

# **India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security**

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IOR-ARC	Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation
IOZP	Indian Ocean Zone of Peace
ISM	Inter-Sessional Meeting
ISPS	International Ship and Port Facility Security
ISR	intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
IUU	illegal, unregulated and unreported
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces
JSDF	Japan Self-Defence Force
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LPD	Landing Platform Docks
LSA	Logistics Support Agreement
MARCOS	Marine Commando Force
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSEWG	Maritime Security Expert Working Group
OVL	ONGC Videsh Ltd
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PoK	Pakistan-occupied Kashmir
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCS	South China Sea
SLOC	Sea Lanes of Communication
SSBN	nuclear strategic missile submarine
SSN	nuclear-powered attack submarine
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VTOL	vertical takeoff and landing
WPNS	Western Pacific Naval Symposium

# 1 Introduction

*Anit Mukherjee and C. Raja Mohan*

India and its Navy had long been marginal to the security politics of post-colonial Asia. This was in contrast to the central role that the armed forces and the economic resources of the undivided Subcontinent played in shaping the outcomes of the Second World War. For a century and a half before the Second World War, the Indian Army was the main instrument of the British Raj in promoting regional stability and providing security to the smaller states all across the region now widely referred to as the Indo-Pacific. If the Partition of the Subcontinent broke the 'India Centre'<sup>1</sup> of the security order in the region, Delhi consciously opted out of the Cold War politics by declaring a policy of non-alignment and promoting solidarity among the post-colonial states in Asia and Africa. Although Nehru sought to develop military cooperation with key regional partners like Indonesia and Egypt in the 1950s, it was too weak and limited to make an effect on the larger balance of power in the region. India's preoccupation with defending the new borders created by the Partition as well as China's control over Tibet exhausted India's military energies and there was little room for Delhi to imagine a larger security role in Asia beyond the Subcontinent. India's focus on the land borders also meant the Navy had little salience in independent India's security strategy. For a brief moment though in the late 1980s, when Rajiv Gandhi launched India's military modernisation, sought to expand the Navy and intervened in Sri Lanka and Maldives, there was some concern in East Asia at Delhi's regional assertiveness. Many of these concerns were rooted less in fears about India's own capabilities and more in the implications of its partnership with the Soviet Union against whose policies much of Asia was united against in the 1980s. The collapse of the Soviet Union, India's Look East Policy and the Indian Navy's tentative outreach to South East Asia quickly removed the perception of India as a regional naval threat.

Seven decades after the Second World War drew to a close and a quarter century after Delhi launched its Look East Policy, India and its Navy are very much at the centre of the regional debates on Asian security. The steady expansion of the Indian growth rates in the reform era that began in the early 1990s saw India emerge as the tenth largest economy in

the world and the third largest in Asia (in nominal terms) by the early 2010s. The increase in India's economic weight has been followed by the growth in India's defence budgets and a modernisation of its military capabilities. By 2013 India had the eighth largest defence budget in the world. Since the early 1990s, India has been fully integrated into most of the East Asian regional institutions. Its bilateral relations with the major powers – the United States, China, Japan – and the key regional actors including Korea, Australia, Vietnam and Indonesia have acquired much depth in the last two decades.

India's improved standing in Asia comes at a moment when the region entered a period of turbulence. The relative harmony among the major powers since the early 1990s has broken down. The concord between China on the one hand and the United States and its Asian allies on the other established in the 1970s now seems a distant memory, as Beijing's assertiveness threatens to undermine the regional order. The absolute gains in India's regional standing and the changed regional dynamic has resulted in Delhi being widely seen as the 'swing state' that could make significant contributions to a new balance of power in the region. This in turn has significantly increased the interest of a number of actors in deepening security cooperation with India. If the Bush Administration saw India as a potential balancer in the region, the Obama Administration described India as the 'linchpin' of their pivot strategy towards the Asia-Pacific.<sup>12</sup> As Washington warmed up to Delhi so have Japan and Australia, both of whom are seeking much stronger defence partnerships with India. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has declared a strategic partnership with India and key members of the forum are eager to see India play a larger security role in the region. Although China is deeply concerned about India's potential alignment with the United States, it is hoping to prevent such an outcome by a more intensive engagement with Delhi. Much like Deng Xiaoping's China in the early 1980s, India finds itself in a strategic sweet spot in the 2010s.

Unlike in the past when it was the Indian Army that represented Delhi's weight in the regional balance, it is India's Navy that is at the centre of the regional and international attention. Given the primacy of the Royal Navy in the Indo-Pacific, the Indian Navy under the Raj was a coastal force that undertook constabulary functions in the immediate environs of the Subcontinent. Independent India quite early on decided to build a strong and balanced Navy. But Delhi neither had the resources nor the need to build such a force amidst the preoccupation with continental threats. This situation began to change as Delhi's economic reforms of the early 1990s generated a maritime imperative and increased the salience of the Navy for a globalising India. As the size, capabilities and reach of the Indian Navy grew since the early 1990s, there has been a growing international interest – both academic and policy – in understanding its doctrine and strategy and its impact on regional security.

### India's new maritime orientation

India's new maritime orientation has its roots in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The 1992 economic reforms and India's subsequent opening up to the forces of globalisation led to a dramatic change in its trading pattern. For instance, according to one study, 'in 1990–1991, India's total external trade (import and export) accounted for a mere 6 per cent of the GDP [and] by 2010–2011, it had increased to 52 per cent'.<sup>3</sup> Crucially, according to the Indian Shipping Ministry, 'about 90% by volume and 70% by value of the country's international trade is carried on through maritime transport'.<sup>4</sup> India's economic growth therefore is increasingly tied to its maritime domain. It was not at all surprising then that the Indian Navy, while releasing its military strategy in 2007, titled it *Freedom to Use the Seas*.<sup>5</sup> This indicated the importance that the Navy attaches to the idea of freedom to trade, navigate and sail the seas. Interestingly the Navy's strategy document not only focuses on the military dimensions of sea power but takes a much broader view of India's maritime interests and strategy. Hence it discusses issues like maritime trade, energy security and protection of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Besides such explicit articulation there are other indicators of a renewed interest in India towards maritime issues. In 2008, the Indian Navy commenced anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden 'to protect Indian ships and Indian citizens employed in sea-faring duties'.<sup>6</sup> These operations have witnessed the deployment of Indian naval ships near the African coast and some pretty robust responses in dealing with the pirates. So far it has prevented over 40 attacks on Indian and foreign merchant ships and has safely escorted over 2671 merchant ships of varying nationalities, including 311 Indian flagged vessels.<sup>7</sup> In November 2008, as a result of the terror attacks in Mumbai, India has also renewed its attention on coastal defence. With a coastline extending up to 7500 kilometres this is a formidable challenge, but the government has taken a number of steps to strengthen coastal security.<sup>8</sup> The new maritime orientation was not only security-focused and in 2011 the Ministry of Shipping unveiled a document envisioning a maritime agenda up to 2020.<sup>9</sup> This document admitted shortcomings in India's overall maritime infrastructure and described a plan to support ship building, port handling and increase maritime trade and commerce.<sup>10</sup> Finally, in 2014, a change of government and the coming to power of Prime Minister Narendra Modi reinvigorated India's foreign and defence policies. Among the first decisions taken by the government was to rename India's 'Look East Policy' as 'Act East Policy', thereby signalling the desire to engage more forcefully with the Asia-Pacific region. This engagement is across all sectors and includes physical connectivity, economic ties and in foreign and defence policies.

**Structure of the volume**

This volume has two parts. The first part – Chapters 2–6 – is focused on India’s naval strategy. The second part – Chapters 7–11 – describes how three of the most significant external powers in the Indo-Pacific – the United States, China and Japan, are engaging in the naval domain with India.<sup>11</sup> It also analyses India’s naval cooperation with the ASEAN and its participation in the regional maritime institutions. The concluding chapter explains why we think this is India’s ‘naval moment’ and the challenges and opportunities faced by the Indian Navy. Chapter 2, by Rajeswari Rajagopalan, describes the drivers of India’s maritime and naval strategy. It begins by describing the historical forces shaping India’s naval strategy and argues that the absence of an immediate naval threat led to all round neglect. Parsing the historical trends in India’s naval modernisation and budgets, Rajagopalan notes the contemporary turn towards a ‘greater appreciation of the changing naval threat scenario’. She analyses the key drivers of India’s naval strategy, including the threat perceptions, expanding maritime interests, imperatives for naval modernisation and enhanced budget allocations. In the next section she describes the broad elements comprising this strategy including defeating Pakistan, deterring China and respond to emerging threats. She underlines the ‘problems in matching India’s capabilities with its ambitions’.

In Chapter 3, Iskander Rehman examines some of the major operational challenges that the Indian Navy will have to face in the next decade and more. He begins by describing this transformation of maritime warfare in an era of nuclear and precision strike weapons. Using the scenario method, he looks at likely future warfare between India and a nuclearised Pakistan and the contours of a Sino-Indian naval conflict. On the former Rehman argues that, with Chinese help, Pakistan has sought ‘to create an A2/AD [Anti Access-Area Denial] “bubble” over the Northern Arabian Sea’. In addition he argues that Pakistan is bolstering its submarine capability and ‘is rapidly moving towards the nuclearisation of its Navy’. Regarding Sino-Indian naval dynamics, the author observes that rivalry ‘is in its ‘preliminary stages’, but suggests that the Indian Navy should be prepared to counter ‘the potentially unconventional nature of future Chinese naval power projection in the Indian Ocean Region’. In a rigorous scrutiny of the Indian Navy’s planning and force design to counter these threats, Rehman argues that it should reevaluate its current emphasis on short-legged carrier-centric forces and focus instead on submarine warfare and on building the capability for a ‘penetrating force’ and long-range maritime interdiction.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth examination of the Indian Navy’s power projection capability. The author, Abhijit Singh, assesses the debates within the Indian Navy on this issue and his central argument is that the Navy’s ‘inability to develop the substantive capacities for sustained

operations in the “far-seas” is due both to a lack of capacity and the political will to project hard-power in the extended neighbourhood’. The author begins by conceptually discussing the idea of ‘far-seas’ operations and then describes the evolution, debates and imperatives underlying the ‘forward operations’ mindset in the Indian Navy. He argues that the institutional change within the Navy on this issue began in 2005 under the leadership of Admiral Arun Prakash. This process has been helped by the lessons learnt by the Navy as a result of overseas operations including anti-piracy missions and for the Indian Ocean Tsunami relief. The chapter dwells upon issues pertaining to forward operating bases and mutual logistical support agreements. Regarding the former, the author argues that while some forward bases are being built up in India’s own territories, however, establishing bases abroad ‘need a leap of imagination and faith – a transition India is yet to make both politically and operationally’. Similarly, after explaining the desirability of logistical support agreements, the author explains how this issue too is considered politically sensitive. The penultimate section of this chapter criticises the contemporary conceptual thinking within the Indian Navy and argues that ‘an excessive focus on benign and constabulary missions in the Indian Ocean Region, and tardiness in the procurement of critical assets for littoral operations and land-attack, has prevented the Navy from playing a strategic role in the Indo-Pacific’. Abhijit Singh recommends that in order to develop a far seas capability the Indian Navy needs to re-orient its mindset and acquire appropriate platforms.

Chapter 5, by Anit Mukherjee, analyses the functioning of India’s first joint command in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. These islands have been attracting a lot of attention as a possible fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific as it provides a strategic ‘bridge between the Indian and Pacific oceans’.<sup>12</sup> The author describes the growing strategic significance of this island chain and how it affords India the capability to dominate the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean. Next, the chapter describes the competing visions surrounding the economic and strategic development of these islands. On the one hand there are those who advocate massive construction and building of a transshipment port to fully exploit the natural resources and location of these islands. However, their vision is being opposed by environmentalists, conservationists and those who want to maintain the ecological balance. The author reviews the debate surrounding the creation of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) – the first joint command in the Indian military. While describing the rationale for more joint commands he explains how the visions of the architects of this command were undone by inter-services rivalry and bureaucratic politics. He examines the military deployment, tasks, organisation chart, force levels, functioning of the ANC and development of bases on the islands. The penultimate section provides an overall appraisal of the Command including its implications for civil-military relations, higher defence management and the future of tri-services commands. The author

concludes that the ANC has not yet changed the geopolitics of the region. Instead, it is 'more of a coastal protection force than one which can project power'. Mukherjee's chapter reiterates India's need to focus on internal capability building and streamline defence management processes in order to play a larger role in the Asia-Pacific.

Chapter 6, written by C. Raja Mohan, examines the history of India's naval diplomacy and lists the factors that have limited its effectiveness. The chapter begins by describing India's post-independence turn towards non-alignment and military isolation leading to reluctance 'to offer significant military cooperation to friendly countries outside the Subcontinent'. There were however two exceptions to this – India was, and continues to remain, an active participant in UN peacekeeping missions and Indian extended considerable military support to countries within the subcontinent. In reviewing India's renewed military engagement after the end of the Cold War, Raja Mohan points out that India has embraced both bilateral and multilateral forums. At the same time, he argues, some in Delhi are 'constrained by the belief that such activity might violate India's traditional commitments to state sovereignty and non-alignment', leading to inconsistencies. The rest of the chapter explores the tension arising from competing ideas among India's strategic and naval analysts. It describes, in some detail, the 'difficulties the Indian Navy has had in finding an appropriate balance between the ideas of power projection, interoperability and contribution to collective security on the one hand and imperatives of territorial defence and strategic autonomy on the other'. He concludes on an optimistic note however noting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi may be more willing than his predecessors to complete 'the long-overdue policy transitions in India's maritime strategy'.

Part II of this book focuses on the external dimensions of India's naval strategy. Chapter 7 written by Timothy D. Hoyt analyses India's role in the United States naval strategy and explores opportunities for enhanced naval cooperation. Hoyt begins his chapter by describing the growing military to military ties between the United States and India and explains the rationale behind this: 'Despite making 'great strides in building trust and opening new opportunities' for defence cooperation, Hoyt notes, there are still many constraints on the relationship. After assessing these constraints, ranging from differing interests to institutional limitations, the author describes three possible futures for this relationship, and 'the drivers that might accelerate change in a given direction'. The first is the status quo arrangement with continued and gradual improvement in ties, the second possibility is greater cooperation especially in South East Asia and the third is much higher level of engagement driven by fears of an aggressive China. Hoyt's chapter reveals that despite obstacles the trend in US-India relations is largely positive and expected to strengthen over time.

Chapter 8, written by Koh Swee Lean Collin, describes naval cooperation and competition between India and China. After describing

the security dilemma that characterises Sino-Indian relations, the author argues both countries 'recognise their mutual economic interdependence' and are working on confidence building measures. Next, Koh argues that that India and China have to 'accept and cope with' the reality of a 'new normal' wherein they will have a growing naval presence in the Western-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region respectively. This 'new normal' arises from increasing capability and a geopolitical interest to obtain a presence in what was previously considered each other's backyard. These interests include growing economic ties, energy flows and diplomatic engagement. As a result, the author argues, the Sino-Indian security dilemma which has traditionally existed on land is currently extending into the maritime dimension. He concludes that both countries should downplay their security dilemma at sea and despite many difficulties try to 'find common grounds for cooperation', especially in the naval arena.

Chapter 9 is written by Tomoko Kiyota and examines Japan's engagement with India and focuses on maritime security. At the outset of this chapter, Kiyota makes two important arguments. First, an aspect overlooked by much of the contemporary literature, changes in Japan's policy towards India 'is an extension of the reform of Japanese national security policy'. In other words, Japan's defence reforms and increasing 'activism' on the part of Japan Self-Defence Force (JSDF) is partly responsible for enhanced ties with India. Second, the author points out that the 'differing perceptions of the term "alliance" could be a potential obstacle for mutual trust and understanding'. Describing the drivers of India-Japan relations, Kiyota argues that the transformation in US-India bilateral relations played an important role in changing Tokyo's perceptions of Delhi. In addition, the author argues that Japan's interest in India has been boosted by the rise of 'military realists' – those most concerned about the rising military threat from China – in Japanese politics. They then, under the rubric of defence reforms, pushed for increased security cooperation with India. The next section describes the naval interaction between Japan and India including exercises and possibility of defence trade.

Chapter 10 analyses naval cooperation between India and all the South East Asian countries. Its author, Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, parses the naval element in India's Look East Policy, renamed Act East Policy in 2014: Supriyanto categorises naval cooperation as consisting of three types – probing, developmental and advanced. In turn, each of these types can be discerned by examining the scope of activities undertaken – information sharing; joint patrols, training and exercises; as well as arms transfers and defence/naval technological cooperation. Probing indicates low level cooperation, the developmental stage shows more enhanced ties and the most developed form of cooperation is at the advanced level. Using these metrics allows us to discern the strength of naval cooperation across different countries. The author briefly describes naval cooperation between India and ten ASEAN countries and concludes that the Indian Navy is at an advanced level of

cooperation only with Singapore. It is at the developmental stage with Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam and is at a probing stage with Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines and Timor Leste. In an important discussion, the author discusses the perspectives of South East Asian countries towards India's role in the ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea. He argues that India, unlike China, is viewed as a benign power and most countries view it as a 'potential strategic counterweight against China's behaviour in the South China Sea'. There is scope, therefore, according to the author, for India to contribute to stability in the South China Sea. The author concludes that variance in naval cooperation with India suggests different motives on individual South East Asian countries.

Chapter 11, written by Sam Bateman, analyses India's involvement in regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific. While doing so it assesses India's overall involvement and its implications for its emerging maritime strategy. Bateman's chapter begins by describing the efforts to build institutions in the Indian Ocean Region. While arguing that it is 'less institutionalised compared with the Asia Pacific', he describes the factors that have prevented this. Next he analyses existing institutions in the Indian Ocean Region including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and various initiatives in the Bay of Bengal. While describing future prospects, Bateman argues that 'while institutions under ASEAN may make progress, the prospects of effective institutions in the IOR, or the wider Indo-Pacific, are less bright'. While focusing in detail on India's approach to regional institutions, the author argues that this is marked by certain 'paradoxes'. For instance, India gives increased priority to bilateral relations rather than regional institutions, appears to be opposed to multilateral security cooperation unless it is driving it and prefers to operate under the United Nations. He argues that these paradoxes translate into a seemingly 'haphazard' strategy as it is a 'bit "all over the place"'. Bateman recommends that it might suit Indian interests to articulate a more comprehensive policy for regional engagement.

In the concluding chapter, we offer some reflections on the rare strategic moment at hand for the Indian Navy. We point to the Navy's potential to acquire, simultaneously, a greater salience in Delhi's national security calculus and become the principal instrument of India's new ability to shape the balance of power in Asia and its waters. It notes the significant changes in the strategic orientation under the government of Narendra Modi that came to power in 2014 and its readiness to reimagine India's great power relations, especially the United States and China. Although Modi is widely seen as departing from the Nehruvian tradition of non-alignment and strategic autonomy, we argue that his maritime vision corresponds with that of K.M. Panikkar who saw in the middle of the last century a self-confident India becoming the anchor of security in the vast Indo-Pacific littoral and taking on the mantle of the British Raj. Panikkar believed that India could do this in partnership with the West

and fully respecting the legitimate interests of China. After a prolonged detour during the second half of the twentieth century, India appears poised to arrive at the same destination in early twenty-first century. While pointing to this tantalising dual possibility for the Indian Navy at the national and regional level, the concluding chapter underlines the host of enduring challenges that Delhi will need to address in turning the unprecedented possibilities for India in the naval domain into a reality.

In tracing the drift of the Navy from the margins of Delhi's national security consciousness to a central position, parsing the tension between its maritime possibilities and the continentalist mindset, and in examining the gap between the growing external demands for its security contributions and internal ambivalence, this volume offers rare insights into India's strategic direction at a critical moment in the nation's evolution. By examining the internal and external dimensions of the Indian naval future, both of which are in dynamic flux, the volume hopes to make a unique contribution to the understanding of India's changing international possibilities.

## Notes

- 1 For a discussion of India's centrality in the Asian security order before the Second World War, see Peter John Brobst, *Future of the Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India's Independence and the Defence of Asia* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2005).
- 2 See remarks made by former US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, 'Partners in the 21st Century', *IDSIA Key Speeches*, 6 June 2012, [www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/LeonEPanettaonPartnersinthe21stcentury](http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/LeonEPanettaonPartnersinthe21stcentury).
- 3 See Military Affairs Center, *Net Security Provider: India's Out of Area Contingency Operations* (New Delhi: Magnum Books, 2012), p. 13.
- 4 See Ministry of Shipping, *Maritime Agenda 2010–2020* (New Delhi, 2011), p. 1).
- 5 See *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy* (New Delhi: Indian Navy Integrated Headquarters, 2007).
- 6 See Indian Navy, 'Anti-Piracy Operations', <http://indianNavy.nic.in/operations/anti-piracy-operations>.
- 7 See Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2013–14* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2013), p. 31.
- 8 See Indian Navy, 'Coastal Maritime Security Initiatives', <http://indianNavy.nic.in/operations/coastal-maritime-security-initiatives> and Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2013–14* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2013), pp. 35–36, 51–53.
- 9 See Ministry of Shipping, *Maritime Agenda 2010–2020* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2011).
- 10 See Shyam Saran, 'Enhancing India's Maritime Security', *The Tribune*, 25 February 2014, [www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140225/edit.htm#7](http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140225/edit.htm#7).
- 11 Arguably Australia is also a significant power; however, as its naval cooperation with India is a relatively recent phenomenon it has not been included in this volume.
- 12 See David Scott, 'The "Indo-Pacific" – New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for US–India Strategic Convergence', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2012, p. 92.

- 87 Raja Mohan, 'From Isolation to Partnership'.
- 88 Josy Joseph, 'Secretive Nation', *Times of India*, 23 March 2014.
- 89 Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, p. 221.
- 90 Sam Bateman, 'Regional Navies and Coastguards: Striking a Balance between "Lawships" and "Warships"', in Geoffrey Till and Jane Chan (eds), *Naval Modernisation in Southeast Asia: Nature, Causes and Consequences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 245–262.
- 91 Ralf Emmers and Sam Bateman, 'ASEAN's Model of Conflict Management: Lessons for the Indian Ocean Region', in Bateman, Chan and Graham, *ASEAN and the Indian Ocean – A Policy Paper*, p. 27.
- 92 Townshend, 'Sino-Indian Maritime Relations', p. 3.

## 12 India's naval moment

*Anit Mukherjee and C. Raja Mohan*

As we noted in the introduction, undivided India and its military power contributed significantly to the outcomes of the two great wars in the first half of the twentieth century. At the heart of the Indian military contribution was its Army, which became the largest all-volunteer force in human history during the Second World War. For nearly a century and a half before that, the Indian Army was at the centre of the British imperial defence system conducting expeditionary operations and providing stability which in turn allowed the modernisation and economic globalisation of Asia. These external functions of the Army were of course in addition to the duties within the Subcontinent for territorial defence as well as internal security. This expansive role for the Army was matched by little effort to build a naval capability. There was no need for one since the Royal Navy dominated the Indian Ocean and provided complete freedom of action for the armies of the Subcontinent after the Napoleonic wars.

This happy circumstance, however, strengthened the continentalist orientation of the Indian security establishment. Despite the fact that India was won by invaders who came from the sea and was controlled by one of the greatest maritime powers in history, Delhi seemed to return to continentalism. Having established dominance over the Subcontinent, the British Raj was focused on defending the North Western frontier that had so obsessed the previous great empires of the Subcontinent. Preventing rival European powers from the overland approaches to the Subcontinent, or the Great Game, became a major strategic preoccupation for the Raj. On the eve of independence, Indian navalists like K.M. Panikkar saw India inheriting both the role of the Army as a security provider as well as building a strong blue water Navy of its own.<sup>1</sup> Another naval thinker, Keshav Vaidya laid out an ambitious naval vision for India, which called for the development of an

an invincible Navy ... to defend not only her coast but her distant oceanic frontiers with her own Navy ... the points which must be within India's control are not merely coastal, but oceanic, and far from the coast itself ... our ocean frontiers are stretched far and wide in all directions.<sup>2</sup>

A number of factors, as we noted in the introduction, prevented this vision from becoming the policy for independent India. These included the Partition of the Subcontinent, the unification of China which gained control of Tibet, India's increasing alienation from the Anglo-American powers, and India's inward economic orientation. In combination these factors significantly limited the possibilities for the Indian Navy, despite the expansive maritime aspirations unveiled by the likes of Panikkar and Vaidya. It was only after the end of the Cold War which opened renewed possibilities for normal relations with the West and an outward economic orientation that the Indian Navy comes into its own. In the intervening period the Navy seemed to have little role in India's preoccupations with the contested frontiers and a diminishing interdependence with the region and the world. Amidst independent India's military isolationism, the Navy had little or no engagement with the other major powers or key regional actors. The Navy became increasingly diminished along with India's own relative decline during the 1960s and 1970s. Despite limited budgetary outlays the Indian Navy did plan on building a balanced force that could operate in all three dimensions. This foundation, including the development of domestic design and development capabilities, helped the Navy to emerge as a force to reckon with in the twenty-first century both in India's own national security calculus and in shaping the regional balance of power.

The introduction of nuclear weapons into the Subcontinent produced an interesting new dynamic on India's contested borders with Pakistan. While the disputes seemed to sharpen over Kashmir, nuclear weapons limited the possibilities of a full scale conventional war between India and Pakistan. Pakistan exploited the window that the shadow of nuclear deterrence opened up for sub-conventional and hybrid warfare in Kashmir. The international community became increasingly concerned about escalation from the sub-conventional to the conventional and the nuclear levels. The frequent military crises with Pakistan tested the doctrines of the Army and the Air Force towards the Western neighbour; but it was not easy to find a solution to the problem of escalation. Although the idea of a 'limited war' or 'Cold Start' generated much concern, especially in the United States and Pakistan, there was no real breakthrough in finding ways in which to punish the Pakistan Army for its support to terrorism within India. The Navy, however, from being generally irrelevant to this problem found a new niche for itself. During the Kargil war as well as the 2001–2002 crisis following the terror attack on the Indian Parliament, the entire Navy was deployed in full force into the Arabian Sea as part of the art of coercive diplomacy that India was beginning to learn.

The Indian Navy has also begun to figure in interesting ways in the debate on the security threats from China. The period of relative tranquillity on the border with China that was established after Rajiv Gandhi's visit

to Beijing in 1988 seemed to break down two decades later. Amidst the improvement in Chinese infrastructure in Tibet the PLA adopted more aggressive patrolling along the disputed frontier. Recognising the dangers of the military balance shifting on the frontier, India chose to modernise its own infrastructure, adapt a more vigilant posture on the border and raise new divisions for deployment along the Chinese border as well as reopen a number of dormant airfields. As the security establishment began to accept the logic of the Army and the Air Force, the Navy found a way of intervening in the China security debate for the first time. A number of analysts, especially from the Navy, began to challenge the argument that additional deployments on the China border would address India's security concerns. They argued instead for strengthening the Navy's ability to interdict Chinese commerce through the Malacca Straits.<sup>3</sup> Whether such an option is feasible or not, the question of securing the land frontier with China has begun to acquire a maritime dimension. The idea that India needs to think asymmetrically and play to its advantages rather than merely increase the size of the military presence on the land borders has gained some traction within Delhi. That the Navy could be an important component of the China strategy has been strengthened by the fact that China's presence in the Indian Ocean has begun to grow. China's outreach to the island states like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius that Delhi had long seen as part of its sphere of influence has increasingly put the Navy at the centre of India's security calculus vis-à-vis China.

The Navy's importance in Delhi's world view has grown not merely because of its potential role in dealing with the traditional security threats emanating from Pakistan and China. It has also come from the broadening of India's definition of its security interests. As the Indian economy became global and increasingly interdependent with the world, Delhi had to necessarily look beyond the requirements of territorial defence and imagine its interests more broadly. As the political establishment began to articulate the proposition that India's interests stretched from Aden to Malacca, the framing had been set for a much wider arc in which the Indian Navy had to operate. This involved more expansive naval diplomacy, greater interest in multilateral and plurilateral cooperation and undertaking new missions such as non-combatant evacuation, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, anti-piracy and securing the sea lanes of communication. The Navy was the natural and flexible instrument to cope with the new and emerging interests of India.

Many problems, however, remain before the Navy emerges as an effective instrument. First, the Navy requires continued budgetary support for its modernisation programme. Despite the sense of India's new strategic opportunities in the maritime domain, the political mindset in Delhi remains stubbornly continentalist. As India's former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran pointed out,



it is through the maritime space that India will be able to re-connect with its neighbours to the east and to the west. The implication of this geographical reality is that India must reorient its resource allocations to enable it to emerge as the key maritime power in the region.<sup>4</sup>

Delhi, however, is nowhere near making that fundamental shift in its resource allocation. Second, the threat of sea-borne terrorism has forced the Navy to alter its acquisition, training, intelligence and operations. The Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008 led to a renewed emphasis on coastal security and have led the Navy to work more closely with state governments, coastal police and local communities. This has its own challenges and distracts from the conventional war fighting role for the Indian Navy. Unfortunately this threat cannot be ignored or wished away. Third, the Indian Navy has to face the reality of insufficient civilian maritime infrastructure and domestic industrial base. Although unrelated sectors, deficiencies in both ultimately limit India's opportunities. Notwithstanding its significant new dependence of its economy on the seas, India's civilian maritime infrastructure remains weak and the talk of massive investments in ports and shipping has not been translated into action. Similarly, while the Navy has done a lot better than the other services in the indigenisation of weapons production and the government led by Narendra Modi has put a special emphasis on reducing arms imports and promoting defence production at home, a variety of policy constraints on domestic naval production remain.

An additional problem, discussed in the volume, relates to India's near lack of awareness of the strategic importance of its island territories to the east and the west of the peninsula. While China has rapidly developed the Hainan Island into a potent economic and strategic asset and is building artificial islands in the South China Sea, India has focused little on developing the Andaman Island chain, so strategically located at the junction of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

On the contrary it has neglected the military potential of these islands. Hence, for instance, the islands play host to the Andaman and Nicobar Command, India's first joint Command, which was created with an aim to forge an integrated, tri-services capability. However, this command suffers from institutional apathy and a woeful lack of resources. Finally, there are significant institutional problems in inter-services cooperation and higher defence management. As discussed by many of the authors in this book, jointness in the Indian military remains problematic and requires urgent attention. Equally important is the issue of higher defence management and civil-military relations which, under the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government, were said to be 'in crisis'.<sup>5</sup> Tensions between civilians and the military led to the unprecedented resignation in February 2014 of Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral D.K. Joshi.<sup>6</sup> While these tensions have since dissipated structural problems in India's higher defence management remain.<sup>7</sup>

As the Indian Navy began to acquire a critical mass by the first decade of the twentieth century, the security environment in Asia and the Indo-Pacific began to take a dramatic turn. The rise of China, its assertiveness in the maritime territorial disputes with the Asian neighbours, the uncertainties in its relations with Japan and the United States has ended an extended period of great power harmony and regional stability in East Asia. Amidst the unfolding redistribution of power in Asia and the Pacific, there has been a growing regional interest in India's contribution to stability in Asia. This broad idea was at the back of the American mind when the Bush Administration gambled on transforming relations with India. The idea that India could contribute positively to the regional balance of power had nudged the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) into inviting India to become a founding member of the East Asia Summit in 2005. But the developments since then – Japan's rethink of its national security policies and the US pivot to Asia – have increased the interest in Tokyo, Washington and Canberra for greater strategic cooperation and coordination with India. With ASEAN unable to develop a united response to the China challenge, individual countries like Myanmar, Vietnam and Indonesia have eagerly sought to develop deeper strategic ties with India. This new dynamic, of course, is playing out in the maritime domain giving the Indian Navy an important future role in the regional balance of power. The Indian Navy seemed to be in a very unique position: to improve its capabilities and reach in collaboration with other powers and regional actors and use its growing capacity to acquire a powerful influence on the maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific.

But the lingering foreign policy of non-alignment and residual military isolationism tended to prevent Delhi from responding to India's new strategic possibilities under the UPA government. Delhi was hesitant to embrace the United States for the fear of offending China. It was also reluctant to carve out a larger role for itself in the Pacific by citing the risks of being drawn into the conflict between China and its neighbours. For many, the UPA government's ambivalent response to the new possibilities with the United States and in Asia was a reminder that strategic autonomy is deeply wired into the Indian mindset and unlikely to change any time soon. Yet within no time after taking charge the Narendra Modi government was quick to discard the ambivalence towards the United States and embarked on an expansive strategic, especially naval cooperation. Neither the BJP's manifesto during the elections nor the articulation of the Modi government's world view during the first year of its tenure have given any salience to terms like 'strategic autonomy' and 'non-alignment' that figured prominently during the Congress years. Whether this shift is enduring or not, Modi has injected a new way of thinking about India and its role in the world. Quite clearly Delhi has ceased to be a political monolith when imagining the possibilities for strategic partnership with the United States in securing a stable balance of power in Asia.

Instead of non-alignment, Modi's emphasis has been on reinventing India as a 'leading power'. Although the idea has not been fleshed out in detail, its essence is to see India as a power in its own right that is ready to engage all other powers on a pragmatic basis. It also involves taking leadership on regional and global issues. Modi has also been unafraid of innovating and experimenting with foreign policy and discarding the long-standing reluctance in Delhi to take risks in pursuit of strategic rewards. Modi ended the drift in India's relations with the United States by resolving the dispute over nuclear liability and renewing the ten year defence framework agreement. During the visit of Barack Obama to India in January 2015, Modi outlined a joint vision with the US President for the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific region that called for comprehensive economic, political and security cooperation between the two nations. It also emphasised the importance of working with other regional partners to promote peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific littoral.<sup>8</sup> This is the first time ever that Delhi and Washington have given a specific regional frame for their strategic partnership.

The importance of India agreeing to work with the United States in its extended neighbourhood after decades of viewing its presence in the region has not gone unnoticed. India's former national security adviser M.K. Narayanan noted that there were 'implicit references in the Joint Strategic Vision Document to China's growing economic and military strength and assertiveness'. He added that this has lent weight to the perception that 'India and the US now see each other as a crucial partner in offsetting China's increasingly assertive role in Asia – marking a significant departure from India's past unwillingness to forge a common front against China'.<sup>9</sup> Narayanan's successor as national security adviser, Shivshankar Menon, had a more nuanced view. He suggested defining a regional framework for India-US strategic cooperation was an important step forward. At the same time, he added that this need not be interpreted as a move to counter China.

For me, the strategic congruence with the US is a big step.... Our interests are not identical. We are not allies, we are not clients. We are not claiming that our interests are identical but there is this congruence. But there is congruence with Chinese as well.... So it does not mean necessarily that every time you assert a common interest with the US, it is somehow going to offend the Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

As he warmed up to America, Modi has also made an extra effort to reach out to the Chinese and remove many obstacles in Delhi for an expanded economic and political engagement with China. Beijing on its part has found Modi a potentially attractive partner and is ready to explore possibilities for finding common ground. Modi's self-assured engagement with both the United States and China is at odds with the defensive and

passive interpretation of non-alignment under the Manmohan Singh government. It is also more in tune with the original vision of Panikkar who envisaged India's expansive naval cooperation with the Anglo-American powers while fully respecting China's legitimate interests. Writing just after the Second World War and before independence, Panikkar argued that 'the alliance between a free and independent India and Britain is ... not only of the utmost importance to the two countries but also to the entire Rimland of the Eurasian continent'.<sup>11</sup> He called for a comprehensive defence partnership between Britain and India and the integration of the defence of India with that of the Indian Ocean. He laid out a clear framework for burden sharing between Britain and India – that put India in the lead in the region with Britain assisting in India's defence modernisation and sharing its regional military bases. Replace Britain with the United States in this framework and one gets a general sense of where Delhi and Washington could head in the early twenty-first century. In emphasising a strong relationship with the West, Panikkar was not trying to isolate China. Unlike those in Delhi today who imagine keeping China out of the Indian Ocean, Panikkar recognised the critical interests of China in the region and the need for a cooperative approach with Beijing of which he was certain was going to be a first rate power after the Second World War.<sup>12</sup>

Modi's sure-footed engagement with the United States, China and other powers offers a rare prospect for significantly improving India's naval capabilities in a shorter time frame. The United States, which has supplied significant equipment for the Indian Navy since 2005 – the USS *Trenton* landing platform docks and the P8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft – entered discussions in 2015 on assisting India with aircraft carrier design and development.<sup>13</sup> Japan is in talks with India on the sale and local assembly of the amphibious aircraft US-2. India has also signalled interest in acquiring Japan's *Soryu* class submarine. Put another way, the range and quality of advanced weapons systems that India can acquire from the United States and its allies has significantly increased. The United States, Japan and Australia are also eager to develop better interoperability with the naval forces of India. If Delhi discards the entrenched opposition to interoperability, the effectiveness of its Navy in the Indo-Pacific could dramatically expand.

At the strategic level, the Modi Administration appears to have recognised that collaboration with the United States is the key to reducing the growing strategic gap with China and consolidating India's strategic advantages in the Indian Ocean and gaining a foothold in the Pacific. During the visit to the Indian Ocean island states in March 2015, Modi articulated a comprehensive framework for a more active Indian Ocean policy.<sup>14</sup> This involved deepening security cooperation with maritime neighbours and friends. India has long had close security partnerships with both Seychelles and Mauritius; Modi has elevated it to a higher level. In Seychelles, Modi announced the gift of a second Dornier aircraft for

maritime monitoring of the island's vast exclusive economic zone and signed an agreement for conducting a hydrographic survey of its waters. Modi also launched a coastal surveillance radar project in Seychelles.<sup>15</sup> The radar project is part of Delhi's ambitious project to build a network of radars across the island states in the Indian Ocean to promote maritime domain awareness in the littoral. It calls for the establishment of eight surveillance radars in Mauritius, eight in Seychelles, six in Sri Lanka and ten in Maldives. They are to be connected to 50 odd sites on the Indian coast and, in turn, will be linked to an integrated analysis centre near Delhi.<sup>16</sup> In Mauritius, the commissioning of the MCGS *Barracuda*, an Offshore Patrol Vessel built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders in Kolkata, marked India's commitment to maritime capacity-building to the small island republics. During his visit to the islands Modi announced important agreements to develop infrastructure for connectivity in the Assumption Island (Seychelles) and Aga Lega (Mauritius). These agreements are likely to strengthen the defence capabilities of the two republics and give India a valuable foothold at critical locations in the South Western Indian Ocean.<sup>17</sup>

Modi also discarded the long-standing Indian self-perception as a 'lone ranger' in the Indian Ocean. For decades India made no secret of its reluctance to cooperate with other major powers in the Indian Ocean. Delhi constantly sought to differentiate between its legitimate role as a 'native' power and the intrusive presence of 'extra-regional' powers. Political opposition to the presence of extra-regional powers was central to India's articulation of Indian Ocean policy during the 1970s and 1980s and has lingered on since the 1990s. This opposition that was once focused on the Western powers, whose presence is seen as a residual legacy of the colonial era, has easily been extended to China in the Indian strategic discourse on the Indian Ocean in recent years. Modi, however, broke from this tradition to present a new and more sophisticated approach. While insisting that 'those who live in the region have the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean', Modi recognised that 'there are other nations around the world, with strong interests and stakes in the region'. Modi declared that 'India is deeply engaged with other powers'. 'We do this through dialogue, visits, exercises, capacity building and economic partnership'.<sup>18</sup>

One should be cautious however in assuming that there will be a significant Indian role in the Pacific Ocean. Instead, in all likelihood, India's priority will be to consolidate its position in the Indian Ocean region. As discussed in this volume, the institutional consensus within the Indian Navy views the Indian Ocean as its primary theatre of operation and the Pacific Ocean as a secondary theatre. In part this is because the Navy believes that it neither has the operational mandate or the assets to be effective in the Pacific theatre. Therefore, its impact on the operational environment in the Pacific will be mainly through taking on larger

responsibilities in the Indian Ocean Region leaving the United States – its partner of choice, free to do more in the Pacific. In addition, rather than being an autonomous player it will necessarily have to work with its partners in the South China Sea. All this will require international diplomacy and extensive discussions on priorities, partnerships and burden sharing.

Apart from a dynamic foreign policy the Modi government has also distinguished itself from its predecessor by focusing on issues relating to the internal management of defence. Perceptually, it was significant that Prime Minister Modi's first visit outside Delhi since he assumed office was for the dedication of India's largest aircraft carrier, INS *Vikramaditya*. Onboard the ship the prime minister articulated a vision for the Navy and its role in safeguarding maritime security. More substantially the new government has distinguished itself with the speed with which it moved on clearing long-pending defence acquisition deals. There is also a significant emphasis on galvanising the domestic defence industrial sector under the 'Make in India' campaign.<sup>19</sup> In a bid to encourage private sector participation in the defence industry it has raised the cap on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from 26 per cent to 49 per cent. The Modi government has shown greater decisiveness and a willingness to engage with the military thereby relieving some strain on civil-military relations.

In the end, there is no doubt that India has begun a consequential drift towards a more ambitious naval policy in the Indo-Pacific. It has shed many ideas and principles that were widely considered sacrosanct in India's world view. India appears well positioned to consolidate its natural geographic advantages in the littoral by effectively negotiating the changing dynamic among the other powers. It is no longer hesitant about taking a larger responsibility for securing the Indian Ocean and promoting regional mechanisms for collective security and economic integration. India is confident enough to collaborate with the United States in self-interest and engage China on maritime issues with greater self-assurance. Yet it is important to note that some of the new naval thinking that has begun to emerge in the Modi era is only the first step towards rejuvenating Delhi's Indo-Pacific strategy. The new approaches will face the familiar tests of implementation and internal political contestation where Delhi has had multiple problems in the past.

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