

35th USI National Security Seminar

**Indian Ocean Region : Emerging Strategic Cooperation, Competition and Conflict Scenarios
Keynote Address***

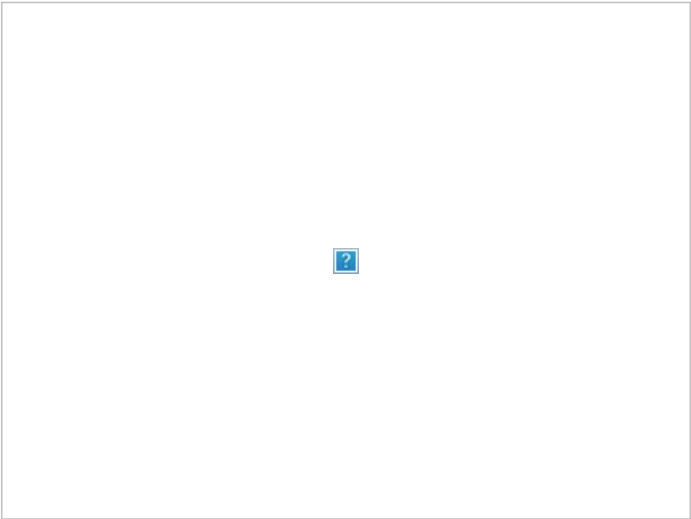
Admiral RK Dhowan, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, ADC Chief of the Naval Staff

Introduction

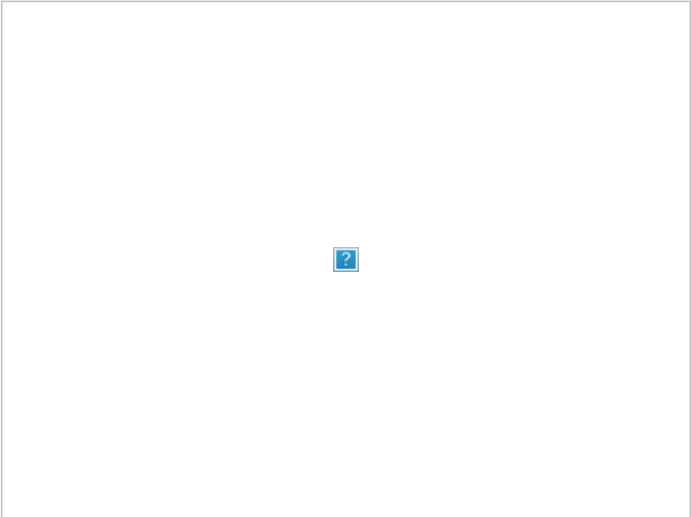
It is indeed a distinct honour and a proud privilege for me to be present here today for the inaugural session of the annual seminar organised by the USI and to address this august audience on a subject which is very close to my heart, that of the Indian Ocean, the emerging security challenges and the strategic cooperation in the region.

The seas around us are gaining new found importance as each day goes by because of their linkages with the blue economy; and there is no doubt that the current century is the century of the seas. The subject of the seas and the oceans therefore, enthuses all of us who have donned the white uniform, but I am sure that the subject would be of equal interest to all others as well, because we are all tied and connected to the oceans.

To explain this further, I would like all of you to reflect on a very interesting biological fact. We all have in our veins, exactly the same percentage of salt in our blood, as the percentage of salt in the oceans. This is true not only for the salt in our blood, but also for the salt in our sweat and in our tears. We are all therefore, tied and connected to the oceans. Whenever we go back to the seas, whether it is to sail on it or merely watch it, we get the feeling of going back to where we came from. This truly defines the relationship of humankind with the oceans and perhaps is also the reason why talking about the seas brings out such passion in us.



Inaugural Session



Keynote Address



Session III - Panelists



Valedictory Address

Our planet Earth, the blue planet, has great significance for the maritime domain because of the 70-80-90 per cent principle. More than 70 per cent of the Earth's surface is covered with water, nearly 80 per cent of humanity lives within 200 nautical miles of the coast and nearly 90 per cent of the world's trade transits across the oceans.

Geostrategic Importance

The Indian Ocean Region has been the vortex of intense maritime activity over centuries, starting way back from the Indus Valley Civilisation in the western part of the country, which existed in 3,300 BC. We still have a dry dock in Lothal in Gujarat, which dates back to 2,200 BC. It is from these small ports that Indian seafarers sailed to distant lands in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and the east coast of Africa. All the kingdoms that existed in the country had deep linkages with the seas. Whether it was the Cholas, the Pandyas or the Cheras, they all sailed to distant lands from the eastern part of the Country. Therefore, even till today, we have the cultural evidence of India in all Southeast Asian countries.

We then had the medieval period, during the Mughal rule, when we lost the supremacy of the seas, and that paved the way in the form of the seafarers from Europe, starting with the arrival of Vasco da Gama from Portugal in May 1498, when he landed at Calicut. This was followed by the Dutch, the British and the French. As you can see, the Indian Ocean has been a strong unifying factor in history and has led to promotion of religion, trade and cultural ties across the oceans.

The Indian Ocean today has emerged as the world's centre of gravity in the maritime domain. It is the third largest water body in the world, after the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, covering an area of 68.5 million square kilometres. As we can see, the Indian Ocean Region is also home to nearly 2.6 billion people, which is nearly 30 per cent of the world's humanity, and this population lives on the rim, or the shores of the Indian Ocean. It is also rich in oil and mineral products. Actually, India was awarded an area of nearly 1,50,000 square kilometres in the central Indian Ocean in 1987, for deep seabed mining.

Another unique factor of the Indian Ocean, compared to the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, is that it is landlocked on three sides and the access is primarily from the southern parts of the Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope and southeast from Australia. So access to the Ocean is primarily through a few choke points, whether the Gulf of Aden (linking the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean), the Strait of Hormuz which links the Persian Gulf or the Strait of Malacca, which links the Ocean to the Southeast Asian countries and the Sunda and the Lombok Straits.

Nearly 100,000 ships transit through these waters every year; 60,000 of these transit through the Strait of Malacca. The Ocean, therefore, has emerged as the world's global economic highway, because 66 per cent of the world's oil, 50 per cent of the world's container traffic and 33 per cent of the world's cargo traffic transit through this Ocean. The oil arteries flow from this region destined to countries on the eastern side, to Japan, China, Australia etc., and to the West to various countries in Europe and even to the United States. These figures are bound to grow in the

future and the importance of the Indian Ocean is ever-increasing.

Another unique factor which distinguishes the Indian Ocean from the Pacific and the Atlantic, apart from being the world's largest oil producing region with thousand million tons of oil transiting through its waters every year, is the unique fact that nearly 80 per cent of the trade which transits through the Indian Ocean Region is extra-regional in nature. The figures are just about reversed when we look at the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, where 80 per cent of the trade is regional in nature. This means that any disruption in the free flow of the oil arteries or in trade would have a detrimental impact, on not just the economies of the region, but the global economy as well. It is evident therefore, that the Indian Ocean Region influences the well-being and prosperity of all nations and it is very important that safety, security and stability is maintained on the waters of the Indian Ocean.

Threats and Challenges

Maritime challenges of the Indian Ocean are as wide and varied as they come. Who could have imagined that in the 21st Century, we would once again be grappling with pirates, or that the major threat in the maritime domain would be in the form of asymmetric warfare and maritime terrorism? But piracy has emerged as a major threat and, as you are all aware, the world's navies are deployed in the Gulf of Aden patrols and off the coast of Somalia, including the Gulf region, in various task forces. As a result, the number of piracy incidents have progressively come down.

Ever since 2008, the Indian Navy has continuously deployed a ship on patrol in the Gulf of Aden. Currently our 45th ship is on patrol and we have safely escorted nearly 3,000 vessels of various flags and nations on which nearly 22,000 Indian seafarers have been embarked. Not a single vessel under Indian Naval escort has been hijacked so far. We have been successful in countering at least 40 piracy attempts. It is also very important to understand that at its peak, sometime in 2010-11, the farthest line of piracy had moved further East, very close to the Indian Islands off the West Coast. With effective action carried out by the Indian Navy in support with all the other navies deployed, we have managed to push back the farthest line of piracy closer to Somalia. While all efforts are on by various countries of the region, the solution to overcoming piracy actually lies in sorting out the issues on land, i.e. in Somalia and efforts are on by the United Nations Contact Group on Piracy to ensure that. While a lot of effort has been taken by the merchant ships themselves to ensure that they adopt safe practices by embarkation of private security guards, there are issues with regard to regulating these guards and floating armouries that have complicated the security matrix.

The other threats and challenges in the maritime domain include drug running, arms and human trafficking and indeed poaching and fishing in the deep sea areas, which is a major threat and challenge in the waters around us. To counter any of these threats is a challenging task because non-state actors which operate these illegal activities have anonymity of identity and intent. They have transnational links and patronage, and at times the money trails go across the oceans and across various countries. Therefore, to counter any of these challenges our policy options are indeed limited.

Another factor that poses a great challenge in the Indian Ocean Region is the fact that 70 per cent of the natural disasters, which emanate in the world, occur in the Indian Ocean Region. You are all aware of the Tsunami of 2004 that had a devastating impact on many countries of the region. It also displayed the alacrity and the speed with which the navies and coastguards of the region reacted, indicating the unique brotherhood of the seas and the ability of the navies to catalyse and facilitate cooperation and collaboration towards humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The oceans are also considered an ideal maritime medium because of the accessibility they provide for disaster relief and for deploying various platforms through the seas to aid and assist in relief efforts. India has accorded a national priority to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Therefore, the environment in our region out at sea is extremely dense because of the increased maritime activity and the dense Sea Lines of Communication that transit the waters around us. At any given time there are at least 4,000-5,000 merchant ships displaying their automatic identification systems, i.e. ships of 300 tons and above, and when you add to this the coastal traffic and fishing boats the environment is very cluttered indeed.

The instability and turbulence in some regions in the India Ocean Region have a potential to spill into the maritime domain and the situation can best be described as fragile. Consequently, about 115 warships from about 20 extra-regional navies are present in the Indian Ocean Region at any given time to protect their own maritime interests.

Regional Cooperation

With regard to the imperatives for regional cooperation, it is evident that the seas are no longer a benign medium, which were earlier used for free flow of trade and commerce. In the wake of globalisation and the challenges in the maritime domain, the global commons and the oceans have become extremely vulnerable and no single navy is robust enough to monitor the global commons on its own. This lends the navies and coastguards naturally towards cooperation out on the high seas. The medium that we operate in, the sea is distinctly different from that encountered by the army or the air force because there are no boundaries on the high seas and you cannot fence your maritime borders. These borders are porous and are to be left open for freedom of navigation and fishing and other commercial activities. Let me just illustrate this with an example. If the army were to find on a particular day, people from another army peering down their pickets, on the borders, it would be cause for grave alarm, because somebody has violated the borders and entered their territory. If an air force aircraft found a fighter aircraft from another air force close to its wing tip, it would be cause for grave alarm because the airspace would have been violated. But out at sea, when the Officer of Watch reports to the Captain that we have a warship from another nation on the starboard bow, he tells him, "Son! Wish him Good Morning, because he is in international waters and so are you". That is the unique nature of the maritime domain and that is the reason why this medium lends itself for maritime cooperation.

Maritime cooperation has to be collective in nature and ensure shared responsibility, only then can we ensure stability in the maritime domain. There needs to be synergy among the various forces, whether it is the navies or the coastguards, which are operating, so that they can combat non-state actors and the asymmetric threats, which have

emerged in the maritime domain. For this, it is very important that we carry out capacity building and capability enhancement of the smaller littoral navies in the region so that they can participate in the maritime cooperation initiatives.

For any element of maritime cooperation to be effective, information exchange is of extreme importance to ensure transparency in the waters around us. This has to be on a 24x7 basis. Information exchange between various stakeholders who operate in the maritime domain is essential for strengthening maritime security. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), therefore, is a key enabler for effective constabulary operations and is crucial for maritime security. Amongst the various stages in achieving an effective MDA, the first is to have actionable intelligence. This provides the advance information, so that one can launch a fool-proof and an effective surveillance in the waters to locate and identify the threat and then initiate an effective response mechanism to deal with that threat.

The essential components of an effective MDA requirement include the development of a common picture. This picture is obtained from space-based Automatic Identification System (AIS), shore-based coastal radars, shore-based AIS, other data from ships and aircraft which are carrying out surveillance. The whole picture is compiled with the exchange of white-shipping information. We also need to have an effective cooperation construct so that we can carry out information sharing and streaming of AIS data across neighbours, across navies and across the friendly countries in the Indian Ocean Region. Therefore, information sharing is an important step towards enhancing the MDA in the region.

At any given time we have in our waters 4000-5000 large merchant ships of above 300 tons that are mandated to have transponders for the AIS. When we add to this at least a thousand coastal vessels which are operating and the 240,000 fishing and coastal craft that we have in our waters, you can well imagine that the picture gets extremely dense. This poses a huge challenge. After the 26/11 attack on Mumbai, a lot of action has been taken, including setting up of the coastal radar and the AIS stations. The Indian Navy has been designated as the lead agency and various initiatives have come up by different agencies in the maritime domain, which are being coordinated by leveraging technology to get a better MDA picture.

We have 46 coastal radar stations, 10 of them in the islands and 74 AIS; the picture or the inputs of these is then fused to our National Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence Network. This has also been established by the Navy. With the Information Management and Analysis Centre located at Gurgaon, 51 nodes of the Navy and the Coast Guard have been integrated, with the Joint Operation Centres at Mumbai, Kochi, Vizag and Port Blair and various state maritime centres which have come up along the coast. What needs to be done in addition is that we need to integrate the inputs from various agencies that operate in the maritime domain. With the Navy being in the lead as the coordinating agency, we also have the Coast Guard, the CISF, Director General Shipping, various ports and harbours under the Port Trust, economic agencies, Director General Hydrocarbons, intelligence agencies, Director General Lighthouses and Lightships, Fisheries, Customs and Immigration, BSF, marine police forces etc. There are both centre and state agencies involved and it makes coordination among them very difficult. But it is very important that the inputs from all these agencies are coordinated together to have an effective national MDA picture and transparency in the waters around us.

Initiatives by the Indian Navy

As part of the initiatives that the Navy has taken with regard to maritime diplomacy, the Indian Navy launched the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in 2008 as a construct to enhance maritime cooperation among 35 member navies in the Indian Ocean Region. The aim was to promote shared understanding of maritime issues facing the littoral nations and formulate strategies to enhance the regional maritime security. Currently, the chairmanship is with Australia, after having been passed on from India to the UAE to South Africa. We also have a construct called 'MILAN'. It is a biennial event to enhance regional cooperation and conducted at Port Blair. The last event was conducted in February this year, where 17 regional navies participated. The forum serves as an avenue for formal and informal dialogues for cooperative maritime engagement between various navies of the region. The Indian Navy has also formulated a 10-year cooperation roadmap for maritime engagement with a clear aim and a sense of purpose. One of the aims is capacity building and capability enhancement among various Indian Ocean littorals and friendly nations. The purpose is to strengthen bridges of friendship and promote avenues of cooperation in the maritime domain. The Indian Navy regularly conducts exercises, at least 10 bilateral and multilateral exercises with various navies; including Exercise Malabar with the United States Navy, Exercise Konkan with the Royal Navy (UK), Varuna with the French and INDRA with the Russian Navy. In addition, we also carry out passage exercises each time our ships visit any foreign country or indeed other ships from foreign navies visit ports of India.

With regard to capacity building, we make sure as part of our annual programmes that we provide hardware and platforms and provide assistance in infrastructure creation to friendly foreign countries in the Indian Ocean Region. As far as capability enhancement is concerned, the various avenues include training, joint exercises, joint patrols, exclusive economic zone surveillance, hydrographic cooperation, technical assistance as well as information sharing with all friendly countries in the Indian Ocean Region. Some of the recent activities carried out by the Indian Navy include the joint patrols carried off Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius; our ships of the Western fleet are on the way back and our survey ships have carried out hydrographic survey off Kenya and Tanzania. Off the east coast in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, we carry out coordinated patrols with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. The aim of all this cooperation with our littoral neighbours is to promote peace and stability in the region, and to see that India emerges as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

Perspective of the Indian Navy

India is a maritime nation with a natural outflow towards the seas. Peninsular India juts deep into the Indian Ocean as the country sits astride busy shipping lanes that transit through the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy, from its humble past of having acquired 33 very old ships from the erstwhile Royal Indian Navy, has emerged as a multidimensional force with 140 ships and submarines, which range from aircraft carriers to destroyers, stealth frigates, landing ships,

anti-submarine warfare corvettes and the landing ships. Also our submarines are both nuclear as well as conventional.

We have nearly 240 aircraft, which include fighter aircraft that operate from aircraft carriers, long range maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft and integral helicopters operating both from ships as well as from shore. We have multidimensional capabilities and with the launching of the naval satellite Rukmani last year, our forces operating across the Indian Ocean region are within its footprint and can carry out effective network-centric operations.

The roles and missions of the Navy are traditional, and are military, diplomatic, constabulary and benign. As part of the military role is the task of sea denial, where we have sea-based deterrence with submarines, both conventional as well as nuclear. As far as sea control is concerned, this is executed by the Carrier Task Force. We also have other roles to safeguard our offshore assets and for coastal defence, as well as to safeguard our mercantile marine and trade, since 90 per cent of our trade transits through the Sea Lines of Communication.

With regard to the diplomatic role, some of which I mentioned earlier, we need to strengthen maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region, portray a credible defensive posture and capability, enhance defence relations with our friendly neighbours and also provide security in the Indian Ocean Region.

On our constabulary role, I had mentioned some aspects related to coastal security. We also have to look after the security of our offshore energy assets, as well as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Lakshadweep Islands.

In the benign role, the Navy looks after aspects such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search and rescue and salvage operations. You are aware that in the recent J&K floods, our marine commandos and divers participated in relief operations. More recently, after the super-cyclone hit the coast of Andhra Pradesh, the Navy was actively deployed, looking after all the people in the state, as well as setting our own house in order.

The Indian Navy seeks to be a stabilising force in the Indian Ocean Region to ensure that the global commons are safe and secure at all times. The Navy has been maintaining a very high operational tempo and carrying out multidimensional operations across the spectrum. Our operational footprint at this point in time extends from South China Sea and Western Pacific in the East to the Persian Gulf and east African countries on the West and the southwest Indian Ocean islands in the South. The ships of the Western fleet are just about returning from their deployment to Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion, Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa. They also participated in the trilateral exercise 'IBSAMAR' between the Indian, Brazilian and South African navies. The ships of the Eastern Fleet proceeded on an overseas deployment from Vishakhapatnam to Vladivostok, where they carried out an exercise with the Russian Navy. They then proceeded off Sasebo in Japan and carried out Exercise Malabar with the United States Navy and with ships of the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) participating. They also visited Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Our indigenously constructed stealth frigate INS Sahyadri proceeded to Hawaii to participate in Exercise RIMPAC, with 22 other navies of the world and she also visited Australia and the Phillipines. These deployments along with the deployment of the Southern Naval Command ships to the Persian Gulf, where they visited Oman, Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia have helped to establish the operational footprint of the Indian Navy across the Indian Ocean Region and also enhanced our avenues of cooperation with the friendly navies as well as with the countries of the Indian Ocean Region.

Capability Development

As part of capability development, we induct platforms in accordance with our Maritime Capability Perspective Plan. As you are all aware, we have integrated the aircraft carrier Vikramaditya, which has the MiG 29K aircraft embarked and these aircraft have a ski-jump assisted short take-off, and as far as their landing is concerned, they carry out arrested recovery on the carrier. Our own pilots have now been trained and they are operating these aircraft from the aircraft carrier.

We recently inducted the P8I long-range maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare aircraft, which has very potent capabilities as regards anti-submarine warfare. We also inducted INS Kolkata, the first ship of Project 15A built at Mazagon Dock Ltd.; the first ship of Project 28, the anti-submarine corvette INS Kamorta and the offshore patrol vessels Sumedha and Sumitra, which were designed and constructed by Goa Shipyard Limited. With regards to our strategic capability, INS Arihant is carrying out its trials in harbour and getting ready to proceed for sea trials shortly.

Future Plans

With regard to our future plans, these are based on a 15-year Maritime Capability Perspective Plan, which is capability-based and mission-dominated. The blueprint of the future Indian Navy is based on self-reliance and indigenisation. Currently, we have 41 ships and submarines under construction in various private and public shipyards in the country. It is our endeavour to increase the indigenous content in these warships, so that future warships will be 100 per cent made in India.

Just a mention of the man behind the machine who remains our greatest asset and strength. It is our endeavour to continuously hone his operational skills and impart the highest quality of training, while providing him a clean, healthy, harmonious and safe living and working environment so that we can run a taut, efficient and a happy Indian Navy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me say that the interests of the nation states of the world are linked to unfettered flow of maritime trade because it is in the maritime domain that the interests of the world converge. The Indian Ocean Region, therefore, lends itself to close maritime cooperation. Networking among the navies of the region is crucial for cooperation and security of the global commons and global maritime partnerships are emerging as the new order of the

21st Century. The Indian Navy is a credible, multidimensional, networked force, which is ready to take on any challenge in the maritime domain in the Indian Ocean Region. It is an instrument for regional cooperation and collaboration. As a maritime nation, India has vast maritime interests and the responsibility of protecting these interests falls squarely on the shoulders of the men in white uniform because it is the responsibility of the Navy and the Coast Guard to ensure that India's maritime interests, which have a vital relationship with the nation's economic growth, are allowed to develop unhindered, both in peace and war.

Jai Hind and Thank You!

*Text of the **Keynote Address** delivered by **Admiral RK Dhowan, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, ADC, Chief of the Naval Staff** at the inaugural session of the 35th USI National Security Seminar 2014 held at USI on 13-14 Nov 2014.

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