



Perspective: Indo-Pacific in Focus

For Prelims: [Indo-Pacific](#), [Act East Policy](#), [Indian Navy](#)

For Mains: [Role of India in Indo-Pacific](#)

What is the Context?

At the “[Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue 2023](#)” IPRD 2023, the three-day annual apex-level regional strategic dialogue of the [Indian Navy](#), the [Vice President of India](#) acknowledged that the seas were emerging as the new frontier for **global contestation** due to their vast economic potential.

- He stressed the need for a **regulatory regime** and its **effective enforcement** to contain the possibility of contesting claims of the seas and its assets.

What has been India's Role in the Indo-Pacific Region?

- **Humanitarian Aid:**
 - **Disaster Relief Operations:**
 - India has actively engaged in **disaster relief operations**, deploying personnel and resources to address the aftermath of events such as [earthquakes](#), [cyclones](#), and [tsunamis](#).
 - **Medical Diplomacy:**
 - The Indo-Pacific has seen India's emergence as a crucial provider of medical aid, especially during the [Covid-19 pandemic](#).
- **Security Provider:**
 - **Maritime Security:**
 - India has increased its maritime presence, conducting **joint exercises** and patrols to **safeguard sea lanes** and [counter-piracy](#).
 - Initiatives like the [Indian Ocean Naval Symposium \(IONS\)](#) and the [Quad \(Quadrilateral Security Dialogue\)](#) reflect India's commitment to ensuring a secure maritime environment.
 - **Strategic Partnerships:**
 - **Bilateral and multilateral partnerships** have become integral to India's security strategy in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Collaborations with nations like the **US, Japan, Australia, and [ASEAN countries](#)** demonstrate India's efforts to build a collective security architecture.
 - **Maritime Diplomacy and Capacity Building:**
 - Under the [SAGAR Doctrine](#), India has engaged in **capacity building**, utilizing maritime diplomacy to strengthen ties with countries in the region.
 - **Upholding Rules-Based Order:**
 - India's active role in upholding the [rules-based order](#) in the region signifies its commitment to maintaining stability and safeguarding maritime interests.

How do Regional Partnerships and Alliances Boost Maritime Connectivity and

Security in the Indo-Pacific Region?

- **Evolution of the Indo-Pacific Paradigm:**
 - The term "Indo-Pacific" represents a **strategic shift** in geopolitical discourse, acknowledging the **interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific Oceans**.
- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):**
 - **IORA, established in 1997**, comprises 22 member states, fostering economic and regional integration. Through initiatives like the **Blue Economy** and the IORA Action Plan, member nations aim to promote **sustainable development** and **maritime cooperation**.
- **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS):**
 - **IONS, initiated in 2008**, serves as a platform for naval cooperation, promoting a **rules-based maritime order**. The symposium facilitates **information sharing, collaborative training, and joint naval exercises**, fostering trust and understanding among member navies.
- **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative:**
 - Announced by the Indian Prime Minister at the **East Asia Summit** in Bangkok in 2019, the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative** focuses on creating a safe and secure maritime domain. It emphasizes inclusivity, sustainability, and respect for international law.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:**
 - While **regional partnerships and alliances** contribute significantly to enhancing maritime connectivity and security, challenges persist. **Divergent national interests, historical disputes, and geopolitical tensions** can hinder the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.
 - However, these challenges also present opportunities for **diplomatic dialogue** and **conflict resolution**, reinforcing the importance of sustained engagement.

How can the Likelihood of Maritime Disputes be Reduced?

The vast expanse of the seas has long been a **source of fascination and economic opportunity** for nations around the world. This is primarily attributed to the **immense economic potential harbored by the seas**. As the stakes rise, it becomes imperative for the international community to explore measures that can contain the possibility of contesting claims on the seas and the valuable assets they hold.

- **International Cooperation:**
 - Strengthening **existing maritime treaties** and agreements.
 - Promoting **collaborative research** on sustainable marine resource management.
- **Legal Frameworks:**
 - Developing **comprehensive international legal frameworks** for maritime disputes.
 - Enhancing the **role of international courts and tribunals** in resolving sea-related conflicts.
- **Technological Innovation:**
 - Investing in **advanced surveillance** and monitoring technologies.
 - Promoting the **development of eco-friendly maritime technologies** to mitigate environmental impact.
- **Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution:**
 - **Encouraging diplomatic dialogue** to address contested claims.
 - Establishing **mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution** to avoid escalations.

How Effective have Current Laws and Conventions been in Serving the Global Community?

- **Historical Evolution of Maritime Laws and Conventions:**
 - **Development of International Maritime Law:**
 - The establishment of the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982** marked a significant milestone in the evolution of maritime law, providing a **comprehensive framework for the rights and responsibilities of nations** in the use of the world's oceans.
 - **Key Conventions and Treaties:**
 - Various international agreements, such as the **International Maritime**

[Organization \(IMO\)](#) conventions on safety, security, and environmental protection, contribute to the global legal framework governing maritime activities.

▪ **Achievements and Positive Impacts:**

◦ **Safety and Navigation:**

- The [International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea \(SOLAS\)](#) and the [International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers \(STCW\)](#) have significantly enhanced safety standards, reducing maritime accidents and casualties.

◦ **Environmental Protection:**

- Conventions like the [International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships \(MARPOL\)](#) have played a crucial role in mitigating the environmental impact of shipping activities, and addressing issues such as oil spills and air emissions.

◦ **Dispute Resolution:**

- **UNCLOS has provided a mechanism for the peaceful settlement** of maritime disputes, contributing to the prevention of conflicts and fostering cooperation among nations.

▪ **International Cooperation and Collaboration:**

◦ **Role of International Organizations:**

- Organizations like the **IMO** and the [International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea \(ITLOS\)](#) play a vital role in facilitating cooperation and addressing gaps in the current legal framework.

◦ **Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements:**

- Nations increasingly engage in **bilateral and multilateral agreements** to complement existing conventions, fostering a more nuanced and adaptable approach to maritime governance.

◦ **Need for Review**

- There is a **need for a reassessment and review of existing laws** of the sea. The urgency is highlighted by territorial disputes, e.g., [Paracel and Spratly Islands](#), [Scarborough Shoal](#), and [St. Thomas](#).

▪ **Challenges and Limitations:**

◦ **Enforcement Issues:**

- Despite the existence of comprehensive legal frameworks, **enforcement remains a challenge**, with some nations lacking the capacity or willingness to implement and uphold international maritime laws.

◦ **Emerging Threats:**

- The rise of new challenges, such as [cyber threats](#) and [piracy](#), highlights the need for continuous adaptation and improvement of existing maritime laws to address evolving risks.

◦ **Gaps in Governance:**

- Gaps in governance exist, particularly in **areas beyond national jurisdiction**, where the effectiveness of current legal instruments is limited.

What is the Likely Impact of Climate Change on India's Maritime Interests?

▪ **India's Vulnerability and Challenges:**

- Current **global warming** and **climate change** scenarios are leading to a **rise in sea levels** and an **increased frequency of natural disasters**.

- Predictions indicate that by the end of the century, **Bombay could revert to seven islands**, and significant portions of the [Lakshadweep Islands](#) are already underwater.

- Coastal areas, such as [Agati Island](#), are experiencing erosion due to rising sea levels.

- The **impact on biodiversity** in the region **directly affects marine life**, impacting over a million people in India who are dependent on the sea for their livelihoods.

- **Rising temperatures** are causing **fish to migrate** towards cooler waters, affecting the livelihoods of those dependent on fishing.

- Anticipated changes in [ocean currents](#) suggest that the **west coast of India** will experience **more extreme weather events**, posing a threat to food security.

▪ **Economic Ramifications:**

- The impact of climate change on India's maritime interests extends beyond immediate physical damage.
- **Disrupted ports, damaged vessels, and compromised maritime infrastructure** can lead to substantial economic losses, affecting trade, shipping, and the overall maritime economy.

How Robust is India's Maritime Security Capability?

▪ **Historical Perspective:**

- India has a **rich maritime history**, with a legacy of **seafaring dating back centuries**. However, **modern challenges necessitate a different approach**, calling for **cutting-edge technologies** to address contemporary threats such as piracy, terrorism, and territorial disputes.
- **Naval Assets and Capabilities:**
 - **Surface Fleet:**
 - India's naval strength is anchored in its surface fleet, comprising a **mix of destroyers, frigates, and corvettes**.
 - **Submarine Fleet:**
 - The **submarine arm** of the Indian Navy has witnessed significant **advancements with** the induction of Scorpene-class submarines.
 - **Aircraft Carrier Capability:**
 - The **commissioning of INS Vikramaditya** and the ongoing development of the indigenous aircraft carrier, **INS Vikrant**, underscore India's commitment to projecting maritime power in the Indian Ocean region.

▪ **Technological Readiness:**

- **Surveillance and Reconnaissance:**
 - India has made strides in maritime surveillance through the **deployment of satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)**, and maritime patrol aircraft.
- **Communication and Networking:**
 - Effective communication is vital for maritime security, and India has invested in **secure communication systems and network-centric warfare** capabilities.
- **Cybersecurity and Electronic Warfare:**
 - As technology evolves, so do the threats in cyberspace. India has recognized the importance of **cybersecurity and electronic warfare** in safeguarding maritime interests. Robust measures are in place to protect naval networks from cyber threats and electronic interference.

Way Forward

▪ **Adaptation and Mitigation Measures**

- India needs **robust adaptation and mitigation strategies** to safeguard its maritime interests. **Investments in resilient infrastructure, innovative technologies for disaster management**, and sustainable coastal development are imperative.

▪ **Diplomatic and Regional Collaboration**

- Collaboration with **international partners and regional alliances** is crucial for **addressing** climate change's maritime implications. **Cooperation in research, technology sharing, and policy frameworks** can aid in mitigating risks and devising sustainable solutions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Between India and East Asia, the navigation-time and distance can be greatly reduced by which of the following? (2011)

1. Deepening the Malacca straits between Malaysia and Indonesia.

2. Opening a new canal across the Kra isthmus between the Gulf of Siam and Andaman Sea.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: B

Mains:

Q1. In 2012, the longitudinal marking for high-risk areas for piracy was moved from 65 degrees east to 78 degrees east in the Arabian Sea by the International Maritime Organisation. What impact does this have on India's maritime security concerns? **(2014)**

Q2. 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)**

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