



## STRATEGIC ROLE OF INDIAN NAVY IN IOR AT PRESENT

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### Introduction-

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) turned out to be the most engaging region for global activities in recent years. The Indian Ocean consists of the most important trade routes of the world. The Indian Ocean provides a way to move through various regions of the world. World's huge economic players always keep an eye on the IOR for its strategic importance. The Indian Ocean is a gateway to the Atlantic Ocean through the Mediterranean Sea via the Red Sea and it also provides a way to the Pacific Ocean through the Strait of Malacca. It is the main shipping channel for the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

The Indian Ocean region is spread over 28 states, three continents and covers 17.5% of the global land area. The IOR is home to almost 36% of the population of the world. The region is proven to have a rich petroleum resources and other metals. Indian Ocean is also a rich source of fish and its export. Major Sea routes of the world pass through the Indian Ocean that connects the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has become a home for economic developments, disputes, conflicts, and competition for regional influence by regional and extra-regional powers.<sup>1</sup> The Trade flow from IOR across the globe has its importance for the global economy as well as regional countries. The growing presence of regional power (China) is a major concern for India and other regional countries and that has compelled them to reshape their maritime strategies. This

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<sup>1</sup> Priyanjoli Ghosh, India's Indian Ocean Region Strategy, (JOURNAL OF INDO-PACIFIC AFFAIRS FALL 2020) Accessed on March 15, 2021, from (<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Aug/31/2002488089/-1/-1/1/GHOSH.PDF>)

article aims to state the importance of IOR in Indian reference and Chinese presence in IOR and its strategies.

### **Strategic Importance of Indian Ocean Region-**

The Indian Ocean is spread across the continent of Africa, Asia, and Australia and they play a critical role in the region. The huge volume of trade passes through the important passage points as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bab-el Mandeb, and so on. The IOR has been a region of intense engagement for political, and economic aspects. Being a gateway for petroleum and petroleum products from the Persian Gulf to over the globe, the world powers show their interest in the region. The Islands in IOR play a significant role in shaping strategies and security architecture. These islands provide easy access to the navies for patrolling and securing the region. Due to its significant importance for trade from the Middle East, external players make efforts to strengthen their footholds in the region.

The IOR is strategically important for India's security. This is one of the main regions where the Indian Navy is deployed in the IOR to provide safe passage to Indian vessels. The Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC– IOR) has been set up by India to keep a close watch on the movement of ships in the region. The partner nations of the IFC– IOR get engaged to develop comprehensive awareness in the maritime domain and share information on vessels of interest.<sup>2</sup> The major concern for regional countries is their security.

### **Indian Navy's Role-**

Indian Navy was established to safeguard India's maritime borders and Indian interests in IOR. Indian Navy seeks to expand its traditional role of providing hydrographic survey, surveillance, disaster relief, and training assistance to our Indian Ocean littorals.<sup>3</sup> Indian Navy also plays a diplomatic role in the strategic arena of IOR. To be the first responder in the IOR, Indian Navy has launched several missions to assist regional countries in need of any natural calamity by providing humanitarian aid. The Indian Navy has been seen as a first responder on several occasions in IOR. Following operations are exemplary deeds of the Indian Navy in IOR.

### **Indian Naval Ships on Visit to Singapore-**

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<sup>2</sup> Priyanjoli Ghosh, India's Indian Ocean Region Strategy, (JOURNAL OF INDO-PACIFIC AFFAIRS FALL 2020) Accessed March 15, 2021 from (<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Aug/31/2002488089/-1/-1/1/GHOSH.PDF>)

<sup>3</sup> [Seminar on "The Influence of Indian Navy in Indian Ocean Region and Foreign Cooperation Initiatives to enhance the Indian Navy's Reach | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/seminar-influence-indian-navy-indian-ocean-region-and-foreign-cooperation-initiatives), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (<https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/seminar-influence-indian-navy-indian-ocean-region-and-foreign-cooperation-initiatives>)

In pursuit of India's 'Look East' and Act East policy, the Eastern Fleet of Indian Navy under command of Rear Admiral Ajendra Bahadur Singh, VSM, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet was on an operational deployment to South China Sea, South East Asia, and Australia. Indigenously built guided missile stealth frigates INS Satpura, and INS Kamorta, the first indigenous Anti-Submarine Warfare Corvette had been deployed. These ships participated in IMDEX-15 and bilateral naval exercise SIMBEX-15 with Singapore Navy from 23-26 May 2015. Two more warships, INS Ranvir, and INS Shakti were deployed as part of the deployment.<sup>4</sup>

### **Operation RAHAT-**

Operation RAHAT was launched for the evacuation of Indians and foreign nationals from Yemen during the military intervention by Saudi Arabia and its allies in 2015. The operation by Indian Armed Forces started on April 1, 2015. INS Mumbai, INS Sumitra, INS Tarkash, MV Kavaratti, and MV Corals were deployed and evacuated approximately 4000 Indians working there for long and they disembarked at Djibouti safely. Evacuated people were assisted with food, water, and accommodation. Those who were in need have been provided medical aid. Indian nationals were airlifted to India by IAF C-17 aircraft.<sup>5</sup>

### **LIMA-15-**

The INS Kamorta participated in the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition (LIMA-15) from 17 - 21, Mar 15.<sup>6</sup>

### **Visit of Royal Brunei Armed Forces Course-**

A delegation of 34-members of Royal Brunei Armed Forces Command and Staff Course (AFCSC) led by Lt Col (U) Mohamad Sallehin Bi Mohamad Taib (Acting Commandant RBAF Defence Academy) visited Mumbai from 14 to 17 May 15. The delegation included 17 Brunei and 16 Foreign Armed Forces' Officers, along with one officer from the Indian Navy. The delegation also visited Naval Dockyard, Heritage Hall, and the guided-missile destroyer INS Mumbai and also interacted with officers of Western Naval Command.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [Indian Naval Ships on visit to Singapore | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-naval-ships-visit-singapore), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-naval-ships-visit-singapore)

<sup>5</sup> [Operation Evacuation - Operation Rahat | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/operation-evacuation-operation-rahata), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/operation-evacuation-operation-rahata)

<sup>6</sup> [LIMA-2015 | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/lima-2015), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/lima-2015)

<sup>7</sup> [Visit of Royal Brunei Armed Forces Course | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-royal-brunei-armed-forces-course-0), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-royal-brunei-armed-forces-course-0)

### **SIMBEX 15-**

Operational interaction between Indian Navy and Republic of Singapore Navy embarked with Anti-Submarine Warfare training exercises in 1994, which has grown steadily over the past 25 years. The operational interaction was later formalized as an annual bilateral exercise 'SIMBEX' in 1999. The bilateral exercise is focused on intensifying bilateral ties and enhancing inter-operability between navies of the two friendly nations.<sup>8</sup>

### **Indian Naval Ships enter Sihanoukville, Cambodia & Sattahip, Thailand-**

In pursuit of India's 'Look East' and Act East policy, the Eastern Fleet ships of Indian Navy under command of Rear Admiral Ajendra Bahadur Singh, VSM, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet were on an operational deployment to South East Asia and Southern Indian Ocean. The INS Shakti, a sophisticated fleet tanker and support ship, entered Sattahip, Thailand on June-15 along with INS Ranvir, INS Kamorta, and INS Satpura. The bilateral exercise is focused on intensifying bilateral ties and deepening interoperability between navies of the two friendly nations.<sup>9</sup>

### **International Fleet Review-16- Passage Exercise-**

The International Fleet Review 2016 was conducted at Visakhapatnam from 04-08 Feb 2016, Just after it, Indian and foreign Naval ships undertook a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) in the Bay of Bengal on 09 Feb 16. The exercise was focused on deepening cooperation and camaraderie with foreign navies and marking a continuation of IFR 16. IFR-16 witnessed the largest scale of participation of foreign ships ever. A sum of 34 navies has participated in IFR. This has shown India's growing gesture in the maritime domain.<sup>10</sup>

### **Indian Warships Visit Colombo-**

INS Vikramaditya and INS Mysore were on an official visit to Colombo in Jan 2016. The visit was for further enhancing already close co-operation between the two Navies. India and Sri Lanka are immediate neighbors and they have cordial diplomatic and defence relations. The visit strengthened the bonds that already exist between the two countries.<sup>11</sup>

### **Indian Naval Ship Tabar visits Mauritius-**

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<sup>8</sup> [SIMBEX 15 - Indian-Singapore Navy Bilateral Exercise | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/simbex-15-indian-singapore-navy-bilateral-exercise), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/simbex-15-indian-singapore-navy-bilateral-exercise)

<sup>9</sup> [Jun 2015 - Indian Navy Ships on Overseas Deployment | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/jun-2015-indian-navy-ships-overseas-deployment), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/jun-2015-indian-navy-ships-overseas-deployment)

<sup>10</sup> [IFR 16 - Passage Exercise | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/ifr-16-passage-exercise), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/ifr-16-passage-exercise)

<sup>11</sup> [Indian Warships visit Colombo, Sri Lanka | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-warships-visit-colombo-sri-lanka-0), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-warships-visit-colombo-sri-lanka-0)

Indian and Mauritius enjoy traditionally friendly relations. A stealth frigate of the Indian Navy, INS Tabar has entered Port Louis, Mauritius. The visit was aimed to participate in the Mauritius National Day celebrations and to strengthen the bonds which already exist. These visits enhance interoperability between two navies and develop a strong relationship of mutual trust.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Visit of INS Beas to Doha, Qatar for DIMDEX 16-**

INS Beas participates in Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition (DIMDEX). It's an ideal platform for displaying our indigenous shipbuilding capability and technological prowess as well as innovation in naval systems. This participation enhances cooperation and friendly ties between Indian and Qatar along with other participating countries.<sup>13</sup>

#### **HADR Exercise at Colombo during Cyclone "ROAUN"-**

Indian Navy has always stood first in providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in the IOR. On the request made by the Government of Sri Lanka, as an expression of solidarity GoI responded with its extended support to disaster-hit Sri Lanka to provide aid to people affected by floods and landslides in different parts of Sri Lanka. The C-17 aircraft carried priority relief materials to Sri Lanka to support the ambitions of GoI.<sup>14</sup> Indian-Sri Lanka has a special relationship and India's assistance to Sri Lanka in an emergency is a manifestation of the bonds between the two nations.

#### **Visit of Indian Warships to Muscat (Oman)-**

History has evidence that India and Oman have deep-rooted cultural and economic relations. Which was later formalized by the India-Oman Treaty of Friendship 1953. The events of signing MOU between the defence organizations of the two countries in subsequent years 2005 & 2006 have established the foundation for increased defence cooperation. Both the countries are members of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a voluntary and cooperative initiative by 30 countries of the IOR. Indian Navy also gets support in anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden by providing OTR facilities.<sup>15</sup> Indian Navy and Oman Navy also

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<sup>12</sup> [Indian Naval Ship Tabar visits Mauritius | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-naval-ship-tabar-visits-mauritius), Accessed on March 16, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-naval-ship-tabar-visits-mauritius)

<sup>13</sup> [Visit of INS Beas to Doha, Qatar for DIMDEX 16 | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-ins-beas-doha-qatar-dimdex-16), Accessed on March 17, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-ins-beas-doha-qatar-dimdex-16)

<sup>14</sup> [HADR Exercise at Colombo During Cyclone "ROAUN" | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/hadr-exercise-colombo-during-cyclone-roaun), Accessed on March 17, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/hadr-exercise-colombo-during-cyclone-roaun)

<sup>15</sup> [Visit of Indian Warships to Muscat \(Oman\) : 21-24 May 16 | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-indian-warships-muscat-oman-21-24-may-16), Accessed on March 17, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-indian-warships-muscat-oman-21-24-may-16)

participate in biennial naval exercise 'Naseem Al-Bahr' to enhance strong ties between the two navies.

### **Sagar Maitri-**

A Marine Acoustic Research ship of the Naval Physical & Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL), Indian Naval Ship Sagardhwani was sailed off for a scientific expedition named 'Marine & Allied Interdisciplinary Training and Research Initiative (MAITRI)'. It is in harmony with the Prime Minister's vision of 'Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)' to foster cooperation along with greater scientific interaction in ocean research among Indian Ocean Region countries. The mission SAGAR MAITRI was set for data collection from the Northern Indian Ocean, and enhancing long-term relations among eight IOR countries in Ocean Research and Development. The Indian Navy and NPOL jointly work in the field of research and development.<sup>16</sup>

### **Operation Sankalp-**

The operation was launched just after security concerns deteriorated in the Gulf region when merchant ships were attacked in the Gulf of Oman in June 2019. The Operation is aimed to ensure the safe passage of Indian flagged ships passing through the Gulf of Hormuz. Indian Navy deployed warships and aircraft to respond to any emergency in the region and provide assurance of safe passage to Indian merchantmen. Indian Navy is committed to safeguarding India's maritime interests.<sup>17</sup>

### **Operation Samudra Setu-**

Operation Samudra Setu (Sea Bridge) was launched by the Indian Navy to bring Indian citizens from overseas. INS Jalashwa and Magar were deployed in the mission. In a time when no mode of transportation was functional, the Indian Navy was directed to provide the evacuation by sea. Proper arrangement of requisite medical screening was ensured in the mission. INS Airavat, INS Kesari, INS Shardul, and INS Kesari were also part of the mission.<sup>18</sup>

### **Operational Preparedness of Indian Navy-**

With the growing importance of the Indian Navy in IOR, Indian Navy always remains ready for operations. Significant examples have been seen in several occasions of natural

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<sup>16</sup> [INS Sagardhwani Flagged Off for 'Sagar Maitri' | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/node/26511), Accessed on March 17, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/node/26511)

<sup>17</sup> [Operation Sankalp | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/node/25168), Accessed on March 18, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/node/25168)

<sup>18</sup> [Operation Samudra Setu | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/operation-samudra-setu-0), Accessed on March 18, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/operation-samudra-setu-0)

calamities and rescue operations. The Chief of Naval Staff reviews operational preparedness of Indian Navy's Carrier Battle Group which includes weapon firings, air-to-air combat operations, anti-submarine drills and fleet manoeuvres under realistic conditions. Even in monsoon when seas get rough and conditions don't favor the Indian Navy maintains the maritime security of the nation as the Navy is always mission deployed and combat-ready across the IOR. Operations like Op Samudra Setu have set an exemplary image of the Indian Navy in bringing our citizens back and providing medical and logistics assistance to the friendly countries in IOR, as part of 'Mission SAGAR'.<sup>19</sup> Indian Naval Fleet includes Aircraft carriers, destroyers, submarines, frigates, support vessels, aircraft, and so on.

### **Strait of Malacca-**

Sea has been the most important source of trade and commerce. India's geographical location provides it a strategic position and advantage in trade. Malacca strait is one of the most strategic and trafficked water bodies for trade and commerce. It is an energy lifeline for Southeast and East Asian countries. India plays an important role in establishing relations with the littoral states of the region with regional and international cooperation. Being technically sound, India holds several defence technology productions and shares data for specific operations. Malacca strait is the gateway for the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Indian navy can play a vital role in case of any conflict with China. As Indian Navy's base at Andaman and Nicobar Island situated at the mouth of the Malacca Strait provides India a strategic advance position.<sup>20</sup> China's energy requirements are fulfilled by the Malacca Strait, and India's position poses a threat to China's energy security. A bunch of ships parked in the channel can choke the passage and there is nothing left to do with it.

### **Conclusion-**

India has increased its military capacity to operate in the Northern Indian Ocean from Malacca Strait to African Coast. India is looking forward to strengthening its presence in IOR. The regional countries should join hands with India to minimize the presence of external powers. The Indian Navy has been portraying an image of the first responder in the IOR littorals and being the priority of the littorals of IOR. The previous missions and deployment of the Indian Navy in the region and increasing cooperation with the regional countries are posing

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<sup>19</sup> [CNS Reviews Operational Readiness at Sea | Indian Navy](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/cns-reviews-operational-readiness-sea), Accessed on March 18, 2021 from (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/cns-reviews-operational-readiness-sea)

<sup>20</sup> [Could The Indian Navy Strangle China's Lifeline In The Malacca Strait? \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/07/08/could-the-indian-navy-strangle-chinas-lifeline-in-the-malacca-strait/?sh=2efa99fd78e8), Accessed on March 18, 2021 from (https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/07/08/could-the-indian-navy-strangle-chinas-lifeline-in-the-malacca-strait/?sh=2efa99fd78e8)

India as a preferred partner in the IOR. Indian Navy's mission-based deployment like; MALDEP (Patrolling near the mouths of the Straits of Malacca), NORDEP (Patrolling in the North Bay of Bengal), ANDEP (Patrolling between the North Andamans and South Nicobar), GULFDEP (patrolling of the North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Hormuz, Persian Gulf), POGDEP (Anti-piracy patrolling of the Gulf of Aden), CENDEP (Patrolling off the Maldives and Sri Lanka), and IODEP (Patrolling off Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar) are major strategic steps by the Indian side to secure the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) and covers most of the parts of Indian Ocean. These deployments are an extension of keeping an eye on the Chinese Navy's activities in the IOR.