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## THE MARITIME GREAT GAME

INDIA, CHINA, US & THE INDIAN OCEAN



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## Increasing Maritime Competition: IORA, IONS, Milan and the Indian Ocean Networks

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The Indian Ocean rim countries have established a number of multilateral maritime mechanisms to address non-traditional security threats and challenges confronting the region. The Indian Ocean Rim-Association of Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), rechristened as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), is the only pan Indian Ocean economic grouping and brings together countries straddling three continents i.e. Africa, Asia and Australia. In recent times it has begun to address maritime security issues.

The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is a 35-member Indian Ocean security apparatus which facilitates exchange of views among the naval professionals to evolve common understanding of maritime security issues in the region. Likewise, Milan (confluence) is a gathering of navies from India's extended neighbourhood of Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand that aims to develop cooperative mechanisms. The 2014 Milan at Port Blair in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal was significant from the perspective that 17 navies participated including two from Africa (Kenya and Tanzania), three Indian Ocean island nations (Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles) and the navies of Philippines and Cambodia made their debut.

While IORA, IONS and Milan are successful models of maritime cooperation in their own right, they have shied from addressing hard security issues which appear in two forms; first, there is a gradual accretion of naval power by the Indian Ocean littorals; and second the continued presence of extra regional naval powers that are forward deployed in the Indian Ocean to support national strategic and economic interests. In essence, the Indian Ocean region emerges as an arena of cooperation and competition.

Among the Indian Ocean littorals, with over 140 vessels, the Indian Navy is the most powerful and its order of battle includes aircraft carriers, submarines, expeditionary platforms, long range maritime surveillance aircraft and these are supported by a sophisticated network centric capability including a dedicated military satellite. Like India, Australia is an important Indian Ocean power and is building its combat capabilities to include new submarines, air defence destroyers, fighter jets, and long range maritime patrol aircraft, etc. France has rejected the notion that it is an extra regional power in the Indian Ocean and its navy is forward deployed at Mayotte, Le Reunion, Djibouti and Abu Dhabi. Iran is an acknowledged regional military power in the Arabian Gulf and in recent times it has made forays deep into the Indian Ocean. Similarly, the Pakistan navy has an impressive array of air, surface and sub-surface capabilities, and has emerged into a powerful force.

Among the extra regional powers, the United States is the predominant military power in the Indian Ocean region and has several port access and basing agreements with Australia, Bahrain, India, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Yemen etc. The US Navy has been the primary component of projecting US military power in the Indian Ocean. The British Royal Navy is forward deployed in the Indian Ocean in support of the US led operations and on account of the 1971 Five Powers Defence Arrangement (FPDA). The

European Union is a new entrant in the Indian Ocean security dynamics and Operation Atlanta in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia to counter piracy which is its first ever naval operation.

Among the Asian powers, China's engagements in the Indian Ocean is through its naval task force (CTF 525) and since 2008, it has deployed 25 warships in 10 groups. Japan is another major Asian power which has forward deployed its maritime and air forces in the Indian Ocean that operate out of its military facilities in Djibouti. Russia too is interested in the security dynamics of the Indian Ocean and the Russian navy's show of 'flag' and 'presence' in the Indian Ocean reflects its ambition to engage in distant water operations. Likewise, the NATO has keenly observed the security dynamics in the Indian Ocean.

Although the Indian Ocean strategic milieu offers immense opportunities for maritime cooperation, the naval buildup by regional countries and the forward presence by extra regional powers showcase competitive dynamics. The US is the strategic anchor of the region and its presence is perceived both as coercive and also as a security provider. Interestingly, some regional countries have created legitimate space for the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean to correct security imbalances, challenge the hegemony of the dominant power and ensure regional stability. The US Navy conducts joint naval exercises and shares intelligence which assures the alliance partners of its political and diplomatic commitments. However, for some, the US is perceived as hegemonic reminiscent of the colonial period and adds to insecurity. Under the circumstances, it is important for IORA, IONS and Milan to also explore confidence building measures to preclude unwarranted naval standoffs.

## The Malabar Exercises: India, Japan and the US

**Teshu Singh**

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When the Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera visited India in the first week of January, an invitation to partake in the Malabar Exercise 2014 was extended to the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force. The exercise would be held sometime after the general election in India. Although it is not the first instance of involving Japan, in the current regional geopolitical scenario, New Delhi's decision to include Tokyo has raised questions about the significance of the Malabar Exercise - and the larger geopolitics around such a naval exercise in the region.

Initiated in 1992, this India-US effort, titled the 'Exercise Malabar', (commonly referred to as Malabar Exercises) is a regular bilateral naval field training exercise in the Indian Ocean, and includes fighter combat operations from aircraft carriers, through the Maritime Interdiction Operations Exercise. Despite several complexities arising from various reasons, the exercise has matured over the years. They were suspended in 1998 after India tested its nuclear weapons, but were subsequently resumed after the September 2001 attacks on the US' World Trade Centre.

However, although a bilateral event, the invitation to participate has been extended to few other countries in the past. In 2007, the ninth Exercise was held off the Japanese Island of Okinawa. This was the first of these Exercises to be held outside the Indian Ocean Region. It has been seen as India's initial assertion towards marking its presence in the Northeast Asian waters.

However, India and the US have largely restricted the Exercises to a bilateral effort after China protested against the 2007 edition of the war games- which had included the Australian, Japanese and Singaporean navies - in the Bay of Bengal. Additionally, after the 2008 Indo-US civil nuclear deal was struck, these Exercises were restricted to India and the US alone.

### **Competing interests of India, Japan and China in the Region**

Both India and China are competing for a similar strategic space in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the South China Sea. Given Beijing's increased access to ports, airfields and gas pipelines; its modernised and ever-expanding navy; and its investments in infrastructure development in the countries of this Region, India is concerned about the increasing Chinese foothold in the IOR.

Japan too is concerned about the development of an interrelated system of Chinese naval development and commercial ports along the littorals of IOR. 90% of the oil imported by Japan reaches its shores after passing through the SCS, and Tokyo views any undue Chinese influence in the region as a potential threat to its economic security. Moreover, Japan and China are already involved in a territorial dispute in the East China Sea over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. China's recent declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone has further vexed the Beijing-Tokyo - infuriating Japan, who had long considered the region to be under its control.

In terms of Chinese naval expansion, early this year, China's first aircraft carrier Liaoning tested its combat system and conducted a formation practice during its sea trials in the SCS. Soon after the announcement of the inclusion of Japan in the Malabar Exercises, China started a naval exercise in the West Pacific Ocean. The three-ship flotilla consisted of the amphibious landing craft Changbaishan, and destroyers Wuhan and Haikou. The flotilla passed along several the strategic locations such as the Lombok Strait, the Makassar Strait and the Sulawesi Sea to enter the West Pacific Ocean.

This, however, was not the first drill conducted by China in the region. So far China's People's Liberation Army Navy has conducted 16 drills, mostly in the western Indian Ocean near the Gulf of Aden. Perhaps, those exercises were meant to demonstrate the growing reach of the country's maritime reach and power.

Needless to mention, the larger geopolitics in the Malabar Exercise is the Indian, US and Japanese effort to balance China's increasing naval assertiveness in the region. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reiterated that the India-Japan partnership was "essential for peace, prosperity and stability in the Asian, Pacific and Indian Ocean regions." Naval exercises of this nature help build and maintain regional security in the IOR and have a vital role to play in the current strategic environment. Furthermore, at the track II level, it helps advance the levels of understanding between sailors. Additionally, from an Indian perspective, it gives the Indian navy exposure to superior carriers and nuclear submarines operated by the world's biggest naval forces.

In the absence of any regional organisation dedicated to the security of the IOR, such naval exercises can help provide an opportunity to advance multinational maritime relationship on mutual security issues.

## The Maritime Silk Route and the Chinese Charm Offensive

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China appears to be in an overdrive to charm India. At the recently concluded 17th Annual Dialogue of the Special Representatives of India and China, state councilor Yang Jeichi proposed a dialogue between the two naives on freedom of navigation and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR). He also invited India to join the 'Maritime Silk Road' which Beijing announced in September 2013. The above initiatives auger well for India-China relations and set in motion the planned joint celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Panchsheel.

### The Indian Ocean Maritime Dialogue

The idea of a maritime dialogue is not new and was first proposed by Yang Jeichi himself during his visit to India in 2012. It included joint counter piracy operations and sharing technological knowhow on seabed research. The former emerged in the form of the multi-nation Asian initiative involving China, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea who established an Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) through which international shipping is escorted by their navies to prevent attacks by Somali pirates. However, the Chinese proposal to share technical knowledge of the seabed was received with suspicion given the fears that China would obtain sensitive underwater data which could be used for its submarine operations.

Freedom of navigation on the sea is a sensitive issue and has been a subject of varying interpretations based on the national understanding of the 1982 Law of the Sea. There is a history of naval incidents between the Chinese and the Indian Navy in the South China Sea in 1958, 2000 and more recently in 2012 when an Indian warship INS Airawat was challenged by the PLA Navy while it was transiting along the Vietnamese coast. Notwithstanding that, the proposal can be explored and both sides can deliberate to develop a common understanding and can even work on an INCSEA (Incidents at Sea) agreement to prevent 'close quarter' situations either in the South China Sea or the Indian Ocean.

There is an opportunity for the Indian Navy and the PLA Navy to cooperate and develop best operational practices for HADR operations. This can be an extension of their engagement in the HADR exercises under the ADMM Plus (ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting Plus) and both navies had participated in the multinational HADR exercise in Brunei Darussalam in June 2013.

### China and the Maritime Silk Route

In October 2013, during his visit to Malaysia and Indonesia, President Xi Jinping underscored the 'shared destiny' of China and ASEAN members and invited them to join China to build a 'new maritime silk road' similar to the ancient Chinese trading route and help accelerate economies of the regional countries. Xi even proposed setting up a China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund to augment maritime-related projects being undertaken by the ASEAN member countries through capacity building.

However, the ASEAN countries do not appear to be very excited about the Chinese proposal since

there are a number of issues that require clarification about the management of the fund, Chinese involvement in these projects, public-private partnership, and above all security issues which undermine Chinese intentions. The Chinese have clarified that the initiative is just an 'idea', an 'open ended platform for cooperation' and it is open to 'good suggestions from other countries'.

China also shared the idea last week with the visiting Sri Lankan foreign minister GL Peiris and expressed its interest in jointly developing Sri Lanka's maritime economy, connectivity, fisheries, disaster prevention and mitigation and search and rescue assistance at sea. China is already engaged in the development of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka.

The 'new maritime silk road' offers a number of opportunities for India which suffers from technological gaps in its maritime infrastructure. It can harness Chinese capability to construct high quality ships, build world class ports, core technologies for marine bio-pharmaceuticals, seawater utilization, offshore wind, sea water and tidal energy, capture and aquaculture fisheries production and offshore equipment manufacturing. This will also help India-ASEAN maritime connectivity initiative which is languishing due to lack of infrastructure.

However, it is important to point out that the Chinese companies have been barred from participation in India's maritime infrastructure projects due to security concerns. For instance, the installation of a Chinese made 10-cm S-band doppler radar system imported by the Indian Metrological Department for real-time monsoon predictions was rejected; Chinese encryption devises in systems and assemblies; joint venture in Vizhinjam Deep-sea Container Transshipment Terminal project involving a Chinese company, etc.

China can be expected to push its idea of the 'Maritime Silk Road' and win support from a number of countries in the Indian Ocean particularly the small island states who are constrained due to lack of expertise and finances. The 'Maritime Silk Road' also helps China to dispel the notion of 'string of pearls' strategy, legitimize its engagement in Gwadar and other maritime infrastructure projects along the 'maritime silk road'.

## China in the Indian Ocean: Competing Priorities

**DS Rajan**

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A recent (January 2014) naval drill in China conducted by a three-ship Chinese navy squadron has received wide attention in the world media. The country's largest amphibious Chinese landing ship - Changbaishan - along with two destroyers took part in it. The choice of Lombok Strait near Indonesia as the drill location has been significant as by doing so, Beijing has confirmed that its navy is paying close attention to operating in the East Indian Ocean.

It has to be admitted that the PRC's strategic focus continues to be on the Pacific and not on the Indian Ocean region. It would however be a folly to ignore the gradually unfolding changes in the Beijing's perceptions of the IOR's strategic importance; they are indeed pointers to the future. As for

now, Beijing's principal interest seems to lie in the need to protect the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) along the Indian Ocean, vital for the country's energy imports. However, official-level articulations on China's IOR views are gradually gaining intensity, which may culminate in China coming out with a comprehensive Indian Ocean doctrine ultimately.

It is not difficult to trace the connection between changing Chinese perceptions on the IOR and the steady emergence of maritime security interests, marking a new trend since the end of the Cold War. It is a key element of China's overall national security strategy. It has contributed to a shift in the PRC's naval objectives - from that of conducting coastal defence activities to offshore defence and ultimately to far sea defence. A case in point is the stress noticed in China's latest Defence White Paper (2013) on "protecting national maritime rights and interests" and "armed forces providing reliable support for China's interests overseas." It is clear that the PRC intends to expand the capabilities of its navy, especially to operate abroad.

A series of signals appearing in official statements and observations of authoritative scholars, including in remarks made in the Blue Book of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published in 2013, confirm that maritime security interests have come to dominate China's thinking on the IOR. They have given enough hints about the likely shape of China's future Indian Ocean Region (IOR) strategy. Given below is an estimate, and possible regional consequences of responses by two important involved powers, the US and India.

China's priority will always be on protecting its energy security interests, by way of securing the SLOC, spreading from the Gulf to the South China Sea. In the short and middle-terms, realising its existing inferior position compared to US maritime power and India's strategic advantage in the IOR, China may persist with its 'harmonious sea' approach. It will shun a military approach and push for 'constructive engagement' in the IOR between three powers - the US, China and India, and concentrate on achieving 'greater space' in the IOR by way of promoting maritime security cooperation with the Indian Ocean littorals. In the long-term, China, under perceived conditions of the continuance of India's domination and strong US presence in the IOR, may intend to project its own power. Beijing may actively work to create alternative energy supply routes, safe from US and Indian challenges.

China's currently fears that the US is trying to contain the PRC by roping in Indian Ocean littorals within an 'Indo-Pacific' framework; this may always influence Chinese strategic thinking. One can expect increased Chinese efforts to woo these littorals through economic and other means. Its drive to build infrastructure in IOR littorals as part of its 'going global' strategy is already setting the trend in this regard.

India is expected to influence China's long-term strategy, as noticed in Chinese analyses so far. India, with its rising regional economic and political power, may become more assertive in the IOR. At the same time, China tends to believe that India will always maintain its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis other nations, particularly the US. Wooing India will therefore be China's long term endeavour; the PRC's 'Look west' strategy accords primacy to rebalancing ties with India (being publicised through highly placed Chinese scholars like Wang Jisi).

The Indian response to China's Indian Ocean strategy is manifesting in its stepped-up efforts to improve bilateral ties with Indian Ocean littorals. Significant is New Delhi's participation in multilateral fora like the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) and the Indian Ocean Naval symposium. The US has reportedly been invited to join the IOR-ARC.



Washington's IOR strategy is based on three imperatives - securing the Indian Ocean for international commerce, avoiding regional conflict on issues of strategic choke points in the IOR (Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait), and dealing with Sino-Indian competition in the IOR ('Defining US Indian Ocean Strategy', The Washington Quarterly, Spring 2012, published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington). The US Defence Department's document 'Strategic Choices and Management Review' ( July 2013) has stressed the need for the US to develop an Indian Ocean policy on the basis of building coalitions with regional allies like Australia, Japan and the Philippines, and partners like Vietnam and India. Washington is currently promoting an 'Indo-Pacific' concept, which connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans as part of its approach towards the IOR.

The geostrategic conditions in the IOR are still developing. The current trends indicate that the three main powers involved - India, China and the US - have their own priorities with potential for conflict. This may not be conducive to the establishment of regional peace and prosperity, a dream of all concerned nations.

## China & Southeast Asia: The Strategy behind the Maritime Silk Road

**Teshu Singh**

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The absence of the US at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Bali has given China an opportunity to downplay its 'charm offensive' in the Southeast Asian region. During the meeting, China proposed the revival of the 'maritime silk road' (MSR). China and ASEAN share unique geographical ties; linked by land and water .This route is a symbol of cultural and historical linkages between the two. China's relations with Southeast Asia were traditionally called Nanyang (or South Sea); this was based on the Tributary System. Perhaps, MSR can be seen as the shared aspirations of both peoples, linking their common memories.

Essentially, MSR was a maritime trade route for trading of silk between China and South Asia, West Asia, Europe and North Africa. Maritime history illustrates that states have relied on maritime power for a full realisation of their power potential. Thus it is no surprise that China is pushing the MSR as a soft power projection in the region to enhance its trade ties. Looking at the timely proposition of the MSR, two questions arise: what is the larger Chinese game plan in the region? Is a route of this nature plausible in contemporary times?

### Chinese Game Plan in the Region

China is ASEAN's largest trading partner while ASEAN is China's third largest trading partner. Bilateral trade has grown from USD 55 billion in 2002 to USD 400 billion in 2012 with a quantum jump of 600 per cent. At the meeting in Brunei, Li Keqiang promised to take it further to USD 1 trillion by 2020.

Ahead of the APEC summit, Xi Jinping visited Malaysia and Indonesia. He signed a five year pact aimed at increasing bilateral trade to USD 160 billion by 2017, and in Indonesia, he addressed the Indonesian Parliament. By emphasising economic relations and bringing in the MSR, China is trying to add historical and cultural dimensions to bilateral relations.

Besides the thriving trade, China is vexed in the territorial dispute of the SCS in which four out of ten ASEAN nations, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, are involved. The SCS is an important source of oil and natural gas and is directly connected to the issue of energy security of all the states. China specifically wants a bilateral solution to the dispute but the ASEAN countries are in favour of a multilateral one. Most recently, there has been increasing pressure on China to sign a Code of Conduct.

There is a power vacuum in the region and the SCS cannot be solved militarily. Further, Chinese assertiveness can cause regional instability. Any anomaly in the region will push these countries closer to external powers like Japan, UK and US.

The US, Japan and Australia have already met on the sidelines of APEC and have issued a statement opposing unilateral action that would change the status quo in the SCS. Taking note of the fact that more than half of the world's super tankers pass through the region's waters, John Kerry reiterated Hillary Clinton's remarks (2010) on the freedom of navigation and the principle of unimpeded lawful commerce.

The larger Chinese interest in the region is that it needs ASEAN resources and its market. It wants a stable and peaceful regional environment in its neighbourhood and greater international space to realise the 'Chinese Dream'. For this, they are prioritising good neighbourly ties with ASEAN for long-term peace and development. To this end, China is trying to cement peaceful relations with ASEAN countries by upholding good faith and taking the initiative to share its development dividend. They are mindful of the fact that a good neighbour is more important than a distant relative.

President Xi Jinping and Premier Li have toured ASEAN extensively; it reflects their strategic outlook of developing relationships with neighbouring countries. The new leadership is trying to diffuse tension in the SCS by using various techniques, of which MSR is one. However, a revival of the MSR looks bleak. Also, earlier the route was used for the import of precious stone, wood and spices but today it will be used for oil and gas, which is directly connected to the energy security of not one but many countries. There is an emerging security architecture in the region which has led to an increased arms build-up, and the assertiveness of new regional powers has further complicated the regional military balance, which makes the MSR an unlikely prospect.

## China in the Indian Ocean: Deep Sea Forays

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China's maritime ambitions are expanding and it is making forays into the deep seas beyond its waters. The State Oceanic Administration (SOA) has drawn plans to build scientific research vessels

and mother ships for submersibles. Further, the scientific agenda for 2014 includes the 30th scientific expedition to Antarctica and 6th expedition to the Arctic. China will also dispatch its research vessels to the northwest Pacific to monitor radioactivity in international waters and its foray into the Indian Ocean would involve seabed resource assessment including the deployment of the 22-ton Jiaolong, China's first indigenously built manned deep-sea submersible.

China's scientific urge had driven its attention to seabed exploration. In the 1970s, it actively participated in the UN led discussions on seabed resource exploitation regime. At that time it did not possess technological capability to exploit seabed resources. In the 1980s, it dispatched ships to undertake hydrographic surveys of the seabed. On 5 March 1991, China registered with the UN as a Pioneer Investor of deep seabed exploitation and was awarded 300,000 square kilometers in the Clarion-Clipperton area in the Pacific Ocean. Soon thereafter, China Ocean Mineral Resources R & D Association (COMRA), the nodal agency for seabed exploration and exploitation of resources was established. In 2001, China obtained mining rights for poly-metallic nodule and in 2002, poly-metallic sulfide deposits in the Southwestern Indian Ocean. In 2011, COMRA signed a 15-year exploration contract with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) that entrusted it with rights to develop ore deposit in future.

Although the Jiaolong has been built indigenously, it is useful to mention that the hull, advanced lights, cameras and manipulator arms of Jiaolong were imported and aquanauts had received training overseas. In August 2010, Jiaolong successfully positioned the Chinese flag at 3,700 meters under the sea in South China Sea and displayed China's technological prowess in deep sea operations. China also possesses an unmanned deep-sea submarine Qianlong 1 (without cable) which can dive to 6,000 meters and an unmanned submersible Hailong (with cable) that can take samples from the seabed. As early as 2005, six Chinese aquanauts (five pilots and one scientist) had undergone deep sea dive training in the US. Currently, China has eight deep-sea submersible operators including six trainees (four men and two women) being trained at State Deep Sea Base in Qingdao on a 2-year course.

China's plans to deploy the manned deep-sea submersible Jiaolong in the Indian Ocean merits attention. The primary task for Jiaolong is to gather geological data, carry out assessment of seabed resources, record biodiversity for exploration and mining. However, China faces a number of technological challenges to develop undersea exploration and extraction systems and equipment. There are few external sources to obtain specialised equipment and a majority of the 'geophysical surveying instruments on the international market are not allowed to be sold to China' amidst fears that these highly sensitive sub-sea sensors could be used by the Chinese navy to develop underwater detection system particularly for the submarines.

It is not beyond the realm of imagination that Jiaolong can potentially monitor submarine cables which carry nearly 99 per cent of digital data and crisscross the Indian Ocean. It will be useful to mention that the undersea cables are prone to covert tapping and in the past, there have been a number of incidents when undersea cables were targeted. For instance in 1914, Great Britain dispatched a ship to cut Germany's five trans-Atlantic submarine telegraph cables, and in 1917 it eavesdropped on a German communication to the Mexican government. During the Cold War the US had undertaken tapping operation of the Soviet underwater cables and Operation Ivy Bell involved USS Halibut deployed in the Sea of Okhotsk to tap the Russian submarine communication cable between Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula to the Soviet Pacific Fleet headquarters at Vladivostok. The 'Five Eyes Alliance (United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand) is designed for eavesdropping on the network of cables which carry global phone calls and internet

traffic.

Jiaolong can possibly monitor maritime and naval activity in the Indian Ocean. This fits well into China's Indian Ocean strategy where its shipping remains vulnerable to a number of asymmetric threats and challenges as also the regional navies that can disrupt the free flow of Chinese shipping from Africa and the Gulf region. Jiaolong can also monitor the US, UK, France and Indian nuclear submarine activity by trailing their radioactive signature. It is fair to argue that the deployment of the Jiaolong goes well beyond its scientific utility and supports the Chinese navy's maritime strategy.

## India, Sri Lanka and Maldives: Tripartite Maritime Security Agreement and Growing Chinese Influence

Iranga Kahangama

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China and India continue to vie for maritime influence, as influence over the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) remains both commercially and strategically advantageous. However, India's recent strategy includes developing regional cooperative maritime frameworks that focus on security as a preventative hedge on Chinese incursions. While China consolidates commercial maritime interests in South Asia, India is hoping to underscore the greater importance of maintaining security, with the subcontinent giant as the cornerstone.

In an attempt to further consolidate its littoral neighbors, India signed a tripartite maritime security pact with Sri Lanka and the Maldives in early July. The deal includes joint cooperation on Exclusive Economic Zone surveillance; search and rescue operations; working on anti-piracy efforts and; sharing and tracking of merchant vessels using new technologies.

The trilateral agreement was signed just days after the announcement giving the control of Gwadar Port to China. In August 2013, a new USD \$500 million container port will open in Colombo harbor in Sri Lanka, completed largely by the Chinese state run firm China Harbor Engineering. Ultimately, this group controls an 85% stake in the terminal and will continue to hold one for the next 35 years. A Chinese state owned firm will also own 125 acres of reclaimed land from the sea being built off the coast of Colombo. These strategic partnerships follow recent US-Indian drills such as the Malabar Exercise while India officials claim both sides' naval cooperation has "hit the big time."

While Chinese commercial influence in the region increases, it has yet to make a significant security related move. Despite China's continued investment in ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, India hopes to remind its neighbors that addressing physical security must include India. Without attempting to be provocative, the tripartite agreement consolidates the regional maritime cooperation; India may also try to expand the agreement to other IOR nations such as Kenya, Oman, Tanzania or Mauritius.

As a part of this, India also called for a common maritime security regime in the IOR in the latest Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) conference in early July. China remains only a periphery dialogue partner to the IOR-ARC and not a full member, while

other strategically important nations such as Seychelles, Mauritius and Thailand are members. This quiet but calculated regional cooperative approach to maritime security plays into the long-term strategy of India. If India can assert itself as the regional head for maritime security, it can pressure China who will become increasingly dependent on energy resources either based in or traversing the IOR bound for China.

The agreement incorporates Sri Lanka and the Maldives into Indian identification and tracking systems as well as provides regular messaging regarding the lines of communication. Shared cooperation on Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) expands the radius of monitoring 200 nautical miles past the coast of Sri Lanka and the Maldives for India. While the agreement may not specifically give access or preferential treatment of other country's EEZs to India, maintaining a stake in them will afford them critical information and monitoring advantages. As previously mentioned, any potential expansion to East African or Gulf nations could have similar benefits.

Last week, China operationalized the China Coast Guard for the purpose of marine surveillance and law enforcement, including the arming of ships. While this move is more clearly aimed towards South China Sea disputes with Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam, it nonetheless underscores the unilateral and assertive nature of Chinese maritime security. Japan and Pakistan will continue to play a role in the continued Indo-Chinese competition.

The agreement does remain subject to broader political pressures and may at times be difficult to implement if India-Sri Lanka tensions rise for example. The agreement is an attempt to cater to mutually accepted norms for cooperation in the IOR namely, piracy, but will likely need to be bolstered in writing to ensure proper implementation and expansion. The language remains broad enough however to accommodate other IOR countries.

Regardless, India is likely betting that regional cooperation and mitigated tension are likely to trumpet the greater uncertainties of Chinese economic investments in the region. And India would do so rightly. Despite China's belief that they can single handedly reinvigorate these ports, it remains an unsustainable plan. China's economy alone has slowed down significantly amidst fear over its own housing bubble and rising credit risks. Previously growing at double-digit rates, it now hovers around 7%. Subsequent potential political and social unrest emanating both domestically and among its foreign partners will pose additional challenges to maritime assertions, including in the IOR.

So while the tripartite agreement is only an introduction to the potential for shared maritime security in the IOR, it emphasizes India's assertion into its own backyard. Furthermore, it does so in a manner that specifically addresses long standing and agreed upon grievances as a means to ease into a security framework. As China concurrently takes a commercially driven approach in the region, the competition becomes a matter of development versus security. IOR nations in the immediate seem to be attracted to China's development aid; but by playing to the long-term necessity for stable lanes of communication, India indeed has embarked upon the proper blueprint.

## India, Sri Lanka & Maldives: A Maritime Troika Leads the Way

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India, Maldives and Sri Lanka have recently signed an agreement on Trilateral Cooperation on Maritime Security (TCMS) to address common maritime security threats and challenges and enhance security through cooperative measures. The Outcome Document released at the end of the National Security Advisor level talks held in July 2013 highlights the intention of the 'maritime troika' i.e. India, Maldives and Sri Lanka to enhance maritime security in the southern Arabian Sea through Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT), Merchant Ship Information System (MSIS) and Automatic Identification System (AIS).

The troika also decided to enhance Search and Rescue (SAR) coordination including training, develop marine oil pollution response cooperation, expand the contents of the bilateral exercises, exchange information on illegal maritime activities through the established channels of communications, and establish a sub-group on policy and legal issues related to piracy. These are significant initiatives and need to be viewed from the geographical-commercial-strategic-environmental-legal matrix.

First, the maritime troika is critical for international shipping transiting through the Arabian Sea. The troika states are strategically located astride the sea lane that connects the Strait of Hormuz to Straits of Malacca. The sea area between India and Maldives is not a choke point per se but is fairly wide and can be termed high seas strategic passageways where the bulk of merchant traffic funnels in/out. The high density of merchant traffic through these waters can potentially witness accidents and pollution including dumping of waste that would have immense impact on the marine environment with dire consequences for the tourism and fishing industry, particularly that of the Maldives.

Second, is the scourge of Somali sea piracy that has now come close to the shores of Maldives and India. There have been a number of incidents of capture of Somali pirates in Maldivian waters and has exposed the vulnerability of the island state to piracy.

Third, the troika states have witnessed terrorism from the sea. In 1988, there was an attempt to overthrow the Maldivian government by some Sri Lanka based dissidents who came from the sea with mercenaries but were later captured by the Indian navy. In Sri Lanka, the LTTE (a terrorist group that has now been decimated) had developed a powerful maritime combat capability with full control over the northern waters of Sri Lanka. In 2008, India witnessed terrorism from the sea after terrorist embarked on fishing boats landed at waterfronts in Mumbai.

Fourth, the current security architecture of Maldives and Sri Lanka is inadequate to deter, detect and defeat maritime security threat and challenges. At functional-operational level, the troika navies have bilateral mechanism for engaging in naval exercises, ship visits, training, transfer of naval hardware, and sharing of intelligence. India and Maldives have signed agreements to deploy maritime patrol aircraft to enhance MDA as also monitor the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for illegal activities. The two navies conduct joint naval patrols in Maldivian waters and have established a mechanism for intelligence sharing. As part of capacity building, India has also provided fast attack craft to the Maldives and assisted in setting a network of coastal radars. Likewise, India and Sri

Lanka have a number of similar arrangements aimed at naval capacity building.

Fifth is the issue of legal training to prosecute pirates. For instance, Maldives had sought international help to develop legal capacity to prosecute the 40 Somalis pirates in its jails. The US Naval Investigation Service and Interpol provided training on ways to conduct investigation into piracy and the method of interviewing pirates and probe such cases.

The TCMS is a robust tool available to the troika to address maritime security threats and challenges in a holistic manner. It also helps expand the defensive maritime perimeter of the troika further seawards. In this context, it has been noted that India is working closely with its maritime neighbours and that “The Indian Navy has been mandated to be a net security provider to the island nations in the Indian Ocean Region. We would like to assure our maritime neighbours about our unstinted support for their security and economic prosperity,”

Finally, it would be useful to explore the possibility of extending the TCMS to the Malacca Strait Sea Patrol (MSSP), a maritime security initiative by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It involves combined and coordinated aerial surveillance under the Eyes in the Sky (EIS) programme, Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG) and a number of operational security measures to enhance safety and security of shipping in the Straits of Malacca. A close coordination between TCMS and MSSP would add to sea lane security from southern Arabian Sea to west of South China Sea.

## Bypassing the Malacca Strait: China circumnavigating ‘Risk-Prone’ Conduit to secure Energy Contingencies

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In May 2013, China will be linked directly to the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean by virtue of a gas pipeline running from Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar to China’s Yunnan Province. This will mark the completion of the first in a number of projects aimed towards circumnavigating the Malacca Strait as an energy conduit for China. This article examines existing and long-term considerations to determine as to why China is pursuing this agenda, and why the Malacca Strait is perceived to be ‘risk-prone’.

The Malacca Strait links economies and enables the fulfilment of energy needs. Joining the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, it is one of the busiest commercial shipping pathways in the world, and is home to the busiest port. Littoral states including Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, are dependent on business in the Strait to sustain their GDPs. User nations, including China and Japan, depend on the smooth functioning of the Malacca Strait for foreign energy sources and economic trade routes. The status quo serves both; however, the long-term implications of three key areas, logistics, security, and power strategies, need to be considered.

The Strait offers a route that is faster and more economic than alternate pathways around the Indonesian islands. The infrastructure, with respect to berthing and refuelling, is well established

and therefore offers a clear and predictable logistical pathway. The current volume of traffic along the Malacca Strait is estimated to range from 60,000-85,000 commercial ships passing through per year. Compounding traffic flow is the structure of the Strait, which has a natural bottleneck near Singapore, as well as a number of shallow sections requiring 'Malaccamax' cargo ships for passage. Investments in ship design as well as in the Strait, to enhance navigation, aims to prevent disruption through traffic jams and grounding. Presently, the Strait offers a relatively smooth transit but the phrase, 'just enough, just in time', used to describe oil shipments implies that there is not much room for disruption. Continued development and growth, particularly in China, are likely to catalyse an exponential increase in the quantity of traffic on the Strait within the next ten years. As needs increase, so will the rate at which needs must be addressed, which will heighten delivery pressures. Higher numbers and greater stakes may translate to increased risks of incidents of disruptive events, such as collision or grounding, as well as more substantial bottlenecks and longer delays. In addition to impacting delivery, this outcome would enhance security concerns.

In 2004, Cooperation Measures (CMs) between littoral and user nations were devised to address a spate of piracy and armed robberies in the Strait. The unified approach made piracy a more hazardous venture, and incidents declined. The need for constant vigilance, however, was emphasised in February when a Japanese cargo ship was hijacked. A number of attacks in Indonesian waters during the early part of 2013 also demonstrate the pervading nature of this threat, and renews the perception of risk associated with the Strait.

Pirate attacks, separatist groups, and underground economies each present a threat, but of greater concern is the potential for terror groups to exploit these respective methods, sentiments, and networks. The Al Qaeda, Jema'ah Islamiyah, and Free Aceh separatist movement are cited as groups with the infrastructure, connections, local knowledge, and agenda to most likely attempt a terror attack at sea. The logistics of conducting such an attack make this an unlikely scenario, but it is the 'high impact' aspect of the 'low probability' event that is important to consider.



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