



Boosting India with Maritime Domain Awareness

Introduction

- The legendary military theorist, Sun Tzu, is once said that the **critical element in battle was foreknowledge**, but that it "could not be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations".
- The foreknowledge could only be gathered with specialised tools and by men who knew the enemy well.
- A prior reading of the adversary and the theatre of battle, could decisively shift the balance of fortune in war.

Nature of the enemy at sea

- Today, the enemy at sea is often unrecognisable — a terrorist, a pirate, a criminal or a sea robber.
- Indian maritime planners have been wary of the possibility of a greater Chinese presence in the eastern littorals.

Indian Navy's Initiatives

- Of late, the Indian Navy has been on a drive to improve domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
- The **Navy is seeking to expand India's surveillance footprint** by setting up radar stations in the Maldives, Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- The Indian Navy's efforts seem focused primarily on monitoring Chinese activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean.
- In recent months, Indian naval ships have patrolled the Andaman Seas and eastern chokepoints to deter any maritime adventurism by Beijing.
- India has moved to **expand its underwater detection capabilities** in the Eastern chokepoints.
- Indian Navy has inducted two Sea Guardian drones on lease from the United States.
- Navy's coverage of the Bay of Bengal littoral is already considerable.

Neighbourhood synergies

- Maritime domain awareness is also generating cooperative synergies in the neighbourhood.
- There are reports that seven Indian Ocean countries will soon post Liaison Officers at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram.
- New Delhi is also upping its engagement in the Western Indian Ocean by positioning a Liaison Officer at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar.
- India has also posted an officer at the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi to assist in the monitoring of maritime activity in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.
- India's military satellite (GSAT-7A) may soon facilitate a real time sharing of maritime information with partners.
- These endeavours are a manifestation of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), that advances the idea of India as a 'security provider' and 'preferred partner' in the Indo-Pacific region.

Maritime grand strategy

- New Delhi's excessive focus on the continental sphere since Independence has not yielded great returns in terms of secure borders, healthy relations with its neighbours or deterrence stability vis-à-vis adversaries.
- **It is time for India to change its grand strategic approach — by shifting its focus from the continental sphere to the maritime sphere.**
- New Delhi has begun to think in this direction with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) establishing a new division to deal with the Indo-Pacific in April 2019.
- The work in this direction, both ideational and practical, needs to be fast-tracked to keep pace with the emerging realities and to make use of new opportunities.
- Unlike in the continental sphere, there is a growing great power interest in the maritime sphere, especially with the arrival of the concept of 'Indo-Pacific'.
- The maritime space is a lot more important to China than engaging in land grab attempts in the Himalayas, due to the massive Chinese trade that happens via the Oceanic routes.
- Therefore, it is high time New Delhi shifted its almost exclusive focus from the continental space to the maritime space.

Concerns / Challenges

- There is concern among maritime watchers that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) may be poised to develop a generation of quieter submarines that would be hard to detect in the near-seas.
- Analysts fear that the next generation of PLAN nuclear submarines could be stealthier than ever, capable of beating adversary surveillance.
- The **recent discovery of a Chinese unmanned underwater vehicle close to a southern Indonesian island** suggests that China may already be mapping the undersea terrain in the approaches to the Indian Ocean Region.
- While cooperative information sharing allows for a joint evaluation of threats, countries do not always share vital information timeously.

Way Forward

- Law enforcement agencies need to be a lot more vigilant on high-grade sensors and communication networks that observe and track suspicious movements, sharing information in real time.
- This state of enhanced consciousness is described as maritime domain awareness.
- Indian decision makers must recognise the need for cooperative tools to fight transnational crime in the littorals.
- Efforts to help smaller island states build capacity to combat regional threats.

- India must ensure seamless information flow, generating operational synergy with partners, and aim to expand collaborative endeavours in shared spaces.
- **New Delhi must ideate on the current and future maritime challenges, consolidate its military and non-military tools, engage its strategic partners, and publish a comprehensive vision document on the Indo-Pacific.**

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