



India's Maritime Security Paradigm

This editorial is based on “[The challenge of maritime security in the Global South](#)” which was published in The Hindu on 29/11/2023. It argues that the Global South faces a complex and evolving maritime security environment, with threats ranging from piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, and environmental degradation, to great power rivalry.

For Prelims: **Grey-Zone Warfare**, [Sea Lanes of Communication \(SLOCs\)](#), [Zero-sum competition](#), [Indian Ocean Rim Association \(IORA\)](#), [Security and Growth for All in the Region \(SAGAR\)](#), [Coastal Surveillance Network](#), [National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network](#), [National Automatic Identification System](#), [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#)

For Mains: Maritime Security: Significance, Challenges, Initiatives taken by the government and Measures that can be taken to enhance maritime security

According to Charles Darwin, the ability to adapt and adjust to the changing environment is the key to human survival and progress. He believed that it is not the strongest or most intelligent species that survives, but the one with the capacity to be resilient and adaptable. This notion of resilient adaptability has been proven true over time, and it is particularly relevant in the maritime domain where dealing with emerging challenges requires a flexible approach.

What is the Significance of Maritime Security for India?

- India has a long **coastline of over 7,000 km**, which makes it vulnerable to various threats such as piracy, terrorism, smuggling, illegal fishing, and environmental degradation. India **needs to protect its coastal and offshore assets**, such as oil and gas installations, fishing grounds, and ports, from these threats.

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- India's economy depends largely on the sea, as **over 70% of its trade value and nearly 95% of its trade volume is carried by sea**. India also imports most of its energy needs from the sea, especially from the [Gulf region](#).
 - Therefore, India needs to ensure the security and freedom of navigation of the [Sea Lanes of Communication \(SLOCs\)](#) in the Indian Ocean and beyond, which are vital for its economic growth and energy security.
- India has a **strategic interest in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**, which is home to many friendly and cooperative countries, as well as some potential adversaries.
 - India has historical, cultural, and diasporic ties with many countries in the IOR, and also invests in their development and security.

What are the Challenges in the Maritime Domain?

- **Hard Security Challenges:**
 - **Asymmetrical Tactics:** The use of asymmetrical tactics, as observed in **Ukraine's actions against Russia in the Black Sea or China's deployment of maritime militias in the South China Sea**, introduces a new dimension to maritime security. This involves unconventional and unexpected methods that may not follow traditional military strategies.
 - **Grey-Zone Warfare:** The use of **grey-zone tactics, which fall between conventional and unconventional methods**, presents challenges in responding effectively as these tactics often exploit legal and policy ambiguities.
 - Such tactics can **include covert operations and actions below the threshold of open conflict**. E.g. Violation of the SEZ by countries like USA.
 - **Combat Drones:** The utilization of combat drones adds a new dimension to maritime operations, enabling states and non-state actors to conduct reconnaissance, surveillance, and potentially carry out attacks.
 - **Land Attack Missiles:** The deployment of land attack missiles at sea poses a direct threat to maritime security. This includes the use of missiles that can target land-based facilities from maritime platforms, challenging traditional notions of sea-based threats.
- **Unconventional Security Threats:**
 - **Illegal Fishing:** Maritime security is threatened by illegal fishing activities, which can deplete marine resources and undermine the livelihoods of coastal communities. **E.g. Fishing in Indian Waters by Shri Lankan fishermen.**
 - **Natural Disasters:** The increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters in the

maritime domain, such as [cyclones](#) and [tsunamis](#), pose significant challenges to maritime security and emergency response efforts.

- **Marine Pollution:** Pollution, including [oil spills](#) and [plastic waste](#), poses environmental and economic threats to the maritime domain.
- **Human and Drug Trafficking:** Illicit activities like human and [drug trafficking](#), often carried out through maritime routes, contribute to insecurity in the maritime domain.
- **Climate Change Impact:** Rising sea levels, [climate change](#), and related impacts disproportionately affect less developed states, making them more vulnerable to environmental changes and extreme weather events.
- **Zero-Sum Competition in the Indo-Pacific:** The perceived [zero-sum competition](#) among powerful nations in the [Indo-Pacific](#) is identified as a threat, particularly for the developing world. The competition may divert attention and resources away from addressing the security concerns of littoral states in Asia, Africa, and the Southern Pacific.
 - Zero-sum competition in the Indo-Pacific is **a term that refers to the idea that the interests and actions of the US and China in the region are mutually exclusive and incompatible** and that any gain for one side is a loss for the other.
 - This perspective assumes that the Indo-Pacific is a zero-sum game, where the two powers are locked in a rivalry for influence, resources, and security.
- **Challenges in Maritime Governance:**
 - **Lack of Coordination:** Littoral states in Asia and Africa face challenges in coordinating their efforts to combat maritime threats. Unequal law-enforcement capabilities and varying security priorities hinder effective collaboration. **E.g. ASEAN countries often show reluctance to call out China's hegemonial actions in the South China Sea.**
 - **Reluctance to Cooperate:** Some littoral states resist maritime cooperation with foreign agencies, aiming to reduce reliance on external assistance. This reluctance can impede the development of comprehensive and coordinated security measures.
 - **Information Sharing Challenges:** While there is a willingness to share information, there are limitations in the extent of collaboration, with states often sharing only the minimum required for common security goals. E.g. Even though India and the USA have signed several agreements on Information sharing but still there are reluctance to information sharing due to some security and sovereignty concerns.

What are the Initiatives Taken by India to Enhance Maritime Security?

- **Capacity Augmentation of Maritime Security Agencies:** This includes the **modernization and expansion of the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Police** to enhance their capabilities for surveillance and patrol of the nation's maritime zones.
 - It also involves the acquisition of advanced platforms, systems, and equipment such as aircraft carriers, submarines, frigates, helicopters, radars, and satellites.
- **Enhanced Technical Surveillance of Coastal and Offshore Areas:** This includes the implementation of various projects and schemes such as the [Coastal Surveillance Network](#), the [National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network](#), the [National Automatic Identification System](#), and the [National Maritime Domain Awareness Project](#).
 - These aim to provide a comprehensive and integrated picture of the maritime domain and enable timely detection and response to any threats or incidents.
- **Establishment of Mechanisms for Inter-Agency Coordination:** This includes the creation of various bodies and committees such as the [National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security](#), the National Maritime Security Coordinator, the Joint Operations Centres, and the Coastal Security Operations Centres.
 - These aim to **facilitate effective coordination and information sharing among various stakeholders involved in maritime security such as the Navy, Coast Guard, Customs, Intelligence, Fisheries, and Ports.**
- **Integration of the Fishing and Coastal Communities:** This includes the implementation of various measures such as the **issuance of biometric identity cards, the installation of transponders and distress alert transmitters, the conduct of community awareness** and education programs, and the provision of livelihood and welfare schemes.
 - These aim to involve the fishing and coastal communities in the maritime security framework and enhance their security and well-being.
- [Security and Growth for All in the Region \(SAGAR\)](#)

- [Indian Ocean Naval Symposium \(IONS\)](#)
- [Indian Ocean Rim Association \(IORA\)](#)

What Measures can be Taken to Overcome the Challenges?

- **Enhancing maritime security cooperation among like-minded countries**, through bilateral, trilateral, or multilateral mechanisms, such as the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue \(Quad\)](#), the [Indian Ocean Rim Association \(IORA\)](#), and the [ASEAN Regional Forum \(ARF\)](#).
 - Such cooperation can include information-sharing, joint exercises, capacity-building, interoperability, and coordination of responses to common threats.
- **Developing a common code of conduct** or a set of norms and rules for the maritime domain, based on the principles of international law, especially the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#).
 - Such a code of conduct can help to prevent or manage disputes, reduce tensions, and promote confidence-building measures among the maritime actors.
- **Strengthening the role and capabilities of the coast guards** and other maritime law enforcement agencies, as they are often the first responders to non-conventional threats, such as piracy, smuggling, trafficking, and pollution.
 - They can also play a vital role in enhancing maritime domain awareness, safeguarding the sovereignty and rights of coastal states, and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
- **Addressing the root causes and drivers of non-conventional threats**, such as poverty, inequality, corruption, governance, and climate change, through sustainable development, regional integration, and multilateral cooperation. These can help to improve the livelihoods, resilience, and security of the coastal communities, and reduce the incentives and opportunities for criminal activities.

Conclusion

India is committed to maritime security and has initiatives like SAGAR and IONS to navigate the evolving landscape. India's capacity building and international cooperation not only protect its coastline but also contribute to global maritime stability. The vision for secure seas propels India towards a future of resilience, adaptability, and collaboration.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the challenges observed in maritime security and how can India enhance its resilience in the face of these challenges.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following in respect of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). (2017)

1. Inaugural IONS was held in India in 2015 under the chairmanship of the Indian Navy.
2. IONS is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q1. Project 'Mausam' is considered a unique foreign policy initiative of Indian government to improve relationship with its neighbours. Does the project have a strategic dimension? Discuss. **(2015)**

Q2. With respect to the South China sea, maritime territorial disputes and rising tension affirm the need for safeguarding maritime security to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight throughout the region. In this context, discuss the bilateral issues between India and China. **(2014)**

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