

Maritime Borders: Prospects And Challenges For India's Foreign Policy

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This paper elucidates the role of geography especially the maritime border in shaping the foreign policy discourse of India. India being a prominent player in contemporary global politics has taken certain grandiose policy stances in its bilateral and multilateral relations in the recent past considering its huge maritime border into due consideration. India's huge maritime borders have explicit implications for its ties with the countries in the Indian Ocean region and its neighborhood. It also examines India's growing inclination towards its maritime borders and the role of the Indian Ocean in India's emergence as a benign power. Nevertheless, this paper also seeks to examine what potential challenges India could face due to its long maritime border. India's huge maritime border not only provides opportunities for its foreign policy. But it also has certain far-reaching challenges for India's foreign policy in its neighborhood and with countries in the Indian Ocean region. India, an important actor in the international sphere, has taken all the challenges comprehensively and launched numerous policy initiatives to tackle the challenges and strengthen its maritime border potential.

KEYWORDS: Maritime border, foreign policy, Strategic, Grandiose.

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy of the state has a key role in enhancing the prestige of state in the global politics and achieving national objectives as well. However, foreign policy being dynamic and multidimensional in nature is itself shaped by numerous determinants. Geography being one such determinant has always played a critical role in shaping the foreign policy discourse of states in global politics. India's significant position in the international milieu is due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean region. Notwithstanding this, history shows that India was most prosperous and secure when she was most connected to the world, and that this connection was mainly by sea. It is well-known that we are an ancient sea-faring nation, as the 4,000-year-old port at Lothal and other Indus Valley finds show. Moreover, Satavahana, Chola, Pallava, Chera and Pandyan prosperity and security were based on a maritime strategy that included Southeast Asia (Menon, 2010).

India enjoys a coastline of 7500 km, 1200 islands and 2.4 million square kilometers of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ; Swaraj, 2015). The Indian coastline (including island territories) of 7,516.5 kms is the 15th longest in the world, with Canada (90,889 kms) and Indonesia (54,705 kms) possessing the longest coasts (Chaudhury, 2018). Furthermore, India shares its maritime border with seven countries which includes Pakistan, Maldives, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh. India's long maritime borders provide certain leeway to

her in shaping its foreign policy discourse in South Asia and IOR as well. The flux in global politics in the post-Cold war era has brought the Indian Ocean in focus, this implicitly enhanced the role of the maritime sector in India's foreign policy in the Indian Ocean and achieved its endeavour of benign power in the global politics as well.

Current Indian foreign policy discourse plans to build a new maritime India. A paradigm shift aimed at binding the sea into the development framework is all too evident. Indian coasts and maritime domains are consciously factored to serve the objectives of growth and development (Rao, 2019). Though India strategic location in the Indian Ocean region and long maritime border insists India to promote the objectives of growth and development in the region. However, C Raja Mohan says that India as the second most populous state in the world, despite having a long coastline, would be forced to pay greater attention to the ocean resources in future. Menon (2010) while highlighting the significance of maritime sector for India's foreign policy, In the midst of the third largest ocean in the world, India's location is in many ways her destiny. The seas, especially the Indian Ocean, are vital to India's interests. All this makes it explicit that maritime domain has its role in India's foreign policy. This paper seeks to examine the prospects of maritime borders in India's foreign policy. Furthermore, it also examines the challenges which India perpetually faces due to its long maritime border, initiatives undertaken by India to strengthen its leverage and resolve constraints as well.

II. MARITIME BORDERS: PROSPECTS FOR INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

India's long maritime border in the Indian Ocean region and the rising geopolitical significance of the region creates certain opportunities for India to achieve its desirable objectives. The growing vitality of the region in the global politics in general and for India's foreign policy lies due to numerous factors. Today, 90 per cent of global commerce and 65 per cent of all oil travels by sea. Of this, half the world's container traffic and 70 per cent of the total traffic of petroleum products is accounted for by the Indian Ocean (Menon, 2010). Morton kaplan is of the view that Indian Ocean Region is a significant geostrategic node for economic, environmental and human resources (Kaplan,2011).

India maritime border not only creates leverage to strengthen its position in the region but the shift in world order towards Indian Ocean region and the region being the major theatre for power projection helps India to achieve its long-term objective of benign power in the region and global politics as well. India by all accounts is factored as a key constituent of the Asian Century. The Asian Century phenomenon symbolizes the transfer of global politico economic power from the Euro-Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific -Pacific region (Rao, 2019). The emerging role of India and the prospect for its foreign policy is mainly due to its strategic location and its long maritime border.

Around 80 percent of China's oil imports, perhaps 90 percent of South Korea's, and up to 90 percent of Japan's are shipped from the Middle East and Africa through the Indian Ocean. This, in turn, is a major strategic vulnerability, which is influencing diplomacy and partnership building, as well as the hard-power priorities of naval modernization. Together, these developments are making the Indo-Pacific the world's economic and strategic center of gravity and India as a prominent player due to its geopolitical vitality in the region (Medclaff, 2018).

Major Choke Points in the Indian Ocean Region



Source, Transition to Guardianship: The Indian Navy 1991-2000I

<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/external-naval-presence-in-indian-ocean/>

At present, connectivity is the Asia's key strategy of building intraregional linkages to facilitate the speedy movement of goods. Compulsions of growth-led economies and also competitive geopolitics are the direct impulses for pushing states toward modernizing an otherwise archaic land and port linkages. The sheer size of Indian territory and centrality of this peninsula to the geography of BOB inevitably factors it into the regional transport networks which has significant role in boasting the economy as well as promoting the sustainable development in the region (Rao, 2019).

India's stakes in the stability in the Indian Ocean stems from energy trade flows in the region. According to a report by the International Energy Agency, India's import needs will double by 2040 (World Energy Outlook 2019). India's maritime activities have been suggestive of an expanding regional strategic ambit. India's increasing activities to ensure safety of passage and trade near the Gulf of Aden, the East African coast and the Andaman Sea, along with its partnership with Japan and Australia in the east, are indicative of its attempt to balance power relations on either side of its peninsular jut into the Indian Ocean (Mishra, 2017). This increasing inclination is mainly due to strengthen its position in the maritime domain and to leverage the advantage of long maritime border as well. Add to this our other maritime interests – almost 5 million Indians work in the Gulf and West Asia, and the significance of the remittances they send home cannot be underestimated. Populations of Indian origin is scattered through the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. India also has a mineral-rich exclusive economic zone, which is well over 2 million sq. Km in area (Menon, 2010).

Presently, the Asia-Pacific is the most dynamic region and considered the growth engine of the world. However, the region is seeing multi-polarity with the rise of new powers, giving it fluidity and instability. Nearly 50% of India's trade passes through this region, and in a globalised world, India wants to ensure an enabling external environment which is supportive of India's growth, development and security (Padmaja, 2015). Besides, all this India relations with littoral states in the Indian Ocean region is also shaped by its maritime border in the past and in the contemporary world as well. While India is boosting its own maritime strength by modernizing the navy and buying new platforms to project its blue water capability, it is in the process of synergizing bilateral and multilateral cooperation to augment its maritime security (Pattanaik, 2016). Despite having numerous prospects and significant role in achieving India's endeavour of benign and major power maritime border also creates certain challenges for India's foreign policy discourse.

III. MARITIME BORDERS: CHALLENGES FOR INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

India's long maritime border not only creates opportunity for India's foreign policy but simultaneously also creates numerous constraints which inhibits India to achieve its national interest in the region in particular and global politics in general as well. Many analysts argue, that despite having longest maritime border, in the aftermath of the 1962 war the Army received the largest proportion of the defense budget whereas the budget allocated for the air force remained unchanged and the increase in the allotment for the army was at the 'cost of the Navy' (Behera, 2015).

James Holmes an expert on Maritime issues argues 'a plan of action for fulfilling goals in a competitive environment' is required which India lacks at the moment (Holmes, 2015). Rise in sea levels, associated with climate change, is a major environmental concern for the planet and the most alarming NT maritime security concern for the IOR in general and India particularly due to its long maritime border (Aswani, 2020). There is very little awareness about the role of sea trade in sustaining economic growth. The fact that India's sea trade is more than 90 per cent by volume and more than 75 per cent by value seems to be forgotten. Without the 40,000 tankers to carry the oil that fuels India's thirsty economy, the GDP cannot be sustained. Little attention is paid to harnessing human resources for the maritime sector (Vasan, 2012). Another major concern that has dominated the Indian maritime security paradigm is the strategic balance in the Indian Ocean. There are two dimensions to this. First is the exponentially growing nuclear arsenal of Pakistan that seeks to bring unsettling regional asymmetries in the IOR. Second is the rising power asymmetry in the IOR in relation to China. China's creeping advance in the Indian Ocean has been a pressing concern for India's security apparatus for the better part of a decade (Mishra, 2017).

The Indo-Pakistani maritime dispute comprises two related issues—the resolution of the land boundary-in Sir Creek (a 38 km long estuary in the marshes of the Rann of Kutch) of the Gujarat (India) and Sindh(Pakistan) provinces, as well as the delineation of the maritime boundary seaward within the territorial sea and beyond is a major irritants between India and Pakistan (Chaudhury, 2008).The lack of reliable and complete data is one of the first of these challenges –and it is, in and of itself, a significant one. There is a dearth of oceanographic data and information regarding the projected use and requirement of fresh water and energy for countries, especially SIDS (Agarwala & Kishor, 2019).

The littoral nations in the IOR are constantly suspicious of each other's strategic intentions and added to this security dilemma, the increasing influence of extra-regional powers, such as USA, China, Japan, and Russia may possibly lead to an ineffective region-wide security cooperation (Cordner, 2010). Moreover, Terrorism is a hard-core threat to Maritime security, it's containing some factors like attacking the ships and crew or passengers to serve a political aim. Historically several incidents against shipping and made a variety of methodologies at the disposal of terrorist organizations (Joy, 2021). A striking deficiency in India's airborne MDA capability is the lack of suitable manned and unmanned aircraft for localised surveillance around a fleet at sea (Gopal, 2020). The long maritime border of India also faced issue of piracy along its borders with neighbouring countries especially Sri Lanka, Indonesia etc.

China ambitious project like string of pearls and huge investment in littoral states in the India's neighbourhood is also a huge cause of concern for India's foreign policy. Moreover, growing China Pakistan nexus in the IOR poses serious challenges to India. Furthermore, it is said that India while countering China in its neighbourhood launched numerous initiatives however India's efforts lack proactiveness in its project implementation for instance for years, India's involvement in restoring the commercial utility of vintage oil tanks at Trincomalee natural harbour on Lankan eastern seaboard is in news. On ground, little has moved in the intended direction (Rao, 2019). It is also argued by many strategists that Asian middle powers Like India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh etc. generally, have shared interests in stable security, booming economy, and maintaining the current maritime order. Still, each of them places its foreign policy priority on different issues because they are each under different specific conditions and situations in terms of geopolitics and geoeconomics (Lee, Lee & Jung, 2020). It is undeniable fact that India long maritime borders not only place India at more strategic position in the contemporary world order but also raises serious concern for India's foreign and maritime security policy. India being proactive in its foreign policy front also have undertaken numerous diplomatic steps to resolve the constraints and strengthen its leverage in the Indian Ocean region and its maritime neighbours as well.

IV. INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY INDIA TO RESOLVE IRRITANTS ENGULFED ITS MARITIME BORDER

India in order to enhance its prestige and takes leverage of its long maritime border has stressed upon resolving certain issues confronted in the region generally and among the littoral states in the Indian Ocean region as well. Growing presence of non-regional actors in the IOR and the perpetual deliberation in the international arena over the region, realise India the need for setup a Coast Guard organisation which eventually was setup in the year 1978 (Singh, 2003). Besides, India in order to strengthen its ties with its neighbours also signed numerous maritime border agreement with littoral states in the IOR (Chaudhury, 2018).

BILATERAL MARITIME BOUNDARY AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND LITTORAL STATES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Indonesia	17 December 1974
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Sri Lanka	10 May 1976 (Extension 05 February 1977)
Maldives	08 June 1978
Myanmar	14 September 1987
Thailand	14 September 1987
Bangladesh	07 July 2014 (judgement date of the Arbitration Tribunal)

From Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian MARITIME Security Strategy 2015
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ensuring_Secure_Seas:_Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy

In the post-Mumbai terror attacks phase, there has been much better coordination between the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and Marine Police. Coastal surveillance has improved significantly through the installations of automatic identification system (AIS) receivers and radars along the coast. More importantly, maritime domain awareness has gained a new emphasis in India’s security (Mishra, 2017). The long maritime border and its significant role in shaping India’s future perspective don’t allow her to keep it aside and the same is apparent in the beginning of 21st century when India launched its first maritime doctrine in 2004, wherein India defines the maritime seascape and identify the contours of maritime strategy while defining the role of the navy in a maritime India. The emphasis in the narrative was obviously on the role of the navy and how it can be a major instrument for power projection, presence and for serving the maritime interests of India (Vasan, 2012).

Notwithstanding with this only, India subsequently makes changes in the maritime doctrine to strengthen its leverage in the maritime sector by launching another maritime doctrine in the 2007 wherein certain modifications were done in the prior maritime doctrine consider the long maritime border of country besides, the changing focus of world order towards the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, in the 2008 Indian Ocean Naval Symposium was launched by India, the primary focus under this was given to strengthen ties with the littoral states and promote cooperation among their navies as well (Sawan, 2020). The current and the updates version of maritime policy of 2007 was launched in 2015, the new document anticipates a renewed assertion at both cognitive and pragmatic levels about India’s evolving maritime security considerations within and outside the region. India’s interests in the maritime domain have increasingly come to incorporate security risks in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) vis-à-vis the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and, more importantly, the choke points of the IOR. India also seeks to further strengthen its resolve regionally apropos pressing issues like maritime terrorism and piracy (Mishra, 2017).

Apart from launching maritime doctrine, India in order to make its position strong in the region due to its strategic location always paid more attention towards the maritime sectors and launched numerous grandiose policy initiatives to strengthen its relations with the littoral states in the region as well. In 2015 India starts SAGAR, i.e., security and growth for all in the region This vision spells out that maritime security is the primary responsibility of the littoral states, while stressing cooperation and collaboration. It also highlights aspects of the Blue Economy and suggests that SAGAR is non-assertive, seeks peaceful resolution of

disputes and calls for a commitment by all countries to adhere to international maritime laws (Padmaja, 2015). India emphasis on the importance of Indian Ocean region was also evident through Project Mausam-an initiative to collate archaeological and historical research to document the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean (Atmakuri & Attanayake, 2020).

India not only focuses on elevating its ties with the littoral states but simultaneously keep on eye on all the major powers in the region. India in order to counter its main adversary China in the region has adopt various diplomatic techniques which encompasses strengthening its ties with major power most prominent among them are USA and Japan. Besides, India also participates in various Naval exercise with other major power in the region as well.

V. CONCLUSION

The geostrategic location of India helps it to participate proactively in the contemporary global politics. Nevertheless, the leverage which long maritime border provides to India has enable India to realise its long-term objective of benign power and dominate the world politics as well. However, the changing world order also creates certain sophistication to India as well. The rising interest of China, certain global challenges, instability in the maritime neighbourhood raises serious question in front of India's foreign policy discourse. It is explicit that Indian foreign policy makers while keeping all the irritants into due consideration have launched numerous grandiose policy initiatives in the maritime sectors. But, to accomplish the dream of benign power and establish peaceful maritime world order, India need to perpetuate the proactive foreign policy posture and utilising multilateral platforms like ASEAN, BIMSTEC, IONS to solve global commons as well.

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