

GEOPOLITICS AND MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES IN INDIAN OCEAN

INTRODUCTION

1. The Indian Ocean is a very 'active' ocean, perceived by many as the emerging center of gravity in the strategic world. In the words attributed to the maritime strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan: 'Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters.' This is particularly true in the context of the struggle for gaining maritime influence in the region.
2. The 'activity' in the Indian Ocean region is defined by extensive trade, energy transfers and a spectrum that ranges from political turbulence on one end, to threats from piracy, terrorism and transnational crime on the other.
3. The region has become ripe for geostrategic competition due to the presence of mutually distrustful littorals, who have prevented the creation of an overall security architecture, despite similar priorities and a common interest in maritime operations. Multilateral forums, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), formed in March 1997, have an economic agenda and are presently widely considered waning. The fate of numerous regional or sub-groupings is better in some cases as they cater exclusively to regional aspirations.
4. China has been making increased forays into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in the interests of energy security and trade. Spiraling demand for energy from India, China and Japan has led to an inevitable and enhanced sensitivity around the security of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and of choke points which dot the entrances of the Indian Ocean.
5. Indian Ocean is surrounded by some of the poorest, most troubled countries in the world. It confronts enormous issues of poverty and food and water scarcity. Unfortunately, the food and security-building mechanisms in the Indian Ocean region are inadequate and show little prospect of improvement.
6. In this presentation, we aim to highlight the geographical variables, resultant political behaviour through and a study of the maritime security challenges as they exist today in the Indian Ocean Region. We also endeavor to highlight the role played by the Sri Lanka Armed Forces, in particular the Navy and Air Force in addressing some of the region's manifest problems. Finally, we would express our recommendations to ensure that the Indian Ocean continues to be 'the great connector' it has always been throughout the course of its long history.

GEOPOLITICS

Geography

7. The Indian Ocean is bounded on the north by Asia, including the country India for which the ocean is named, on the west by Africa, and on the east by Indonesia and Australia. It extends southward to its intersection with the Southern Ocean, also referred to as the Antarctic Ocean.

9. The western extremity of the Indian Ocean is outlined from the Atlantic Ocean in two places—at the Suez Canal, and at the meridian running south from Cape Agulhas in South Africa. At its easternmost extremity, the Indian Ocean touches the Pacific Ocean at the 147°E meridian, running south from South East Cape on Tasmania to 60°S latitude.

10. Travel across the Indian Ocean and passage from its waters into neighbouring seas is both facilitated and potentially constrained by chokepoints. The seven key chokepoints in the IOR are the Mozambique Channel, the Bab el Mandeb, the, the Strait of Hormuz, the Malacca Straits, the Sunda Strait, and the Lombok Strait.

11. Indian Ocean covers 20% of earth and ranked as the third largest water coverage of the world. Indian Ocean Region comprises 38 littoral states, 24 Ocean territories and 17 landlocked countries. It is home for the 1/3rd of the world's population and world's fastest growing economies co-exist with some of the poorest.

Regional Politics

12. For most of the 20th century, the region's role and importance were mostly overshadowed, considered subsidiary to super power rivalries largely enacted elsewhere and across other oceans. Today, however, the IOR has risen to the forefront of world geopolitics. Propelled by the world's continuing reliance on Persian Gulf hydrocarbon resources, the growing significance of the Indian Ocean's sea lanes of communication and chokepoints, as well as the turbulent regional socio-political environment, and the rise of China and India as global powers, the region is increasingly considered an area of crucial geostrategic importance. The regional politics is characterised by volatility due to rising ambitions and desire to be counted amongst the world leaders.

Sino-Indian Equation

13. The Chinese engine of growth has a great appetite for energy as its own oil resources are insufficient leading to dependent upon the overseas imports. China has acquired oil assets mostly in Africa and Persian Gulf where most come home by sea via Indian Ocean. To protect their SLOC they have created focal points in Indian ocean in countries including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar etc. which is also interpreted as 'String of Pearls'. India in other hand processing the most powerful maritime force among littoral states

is very much concerned regarding this intrusion. Both China and India are major powers with nuclear arsenals. Both have aspirations over the maritime domain.

Conflicts and Political stability

14. While the IOR now features more prominently in the geopolitical interests and commercial calculations of extra-regional powers such as the US, the European Union nations, Japan, and China, regional states and non-state actors also increasingly influence regional and global affairs. Indeed, regional developments now echo far beyond the Indian Ocean's shores. Overall, the IOR represents the most politically troubled and potentially combustible area of the world.

15. The Indo-Pakistan dispute over the northern state of Jammu & Kashmir has been simmering since independence in 1947, and has led to three open conflicts so far. As a large and significant Indian Ocean nation, the integrity and continued stability of Pakistan is of vital importance for the entire IOR. The conflict between India and Pakistan also has a great potential to bloody the waters not only of North Arabian Sea but the entire Indian Ocean.

16. In the most recent conflicts which have emerged in the Middle East, millions have been affected by the conflicts caused by religious intolerance and extremism. More than 2,600 people have been killed since a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched a bombing campaign on Yemen, an important littoral state, in an effort to oust Shia Houthi rebels. This and many more such conflicts lead to political instability and presence of extra regional maritime forces promising quick fix solutions.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA

17. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which is often referred to as 'Constitution of the Ocean' provides a comprehensive legal and scientific framework for addressing various issues related to oceanic areas. UNCLOS came into force from 10th December 1982. Sri Lanka ratified UNCLOS on 19 July 1994. One of the most important achievements of UNCLOS is the successful formulation of a set of criteria that determines the extent of sea area that a maritime country can claim under its jurisdiction. The treaty addresses a number of topics including navigational rights, economic rights, and pollution of the seas, conservation of marine life, scientific exploration, piracy, and more. The treaty, one of the longest in history, is comprised of 320 articles and 9 annexes.

18. As per the UNCLOS, Sri Lanka possesses Territorial water up to 12 Nm, contiguous Zone up to 24 Nm and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) up to 200 Nm from base line. The continental shelf is defined as the natural prolongation of the land territory to the outer edge, or 200 nautical miles (370 km) from the coastal state's baseline, whichever is greater. Coastal

states have the right to harvest mineral and non-living material in the subsoil of its continental shelf.

19. Sri Lanka made its submission on 8th May 2009 claiming extension for EEZ. However, as there were forty two countries made their submissions before Sri Lanka, it is unlikely that our claim will be taken up for hearing before 2025. If Sri Lanka wins its claim, it would give the country control of an area 20 times as large as the country's land area in addition to a sea area extending up to 350 nautical miles. If successful, Sri Lanka stands to benefit economically as the new territory is believed to be rich in oil and other mineral resources.

19. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is a comprehensive legal text that establishes jurisdiction and governance parameters of many key natural resources, including high seas fisheries.

- a. States have an obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment.
- b. Take measures to ensure the conservation of living resources on the high seas. Nations who are fishing for the same species or different species within the same area of the high seas should conserve and protect the species from over-exploitation.
- c. Flag nations are also obligated to make sure that ships flying their flag meet the requirements of seaworthiness.
- d. Obligation to not endanger the safety of navigation of other vessels and also to not bring any detained vessel to an unsafe port. In the event that a nation takes action against a foreign vessel, the nation has a duty to inform the ship's flag nation of what measures were taken.

Territorial Sea (TS)

20. Coastal States exercise sovereignty over their territorial sea which they have the right to establish its breadth up to a limit not to exceed 12 nautical miles from base line.

Contiguous Zone (CZ)

21. The contiguous zone may not extend beyond 24 nautical miles from the baseline.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

22. With the ratification and acceptance by the required number of countries of the UNCLOS on 16th November 1994, a large area of ocean has come under the jurisdiction of Sri Lanka, namely up to 200 nautical miles (370.4 km) from the low water mark. This area is called the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which comprises an area of about 437,000 km² which is approximately 7.5 times the land area of Sri Lanka. The proposal was taken up by Sri Lanka and it is at least 350 nm from the low water mark and the approximate boundary of the deep sea would comprise an area of at least 30 times the land area of Sri Lanka.

Living and non-living resources at EEZ

23. The large area falling within the jurisdiction of Sri Lanka has given us much hope for the economic development of Sri Lanka in the next millennium, as it involves the exploitation of the natural resources on and below the sea in a total area almost 25 times the land area of our country. The wealth and resources within this vast area are enormous. Their exploration and exploitation will make Sri Lanka one of the richest countries in Asia. The resources are broadly.

- a. Ocean bed minerals.
- b. Petroleum, gas and shale.
- c. Potential for energy generation.
- d. Fishery resources.

Exploration and Exploitation of the Resources Under the Sea

24. The task of exploration and exploitation of the living and non-living resources of the sea should include measures for prevention of other countries from exploitation of our resources. Thus this would also require continuous surveillance of EEZ.

Maritime Interests

25. As a maritime nation our lifeline is the sea, we cannot afford to let anyone strangle us by cutting our sea lines of communication. To this end we have a well-trained compact navy predominantly to deter threats that challenge the control of our SLOC's thereby endangering the nation. Sri Lanka's Maritime interests are like that of other nations based on survival, sovereignty and vital interests

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MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES

Piracy

26. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Horn of Africa and Strait of Malacca has presented a major transnational threat in the region. Pirate attacks, which had been rising for years, began dropping last year for a few reasons. First, the work of multinational and independent naval task forces. International Maritime Bureau reported a drop in piracy of 40 per cent worldwide between 2011 and 2013 with incidents around the coast of Somalia dwindling from 237 to 15. The adoption of best-management practices by ships and the use of private security contractors on board have also helped. In addition, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia's agreement to combat piracy on their end of the Indian Ocean has also contributed to security. Piracy is generally under control, but the need still exists to monitor it.

Maritime terrorism

23. Maritime terrorism also poses a potentially serious danger to the region. Although there has been little in the way of seaborne terrorist attacks in the IOR over the past decade, extremist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda have expressed a continuing interest in closing down strategic maritime chokepoints, such as the Bab al-Mandeb that separates Yemen from Djibouti. The attacks on USS COLE in 2000, when ship was at Aden for refuelling via 17 sailors killed and 37 injured. Clearly demonstrate that the threat of terrorism at sea is a reality.

24. The military defeat of the LTTE and the dismantling of its military infrastructure have considerably reduced security threats in South Asia. LTTE launched attacks not only the naval vessels but also merchant vessels like MV Nimalawa and MV Farah III. They also tried to offensive actions against merchant harbours including Galle and Trincomalee. The LTTE became a threat not only to Sri Lanka but also to other countries in the sense that its techniques were widely used and copied by other terrorist organizations.

Protection of SLOCs

25. In many countries in the world, the increasing reliance on imported oil and natural gas to fuel its economic expansion has led the governments to view the Indian Ocean as a maritime territory to dominate and police. The dependence on the security of the Indian Ocean, combined with its need to monitor, makes their navies compelled to reach out deep into the Indian Ocean, far beyond its own littoral to enable more expansive maritime domain awareness in IOR.

26. Beijing is in the midst of several ambitious projects to expand its naval power projection capabilities well beyond its littoral, and indeed well beyond the South China Sea. Aside from the clear worry to India and other Asian states, the evolution of China's maritime power, or what Beijing has labelled its 'Far Sea Defence' is also of increasing concern to the US. Presently Task groups belongs to USA, Japan, Russia and UK are continuously present themselves in IOR to enhance their Maritime Domain Awareness in their SLOCs.

Ownership of Seabed Minerals

27. The rich fishery resources and biodiversity, oil, gas and many types of minerals makes the Indian Ocean a vital contributor to the economic growth of its littoral nations.

28. The coastal state has the sovereign right to manage, exploit, and protect mineral and living resources up to 200 nautical miles offshore. Countries are now very much keen to extend their EEZs to manipulate these resources.

29. Polymetallic nodules and polymetallic massive sulphides are the two mineral resources of primary interest to developers in the Indian Ocean.

30. Only 2-3 percent of the global sea floor has been properly mapped, and extremely small fraction has been scientifically investigated.

The economic and political effects of seabed mining along with its environmental impact constitutes a major challenge for the region.

Narcotics Trafficking

31. Three types of illicit narcotics dominate trafficking in the Indian Ocean; heroin, opiates, Ganja and cannabis. The Sea conveyance of narcotics is substantial. The flows of greatest concern are the Afghan heroin trafficking to Europe via the Arabian Sea. Sri Lanka being the door step to south East Asia is vulnerable as a transit port for these illicit traffickers and is particularly effected by the trafficking of Ganja.

Small Arms and Light Weapons Trafficking

32. Flows of illicit weapons and ammunition in this region follow the familiar logic of supply and demand, moving from source to areas of conflict, where they can fuel insurgency

or, to a lesser extent, terrorist activity. The linkages of greatest concern are flows of small arms and light weapons (SALW) from Iran to Yemen and onwards to the Eastern Mediterranean via the Suez Canal, and between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. The insurgent groups in ASEAN region are also relying on the illicit trafficking of arms through IOR.

Human Trafficking

33. From a Sri Lankan perspective, illegal migration is committed mainly for economic reasons. With the annihilation of the LTTE on ground in Sri Lanka, terrorists are illegally migrating encouraged by their foreign networks and engaged in trafficking of their cadres across borders.

34. Also Geographical location of the Sri Lanka is one of the closest reasons for rising human trafficking. In the past, many illegal asylum seekers used Thailand and Indonesia as transit points. But recently, Sri Lanka has been identified as a transit point by human smugglers. There are increasing incidents of foreigners using Sri Lanka to get on the boats, while a number of locals are also known to be taking the same risky route.

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing

27. The increasing sophistication of fishing systems has allowed modern fishing vessels and fleets to enter a fishery and quickly harvest available resources before moving on to other grounds. This situation has left many countries' offshore resources vulnerable to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, with major economic losses IUU fishing has proven even more problematic for fisheries that straddle the EEZ and the high seas, or fisheries that migrate across national boundaries.

28. Sri Lanka is also highly affected by the IUU fishing activities in Mannar basin by Indian fishing trawlers who destroy the entire marine habitat with their bottom trawling techniques.

Environmental Stresses

29. Environmental stresses including pollution increasingly threaten Indian Ocean biodiversity and marine life. By one estimate, some 40-trillion litres of sewage and 4 trillion litres of industrial effluents enter the region's coastal waters each year. It has also been alleged that several foreign companies taking advantage of the lawlessness in Somalia, dumped their radioactive and toxic waste containers along the country's troubled coast. These later broke following the 2004 tsunami to spill and wash the contents ashore. To top, in 2012 a record breaking number of 365 toxic laden ships were sent for breaking by European ship-owners to the beaches of South Asia and included Pakistan and India.

30. Leaving these issues unaddressed will not only cut through the region's economy in future but may trigger widespread security problems leading to impairment of 'freedom of the seas'. It needs no recall that seeds of modern day Somalian piracy are embedded in the overthrow of government of Islamic Court Union and subsequent lawlessness which led to poaching off the country's long coast rich in fishery and other resources

Natural Calamities

31. A majority of planets natural disasters, unfortunately, happen to strike the Indian Ocean region. The Tsunami of 2004 vividly demonstrated the level of suffering that could result from a mega disaster, and the scale of humanitarian aid and disaster relief that such scenarios would demand. All military forces specially Navies and Air Forces in the region are bound to help nations in face of disasters. For example during the recent earth quake in Nepal Many air force planes flew with aids including SL Air Force who landed as the first arrived foreign aid to Kathmandu. Sri Lanka Navy provided assistance to Maldives in number of occasions in the past providing drinking water and aids.

Nuclear Proliferation

32. Contrary to being a nuclear free zone, the Indian Ocean is becoming a "nuclear ocean" given the increasing number of regional nuclear weapons on land, as well as the indeterminate number on and under the ocean at any time with nuke Submarines and ships. Arguably, the regional nuclear proliferation can be seen both as a security threat and also a guarantor of peace.

SRI LANKA NAVY'S PERSPECTIVE ON OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

39. After contributing immensely in defeating maritime terrorism posed by LTTE, presently, the Navy is performing an exceptional task in protecting the maritime domain of Sri Lanka. In course of protecting the territorial integrity of the nation, naval vessels continuously patrol the territorial and high seas to safeguard the island from various threats. All attempts of illicit trafficking, piracy and terrorism is hindered by them while holding a vivid picture of its maritime domain by patrol vessels and shore based surveillance units.

40. `Maintenance of maritime sovereignty and territorial integrity is a main concern of SL Navy. Safe guarding the huge water body towards south of island is a huge challenge for the Navy. The obligation lies with the expanded Search and Rescue in region and the effective functioning of the Maritime rescue Co-ordinate Centre(MRCC) is a huge global responsibility lies on our shoulders. Enhance capabilities of Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) is also a great challenge and obligation rest on us.

41. Sri Lanka has been blessed with discovering oil resources in the Indian Ocean region especially in the Mannar Basin which could host for new economic opportunities in future. As of now, there have been no focused investigations of gas hydrate potentials of Sri Lankan off-shores is also a responsibility of the Navy to assist these developments.

42. The complexity of the Strategic environment is merely provide a great opportunity for the Navy to have co-ordinate maritime operations with the other maritime nations regionally and beyond specially with Indian, Unites States, United Kingdom and China whose having great concern to the area. Sri Lanka should assist these nations in maritime operating in close quarters will provide greater opportunities in developing.

WAY AHEAD

Effective Maritime Governance

40. Good order at sea is crucial in making the Indian Ocean Region safe. Regional cooperation in enforcing effective maritime governance is a responsibility of all Indian Ocean Region states. Enhanced cooperation between various organizations at national level will be of immense value. Even though the borders of land and sea areas are well defined and monitored, maritime borders are generally provides less restrictions allowing free access without an effective mechanism for surveillance and proper investigation/inquiry. Limitations in visibility in the maritime domain create a challenging situation. Strong regulations and effective monitoring is a key aspect in this regard.

Real Time Intelligence Sharing

43. Even though we agree to sharing information and intelligence on various subject matters, there is an inherent reluctance to share much important and valued real time intelligence among the regional states. On the other hand, we see an advanced information/intelligence sharing network among the pirates as well as terrorist networks. One important corner stone in our success in winning against LTTE was the timely receipt of real time intelligence. When we all are challenged with maritime security concerns that affect the whole Indian Ocean Region, importance of sharing valued information remain crucial.

Maritime Domain Awareness

44. In order to have a better view of the Indian Ocean Region, regional cooperation in maritime domain awareness is another key area. This will immensely assist the countries to share and be aware of the activities not only in one's interested area, but of the whole region. Having the knowledge and awareness of the broader maritime picture will be of immense help in arriving at critical decisions.

Soft Power Geopolitics

45. Since the introduction of ‘Soft Power’ concept by Joseph S. Nye of Harvard University to describe the ability to attract and choose rather than coerce, use force or give money as a means of persuasion. It has gradually developed into a tool which is being used by many countries in the present geopolitical context. In making the future way ahead, ‘Soft Power’ will remain as one key area where we need to look at emerging issues not only in the Indian Ocean Region but in a global perspective too.

Regional Integration

46. Out of the above areas that have been mentioned till now as tools to address challenges in our region, effective ‘Regional Integration’ can be sighted as the most important pillar in finding solutions. One country can be more powerful in terms of military, wealth or in size. But unless that country is a strong link in the regional integration process, the mere survival of that country is questionable. The regional integration need to focus on building up a cooperative security dialogue and effective apparatus.

47. As many tend to view the Indian Ocean Region as a collection of Sub-regions, there is a need for Region-wide institutions too. The Organizations/institutions already existing and working for the regional integration are as flashed on the screen;

53. Even the Galle Dialogue is among many other initiatives which provide immense value in bridging this much wanted bridge in the Indian Ocean Region.

CONCLUSION

56. To conclude, it is reiterated that the focus should be to increase maritime co-operation among navies of littoral states of the Indian Ocean region, by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues. The endeavor should be to generate a flow of information between naval professionals resulting in common understanding and agreements. Regional forums like Galle Dialogue are excellent attempts to promote peace and harmony in the region by mutual discussions, understandings and exchange of ideas.

Collaboration between the navies is crucial in order to effectively advance their shared commitment to maritime and sea-lane security. Use of collaborative efforts rather than individual effort is going to be the key for success in encountering these nontraditional challenges in IOR. Solution must also be found in a collaborative manner by deepening partnership between all tri forces, countries and regions and finally the entire globe.

57. In ever evolving world, the mission of the Navy has become harmoniously more complex and composite than ever before. Indian Ocean theatre was the key stage for many a dramas in the history of mankind and it will remain same in future as well. So the concepts of Maritime strategies should also progress according to the development of new encounters.