In the Political Context, India's Maritime Strategic Plans and Policies

*Ambutai, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Govt. First Grade College, Siruguppa.

Abstract:

   The evolving dynamics of India's maritime policy are examined in this article. First, The globe in the twenty-first century is a far cry from the Cold War era. The end of ideological clashes and strategic competition between superpowers, which had a significant part in exacerbating crises throughout the world, gave rise to fresh optimism for the creation of a peaceful and cooperative international order. The new global order, on the other hand, is rife with ambiguity. Ethnic conflicts, refugee problems, environmental degradation, terrorism, and other concerns have emerged as new conflicts and crises. A country's Maritime Policy is shaped by the periods in which it is carried out. India's Maritime Policy in the twenty-first century will be substantially different from what it was when the country gained independence. There were two well-known blocs at the time: the United States and the Soviet Union. India's Maritime Policy, understandably, avoided joining either of the two blocs, resulting in the formation of a non-aligned group of countries. International politics since 1991 have highlighted the necessity for India's Maritime Policy to be fundamentally rethought.

Keywords: Maritime Policy, Maritime Zones, western Indian Ocean, Indian Ocean Reg.

1. INTRODUCTION

   India has attracted greater worldwide interest than ever before in the early twenty-first century. "In 1947, India was probably at the bottom of the international power pyramid. However, India accelerated its development and became the most developed country among underdeveloped countries in just three or four decades." India is the world's seventh-largest country, and it has the world's second-largest population, second only to China. Mountains and oceans separate it from the rest of Asia, giving the nation a distinct geographical character.   "Maritime Policy is a tool that a country may use to safeguard and develop its national interests." The heart of the national interest remains constant: protect territorial integrity and sovereignty, improve people's economic and social well-being, develop prospects for successful trade connections with other nations, and exploit soft power' via cultural assets dissemination. While the national interest will always exist, the content of that interest will change throughout time and in response to changing circumstances. As a result, the strategy must be adaptable and responsive to changes in the world as well as the national environment." This study is a modest attempt to examine India's Maritime Policy as a tool for safeguarding national interests, its successes, and the problems it faces in the twenty-first century.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

When India gained independence, the world landscape altered dramatically. It was during the Cold War. The world's politics were divided into two blocs: one headed by the United States under a capitalist philosophy, and the other by the Soviet Union under a communist ideology. India did not want to join any bloc under Nehru's leadership, therefore it developed a new strategy known as non-alignment. The most essential element of India's Maritime Policy has been non-alignment. Non-alignment is a strategy for retaining national independence in international affairs by refusing to join any military alliance created by the United States and the Soviet Union after WWII. Non-alignment has nothing to do with neutrality, non-involvement, or isolationism. It was a fluid idea that implied adopting an independent stance on foreign matters based on the merits of each case rather than committing to any military bloc. The policy of non-alignment won many supporters among the developing countries as it provided an opportunity to them for protecting their sovereignty as also retain their freedom of action during the tension-ridden cold war period. In the tense climate of cold war bloc politics between the United States and the Soviet Union, India took an autonomous Maritime Policy course and emerged as a natural leader of newly independent Afro-Asian nations under this strategy. "India is too huge a country," Nehru said to explain this stance. India will be and must be a country that aspires to be involved in world events while being independent of power blocs. We are in a stronger position to throw our weight in favor of peace at the proper time, and in the meantime, our relations with nations with whom we can easily expand can become as close as possible in the economic or another sphere."

India has long been a staunch opponent of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. Whenever there was an injustice, India spoke out, for example, in support of Indonesian nationality in the battle against Dutch colonialism in 1947, and against South Africa's unlawful takeover of Namibia and the infamous apartheid policy in South Africa. India was a strong supporter of communist China's admission to the United Nations. Because India has had so many encounters with British colonialism, it naturally rejects it. In this capacity, India has backed the liberation movements in Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Malaya, and other third-world nations.

India has long considered the United Nations as a vehicle for international peace and peaceful transformation. Apart from that, India has always expected the UN to actively engage nations in talks or negotiations to help them resolve their problems. India has also urged for the UN to play a more active role in the development of Third World countries. In the Unified Nations, India has urged for a united front of third-world countries. It argues that, because of its size, the non-aligned group of states can play a constructive and relevant role in the UN by preventing superpowers from utilizing the global organization for their ends. India connected the decrease of weaponry with the wider objective of development as early as 1950. By assisting in the decolonization process, giving humanitarian and developmental assistance, and maintaining peace, the UN has played an important role in maintaining international peace. Decolonization is the process of gaining freedom from colonial domination. Many

colonies in Asia and Africa gained independence after World War II. India's mission in the UN is to improve the effectiveness of the institution.

Many academics argue that all of these factors influence India's Maritime Policy because they encourage a utopian perspective of international politics that ignores the harsh reality of international relations. As a result, they believe India's Maritime Policy has failed to attain a realistic aim. However, it is a one-sided truth. Above all, India's Maritime Policy was shaped by ideological factors, which made her a significant player in global affairs. India benefited from both sides of the bipolar globe and was successful in balancing ties as a result of its non-alignment strategy. India stretched its politics throughout the globe with this approach, bringing newly independent countries under one roof. The non-alignment group of countries stood firm against the west's dominant economic practices. They were staunch opponents of the Bretton Woods system and offered a solid foundation for the creation of a new international economic order. India has become the natural leader of third-world nations as a result of its opposition to colonialism, imperialism, and racism; for example, the G77 and other groupings are led by India.

3. CHANGING PARADIGMS

The changes that occurred in 1989-91 were global in scope. The world was going through a period of ideological, militaristic, and economic transformations. It was time for the Cold War to end and the Soviet Union to fall apart. In such conditions, India had a significant problem in coordinating with the world situation. For India, economic liberalization became a necessity rather than a choice. The fundamental problem for India in terms of Maritime Policy is to identify new subjects in light of new international conditions because those subjects that were significant determinants of India's Maritime Policy in the post-independence period became obsolete following the conclusion of the Cold War. India's Maritime Policy was replaced by a pragmatic strategy after the Cold War ended, as it tried to create new and significant ties that would promote its global rise. In the post-Cold War era, India has pursued a practical, goal-oriented, and constructive Maritime Policy. India's early 1990s economic liberalization allowed it to base its new Maritime Policy on the principles of economic diplomacy. India also abandoned its non-aligned image in the 1990s, pursuing membership in other multilateral organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The end of the Cold War posed new difficulties and provided India's Maritime Policymakers with a plethora of possibilities. In a unipolar world, policymakers have several obstacles in terms of Maritime Policy. Balancing relations with global powers, forming new partnerships with regional organizations, expanding influence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, making NAM more relevant in light of new circumstances, enhancing India's economic and energy security, dealing with environmental and human security threats, UN reforms and permanent membership in the Security Council, and active pursuit of a multipolar world was among the challenges.

4. CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA'S MARITIME POLICY

India's ever-changing maritime policy has been a recognition and response to a variety of geopolitical pressures, attempting to fit its goal in the larger global order. As a result, over the last decade or two, there has been a constant renewal of maritime security arguments and geopolitical imperatives aimed at broadening India's diplomatic pursuit. The Indo-Pacific narrative is one such topic that has recently gained traction, underlining India's strategic reorientation as seen by the country's new and evolving maritime strategy. The Indo-strategic Pacific's delimitation has been appropriately extended by the country to include not only India's eastward movement across the Bay of Bengal, beyond the ASEAN nations, but also the western expanse—to the western Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea island nations, and the eastern shores of Africa. This is one area where India's interests have converged, as a result of increased security, connectivity, and economic concerns. As a result, India's maritime strategy has recognized the need to transform from a beneficent to a dominant and aspirational power by broadening its scope of prospects and outreach facilitation.

With the increased trade transits and critical nodes, India has found itself during escalating competition among the main global powers—the principal stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific, such as Australia, Japan, the United States, and China. The country's transformative attempt for the maritime space by creating a seamless stretch of security architecture, moving from the coasts up to the high seas, capacity building through appropriate acquisition and manufacturing with increased investments, and the Navy's evolving significance have all been highlighted.

Keeping its core national interests in mind, India has worked to preserve, promote, and protect several key maritime gains, including the protection of India's territorial integrity from sea-based threats, the development of the Blue Economy, and the pursuit and protection of India's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and maritime resources both within and beyond its maritime zones (MZI). The goal was to create a welcoming and comprehensive marine environment.

In this context, India's maritime strategic plans or naval doctrines might be described as the most accurate representation or manifestation of the country's marine ambitions. One such paper is the Indian Navy's latest compilation, Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (November 2015), which envisions the altering contours of India's maritime role, primarily pointing at maritime military capacity and the Indo-Pacific framework's disposition. Apart from the aforementioned developmental factors, the goal has been to seek and maintain security control over critical chokepoints in the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific areas, such as the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Bab-el-Mandeb, to name a few. In actuality, this plan has adopted the viewpoint of India's earlier maritime doctrine, Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy, from 2007.

'Diplomatic maneuvering' is another major pillar of India's maritime strategy about nations like China and the issues that come with policies like connecting and using the Indian Ocean's main ports under the pretense of infrastructure development and deterring Chinese piracy. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2018 Shangri-La address, expressing India's ambition for increased connectivity and fair access to the India Ocean area, arose from this situation. The end destination was

affirmed as a complete status quo, to be specified through Act East and Act West policies and rules-based order, reducing barriers to greater collaboration and continuous exercise for the most efficient use of the region's economic benefits.

India has also been leveraging key places such as the Bay of Bengal to assure the security of 90% of its external trade volume (mostly oil imports), as well as the critical SLOCs that pass through the Bay, ultimately using the area as a stepping stone to the larger Indo-Pacific. The Bay littorals, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, as well as the easternmost regions of the Indian Ocean, are being viewed as an 'inter-regional battlefield.' Organizations such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) may have equal clout as a key transit route between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, situated at the crossroads of Chinese and Indian strategic interests, thereby bolstering India's Act East Policy as well as deeper integration with ASEAN. Though India does not have any direct claims to the South China Sea, it has made progress there through its Act East strategy and relations with Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, accords like the LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) with the United States, which allows the forces of the two countries to use one other's facilities, have enhanced bilateral 'interoperability.'

Through its Act West endeavor, India has attempted to tap into the full potential of the western Indian Ocean (WIO), focusing mostly on the Vanilla Islands, which include Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Reunion, and Seychelles. Much to India's chagrin, China's strategic position here has posed a danger to the latter's access to continental Africa. The situation may improve once India is granted 'observer status' at the Indian Ocean Agency (an international commission that monitors the development of the five African Indian Ocean states). In addition, India's new diplomatic connection with Seychelles, which has been dubbed a "key area" of its focus, has been a positive step forward in the region. Better future spending on naval bases may help to ameliorate the situation.

India has begun to use the overall concept of being a "net security provider" as a "formal endorsement" of India's active leadership capabilities for regional security and stability at this point. India has been defining its footprint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Indo-Pacific, moving beyond any uncertainty. The various conceptions and interpretations associated with the argument of a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) eventually culminate in the creation of better multilateral platforms for India with like-minded partners in the region, such as the idea of creating the 'Quad' or a quadrilateral partnership (with the US, Japan, Australia, and India) or strengthened bilateral naval exercises demanding a strategic vision for the future. India would only be able to make its imprint in the new global maritime picture if a new geopolitical scenario is implemented.

5. CONCLUSION

Maritime Policy is fluid; it shifts with the passage of time and changing circumstances. With the conclusion of the Cold War, international politics changed dramatically, and nation-states faced a slew of new issues in their foreign relations. Changes in India's Maritime Policy were brought about by the country's policy planners in response to the changing global situation. India's Maritime Policy is becoming more realistic as she balances her long-term and short-term

national interests. However, it is difficult to argue that the idealistic aspects of India's Maritime Policy are simply meaningless. In their new guise, colonialism and imperialism exist across the world, and fake wars, drug trafficking, nuclear weapons, and other risks to human security have expanded dramatically. The idealistic aspects of India's Maritime Policy are crucial in resolving these issues.

India has been strengthening its ties with superpowers since the conclusion of the Cold War. India's Maritime Policy has shifted its focus to the United States. Although the era requires to development of deeper ties with superpowers, India's stance toward the US raises questions about the country's independence in Maritime Policy. Consider India's vote at the IAEA against Iran. India and Iran have a long history together. As a result, the Indo-Iran gas pipeline project was abandoned. Such a diplomatic blunder will obstruct India's quest for energy security.

India is disregarding its near neighbors and third-world nations in its pursuit of closer ties with superpowers. Some scholars see India as an Asian power, but this has to be reconsidered. In the case of Nepal and Bangladesh, there is no clear policy. India's Maritime Policy on the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and the Bangladeshi refugee crisis is unclear. Sri Lanka is a crucial priority for India's Maritime Policy, however, India's influence in Sri Lanka is waning. China's influence in South Asia is steadily increasing. India has to take a step back and rethink its Asian Maritime Policy. It is past time for India to collaborate with third-world countries on matters such as economics, energy, and the environment. India has the potential to play a significant role on international platforms such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the Copenhagen Conference, the Kyoto Protocol, and UN reforms involving developing nations.

6. REFERENCES

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