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India Maritime Strategy Towards China

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Abstract

The strategic value of the Indian Ocean has invited lots of attention from a major power. For India, the Indian Ocean shows its domain and obvious superiority that it has held for some centuries. However, there seem to be an arise from China presence in the region. This action has prompted India as the leading actor in the area and created a diversified approach to mitigating the issue. How should India respond to this? What would be the impact of this phenomenon on India maritime strategy? Is China presence should be defined as a threat for India to continue its ambition as a prospect dominant global key player, or it produces opportunity that India should grab to remain relevant in the Indian Ocean perspective. The objective of this article is to discuss the actions taken by India to enhance its national interest in the India Ocean. This qualitative approach has using secondary data from 2010- 2018. The finding of this study are 1) India has come out with a maritime strategy to counterbalance China, 2) the Act east policy appeared to be a soft power for India to pursuit more strategic goals as compared to the previous Look East policy which seems to be typically rhetoric and concentrated on economic friendship, 3) India continues to develop cooperation with the superpower and major power countries such as the United States, Australia, and Japan.

Keywords: Act East Policy, China, India, Indian Ocean, Maritime Security

Introduction

It is undeniable on the importance of the sea to humankind. For centuries it has been used as a mean of transportation and as well as a tool for strategic domination. Few seas functioning as the essential Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), one of those are the Indian Ocean. Being one of the most massive water bodies, the Indian Ocean area covers approximately 70 million kilometer square. Resources such as oil and natural gas coming far from the Middle East, Africa and Asia transport via SLOC through the Indian Ocean. Geographically, the Indian Ocean is bounded by Central Asia to the north; the Peninsula of Malaysia, half of Indonesia, and Australia to the east; African continent and the Arabian Peninsula to the west and lastly, Antarctica to the south. Its join to the Atlantic Ocean and south of the southern tip of Africa to the southwest, and the east and southeast, it is watered blend with waters from the Pacific Ocean. The Indian Ocean also encompasses several regional seas, bounded by 38 states. The Indian Ocean also has seven vital straits and channel such as the Bab el Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, the Mozambique Channel, the Suez Canal, the Malacca Straits, the Sunda Strait, and lastly the Lombok Strait.

With a population passing 1 billion, India and China both need many resources to fulfill their needs. Both countries are dependent on energy resource transported by the sea. People Republic of China (PRC) has arisen as one of the significant power in the world today. Located in East Asia and have a population of more than 1 billion. The economy in China is flourishing, where they manage to become the world biggest GDP (purchasing power parity) with \$23.12 trillion in 2017. PRC national interest is secured and guarded by the largest army which

has both nuclear and space program. China has a seat as one of the permanent members in the UN Security Council since 1971 (Callahan:2005). This Communist ideology state which the central capital is Beijing. Beijing is governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since post World War 2. PRC covers approximately 9.6 million square kilometers, which border with a total of 14 countries including India.

As stated in the CIA World Fact book (2017), the Pacific Oceans has a coastline stretching up to 14,500 km surrounded by the South China Sea, Yellow East Sea and Korean Bay in the North East. It is blessed with numbers of qualities of extraordinary influence, India in another hand, emerging from its number of population and geographical area. Located in the northwest and upper East Indian Ocean, it is isolated by the ocean, and this gives it the ability to for India to monitor and command in the Indian Ocean area. With the coastline near 5,700 km, its provide India to the principle of exchanging path between Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. Indian military consist of 1.1 million working force, made India as the second biggest armed forces in the world. It is also being recognized as the ninth biggest military consumption in the world at US\$36.3 billion and operating 50 to 60 atomic weapon. India Air power is being visualized with around 850 aircraft, which made it is like the fourth biggest aviation based armed forces. India also was known as one of the countries which operate massive naval forces. In any case, India's military capability is unrivaled by any South Asia nation but keep remain humble and maintain an excellent relationship with the South Asian (Poddar & Yi 2007).

China presence in the Indian Ocean has caused several impacts towards India, especially in term of economy and security. New Delhi realized that if there no action is taken, it would swift the regional power to the outsider, in this case, China. India has taken several strategies to deal with problems that arise.

Look East – Act East Policy

In 1991, India had to embrace the look east policy as its foreign policy (Naidu 2004). This is an effort to promote the widespread economic and strategic relations with the nation outside the Indian Ocean, especially South East Asia (Sikri 2009). The engagement is focusing on Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea as to counterbalance the influence of China in the India Ocean, which India mark as its backyard. This policy is started during the government of Prime Minister P.V Narasimha Rao and continued by the next Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The policy remained very much undeveloped with little action due to a half-hearted commitment by the previous government. Until in 2014, under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has to announce the new Act East policy which is more action-oriented policy.

The Act East policy appears to be different from the Look East Policy as it can boost India to stand as the regional power (Lee 2015). The new policy has to increase India cooperation with the nation in the region and at the same time, act as a counterweight to China increasing strategic influence. The presence of China in the Indian Ocean region has to increase India stance to strengthen the relationship to the countries in the South China Sea. In conjunction with the announcement of India Act East policy, Prime Minister Modi declared that India is giving full support for the South China Sea to be treated as international waters (Pant & Joshi 2015). Besides, India through it states own company ONGC Videsh Ltd has accepted Vietnam invitation to collaborate in exploring oil and gas block in Vietnam waters. This action is not only an aspiration for enhancing the cooperation between India and Vietnam. However, it is a passive-aggressive stance toward China.

India, under Prime Minister Modi, is focusing on improving the relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other Asia-Pacific nations (Medeiros 2005). ASEAN, as the 7th largest economic block in the world, has much to offer (Ghoshal 2009). India and ASEAN have materialized the Free Trade Agreement in July 2015 which make ASEAN now has a significantly larger share of Indian market trade than China. It is apparent that India policy towards China is changing. Recently, India, through the Indian Navy has established a defense tie with the nations across Asia – Pacific, namely Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, Vietnam, South Korea, and

Japan) (Guha 2016). The cooperation that initially to improve economic engagement later turned into the tool for strategic partnership and security cooperation.

India started to pursue a policy which balancing internal and external in the east as an attempt to protect its core interest, which clashes with China. Thus, the ActEast policy appeared to be a soft power for India to pursuit more strategic goals as compared to the previous Look East policy, which seems to be typically rhetoric and concentrated on economic friendship. The Act East policy gives the idea that India attempt to balance China power in the region. China is not a match for India in military power. Thus the use of soft power seems to be an alternative solution for India.

Cooperation

India has been well recognized as the ally of the United States (Mohan 2006). The cooperation between this two-nation has been nurtured through sizeable joint exercise conducted by India in the Indian Ocean. Initially, Malabar Exercise is a bilateral exercise between India and the United States. However, United States allies such as Australia, Singapore, and Japan occasionally join as non-permanent members. Japan is then becoming permanent members in 2015 (Singh 2015). The exercise aim is to provide all the participants with an excellent opportunity to increase mutual understanding and interoperability while sharing the best practice. Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces active participation has prompted China to raise the issue about the motivation behind the exercise (Scott 2007). This exercise initially comprised primary navigation, seamanship, and damage control activities among naval vessel. The exercise scale is gradually increased from necessary naval exercise to more complicated exercise such as Anti-Submarine Warfare and Aircraft Carrier operation. This also has invited China concerns due to the submarine-hunting exercise conduct by the exercise participant (ET Online 2018). This exercise is conducted within two months after the Indian Navy has detected an unusual movement of submarine entering the Indian Ocean region believed to be the Chinese Submarine. By conducting this Submarine-hunting serial of exercise, the Indian Navy has shown its capabilities to hunt the submarine and giving the signal towards Beijing's. Indian Prime Minister and the United States President both have agreed to enhance the defense and security partnership in the future further. The massive conduct of the exercise since 2016 is the most visible sign of this great partnership. China has expressed their concern through the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang by telling that China hopes that the upcoming naval drill between the exercise participants is not aimed at others countries but more towards the regional peace and stability (China Foreign Affairs 2017).

Even though the exercise has seemed to be an excellent platform for India to show its military capabilities, India has decided to shrink its participation in the exercise in 2018 (Singh 2018). This is because of the discussion during the informal summit in Wuhan, a couple of months before the exercise started. Both nations have agreed to provide strategic direction to the respective military to ensure peace and stability in both respective regions. The declining United States global leadership has seen India review its policy of multi-alignment as they try to build a good relationship with as many countries as possible. Meanwhile, India remains open to conduct military exercises with China as it been discussed during the Wuhan summit that both nation optimism that it will be a regular event (Levesques 2018).

Becoming a Global Player

India, as the second most populated country in the world and as one of the fastest-growing in the world currently is considered as the dominant power and a potential superpower (Nayar & Paul 2003). Thus its growing international influences giving India a prominent voice in global affairs. After the 9/11, India has strengthened the military relation with the United States, mainly in combating Islamist terrorism. The cooperation are including information sharing, intelligence, technology transfer, and exercise. Based on India rising on the international

view, India now has significant participation in many regional forums such as the IBSA, IOR-ARC, SCO and the SAARC. In 2008, India created two international forums, which are the IONS and the India Africa Forum (De Silva-Ranasinghe 2011). Both are to serve further extend and consolidate India influence in the Indian Ocean region.

India also has signed several of the bilateral naval access agreement, including the joint training exercise with the country in the Indian Ocean. In 2016, India renewed its defense pact with the United States (Lakshmi 2018). The LEMOA allows India and the United States to use each other's land, air and naval bases for resupply and repair. This agreement appears to further increase their security cooperation to counter China. In the same time, this cooperation seems to help India to become a dominant power in the region and playing a more significant role in international affairs. India continues to enhance its influence through cooperation as they tried to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. It is relevant to India to continues to gain trust and support from the developing countries to secure the hot seat.

Fleet Modernisation

India has embraced the strategy of military modernization on its force to achieve its primary objective (Cohen & Dasgupta 2013). Indian navy is the primary concentration for India to achieve the goal, which is to emerge as a significant global player. Currently, modernization and growing are the two significant elements to describe the Indian Navy (Rehman 2016). The modernization and expansion of the Indian Naval fleet will suite this three purpose which is to prevent the nation coastline and expensive maritime area of economic interest, to full fill the desire as to be regional and global ambitions and last is to protect the Sea Line of Communication. Indian Naval doctrine has emphasized on the importance to enhance the naval capabilities to influence land warfare and the development of forwarding power projection abilities. Thus, India has increased its military spending. The annual growth rate of Navy budget is around 15 to 18 percent.

India owns nearly 4800 miles of coastline and massive 2.54 million square miles exclusive economic zone, which made almost 10% of the Indian Ocean (Pant 2016). The core of its maritime strategy is to defend the Indian Ocean as the country rightful and exclusive sphere of interest. India has a growing concern about the continuous presence of China in its backyard. Thus, naval modernization seems to be the ways to India as to maintain his influences in its backyard. During the early 90s, Indian Navy submarine fleet only has seven obsolete Russian Foxtrot-class diesel-electric submarines, two German HDW 209s, and eight modern Russian Kilo-class boat. Within the two-decade operating the submarine, the Indian submarine fleet is undergone a steady decline. There is an additional of HDW 209s and Kilo-class with the upgrade on system and weaponry. However, in 2009, the submarine fleet readiness has fallen below 50%, which only possessed two-third of the numbers of total India submarine (Ladwig 2016). India signed a contract with French for Scorpene class submarine in 2005, only when five from seven has withdrawn from service. The first Scorpene only arrived in India in 2012.

As time goes by, both nation has continued to maximize their military capabilities (Medcalf 2012). India has to react to ensure its military is capable of deterring any unwanted conflict in the region (Rice 2000). Both nations are well known as the nuclear power nation. They also have outlined various modernization program to strengthen and to upgrade their military capabilities, especially the maritime asset. Both countries seem serious focusing on upgrading their conventional military capabilities. The expansion would be located in a strategic area such as the Indian Ocean and as well as to providing military assistant to their respective friendly nations. Both nations have involved in the naval expansion to safeguard the flows of their energy resources.

From the past, the safety of the supply line was being guaranteed by the presence of the United States in East Asia Yergin 2006). China sees the US as a prospective competitor, and since then, she is pursuing naval expansions (Mearsheimer 2010). It cannot be denied that the US has the most prominent naval fleet in the world. They have operated 11 large carriers covers almost all continent which no other country can match them

regarding size and striking power to compete. Even if the rest of the world combined, still cannot compare with US Navy 57 nuclear-power attack and cruise submarine fleet (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2010). In that regard, China and India have been strengthening and developing their naval capabilities to cope with naval rivalry in the region. Table 1 is displaying the comparison between China and India of naval forces in 2017.

Table 1: Comparative Strength of Fleet in 2017

Platform	China	India
Aircraft carriers	1	1
Cruisers/Destroyers	26	11
Frigates	52	14
Nuclear-powered submarines	9	1
Conventional submarines	62	16
Amphibious forces	56	9
Mine Warfare	42	6
Fixed-wing Aircraft	456	92
Helicopters	71	127
Personnel (including Naval Aviation and Marines)	255,000	58,350
Personnel (Marine Corps)	10,000	2,000

Source: US Office of Naval Intelligence and the Indian Navy.

According to research by Trading Economic, India military expenditure had improved from 56637.60 USD Million in 2016 to 59757.10 USD million in 2017 (Trending Economy 2018). The expenditure was averaged 20080.49 USD million from 1956 until 2017 and getting an all-time high of 59757.10 USD million in 2017 and the lowest being in the record are in 1956 which is only 2590.70 USD million (Trending Economy 2018). On the other hand, China military expenditure on military expenditure was increasing from 216031 USD million in 2016 to 228173 USD million in 2017 (Trending Economy 2018). The expenditure was being an average of 87583.52 USD million from 1989 until 2017, getting an all-time high of 228,173 USD million in 2017 and the lowest is 19,320 USD million in 1989 (Trending Economy 2018). Based on this statistic, it has proved that both nations are dangerous in conducting military modernization.

US's Congressional report has stated that China's Naval modernization program has started since the late 1990s. The program are concentrating on a various of weapon procurement programs such as the programs for land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs), anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), mines, surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), manned aircraft, unmanned aircraft, aircraft carriers, submarines, amphibious ships, destroyers, frigates, patrol craft, mine countermeasures (MCM) ships, hospital ships, and supporting Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR). (Rourke 2018)

India government has been criticized for lack of intention to equip their navy previously (Saksena 2014). Thus, China naval expansion program has been a wakeup call for India. Under the Maritime Capabilities Perspective Plan 2022's, the indigenous construction component is "the Navy will acquire two Cadet Training Ships, five more offshore patrol vessels (OPV) to add to the four already ordered from Goa Shipyard Ltd, three LPDs, seven Project 17A FFGs, six SSKs under Project 75(I), eight guided-missile corvettes under Project 28A (to add to the four Project 28 ASW vessels now being built by Garden Reach Shipbuilding & Engineering), eight GRP-hulled

MCMVs, and another integrated aircraft carrier" (Global Security 2018). By 2020 the Indian Navy surface combatant fleet will be consisting of 3 carriers, ten destroyers, 24 frigates, 20 Corvettes and for the Underwater fleet will consist of 34 submarines including the first locally built nuclear submarine with nuclear capability to undertaking the strategic nuclear role (Khan 2012).

The growing numbers of an asset, specifically naval by both nation, have developed an arms race. The Indian Ocean will be occupied by the warship conducting an operation all over. There are lots of advantages and disadvantage, especially in the maritime community in the area. This will increase the safety and security within the area. It could reduce piracy and sea robbery cases in the region. The sea route can safely be flown by the merchant from point to point without worried about piracy and sea robbery. However, there increasing of a warship in the area could trigger some other issue. There is a possibility for conflict of interest amongst the two-nation. If there are piracy or sea robbery incident happened and both of the nations had their warship in the vicinity, both of the nations would react to show their capabilities to settle the problem. Hence, without proper coordination among both nations, the operation would not be able to be run smoothly. Thus, both nation should sit down and discuss the interoperability among each other.

4.6 Conclusion

The presence of China has continued to increase. New Delhi realized he needs to counterpoise the action due to it could swift the regional power to China. Thus, India has come out with a maritime strategy to counterbalance China. In 1991, India had to embrace the look east policy as its foreign policy. When the changing of government in India, the new government observe the policy remained undeveloped with little action due to a half-hearted commitment by the previous government. Under Prime Minister Modi in 2014, India has announced the new Act East policy which is more action-oriented policy. Thus, the Act East policy appeared to be a soft power for India to pursuit more strategic goals as compared to the previous Look East policy, which seems to be typically rhetoric and concentrated on economic friendship. India continues to develop cooperation with the US and other major power countries which Australia and Japan. This cooperation has been nurtured through sizeable joint exercise conducted by India in the Indian Ocean, namely Malabar Exercise. India also emergence its nation to become a global player. India current status as one of the most populated nations and as well as the fastest-growing economic, enabling her the major power status. In the future, India has the potential to become one of the superpowers in the world. Therefore, its emergent in the international, giving India a prominent voice in global affairs. India continues actively to involve with the HADR and peacekeeping operation worldwide. They are also looking for the seat in the UN security council. Indian navy is the primary concentration for India to achieve the goal, which is to emerge as a significant global player. Currently, modernisation and growing are the two significant elements to describe the Indian Navy. The modernization and expansion of the Indian Naval fleet will suite this three purpose which is to prevent the nation coastline and expensive maritime area of economic interest, to full fill the desire as to be regional and global ambitions and last is to protect the Sea Line of Communication. India understands the China military power and influences are significantly compared to them. Thus India would never to react with the military or hard power to counter China. India believes the combination of hard and soft power is the key to not to deny but to poise the power of China in the Indian Ocean.

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