



COMMITMENT OF INDIA TOWARDS THE INDO- PACIFIC REGION BORDERS

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In recent years, the geopolitical concept of the "Indo-Pacific" has gained traction in global geopolitics. The construction has been defined as a region that envelops a wide area from the Western Pacific to the Western Indian Ocean reaching the East African shores. The term 'Indo-Pacific' was elucidated by the geopolitics scholar Karl Haushofer coining the term as 'IndopazifischenRaum'. Haushofer termed it as the 'dense Indo-Pacific' concentration of humanity and cultural empire of India and China, which are geographically sheltered behind the protective veil of the offshore island arcs'. In this paper author describes why india need to be engaged in this geographical region. Author's also elucidated historical context of the term Indo-Pacific.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Indo-Pacific' has come into circulation relatively more recently, but is rapidly gaining salience as a tool for analysis, and a means of understanding the emerging dynamics in a rapidly changing politico-economic environment. The credit for coining the concept of the Indo-Pacific as a reference point for analytical purposes goes to the historic speech that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave to the Indian Parliament in 2007. He resisted that, The term Indo-Pacific has been used with increasing frequency since the beginning of this decade, and its increasing usage today is the recognition of India's strengths and its role in the region. While speaking at Honolulu in October 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used it to describe 'a newly emerging integrated geographical and strategic reality'. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the focus of India's "Look East" policy gradually expanded from economic and cultural fields to strategic and security fields, and from Southeast

to Northeast Asia. In 2011, India interfered with South China Sea disputes by declaring that it would cooperate with Vietnam on oil fields exploitation in this region. In December 2012, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh used the term during the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, stating that ASEAN-India's 'future is inter-linked, and a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for our own progress and prosperity'. In its 2013 Defense White Paper, Australia mentioned the idea of the Indo Pacific, highlighting the strategic connections between the Indian and Pacific Oceans through trade routes and energy flows. After Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power, the "Look East" policy was developed into an "Act East" policy. India has enhanced its strategic and military cooperation with countries around China, such as Japan, Vietnam and Australia (Medcalf 2013).

India's Look East Policy (LEP) is an approach to connect India with countries in the eastern neighborhood. LEP, initiated in early 1990s by the



then Prime Minister Narashimha Rao, has gained a new avatar which is often identified as LEP 3.0 or Act East that encompasses India's strategy of augmenting relation with the Asia Pacific region, particularly, East Asia. Since the new administration under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken charges the charge of government in New Delhi, it has identified that it would give strong priority to LEP 3.0. Within first few months of the initiation of the new administration, both the prime minister and the foreign minister have chosen to visit some of the immediate neighbor's to express India's willingness to harness better relations with them. Within first few months of new government, PM Modi visited Japan, hosted Australian PM Tony Abott and Chinese President Xi Jinping: the External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and China. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj during her recent visit to Vietnam emphasized the need to 'Act East' and not just 'Look East'. PM Modi recent visit of Myanmar, Australia and Fiji for a series of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements has the potential to confirm his country's place in what increasingly labeled as the Indo-Pacific region. The trip promises to deepen India's economic and strategic links with critical partners and reify Mr. Modi's mantra of 'Act East'. India has desires for APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) membership. But APEC denied on the basis of trade liberalisation norms. India's isolation towards East Asia is now going to be managed by Indo-Pacific term. By its

very name, Indo-Pacific gives India a vantage point to position itself as a hub for the frenetic economic and political networks being spun through integration of the Asian landmass and waterways (MEA, 2014).

India, no doubt, has had a long history of an extraordinary cultural imprint on Southeast Asia. For close to 2000 years, from the pre-Christian era to the 15th century, there was continuous maritime, political and cultural contact between India and the Kingdoms of South East and East Asia. The Indianised kingdoms that held sway, from Champa in South Vietnam to Khmers in Cambodia, and from Sri Vijayas and Sailendras in Indonesia to numerous kingdoms in Thailand and Myanmar are testimony to not merely the mammoth nature of Indian influence but also to the dynamic and expansive exchanges encompassing the vast Indo-Pacific region. The south Indian Chola kings dispatched a huge flotilla of ships in the 10th century to subdue a wayward Sri Vijayan king in Indonesia (the only known naval mission by an Indian king), and the most spectacular overseas maritime expeditions, led by Admiral Zheng He during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), were to the Indian Ocean. Even during the long colonial era—when whatever remnants of seafaring traditions of the littoral states were severely curtailed, and any semblance of naval power was decimated, and thriving regional economic links were ruthlessly snapped—the Indian Ocean's strategic and economic significance and its close connection with the Pacific never



diminished. What the British did was to secure the ancient trade links that existed within the Indian Ocean rim and the Indo-Pacific region through their colonial rule. India played a pivotal role in controlling much of this vast region because of the huge material and manpower support it could offer (Naidu, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

India's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific has largely been promoted by a broader network of Australian and American think tanks. Promoters of the concept talk about how countries in the region 'should take a leading role in shaping the economic and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific' and seek to tie India more closely with the US, Australia and Japan. The US has talked about India's desired role as a "net security provider" to preserve maritime transportation routes and global commons in the Indian Ocean. The proponents of the concept among the Indian policy makers defend India's role in 'Indo-Pacific' by stating that it preserves the 'strategic autonomy'. Strategic autonomy is a step ahead from the Non Alignment idea as it talks about giving "maximum options (to India) in its relations with the outside world". It is believed that the Indo-Pacific construct seeks to establish plural, inclusive and open security architecture. This allows India to create a web of cooperative relations with all the stakeholders based on mutual interest and benefit (Scott, 2012).

Confidence building in the region would require greater coordination, cooperation, and integration between the nations of the region and their

economies. ASEAN has provided an example for the construction of regional institutions based on cooperation and consensus. Today, it has also become the nucleus for the confidence building economic and security structures and institutions that are emerging in the region, such as the East Asian Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting plus (ADMM++), and in the negotiations for the creation of a region wide free economic space-RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). While there are other bilateral and multilateral arrangements in place, or being negotiated (such as the TPP), the ones created by the ASEAN continue to be the most important. ASEAN centrality and leadership—which India supports—has provided the basis for the success of these forums. Closer relations with the countries of ASEAN are at the core of India's 'Look East Policy'. Seen as a force for stability and progress, India has regularly been urged by its South East Asian partners to enhance its engagement both multilaterally with ASEAN as a whole as well as bilaterally with its constituent countries. Today, India ties with each of ASEAN neighbors are multifaceted marked by expanding trade and economic cooperation. Alongside, India is working with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Nepal for closer trade through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The Mekong-Ganga initiative, launched in 2000 involving India, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam has recently



expanded its ambit to include trade, investment, energy, food, health and highway connectivity. India has also associated itself with triangular strategic partnership between India-Russia-China and in the areas of trade, technology transfer and resource sharing. The dynamism of the Asian market has led to emergence of such multilateral and bilateral initiatives which are more likely to remain fluid rather than structured. It is thus in India's interest to take a more active role in these forums in a way that maximises its own priorities and needs (Singh, 2014).

However, territorial and maritime disputes in the region pose a major challenge to this phenomenon. China factor looms large in India's strategic calculus. China's so called string of pearls has granted it several footholds in the Indian Ocean. India would want to see those reduced but cannot do much to undo it. Even though China's trade routes and dependence on energy bring it to Indian Ocean, it has so far shown ambivalence in joining any cooperative framework and has preferred to stand apart. Albeit late, New Delhi is trying to renew its ties with countries in the Indian Ocean region. Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Verma stated, "It is important to realise that if one nation does not meet a need, there will always be another ready to fill the vacuum. Such cooperation drives the strategic balance between friendly and other influences in the region." Thus, India aims at denying further opportunities to China to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region. New Delhi is also trying to gain a foothold in the Pacific.

It is conducting naval partnership with Hanoi and pursuing oil exploration with Vietnam. New Delhi is also providing strong support for the peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, criticising China's nine-dash line policy and emphasising on the freedom of navigation in the Western Pacific (Arun, 2016).

The emergence of India as a great power and its growing forays into East Asia besides being a dominant power in the Indian Ocean. As an emerging great power, India is aspiring to play a bigger role in the larger region beyond the narrow confines of its immediate neighborhood. Its formidable military power—equipped with nuclear weapons and a variety of ballistic missiles, a navy that is fast becoming blue-water capable, and an economy that is already the fourth largest in PPP terms with huge untapped potential—will be a major factor in any new architecture that emerges. The Indian Navy's exercises with Southeast Asian navies have varied levels of scope with the different naval forces of the regions. Indian naval operations have the objective to develop capacity for interoperability with the various Southeast Asian navies although each force varies in terms of different operational capacities and platform capabilities. Interoperability may not be feasible with the vast differences in training, operations and platforms, yet the exercises with each of the navies provide the Indian navy familiarity of operations and development of capacity. Although the exercises cannot accrue real offensive capability, the scope in terms of cooperative and



constabulary elements remains high. From the Indian Navy's point of view, these exercises enhance maritime domain awareness, sharing of maritime intelligence and enhance the benign scope of ties. India's hosting of the MILAN and IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium) reciprocally brings in the Southeast Asian navies to Indian waters for similar exercises that serve to enhance interoperable features of the various operational capacities of the different navies with the Indian Navy. Interoperability serves as the benchmark of the closer degree of naval cooperation and operational capacity. The Indian Navy's operational capacity and its doctrinal focus endeavor towards greater cooperative capacity between its force and the navies in the region. Indian navy has participated in a series of engagements in the Pacific recently- including an interaction with PLA-N (People's Liberation Army Navy) at Qingdao, the U.S.-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, and the U.S.-India MALABAR exercises (also joined by Japan previous year)- it has tended to treat all its maritime engagements as isolated and unconnected events, thereby hindering the creation of a coherent strategic picture. For the moment, India is rightly wary of countervailing China's maritime power in the Indo-Pacific. New Delhi neither has the naval capability at its disposal, nor the political capital to resist

CONCLUSION

China's broader nautical endeavors in maritime-Asia. But it needs to search for an answer to end its strategic

predicament. For one thing, in the larger contest for regional dominance, New Delhi will need the Indian Navy to deliver on its principle mandate of defending national stakes by remedying power asymmetries that undermine regional stability. For this, it must consider playing the role of a gentle stabilizer in the Indo-Pacific (Singh 2014).

Aimed at India, non-traditional security challenges comprise an important part of the 'Indo-Pacific' policy formulation. Problems of regional instability from non-traditional sources, such as feeble state capacity in key parts of the Indo-Pacific, pose a significant challenge. This requires that India steps up its role in securing and safeguarding the trade routes crossing the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. The focus remains on securing sea-lanes and maritime governance through regional initiatives such as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). Indian navy is cooperating with navies of the region to tackle disasters, narcotic smuggling, gun running etc. The Indian Ocean Naval

Symposium (IONS) is an initiative in this direction. India also contributes to the African Union Mission in Somalia and has begun bilateral and trilateral naval coordination and patrolling with China, Japan and Kenya, Madagascar and the Seychelles in Africa. There have also been efforts to strengthen organisations like Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), an institutional set up for enhancing cooperation among 36



littoral and 11 hinterland states of the region (Raja Mohan 2013).

India's likely future role in the Indo-Pacific region can be analysed in the context of understanding the convergence of the security dynamics and the geopolitical compulsions of both the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions. That India is emerging as a significant power in the geopolitical dynamics of Southeast Asia is being acknowledged by members of the strategic community. India has also been actively engaging itself in Northeast Asia and the South Pacific. In the current situation, it is anticipated that the new government in New Delhi will play a more proactive role in South Asia. The signs of such changes in India's policies are becoming visible.

In summation, the Indo-Pacific is important because it represents the centre of gravity of the world's economic and strategic interests. As the world's most economically dynamic region, it is home to resources that can help power many developed and developing economies. Needless to say, maritime security in this region is expected to be a key factor in the development of many countries. In Indo-Pacific India has deep cultural, political and commerce linkages and India would provide balance and stability to this region. In the Aftermath of the cold war India hardly mattered either in regional security or economics; today virtually no discourse on East Asia is complete without a reference to India. Aside from the USA and Japan, several Southeast Asian countries have been nudging India to play a more proactive role in East

Asian affairs. Even China had to concede that India is an East Asian power, and that it could significantly contribute to regional peace and development. India would apply 'Smart Power' strategy in this region because there is a lot of hope for India's soft power and India is also considered as a maritime player for its hard power.

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