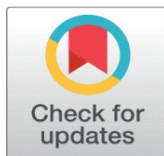


INDIA'S MARITIME SECURITY ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICAN ISLANDS

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ABSTRACT

India's growing power in the Indian Ocean underscores the nation's essential role in maintaining regional stability and fostering international trade. The country has held a crucial role in enhancing security of African island nations by forming strong marine alliances with countries such as Mauritius and Seychelles, particularly through effective coastal surveillance and defense projects. The Indian Ocean, once known as a 'British Lake,' has evolved into an important global commerce route, connecting Eastern and Western economies via major choke points like the Suez Canal and the Malacca Strait. During the period of Cold War, the region experienced intense power struggles between the America and the Russia. Today, it remains a key arena for competition over resources, trade routes, and environmental challenges.

India's unique geographical position, which extends into the Indian Ocean, along with its expanding naval and military capability, provides a strategic advantage in influencing maritime governance in the respective region. The strategic design of the Indian Navy highlights the significance of naval power not only in safeguarding national interests but also in advancing wider diplomatic goals. As India's presence at sea expands, it will be crucial in taking care of regional peace, enhancing security, and ensuring the sustainable management of ocean resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

If we look closely at India's history, we can see that it has long been tied to the countries and populations surrounding the Indian Ocean through trade, culture, and religion. For a long time, the Indian Ocean served as an effective maritime hub, facilitating economic and cultural connections. The previously established balance was upset in the sixteenth century by the rise of colonial powers. Following the decolonization process after World War II, newly independent nations of the region redefined their foreign policies, emphasizing national interests and emerging geopolitical realities. In order to establish itself as a major maritime power, India in particular strengthened its ties with the Indian Ocean's coastline states through trade, financial support, and aid.

The Indian Ocean, which was formerly known as a "British Lake," has long been an important global commerce route that connects the economies of the East and the West via vital chokepoints like the Malacca Strait and the Suez Canal. It developed into a region of rivalry between the US and the USSR during the Cold War era and continues to be a hot spot for ongoing conflicts over resources, commercial routes, and environmental issues.

India's strategic location, with its peninsula stretching into the ocean, strengthens its role in promoting regional stability. The Indian Navy's Maritime Strategy emphasizes how crucial naval might is to achieving foreign policy goals and maintaining regional stability.

India has been involved in the area since the Mauryan period, according to Kautilya's Arthashastra, which mentions an administrative branch in charge of nautical matters. For centuries, India held considerable influence over the Indian Ocean, using culture, religion, and trade as tools to interact with coastal regions, rather than relying on military power. However, during colonial rule, India's maritime orientation diminished, and its focus shifted northward towards Central and West Asia. The strategic significance of the ocean was further emphasized during World War II, especially with Japan's advance into South Asia and the capture of Singapore in 1942. This led to a renewed awareness of the significance of maritime security, a concern articulated by strategic thinkers like K.M. Panikkar, who asserted that India's independence was historically linked to its control over the seas.

Jawaharlal Nehru, who governed India after independence, recognized the strategic significance of the nation's maritime location and sought to maintain the secure and peaceful regional environment. India promoted the recognition of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and developed a non-alignment policy focused on economic growth rather than military expansion. The country played an active role in opposing external power rivalries in the respective region, especially in reaction to the increasing presence of US and Soviet naval forces. Furthermore, India spearheaded diplomatic initiatives at the UN and other international fora to promote a nuclear-free Indian Ocean region and vehemently opposed the British provision of weapons to South Africa under the Simonstown Agreement.

Given its growing economic and technological might, the country's maritime strategy has evolved to reflect changing geopolitical conditions, underscoring the need to reinterpret its influence in the Indian Ocean Region. India is poised to become a major maritime power due to its vast coastline and advantageous location. By bolstering its naval presence, protecting important trade routes, and promoting regional relationships, the nation hopes to make a substantial contribution to preserving peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

2. MARITIME SECURITY AND RELATED ISSUES

Maritime protection is essential for global trade and economic security, ensuring the safety of vessels from both domestic and international threats. Piracy, armed robbery, illicit human and commercial trafficking, illegal fishing, and maritime pollution are among the concerns. The maritime defense system combines several critical components, including naval power, security safeguards at sea, effective utilization of ocean resources, and the capacity to act on newly developed threats, all of which work jointly so as to guarantee safe and efficient transit of products across the world's oceans.

A primary issue in marine security is the growing number of business threats. In some places, piracy is still a serious issue, with criminals targeting ships transporting valuable goods, while terrorist organizations exploit marine routes to smuggle lethal supplies. Smuggling and human trafficking pose significant threats, as criminals use the immensity of the ocean to escape law enforcement. Cargo theft and fraud exacerbate the issues, hurting firms and worldwide supply systems. Furthermore, bribery and extortion in the marine business undermine security measures and enable illegal activity.

To fight these risks, international and national agencies play critical roles in implementing marine security rules. National coast guards and agencies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) work together to improve security measures and combat illegal maritime activity. The implementation of modern technology, such as surveillance systems and artificial intelligence, has improved maritime monitoring and enforcement capabilities. Security officers and crew members must be thoroughly trained to ensure compliance with international maritime security standards and effective risk minimization.

Aside from security concerns, environmental and economic issues are essential to maritime security. Overfishing, oil spills, and waste dumping are all unlawful activities that harm marine ecosystems and biodiversity. Furthermore, climate change and natural disasters provide considerable challenges to port operations and global commerce routes. With more than three billion people relying on the ocean for a living, protecting maritime resources is crucial to economic sustainability. Maritime security activities must therefore strike a balance between environmental preservation and sustainable commercial practices.

India has become a significant force in global maritime security, advocating for international cooperation and stronger enforcement mechanisms. India underlined the importance of maritime security in preserving global trade and stability during its tenure as chair of the UN Security Council in August 2021. Maritime waterways are a "shared global commons" that need to be protected from dangers like terrorism and piracy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized. In an effort

to promote collaboration among surrounding countries, India has also taken an active part in regional marine security initiatives, particularly in the Indian Ocean.

Being able to handle new threats and put strong security measures in place will be crucial for maritime security in the future as trade grows. The safety of international shipping operations will be largely dependent on strengthening international maritime rules, improving international cooperation, and utilizing technological improvements. By remaining vigilant and implementing strict security measures, the maritime sector may successfully mitigate threats and safeguard one of the most important economic sectors globally.

3. INDIA'S MARITIME SECURITY ENGAGEMENT WITH MAURITIUS

India's collaboration with Mauritius on maritime safety reflects not only shared defense interests but also the strong historical, cultural, and economic bonds between the two countries. Mauritius and India are major partners in the Indian Ocean, and their relationship is founded on practical cooperation as well as shared values such as commitment to sustainable development, regional stability, and peaceful maritime governance. India has been instrumental in enhancing the capabilities of Mauritius' Coast Guard by supplying patrol boats and surveillance equipment. To ensure that both countries are prepared to deal with the growing number of marine threats, cooperative training programs and exchange visits have increased the human resources participating in maritime security operations. These steps are particularly crucial due to the rising maritime traffic and the escalating threats (IUU) fishing, a significant challenge impacting the livelihoods of numerous coastal communities in the surrounding region.

The support provided by India to Mauritius goes beyond the operational aspects of maritime security, addressing both regional and global challenges. Mauritius is a key member of Indian Ocean Rim Association and its collaboration with India has been essential to advancing a rules-based and collaborative regional framework. Both countries are dedicated to fostering freedom of navigation, marine environmental preservation, and peaceful resolution of maritime issues, all of which are growing more vital as resource rivalry heats up.

India's Line of Credit worth \$500 million reflects its ongoing commitment to improving Mauritius' infrastructure, including defense and security, as well as economic growth areas like port modernization and connectivity. This financial aid increases Mauritius' ability to serve as a regional hub for transshipment, trade, and maritime services, benefiting both countries by expanding access to markets in Africa, Asia, and beyond. Moreover, the growing economic relationship between the two nations has created new opportunities for cooperation, especially in areas like renewable energy, information technology, and tourism. These agreements highlight Mauritius' strategic importance as a gateway for Indian investments in Africa and a critical link in India's "Act East" strategy.

Another significant feature of India-Mauritius collaboration is the rising participation in oceanographic research and scientific studies. Both governments acknowledge the significance of safeguarding the maritime ecosystem and have collaborated on monitoring ocean health, evaluating the impacts of climate change, and researching sustainable Blue Economy practices. As a climate-vulnerable island nation, Mauritius has partnered with India to address rising sea levels and other environmental challenges, with India's expertise in renewable energy and climate-resilient infrastructure playing a key role.

Furthermore, ongoing conversations about the construction of a naval facility on the island of North Agalega, as well as other defense infrastructure projects, demonstrate the increasing security collaboration. The military presence of India in the region serves as an important deterrent against potential threats, while both nations have emphasized the importance of preserving Mauritius' sovereignty and independence in formulating its foreign policy. Mauritius's approach to engaging with both India and other global powers, such as China, highlights its desire for a balanced foreign policy, ensuring it benefits from diverse partnerships while aligning with India's security and economic priorities.

Looking ahead, India and Mauritius have an opportunity to broaden their engagement in the areas of maritime operations, particularly in joint disaster response and humanitarian assistance in the face of natural calamities. Joint operational frameworks may be critical in improving response times and efficacy in dealing with cyclones and tsunamis that occur often in the Indian Ocean. If they improve their collaboration on these fronts, their relationship will be strengthened and more resilient in the face of common challenges.

The Indo-Mauritian partnership has a bright future as both countries collaborate to promote sustainable development, economic prosperity, and regional security. India's strategic assistance will be important in maintaining Mauritius' position as a strong and secure actor in the changing geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean Region. With its emphasis on infrastructure development, marine security, and sustainable practices, India and Mauritius' bilateral engagement is

well-positioned to establish a model for cooperation across the Indian Ocean and beyond, ensuring stability and long-term benefits for both nations.

4. INDIA'S MARITIME SECURITY ENGAGEMENT WITH MADAGASCAR

The role that Madagascar and India play in marine security is a relatively new but growingly significant sector of bilateral ties. In the past, India-Madagascar relations have mostly focused on trade, commerce, and cultural exchange. However, in recent years, defense and strategic cooperation have gained importance, particularly given the shifting geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean. The resource-rich and very diverse nation of Madagascar has worked to deepen its connections with important international partners, such as India. The signing of a Defense Cooperation Agreement by Indian President Ram Nath Kovind during his March 2018 visit to Madagascar was a major advancement in defense cooperation. This agreement opened the door to more extensive defense relations, including India's support for Madagascar in the aftermath of natural disasters. India provided military vessels to help during Cyclone Diane in 2020, and in 2021, INS Jalashwa, a Landing Platform Dock which belonged to the Indian navy, delivered 1,000 tons of grain. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India's humanitarian operation Operation SAGAR also provided medical aid to Madagascar and other island nations in the Indian Ocean.

Madagascar, while facing developmental challenges as a Least Developed Country (LDC), is keen to engage with countries that can assist in its growth. The substantial Indian diaspora, which is primarily composed of Gujarati people, is essential to strengthening ties between the two nations. India has contributed to the development of Madagascar by supporting global projects like the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the International Solar Alliance. These programs demonstrate India's larger dedication to tackling unconventional security issues like climate change and advancing sustainable development. Despite these encouraging advancements, Madagascar has also increased its strategic and commercial ties with China, especially in areas like infrastructure and mining, because of the nation's advantageous location in the Indian Ocean area and abundant mineral resources. The deployment of defense attachés in Madagascar and the donation of patrol boats to the Malagasy Navy are two examples of how China's influence has increased.

In reaction to the expanding influence of China, India has prioritized strengthening its maritime security partnership with Madagascar. Both countries are dedicated to safeguarding the vital maritime lanes in the western Indian Ocean, which are essential for international trade and energy security. Talks between the Defence Minister of India, Rajnath Singh, and his Malagasy colleague revolved around strengthening maritime security ties. The partnership was further solidified in 2021 when the Defence Minister of Madagascar visited India to attend the Aero India exhibition. India has a clear strategic focus on the region, aiming to maintain stability amid China's growing competition and safeguard vital maritime routes.

Madagascar's strategic location between Mauritius, Seychelles, and Mozambique makes it a vital actor in preserving regional stability, hence the collaboration between India and Madagascar could have a big impact on the safety of the environment of the Indian Ocean area.

The country's attempts to promote engagement with Madagascar demonstrate a stronger commitment to building security connections with Indian Ocean island countries, ensuring a stable maritime environment conducive to regional trade, economic prosperity, and peace. As the two nations deepen their defense and marine security cooperation, India must expand its influence in Madagascar to oppose China's objectives in the respective area.

5. INDIA'S MARITIME SECURITY ENGAGEMENT WITH SEYCHELLES

The two countries' expanding marine security cooperation has become stronger as a key component of India's Indian Ocean strategy, highlighting India's vital role in promoting regional peace and stability. India is becoming a significant ally in bolstering Seychelles' maritime security capabilities, and this partnership has developed beyond conventional diplomatic connections. One example of India's continued support for Seychelles is the PS Zoroaster, a fast patrol boat that helps safeguard the country's vast marine area from threats including drug trafficking, illicit fishing, and piracy. Fast patrol boats help Seychelles enhance its surveillance skills and ensure the safety of its seas, which are critical for both domestic and international shipping, as part of a broader maritime security partnership.

India's approach to its relationship with Seychelles currently includes development assistance aimed at improving the standard of living for Seychelles citizens in addition to tackling security concerns. By funding infrastructure projects like the Magistrates Court and solar plants, India has shown that it understands the complex needs of small island republics. The island nation of Seychelles has been able to address its economic and environmental problems with the aid of these

High Impact Community Development Projects. By helping hundreds of households fulfill their energy needs, the 1-megawatt solar project, for example, will promote sustainable growth and lessen Seychelles' dependency on imported energy. Aligned with this holistic approach, India aims to provide comprehensive support to foster enduring regional harmony and safety.

Within the strategic partnership's framework, between the two nations, human development has also been given increased importance, which is significant considering the global concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. India promptly donated 50,000 doses of COVISHIELD to Seychelles, helping the country meet its immunization targets and ensuring it was ready to deal with the pandemic's effects. India has also been a proactive participant in the Seychelles' economic recovery, having discussed ways to increase business, trade, and tourism.

The importance of Seychelles as a tourism hub, particularly in light of the pandemic's adverse impact on global travel, cannot be overstated. India's involvement in these fields, together with its persistent diplomatic effort, is intended to boost bilateral relations and revitalize the Seychellois economy. This developing friendship was further solidified in 2020 when Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar visited the Seychelles. Jaishankar's visit provided an opportunity to reaffirm India's dedication to the sovereignty and long-term progress of Seychelles, particularly as President Wavel Ramkalawan assumed office. Given the controversy surrounding the Assumption Island project, which sparked debate about sovereignty and the potential for a military presence in the Seychelles, this is especially crucial. In the end, the project served as a catalyst for India to change its approach, concentrating more on meeting the socioeconomic requirements of the Seychelles and dispelling the myth that its engagement in the area was only motivated by geopolitical considerations.

In order to establish enduring relationships with its island neighbors, India must make the transition to a people-centric engagement approach. Seychelles is a key ally in India's goal of a safe and stable Indian Ocean because of its strategic location at the intersection of major international shipping lanes. Strong bilateral collaboration is essential given the region's changing strategic circumstances, which are characterized by conflicting interests from superpowers like the US, France, and China. In this perspective, India's emphasis on human development, together with its maritime security activities, constitutes a complete strategy for maintaining regional peace and achieving long-term progress.

As part of its broader engagement with Seychelles, India has also provided comparable support to nations in the Indian Ocean, such as Mauritius and Madagascar, through initiatives in commerce, investment, and infrastructure growth. The country's broader Indo-Pacific policy, which seeks to enhance regional partners' cooperation in addressing common concerns including financial growth, maritime safety, and climate change, is reflected in the trilateral alliance. These programs closely correlate to serve India's broader strategic aims, which are outlined in SAGAR and prioritize long-term growth, regional collaboration, and collective security.

Along with sea security, India and Seychelles have bright futures ahead of them in terms of interpersonal relationships, economic collaboration, and environmental protection. As worldwide attention on the Indian Ocean intensifies, the new Indo-Seychellois alliance is poised to set an example for how India can partner with smaller island nations to foster mutual prosperity and enhance regional security. India, Seychelles, and their neighboring countries are committed to working together and forming development-focused partnerships in order to realize their common goal of a safe, prosperous, as well as sustainable Indian Ocean.

6. CONCLUSION

The main maritime safety issues in the Indian Ocean area were discussed in this article, with special attention paid to Indian growing partnerships with island states in the western Indian Ocean, such as Mauritius, Madagascar, and Seychelles. The country's expanding influence as a maritime force in the region highlights the strategic importance of safeguarding secure and stable sea routes amidst increasing threats such as terrorism, illicit trade, piracy, and environmental degradation. India has been able to solve these concerns by strengthening human resilience, creating a sustainable blue economy, and improving maritime safety thanks to strong cooperation with regional governments.

Protecting India's coastline is the responsibility of the Indian Coast Guard and the Directorate of Anti-Smuggling and Narcotics Control (AS&NC), underscoring the need of all-encompassing maritime security initiatives. India has adopted the tactic of defending its maritime rights and freedom of navigation while simultaneously working to strengthen the security framework of its smaller island neighbors in the face of escalating geopolitical challenges, such as China's expanding regional influence. India's diplomatic efforts with the Indian Ocean's island states are consistent with a broader goal of an Indo-Pacific that is open, inclusive, and governed by laws. This strategy is exemplified by the government of Narendra Modi's 2015 launch of the "SAGAR" project.

India's commitment to regional cooperation, encompassing both security and development dimensions. By providing concrete assistance like patrol boats, capacity-building plans, and cooperative marine projects, India is essential in bolstering Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar's maritime security capacities.

Furthermore, India's diplomatic initiatives and the signing of key agreements, including the transfer of fast patrol vessels to Seychelles and the enhancement of maritime domain awareness, underline the strengthening of bilateral ties. The wider development initiatives, including infrastructure projects and environmental conservation efforts, demonstrate India's dedication to sustainable growth in the region, which is essential for achieving long-term stability and prosperity. To sum up, the nation's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean has grown into a strong framework that tackles both conventional and modern security risks. As it strengthens its ties with countries like Mauritius, Madagascar, and Seychelles, India emphasizes the importance of security cooperation, regional alliances, and sustainable development as crucial to its wider goals. Through strengthening its relationships with the southwestern Indian Ocean region, India aims to establish itself as a trusted security partner and a key contributor to the region's stability, security, and economic growth.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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