

A Geospatial Analysis Of India's Strategic Ascent As A Net Security Provider In The Indian Ocean Region

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Abstract:

This paper examines the changing role of India as a Net Security Provider (NSP) in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), a vital maritime intersection for the global flow of energy and trade. India has been historically viewed as a country with a "continental mindset," but 2014 was a paradigm shift in India's maritime strategy that led to the rise of the IOR as a core foreign policy objective. The study examines the strategic shift from the 2015 Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine to the broader MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) framework introduced in 2025. The paper evaluates India's infrastructure-led security initiatives like the Coastal Surveillance Radar Networks (CSRN) constructed in partner countries like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Maldives using geospatial analysis, which includes QGIS-based buffer analysis. It also assesses India's 'Necklace of Diamonds' strategy and the establishment of 'Unsinkable Aircraft Carriers' in the Andaman and Nicobar and Agalega Islands as pre-emptive measures to counter China's 'String of Pearls.' The analysis identifies India as a "first responder" through high-impact Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and its Mission-Based Deployment (MBD) model that enables a standing naval presence at important chokepoints. The paper acknowledges structural challenges like changing regional political dynamics but concludes that India's adoption of space-based sensors (GSAT-7R) and AI-driven predictive analytics will be decisive in maintaining its position as a stabilising "keystone" power in a rules-based maritime order.

Keywords: Net Security Provider, Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Maritime Security, Maritime Domain Awareness, SAGAR, MAHASAGAR, HADR

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I. Introduction:

Historians have long recognised the Indian Ocean as a unique maritime space. As Fernand Braudel observed, "The Indian Ocean is the centre of the world's third largest continent... For centuries, it was the most important maritime crossroads of the world, linking the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China" (Braudel, 1992, p. 134). Similarly, K. N. Chaudhuri emphasised its economic significance, noting that the Indian Ocean has always been a meeting point for diverse cultures, religions, and civilisations. Its waters were the highway for a pre-modern global economy long before the Atlantic became the centre of world trade (Chaudhuri, 1985, p. 17). Similarly, Michael N. Pearson argued that "the Indian Ocean was not a barrier but a connector; a zone of interaction, of trade, of pilgrimage, and of empire, shaping the destinies of societies from East Africa to Southeast Asia far more than any land frontier ever did" (Pearson, 2003, p. 3).

The Indian Ocean has held profound historical significance across multiple eras. During the Indus Valley civilisation, it enabled trade with Mesopotamia and the Sumerians. In the classical period, the Mauryas and Cholas used naval power for expansion and cultural diffusion. The mediaeval era saw Arab dominance in commercial navigation, linking Southeast Asia, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf (Sawant, 2022). The European entry in 1498, led by Vasco da Gama, integrated the Indian Ocean into global trade. Later, British control turned it into a "British lake." Thus, the ocean has consistently shaped India's economic and strategic history (Prabhakar, 2016). Stretching from Australasia through Southeast Asia, South Asia, and West Asia to Eastern and Southern Africa, the Indian Ocean region supports a population of 2.7 billion. Remarkably, the Indian Ocean is one of the youngest regions on the planet, with a median age under 30. It is rich in natural resources, from abundant fish stocks to significant mineral deposits. It contains several of the world's rapidly growing economies (Raja Mohan, 2016). The ocean itself supplies 40 percent of global offshore oil production, while 80 percent of all seaborne oil trade passes through its waters. Located at the intersection of major markets such as the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Europe, and the Americas, the region serves as a crucial conduit for global

energy flows (Davis & Balls, 2019). The Indian Ocean has critical chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Bab-al-Mandeb, which, if disrupted, could have serious consequences for world trade and energy supply (Sen Gupta, 2025). Consequently, the ocean's role as a high-traffic, transcontinental trade superhighway is why it is often described as an "economic interstate."

Under the colonial administration, India's rich maritime heritage has been suppressed. The critics have always accused India of having a "continental mindset" (Singh, 2003). However, in the post-1960s period, there has been a substantial movement toward a comprehensive maritime framework. The transition was prompted by the need for non-military initiatives, the acquisition of Soviet naval capabilities and the increasing presence of large powers in the Indian Ocean. Initially, India focused on its neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan. However, its strategy broadened in the 1970s to include economic dimensions such as merchant shipping, fisheries, and continental shelf resources. By the mid-1990s, maritime security was increasingly viewed through an economic lens rather than a purely military one (Singh, 2003).

The mid-2000s saw the emergence of concerns over China's "string of pearls" strategy and its efforts to project naval strength to secure maritime lines of communication (SLOCs) (Chaudhuri, 2016). But it was only in 2014 that India adopted a more assertive posture, and a strong maritime policy emerged. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gained priority as a major foreign policy focus area (Chaudhuri, 2016). The key developments include:

- Diplomatic Outreach: Strengthen ties with island states like Mauritius and Seychelles.
- Infrastructure: Development of air and sea facilities at Agaléga and Assumption Islands to secure crucial chokepoints.
- Cultural & Economic Integration: Programmes such as Sagar Mala and Mausam seek to connect India's coastal regions to the interior and to revitalise traditional maritime links.

India's muscular maritime security policy was first reflected through the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative, which served as the modern blueprint for India's security paradigm (Das, 2025). It emphasises five pillars (Sarangi, 2019):

1. Safeguarding mainland and island territories.
2. Cooperation with regional neighbours to build economic and security capacities.
3. Collective action to address maritime challenges and promote peace.
4. Sustainable development via the "Blue Economy" and climate action.
5. Global engagement based on transparency, international rules, and a climate of trust.

This shift effectively addresses previous "sea blindness", leveraging India's coastline to ensure regional stability and leadership (Das, 2025). The SAGAR doctrine was further concretised and the scope was broadened through MAHASAGAR.

From SAGAR to MAHASAGAR

The transformation of the 'Look East' policy into the 'Act East' policy by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2014 was widely regarded as a pivotal shift in India's foreign policy (Rajendran, 2014). A key element of the Act East Policy is its effort to enhance its footprint in the Asia-Pacific through regular naval exercises and joint maritime capacity building with regional partners' navies (Singh, 2018). India's maritime outlook has undergone a total transformation since 2015, with the Indian Navy taking a leading role in maritime diplomacy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and search and rescue (SAR) operations (Durai, 2025).

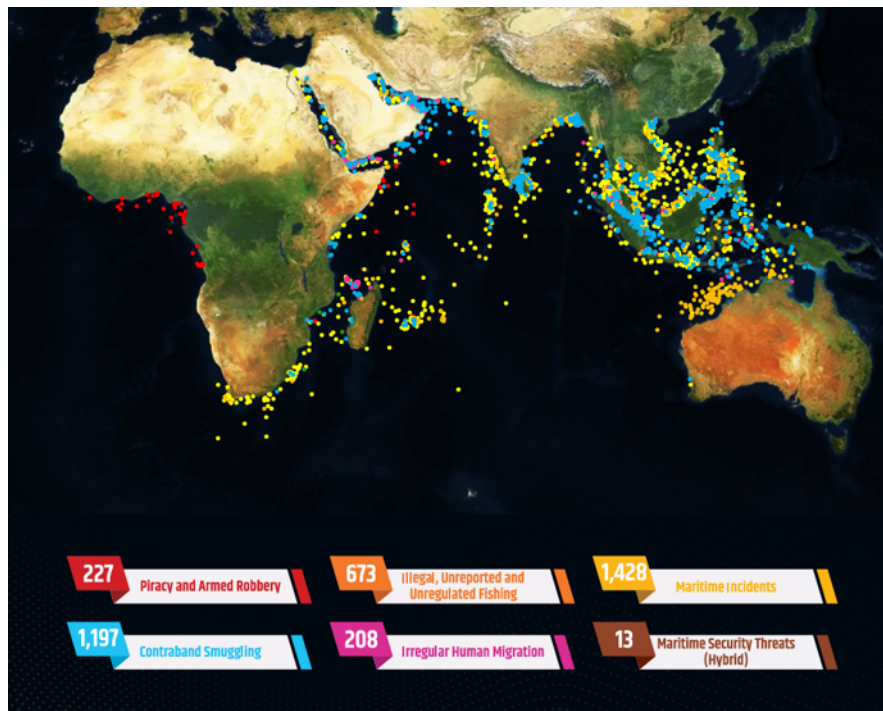
In March 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited three small but significant Indian ocean islands: the Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka. He unveiled India's strategic vision for Indian Ocean Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) during his tour (The Hindu 2020). The inclusion ceremony for the offshore patrol vessel MCGS Barracuda, which was gifted by India to Mauritius, took place. India's maritime vision is to guarantee a stable, secure maritime environment that tackles multi-faceted challenges. The Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, in 2017, clearly specified that the primary objective of SAGAR is to ensure safety and security from maritime threats, whether traditional or non-traditional (MEA, 2017). India's goal is to be the preferred security partner and a first responder for all countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Padmaja, 2018). At the core of SAGAR is the adoption of sustainable development and blue economy paradigms to tap ocean resources without jeopardising ecological integrity (Panda, 2024). This SAGAR vision has been India's template for cooperation across the Indian Ocean Region, catalysing regional connectivity and institutional dialogue. The initiative aims to realise its core goals by emphasising better port infrastructure and trade linkages. Furthermore, SAGAR reflects India's proclaimed desire to be considered a promoter of collaboration and partnership, and it actively reinforces multilateral initiatives (Schöttli, 2019). As stated by the Indian Navy, SAGAR was also a declaration of India's obligation to act as a net security provider in the region.

During a speech in Mauritius in March 2025, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced a new and comprehensive marine doctrine known as MAHASAGAR, which stands for "Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions." In his speech, he described MAHASAGAR as a "vision for the Global South" that "will encompass the ideas of trade for development, capacity building for sustainable growth, and mutual security for a shared future...extend cooperation through technology sharing, concessional loans and grants (MEA, 2025). In a press briefing, foreign secretary Vikram Misri stated that MAHASAGAR and its initiatives will broaden current cooperation and identify "new horizons for engagement" that prioritise both security and growth (MEA, 2025). Expanding upon the earlier 2015 SAGAR, MAHASAGAR transcends its predecessor's regional and primarily security-centric emphasis. In a testimony before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, assessing India's Indian Ocean Strategy, the Ministry of External Affairs underlined that the revised version embodies a "larger agenda". This agenda encompasses economic growth, sustainable development, and enhanced trade and technological cooperation, while "extending India's involvement from the Indian Ocean region to the entirety of the Global South". This transition highlights the constraints of the initial SAGAR idea, which limited its geographic scope and areas of cooperation (Saha, 2026).

MAHASAGAR seeks to counter Chinese influences directly in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond through promoting cooperative marine security, transparent infrastructural development, and sustainable economic growth. In contrast to China's unilateral, debt-driven infrastructure approach, it prioritises regional cooperation and highlights humanitarian assistance, capacity building, and respect for national sovereignty (Mann, 2025). MAHASAGAR strives to expand to a more holistic approach driven by mutual interest and challenges, while SAGAR provides a critical strategic framework primarily enabling security cooperation (Halder, 2025).

India: Guardians of the Maritime Commons

The oceans have remained a means of subsistence, trade and prosperity for the human population since the beginning of human history. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), from where a significant portion of world trade and energy passes, faces a slew of maritime challenges, which include piracy, armed robbery, irregular human migration (IHM), illegal unsupported and unregulated fishing (IUUF), gun running, poaching, maritime terrorism, etc. (Halder, 2024). IFC-IOR (2025) reported a total of 1,428 maritime incidents and 1,197 cases of contraband smuggling. There were 673 instances of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, alongside 227 cases of piracy and armed robbery. In the region, 208 cases of irregular human migration and 13 specific hybrid maritime security threats were recorded. Map no. 1.1 displays the sub-regions of the IOR with the highest reported incidents.



Map No. 1.1: Sub-regions of the IOR with Reported Incidents

Source: IFC-IOR Annual Report, 2025

1. Northeast IOR (SE Asia & Malay Archipelago)

The map shows a high concentration of contraband smuggling and maritime incidents, particularly in the Strait of Malacca and the Indonesian archipelago.

2. Northwest IOR (Red Sea Gate & West Asia)

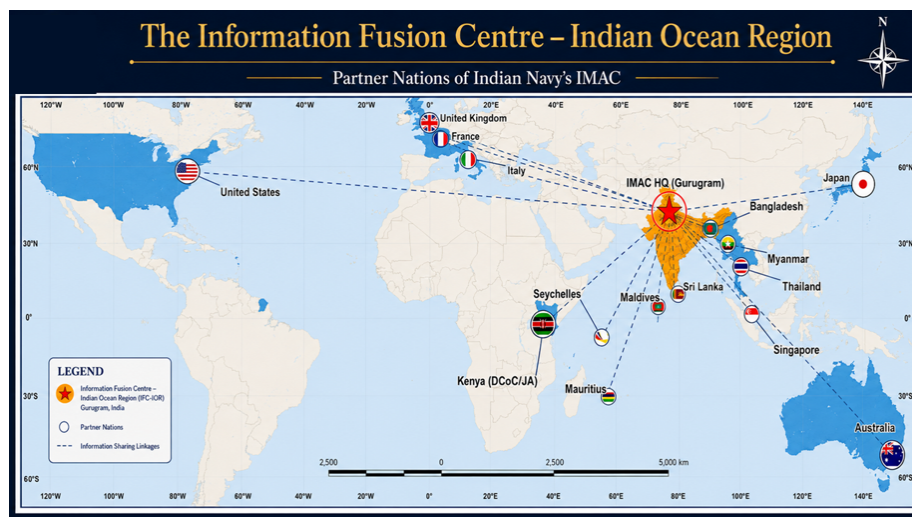
It includes major maritime chokepoints, including the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Strait of Hormuz. This sub-region is characterised mainly by high levels of contraband smuggling and maritime incidents.

3. Central IOR (South Asian Littoral)

The main areas include the shores of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, which encircle the Indian subcontinent. Here, the most common are Contraband Smuggling and Maritime Incidents, with heavy traffic in those coastal waterways.

4. Southwest IOR (East African Coast & Island Countries)

This sub-region includes the oceans off Madagascar, the Mozambique Channel and the South African coast. Importantly, it comprises a high proportion of reported Irregular Human Migration occurrences and concentrations of smuggling.



Map No. 1.2: The Information Fusion Centre – IOR (Partner Nations of Indian Navy's IMAC)

The unrestricted use of 'Global Commons' for the prosperity of human beings cannot be realised without addressing maritime security challenges. To effectively tackle such issues, information sharing and cooperation are necessary (IFC-IOR). As a consequence, the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), hosted by the Indian Navy, was established in 2018 to address the need to promote collaboration for maritime safety and security (Subramanian, 2022). Based in Gurugram, the data fusion centre has information-sharing links with 28 countries. So far, the centre has hosted International Liaison Officers (ILOs) from 15 partner nations viz. Kenya, Australia, Bangladesh, France, Italy, Japan, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (IFC-IOR). The centre monitors White Shipping using reports from shipping companies in the Indian Ocean and adjoining seas to understand each region and generates various periodic reports, viz., weekly maritime security updates (WMSU) and monthly maritime security updates (MMSU), half-yearly overviews and annual reports. The centre has strengthened maritime security in the region by creating a coherent maritime situation, functioning as a hub for friendly and partner countries (Dutta, 2024).

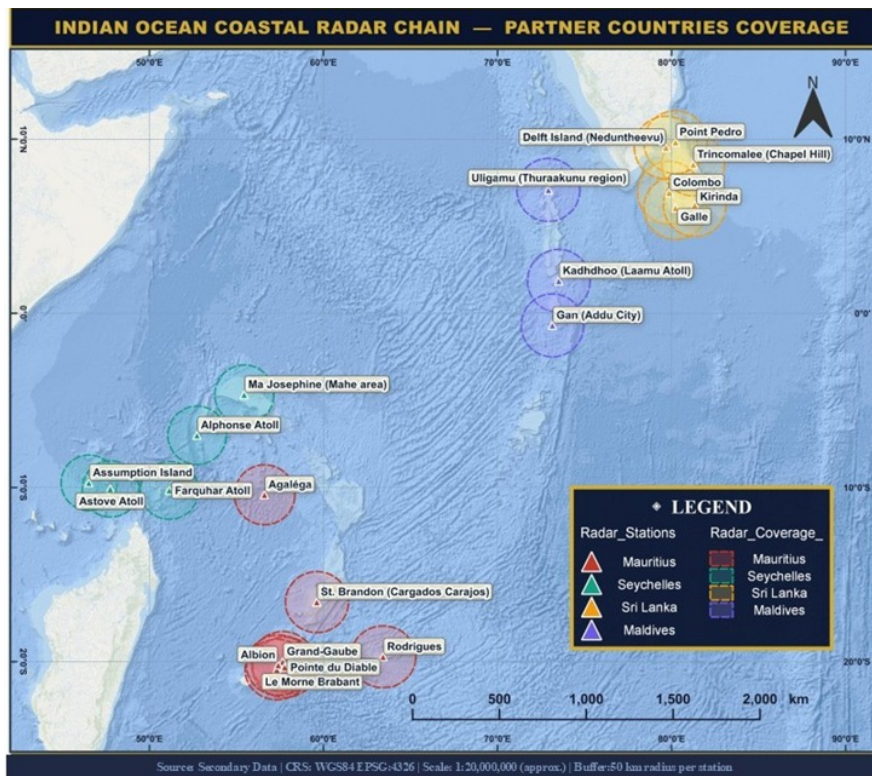
Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

The country has placed significant emphasis on enhancing its maritime domain awareness as a response to maritime security threats after the introduction of the SAGAR vision. The concept of MDA involves awareness of the positions and intentions of all the actors whether friendly, hostile, or neutral. India's

vision of MDA now extends beyond its coastal waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to cover much of the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2016).

Coastal Surveillance Radar Networks in IOR

India has bolstered coastal surveillance by implementing a chain of static sensors. These X-band and S-band radars detect small vessels in all weather conditions (Jha, 2023). Surveillance radars have been installed in two phases. Under Phase I, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) established 46 stations, of which 10 are on the Islands that include Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep, and 36 are on the mainland (The Indian Express, 2022).



Map No. 1.3: Buffer Analysis of CSRN Coverage

India has also installed coastal radar stations in Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Seychelles. The initiative aims to expand the radar network to get real-time monitoring of the potential threats in the high seas (The Hindu, 2022). India has installed ten radar stations in the Maldives (Laskar, 2022). In a reply to a question raised in the Parliament of Mauritius, the Prime Minister, Pravin Kumar Jugnauth, stated that in the first phase six radar systems were installed, while two radars were installed in the second phase (AllAfrica, 2020). Similarly, Seychelles, with the support of India to protect its vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), installed six coastal surveillance radar systems (CSRS) on five different islands (Seychelles Nation, 2016). The Indian coastal radar systems have a maximum instrumented range of approximately 50 km (around 27 nautical miles). The radar detection range for small county boats (RCS sqm) is up to 20 km (DRDO). For this paper, a buffer analysis (see map no. 1.3) has been carried out using QGIS. All the IOR radar stations have been mapped as point data, and a buffer of 50 km has been created to ascertain the reach of the coastal radars.

Leveraging Space-based Sensors

In the Indian Ocean region, an increase has been observed in illicit networks, covert logistics and grey-zone actors whose operations obscure the line between military and civilian purposes. For India, the primary challenge is not lack of vessel visibility. Instead, it is the inability of legacy tools to tackle the newly emerged challenges. While AIS, VTS and coastal radar offer partial coverage, they fail to detect deception and identity conflicts (Windward, 2024). Keeping these factors in mind, India's first dedicated military satellite, GSAT-7 Rukmini, was launched in 2013. Rukmini brought a revolutionary transformation in naval communications by establishing real-time data links throughout the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal (The Indian Express, 2017). In November 2025, India launched CMS-03 (GSAT-7R), an upgraded version of Rukmini, to provide a major boost to India's effort to attain maritime security and technological self-reliance. Through its multi-band

transponders, the GSAT-7R facilitates seamless voice, data and video communication among naval ships, submarines, aircraft and maritime operation centres (MOCs). It offers secure communications coverage extending to 2000 km from India's coastline, encompassing vast stretches of the Indian Ocean Region (Sharma, 2013).

Indian Navy Mission-Based Deployments

India implemented the mission-based deployment (MBD) model in August 2017 to ensure the Indian Navy's 24x7x365 presence across the Indian Ocean region (MOD, 2017). The primary goal was to ensure that Indian Naval ships are permanently deployed in areas of critical maritime interest to maintain continuous vigil and surveillance and secure the international Shipping Lines of Communication (SLOCs) (see map no. 1.4) for any contingency (MOD, 2017).

Deployment Sector	Focus Area	Key Objectives
Gulf of Aden / Red Sea	Horn of Africa	Anti-piracy and maritime security (escorted 3,400+ ships & 25000 seafarers).
Persian Gulf / Gulf of Oman	Strait of Hormuz	Operation Sankalp (Started 2019): Protection of Indian-flagged merchant vessels.
Malacca Strait	Andaman Sea	Monitoring the primary choke point for traffic entering the IOR from the East.
Central IOR	Mauritius / Seychelles	Surveillance of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and EEZ protection.
Northern Arabian Sea	Off Pakistan/Iran	Monitoring non-traditional threats and narcotic smuggling.
Northern Bay of Bengal	Bangladesh / Myanmar	Coordinated patrols (CORPAT) and regional security.
Southern IOR	Madagascar / Reunion	Presence in the South-Western IOR to monitor extra-regional naval activity.

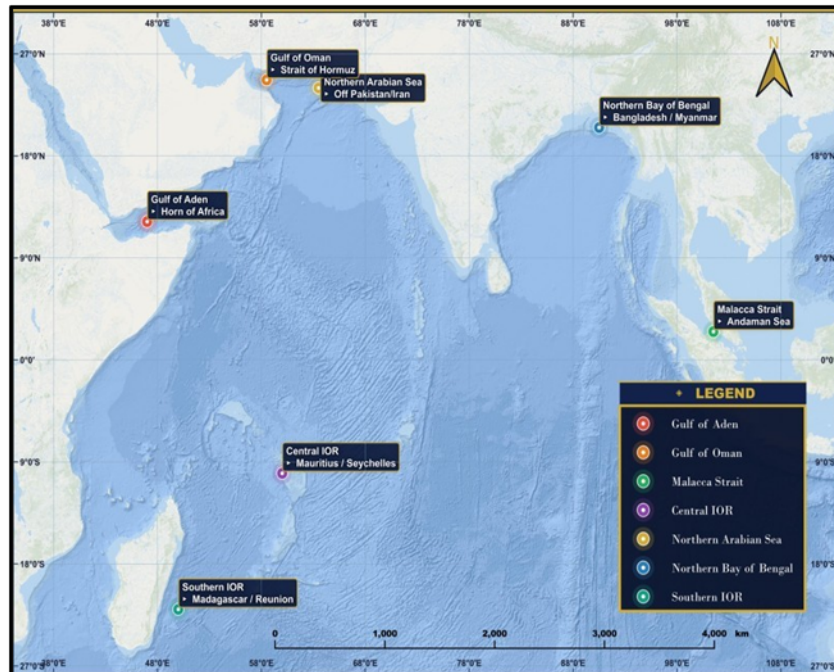
Table No. 1.1: Mission-Based Deployments of the Indian Navy (2017-2025)
Source: Ministry of Defense Annual Reports, PIB (2017-2025)



Map No. 1.4: Indian Navy – Securing Sea Lanes of Communication in the Indian Ocean
Source: Based on Hemamali Tennakoon (2025)

The Indian Navy has been consistently engaging with regional and extra-regional navies and maritime forces to promote maritime security. Since 2008, it has deployed units in the Gulf of Aden and along the East Coast of Africa for anti-piracy patrols. A total of 3440 ships and over 25000 seafarers have been safely escorted (MOD, 2024). Similarly, 'Operation Sankalp' was launched to provide safe passage for Indian-flagged vessels transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, following the attacks on merchant ships in the Gulf of Oman in June 2019 (MOD, 2022). The year 2023 marked the 15th year of Indian Navy's continuous anti-piracy missions in

the IOR. According to the Ministry of Defense's Annual Report, the Indian Navy intensified vigil in the IOR under the MBD framework due to a surge in maritime security incidents, including drone attacks.



Map No. 1.5: Indian Navy: Mission-based Deployments (MBD)

Source: Ministry of Defense Annual Reports, PIB (2017-2025)

Major deployments were in the North/Central Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden to safeguard global commons (MOD, 2024). During 'Operation Sindoor,' the Indian Navy uses its mission-based assets to maintain a strong posture in the North Arabian Sea. The implementation of MBD has also seen a push towards indigenous technology; new approvals were granted for BrahMos systems and the Barak-1 missile system for naval ships (MOD, 2025).

The First Responder and HADR Strategy

After the introduction of the SAGAR doctrine, India has positioned itself as a 'First Responder' in the Indian Ocean and beyond. The Indian Navy, guided by the vision of SAGAR, uses its maritime reach and logistical capabilities to respond promptly to the needs of the friendly foreign nations. As a result, India has emerged as a dependable partner in the IOR (Ramsay, 2015; Singh, 2024). The Navy's HADR role is driven by a humanitarian impulse that aligns with India's broader foreign policy objectives of maritime diplomacy (Singh, 2024).

Unlike conventional military operations, HADR helps India to establish trust and regional stability in the region. When the main water treatment plant of Malé collapsed and a severe drinking water crisis followed, Indian Navy responded first, and INS Sukanya and INS Deepak reached it within hours with a desalination plant and fresh water (Ramsay, 2015). The Indian Navy carried out one of the biggest evacuation operations in history during the civil war in Yemen. Indian vessels evacuated more than 3000 Indian nationals and 1200 foreign nationals from 41 countries, underlining India's commitment to provide security to the global community (Menon, 2024). After the devastating cyclone Idai, the Indian Navy diverted three ships, Sujata, Sarathi and Shardul, for immediate relief in the Port of Beira, Mozambique. The Indian personnel were first to reach the ground to provide medical aid, provide food and conduct rescue missions (Upadhyaya, 2022). Indian Navy launched 'Mission Sagar' to assist IOR nations in the wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. INS Kesari and other ships delivered food, medicines and medical assistance teams to Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles (Singh, 2024; MOD, 2024). After Cyclone Moca, the Indian Navy initiated 'Operation Karuna.' Emergency supplies were delivered through ships like INS Shivalik, Komotra and Savitri to Yangon, Myanmar, reiterating India's 'neighbourhood first' policy (Menon, 2024; MOD, 2024).

The Indian Navy's success in their missions can be credited to versatile fleets like INS Jaleshwar that consist of Landing Platforms and hospital-grade medical facilities (Chanana & Pandey, 2024). The Indian Navy has contributed in a big way to shaping India's image as a 'preferred security partner' by assisting nations in crisis without transgressing their sovereignty. This strategic soft power balances the increasing influence of

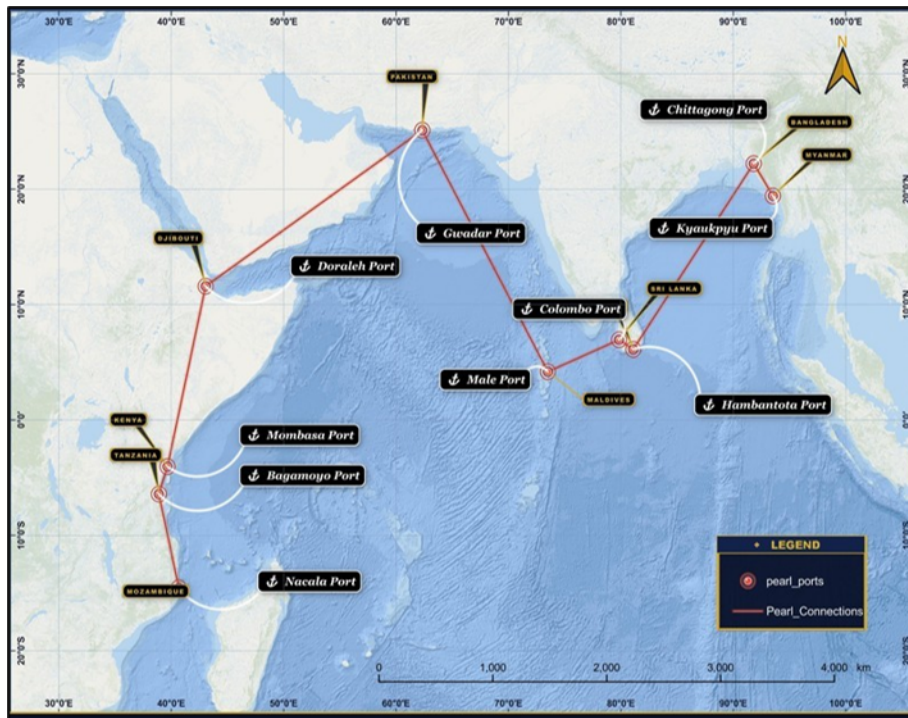
other extra-regional powers in the IOR and promotes a cooperative maritime environment (Menon, 2024; Upadhyaya, 2022).

India's Strategic Footprints through Infrastructure Projects

In the past decade and a half, China's Navy has rapidly advanced into Indian Ocean, attempting to build a 'string of pearls' of naval ports encircling India from the southeast to the southwest (The Indian Express, 2013). China's Admirals Shi Yunsheng and Liu Huaqing devised a blue-water strategy for the Indian Ocean, encompassing the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, for a strategic encirclement of India through cooperation with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar (The Indian Express, 2013).

Strings of Pearls

The People's Republic of China has been using the 'Strings of Pearls' strategy to diplomatically entice IOR states with assurances of port development projects. The infrastructure could be used as forward naval bases for the PLA Navy's plan to control crucial sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in the event of war (Pehrson, 2006). China's ports include a deep-water port in Sittwe (Myanmar); a container shipping facility in Chittagong (Bangladesh); a deep-water naval station in Gwadar (Pakistan); a naval base in Ormara (Pakistan) on the Makran coast; and container shipping ports in Hambantota and Colombo in Sri Lanka, stretching all the way to Djibouti, Africa, which is China's only naval base in the region (Barton, 2021). Strings of Pearls exhibits China's massive foreign investment efforts through its 21st-century maritime silk road which poses a military threat to India and the United States



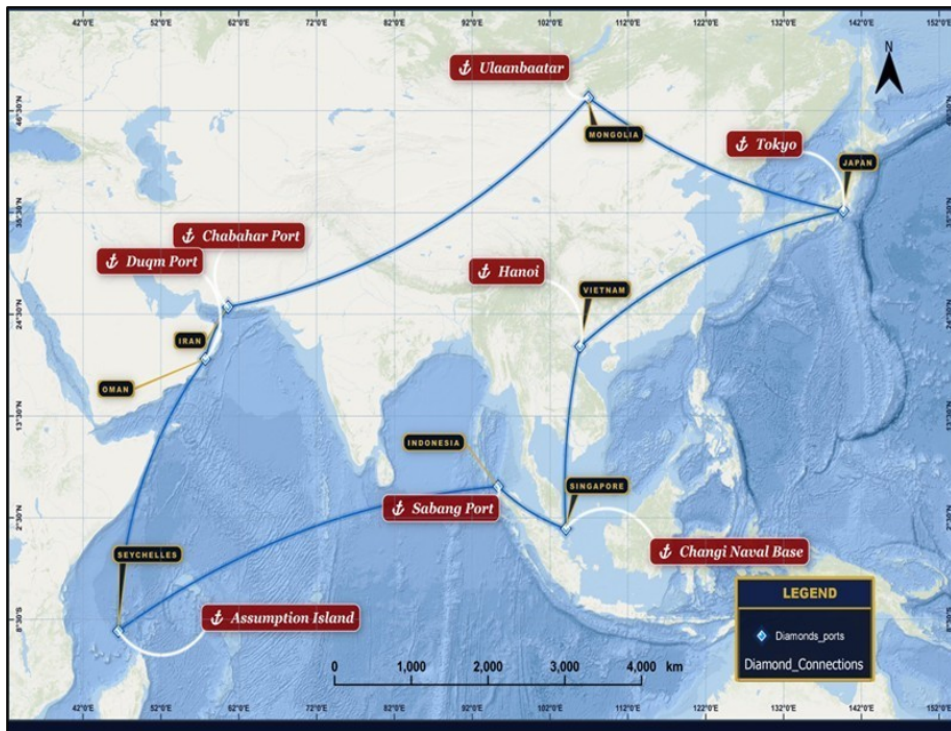
Map No. 1.6: Strings of Pearls of China

Source: Based on Energy Futures in Asia, Booz Allen Hamilton

Necklace of Diamonds

Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval strategist, predicted in 1890 that whosoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia. This thought has always dominated the minds of Indian Navy leaders (The Indian Express, 2013). India's 'necklace of diamonds' strategy is a counter to China's strings of pearls. It was first used by India's former foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh in 2011. Unlike the SAGAR doctrine, the 'necklace of diamonds' is not an officially proclaimed policy but rather is used by analysts to interpret certain government initiatives. This approach comprises gaining access to naval bases in strategically positioned states, viz., strengthening ties with other Indo-Pacific and IOR countries. Under this strategy, India gained access to important ports, including Singapore's Changi Naval base, Indonesia's Sabang port, Iran's Chabahar port, Oman's Duqm port, and the Assumption Islands of the Seychelles (Banik, 2026). To offset China's hold on the Mozambique channel's chokepoint, India inked a deal with Seychelles in 2015, allowing it to use Assumption

Islands for military purposes (Jochheim and Lobo, 2023). As part of this initiative, India is working very closely with Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Oman, the Seychelles, Singapore and Vietnam to encircle China.



Map No. 1.7: India's 'Necklace of diamonds' Strategy
Source: Caspian Report

Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier Strategy

The term 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' refers to geographically fixed island territories that can serve as permanent, non-submersible platforms for military use and power projection. For India, this strategy is central to its transition from a land-centric posture to a maritime-focused one aiming to serve the IOR. The primary pillars of this strategy are the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) in the east and Agalega Island in the West.

The archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar, consisting of 836 islands, has a commanding position in the IOR at the eastern entrance of the Malacca Strait. It is situated along the major route of China's energy imports. India has established its only Tri-Services command. Recent infrastructure upgrades include INS Baaz and INS Kohasa to support heavier aircraft and BrahMos missile-equipped fighters (Abraham, 2015). In the western IOR, Agalega island in Mauritius has emerged as a key node of the SAGAR framework. In 2015, MOU, India, funded the creation of a 3 km runway and modern jetties (Singh & Sudarshan, 2024). Regardless of permanent military presence, these assets on Agalega islands provide India the means to respond quickly to threats and disasters. The dual-use capability emphasises India's desire for a covert strategic posture over open militarisation.

II. Conclusion

India's strategic path in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is showing a gradual shift from being a regional player to a prominent Net Security Provider (NSP). India has successfully concretised its presence, changing the regional image from a hesitant onlooker to a reliable "keystone" of stability. The shift from SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine to a larger MAHASAGAR paradigm is indicative of a holistic rise, reaffirming India's position as the first responder to traditional and non-traditional threats.

However, structural hurdles persist for India's strategic rise in securing permanent naval footprints in the IOR. In the Maldives, the new administration's policies have weakened long-standing security pacts, while in Bangladesh, domestic political sensitivities over a perceived big-brotherly attitude often restrict the scope of formal naval bases. This complexity also manifests in the divergence between Duqm and Chabahar. India's western strategy is anchored by the Duqm port in Oman, which provides deep-sea access away from volatile chokepoints, while the Chabahar project in Iran has been put on a strategic pause as of April 2026. The end of US sanctions waivers and the hawkish maximum pressure policy of the Donald Trump administration forced a

recalibration. India's 'subdued' posture during the 2026 Ramadan War was not a sign of weakness but rather a masterclass in strategic autonomy. This was exemplified by New Delhi's balanced talks with both Washington and Tehran and its emphasis on the security of the Strait of Hormuz and the safety of the Indian diaspora without any military involvement. This pragmatic "middle path" enabled India to safeguard its energy interests without threatening its strategic partnership with the US.

As per India's current Naval Chief Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, the future of IOR security relies on the integration of satellite surveillance, geospatial technology, and artificial intelligence. The IOR is becoming a theatre for hybrid warfare, and India's ability to sustain Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through the use of AI-driven predictive analytics and real-time satellite feeds will be the decisive factor in its NSP status. India, with its high-tech capabilities together with "neighbourhood first" diplomacy, is well-placed to ensure that the Indian Ocean remains a zone of peace and rule-based order.

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