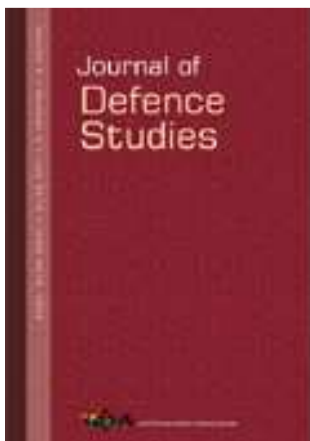


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Indian Ocean Maritime Security Cooperation Needs Coherent Indian Leadership

*Lee Corder**

Maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a central issue for regional and extra-regional actors. Traditional and non-traditional security challenges largely converge at sea as they impact economic, environmental, energy, human, food and national security. As the major regional power and an emerging Asian great power, India's willingness and capacity to provide strategic leadership is critical to engendering a cooperative spirit of shared destiny. India's growing naval capabilities indicate a strong commitment to maritime security. However, its strategic policy ambiguity and lack of transparency undermines trust and confidence. Allegations of civil-military dissonance and the lack of political will for reform raises questions about strategic competence. India's willingness and capacity for cooperative regional security leadership presents regional risks. The new Indian government is presented with significant challenges to reform domestic politico-bureaucratic-military arrangements in order to enhance external and internal consistency and credibility, and improve openness and coherency.

It is...a pre-requisite of India's...freedom that she should share in the responsibility of guarding in the Indian Ocean...as her interest in this area is predominant...¹

The emergence of a dynamic, multipolar world following the Cold War, combined with the effects of globalization, has seen the strategic

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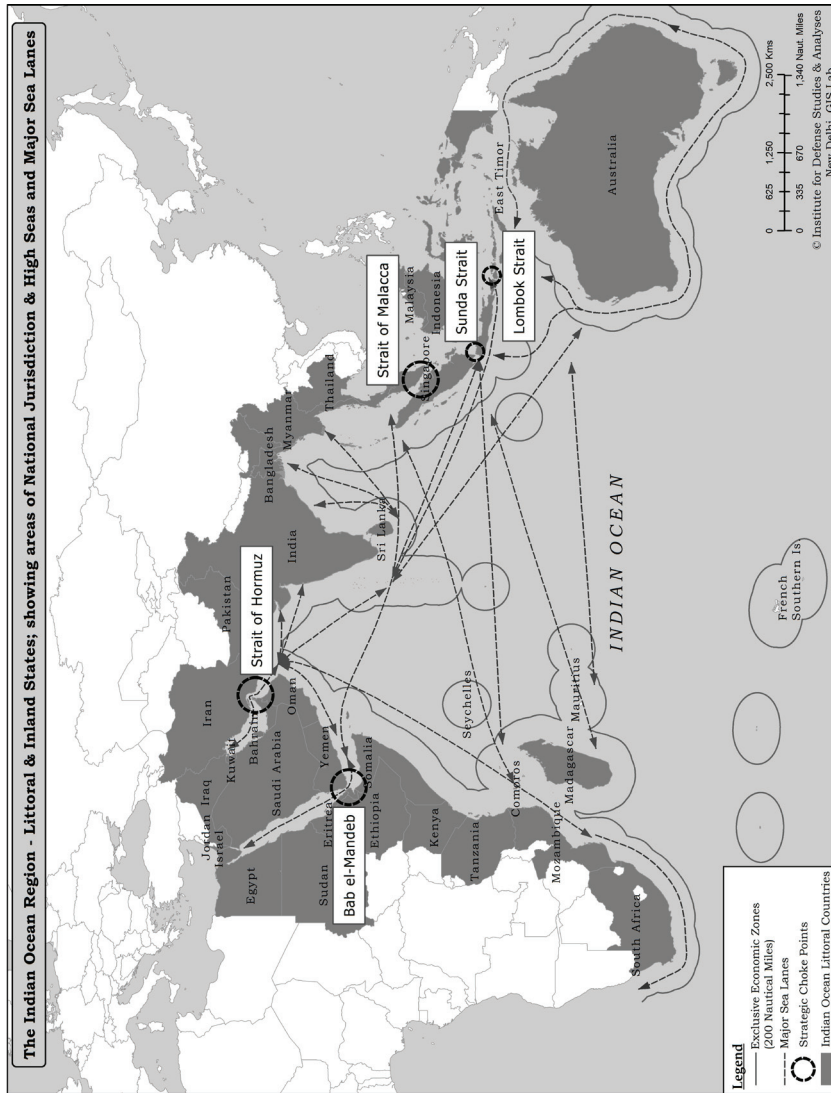


Figure 1 Indian Ocean Region—Maritime Context

importance of the IOR rise. Notions of the Indian Ocean (IO) as a peaceful, largely unclaimed thoroughfare and 'a well-integrated interregional arena of economic and cultural interaction and exchange'² where Arab and Asian traders plied their wares, and subsequently a pre-Second World War 'British Lake',³ have faded into history. The IO 'has rapidly emerged as the geographic nexus of vital economic and security issues that have global consequences';⁴ integral to global energy politics, emerging Asian geopolitical cooperation and competition, and disparate economic, racial, ethnic and religious issues; where the sea is the main regional coalescing factor.⁵ In this developing strategic milieu, India is the major regional power and an emerging Asian great power; there are expectations, reasonable or not, that India will assume a significant leadership role. Providing regional maritime security, defined in a holistic sense, will require effective and enduring partnerships between those with interests in the IOR.⁶ This article analyses India's willingness and capacity to provide coherent regional maritime security cooperation leadership in the evolving IOR context.

IOR MARITIME SECURITY CONTEXT

The IOR is perceived to be a disaggregated oceanic and littoral region; more a collection of sub-regions than a single region.⁷ Any notion of regional coherency primarily arises at sea where the interests of regional and extra-regional nation-states and other actors largely converge (see Figure 1).⁸ The maritime security aspects of traditional and non-traditional security challenges, as they impact economic, environmental, energy, human, food and national security, have become paramount considerations. Changing Indo-Pacific balances of power, as an increasingly powerful China looks South and West and India and Indonesia emerge as regional powers, is a major factor in realists' notions of IOR security challenges and dynamics.⁹ Regional states are increasingly focused upon maritime security; concomitantly, investment in maritime security capabilities is rapidly rising.¹⁰ The IO sea lines of communication (SLOCs) have become the world's most important with the highest global tonnage of goods transported, including more than two-thirds of the world's crude oil, more than half the container trade and one-third of bulk cargoes; the unfettered flow of maritime trade is a shared economic necessity.¹¹ However, it is the changing and deteriorating environmental and oceanic resource conditions, exacerbated by forecast impacts of climate change, that are likely to present the greatest IOR maritime security-related

challenges in the medium to longer term. Climate change, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and natural disasters will have profound implications; the effects will transcend borders and will be felt in densely populated coastal areas, and the maritime domain.¹²

The need for strong regional leadership to develop productive cooperative partnerships between regional and extra-regional states, and other actors, is becoming increasingly apparent. There are shared risks and common vulnerabilities where Western and non-Western societies share the same space, time and similar challenges.¹³ Security concerns generate the need for cooperative approaches for dealing with non-traditional security risks that are beyond the capability and mandate of any single nation-state or collective entity to address.¹⁴ Apart from United Nations (UN) entities, the only extant region-wide forums for dialogue and promoting cooperation are the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which does not include security in its charter,¹⁵ and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), essentially an operational-level gathering of IOR maritime security force leaders.¹⁶ There are several sub-regional institutions in place that mostly do not address security matters and offer varying levels of effectiveness.¹⁷

DRIVERS AND OBSTACLES FOR Enhanced IOR SECURITY COOPERATION

Understanding the drivers and obstacles for security cooperation in the IOR is important as it informs what is necessary, and what is possible. The drivers for enhancing maritime security cooperation in the IOR are about protecting shared interests; reducing common vulnerabilities; dealing with largely non-state-centric threats, including the amorphous 'other' presented by climate change; and the chronic lack of regional capacity to address them.¹⁸ The drivers can be summarized as follows:

1. the majority of regional and extra-regional actors with interests in the IOR share objectives for economic and societal development, environmental well-being, territorial integrity—they fundamentally seek comprehensive security;¹⁹
2. risks are to varying degrees shared, and common vulnerabilities exist, they transcend national borders, on land and significantly at sea; and
3. no single state or other entity has the capability or the mandate to treat the emerging risks, therefore cooperation becomes a compelling necessity.

The obstacles to progressing enhanced maritime security cooperation are many and varied. The international system is essentially anarchic, with nation-states primarily acting in accordance with perceptions of self-interest; this factor makes progressing cooperation challenging.²⁰ Obstacles are likely to include combinations of the following:

1. differing worldviews, political perspectives and ideologies, diverse priorities and aspirations;
2. varying appreciations of the nature, extent and consequences of risks;
3. strategic and economic inter-state competition, sometimes combined with national hubris;
4. (in some cases) deep-seated, historically based mistrust inhibiting openness and cooperation, often affected by colonialist experiences;
5. concerns about impacts on national sovereignty of cooperative or collective approaches;
6. strategic and political cultures attuned to regional sensitivities that seek to inhibit perceptions of hegemonic behaviour, not wishing to be seen as being overly assertive;
7. lack of intellectual capacity and structural shortcomings, including national institutions and polity able to comprehend and develop coherent and consistent strategies to deal with the breadth of issues;
8. lack of resources—materiel, financial, technical and personnel—and inability to adapt and to be innovative;
9. failed state circumstances;
10. lack of effective regional architectures for security dialogue and cooperation; and
11. lack of political will.²¹

Drawing upon the drivers and addressing the obstacles in order to develop cooperative maritime security requires strong regional security leadership and management capabilities in a largely incoherent and complex international context. Regional security leaders

actively seek to move other regional members in specific security policy directions. They initiate means through which to address common security issues and concerns framing them as shared ones and developing mechanisms for their management...effectively exert command and cooperative power over regional members in order

to generate their consensus, cooperation, or acceptance with respect to...shared interests and the mechanisms for their attainment.²²

Building relationships, eliciting cooperation towards shared objectives, developing trust and confidence and engendering partnerships requires persistence and mature diplomacy supported by political will, vision and drive, combined with the application of both hard and soft power.²³ In the final equation, the reasons to act and cooperate need to outweigh the grounds for inaction. An essential question is: who will lead? Historically, the IOR has lacked a dominant regional power prepared to take a leadership role, and to be accepted as such.²⁴ Leadership has often been provided, indeed imposed, by external forces.²⁵ With the changing regional power and risk circumstances, the need for leadership from within the IOR that can engage internal and external actors is becoming ever more important. Will India provide coherent, cooperative regional maritime security leadership?

INDIA AS A REGIONAL SECURITY LEADER

India has been described as a 'reluctant superpower'²⁶ that is uncomfortable with the 'Great Power' label²⁷ and lacks 'clarity in strategic thinking'.²⁸ There are allegations of 'strong vested interest among the Indian political class to discourage development of strategic thinking' due to a 'total preoccupation with domestic politics'.²⁹ Whether or not these assertions stand today is a matter of contention and requires careful, analytical consideration.³⁰ Western strategic analysts typically approach attempts to comprehend India's strategic perspectives and culture with considerable trepidation and frustration.³¹ Formal strategic policy statements are difficult to find; this leads to potentially inaccurate assumptions that either India does not possess coherent strategic policies and is therefore disorganized and weak in its thinking, or is particularly devious and secretive.³² The lack of coherent and overt Indian strategic declarations has been lamented by the 'doyen of Indian strategic thought',³³ the late K. Subrahmanyam,³⁴ and echoed by others.³⁵ In an incisive analysis published in 2005, an undoubtedly frustrated Subrahmanyam in the twilight of his illustrious career assessed that:³⁶

In India, in spite of our functioning democracy for five decades, there is no system of government coming out with white papers and documents, sharing its assessments, spelling out goals and objectives and our policies to achieve them. In the absence of clearly formulated

policies, other nations are likely to interpret our intentions as worst-case scenarios...The annual reports of the ministries are not only pedestrian, but just recount the developments of the previous year and give no clues to future policy. Our ministers' speeches in Parliament rarely contain precisely formulated policy inputs... In the absence of well-formulated government policy and relevant documentation, there are wide variations in the perceptions and understanding among our politicians, bureaucrats, media persons and academia.³⁷

On the surface at least, little appears to have changed. There exists the 'great irony' of an India that 'started with a comprehensive grand strategy' and has emerged as a pluralist, secular and industrializing democracy that is today asserted to be beset with endemic political corruption exercised by an alleged inept and pernicious political elite that gains power by 'partisan patronage politics' and is sustained by an equally corrupt bureaucracy that resists change in order to maintain power.³⁸ The political and bureaucratic leadership has remained focused upon domestic socio-economic development; this is understandable given the huge internal challenges faced by India. Allegations of a 'lack of strategic vision and higher direction' persist along with counter assertions that an Indian strategic culture is evident with 'two ideational influences' that impose a 'complex structure...on Indian strategic preferences'.³⁹ This involves 'realist aspirations for Great Power status based on military power projection but tempered by Nehruvian ethos of dialogue and international cooperation'.⁴⁰

When the military adviser in the Government of India (GoI) National Security Council Secretariat was asked, in 2014, about the lack of security policy documents, he responded that India was happy with ambiguity as it did not want to be tied down.⁴¹ As India moves towards great power status, desired or not, it will increasingly come under close scrutiny as regional and extra-regional actors and the domestic audience in the world's largest democracy endeavour to understand India's strategic aspirations and intentions.⁴² There will be increasing pressure to develop 'appropriate institutions' and to articulate 'an appropriate national vision'.⁴³ India's strategic credentials and likely effectiveness as a regional security cooperation leader will hinge, in considerable part, upon how others perceive India's strategic abilities and motives. Uncertainties fuelled by lack of clarity about what India stands for and where it is trying to head will undermine its leadership credibility and aspirations.

India's National Security Policies

Despite the lack of declaratory Indian national security policies neatly collated and presented in comprehensive GoI policy papers, some sense can be gleaned by examining the retrospective announcements contained in Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Ministry of Defence (MoD) annual reports, other official documents, speeches by GoI political leaders and senior officials and importantly, as demonstrated by India's actions.⁴⁴ The essence of India's foreign policy is stated as ensuring 'India's security, promoting its socio-economic development, maintaining the country's strategic autonomy and working towards a more just global order'.⁴⁵ There are expressions of aspiring for good relations with its neighbours, sharing mutually beneficial trade and investment, and seeking 'a peaceful and secure periphery...cordial and balanced relations with major powers and mutually beneficial partnerships with developing countries'.⁴⁶ The 'strong multilateral dimension' of India's foreign policy is also emphasized.

India's annual defence report throws little light on national defence policy and strategy. It contains trite strategic policy pronouncements: 'India continues to pursue a robust defence strategy that involves both, the strengthening of its own capabilities as well as engagement in regional and global efforts to promote peace and stability'; 'A secure, peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood is central to India's economic prosperity and security'; and 'The Indian Ocean...is critical to India's maritime interests and concerns'.⁴⁷

Other publicly available documents are similarly uninformative. For example, on 2 April 2012, the Indian MoD announced that the Defence Acquisition Council had approved a Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) 2012–27 and the Indian Defence Minister announced that a version of this document would be made publicly available.⁴⁸ This plan presumably encompasses the Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MCPP) developed by the Indian Navy (IN) and similar plans from the other Services. While the LTIPP and MCPP were not publicly released, an associated Technological Perspective Capability Roadmap (TPCR) was made available in April 2013, to assist industry to position itself to support Indian MoD capability and technological developments.⁴⁹ The TPCR provides general information of a technical nature and is silent on Indian defence policy and strategy. This circumstance, where the responsible minister's announced intent to provide advice to the domestic and international community about India's defence-related capital procurement requirements and plans was subsequently watered down,

presumably by the powerful defence civilian bureaucracy, is typical of many such instances that provide insights into the politico-bureaucratic–military relationship in India. It fuels perceptions of incoherence within the higher defence organization and a lack of willingness to be transparent about India’s national security plans and priorities.

As a major regional and rising global power armed with nuclear weapons, India understandably ‘seeks reform of international institutions to reflect the global reality of the present day world and to ensure an appropriate role for India’.⁵⁰ Related to this aspiration, there is no publicly available official GoI definition that explains ‘strategic autonomy’, a defining philosophy that underpins India’s strategic posture.⁵¹ Anecdotally, strategic autonomy is taken to be a contemporary extension of India’s earlier non-alignment policy during the Cold War, whereby India wished to avoid formal and binding security alliances so as to maintain strategic flexibility.⁵² How strategic autonomy sits in the context of India’s engagement in regional cooperative maritime security is unclear. India’s strategic autonomy aspirations have not prevented it from entering into a widening web of bilateral cooperative defence agreements with a disparate array of countries.⁵³ India’s propensity for strategic ambiguity and abiding pragmatism is apparent.⁵⁴

India’s Approach to Regionalism

India’s approach to regionalism in the past has been described as minimalist.⁵⁵ Evidence for this can be seen in the genesis of IORA, launched in 1997.⁵⁶ India wanted the membership to be limited and exclusive (that is, not to include Pakistan), with a narrow charter focussed upon economic, business and cultural interaction (that is, not to include security dialogue), whereas Australia and others preferred a more inclusive IOR membership and broader charter. The outcome was a compromise, with India essentially prevailing.⁵⁷ Ironically, primarily Indian leaders have frequently criticized IORA as being ineffective.⁵⁸ Recently, under India’s leadership in collaboration with an Australian and Indonesian ‘troika’, IORA is being revitalized. Maritime safety and security has been identified as the highest priority area for consideration.⁵⁹ This may portend a new Indian approach to IOR-wide maritime security regionalism.

India is engaged in sub-regional cooperative entities, for example, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which does not include security dialogue in its charter.⁶⁰ Notably also at the sub-regional level, India is developing Maritime Security Cooperation

arrangements with Maldives and Sri Lanka, to which Mauritius and Seychelles have been recently added,⁶¹ as part of India's self-appointed role as a 'net security provider' to small island states in the region.⁶²

India's Paradox: Civil–Military Relations

Central to an assessment of India's capacity to provide strategic leadership is the nature and functioning of the national politico-military establishment. The concept of civilian control of the military is fundamental to politico-military relationships in parliamentary democracies, and India is no exception. In most states that inherited the British model, civilian control is exercised by politicians, the elected representatives of the people.⁶³ In India, civil control is applied by civilian bureaucrats, with the military leadership largely isolated from the politico-strategic national security leadership.⁶⁴ The 'Integrated Headquarters' of Defence in New Delhi exists in name only, with each of the Service staffs largely working separately from the other, and separate from the Defence civilian bureaucracy. An extraordinary circumstance obtains whereby uniformed officers are occasionally appointed to work for civil servants, always in a subordinate capacity, but civil servants are never subordinated to uniform officers.⁶⁵ The need for reform of the Indian higher defence organizational arrangements has been variously suggested for more than 60 years; however, little significant change has occurred.⁶⁶

Notably, India's armed forces rate only a brief mention in the extensive 471-page *The Constitution of India* and there is no national defence act or similar document in place.⁶⁷ The bases for the civilian Defence Secretary exercising executive authority to the GoI for India's defence is defined in GoI 'Business Rules', a bureaucratic document that describes the structure of national departmental arrangements.⁶⁸ The secretary has responsibility for the 'Defence of India and every part thereof including preparation for defence and all acts as may be conducive in times of war to its prosecution and after its termination to effective demobilisation'.⁶⁹ This arrangement, where army, navy and air force headquarters sit outside and subordinate to the central Defence civilian bureaucracy, has been described as imposing a situation where 'a layer of civilian bureaucracy has interposed itself between the political leadership and an isolated military establishment'.⁷⁰ According to retired Admiral Arun Prakash, this has produced a 'three-cornered relationship' that has 'evolved into a triangle of discord, tension and indifference; whose most damaging impact has been a stasis in national security affairs'.⁷¹

There is ongoing disquiet among (at least former) senior Indian military leaders about the function and structure of the higher national security and defence arrangements.⁷² The need for reform has frequently been mooted, for example, the 1999 *Kargil Review Committee Report* observed that:

The Findings bring out many grave deficiencies in India's security management system...There has been very little change over the past 52 years despite the 1962 debacle, the 1965 stalemate and the 1971 victory, the growing nuclear threat, end of the cold war... The political, bureaucratic, military and intelligence establishments appear to have developed a vested interest in the status quo...the Kargil experience, the continuing proxy war and the prevailing nuclearised security environment justify a thorough review of the national security system in its entirety...India is perhaps the only major democracy where the Armed Forces Headquarters are outside the apex governmental structures...Most opposition to change comes from inadequate knowledge of the national security decision-making process elsewhere in the world and a reluctance to change the status quo and move away from considerations of parochial interest...Structural reforms could bring about a much closer and more constructive interaction between the Civil Government and the Services...There is both comfort and danger in clinging to any long established status quo. There will be many who counsel the most (read prolonged) deliberation. Procrastination has cost nations dear.⁷³

In 2000, consequent to the Kargil Review, a Group of Ministers was tasked with undertaking a review of Indian national security. However, its 2001 report that contained 'some critical recommendations relating to reforms in higher defence management' produced little action.⁷⁴ A 2011 Task Force on National Security Reform, whose report was submitted to the Prime Minister in May 2012, has also not generated action. Admiral Arun Prakash's informed reflections are telling:

As the only individual to have been a member of both the 2000 and 2011 Task Forces, it was my personal observation that the security conundrums and lacunae confronting both bodies remained, substantially, the same; nor had the mindsets and attitudes of bureaucrats as well as politicians undergone any change over the past decade.⁷⁵

In a 22 November 2013 speech, the then Prime Minister of India,

Dr Manmohan Singh, six months before a national general election in which he had announced he would not be standing, appeared to partly acknowledge these concerns but did not mention the civil service interposition. He offered platitudes and directed no substantial way forward:

We require urgent and tangible progress in establishing the right structures for higher defence management and the appropriate civil–military balance in decision making that our complex security environment demands. Again, I encourage you to give this the highest professional consideration, harmonize existing differences among the individual services and evolve a blue-print for the future. I can assure you of the most careful consideration of your recommendations by the political leadership...There have been concerns that have been raised in recent times about the nature of civil–military relations in our country. Let me assert, clearly and unequivocally, that the political leadership of India has the highest faith in its military and its institutional rectitude within the democratic framework. The apolitical nature of our military and its proven professionalism are the envy of the world and have also nurtured the Indian democratic experience. Our democracy and institutions have proven their ability to deal with any issues or doubts that may arise.⁷⁶

According to Shashi Tharoor, who is also highly critical of the civil service-dominated defence bureaucratic arrangements that have the armed forces removed from meaningful decision making, similar politico-bureaucratic inability to reform has beset the Indian external affairs community.⁷⁷ He cites the 1966 Pillai Report on the MEA that ‘died of inattention...everything that Pillai said in 1966 remains oddly relevant in 2011.’⁷⁸ The ongoing reform stasis affecting vital components of India’s national security establishment, defence and external affairs, casts doubts upon India’s ability to provide dynamic and enlightened politico-strategic cooperative leadership in a complex international context.

The paradox evident in the case of India’s higher defence arrangements is staggering. India has the fourth largest defence force in the world, which includes the ‘largest standing volunteer Army in the world’ with over 1.2 million men and women in uniform.⁷⁹ India is beleaguered by chronic land border security concerns, has fought several wars since Partition in 1947 and has militarily intervened regionally on several occasions.⁸⁰ India has also been a stalwart supporter of international collective security as the largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, participating

in 43 peacekeeping operations.⁸¹ Contemporary India is increasingly reliant upon a stable security environment, particularly in the maritime domain, to ensure that domestic economic growth can be sustained. The need for enhanced maritime security capabilities is recognized, as evinced by India's ambitious naval 'capability accretion' that, in 2012, included '46 ships under construction, Acceptance of Necessity for 49 more ships and submarines has been obtained.'⁸² Maintaining sizeable military capabilities and the capacity to deploy significant military force is integral to modern India's identity.

The lack of engagement and alignment between India's Defence civil bureaucracy and senior military leadership casts serious doubts upon the coherency of India's military and national security establishment and the quality of advice provided to India's political leadership. Underlying this is a chronic lack of political will and administrative capacity to impose real reform. One of the few reforms was the appointment of a National Security Advisor (NSA), implemented in 1998, that, in effect, imposed another senior and powerful civil servant (in addition to departmental secretaries) between the GoI and the military. In the international context, cooperative partners remain uncertain about the veracity, integrity and consistency of Indian policy and operational engagement being projected by various levels of government, the bureaucracy and the military that are apparently disconnected and uncoordinated.

The Indian political elite appear to have largely relegated their responsibilities for national security policy to generalist civil servants whose main interest is preserving the status quo by holding onto power. The picture that emerges is one of weak political leadership and lack of political will, with power centralized among career bureaucrats that are impervious to change. Political change is afoot: Narendra Modi assumed the Prime Ministership of India on 26 May 2014 with a significant parliamentary majority amid an atmosphere of national optimism. Whether or not the Modi government proves to have the political will and tenacity to take on the powerful Indian civil service and impose real reforms to India's national security and higher defence arrangements remains to be seen. Previous generations of Indian politicians have promised reform but have delivered little real change; the Indian civil service mandarins have always managed to hold on to their power. However, change is necessary if India is to be positioned to present consistent, transparent, coherent and credible regional cooperative security leadership.

The Indian Navy—Doctrine and Strategy

The IN is clearly an important Indian national maritime security institution. From a modest beginning, the IN has developed into a modern, capable and balanced maritime force that is the strongest IO regional navy. The contemporary IN displays a professional and mature approach to maritime strategy and the conduct of naval operations. Several IN official publications have emerged, including an inaugural maritime doctrine, launched in 2004 (updated in 2009), a vision statement and a maritime strategy document.⁸³ These documents exhibit clarity of thought and purpose that explains to the wider international, national and internal naval audience, the philosophy and rationale for the IN's contribution to India's security.⁸⁴ The IN documents set foundation benchmarks for potential emulation by the Indian Defence organization should there be decisions to formally promulgate defence policy, white papers, joint doctrine and the like, in the future.

Indian Navy in Multinational Contexts

The IN has been proactive in promoting cooperation between IOR naval and other maritime security forces. The IONS, for example, was an IN initiative. Launched in 2008, it involves 35 IOR littoral maritime forces and is evolving to make an important contribution to regional maritime security cooperation and capacity building. Some influential sections of the GoI were reported to be opposed initially to the idea, however, the MoD was able to prevail.⁸⁵ The IN regularly participates in bilateral and multilateral exercises and exchanges with other navies, including, for example, the MILAN series of exercises, hosted by India.⁸⁶ The IN is generally perceived to be a professional and capable navy that seeks to provide operational leadership in the IOR and beyond.

In the context of cooperation to address non-traditional maritime security threats, an example is the IN contribution to the international anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden from 23 October 2008.⁸⁷ India chose not to assign IN units to the multinational combined naval task forces or operations, instead operating independently, as did naval forces from some other countries, including China and Russia. On 19 November 2008, less than a month after the IN commenced anti-piracy operations, INS Tabar sank a suspected pirate mothership, which subsequently proved to be a Thai trawler being hijacked by pirates. According to media reports, 15 Thai fishermen being held hostage died.⁸⁸ The IN Chief strongly defended his navy's actions.⁸⁹ The decision not to join the multinational

anti-piracy force (reportedly) meant that IN units were not in receipt of information from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) that had provided advice about the Thai vessel being under attack from pirates that could have resulted in the incident being handled differently.⁹⁰

Questions that arise include: was the warship acting in self defence, as alleged by the IN, and if so, was the level of lethal response justified? Why was it decided not to assign IN warships to the multinational combined task force and therefore not be included in coordination, communication and sharing of operational experience? Importantly, what rules of engagement, and consequent rules for opening fire, had the GoI directed?⁹¹ The findings of any formal Indian investigations of the incident have not been made public; another indication of the lack of Indian transparency in an international context. While it is inappropriate to judge this incident upon available media reports, the circumstances are illustrative of why a close alignment between political and naval leaders regarding operational intent and the use of force is vital in non-traditional maritime security operations; particularly in complex multilateral cooperative operations. Perceptions of India as a regional maritime security cooperative leader are affected by India's performance and willingness to engage as a cooperative partner in such operations.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR INDIA'S LEADERSHIP IN IOR MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION?

India's growing maritime hard power, including the aspiration to have a '160+ ship Navy by 2022', supports regional major power leadership credentials, although capabilities are some way short of ambitions to 'dominate the Indian Ocean region' advocated by some Indian analysts.⁹² This oft-stated aspiration begs the question: does India really aspire to be the quasi-Indian Ocean maritime security policeman? Would it not be advisable that India devote significant political, diplomatic and military energy to engaging the IOR middle powers and external powers with interests in the Indian Ocean that have maritime security capabilities in effective regional cooperative partnerships? Particularly evident in the IOR maritime security context are shared risks and common vulnerabilities for both regional and extra-regional states, combined with the lack of regional maritime security capacities that underline the need for cooperative, multilateral approaches.

India's capacity and willingness to encourage and manage effective cooperative partnerships with and between regional middle powers, like

Australia, Indonesia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan that have capabilities to contribute, is important. Responsibilities for dealing with the emerging maritime security challenges need to be appropriately shared. Building habits of cooperation at the political and operational levels will require energy, persistence and a carefully coordinated approach. The evolving IORA agenda and the nascent IONS along with the web of sub-regional, multilateral and bilateral arrangements appear to be heading in a positive direction; however, there remains much to do before IOR maritime security cooperation is at an effective level. One significant shortcoming is the lack of a viable Track 2 cooperative security dialogue entity in the IOR, along the lines of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP).⁹³ An appropriately resourced Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG) could potentially help to fill this gap.⁹⁴

The quality and alignment of the Indian politico-bureaucratic–military establishment are highly relevant to India’s capacity to provide credible and coherent leadership intended to effectively coordinate multinational, cooperative maritime security efforts in complex international contexts. The demonstrable lack of coherence and ongoing allegations of dissonance between India’s politico-bureaucratic and military leaderships raises questions about India’s strategic competence.⁹⁵ Weak political leadership, combined with mounting frustration among a capable and demonstrably apolitical, non-partisan military establishment removed from national security leadership, ironically appears to have created a climate where public commentary critical of the ongoing situation, primarily by former senior military officers, is the norm, thereby presenting India’s strategic unity in a less than favourable light.

The politico-civil–military situation in India will continue to attract (probably unwelcome) international attention from regional countries that are looking to India for leadership. Uncertainty about the major regional power’s strategic intent and capacity to provide coherent leadership presents a strategic risk to regional maritime security cooperation, which other regional actors must factor into their own security preparations and arrangements. If India cannot exhibit national strategic coherence domestically, what is the likelihood of it providing consistent and credible leadership internationally? To be effective, all arms of government need to be aligned, mutually supportive, ‘in step’: political, diplomatic and defence, including the armed forces. It remains to be seen whether or not the new Modi-led GoI will have the political will and strategic wisdom to implement reforms to India’s national security and higher defence

arrangements that successive enquiries and investigations have advocated. The IOR needs a coherent and strong India to provide regional maritime security leadership during a period of rising uncertainty.

CONCLUSIONS

Providing a definitive assessment of India's willingness and capacity to provide regional maritime security cooperative leadership in the evolving IOR context is illusive. India remains focused internally on socio-economic development and domestic security issues, combined with major land border security problems with its neighbours. The need to ensure a secure maritime domain is also understood by India, as demonstrated by significant investments in maritime security capabilities in recent times. The Indian military, including the navy, have evolved into capable, professional and well-led forces with considerable experience in multinational (particularly UN) operations.

Strategic policy ambiguity and lack of transparency mean that external observers are unclear about India's strategic direction, priorities and competence. The need to build trust and confidence is undermined. The ongoing politico-civil–military divide with the lack of willingness to impose serious reform, to bring the Indian senior military leadership into the national decision-making framework as part of a cohesive national security entity, raises concerns about political will and strategic acumen. Perceptions of a lack of alignment between the Indian political, bureaucratic and military establishments persist; this generates uncertainty that equates to risk in the regional maritime security context.

The IOR needs regional leadership, particularly in the maritime domain, as littoral states and other actors, along with extra-regional actors, need to cooperate in the face of considerable and growing risks to maritime security in the medium term. Others in the region will increasingly look to India, as the major regional power, to provide strong, proactive and coherent leadership engendering a spirit of cooperation and shared destiny. Based upon performance over the past 60 years, indications are that India's IOR-wide leadership prospects will remain uncertain and this will be factored into regional security thinking; other regional actors will need to continue to develop hedging strategies. There are compelling drivers for enhancing maritime security cooperation in the IOR. India's willingness and capacity to provide cooperative regional security leadership presents a key risk. A major challenge and opportunity is presented for the new Indian government to provide proactive

leadership that will require reform of domestic politico-bureaucratic–military arrangements to enhance consistency and credibility, combined with improved transparency and coherency.

NOTES

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of sustainable security in all fields (personal, political, economic, social, cultural, military, environmental) in both the domestic and external spheres, essentially through cooperative means. The CSCAP concept of comprehensive security included seven principles: comprehensiveness, mutual interdependence, cooperative peace and shared security, self-reliance, inclusiveness, peaceful engagement and good citizenship (Ibid., pp. 2–5). The CSCAP recognized that the all-inclusive concept of comprehensive security must inevitably have limits and ‘suggested that a problem may be regarded as a comprehensive security problem when it is perceived as threatening, or as having the clear potential to threaten, the security of the vital interests or core values of the person, the community or the state.’

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