



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the strategic implications of India's expanding maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean Region. How does this align with its regional security objectives? **(250 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing the significance of Indian Ocean Region for India
- Delve into Strategic Implications of India's Expanding Maritime Engagement
- Highlight its Alignment with India's Regional Security Objectives
- Give the Concerns Related to India's Maritime Engagement
- Suggest a Way forward
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** is central to India's maritime strategy due to its **geo-economic importance, security dynamics, and strategic location**. Initiatives like Maritime India Vision 2030 and the **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** doctrine reflect India's intent to strengthen its maritime footprint.

Body

Strategic Implications of India's Expanding Maritime Engagement:

- **Securing Trade Routes and Economic Interests:** The Indian Ocean handles over **95% of India's trade by volume** and 70% by value.
 - India's reliance on foreign ships for trade exposes it to vulnerabilities, as seen in the **Red Sea crisis** where global shipping disruptions underscored the risks.
 - **Maritime infrastructure development**, including port modernization (e.g., **Sagarmala Programme**), enhances India's control over trade routes.
- **Enhancing Maritime Security and Surveillance:** India's expanding naval capabilities and partnerships improve monitoring of sea lanes, ensuring freedom of navigation and addressing challenges like **piracy, terrorism, and illegal fishing**.
 - Initiatives such as **Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** provide real-time maritime domain awareness.
- **Boosting Blue Economy and Sustainable Development:** India is leveraging its maritime infrastructure for economic diversification, including **coastal shipping, fisheries, and marine tourism**.
 - Programs like the **Harit Sagar Initiative** align maritime growth with environmental sustainability, supporting **India's COP28 commitments**.
- **Employment Generation and Domestic Shipbuilding:** India aims to reduce dependence on foreign ships, saving forex and boosting local shipbuilding under **Atma Nirbhar Bharat**.
 - The **Sagarmala Programme** and initiatives like **Cochin Shipyard's autonomous vessels** create employment opportunities and bolster the maritime workforce.

Alignment with India's Regional Security Objectives:

- **Ensuring Maritime Sovereignty:** India seeks to protect its **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** and safeguard resources from illegal exploitation.
 - Expanding naval assets, including aircraft carriers like **INS Vikrant**, strengthens India's maritime deterrence.
- **Countering China's Maritime Influence** China's **String of Pearls** strategy and its dominant position in global shipbuilding (**46.6% market share**) challenge India's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific.
 - India's investments in **Sabang Port (Indonesia), Sittwe Port (Myanmar)**, and the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** act as counterweights to China's Maritime Silk Road.
 - Strengthening naval presence and developing critical infrastructure boosts India's influence across chokepoints like the **Strait of Malacca** and the **Strait of Hormuz**.
- **Strengthening Indo-Pacific Partnerships:** India's maritime engagements align with its **Act East Policy** and **Indo-Pacific strategy**, enhancing partnerships with countries like Japan, the USA, and ASEAN nations.
 - The Quad Initiative (India, US, Japan, Australia) focuses on promoting a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, countering hegemonic threats.
 - India's infrastructure investments in ports and shipping hubs promote regional connectivity, strengthening its leadership role.

Concerns Related to India's Maritime Engagement:

- **Financing and Infrastructure Gaps:** The absence of **competitive financing** and **ship classification as infrastructure limits domestic shipbuilding growth**.
 - High logistics costs and inefficient port operations hinder maritime competitiveness.
- **Chinese Dominance:** China's aggressive maritime expansion and economic dominance in the IOR create **strategic competition for India**.
- **Connectivity Bottlenecks:** Poor hinterland connectivity and inadequate multimodal infrastructure impede port efficiency.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** Conflicts in regions like the **West Asia and Middle East** add complexities to India's maritime engagements.

Way Forward for India's Maritime Engagement:

- **Enhancing Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthen maritime alliances with key Indo-Pacific nations to **counter China's growing influence and secure vital trade routes**.
 - Expanding collaborations with countries like the Island Countries like **Maldives and Madagascar** will ensure collective security and stability in the region.
 - Foster deeper ties within the Quad, ensuring that **strategic infrastructure projects, security partnerships**, and multilateral initiatives are prioritized.
- **Expanding Maritime Infrastructure and Connectivity:** Accelerate the development of **port infrastructure, focusing on efficiency, modern technologies, and seamless connectivity with inland transportation**.
 - This includes upgrading facilities like the Sagarmala Programme to improve logistics and reduce high costs.
- **Strengthening Domestic Shipbuilding and Innovation:** Promote innovation in **domestic shipbuilding by incentivizing the sector through competitive financing**, technology adoption, and research.
 - This will help reduce India's reliance on foreign ships, creating a sustainable maritime industry.
- **Addressing Environmental Sustainability:** Align maritime growth with India's commitment to sustainability by intensifying efforts to **reduce carbon emissions from the shipping industry**.
- **Improving Maritime Security:** Enhance surveillance and monitoring capabilities to safeguard the nation's maritime domain.
 - Expand the **Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** to provide **real-time intelligence to regional partners**, improving collective maritime security.

Conclusion

India's expanding maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean Region aligns **closely with its regional security and economic objectives**. By strengthening maritime infrastructure, enhancing naval capabilities, and promoting regional cooperation, **India seeks to assert its role as a dominant maritime power**.

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