

India's Emerging Indian Ocean Strategy

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Abstract

India, while emerging as a major economic player in the world, also possesses an ambitious maritime development plan. Its strategic interest in the Indian Ocean primarily derives from its historical sense of considering the Indian Ocean as India's Ocean. The Indian maritime doctrine provides a guiding principle for increasing the capabilities, peace operations and rescue missions of the Indian Navy and a means for giving India a leadership role in the Indian Ocean region. This study focuses on understanding the emerging Indian strategic thinking on the Indian Ocean. The analysis of Indo-US strategic cooperation which gives India — a special status in the Indian Ocean, the joint exercises with other regional players, the capability of INS Arihant and its future course, and the position of China as a major competitor in the Indian Ocean are, however, some of the key questions which have been addressed.

Keywords: India, Indian Ocean, Indian Naval Strategy, Maritime Strategy

Introduction

Man lives on the land, not on the sea, and conflict at sea has strategic meaning only with reference to what its outcome enables, or implies, for the course of events on land. (Military Strategist, Colin S. Gray).¹

Maritime strategy is a subset of a grand strategy; it is a long-term plan of action designed to attain a special maritime goal and a connection between military power and politico-economic intentions at sea. As a seaward opportunity, shaped by geo-strategic setting and determined by national leadership, a maritime strategy answers the pertinent questions of what to control, for what purpose, and to what degree. However, a naval strategy, on the other hand, is nothing more than the use of military force to

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¹ Colin S. Gray and Roger W. Barnett, eds., *Sea Power and Strategy* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute, 1989), 4.

obtain, or deny, command of the sea, hence, it is only the ocean-going military tactic and deals with the strategic thinking of admirals.² Maritime strategy has a significant meaning in the grand strategy of a maritime state. No nation that aspires power can neglect the maritime dimension. All great powers of the world such as the US, Russia, China, France, Britain and Japan have developed massive maritime infrastructures and command robust and technologically advanced navies.

In the present international scenario, India is emerging as a major economic and political player at the global level. In order to further strengthen its position, it is developing an ambitious plan of maritime modernization. Similarly, the process of its navy's growth and progress has been accelerated and the Indian Navy is taking every possible measure to establish itself as a blue water navy.³ Such developments have taken place particularly since India has begun to aspire for itself a leadership status in the Indian Ocean region.

New Delhi regards the Indian Ocean as its backyard and deems it both natural and desirable that India acts as the leader of the Indian Ocean region.⁴ Therefore, Indian strategic thinking since its origination and since the early twenty-first century has been regional in reach, oceanic in outlook and proactive in scope.

The Evolution of India's Strategic Thinking on Indian Ocean Region

It is the established thinking particularly among the Indian intelligentsia that they are an ancient sea-faring nation and that India was one of the most prosperous civilizations when she was connected to the world mainly by sea.⁵ From about the third millennium BC, till the 13th century AD, India was a thriving maritime power.⁶ The Indian Western coast had commercial ties with the countries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Subsequently successive kingdoms in peninsular and Eastern India created

² Ohn B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the US Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977-1986* (Newport: Naval War College, 2004), 5-6.

³ A classical definition of a blue water navy is a maritime force which can operate 320 km away from its shores.

⁴ Donald L. Berlin, "India in the Indian Ocean," *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 60.

⁵ Arun Prakash, Raj Lieberhan, and Uday Bhaskar, "Maritime Imperatives of Indian Foreign Policy," (paper presented at National Maritime Foundation, Chennai, India, September 11, 2009), http://www.indiahabitat.org/download/Maritime_Imperatives.pdf (accessed July 8, 2012).

⁶ Ibid.

a powerful maritime vision and tradition.⁷ Similarly, dynasties like the Mauryas, Sattavahanas, Pallavas and Cholas sent out fleets that were instrumental in spreading India's trade, culture, and religions by sea to Southeast Asia and further.⁸ Nevertheless, from 13th century onwards the decline of Indian maritime power and tradition had set in which coincided with the domination of foreign powers for the next 600-700 years.⁹

Perhaps, this is the reason that in the prevailing Indian strategic thinking it is widely believed that geography has placed a heavy responsibility on India's shoulders as it has made her a natural sentinel of the region's major trade routes.¹⁰ India takes the credit for trade and travel of various vital commodities, and millions of tons of hydrocarbons from the Middle East to Southeast Asian countries. In fact the industrial and economic engines of these regions use this passage way which is situated at the peninsular configuration of only 1,500 miles.¹¹ It is not without reason, therefore, for New Delhi to perceive the Indian Ocean as "India's Ocean." Indian strategic thinking sees a close connection between India's maritime ambitions and its future destiny. Forecasting India as a future great power the former Indian Foreign Minister, Pranab Mukherjee stated:

"After nearly a millennia of inward and landward focus, we are once again turning our gaze outwards and seawards, which is the natural direction of view for a nation seeking to re-establish itself, not simply as a continental power, but even more so as a maritime power, and as one that is of significance on the world stage."¹²

Nevertheless, in the prevailing international political scenario, the Indian maritime strategic designs have co-integrated with multiple compulsions and reasoning which can be understood by analyzing the strength of the Indian navy.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Arun Prakash, "A Vision of India's Maritime Power in the 21st Century," *Air Power Journal*, vol. 3 no. 1 (Winter 2006): 22-33.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pranab Mukherjee, Speech for the Admiral A. K. Chatterjee Memorial Lecture, Kolkata, June 30, 2007, (accessed July 10, 2012), <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=28921>

Indian Maritime Strength, Ambitions and Compulsions

Capabilities and Strength

The Indian Navy has entered into the new millennium as a professional, focused and committed force, deeply conscious of its roles and responsibilities. In times of peace and tension, the Indian Navy is a powerful instrument of the nation's foreign policy, while in times of conflict, it is the foremost expression of the nation's maritime power.¹³ This thinking is mainly owing to the fact that India considers its position in the Indian Ocean “pivotal,” and “the only viable link” between the various maritime zones of the Indian Ocean region, i.e. between the Malacca Straits, Andaman Sea, Bay of Bengal, Central Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and its extensions in the Gulf and Red Sea.¹⁴

The Indian thrust to operate deep into the Indian Ocean enables it to go for extended military build up and blue water capabilities. That is the reason India is capable of having six Scorpene submarines which were produced under licence with French technologies with a follow-on order for six additional submarines; six improved Project 17A frigates; a nuclear-powered missile submarine (the INS Arihant), and the domestically-built Project 15 (Delhi-class) destroyers.¹⁵ Russian MiG-29K jet fighters have also been obtained for its aircraft fleet.¹⁶ On the same pattern India has worked on an Advanced Technology Vessels (ATV) programme for the past three decades. The show of power on July 26, 2009 when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh launched India's so-called own, domestically produced 6,000 ton nuclear powered submarine, INS Arihant was a big day in Indian maritime history. Manmohan Singh puts it by stating, “... today we join a select group of five nations who possess the capability to build a nuclear-powered submarine; i.e. the five Permanent Members of the UNSC — the US, Russia, UK, France and China.”¹⁷ INS Arihant, with its 85-megawatt nuclear reactor, after a trial in the Bay of Bengal soon will be

¹³ “Indian Maritime Doctrine,” *Global Security*, (accessed August 11, 2009), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/india/in-navy-doctrine.htm>

¹⁴ K. Pant, “Dimensions of National security — the Maritime Aspect,” <http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/speech/dch157.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2009).

¹⁵ Daniel Darling, “Will the Indian Ocean Become the Next Arena of Great Power Conflict?,” *The Faster Times*, March 24, 2010, (accessed March 24, 2011), <http://thefastertimes.com/defensespending/2010/03/24/will-the-indian-ocean-become-the-next-arena-of-great-power-conflict/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “India has No Aggressive Design, Says PM,” July 26, 2009, *Times of India*, (accessed on August 26, 2011), <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>

commissioned and deployed into full service.¹⁸ It is forecast that few more ATV nuclear powered submarines are due for construction in the coming years.¹⁹

These nuclear capabilities in the Indian Ocean apart, around 95 per cent of India's external trade passes through the sea. Moreover its predominance on over 1000 islands and atolls, accounting for over 1300 miles of additional coastline gives her a huge Exclusive Economic Zone of around 1.37 million square miles. India is also taking steps to expand its air force bases in the Andaman and Nicobar island chains and plans to station Su-30MKI fighters, mid-air refuelling tankers and short-and-medium-range unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) on these island bases.²⁰ Besides, while acting as a facilitator for regional cooperation, it has made substantial progress in establishing its prominence in the Indian Ocean region through such interventions as her role in the secession of Bangladesh, operations in Sri Lanka and suppression of the coup in the Maldives.²¹

Ambitions and Compulsions

Indian strategic hopes in the Indian Ocean rest most visibly on its maritime forces — its navy. Kailash Kumar Kohli, then Commander of the Western Fleet elaborates that, “it is vital, not just for India's security but also for her continued prosperity, that we possess a Navy which will protect the nation's vast and varied maritime interests, where the Navy's role is to help maintain peace in the Indian Ocean, meet the expectations of our friends and neighbours in times of need, and underpin India's status as a regional power.”²²

For that matter Indian strategic aim is to be the pre-eminent maritime power in the Indian Ocean, and the “means” to bring about this end is a “strong navy that can maintain a capability for sustained operations in and throughout the Indian Ocean.”²³ In the current strategic scenario, the missions of the Indian Navy are correspondingly more diverse and complex than ever before. As the maritime domain is changing rapidly, India appreciates these changes and shapes strategies and policies to further her

¹⁸ “Arihant — Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV),” August 11, 2009, (accessed August 19, 2011), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/india/atv.htm>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Darling, “Will the Indian Ocean Become the Next Arena of Great Power Conflict?”

²¹ J. M Golsalves, “The Indian Navy — A Perspective Vision upto 2020,” December 25, 2009, *Bharat-Rakshak*, (accessed August 24, 2011), <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/NAVY/History/2000s/Golsalves.pdf>

²² Prakash, “Warship Building” (presented at a Seminar, March 22, 2006).

²³ Ibid.

national interests because it aspires to use the seas to its advantage.²⁴ India considers her geographic location as uniquely positioned to face in both directions, and thus seek to simultaneously control the Arabian Sea to the west and the Bay of Bengal to the east, as well as to look southwards deep into the Indian Ocean.

Indian strategic thinking in the Indian Ocean compels India to ensure steady and secure energy supply routes. Because being an emerging economic power India's energy needs have grown and India has to secure its sea-lanes of communication and choke points in the Indian Ocean including the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-El-Mandeb, Cape of Good Hope, Mozambique Channel and the Malacca Straits.²⁵ However, the rationale behind India's military build-up in the Indian Ocean is also related to its concern about the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.²⁶ Therefore, analysts are of the view that behind the Indo-US shared democratic, pluralistic values, the security of oil routes and containing China's rise are the main reasons for their growing strategic cooperation which serves the interests of both states in the Indian Ocean.²⁷

Nevertheless, there is a strong connection between Indian maritime strength and capabilities and the Indian maritime doctrine which has a long-term as well as a short-term plan of action and helps in fulfilling India's grand strategy in the Indian Ocean.

Indian Maritime Doctrine (IMD)

India's first-ever Maritime Doctrine was made public in April 2004. However, the *Navy Day* in 2006 is considered the important day when the Indian Navy transformed itself from a 'brown water' coastal defence force to a formidable 'blue water' fleet²⁸. The Indian Maritime Doctrine (IMD)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rizwan Zeb, "Military Modernization," *South Asia Global Affairs*, March 2011, (accessed July 11, 2012), <http://www.saglobalaffairs.com/regional/834-military-modernization.html>

²⁶ India's Military expenditure has doubled in the past decade to about \$US30 billion (\$A36 billion) and if it keeps up with expected economic growth, analysts believe, India will be the third largest military power in two decades. "India's navy build-up shows regional ambitions run deep," Matt Wade, August 1, 2009, *Brisbane Times*, (accessed on March 27, 2010), <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/indias-navy-buildup-shows-regional-ambitions-run-deep-20090801-e4ue.html>

²⁷ Richard B Gasparre, "Indo-U.S. Naval Cooperation," October 23, 2007, (accessed July 16, 2012), <http://www.navaltechnology.com/features/feature1130/>

²⁸ Raja Muhammad Khan, "The Strategic Vision of Indian Navy," *Kashmir Watch* May 23, 2010, (accessed June 7, 2010),

undoubtedly reveals the future strategic vision of the Indian Navy. The statement of October 2006 gave a roadmap for its transformation. Whereas, the Indian Maritime Military Strategy (IMMS) was issued in 2007 with its slogan, 'Freedom to use the Seas,'²⁹ Admiral Nirmal Verma, then Chief of Naval Staff, stated, "if we are to fulfil our maritime destiny, all of us — the Government, the armed forces, the civil services, the media and the public — must have a maritime vision and a thorough understanding of the maritime concepts outlined in this doctrine."³⁰

The IMD has in fact a revised version of earlier Indian Navy's defence doctrine which particularly focused on coastal protection through an aggressive, competitive strategy, pursuing littoral warfare and dominating the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).³¹ The following points of the doctrine are worth noticing:

It was for the first time ever that the Navy stressed the need for a submarine-based credible minimum nuclear deterrence (MND) capability that inevitably linked India's pursuit of an independent foreign policy posture. It goes on to state that for India to occupy its appropriate place in the global hierarchy as a secular, vibrant and economically thriving democracy, it makes a strong case for acquiring a non-provocative strategic capability through the most viable platform, the submarine. The document strongly urges the Navy to "recognize" its MND responsibilities correctly and as urgently important.³²

An updated version of the naval doctrine, known as *2009 Document* was also released, which further took into account the rapid changes in regional and international geo-strategic environment, evolved complexities and transformational changes that the domain was witnessing.³³ Firstly, it was published in 2004 in order to provide a common understanding of the universally applicable maritime concepts, both for men in uniform and for the common man.³⁴ The central focus of the doctrine is, however, based on concepts as well as application of maritime power from which further

http://www.kashmirwatch.com/showexclusives.php?subaction=showfull&id=1274614811&archive=&start_from=&ucat=15&var1news=value1news

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Indian Maritime Doctrine," *Global Security*.

³¹ Rahul Bedi, "A new doctrine for the Navy," *Front Line*, September 26, 2009, (accessed June 26, 2010), <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2114/stories/20040716002104600.htm>

³² Ibid.

³³ "Navy releases 2009 version of Maritime Doctrine," *Hindu*, August 29, 2009, (accessed April 11, 2010),

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/08/29/stories/2009082960571000.htm>

³⁴ Ibid.

doctrines would flow.³⁵ The additional doctrine will help India to enhance awareness about its maritime environment, national interests, and provide the fundamentals for readiness and response planning in future.³⁶ Admiral Suresh Mehta, then Chief of Naval Staff, highlights the key points of Indian Maritime Strategy as:

- (a) In conjunction with other Armed Forces of the Union, act to deter or defeat any threats or aggression against the territory, peoples or maritime interests of India, both in war and peace;
- (b) Project influence in their maritime area of interest, to further the nation's political, economic and security objectives;
- (c) In cooperation with the Coast Guard, ensure good order and stability in its maritime zones of responsibility;
- (d) Provide maritime assistance (including disaster relief) in India's maritime neighbourhood.³⁷

The Mumbai terror attacks and the sharp rise in piracy off Somalia have thrown a wrench into India's ten-year, US\$15 billion naval acquisition plan. The Indian government has fast-tracked some acquisitions to meet its immediate requirements, including aerostat radars for surveillance on the coastline.³⁸ Under the 2004 naval doctrine, which sought to build up a blue-water force, the Navy has been buying aircraft carriers, submarines, landing platform docks and reconnaissance aircraft. But the recent events demand that the Navy craft a fresh doctrine, according to one Indian Navy rear admiral.³⁹ While the Navy buys ships to maintain its 150-vessel fleet, it needs to clearly outline its short- and long-term plans, the rear admiral said. "What are the short-term and long-term requirements of the Indian Navy in the changing scenario? These are new questions, which need to be integrated into a fresh doctrine."⁴⁰

Probal Ghosh, a senior fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies, says the Indian Ocean maritime scenario is becoming complex, with threats

³⁵ "Indian Maritime Doctrine Released," *Press Information Bureau, GoI*, August 28, 2009, (accessed April 11, 2010), <http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/4025698-indian-maritime-doctrine-released>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Suresh Mehta, "The Indian Ocean Region: Shaping India's Maritime Strategy - Opportunities & Challenges," April 13, 2009, (accessed July 27, 2010), http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/indian_ocean/0511indian_maritime_strategy.htm

³⁸ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India May Rethink Naval Needs After Mumbai Attack," *Defense News*, (accessed June 11, 2010), <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4070499>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

from terrorists and pirates and clashing economic interests with China and other countries.⁴¹ He noted that destabilizing activities, such as drug smuggling, gunrunning, illegal human transportation, and the use of seas by land-based terrorists, were on the rise. "A balanced approach would be best," he said. "In the long term, a three-carrier Navy is what one would envisage, since it would drastically enhance the power projection capability; a major enhancement in amphibious inventory is again well-suited to our doctrine and challenges."⁴²

Indo-US Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region

During the heydays of US domination particularly since the 1990s when the decline of the Soviet Union set in, India and the US took the golden opportunity to come closer. Initially in 1992, the Indo-US Malabar naval exercises,⁴³ was a regular feature of cooperation. Although this annual exercise actually formed the base for cooperation in the air force and army as well, nevertheless, in later years it remained limited to maritime and land forces' cooperation between the two countries.⁴⁴ In the wake of Indo-US strategic alliance, the dynamics of Indo-US cooperation has acquired special significance. The long term commitment of strategic relations of the two countries significantly echoed during the Indo-US strategic talks of 2005 when under the "New Framework of US-India Defence Relationship," the Bush administration showing its full commitment to help India become a major global power,⁴⁵ emphasized convergence of their major strategic goals in the Indian Ocean region. During his India's visit in June 2012, Pentagon Chief, Leon Panetta, said, in US's new military strategy for Asia, India is a "linchpin" and it wants to expand its military partnerships and presence in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia.⁴⁶ During the third annual US-India

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ For India, Malabar series exercise is considered the most advanced compare to other foreign naval exercises, it includes: US destroyers, frigates, nuclear submarines and powerful nuclear aircraft carriers USS Nimitz and USS Kitty Hawk with India's INS Viraat and Indian destroyers and MR aircraft etc, Ranjit B RAI, "Indo-French International Naval Exercise Varuna 2011 was very advanced and included a sales pitch," *India Defence Update*, (accessed on July 18, 2012), <http://www.indiadefenceupdate.com/news160.htm>

⁴⁴ "Enhancing scope of Malabar exercise," *Centre for Asian Strategic Studies-India*, (accessed July 18, 2012) <http://cassindia.com/ShowNews.aspx?id=113>.

⁴⁵ Gasparre, "Indo-US Naval Cooperation."

⁴⁶ "Leon Panetta in Delhi, says India 'linchpin' for American Strategy in Asia," *Times of India*, (accessed on July 18, 2012),

Strategic Dialogue, India's Minister of External Affairs, S.M. Krishna and US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, met in Washington DC, on June 13, 2012, and in the joint statements it was clearly stated that the United States and India had a shared vision for peace, stability, and prosperity in Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and the Pacific region and are committed to work together, and with others in the region, for the evolution of an open, balanced, and inclusive architecture.⁴⁷ Similarly, the same commitment of shared vision for peace and stability in Asia and in the Indian and Pacific Oceans was reaffirmed during the 4th Annual Strategic Dialogue held in June 24, 2013.

Indian Maritime Cooperation with other Countries

The Indian Navy, with three commands — the western, southern and eastern is the 5th largest in the world. A tri-services command was set up in 2001 at Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.⁴⁸

During the past few decades, the Indian navy has been actively engaged in building closer relations with several navies across the globe. A fair example is the multinational naval exercises called *Milan*, hosted by Indian Navy at Port Blair which aims to build mutual confidence between the navies of the Asia Pacific region.⁴⁹ In February 2012, navies of 14 countries,⁵⁰ attended the *Milan 12* exercise.⁵¹ The 2012 exercise was the eighth episode of 'Milan' it has been conducting off Andaman every alternate year since the first exercise took place in 1995.⁵² Besides, India has participated in international fleet reviews, royal functions, carried out disaster relief activities, search and rescue, anti-piracy patrols and has

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Leon-Panetta-in-Delhi-says-India-linchpin-for-American-strategy-in-Asia/articleshow/13871933.cms?>

⁴⁷ Statements from 3rd Indo-US Strategic Dialogue 2012 US Department of State, (accessed July 2, 2013), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/06/192267.htm>

⁴⁸ Sudha Ramachandran, "Indian navy pumps up eastern muscle," *Asia Times*, August 20, 2011, (accessed on July 13, 2012), http://www.atimes.com/atimes/south_asia/mh20df02.html

⁴⁹ Ramachandran, "Indian Navy Pumps up Eastern Muscle."

⁵⁰ Countries includes Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Mauritius, New Zealand, the Philippines, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

⁵¹ "Indian Navy Stages Milan 2012 naval exercise with 14+ countries," *Asian Defence News*, February 3, 2012, (accessed July 13, 2012), <http://asian-defence-news.blogspot.com/2012/02/indian-navy-stages-milan-2012-naval.html>

⁵² "India's Milan with 14 countries at Andaman," *Daily Pioneer*, January 30, 2012, (accessed July 19, 2012), <http://www.dailypioneer.com/nation/39017-indias-milan-with-14-countries-at-andaman.html>

conducted joint exercises aimed to build confidence and trust.⁵³ India's role was more visible after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, when Indian navy played an active role, it deployed warships in Sri Lanka and Indonesia in order to help both the countries.⁵⁴

In June 2012, the first bilateral maritime exercise between India and Japan known as 'JIMEX 12' (Japan India Maritime Exercise) conducted off the coast of Tokyo. The Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) units took part with two destroyers; one maritime patrol aircraft and a helicopter whereas the Indian Naval units participated with INS Rana, INS Shivalik, INS Karmukh and INS Shakti.⁵⁵ Between India and Japan, this first joint naval exercise ever marks a significant advance in maritime cooperation and in future it may induce strategic concerns for their contenders in the Indian Ocean region.⁵⁶ The Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and the Indian Navy (IN) have been conducting Singapore-Indian Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) since 1994.⁵⁷ India hosted SIMBEX in March-April 2012 at the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal; it was the 19th instalment in the series of bilateral exercises held since its initiation.⁵⁸ Similarly, the Indian Navy and the French Navy have been conducting bilateral naval exercises named 'VARUNA' since 1993.⁵⁹

In April 2012, India commissioned the 8,140-tonne Akula II-class nuclear powered submarine, built by the Russians as the K-152 Nerpa, and renamed it as INS Chakra II which was worth \$1bn (£630m). The vessel

⁵³ Vijay Sakhujia, "Naval Diplomacy: Indian Initiatives," *Bharat-Rakshak*, October 10, 2006, (accessed March 11, 2010),

<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/monitor/issue6-1/Sakhujia.html>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "First Indo-Japan bilateral Naval Exercise 'JIMEX 12 Underway,'" *Indian Navy*, June 8, 2012, (accessed July 18, 2012), <http://indiannavy.nic.in/press-release/first-indo-japan-bilateral-naval-exercise-jimex12-underway>

⁵⁶ "India-Japan Navy," *World Defence Review*, June 2012, (accessed July 18, 2012), <http://world-defece-review.blogspot.com/2012/06/india-japan-navy.htm>

⁵⁷ "Singapore and Indian Navies Conduct Bilateral Maritime Exercise," *Mindef Singapore*, April 1, 2012, (accessed on July 18, 2012),

http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2012/apr/01apr12_nr.html

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Indo-French bilateral Naval Exercise 'VARUNA 10' gets underway with two aircraft carriers and two submarines," *Indian Defence Review*, January 6, 2012, (accessed July 19, 2012), <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/indo-french-bilateral-naval-exercise-varuna-10-gets-underway-with-two-aircraft-carriers-and-two-submarines>

has been leased by the Indian Navy for the next 10 years.⁶⁰ India has now joined countries like China, Russia, the US, the UK and France as the operator of nuclear submarines. In this regard, the country's Defence Minister, AK Antony, on one occasion said, "this will be a big boost for the Indian navy and the INS Chakra will ensure the security and sovereignty of the country."⁶¹ With the INS *Chakra* and the INS *Arihant*, India will soon have two nuclear submarines guarding its vast maritime boundaries.⁶²

Indian analyst Sakhuja has explained this aspect in these words:

Indian naval strategists and naval planners are convinced that the acquisition of a nuclear submarine will provide the most reliable deterrence, will give the navy a true blue water status and will add to great power status for India.⁶³

However, analysts are of the view that such developments are efforts merely to show off India's power projection as a regional power in the Indian Ocean region. India's constructing and buying ships, submarines and aircraft is also a means for expanding its influence in the Indian Ocean and among the regional countries.⁶⁴ It is similar to other efforts which India has formally started to pursue like announcing the setting up of a base in Tajikistan, and by these efforts it hopes to undertake the following military programme through 2013 such as a ten year military build-up programme which includes improving military logistics in Iran, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; increasing military interaction with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam; increasing naval interaction with South Africa, other African states, Iran, Oman, the United Arab Emirates

⁶⁰ "Russian-built nuclear submarine joins Indian navy," *BBC News India*, April 4, 2012, (accessed July 12, 2012), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-17606829>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "India commissions nuclear-powered submarine," *Aljazeera*, April 4, 2012, (accessed July 12, 2012), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/04/201244143536357132.html>. It is worthier to note that Nuclear powered submarines have great significance as they can operate underwater for long periods i.e. with normal patrols they can remain underwater for 70 days. However, in contrast the conventional diesel electric submarine needs to come to surface after every 3-4 days in order to get oxygen and to recharge their batteries.

⁶³ Sakhuja, "Naval Diplomacy: Indian Initiatives."

⁶⁴ "India launches naval exercise off Andamans," *Defence Talk*, February 6, 2010 (accessed July 13, 2012), <http://www.defencetalk.com/india-launches-naval-exercise-off-andamans-24086/>

and other Gulf nations; and lastly extending infrastructure, logistic and material support to Myanmar to contain Chinese activities there.⁶⁵

Future Prospects

Taking into account India's power potential, relationship with neighbours and its pre-eminence in the region, it can be said that India is likely to establish itself as a regional power in the Indian Ocean in the future as the former President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, once said, "a developed and strong India by 2020, or even earlier, is not a dream. It may not even be a mere inspiration in the minds of many Indians. It is a mission we can all take up and accomplish."⁶⁶ These ambitious statements notwithstanding it is on record that for years both Indian and foreign analysts have been expecting that by the early 21st century India would have become a major power and influence throughout Asia. Indeed, the most recent evidence suggests that the Indian government has now opted for another 20-year programme to fulfil that goal and become "a world power with influence spreading across the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Gulf and the four corners of Asia."⁶⁷

At the same time, however, it is also pertinent to note that there are certain capabilities that India seeks for acquiring a global power status: an Indian ocean long-range air defence and anti-missile defence system, airborne early warning system, anti-submarine warfare capability, anti-ship and land attack missiles, , maritime reconnaissance, amphibious assault, Special Forces, and mine counter-measures, ship-borne logistics and support. These are some of the overarching requirements which will ensure India's "blue water" capabilities.⁶⁸ Although India's plan to grow its blue-water capabilities also includes bringing three aircraft carriers into naval service by 2015.⁶⁹ It is yet to be seen if India will be able to acquire these capabilities in the coming two years even as the percentage of its population living below the poverty line continues to rise. It is also speculated that by 2025 India is likely to possess three to four aircraft carrier battle groups, a

⁶⁵ Stephen Blank, "India's grand strategic vision gets grander," Asia Times Online, December 25, 2003 (accessed March 2, 2010), http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/EL25Df09.html

⁶⁶ J M Golsalves, "The Indian Navy — A Perspective Vision Upto 2020," *Bharat-Rakshak*, October 27, 2008, (accessed December 25, 2009) <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/NAVY/History/2000s/Golsalves.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Parkah, "A Vision of India's Maritime Power In The 21st Century," 33.

⁶⁹ Darling, "Will the Indian Ocean Become the Next Arena of Great Power Conflict?"

fleet of nuclear submarines, an air force with 35 squadrons and sophisticated land-based weapon systems to go with its huge army.⁷⁰

Although there are many who regard India as a nation with a large “security deficit,” and not enough resources to ensure its territorial integrity and regard change in its land environment crucial to its ability and capacity to offer security to other regional states — a grandiose future in which Indian Navy’s role is going to be central.⁷¹ Though India may emerge as a major force in the Indian Ocean but, for now, it is still constrained by internal security challenges and threatening neighbours.

India has to maintain a huge land force, its regular army of about 1.3 million troops is supported by a part-time reserve force of 1.2 million and its paramilitary forces number about 1.1 million. In addition, India has about 60-70 operational nuclear weapons.⁷² The Indian Navy only gets about 15 per cent of the defence budget, while the army gets about 60 per cent, therefore, India will have to devote far more resources to its navy.⁷³ Similarly, the Naxal movement presents the greatest overall threat to India in the future, as it highlights various underlying weaknesses of India’s governance, political institutions and socio-economic structure. It is believed that Naxalism is one of the biggest threats because it affects several areas including the economy, security and foreign affairs, its citizens and rule of law. This is why one Indian analyst admits that, projecting India’s Indian Ocean ambitions is only one side of the coin, there are several other factors — real and part of some dream — that pose threat to Indian security and may frustrate its ambitions.⁷⁴

Last but not least, in the light of the statement of Kailash Kumar Kohli, then Commander of the Western Fleet, it can be concluded that the Indian projection in and around the Indian Ocean has become noticeable, and “history has taught India two bitter lessons: firstly, that neglect of maritime power can culminate in a cessation of sovereignty, and secondly, that it takes decades to revert to being a considerable maritime power after a period of neglect and decline.”⁷⁵ Therefore, the question of how far India is

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ C. Raja Mohan, “India’s new naval doctrine,” *Hindu*, April 29, 2004 (accessed July 11, 2012), <http://www.hindu.com/2004/04/29/stories/2004042904801100.htm>

⁷² Parkah, “A Vision of India’s Maritime Power In the 21st Century,” 33.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Althea Carbon*, “Naxalism — The Biggest Security Threat to India”, *India Future of Change*, (accessed July 10, 2012), http://www.indiafutureofchange.com/featureEssay_D0012.htm

⁷⁵ Kalash Kumar Kohli, “Maritime Power in Peace and War — an Indian View,” *African Security Review* 5, no. 2 (1996), (accessed April 22, 2010), <http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/ASR/5No2/5No2/MaritimePower.html>

seeking, and succeeding, in making the Indian Ocean, “India’s Ocean” is a valid question in the prevailing Indian Ocean environment. ■