of a multinational naval task forces and the independent deployment of several other navies to the Gulf of Aden and beyond, brought the menace under control by 2015. The Indian Navy, being the largest resident navy in the IOR, has played a key role in anti-piracy operations, with one ship being constantly deployed in the Gulf of Aden since 2008. In response to these conflicts and tensions, as also the ongoing anti-piracy patrols, almost 125 warships¹² from navies across the globe remain deployed in the northern Indian Ocean at any given time of the year.

The emergence of China as a new maritime global power is a fresh cause for concern, especially in the IOR. While every nation is entitled to maintain forces for its

⁸ Ibid, "Annual Report 2020 – Information Fusion Centre- Indian Ocean Region, *Indian Navy*, 2021, 59.

⁹ "CTF 150 seizes record amount of illegal drugs in 2021", *Combined Maritime Forces*, 09 December 2021, <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2021/12/09/ctf-150=seizes-record-amount-of-illegal-drugs-in-2021/>, accessed 16 February 2021.

¹⁰ Estimated by author based on open source reports of apprehension of drugs in 2021 by the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and other Indian maritime agencies.

¹¹ Neelam Pandey, "10x rise in heroin seizures, Gujarat tells drug panel, wants Coast Guard to track with drones", *The Print*, 19 February 2022, <https://theprint.in/India/10x-rise-in-heroin-seizures-gujarat-tells-drug-panel-wants-coast-guard-to-track-with-drones/837306/>, accessed 26 February 2022.

¹² Sudhi Ranjan Sen, "India carrying out more warship patrols than ever to catch China in crowded global seas", *The Print*, 28 January 2022, <https://theprint.in/defence/india-carrying-out-more-warship-patrols-than-ever-to-catch-china-in-croded-global-seas/814894/>, accessed 16 February 2022.

defence, the current international unease stems from the opacity of China's intentions and the unprecedented build-up of the PLA Navy (PLAN). The PLAN's extensive deployment in the IOR and beyond, under the guise of anti-piracy patrols; as also the aggression displayed by China in the South China Sea to usurp islets and reefs, and subsequently restrict freedom of movement in its waters, displays a contempt for a rules-based international order and China's belief that 'might is right'. Today, the PLAN outmatches every regional navy in Asia, and in the past few years, has surpassed the US Navy in total numbers of major combatants. Indeed, by the end of 2020, the PLAN had 360 surface combatants, as compared to the US Navy's 297; and is predicted to grow to 400 major combatants by 2025 and 425 by 2030¹³. The US itself acknowledges that the PLAN poses a major challenge to their ability to maintain wartime sea control in ocean areas of the Western Pacific – the first such challenge posed to the US Navy since the end of the Cold War¹⁴.

The apprehension that China's maritime strategy aims to not only build up its military power, but more importantly, to use that power to secure resources, trade routes, export markets and overseas bases for the eventual realisation of the 'Chinese Dream', is exemplified by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The maritime section of the BRI initiative has its origins in China's anxiety over its 'Malacca Dilemma'. Being overly dependent on energy supplies and access to export markets through the choke-points of the Indian Ocean, China commenced building maritime infrastructure and overland oil pipelines along its major sea lines of communication in the IOR at the turn of the 21st century. This was transformed into a mammoth blue print for construction of infrastructure, harbours, roads, power plants, SEZs, etc., the final design of which was released in the form of the BRI on 28 March 2015.

While China has strenuously insisted that the BRI is solely about economic cooperation and does not have any military component, it had said much the same about the reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, which have now been militarised. Thus, despite assurances by China, there is deep global suspicion that the BRI is a Trojan horse for China's strategic military ambitions, which will not only support its economic growth, but also provide it leverage to obtain military bases, particularly from weak and indebted countries along the BRI. This is bolstered by the fact that several BRI port projects, such as Gwadar and Hambantota, located in strategic proximity to vital sea lanes and maritime chokepoints in the Indo-Pacific, do not appear to be driven by commercial logic¹⁵. China's 2019 Defence White Paper has also included 'protection of China's overseas interests' as a

¹³ "China Naval Modernisation: Implications for US Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress", 21 May 2020, *Congressional Research Service*, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>, accessed 15 February 2022, 8-9.

¹⁴ Ian Forsyth, *Great Powers, Grand Strategies: Old Game Plan, New Game: China's Grand Strategy in the South China Sea*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 83.

¹⁵ Daniel Russel and Samuel Locklear, "China Is Weaponizing the Belt and Road. What Can the US Do About It?" *The Diplomat*, 22 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/china-is-weaponizing-the-belt-and-road-what-can-the-us-do-about-it/>, accessed 10 May 2021.

new mission for the PLA. This has been justified by the fact that China's overseas investments and properties now roughly amount to US\$ 7 trillion, with over 5.5 million Chinese citizens living overseas¹⁶, which are set to grow exponentially with the BRI. These developments could impact IOR littorals and the world adversely, if not countered in time.

Miscellaneous Maritime Issues in the IOR

With the emergence of the concept of the 'blue economy' and the dependence of IOR littorals on the ocean for their prosperity and well-being, the sustainable exploitation of the Indian Ocean's untapped potential requires a stable, secure and law-abiding littoral, which can only be guaranteed by maritime forces working in concert. Prominent reserves of minerals on the Indian Ocean seabed include manganese, ilmenite, tin, monazite (a rare earth), zircon and chromite. Of the global proven oil and natural gas reserves, over 50% of oil and natural gas reserves lie within the IOR, with the Persian Gulf being the largest oil and natural gas producing region in the world¹⁷. Major commodities exported include iron ore, coal, rubber, tea, sea food, etc., and most Indian Ocean littoral states continue to remain exporters of raw materials and importers of finished goods, with a few exceptions such as India, South Africa and Australia. The Indian Ocean is also a rich trove of living resources and provides almost 30% of global maritime catches¹⁸. While the fishing sector employs over 28.5 million people, 90% are engaged in artisanal fishing¹⁹ with most commercial deep-sea fishing being done by extra-regional countries, such as China and Taiwan. Most IOR littorals, therefore, require both capability and capacity inputs to enable them to realise the potential of their Blue Economy. In addition, the IOR is also an important hub of ocean tourism, particularly for the island states such as Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles, for whom the sector is a major contributor to their GDP.

Unfortunately, the IOR is also the locus of a large number of natural disasters, and is sometimes termed as the 'World's Hazard Belt', being susceptible to Climatological (cyclones and droughts), Geological and Tectonic (earthquakes and tsunamis) and Hydrological (floods and tidal surges) disasters. The IOR littorals are also heavily dependent for water on the annual monsoon winds, and their disruption or delay due to climatological factors can have a devastating impact on the daily life of millions of people residing in littoral countries. Global warming is calculated to be impacting the Indian Ocean three times more than the Pacific Ocean, with the Indian Ocean rising by an average of 3.7 mm every

¹⁶ Zhou Bo, "The Future of the PLA", *Foreign Policy*, 06 August 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/06/the-future-of-the-pla/>, accessed 02 February 2022.

¹⁷ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021, 70th Edition", *bp*, <https://www.bp.com>, accessed 05 February 2022.

¹⁸ Renison Ruawa and Jake Rice, "Chapter 36E, Indian Ocean", *United Nations*, 2016, https://www.un.org/depts/los/global_reporting/WOA_RPROC/Chapter_36E.pdf, accessed 26 Feb 2022, 5

¹⁹ "Fisheries Management", *IORA*, 2017, <https://www.iora.int/en/priorities-focus-areas/fisheries-management>, accessed 26 February 2022.

year. Global warming is resulting in more intense and unseasonal rainfall and rising sea levels are already displacing thousands of people living in oceanic delta regions such as the Sunderbans, with the potential to create 40 million 'climate refugees' in South Asia alone by 2050²⁰ if the rise in sea levels is unchecked. Climate change, therefore, is emerging as one of the biggest threats to IOR security²¹. Another looming menace that requires coordinated action, not just by the IOR, but the entire globe, is oceanic pollution and over-exploitation of oceanic resources. Since times immemorial, the oceans have been seen as a limitless resource, but unsustainable fishing practices on the high seas and massive dumping of plastics and other pollutants in the oceans has adversely impacted marine life in the oceans. In 2017 it was reported that of 441 stocks, 47% were fully exploited, 18% were over-exploited, 9% were depleted and 1% was recovering²². Since the oceans are global commons, concerted global action is required to check the pollution, clean up the oceans and revive these biospheres critical to human existence.

As is evident, there are a number of other matters, such as search and rescue, pollution control, marine scientific research, hydrography, etc., where most IOR littorals do not have the necessary expertise, resources or capacity. Maritime power is expensive and not within the reach of everyone, and yet national sovereignty is sacrosanct. It is our experience that smaller nations in the IOR neighbourhood not only look up to India for help and support, but also expect the Indian Navy to safeguard their interests in many ways. India's democratic credentials, its commitment to international agreements and laws, its close diplomatic relations with almost all countries in the region, and its ancient philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family), makes it a trusted and reliable ally. In addition, the apolitical and professional nature of the Indian Armed Forces makes them an ideal partner for training and multinational operations.

While the 17th century Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius was the first to propagate the notion of the 'high seas', the free use of the oceans for all mariners has been Indian philosophy from time immemorial. This freedom of the seas is in jeopardy today from a variety of threats, including piracy, terrorism – both non-state and state-sponsored – and rising maritime powers such as China. While countering these threats requires a coordinated response by like-minded countries, whether we like it or not, the mantle of regional leadership for such a collective effort tends to fall squarely on India's shoulders. It is only a question of showing long term vision and carrying the mantle with sagacity, wisdom and grace, pointers to which are available through our long and distinguished maritime history.

²⁰ Clement et al, "Groundswell Part II: Acting on Internal Climate Migration", *World Bank*, Washington D.C., 2021, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36248>, accessed 04 February 2022.

²¹ Arjun Gargeyas, "Climate Change is the Biggest Threat to Indian Ocean Security", *The Diplomat*, 31 August 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/climate-change-is-the-biggest-threat-to-indian-ocean-security/>, accessed 04 February 2022.

²² Ibid, "Fisheries Management", *IORA*.

India's Maritime History

India has had a long maritime history dating back to antiquity, with first references to maritime activities being contained in the Rig Veda. Excavations at Lothal in Gujarat have revealed a seal depicting a boat and the remains of a dockyard, both dating back to 2500-1700 B.C.E. Substantial literary and archaeological evidence of our ancient and medieval maritime prowess is available, which indicates that India had flourishing trade relations with ancient Rome, and the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf dating back to 3000 B.C.E. Subsequently, the Kalinga (1700 to 3 B.C.E.), Gupta (350 to 52 B.C.E), Satavahana (200 B.C.E to 250 C.E.), Pallava (275 to 897 C.E.), Chola (200 to 1279 C.E.), Pandya (3 B.C.E to 14th century C.E.), Chera (300 B.C.E to 300 C.E.), Chera Perumal (9 to 12 C.E.) and Vijayanagara (1336 to 1646) dynasties maintained substantial maritime forces and spread Indian thought and trade as far afield as Japan and as far west as Europe. Probably the best known use of India's maritime tradition was to spread Buddhism to Southeast Asia, East Asia and Sri Lanka. Emperor Ashoka's eldest daughter Princess Sangamitra's (282-203 B.C.E.) voyage to Sri Lanka carrying a sapling of the Bodhi tree, which still stands today at Anuradhapura, is probably one of the best known uses of India's maritime tradition.

The control of the waters of the Indian Ocean was in Indian hands till the thirteenth century. The arrival of invaders from Central Asia, who were more conversant with land than the oceans, and were to be the pre-dominant power in India for the next five centuries, caused India to withdraw from the seas. The resulting vacuum was only partially filled by the Arabs, as they were only commercial navigators, not the instruments of any state policy or power. In short, when the Portuguese appeared off Calicut in 1498, guided by a Gujarati navigator, the Indian Ocean was bereft of any naval power²³. The result was the gradual colonisation of not just the Indian sub-continent, but also most of Africa, Southeast Asia and Australia by European maritime powers. Vasco da Gama and his successors also introduced into Indian history the claim to an exclusive control of the sea²⁴, which was at variance to the largely peaceful and '*mare liberum*' concept exercised till then by Indian maritime powers. During the colonial era, despite episodic and gallant efforts of a few, most notably the Maratha Empire and the Zamorins of Calicut, colonial maritime powers, starting with Portuguese, then the Dutch and French, and finally the British, held sway over the waters of the Indian Ocean till India's independence in 1947.

²³ K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1945, 8.

²⁴ Ibid.

The Emergence and Growth of the Indian Navy (1950-1990)

While Indian maritime forces existed in various avatars during the colonial era, the Indian Navy in its present form came into being in 1934 as the Royal Indian Navy. It was renamed as the Indian Navy on 26 January 1950, when India became a Republic. At independence, the Indian Navy comprised just over a score of brown water ships, which was to grow into the potent multi-dimensional blue water force that exists today. After a brief decade of flowering into its diplomatic role in the 1950s, during which the Indian Navy took active part in supporting India's diplomatic outreach to East Africa and Southeast Asia, its international role was stymied by the hardening of the world into two blocs during the Cold War. The Indian Navy also played a key role in India's victory in the War to liberate Bangladesh in 1971.

Two operations in the late 1980s: Op *Cactus* in 1988, in which the Indian Armed Forces helped restore the legitimate government of Maldives, subsequent to a coup attempt; and Op *Pawan* (1987-90), where India intervened to ensure the integrity of Sri Lanka, specifically demonstrated the capability and the good neighbourly and democratic nature of the Indian state. In both these operations in island countries, in which the Indian Navy played a key role, India intervened only at the specific requests of the host governments and withdrew immediately after the mission was over. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) paid a substantial cost in blood, losing over 1200 servicemen, with over 3,000 wounded during the operation. Their sacrifice is today immortalised in a dignified war memorial near Colombo, and joins other war memorials spread across Europe, Middle-East, North Africa and Asia, commemorating the sacrifice of Indian arms in the earlier wars of the 19th and 20th century.

The Indian Navy's Rise to Eminence (1990-2020)

It was only after the Cold War ended in 1990 that India saw a more coordinated use of its Navy in concert with some foreign policy objectives – the initiation of the *Malabar Exercises* with the US Navy and the *MILAN Exercises* with Bay of Bengal rim navies were not merely military interactions but also contained powerful political messages. The fact that the US elevated Indo-US relations to the strategic plane and India become a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992, a full dialogue partner in 1995 (elevated to ASEAN+1 in 2003), as also a member of the ARF in 1996, could be attributed to the successful integration of India's diplomatic, economic and military (mainly maritime) strategies in the region. Our economic diplomacy initiated with the '*Look East*' policy specifically re-invigorated our military ties with key Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Singapore. Notably, India's economic liberalisation in 1991 also coincided with the re-commencement of the Indian Navy's role in building security partnerships with key allies in the Indo-Pacific – an implicit recognition of the close connection between economic

prosperity and maritime security. It is not surprising that the economic relationship between India and ASEAN also began in earnest in 1992 and a Free Trade Agreement was signed in 2009, which increased bilateral trade from US\$420 million in 1995 to US\$96.79 billion in 2019-20²⁵, amply demonstrating the synergy between trade and maritime engagement.

Post 9/11, the Indian Navy's interactions with other navies expanded at a dizzying pace. As the then Prime Minister Vajpayee stated in 2003, "India's growing international stature gives it strategic relevance in the area ranging from the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca.... India has exploited the fluidities of the emerging world order to forge new links, and a combination of diplomatic repositioning, economic resurgence and *military firmness* has given India a new importance in the international league"²⁶. Joint exercises are now being conducted regularly with all major global and all regional navies (with the sole exception of Pakistan). Prominent among them are the *Malabar* series of exercises with the US, Japanese and Australian navies under the 'Quad' construct. India has also signed defence-related MoUs and agreements with most major and all regional countries under which a large number of defence-related initiatives are being advanced. Indeed, India's innate strengths and the Indian Navy's professionalism have placed it in a position of not just being a preferred defence partner, but indeed in providing maritime leadership in the IOR, but this reputation and credibility has not been earned overnight.

India and the Indian Navy's Recent Record as a Maritime Security Partner/ Provider

A major inflexion point was the disaster caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Proof of the Indian Navy's ability to render meaningful assistance, and to operate on a regional scale was provided during the multi-nation humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) rescue and rehabilitation operation carried out in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Maldives, while simultaneously carrying out HADR operations along the affected coasts of India and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Being the first responder, the Indian Navy demonstrated quick decision-making, prompt response and professional execution by its ships and aircraft. However, this spontaneous reaction may not have been possible if we did not have an existing level of trust and confidence with these countries, evolved through past interaction. The tsunami relief operations, which subsequently became a multinational maritime effort, also had another side effect – it spawned the kernel of what was to become the quadrilateral cooperation between the US, Indian, Japanese and Australian navies – the 'Quad' as it is known today – which has now expanded well beyond the maritime military arena to become a political grouping with common interests based on values of democratic and openness values.

²⁵ Huma Siddiqui, "India-Asean Trade likely to cross \$50 bn by 10", 30 June 2009, *Financial Express*, www.financialexpress.com/archive/india-asean-trade-likely-to-cross-50-bn-by-10/482586/, accessed 05 February 2022.

²⁶ Statement by PM Vajpayee during the Combined Commander's Conference at New Delhi on 01 Nov 03.

Doctrinally, 2004 was a significant year as it saw the release of the Indian Navy's 'Maritime Doctrine' which categorised the tasks being carried out under international cooperation as one of the four principal roles of the Navy – the 'Diplomatic' role – the other three being the Military, Constabulary and Benign roles²⁷. Increasing international commitments also necessitated the setting up of a dedicated Foreign Cooperation organisation for the Indian Navy in 2005. The release of the Indian Navy's Maritime Strategy in 2006 provided further direction and purpose to this role (among other roles)²⁸, besides ensuring national and international transparency to the Indian Navy's intentions and actions. Doctrinal support for the Diplomatic role, along with dedicated organisational attention has synergised the Indian Navy's Foreign Cooperation in sync with overall policy direction by the Ministry of External Affairs, and today constitutes the Navy's most important, visible and useful peacetime roles.

A major step in furthering international cooperation was the formation of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2008, with the Indian Navy's nascent Foreign Cooperation organisation being the architect of the first multinational maritime construct of the 21st Century²⁹. The aim of the initiative, which today comprises 24 IOR littorals as full members and eight other countries as observers, is to increase maritime cooperation amongst navies of the littoral states of the IOR by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally sensitive issues. In the process, it endeavours to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly, cooperative solutions on the way ahead. While the Indian Navy provided the initial leadership to the forum and also supports its virtual secretariat, congruent to Indian philosophy, the rotational leadership and equal ownership of the construct, has ensured its universal acceptability and hence, its practical utility in resolving many maritime issues of common interest to all member states.

In a March 2015 speech delivered in Mauritius, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined what he described would be India's vision for the Indian Ocean Region, called SAGAR or 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'. The vision for SAGAR focuses on cooperative measures for sustainable use of the oceans, and provides a framework for a safe, secure and stable maritime domain in the region. In his speech in Mauritius, he stated: "Our goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation"³⁰. In the 2019 East Asia Summit

²⁷ *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2004, 92.

²⁸ *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015.

²⁹ "About IONS", Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, www.ions.global/, accessed 11 February 2022.

³⁰ "Prime Minister's Remarks at the Commissioning of Offshore Patrol vessel (OPV) Barracuda in Mauritius (March 12, 2015), *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches->

(EAS), this initiative was further elaborated through the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) with a focus on seven pillars of maritime security including: Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport.³¹ In the latest initiative to enhance IOR security, Prime Minister Modi also chaired a High-level Open Debate on 'Enhancing Maritime Security – A Case for International Cooperation' on 09 August 2021. These new initiatives have added to India's long-standing participation in Indian Ocean focused forums including: the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA); the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM); the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation; the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS); and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The Indian Navy has been an integral part of the maritime security components, and provided significant leadership, in all these initiatives.

As brought out earlier, the IOR has witnessed several natural disasters in the past and with the impact of global warming becoming more evident, the frequency and severity of disasters such as cyclones and floods has increased over the past two decades. With many countries in the IOR lacking capability for a comprehensive response to natural disasters, and the central location of India in the IOR, the Indian Navy has often been the first responder in many instances. In response to floods, cyclones, tsunami and the recent pandemic, regular assistance has been rendered by the Indian Navy over the past two decades to Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Indonesia, Mozambique, Madagascar, Mauritius, Somalia, the Philippines, etc. The Indian Navy has also been involved in Neo-Combatant Evacuation operations of both Indian and Foreign nationals in Lebanon (2006), Libya (2011), Kuwait (2014) and Yemen (2016). During the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the entire world locked down, the Indian Navy was engaged in HADR operations in 2020, not only to evacuate our citizens stranded in Iran, the Gulf countries, Maldives and Sri Lanka, but also in transporting doctors with medicines and protective equipment to these countries. In 2021, the Indian Navy was once again pressed into service (along with the Indian Air Force) to transport vaccines to all island nations in the IOR, as also a few countries in East Africa. All these efforts have won the Indian Navy and India much appreciation and further burnished the Indian Navy's reputation as a trusted and capable partner.

For the last six decades, the Indian Navy has been working to enhance both the capability and the capacity of IOR littoral navies. Because of its professional expertise and the quality of its training institutions, India has been the preferred training destination for

[Statements.htm?dtl/24912/Prime+Ministers+Remarks+at+the+Commissioning+of+Offshore+Patrol+Vessel+OPV+Barracuda+in+Mauritius+March+12+2015](#), accessed 05 February 2022.

³¹ "Indo-Pacific Division Briefs", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, 07 February 2020, https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf, accessed 06 February 2022.

naval personnel from over 40 friendly foreign countries and every year almost a thousand foreign personnel receive training at its training institutions, encompassing all dimensions of maritime warfare – surface, sub-surface, air, special operations, cyber, space and electromagnetic. Material assistance packages have been worked out for smaller IOR navies, to assist them in maritime tasks and responsibilities, and in the process engender long term relations. While defence cooperation with Mauritius has been ongoing for over four decades, commencing 2005, an ex-Indian Navy FAC was transferred to Seychelles; spare parts were gifted to Vietnam; surveillance aircraft to Myanmar; and a FAC to the Maldives. Over the past decade-and-a-half, the pace of such transfers has increased and India has also built OPVs for Sri Lanka, surveillance and survey craft for Mozambique and maritime surveillance assets to the Maldives and Seychelles. Apart from supplying much needed hardware, the Indian Navy has ensured that the vessels and aircraft supplied have been trained to operate and maintain them independently. These actions have again demonstrated that the Indian Navy is a reliable and dependable security partner.

A last facet worthy of mention is the Indian Navy's assistance to IOR littorals in the field of Hydrography. The Indian Navy is one of the few navies in the IOR with advanced hydrographic capabilities. Based on requests received from individual countries, Indian Navy survey ships have carried out surveys in the waters of Kenya, Mauritius, Maldives, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Tanzania. India's National Institute of Hydrography, which has been classified as the Regional Hydrographic Training Centre for Africa, Persian Gulf and South East Asian region, and has trained over 500 hydrographers from 25 countries³². The Indian Navy has also supplied hydrographic equipment to several IOR littorals. Besides this, the Indian Navy and its National Hydrographic Office (NHO) is responsible for issuing navigational charts, and coordinating the issue of navigational area warnings and Notices to Mariners for the northern portion of the IOR (NAVAREA VIII), placed under its jurisdiction by the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO). Preparation and updating of charts being a basic requirement for safe navigation by all mariners, the Indian Navy plays a crucial part through this service in ensuring safety of navigation for all mariners in the waters of the Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

As we head into the second quarter of the 21st century, it is evident that the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean will grow due to the locus of the global economy shifting from the West to the East. With the Indian Ocean playing a crucial role in global energy security and the growth in the sustainable exploitation of the blue economy, the need to ensure the freedom of safe transit for all mariners and the unhindered exploitation of the oceans for all countries will remain more important than ever before. However, as brought

³² "National Hydrographic Office – International Cooperation", *National Hydrographic Office*, India, <https://hydrobharat.gov.in>, accessed on 15 February 2022.

out in this essay, a multitude of threats and issues threaten this freedom. These include the emergence of a belligerent and expansionist China as a global maritime power, unresolved ongoing regional conflicts, piracy, terrorism, drug smuggling, etc. In addition, global warming and oceanic pollution threaten the very survival of mankind, requiring a concerted global response.

India's pivotal geographical position in the Indian Ocean requires it to play a central role in combating these threats for the greater good of all countries. The Indian Navy has emerged as a key security partner in the IOR to both regional and extra-regional navies due to the consistent democratic values of the Indian Republic; its respect for the rule of law; its excellent international diplomatic rapport; and the professional capability of the Indian Navy. The Indian Navy realises that international maritime cooperation is essential to maintain peace and stability in the IOR. Towards this end, it had commenced engaging with all regional and major global navies after the Cold War and today has substantially expanded its international engagements in a multitude of ways, including joint exercises and patrols with friendly navies, and the capacity and capability building of smaller regional navies in the IOR. The Indian Navy has led the way in establishing a regional maritime forum for multilateral cooperation, the IONS, as also in participating in the maritime security component of all multilateral initiatives being participated by India. There is, therefore, an un-refutable rationale for the Indian Navy to not just be a key security partner, but provide leadership in the IOR in the 21st century, based on the timeless Indian belief of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*) – succinctly encapsulated in modern terms as SAGAR by Prime Minister Modi.