THE ROLE OF THE NAVY IN SERVING THE SECURITY, PROSPERITY AND ORDER AT SEA: AN OVERVIEW OF THE INDO-PACIFIC CONSTRUCT

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ABSTRACT

In the context of geostrategic discourse, the rise of the Indo-Pacific construct has often been discussed in terms of power politics. This paper argues that the IP does not necessarily mean excellent power competition but can also promote a progressive value in the global maritime domain, such as creating a rule-based order at sea, freedom of navigation, and maritime connectivity. In order to comprehend the argument, this paper studies the extent to which the Navy can work towards achieving these values, as the sea is the core business of navies around the world, both during peace and wartime. Specifically, this paper seeks to analyse the role and function of navies in serving the common interests of the IP and its commitment towards a purpose, security, prosperity, and order at sea, namely first, ensuring the safety and security of the sea lines of communication, second, building on regional and global maritime networks, and third, assisting humanitarian and disaster relief and search and rescue. This paper finds that the Navy plays a significant role, and all these aspects are inclusive and shared with states; as such, navies are to serve the interests of the commitment of the IP.

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific (IP) is originally a geographic concept that spans two regions of the Indian and Pacific oceans. It covers almost half the globe, approximately 60 per cent of the world's population, and 35 diverse nations. This area is a geography alteration from the previously known "Asia Pacific" canton a decade ago. The shift from "Asia Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific" focuses on the Indian Ocean and a rising India (Krishnan, 2020). From a strategic viewpoint, the shaping of the IP is based on an information security framework between the United States (US), Japan, Australia and India known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). It is a strategy shaped to respond to a rising China.

Map 1: Indo-Pacific Span

Source: Author

Although this phenomenon is steadfast in its making, the dimension that the IP takes does not entirely revolve around the game of power politics alone; instead, it holds a progressive value. This valuable progression can be seen through the IP objectives, such as achieving a rule-based order at sea, ensuring freedom of navigation, and enhancing maritime connectivity. These values undoubtedly have many positive implications for the stability and prosperity of the global maritime domain. Hence, the critical concept of the IP and its values has been broadly recognised and accepted, and the IP nations that cut across the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are expected to give a solid commitment to the IP regardless of the size of the nation, they make valuable contributions towards states' security and prosperity on common maritime interests.
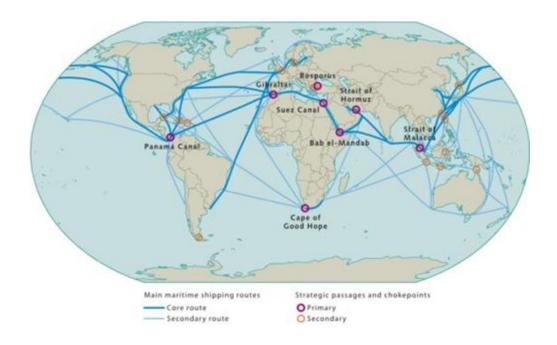
Since the IP contributes significantly to the prosperity and security of maritime nations, the Navy holds the most extensive responsibility in this equation. The sea is the core business of navies around the world, both during peace and wartime, and are responsible for defending the maritime interests of its nations, protecting sea lanes, defending the shores of their nations, reducing regional disputes, and projecting the power of its nation both at sea and ashore. The universality of the Navy and its typical role at sea allows this entity to serve the common interests of the IP. In short, the interrelationship between the commonality of the IP and the similarity of the function of the Navy at sea hold the centre of gravity in achieving the objectives of the IP.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to analyse the role and function of navies in serving the common interests of the IP and its commitment towards a purpose, security, prosperity, and order at sea. This paper studies three aspects, namely ensuring the safety and security of the sea lines of communication (SLOCs), building on regional and global maritime networks, and assisting humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) and search and rescue (SAR). All of these aspects are inclusive and common to states; as such, navies are to serve the interests of the commitment of the IP.

Ensuring the Safety and Security of Sea Lanes of Communication

With the ocean covering over 70 per cent of the earth's surface, sea routes constitute an effective medium for economic prosperity. Furthermore, though oceans are listed separately, such as Arctic, Atlantic, Indian, Pacific, and Southern, all these oceans are interconnected, forming one global ocean. There are no barriers, boundaries, or borders – as such, 90 per cent of global trade transportation is through the ocean, which is laced by a network of shipping routes worldwide (Alexander, 1992). Nine of the world's ten busiest seaports are in the IP, and 60 per cent of global maritime trade transits through Asia and contributes over

half of the world's Gross Domestic Product and 46 per cent of the world's merchandise trade. Since the ocean is an essential lifeline for economic prosperity, an undisrupted shipping network is essential. In this view, playing a significant role in safeguarding the maritime space throughout the world, the Navy will be committed to working together to ensure a safe and secure as the IP and its objective are to serve as a realm of safety network for member states across countries from Indian to Pacific Ocean.

Map 2: Primary Global Maritime Choke Points

Source: World Ocean Review

Navies are generally designed to defend their nation's sovereignty and protect national interests at sea. At the regional and global level, all navies promote peace and stability of international SLOCs and strengthen the goodwill between nations. As such, the commitment of the Navy is mainly seen with them playing a significant role in vital areas such as the choke points along the IP. For instance, the Suez Canal is an important waterway that links the Persian Gulf to Europe and North America; it is the shortest way to travel from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean and will discount the need to go through the Southern Africa tip. Therefore, this canal is an important route that saves cost and time for most trading activities. Any disruption will then require states to use a longer route.

The Panama Canal links the Pacific Ocean with the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, another important waterway similar to the Suez Canal that links maritime connectivity on the westbound. These three straits are among the few choke points – there are many more, such as the Bab el-Mandeb that links the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, washing through the Indian Ocean to the tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, the Straits of Gibraltar, the Turkish Straits, and the Danish Straits, which acts as a link for the global economy, trade, and communication. This implication may be seen in the case of the extent it can disrupt world oil transit; out of eight maritime choke points, the Straits of Hormuz and Straits of Malacca are crucial as they account for over 60 per cent of global oil transit. The Straits of Hormuz hold the strategic gate to the oil field of the Middle East (Rodrigue, 2015). On the other hand, the Malacca Straits, the most important maritime chokepoint, bridges the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean up to the South China Sea, making it the most strategic waterway.

Furthermore, as the busiest international trading route with narrow waterways, the Malacca Straits are the most vulnerable to potential ship collision, oil spills, attacks from non-state actors and increasing military activity. It is crucial to ensure smooth sailing without interruption in these chokepoints as it will affect the entire global maritime economic network, particularly the route to the eastbound.

Others imply disruption in the world food chain, where countries depend on one another for food supply and demand. For example, the container ship Ever Given, which was stuck in the Suez Canal, though this incident was an accident, reflects upon the implication of such blockages on the economic flow via sea if used intentionally. Referred to as block ships, the British used this tactic during the world wars and the Union forces during the American Civil War (Savitz, 2021). In 2014, the Russian forces used this approach against the Ukrainian Navy in a Crimean Port.

Since the global economy is connected via sea, it is also vital to ensure the sea is secure from hostile situations such as terrorism and other globalised forms of criminal activity, such as piracy and armed robbery. Illicit activities such as the smuggling of goods, drugs, arms, and humans will disrupt the maritime connectivity of states and eventually impact states' economic growth. It is, therefore, a significant duty for the navies to ensure a conducive ocean environment, free and open to move and fully benefit from the maritime domain. In the context of the IP, nations, regardless of geographical proximity, are strongly interconnected and recognise the gravity of the issue. Therefore, despite considerable differences in maritime interest among the world's navies, states understand that disruption in any just one of the maritime chokepoints could have devastating effects on global security, the livelihood of people, and the national interest of countries.

The safety and security of the chokepoints and major SLOCs remain common to all states. As such, the IP realm is characterised as one, so a disturbance in one component will affect all others. Hence, as a primary role to safeguard the ocean space, maritime nations across the IP are genuinely dedicated to ensuring a smooth network of trade and directly becoming significant for the navies to pay attention to the contribution of the economic resources and the size of the economy that benefit them in the IP. As such, navies are expected to serve the interests of the IP and its implementation to ensure a smooth, secure environment for prosperity and order.

Building on Regional and Global Maritime Networking

As discussed, the ocean is borderless, and the sea's universality makes it impossible for maritime nations to work alone in safeguarding their interests. Therefore, strong communication and warnings from navies, regardless of nationality, are of utmost importance, especially in sharing and providing information at sea and early preparation to address maritime issues together. Hence, it is in the interest of navies to act together and respond to crises, whether combatant or humanitarian. In this way, many countries seek to continuously build a strong security network through an international navy, which is achieved based on the commonality of the Navy's roles and functions at sea.

In order to achieve security, prosperity, and order over the vast area of the IP, the Navy can serve its best interests at sea through a maritime partnership. This maritime partnership may be built based on an unbinding consensus on principles and norms to work together on undertaking everyday activities to address maritime challenges. A maritime partnership of this character has been implemented by the United States (US); since its inception, the outcomes have been outstanding. Maritime networking goes along with the idea of 'partnership', and by leveraging the capacity of all the navies worldwide, the maritime domain will be more organised. What matters is ensuring a good mix of capacity and capability in the right place and time (Greenert & Foggo, 2014). This mix is precisely the representation of the IP since its interception in 2007, seeking a solid network and interdependency amongst navies and nurturing one another for safety and security in commerce and freedom at sea.

The IP space covers interactions of power, consisting of almost 35 nations and including considerable power and small and medium states. Based on this diversity, if each power seeks to share and exert its power, the maritime domain of the IP will be a free and stable ocean space. For navies to achieve commonality in the IP realm, one of the most effective methods is to serve interests through existing regional and global networks. Currently, many existing strategic partnerships, multilateralism, and bilateralism overlap across the IP. These partnerships may offer a platform for navies to expand their networks further and serve the interest of the IP and its objectives. For instance, through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), many mechanisms have been used to serve the common maritime interest of the Southeast Asia (SEA) nations regionally, such as the ASEAN Maritime Forum and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, which led to a regional collaboration of the Eyes in the Sky as part of

the Malacca Straits Security Initiative. Other agreements are the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), which has established the ASEAN Navy Chiefs Meetings. This representation from the SEA navies will aid in serving the common interest and addressing the maritime threats of the IP, with the Navy playing a pivotal role.

ASEAN has also collaborated with the European Union (EU), in which both parties seek to expand their network in promoting international and regional cooperation, information sharing, capability development, and risk management and training to ensure safe, secure, and clean seas and oceans (EU ASEAN Strategic Partners Blue Book, 2021). This approach involves building resilience against and mitigating the impact of climate change on the marine and coastal environment. In 2020, regional partners collaborated, such as the ASEAN-EU on Maritime Security Cooperation and the ARF Workshop on Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation. The cooperation between the ASEAN and the EU is a unique example of how navies from different regions can work together on a common interest that the IP intends to spread amongst countries. Another existing regional maritime network can be found in the Indian Ocean rim, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The IORA, for example, seeks to maintain maritime safety and security and push for information and data sharing on issues such as piracy, armed robberies at sea, illicit activities, and fisheries. These aspects are all standard, not just to the Indian Ocean states, but it also has a spillover effect to other sub-regional groupings such as the ASEAN and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Another example is the Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA), which advocated for, and the IORA Centre of Excellence for Maritime Safety and Security in 2017, showcasing the strong connection of navies across the IP confluence. The recent Joint Guidance between the Australian Navy and the Indian Navy seeks to showcase the intent of both to work together bilaterally and multilaterally on regional maritime security and consolidate a shared commitment to promote peace, security, stability, and prosperity in the IP region (Negi, 2021). Therefore, it is clear that the IP recognises that, in a world that is interconnected, the Navy has the responsibility to work to solve common issues; aside from materialising to solve these issues, navies should be present at sea to support one another and continue to build on regional and global maritime networks that can rapidly support and react to situations and provide an enduring backbone (Greenert & Foggo, 2014).

Assisting Humanitarian and Disaster Relief and Search and Rescue at Sea

In the era of globalisation, where trade and the movement of people and services cross boundaries and are hyper-connected, maritime activities are increasing. Therefore, the IP is committed to ensuring that the ocean space is always free from disruption, such as ship collisions, oil spills, and other forms of sea distress. Furthermore, when ships are moving at sea, the most excellent support for navies is fellow navies in providing life support to ensure the safety of navy personnel at sea. Even commercial ships and small boats depend on navies to provide a safety network, as there is no reliable safety network around the sea. Furthermore, the Navy is a form of showing support to all maritime nations, meaning that its role is used for combat and crucial in assisting each other. In this case, both the HADR and SAR have been attracting the attention of the maritime community, particularly in terms of building on capabilities and interoperability. Therefore, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and Search and Rescue (SAR) are secondary roles for the Navy during peacetime. The IP converges its value strongly on this aspect to ensure security and order across the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean; the Navy is most effective.

Navies already have much experience working together on both HADR and SAR. For instance, during the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 incident, the international rescue effort for the South China Sea demonstrated a rare show of goodwill and cooperation between the SEA nations, who are often seen as arguing over territorial disputes (Panda, 2014). China assisted in the SAR operation despite its territorial conflicts with the region. Another example is the assistance the USS Fort Worth provided in search of the Air Asia Flight QZ8501. Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, South Korea, the USA, Russia, and China supported the SAR operation led by Basarnas. The two examples showcase an understanding between navies regionally in assisting the principle of goodwill. Other efforts are notable amongst the navies in serving the goodwill of the maritime community at sea, such as when the Singapore Navy rescued five crew members of a fishing trawler and provided medical attention and when New Zealand rescued a

Thai man believed to be stranded for almost six hours on Malaysian waters. More instances have been observed in SEA waters as fishing activities are common. Therefore, these efforts are shared amongst the navies based on humanitarian grounds.

Furthermore, navies can expand their existing HADR and SAR efforts and concept of goodwill by showing more commitment. The IP and its leader countries seek to shape efforts in HADR and SAR, such as the Maritime Search and Rescue and Disaster Relief, which focus on the human safety of the littoral states of the IP (Khurana, 2017). Recently, the introduction of the Resource Guide by the Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM) has sought to locate all related centres in the IP region to respond and conduct a range of issues such as HADR activities, information sharing, knowledge, and promoting best practice in terms of technology, disaster mitigation, and risk management. Since HADR is based on humanitarian grounds, navies can shape cooperation easily, such as collaboration between the Coast Guard with seven Asian countries for cooperation in maritime SAR operations, and the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Vietnam in response to SAR incidents and reducing maritime distress. Another example is the IONS Working Group, which brought representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, France, Indonesia, Kenya, Oman, and Thailand. This meeting featured tabletop simulation, an effort that represents the general practices of the Navy that rehearses a coordinated response to a disaster. To ensure security and order, international navies can realise the IP's commitment with strong involvement in both HADR and SAR.

Conclusion

Sir Julian Corbett states that the ocean is a thoroughfare critical to national life (Rath, 2005). The IP and its constructs have captured this idea; the IP seeks to bring together vital ocean space that contributes to the development of the economy, the livelihood of states, and the security of maritime nations worldwide. This idea involves converging countries, regardless of size, to work together towards a common goal of purpose, security, prosperity, and order. The logic is actual, particularly regarding maritime connectivity and other factors such as ensuring undisrupted SLOCs and a conducive environment for maritime activities. In this sense, the interception of the IP should be applauded for its positive intentions in seeking to build an entire network of the maritime domain.

Regarding the IP's commitments to materialising, the Navy plays a significant role. The Navy's primary function is to ensure a safe and sound sea environment and that daily maritime activities are conducted without disruption. Though there could be many areas in which the Navy can contribute towards the IP's commitment, this paper affirms that three roles of the Navy can most appropriately contribute towards the common interests of the IP and its objectives. The Navy can most appropriately ensure safe and secure SLOCs, particularly important in the maritime domain. Disruption in sea communication will disconnect the entire ocean network; in the case of the IP, maritime sea routes are highly affected without the Navy playing a pivotal role.

Secondly, globalisation is fast-moving and complex, which compels navies to strengthen both regional and global maritime cooperation and fits the purpose of IP. Finally, the IP also seeks to ensure order and security at sea. The Navy can serve this interest because it is responsible during peacetime. In this case, the Navy's role in HADR and SAR prevails. With the Navy serving the common interests and commitments of the IP, the IP is one concept that entails positive values and progression for improving the maritime community and international Navy across the globe.

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