

India's National Security and Global South

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Abstract: It becomes increasingly evident that states must collaborate in security matters in the era of globalisation and interdependence, as no nation can single-handedly address threats. This necessitates global security to be a collective effort. As the 21st century is often called the century of the seas, maritime issues take centre stage. Hence, this article delves into India's Maritime Security and its connections to the Global South. It underscores India's initiatives for collective security in the maritime domain to instil a sense of reassurance and confidence in the audience about India's proactive role in global security. Maritime issues, as this paper will demonstrate, have a significant role in India's economic and strategic well-being.

Keywords: Global South, Maritime Domain, UN, South-South cooperation, Indo-Pacific.

The term Global South, first introduced by Carl Oglesby in 1969, refers to a group of economically and politically less developed countries than those in the Northern Hemisphere. This concept gained traction in the 1970s and became more regular after the 1980 International Commission report steered by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. The report differentiated between countries with higher GDP per capita, mainly in the Northern Hemisphere, and poorer ones, most of whom fell South of what became known as the Brandt line. This line is an imaginary boundary across the Atlantic Ocean, through the Mediterranean Sea, and over the vast expanses of Central Asia to the Pacific Ocean. The Global South is often synonymous with the Group of 77, a collection of postcolonial and developing countries that united in 1964 to protect their collective economic interests and to enhance their negotiating capacity at the UN. Today, the members of the G77, now 134 strong countries, regularly refer to themselves as the Global South and the UN has launched multiple initiatives to respond to their needs and aspirations, including a UN Office for South-South Cooperation. According to the United Nations Conference

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on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Global South broadly comprises Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia (excluding Israel, Japan, and South Korea), and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the importance of the Global South for India in Nov 2023 at the G20 meet. He stated, "On behalf of 140 crore Indians, I heartily welcome you all to the inaugural session of the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit. Voice of Global South is the most unique platform of the changing world of the 21st century. Geographically, the Global South has always existed. However, it is getting a voice like this for the first time. This has been possible due to our joint efforts. We are more than 100 different countries but have similar interests and priorities. In December last year, when Bharat assumed the presidency of the G-20, we considered it our responsibility to amplify the voices of the countries of the Global South in this forum.

Our priority was to make the G-20 inclusive and human-centric globally." From India's perspective, the Global South represents a collective of nations with shared economic and political interests, often characterised by their postcolonial and developing status.

India and Maritime Domain

The importance of the maritime domain for India is not just a matter of geography, but a crucial aspect of its economic and strategic well-being. India, being both a continental and maritime nation, has over 3 million square km of territory, with a land frontier of 15,000 km. On the other hand, India's coastline is over 7500 km, with nine Coastal States, four Union territories, and close to 1200 Islands, with an Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.2 million square km with another 0.5 million sq. km to be added to the continental shelf. India has also been allotted by the International Seabed Authority (ISA) an area of 1.5 lakh sq. km in the Indian Ocean for exploitation of seabed resources, of which, after preliminary surveys, we have retained 75,000 sq. km for exploitation. India also has established interests in Antarctica. India's trade through sea amounts to 90 % by volume and 70% by value. As the Indian economy and industry grow, Indian shipping, ports and supporting industries will play a pivotal role in her future economic growth. Maritime issues, as this paper will demonstrate, have a significant role in India's economic and strategic well-being.

Indo-Pacific and its Strategic Importance

The dawn of this century witnessed significant strategic shifts in global politics, the most notable being the shift from the Pacific-Atlantic to the Pacific-Indian Ocean. The emergence of a multipolar world at the end of the Cold War and the expanding globalisation of trade and commerce led to the

growth of Asian economies, most of which are in the so-called Global South. This growth necessitated the movement of energy and mineral resources from the Arabian Gulf and Africa and the transportation of finished products from these nations to other parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe, resulting in increased shipping between the Indian and Pacific oceans. This strategic shift led to the conception of the Asia–Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific construct, which emerged later, linked both oceans into one strategic area. The strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region, a key focus of this paper, has realigned relationships and strategic engagements between nations in the region and extra-regional nations with economic or strategic interests in the region. It has also enhanced the focus on the maritime domain, as nations seek an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific to ensure good order at sea and freedom of navigation for all.

Indo-Pacific is a multi-cultural and multipolar region accounting for nearly 60% of the world's GDP and 65 % of the population. It is also a significant repository of marine resources, both living and non-living, and dwindling resources on land are compelling a relook at the oceans with their seemingly considerable untapped resources. Maritime trade and commerce transiting through the region, including energy flows, is equally significant. It has the Persian Gulf, with 60% of world oil and 26% of natural gas reserves in this region; major oil arteries of the world flow through its waters. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that roughly 80 per cent of global trade by volume and 70 per cent by value is transported by sea. Of that volume, 60 per cent of maritime trade passes the Indo-Pacific, with the South China Sea carrying an estimated one-third of global shipping. Trade through region impacts the economies of nearly all significant nations, thus encouraging most world powers to have a foothold or a regular presence in the region. The waters of the South China Sea are particularly critical for China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, all of which rely on the Strait of Malacca, which connects the South China Sea and, by extension, the Pacific Ocean with the Indian Ocean. China's economic security is closely tied to the South China Sea, as over 64 per cent of its maritime trade and almost 80 per cent of oil transits through it. Nearly 42 per cent of Japan's maritime trade passes through the South China Sea. In the case of India, 55% of trade worth over \$5 trillion passes through the South China Sea and its share with ASEAN nations alone is over 11.5% of its total world trade. Due to the very nature of the maritime domain, we cannot look at the South China Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, or the Persian Gulf in isolation; we need to look at the Indo-Pacific as one entity.

A region of the Indo-Pacific that needs special focus from an Indian point of view is the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR), which includes the Arabian Sea. Sitting at the intersection of Asia, Africa, and Europe, the region is strategically important to India. The region's rich natural resource

profile, estimated to be worth at least US\$333.8 billion, has generated interest amongst all the major world economies. For India, the region is part of its strategic maritime frontier, which extends from the Persian Gulf to the East coast of Africa and across the Malacca Strait. Significant container shipping traffic transits the region, and it is home to some of the most vital and strategic maritime chokepoints, such as the Gulf of Aden, Bab-el-Mandeb, Mozambique Channel, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Cape of Good Hope. India's increasing outreach to African countries includes the Navy's role as a regional security partner. The recent interventions of Indian Naval ships in aiding ships facing Houthi attacks have drawn world attention.

The geo-strategic value of the Pacific region, where the bulk of the so-called Global South is situated, would therefore be evident and explain the reason for the number of extra-regional powers who are looking for bases or have forward-deployed their forces, including nuclear-capable ones, in the region in support of respective national interests, such as naval forces of United States, United Kingdom, France, EU, Russia and many others with lesser frequency. Over the past two decades, China has increased its presence and engagements across the region. The Indo-Pacific region has, therefore, become the Centre of 21st-century geopolitics, wherein the regional and external powers are actively competing and collaborating to counter and expand their interests and influences.

Maritime Security Issues

Any overview of Indo-Pacific's strategic security perspectives would show that Maritime Security has a predominant role. At the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Maritime security has been one of the focus areas to safeguard the legitimate uses of the oceans by international laws — the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, a global instrument in this regard. Towards the second half of the 20th century, it became evident that there was a shift from traditional Naval confrontation on the high seas, i.e. conventional interstate conflict, to challenges in the littoral region and more so towards non-conventional maritime security challenges, also called LIMO (Low-Intensity Maritime Operations). It would include maritime terrorism, piracy, drug and human trafficking, gun running, poaching or IUU (Illegal Unregulated and Unreported) fishing and illegal gathering of sensitive seismic and economic data and threats to energy security, economy, environment and maritime fraud.

An emerging maritime security issue is Cyber Security. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Review of Maritime Transport of 2017 opined that new technologies are transforming the maritime transport industry and providing opportunities to improve economic efficiency, optimise logistics management systems and operations and expand connectivity, including digital connectivity.

Technological advances include advanced analytics, onboard sensors, communications technology, port-call optimisation, blockchains, big data and autonomous ships and vehicles. Enhanced technologies have also redefined how ships, ports, and hinterland connections deliver cargo and services. Every section of the maritime industry, be it port management, cargo and container handling and distribution, operation of ships machinery and navigation systems and even global navigation aids, have all become technology-intensive, making them potential targets for cyberattacks. Cyber incidents can last for hours, days, or weeks. For example, if a ship gets grounded or stranded due to an attack on its control systems in a shipping channel, it could impact the entire operations as all vessel movements would be affected.

Another aspect of maritime security impacting the Global South is the rise of China and its assertive political and military behaviour in the Western Pacific and expansion into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). China increasingly seeks domination in the maritime arena well beyond its traditional waters. China's territorial claims in the East and South China Seas for historical ownership over nearly the entire region to enhance her claims over island territories in the seas around her is a significant security concern. Over the years, China has mastered the art of 'Salami slicing' or gradually bringing small changes or making incremental gains, each of which may not raise any alarms but can bring about significant strategic changes in the long run. Taiwan has become another dangerous flashpoint in the Indo-Pacific. Some analysts believe that towards the end of this decade, Beijing's confidence in its capacity to prevail in a conflict over Taiwan will grow as critical military balances begin tilting in China's favour, undermining the United States' ability to commit to Taiwan's defence. China is also looking for bases in the region. In addition to its established base in Djibouti, China is looking at bases/ maritime logistics support facilities all along the Pacific and has been closely focussing on Myanmar, Thailand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania and now into Maldives. China has also been trying to get a foothold in island nations in the Pacific. While China has been enunciating that it remains committed to peaceful development, it has been observed that it tends to ignore international norms and does not hesitate to enter conflicts to further its interests. Therefore, expanding the presence of China's maritime forces across the Indo-Pacific would be a key factor when reviewing maritime security in the region.

India and Maritime Security

As far as India is concerned, we have threats in the conventional, unconventional, and nuclear domains that impact our national security. On our land borders, India faces disputed boundaries and competing territorial claims from Pakistan and China. The Line of Control (LOC) with

Pakistan and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China have remained contentious for decades. Apart from land borders, these countries are also a threat in the maritime domain. China has, over the past decade and a half, enhanced its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), including the establishment of bases across the region, not to mention its increasing cooperation with Pakistan. India also faces the entire gamut of non-conventional maritime security challenges, or LIMO brought out earlier.

It would be apparent that to safeguard her maritime security interests, India would need to protect not only her littoral region but also enhance net maritime security all along the Indo-Pacific region in cooperation with maritime forces from friendly nations and more so with nations of the so-called Global South. In this regard, India has, over the years, been leveraging international cooperation in the maritime arena by participating in and conducting bilateral and multilateral exercises, dialogues, and symposiums. Among these, joint exercises have emerged as the most effective method to meet emerging threats as joint exercises enhance interoperability, enable maritime forces, both Navies and coastguards, to understand each other's methodologies and standard operating procedures and enable familiarisation with equipment capabilities, including technologies used by other participating forces. Joint exercises also have a strategic aspect of indicating linkages between participating countries and other nations and how they could safeguard their common interests if needed. Most maritime nations are today looking at bilateral and multilateral exercises. The Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard have been regularly exercising with maritime forces of other nations to enhance interoperability and confidence building.

While examining maritime exercises, one exercise that impacts Indian Security is Exercise Sea Guardian, a bilateral naval exercise between Pakistan and China; the third edition was conducted in the Arabian Sea off Pakistan's coast in November 2023. This was the largest exercise between the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the Pakistani Navy to date, and it included both land and sea phases. With the Indo-Pacific region becoming an increasingly important theatre of competition, the Sea Guardian exercises have become an institutionalised mechanism for the PLAN to gain access to the Arabian Sea and sustain its presence in the Indian Ocean.

Indian Initiatives for Collective Security in the Maritime Domain

Regarding working together for the common good in the Indo-Pacific, India has been part of some significant initiatives. The first is the QUAD or the quadrilateral security dialogue, a grouping of four democratic nations with considerable maritime interests in the region: India, the US, Japan and Australia. Following the Tsunami of 2004, the Group combined to provide HADR. In 2007, the Group met again unofficially on the sidelines of an ARF

(Asian Regional Forum) meeting based on an initiative by then-Japanese PM Shinzo Abe. After being dormant for a while, it was revived in 2017, coined as Quad 2.0 to develop the collective vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo Pacific, in other words, to ensure the critical Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) in the area free of any influence. The focus has been on connectivity, sustainable development, counter-terrorism and maritime security to promote peace, stability and prosperity in an increasingly inter-connected Indo-Pacific region.

Exercise Malabar started as a bilateral between Indian and US Navies in 1992 and has since become multilateral with Japan and Australia or all the QUAD nations as regular participants. Even though it commenced well before QUAD, the Malabar series of Naval exercises has been linked to the QUAD concept. While there were times when it was conducted with just two or three members, the 27th edition of the exercise in August 2023, off Sydney, saw the participation of Navies of all the QUAD countries. Considering QUAD nations' economic and military capabilities, a joint major maritime exercise such as Malabar can potentially send a deterrent message to nations like China.

MILAN, a biennial exercise of regional navies started a few years after Malabar in 1995, with four other Navies, has today emerged as a significant forum for improving operational interaction between Navies not only in the region but virtually across the world and saw participation of 50 friendly foreign countries across continents in MILAN 2024. Exercise MILAN has emerged as an ideal forum for India to take the initiative to enhance Maritime Engagement with nations in the Indo-Pacific and worldwide, as seen from the participation in MILAN 2024. Apart from exercises at sea, it also provides for closer professional interaction with participants through seminars and other activities. It is also evident from the increasing number of participating nations in MILAN that more and more nations across the globe are looking at India as a reliable partner to enhance safety and security in the maritime domain.

The setting up of the Information Fusion Centre (IFC- IOR) at Gurugram in 2018 was a significant initiative by India to collaborate with countries in the region and multinational agencies to enhance maritime domain awareness and share information. The Centre currently has 12 International Liaison officers based at the Centre and linkages with 65 international agencies across the world to enhance the surveillance of maritime spaces and sea lanes of communication across the Indo-Pacific.

Another major initiative in maritime cooperation by India that can benefit all Global South nations is the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which was put forward at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok on 04 November 2019. Essentially, IPOI seeks to create partnerships with like-minded countries across the regions to ensure security and stability in the maritime domain

through a non-treaty-based, cooperative and collaborative approach. IPOI covers a broad spectrum of significant issues through its seven pillars of Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Resource Sharing, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport.

Conclusions

In the 21st century, there are few areas of greater strategic importance than the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific region, where the bulk of Global South nations are located. The region's vision as an area of peace, security, and stability where all nations should work together for global good is gaining support despite the efforts of China to underplay the concept. Most littoral and non-littoral nations, including the United States, Japan, Australia, the UK, France, and many European powers with regional interests, have been looking to India as a strategic partner to safeguard their interests. This has allowed India to expand strategic cooperation to safeguard her security and those of other nations in the region, most of whom are in the Global South. Therefore, India should evolve plans to safeguard its national interests and promote a more equitable international order. While interaction at higher political and official levels is called for, exercises between maritime forces of nations at regular intervals, apart from enhancing inter-operability and understanding between maritime forces, also have a strategic aspect of indicating to other nations of linkages between participating countries and how they could, if the need arises jointly safeguard their common interests. India also needs to ensure the presence of its maritime forces across the Indo-Pacific to counter the growing Chinese presence across the region and, more so, to thwart China's adventurism across our land borders.