

India's Maritime Strategy: Navigating the Indo-Pacific Landscape

Santosh Kumar Sahoo

Lecturer in Political Science

Rajsunakhala College, Rajsunakhala, Nayagarh & Ph.D. Research Scholar, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar

Abstract-This article provides a concise overview of India's strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific region. India, recognizing its pivotal position at the crossroads of global trade routes, has crafted a comprehensive maritime strategy. This strategy encompasses the promotion of the blue economy, naval modernization, strategic partnerships, and a focus on the Indian Ocean. By actively engaging in regional cooperation and countering challenges such as China's "String of Pearls", India seeks to maintain maritime dominance, ensure freedom of navigation, and contribute to the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region. The article explores the geopolitical context, challenges, and opportunities inherent in India's maritime strategy, highlighting its significance in the evolving global order.

Keywords: Global Order, Indo-Pacific Region, maritime strategy, Strategic Partnership

INTRODUCTION

India's maritime strategy holds significant implications for the Indo-Pacific region, a dynamic and strategically vital expanse of the world's oceans. As a rising global power, India recognizes the importance of maritime security, trade, and diplomatic influence in this vast geopolitical theater. This article delves into India's maritime strategy, exploring its key components and the consequential impact on the Indo-Pacific region. The new maritime strategy document was promulgated by the Indian Navy in October 2015 – titled *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* – received much attention among policy makers, analysts and academicians worldwide. However, this strategy superseded the Indian Navy strategy document of 2007 titled *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy* (Khurana, S. Gurpreet, 2017). Strategy -2015 indicates a renewed emphasis on maritime domain awareness MDA and

network – centric operations (NCO), along with anti-submarine warfare (ASW).

Geopolitical Context: India's maritime strategy is shaped by its geopolitical environment. The Indo-Pacific encompassing the Indian Ocean and the western and central Pacific Ocean, is a critical area for global trade and security. India's location at the crossroads of these vital sea lanes gives it a natural advantage and responsibility in safeguarding maritime interests.

Blue Economy and Trade: One of the cornerstones of India's maritime strategy is the promotion of the blue economy. With a vast coastline and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that extends into the Indian Ocean, India seeks to harness marine resources for sustainable economic growth. This includes fisheries, aquaculture and the exploration of seabed minerals. Moreover, India's maritime connectivity initiatives aim to enhance trade links with regional and global partners, reinforcing its economic influence.

Naval Modernization: India has invested significantly in enhancing its naval capabilities to meet evolving security challenges. A modern and capable navy is crucial for safeguarding sea lines of communication, countering piracy, and addressing non-traditional security threats such as maritime terrorism. The Indian Navy's fleet expansion, including the induction of aircraft carriers, submarines, and advanced surface vessels, underscores its commitment to maintaining maritime dominance in the region.

Strategic Partnerships: India actively engages in strategic partnerships with like-minded nations to foster a cooperative and rules-based maritime order. Collaborations with countries such as the United

States, Japan, Australia, and others in the Indo-Pacific region aim to strengthen maritime security, promote stability, and uphold the principles of freedom of navigation. These Partnerships contribute to a collective effort to address common challenges, including those posed by regional assertiveness.

Implications for the Indo-Pacific Region

Balancing China's Influence: India's maritime strategy serves as a key component of its broader geopolitical calculus, particularly in managing China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. With overlapping maritime interests and concerns about China's assertive behavior, India seeks to preserve a favorable balance of power while upholding its own security and sovereignty. Despite strategic differences, India and China maintain extensive economic ties, with trade and investment forming a significant component of their relationship. Both countries are members of forums like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which provide platforms for economic cooperation and dialogue. As far as diplomatic engagement is concerned, India engages with China through various diplomatic channels, including high-level summits, Track-II dialogues, and bilateral mechanisms like the Special Representatives talks on the boundary question. While speaking to address areas of mutual concern and explore avenues for cooperation, India also articulates its concerns regarding issues such as the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) and China's assertive behavior in South China Sea.

Promoting Rules – Based Order: India advocates for a rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific, characterized by respect for international law, freedom of navigation, and peaceful resolution of disputes. Through its active participation in forums like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and ASEAN-led mechanisms, India seeks to uphold shared values and principles that underpin regional stability and prosperity. India's maritime diplomacy aims to foster cooperative relationships with littoral states, major powers, and multilateral institutions in the Indo-Pacific region. Through forums like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), India promotes dialogue,

confidence – building measures, and maritime security cooperation among regional stakeholders.

Strengthening Regional Connectivity: India's emphasis maritime infrastructure development and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) aim to bolster trade, investment and people-to-people linkages, fostering greater economic integration and stability. India advocates for adherence to international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as the basis for managing maritime disputes and regulating maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific. Upholding the principles of freedom of navigation, overflight, and peaceful resolution of disputes, India contributes to maintaining a rules – based maritime order.

In the coming years, India's maritime -military power is likely to play an increasingly crucial role in shaping the geo-political, economic and security environment in the maritime – configured Indo-Pacific region. India's characteristic military culture is closely related to its reverence for the concept of "Ahimsa". Strategy -2015 in particular flows from the new government's national-strategic priorities of "Act-East" and "Make in India", furthermore Prime Minister Modi's vision of "Sagar"(Security and Growth for All in the Region) and other initiatives taken by Government of India (Khurana,S.Gurpreet,2017) .

India's SAGAR Initiative: A Strategic Paradigm Shift in the Indo-Pacific Region

In the recent years, India has emerged as a key player in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region through its innovative maritime policy known as SAGAR, which stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region. initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, SAGAR represents a strategic paradigm shift aimed at fostering regional stability, economic prosperity, and maritime security. Sagar is anchored on the principles of inclusivity, sustainability, and respect for international law. It seeks to promote cooperation among maritime nations in the Indo-Pacific, while also addressing common challenges such as maritime security threats, piracy, illegal fishing, and environmental degradation. At its heart, SAGAR envisions a peaceful and prosperous

maritime neighborhood, where nations can harness the potential of the oceans for mutual benefit.

Key Components of SAGAR

1. Security: One of the primary objectives of SAGAR is to enhance maritime security through joint patrols, information sharing, capacity-building initiatives. India has actively engaged in maritime exercises with various countries, including the United States, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN nations, to strengthen regional security architecture.

2. Economic Growth: SAGAR emphasizes the importance of sustainable economic development through maritime trade, investment and connectivity. India aims to leverage its strategic location to promote port-led development and maritime infrastructure projects in the region, thereby boosting economic growth and fostering closer ties with neighboring countries.

3. Maritime Cooperation: Under SAGAR, India seeks to deepen maritime cooperation with like-minded nations through forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). By promoting dialogue and collaboration, India aims to address common challenges and build trust among maritime stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific.

4. Environmental Protection: Recognizing the critical importance of marine conservation, SAGAR advocates for sustainable ocean management practices to preserve marine biodiversity and combat pollution. India has launched initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure to promote renewable energy and climate resilience in the region.

India's SAGAR initiative represents a bold and visionary approach to maritime diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific region. By emphasizing security, economic growth, cooperation, and environmental protection, SAGAR seeks to foster a rules-based maritime order that promotes peace, stability and prosperity for all stakeholders. As India continues to play an increasingly assertive role in the region, SAGAR is likely to shape the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-

Pacific in the years to come, laying the foundation for a more secure and prosperous maritime neighborhood.

CONCLUSION

India's maritime strategy reflects its growing recognition of the centrality of the oceans in shaping the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. By prioritizing security, economic growth, diplomacy, and environmental sustainability, India seeks to play a constructive role in promoting stability and prosperity in the maritime domain. As India continues to assert its maritime power and deepen its engagement with regional stakeholders, its maritime strategy is likely to have a lasting impact on the evolving security and economic architecture of the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, India should proactively capitalize on already existing, but largely inactive, regional forum – for example, the BIMSTEC, the Mekong Ganga Cooperation, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association – by meaningfully activating them and knitting the member states' interests with the emerging larger platforms in the Indo-Pacific (like the APEC and RCEP) with a clear vision to increase its political profile and diplomatic capital (Mohan, Surinder & Abraham, C. Josukutty, 2020).

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