

## **Diplomatic Dimensions of Maritime Challenges for India in the 21st Century**, by Yogendra Kumar, New Delhi:

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The book records the story of India's development into a modern maritime nation ready to take on the challenges of the twenty-first century. It also tells us how India has steadily built upon its nascent capacities since the early years of independence. In doing so, it begins by giving a brief historical overview of the Indian maritime tradition.

According to the maritime history of the world, as explained by legendary Sardar K.M. Panikkar with a historical focus on the Indian Ocean from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, India enjoyed transoceanic supremacy, was active from its coasts in the east, south and west and covered the entire South-East and South Asia. India also transported goods, values, culture, religion and friendship to far-flung places in West Asia, which was India's immediate neighbourhood until independence. After the Partition, the neighbourhood changed into extended and proximate neighbourhoods.

India's oceanic supremacy was curtailed in early sixteenth century by the Portuguese Navy which was a formidable foe to naval activities. The Portuguese subsequently lost to the Dutch, and then to the British. After setting up its empire in India, Britain turned the Indian Ocean

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into a 'British lake', that means, it established complete supremacy in the oceanic regions from the Bay of Bengal to the Oman Gulf and beyond, the Persian Gulf as well as the Red Sea up to the Mediterranean Sea. Under British rule, India's ethnic maritime culture remained highly restricted. This had to be a maritime military strategy of the British' contemporary world. The book observes that after independence, Indian Navy's maritime vision had to be a 'maritime military strategy' for the times to come and therefore, the maritime doctrine had to be readdressed.

The book kaleidoscopically focuses on the diplomatic activities for nearly seven decades in post-independent India for raising a formidable navy and framing of maritime planning for the country. The author details how our national navy changed, beginning from India's 'maritime blindness' to reach the maturity of astute agenda-setting by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for a broader transoceanic vision. Topographically in a unique position, India's peninsular structure gives it a strategic vantage point in the world's highly coveted space of the seas, the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean. Yet, India had to begin from a position of disadvantage in the Indian Ocean in the post-British era as it knew that by turning the Indian Ocean into a 'British lake', the British had indeed damaged Indian traditional maritime ethos.

In five of well explicated nine chapters, Kumar details how the felt necessities made India grow from strength to strength to emerge with special international maritime status in the new century. The book tells of a highly documented history which cannot be lost. Chapter V, in particular, builds upon India's nascent maritime strength to match the post-Cold War international environment. Globalisation too had a decisive impact on the international maritime practices, with which Indian agencies had to cope, responding to the demands of international trade and traffic on its high seas. Thus, the question of maritime security came up for which strategic planning was essential, not only for situations in the high seas but also for the surrounding hinterlands. Various dimensions of policies, even for coastal waters, atolls and islands on seas, needed to be adopted to guard against issues such as coastal states' objections, piracies and accosting militants on waters. All these created a multipronged strategic concern for the Indian Navy, which took on the task of working on a globally acceptable maritime legal framework. It created ministries of shipping and earth sciences, coast guards, coastal police and its very own naval doctrine for the high seas, along with actively joining in formulating security measures for the

sea lanes of communication (SLOC) and actively participating in the creation of the global maritime legal framework in the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS). Creation of the UNCLOS was a disciplinary measure in the vortex of issues related to the seas. Also, India soon became an active member of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

In the middle of all these developments, the Indian Navy got a competitor, if not an outright challenger, in China. After the end of the Cold War, China started pursuing a policy of building maritime infrastructure for both civil and naval use in a network around India, referred to as 'string of pearls' by an American analyst. China sought to play this down by calling it 'maritime silk route'. China spread its tentacles among almost all littorals on the Indian Ocean, and aggressively started influencing littorals on the Pacific Ocean too. It was a clever ploy of China to use Pakistan to counteract Indian naval positions. The littorals on the Indian and Pacific Oceans are politically, culturally and climatically diverse. This fact, in particular, has resulted in enormous maritime security challenges, even as it necessitates sharp strategic policies. Diplomacy is one very strong dimension in that direction.

Chapter VI highlights India's 'mutating maritime challenges' in the rapidly changing circumstances in various water bodies, littorals, and the failing and failed states across the seas. The chapter is prescriptive in content coming from decades-long expertise of the author in diplomacy in complex geopolitics of various countries. Changing types of warfare and dimensions beyond the traditional security paradigms have all the more intensified India's challenges in the coming decades. The book discusses the issues involved in the Indian Navy's step-by-step preparation to acquire skills and strength in tackling the 'emerging over-the-horizon challenges' created by evolving technological innovation and institutional 'ossification'. It delves into prognostics of future naval war situations, deployment of robots in place of soldiers, precision strike navigation, and such locational tensions as over passage through the straits of Hormuz and Malacca—all conjoined with rapidly transformed security measures, namely, the fifth-generation airpower for electronic jamming, anti-satellite weapons, electromagnetic pulse and cyber security and warfare.

In this chapter, the author also takes an incisive look into China's futuristic space programmes. The space research, implementation of space security policies and the space cooperation measures like Asia-

Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) have been discussed, with prognosis of unmanned military space laboratory (Tiangong-I Project), which China had declared to launch in 2009, but was indeed launched in 2011. Though much is not discussed in the book about what happened between the declared deadline of 2009 to the actual lift-off on 29 September 2011, the possible repercussions about the space security issues can be felt. The Tiangong-1 was an unmanned space lab module. It was launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu province of China on that day.

The book also examines, in detail, the issues about and measures for tackling piracies. In Chapter VII, a panoramic view of the inter-governmental diplomatic measures has been taken about how to handle the non-traditional security threats which are likely to emerge with proliferation of nuclear weapon knowledge and capabilities associated with biological and chemical weapons manufacturing (NBC weapons). One of dangerous threats is piracy on the high seas. The Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) initiative of all major countries is a step that has been taken to ensure the best practices against all types of piracies, including the one called ideological piracy which aims to fund terrorism across countries. Diplomacy plays the major role in these situations, especially to bring together various regional players into a composite intelligence-sharing community.

Also, the scenario in navigational relations today is much more complex and devoid of composite trend like it was during the Cold War period. Especially after the 9/11, the world's response towards organised terrorism has spurred political scientists of international relations to work on new acceptable norms about passage in the seas. The book discusses newer challenges for the international relations theorists today, and raises newer debates. The debates are related to the ongoing confusion among the international communities because of the uncertainty in global order of navigational geopolitics. Increasingly, new forums are being looked into, with newer prisms to examine the issues which are of importance today.

Chapter VIII touches on the necessity of good governance in littoral states for safe, cooperative and prosperous navigational relations among nations. It is the minimum expectation of the navigational communities from the littorals to ensure safe, innocent navigational passage for trade, commerce, tourism and energy sourcing. This is an important cause for all the navies of the world, including Indian Navy. With a

view to ensuring secure resources for economic growth and collective prosperity, navigation needs to be safe and incident-free. For that to happen, the author believes, the nations need to take a broad approach beyond navigation and maritime issues so that in the entire architecture of international relations, national engagements are possible. Benign security environment in waters, along with stable cooperative governance in the littorals, will certainly make this earth a better place to live in. All this brings the debate back to the question: Is the Indian Navy capable enough to take the call of the future times?

The author believes that India needs to carry out holistic modernisation drives continuously. There is no scope for laxity in this mission. Development of skills needs to be an ongoing input, along with modernisation of hardware. Research and development paradigms need to be honed further to promote development of skills of people in the services. For this, all the arms of the nation's services have to be pressed to coordinate with one another even as the federal government has to come forward. Security is a daunting issue and will continue to be more daunting in future times. The major tool for this purpose is diplomacy. Historically, diplomacy has taken the lead for India in water issues with countries, and that needs to be furthered adroitly. It is necessary for India to position its navy advantageously in all seas of the world for effective balance of navigational power. With a modern fleet, skilled personnel and technologically capable Indian Navy positioned in strategic seas, effective peace on water would be a possibility because India continues to promote a no-first aggressor and a non-aligned foreign policy. Some critics have viewed India's current foreign policy as a 'Swing Policy', meaning suitably changing its positions for its own benefit. However, taking their idea as granted, that policy also is by and large fundamentally based on national interests, and firmly entrenched in the non-aligned foreign policy. Littoral states in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific regions have already endorsed this stand of India in the recent past.

This belief stems from the fact that Indian Navy has successfully ensured its 'power-projection capability and domain awareness' on the Indian Ocean, drawing welcome responses from the littoral states. Indian maritime agencies progressively engage themselves with the littoral states by routine diplomatic interactions, and this builds confidence in all the stakeholders of the oceanic region. Thanks to global surge in commerce and trade, the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region are witnessing increasing presence of world's extra-regional navies. Presence of the

Indian Navy in that milieu is equally sensible even as the United States Navy takes the lead for security expeditions against piracies.

At the same time, the author's contention that seamless diplomatic interactions need to be skilfully adopted to handle both non-traditional as well as traditional security issues, and that Indian diplomacy is capable of doing all that to the support and satisfaction of every stakeholder in the littorals, are a tested fact. Under this realistic prism the book is an essential reference text for people in international relations, media, and military science.