

India's Maritime Strategy

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Apioneering paratrooper of the Indian Army and a soldier of great distinction, Major General Sinha, in his eventful career of 40 years, saw action in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, participated in the Goa operations in 1961 and played a vital role in the administration of post-liberation Bangladesh. In every rank, he was selected, not only for command of fighting formations, but also to hold key staff assignments. The General's military virtues were matched in equal measure by his intellectual acumen and the USI gained tremendously from his lifetime association with this institution; especially his long tenure as the Director. Today, I am here to deliver a talk on *India's Maritime Strategy* as a part of the annual tribute that we pay to this gallant and distinguished soldier.

In October 2006, the Indian Navy (IN) promulgated a document titled, "*Freedom of the Seas...India's Maritime Strategy*". This was a classified publication, to which the general public would have had no access. However, since it was desirable that sections of society, other than the defence community, should be familiar with the elements of the maritime strategy, Naval Headquarters (Naval HQ) have decided to issue an unclassified version. So now, both the Maritime Doctrine and the Maritime Strategy will be available to those sections of the civil society who have an interest in such arcane matters.

Not wishing to steal the thunder from Naval HQ, I have tried my best to ensure that the talk which follows, while adhering to the spirit of these documents, takes as little from them as possible. Therefore, as they say in the title of any movie : "any similarities that you may note are purely unintended and coincidental."

I would like to start by giving a perspective on the subject of strategy, and why one is required at all. This aspect assumes more importance today, because each Service has promulgated a Doctrine and we also have a Joint Doctrine. Often the terms

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"doctrine" and "strategy" get confused, or are even used interchangeably. So I think it will be useful, if I spend some time to provide a distinction between the two.

Doctrine and Strategy : The Distinction

According to dictionary meaning, doctrine is simply "that which is taught", and a NATO definition describes it as "the fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of objectives." It is also defined as a "framework of principles, practices and procedures, the understanding of which provides a basis for action." It is meant to be authoritative and yet requires judgment in application. Doctrine is based on the enduring lessons of history and experience, and the repeated success or failure of certain actions over time, tends to elevate them to the level of axioms, which remain relevant to the present and the future. On the other hand, a strategy has to be essentially based on a threat. Without a coherent threat, whether existing or projected in the future, there may not be a *raison d'être* for a strategy. As the threat alters its form and shape, the strategy too, must keep evolving and changing in response.

Traditionally, strategy has been associated with the preparation and waging of war. However, since the nature of conflict, the fabric of society and our geo-political environment has undergone a change post-World War II, the threat has assumed different proportions. Strategy is now, more than merely a military concept since it increasingly requires consideration of non-military matters, with economic, political, sociological and environmental issues driving it into the realm of state-craft. Strategy can, thus, be summed up as an overall plan to go from the present situation to some desired goal in the face of a threat, whether in peacetime or a conflict scenario. A strategy will always be set in the context of a given politico-military situation prevailing over a finite time-frame and within the ambit of overall national aims. Doctrine, on the other hand, is a body of thought and a knowledge base, which should underpin the evolution of strategy. Without doctrine, strategists would have to make decisions without points of reference or guidelines.

In this context, the US provides a useful illustration. In pursuit of victory over Nazi Germany, it evolved a strategy for World War II which-required it to strike a Faustian bargain with the Soviet Union and make her an ally. No sooner had the war ended, that

the US launched a new strategy of "containment" to prevent a powerful USSR from reshaping the post-war world order according to its own ideology. The strategy to implement containment went through several *iterations* because the threat from Communism kept changing in intensity and geographical focus throughout the Cold War era.

The end of the Cold War brought with it, a complete change in the threat scenario, and the Global War on Terrorism that followed a decade later resulted in a flux in international affairs. All this has caused the US Department of Defense and the US Navy to continuously evolve new strategies and bring out vision documents at the rate of one every 4-5 years.

Why a Maritime Strategy?

The well known defence analyst Edward Lutwak asks the question, "What is a Navy in the absence of a strategy? It is, in effect a priesthood." Because, without strategy to guide and inform naval officers, he argues, it is all merely ritual and routine, gold braid and glitter. In the mid-1980s, I recall reading with great indignation, a statement by the editor of *Jane's Fighting Ships* in one of his Forewords, which said something to this effect: "...the Indian Navy is probably one of the few major navies which first acquires hardware and then thinks about how to use it." In retrospect, I can understand the reason for such a statement, because at that juncture, not only did the Navy lack a doctrine and strategy, but was truly a "Cinderella" Service whose fortunes were hostage to the whims and fancies of the annual budget.

A maritime strategy, however, does not concern naval officers alone, and cannot be anything but a sub-set of national strategy. *Every nation must have a vision of its place in the world, as well as the role it wishes to play in the international order.* Regrettably, in India's case, we have historically suffered from an intellectual vacuum as far as strategic thinking is concerned, and that is why, after 60 years as a sovereign republic we lack a clearly articulated statement of national aims and objectives. This is a cultural handicap which has not just deprived us of a healthy tradition of strategic debate and discourse, but also had a deleterious impact on internal security as well as foreign policy issues at the national level. We do not seem to realise that this shortcoming has often been mis-interpreted as a sign of weakness and lack of national resolve, and perhaps even acted as a provocation for aggression.

If I were to state the reasons why the IN considered it essential to generate a strategy at this particular juncture, I would sum them up as under :-

(a) Firstly, the sustained induction of hardware from diverse foreign sources that we have seen over the years, was never accompanied by any operational expertise or doctrine, because such things are not to be had for money. The hiatus that I just spoke about, has in the past often impacted adversely on doctrine, force planning, equipment acquisition and infrastructure development processes.

(b) Secondly, in the absence of higher strategic direction, the Constitution of India has given us the core national values and interests to be protected. But as notional substitutes for a national security document, we have often had to use the *Raksha Mantri's* Operational Directive, and even the *MoD Annual Report*. Thus, while the formulation of a maritime strategy was clearly considered overdue by the Navy, there was also the possibility that it might provide an incentive for the national security establishment to shake off its inertia, and get to work in this field.

(c) And finally, India's emergence as a nation of global significance has brought with it the recognition that not just our national security, but also our economic prosperity has deep linkages with the maritime environment. While a comprehensive National Maritime Strategy may take time to evolve, the Navy considered it prudent to make a start with the Military Maritime Strategy.

At one level, our decision makers are recognising the key role of the Navy in insulating the nation from external intervention, as well as its vast potential as an instrument of state power. At another level, the realisation has also begun to dawn on the intelligentsia that trade and energy, the twin pillars of our economic resurgence, are inextricably linked with maritime power. A clear cut roadmap is, therefore, necessary at this juncture to synergise our national maritime endeavours.

India's Geo-strategic Environment

The Indian peninsula juts out over 1,000 miles into the Indian Ocean, and her geo-physical configuration makes her as dependant

on the seas as any island nation. This predicates the profound influence that this ocean, the only one named after a country, will have on India's security environment. KM Panikkar summed it up neatly, half a century ago, in these words: "while to other countries- the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas, to India it is a vital sea. Her lifelines are concentrated in that area; her freedom is dependant on the freedom of the sea-lanes."

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), at whose focal point India is located, has some unique general features, of which we must take note before examining specific issues :-

(a) Amongst 56 nations of the IOR, some of the fastest growing economies of the world co-exist with some of the poorest. Many of the countries are afflicted with serious problems of backwardness, fundamentalism and insurgency. Most of them are under military dictatorship or authoritarian rule.

(b) This region is the largest repository of the world's hydrocarbon resources, and apart from producing the most rubber, tin, tea and jute, is well endowed with strategic materials like uranium, tungsten, cobalt, gold and diamonds.

(c) The region is home to 1/3rd of the world's population which is regularly struck by 70 per cent of the planet's natural disasters.

(d) Most of the post-Cold War conflicts have taken place in this region. Today, the global epicentre of terrorism as well as nuclear and missile proliferation exist right next door to us.

(e) Areas of the IOR like the Horn of Africa and the Malacca Straits are rife with incidents of piracy, gun-running, drug-trafficking and hijacking.

Territorial and maritime boundary disputes, runaway population growth and the migrant labour economy of South Asia are some of the other generic factors which need to be noted as containing the seeds of future conflict. As far as the regional and other players are concerned, we need to spend a few minutes to make a brief assessment of their current and future impact on the region.

First, a look at the sole superpower the USA, which has to be

counted as a regional player by virtue of her large and ubiquitous maritime presence in the IOR.

(a) It is clear that for the foreseeable future, the US will continue to remain deeply engaged in the IOR and the wider Asia-Pacific region. The two abiding US interests in this region are: safeguarding the hydrocarbon resources of the Middle East and Central Asia; and the containment of China to protect the autonomy of Taiwan. The Asia-Pacific geographic area has been divided along the Indo-Pakistan border, between the Hawaii-based Pacific Command and the Florida-based Central Command.

(b) Currently, America's resources and attention are intensely focused on the ongoing operations in Iraq, and the requirement to keep the terrorist hubs in Pakistan and Afghanistan under check. Monitoring and finding ways to circumscribe the nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran, are the other two issues that have critical significance for the US today.

(c) It is now becoming obvious that while she can try and set an agenda to suit her interests, the US cannot by herself implement such an agenda world-wide. Signs of "imperial overstretch" are surfacing, as are low key feelers seeking help and support, especially at sea. Under these circumstances, a helping hand from a respected regional power like India would bring welcome relief. The stage for this has been set by the passage of the Henry Hyde Act and rapidly warming relations between the armed forces.

Next, let us take a look at China which, though not on the littoral, looms menacingly over the IOR as a rapidly emerging entity with her sights set firmly on super-power status. In the context under discussion, there are just four major points to be noted :-

(a) Firstly, China's nearest competitor in both the military as well as economic spheres is India. Since both are Asian powers, it is a historical inevitability that they will have to compete and even clash for the same strategic space.

(b) Secondly, with Sino-Indian bilateral trade having crossed the US\$ 20 billion mark, China is well on the way to becoming our largest trading partner. This is a welcome development, but one which also contains a contradiction. We must not

allow it to lull us into a sense of complacency, because the Chinese have not forgotten our territorial disputes. Just a fortnight before the visit of President Hu Jintao in November 2006, in a most undiplomatic gesture, the Chinese ambassador in New Delhi reiterated an emphatic public claim to Arunachal Pradesh. It is significant that China has settled boundary disputes with 12 out of 14 neighbours; the only exceptions being India and Bhutan.

(c) Thirdly, the "string of pearls" strategy is another source of concern, due to the clear connotation of military encirclement that it conveys to India. In this context, Gwadar situated at the mouth of the Persian Gulf is probably the first in a chain of ports that China is helping our neighbours to develop, and which could provide future facilities to the PLA Navy ships and nuclear submarines. The other ports in this chain are likely to be: Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh and Sittwe in Myanmar.

(d) And finally, to all those who get dreamy-eyed about the future of Sino-Indian relations, I would put just one question. Where in the annals of international relations can one find a precedent for one nation handing over to another, not just the designs and expertise, but also actual hardware relating to nuclear weapons and a family of ballistic missiles? Even the British were denied atomic secrets by their Anglo-Saxon cousins, the Americans, using the post-War McMahon Act.

(e) By arming Pakistan with conventional and nuclear weaponry, China has, by proxy, forced India to divert scarce resources, and thus tried to checkmate her as a military and economic rival.

Coming to our immediate neighbourhood, India's attitude of detachment with regard to most geo-political developments, is often worrisome. Unless we are involved, we will have no leverage, and unless we have some leverage, we are powerless to influence the course of events vital to our national security. In this context, two examples are illuminating :-

(a) India's national security interests have suffered the most from the sinister nexus between China, Pakistan, and North Korea, to accomplish nuclear and missile proliferation, much of which has taken place by the sea route. The Proliferation

Security Initiative (PSI) was meant for the specific purpose of interdicting transportation of WMDs by ship, but we have yet to make up our mind about joining it.

(b) Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in our close volatile neighbourhood, are countries where we have chosen to remain hands-off, but where things could blow up in our face overnight, and catch us unprepared, because we have no "trip-wires" in place.

Next, a brief look at Pakistan. While Pakistan will remain a factor in our security calculus for the foreseeable future, we need to be careful that this troublesome neighbour does not dominate our radar scope. It is certainly in our interest that she should remain a stable and integral nation, and outgrow the sense of insecurity which has haunted her since independence. Our national security policy should convey a couple of clear messages to the Pakistani leadership, such as :-

(a) Firstly, that India has vast resources of strength and has demonstrated the resilience to withstand whatever Pakistan could throw at us. We will, therefore, never be cowed down either by force or by terrorism.

(b) Notwithstanding threats of a "thousand cuts", India will continue her march on the road to economic, industrial and scientific progress with resolve. Engaging in an arms race with India could break the Pakistani economy's back.

(c) And finally, modern day governments need to focus energies on providing a better quality of life to their citizens through social change and economic development, rather than by breeding fundamentalism in *madarsas*.

We need to bear in mind that the drug traffic emerging from the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent on either side of India provides funding for international terrorism. Organisations like the *Al Quaida* and the *Jemmah Islamiah* find both recruits and financial sustenance here, and use the sea routes for their nefarious activities. The LTTE not only has a "Sea Tiger" wing, but also runs a clandestine merchant fleet which provides efficient logistic support for its insurgency. The emergence of an LTTE aviation component and the recent air attacks carried out by it, have added an altogether

new dimension to this insurgency. In addition, the Horn of Africa, Bay of Bengal and the Malacca Straits are witness to frequent incidents of lawlessness including piracy, hijacking and human trafficking. In the midst of such a scenario, the smaller island nations of the IOR are beset by a feeling of insecurity and seek reassurance from neighbouring maritime powers that their sovereignty will remain protected, and that they will receive succour in times of need.

The last word in any discussion on geo-politics must go to Lord Palmerston who so rightly reminded us that in international relations, core national interests always take precedence over sentiments like friendship or enmity. As a corollary, it must always remain etched in our minds that should a clash of interests arise between India and any other power, regional or extra-regional; the use of coercive power and even conflict remains a distinct possibility.

Security of Energy and Trade

India's own dependence on the seas, and her geographic location astride major shipping routes of the world place a dual responsibility on her. Not only does India have to safeguard the maritime interests vital to her own security and economic well-being, but she must, as an obligation to the larger world community, ensure the free flow of vital hydrocarbons and commerce through the IOR sea lanes.

India, with a merchant fleet of 760 ships totaling 8.6 million tons GRT, ranks 15th amongst seafaring nations. This fleet, operating out of 12 major and 184 minor Indian ports can carry a little less than a sixth of our seaborne trade, and has much scope for expansion. As far as our foreign trade is concerned, I reiterate three oft quoted facts to emphasise the role of the sea:-

(a) Of our foreign trade, more than 75 per cent by value, and over 97 per cent by volume is carried by merchant ships.

(b) Our exports were US \$ 100 billion in 2006. These are slated to cross US \$ 200 billion in the next five years.

(c) India's share of total world trade has been hovering around just one per cent. The government is aiming to double it by 2009.

Currently, at a very energy-intensive state of its development, India is predicted to become the world's largest importer of hydrocarbons by 2050. A new development in this context is our acquisition of oil and gas fields across the globe by Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh. While investments worth billions of dollars have been made in these overseas assets extending from Sakhalin across Africa to Brazil, little thought has been given to their protection, which will certainly have maritime security connotations. Above and beyond whatever our offshore oilfields are currently producing, the seas hold out tremendous promise in terms of oil, gas, and mineral seabed wealth, as well as organic resources. We need to, therefore, not only safeguard our vast exclusive economic zones (EEZ), but also mobilise the technologies required to exploit these resources.

Annually, over 100,000 merchantmen including bulk carriers, container ships, car ferries, oil tankers and liquefied gas carriers transit the waters of the Indian Ocean, carrying cargo worth about a trillion dollars. Both east-bound and west-bound shipping has to pass through a number of choke points where it is vulnerable to interdiction or interference by state and non-state entities. Any disruption in the supply of energy or commodities, would send prices skyrocketing and destabilise industries as well as economies world-wide. It is against this backdrop that India, as a major maritime power in this region, has to shoulder responsibilities in the maritime domain. Let us then look at how our maritime strategy envisages the employment of national assets in peace and in war.

Strategy in Peacetime Conditions

Let me start by quoting a passage from the first version of the US Maritime Strategy promulgated by the CNO Admiral James Watkins in 1986. It says "Sea power is said to be relevant across the spectrum of conflict, from routine operations in peacetime to the provision of the most survivable component of a nation's forces for deterring strategic nuclear war. The maritime strategy provides a framework for considering all uses of maritime power. Amongst the greatest services we can provide to the nation is to operate in peacetime and in crises in a way that will deter war."

Our Maritime Doctrine has clearly outlined the four basic missions assigned to the Indian Navy, which span the full spectrum of conflict, and these are: military, diplomatic, constabulary, and

benign roles. Of these, the diplomatic, constabulary, and benign roles are undertaken in peacetime, and shall receive priority in discussion. However, from the wartime military role, I will de-link deterrence, which happens to be a peacetime function, and discuss it first of all.

Strategic Deterrence

Having crossed the nuclear rubicon in 1998, we are committed to maintaining a minimum credible deterrent under a self imposed condition of 'no first use' (NFU). Having also gone public with a nuclear doctrine, there is no room for second thoughts now, because our adversaries have designed their strategic forces and crafted their nuclear posture based on our declarations.

India's Nuclear Doctrine clearly envisages, and is based on a deterrent in the form of a "triad" with land-based, aircraft-borne, and submarine launched weapons. Of this triad, we only have the first two in our inventory at present. Nuclear weapons are not meant for war fighting, and achieve deterrence by convincing the enemy of the futility of a nuclear first strike, because the response would be so devastating that it would render the strike meaningless.

Two specific attributes are necessary to convince the enemy of the credibility of your deterrent; it should have massive destructive power, and it must be substantially survivable in the face of a sneak first strike. The only platform which can claim to be virtually invulnerable to attack, and ready for instant response is the nuclear propelled submarine armed with strategic weapons. We do have ship-launched ballistic missiles in our arsenal, but our nuclear deterrent would attain true credibility only when its underwater leg becomes operational. However, operating a submarine-based deterrent is a complex undertaking, and requires not only fail-safe communications, but also a full fledged command and control system, backed up by extensive intelligence, planning, training and maintenance infrastructure. We did operate a Charlie I class nuclear submarine on a lease from the USSR for three years, and that provided useful exposure to navy personnel and perhaps scientists. But *INS Chakra* as she was called, carried no nuclear weapons, and we are, therefore, still to learn the complexities of operating a seaborne deterrent. If we are looking forward to deploying such a weapon system in the next few years, perhaps now is the time to start putting its components in place.

The unique doctrine of NFU, does raise the threshold of a nuclear conflict, but requires us to maintain adequate conventional forces in addition to our strategic assets. And that brings us to the issue of conventional deterrence.

Conventional Deterrence

As I just said, nuclear weapons are not meant for the purpose of fighting wars, and every soldier, sailor and airman would do well to remember that these are actually political tools to be used only for sending a message of deterrence, compellence, or coercion to an adversary. But such a situation should arise only when persuasion or dissuasion by all other means has been tried without success, and herein lies the need for conventional deterrence.

The main objective of a peacetime strategy is to deter conflict, and ensure peace and stability in our areas of interest. This is best done by maintaining a preponderance in maritime capability; the idea being to never leave friends as well as adversaries or potential adversaries in doubt about India's superiority at sea. In this context, it is important to convey a clear and unambiguous message to all concerned, so that there is no room for misunderstandings. A message to convey reassurance or deterrence can have many nuances, and I shall just mention the three main elements:

(a) First of all, comes what we now call maritime domain awareness (MDA). It encompasses the ability to keep our oceanic areas under sustained surveillance so that we can compile a comprehensive picture of the peacetime merchant traffic as well as deployment and operating patterns of naval forces. The availability of such a picture not only reduces the "fog of war" but also gives us an early warning of any deviations from the normal state. MDA requires many input sources; from satellite surveillance, aerial reconnaissance, and scouting by warships, to direction finding (DF) stations and merchant ship tracking systems. Making this information available in real time to all our widely dispersed platforms at sea will call for networking of a sophisticated nature.

(b) The second element involves our ability to ensure presence, or physically position units in an area of interest, no matter how distant, and sustain them for as long as necessary. Our vision encompasses an arc extending from

the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Straits as India's legitimate area of interest. The presence of our maritime units not only enhances our familiarity with those waters, and boosts intelligence gathering, but also demonstrates our commitment to friends in that area, and willingness to protect our interests.

(c) The third and most important element of this message that would reinforce deterrence is one of combat efficiency and readiness. While we may consider these as inherent attributes of a professional maritime force, overt demonstrations through overseas deployments, joint exercises, training exchanges and even humanitarian relief operations are keenly observed and noted by friends and rivals alike.

Diplomatic Role

"Gunboat diplomacy", used to be considered one of the less pleasant coercive tactics used by colonial powers in the heyday of imperialism. Today, however, maritime diplomacy obviously has no such connotation, because navies are now being increasingly used to build bridges, to foster mutual trust and confidence, to create partnerships through inter-operability and to render assistance, if required. Of course, post-Cold War they are also being increasingly used to project power across the littoral of third world nations.

For our maritime strategy, this role has two-fold importance. Firstly, the Navy can discharge its peacetime functions in a far more efficient manner, if we have an atmosphere of cooperation with our neighbours and we have friendly ports and airfields available to our units. Secondly, in times of crisis or war too, operations proceed much more smoothly, if the environment has already been shaped, and a certain level of comfort established. This aspect emerged clearly during both the tsunami relief and the Lebanon refugee evacuation operations. However, this role would acquire true significance only, if it forms an integral part of the nation's overall diplomatic initiatives, and the political establishment as well as the MEA learn how to use the Navy as an instrument of state policy. On its part, the IN has accorded the highest priority to what it calls "International Maritime Cooperation" and has created structures, schemes and financial heads to pursue it vigorously. Friendly IOR neighbours, on their part have offered us refuelling and re-supply facilities in a number of ports.

Constabulary Role

The constabulary role in our context, must be seen in two dimensions; ensuring good order at sea, and managing low intensity maritime operations (LIMO).

As mentioned a little while ago, a combination of factors and an unfortunate convergence of interests, make the high seas a fertile ground for criminal organisations and terrorist activities. So when we speak of threats to "good order" at sea, it encompasses the full gamut of lawlessness: from piracy, hijacking and trafficking in arms, drugs and humans to smuggling of Weapons of Mass Destruction. In our own context, the effective sealing of land routes from Pakistan has forced clandestine traffic into the sea, and opened a new window of vulnerability all along our western seaboard. Therefore, while good order at sea is certainly an internal security imperative for India, it is also an important bilateral and international maritime obligation.

LIMO involves countering non-state entities using the sea for unlawful purposes or indulging in violent activities against states. In this context, we have a tangible threat from our west where terrorism breeds unfettered with state support, and is likely to spill over into the sea. To the south, the Sea Tiger wing of the LTTE which has attained proficiency in maritime operations, operates at our door step.

The Service has to tread with a degree of caution in the constabulary role because it is very easy to become excessively involved in low end or "brown water" operations, to the detriment of the navy's prime tasks which lie in the "blue waters" or the high seas. With the creation of the Indian Coast Guard in 1978, most law enforcement aspects of the constabulary role within the Maritime Zones of India have been assigned to them. The Navy needs to stand behind its sister maritime Service and render support and assistance, when required.

Benign Role

The Navy is the repository of certain capabilities and specialist knowledge which are instrumental in the discharge of its benign role. This role involves tasks such as humanitarian aid, disaster relief, search and rescue diving assistance, salvage and hydrographic surveys, and is essentially defined by the complete absence of force or violence in its execution.

The tsunami of December 2004 provided an example of how the basic attributes of maritime power enable it to react at short notice, and respond to emergent situations. The disaster struck on a Sunday morning, and as our ships were sailing for our own East coast and the Andaman Islands we received requests for help from Sri Lanka and Maldives. We mobilised more ships, helicopters, medicines and stores, and by the same evening they were on their way to Male and Galle. Government approval came later by phone, but we knew that if there was to be a problem (government approval), our ships would just anchor 12½ miles offshore and await further directions. Similarly in June 2006, our ships were returning from the Mediterranean when the Lebanon refugee crisis arose. We ordered them to anchor in the Suez canal while the MEA pondered over the issues involved. As soon as the Government decision was received, they turned around and sailed into Beirut to commence the evacuation operations within hours.

These two operations have had a significant impact and have served to enhance India's image in the international community. It is to be hoped that the establishment has drawn the right conclusions about the employment of the Navy as an instrument of diplomacy.

Strategy in War

I have dwelt at some length on the navy's peacetime strategy, because peace fortunately prevails about 90 per cent time. But we have to remember that the prevalence of peace is an indicator that deterrence is working. Should deterrence fail, war will surely follow, and war is what navies train and prepare for. An essential element of this preparation for war is the evolution of a new maritime strategy. Apart from the other imperatives that we have discussed earlier, this evolutionary process has been accelerated by economic, geo-political and technological developments that have come about in the recent past.

Before embarking on a discussion of the strategy, I would like to make two important points, which may call for a paradigm shift :-

- (a) Firstly, under the influence of Mahanian ideas, most navies including our own, imagined that their *raison d'être* was only to engage the enemy in a big battle at sea, and plans were shaped accordingly. However, the lessons that emerged from

exercise after exercise clearly conveyed that navies cannot achieve a great deal, conducting maritime operations in isolation. Unless our actions at sea had a linkage, no matter how indirect, with events on land, the navy's potential would be wasted. There is now acknowledgement that wars are won only on land, and that the navy must ensure that its planning process as well as operations are synchronous with those of the army, so that we obtain the maximum synergy.

(b) Secondly, there is a section of opinion, especially in the army and air force, which firmly believes that all future wars in our context, should be "short and sharp". Perhaps it is a Hobson's choice for these Services because the intensity of fuel, oil and lubricants (FOL) and ammunition consumption as well as attrition can be limiting factors for them. As far as the navy is concerned, the longer a conflict lasts, the greater the pressure that it can bring to bear on the enemy. As the Vietnam, Iran-Iraq, Kosovo, and current Iraq wars have shown, short conflicts are not an inevitability, and we should retain the option to prolong a conflict, if it suits our national interests.

Maritime forces can be deployed in two ways to influence the outcome of war on land. They can be used to interdict the enemy's foreign trade lifeline in an attempt to starve his industry, economy and people, and bring his military machine to a halt. The impact of this "commodity denial" or "indirect" regime requires a finite time to be felt by a nation. Factors like the enemy's dependence on imports, his buffer stocks and ability to re-stock via land routes will decide the effectiveness of these indirect operations, and that is why a superior navy would like to prolong a war.

In the other, "direct" mode of creating an impact on the land battle, the enemy's homeland is targeted by naval platforms delivering weapons from the sea, undertaking amphibious operations or inserting special forces. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the open-ocean warfare challenge disappeared, and the USN-Marine Corps combine shifted their focus to crisis-response and interventions in the third world. Herein, lies the origin of concepts like "littoral warfare" and "naval expeditionary forces". Adapting these concepts to our environment, the maritime strategy must encompass the resolute and judicious deployment of our maritime forces in both direct and indirect operations. This will ensure that

the impact of sea power is felt on the land battle, both in the short term and long term time frames.

Neither littoral warfare nor expeditionary warfare are new functions, but essentially involve a geographic relocation of the theatre from mid-ocean to a zone extending about 50-100 miles inland and seaward from the enemy coast of interest. All the other traditional forms of naval warfare, like amphibious, anti-submarine, anti-aircraft, electronic and mine warfare would retain their importance. However, there are some concepts and factors, mostly technology based, that we would need to incorporate into our new strategy :-

- (a) The littoral of an adversary is an inherently dangerous area for maritime operations due to threats from submarines, strike aircraft and mines etc. Therefore, it would be essential to impose a sequencing of operations so that the battle space is adequately sanitised and favourable conditions created prior to launching any operations.
- (b) In such sequencing or phasing, it would be imperative to first establish information dominance in order to disrupt the enemy's command and control systems and deny him information about our intentions. Thereafter, sea control, a favourable air situation, or mine counter-measures as appropriate, could be pursued before the actual operation is launched.
- (c) Although a new buzz word, all that information dominance, means is attaining superiority in the electromagnetic as well as information warfare domains for one's own forces while destroying, degrading and even deceiving the enemy's intelligence and surveillance assets. We should have no doubt that this would be a decisive factor in any future conflict.
- (d) Today, our fleets possess tremendous striking power in terms of number of SSMs, ASMs and SAMs that can be launched from our ships, submarines, aircraft and helicopters. However, this punch would be wasted in a conflict, unless we can bring the enemy to battle. Our forces would, therefore, have to aggressively seek out enemy units and bring them to action, so that we can inflict adequate attrition prior to attacking his homeland.

(e) In order to obtain the maximum synergy and advantage from our superior numbers as well as capabilities, it is necessary that we fight what the Soviets used to call a "combined arms battle" at sea. By ensuring reliable and secure communications, between warships, aircraft and submarines, it should be possible to concentrate their firepower in a geographical location and inflict heavy attrition on the enemy. Shore based IAF strike aircraft would make an important contribution here. With network centric operations on the horizon, implementation of this concept should not pose a problem.

(f) Combined arms operations fit neatly into another concept termed: "maritime manoeuvre from the sea". Given their inherent mobility and the access provided by the sea, maritime forces can exploit the principles of surprise, concentration, and flexibility to deal the enemy a sudden blow which will unbalance him and shatter his morale and cohesion. Essential ingredients for such an operation include naval aviation, land attack missiles, amphibious shipping and special forces. These are all available to the IN, and manoeuvre warfare should be an important part of our strategy.

(g) In the final phase, our strategy should envisage the linking up of the three Services in a joint operation, no matter how widely dispersed these forces, or brief this phase may be.

Ideally speaking, maritime force structures should evolve from an approved strategy. But having made a late start in this domain, we will have to make some compromises, till the cyclic process in which strategy leads to capability requirements, which in turn influence the force planning progress, stabilises. Nevertheless, the IN has not done too badly; having generated a doctrine, a maritime capabilities perspective plan, and a strategy withing a span of two years. The thought process and discussions that went into the evolution of these documents has generated a need-based, budget-linked force structure for the next 15 years which has been accepted in principle by the MoD.

Epilogue

It is not entirely happenstance that the Navy as it evolves, will meet most of the demands of India's maritime strategy over the

next decade and a half. It did not happen overnight, and great deal of credit for this should rightly go to our farsighted predecessors who laid sound foundations and put the Service on the right track

This talk would, therefore, not be complete, if I fail to make mention of one last set of issues. Just as strategy forms the basis of operational plans, it must itself be supported by a philosophic underpinning which will help the Navy retain a clear vision of the future and steer a steady course. This underpinning is provided by a set of five factors which I would commend to the Navy for close attention :-

(a) **Indigenisation.** India today has the dubious distinction of being the largest arms importer in the world, having signed deals worth US\$ 11.7 billion over the past two years. Experience has shown us that every time we induct a system of foreign origin, we are entering a dangerous cycle of spiraling costs, uncertainty, and dependence on an unreliable supply source. Self-reliance should remain a key result area and, for all their clumsy ways, we should continue our symbiotic relationship with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Firmly rejecting "screwdriver technology", we should insist on the DRDO entering collaborative development and co-production arrangements, wherever we are offered transfer of technology.

(b) **Shipbuilding Industry.** Our current status as a maritime power is due in substantial measure to the 40 years of warship building endeavours of our shipyards. The shipbuilding industry is a strategic asset which must be carefully nurtured and guided by the Navy. Apart from undertaking urgent modernisation, the shipyards must be encouraged to seek partnerships with the private sector and technical collaborations abroad.

(c) **Foreign Cooperation.** The Navy's most important contribution to the nation during peacetime is going to be as an instrument of diplomacy, providing support for political objectives and foreign policy initiatives. In coordination with the Ministry of External Affairs a sharp focus will have to be retained on coordinating assistance to our maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean littoral in areas of training hardware and expertise.

(d) **Networked Operations.** Our maritime forces currently encompass weapons, sensors and platforms of formidable range and capability. With the induction of the aircraft carrier *Vikramaditya*, systems like the Brahmos missile and new classes of submarines, our capabilities at sea will be further enhanced. In order to exploit their full potential, we will need to have a sophisticated communication network covering the entire IOR. With a dedicated maritime communication satellite and the help of our Information Technology (IT) industry we should aim to have a would class network in place by the middle of the next decade.

(e) **Transformation.** Change of any kind does not come easily to us, because we dislike the associated turbulence, and dread the thought of failure. But the choices are stark; we either look ahead and bring about an orderly sequence of change through "transformation", or get overtaken by events and react to them *post facto*. Transformation is the engine which will help the Service absorb new technologies, move towards networked operations, make organisational improvements, embrace joint philosophies and incorporate other ideas to improve combat efficiency.

That brings me to the end of my talk, and I hope that I have been able to convey an idea of our maritime aspirations and a roadmap for the future.