



## Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the major challenges for India in framing a credible Maritime Doctrine.

27 May, 2021 GS Paper 2 International Relations

### Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the need for a maritime doctrine.
- Discuss main challenges in India's Maritime Doctrine.
- Conclude Suitably.

### Introduction

China's assertiveness in the Indian ocean region, India's engagement with Quad in Indi-pacific region, foreign policy imperative for India to emerge as net security provider in the region, these are factors that point out the need for India to play a more dominant role in the maritime sphere.

This highlights the need for a maritime doctrine, but there are many challenges in the current geo-political scenario.

### Body

#### Challenges in India's Maritime Doctrine

- **Silos Approach in the Indian Ocean:** India's political class has divided the Indian ocean into many sub-regions.
  - In terms of sub-regions, the priority is in the northern (Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal), and eastern Indian Ocean (the Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca).
  - Due to this, the western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa still continue to be in the maritime periphery in India's foreign policy.
- **Lesser Hold on Strategic Chokepoint:** China's first overseas military base was set up in the western Indian Ocean, in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.
  - Russia too recently acquired a base in Sudan, on the Red Sea coast, between the Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandeb — a strategic chokepoint in the Indian Ocean.
  - However, beyond the anti-piracy mission, India's presence and maritime engagements with the African coast have been largely ad hoc.
- **Increasing Chinese Assertiveness:** Through the Maritime Silk Road, China engages with littorals and islands across the Ocean.
  - China has consistently aimed to improve its diplomatic, political, and military engagements in the region from Sri Lanka to Comoros, spanning the Indian Ocean in its entirety.
- **Continental Bias:** India's reorientation toward the maritime domain has not been easy, with generations of foreign and defense service officials focusing and training on continental issues.
  - Further, the Indian Navy is allotted approximately 14% of the defense budget speaks clearly to the defense establishment's priorities.

## Conclusion

While this is not to discount India's continental troubles, seen in recent crises such as Doklam and Ladakh, there is a need to understand the importance of maritime geography and its link to India's strategic interests and growing competition in the region.

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