

# India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?

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## Abstract

The rapidly evolving power equations, and great power rivalry, in the Indo-Pacific create unique and demanding conditions for all stakeholders in the region. In this fluid context, regional and extra-regional actors are expressing competing visions of a regional security order. As an important regional power, India has shown interest in this process, in order to help shape the emerging Indo-Pacific security order. However, it faces multiple challenges in achieving these objectives. It is observably adjusting its internal and external policies to seek these objectives. One such major adjustment is India's reorientation of its defence diplomacy (DD) towards a shared understanding of regional security norms. This article argues that India's DD is primarily driven by the quest for shaping a new regional security order which can accommodate visions of both regional and extra-regional stakeholders. The paper examines the means employed in this process by focusing on India's defence cooperation mechanisms, surveying debates and declarations pertaining to maritime security, to decipher the normative content and values behind India's approach. The paper advances the argument that India's Indo-Pacific engagement is gradually evolving to empower the capacities of the regional partners, institutionalising inter-operability, and assisting key actors for building cooperative regional security architecture, thereby stabilising the regional security environment.

**Key Words:** Indo-Pacific, Defence Diplomacy (DD), Indian Navy, Norm Entrepreneur, Regional Security Order (RSO)

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## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region is gaining prominence with emerging great power rivalry in the region. The region is also witnessing rise of polarisation, populism, extremism, and backlash politics. China is exploiting these tendencies and asserts its economic and strategic weight to flout international law, established practices, and democratic credentials. The rise of authoritarianism, violent non-state actors and China's salami slicing tactics are disrupting and posing challenges to the international liberal order(s). To enhance the survivability of liberal international order, the international community needs to ensure greater equity in cooperative mechanism being imagined for the accommodation of smaller states in the region (Colgan 2019). In this pursuit, future international order(s) are bound to get more regionalised and fragmented (Tang 2018) According to Shiping Tang, this would motivate nation-states to cooperate for making new governing rules and norms. Consequently, it would cement multinational groupings and coordination to move 'toward a better governed international

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

order' (Tang 2018). Fundamentally, a new international order is unfolding through bottom-up oriented statecraft and engagement to make new rules and governing mechanisms (Tang 2013). This new order entails greater 'regionalisation, interregional bargaining, and coordination' (Tang 2018).

The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific has a significant bearing on India's global aspirations. This paper analyses the role of India's DD in creating new strategic norms to shape the security order in the Indo Pacific region. Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical construct in the making to connect Indian and Pacific Ocean from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of America, including several littoral countries. However, the region has contested connotations that vary from state to state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined an Indian conception of Indo-Pacific as follows:

The Indo-Pacific is a natural region. It is also home to a vast array of global opportunities and challenges... The ten countries of South East Asia connect the two great oceans in both the geographical and civilisational sense. Inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity, therefore, lie at the heart of the new Indo-Pacific. India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country. A geographical definition, as such, cannot be. India's vision for the Indo-Pacific Region is, therefore, a positive one (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2018).

This vision for Indo-Pacific asserts the creation, and sustaining, of a regional security order as an extension of India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) policy, which encompasses five key pillars – prosperity and security for all, cooperative capacity building for peace and security through dialogue, building consensual norms and rules for ocean governance, inclusive freedom of navigation and collective action against defaulters and trespassers, and enhancing maritime connectivity for sustainable development for Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and beyond (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2015).

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

To achieve this vision for Indo-Pacific, India has reoriented the scale and scope of its DD to advance defence cooperation, reassure small Island and littoral states, and moderate the aggressive posturing of revisionist actors to build a 'consultative, democratic and equitable' regional security order (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2019). Historically, India has contributed significantly to shape international/regional order(s) through normative values and proactive engagement. Ian Hall has explored India's historical behaviour as a 'normative power'. He argues that India has done this by- delegitimising imperialism and racial discrimination, seeking democratisation of the UN, advocating for just and equal nuclear order, and attempting to devise mechanisms for bridging disparity between the global North and South (Hall 2017). However, with the end of the Cold War, India become a reluctant 'norm taker' to adjust into a new emerging liberal economic order. Over the last few decades there has been a considerable shift in India's position as a 'norm maker'. In this period it has consistently shown 'a clear vision of how international affairs ought to be organized', instead of accepting 'the system as it is' (Hall 2017).

From the above-mentioned theoretical standpoint and context, this paper advances the argument that India's DD is aimed at institutionalising certain maritime security norms to visualise and practice the Indian vision of the Indo-Pacific order. India's DD has four key roles – Defence and Security related Capacity Building (DSCB), Defence Aid and Export (DAE), organising bilateral and multilateral exchanges, and assisting in disasters and crises. The four roles of DD produce four corresponding regional security norms – endure equity, enabled partners, institutionalised inter-operability, and become a credible responder through pooled information, respectively. India has been pursuing these to build a just and equal regional security order based on shared understanding, accommodating aspirations of regional and extra regional players to institutionalise regional cooperative security architecture.

The article is divided into three sections; the first section focuses on a conceptual foundation establishing the link between DD, norms entrepreneurship, and regional security orders; the second section explores the contribution of India's DD in producing certain security norms; and, the third section analyses the nature and impact of these norms in building a new regional security order. It concludes that sustained engagement with Indo-Pacific countries leads to

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

inclusive rule-based regional security order through ideating and assisting for mutual security concerns.

### **Defence Diplomacy: A Vehicle for Norm Entrepreneurship and Building Regional Security Order**

The DD is an important tool for norms entrepreneurship to build regional security order(s). These are interrelated concepts as illustrated below in Figure 1. Historically, diplomacy in general, and DD in particular is a key institution to entrepreneur, bandwagon, and cascade international/regional norms for seeking stability and shaping order. DD activities reconstitute security norms and order through changing perceptions of warfare and engaging nations for disarmament, deterring aggressors, and detecting avenues for employing militaries for humanitarian assistance (Thomas 2021).

In short, DD facilitates creation and proliferation of new security norms. Thus, as can be inferred from Martha Finnemore's and Kathryn Sikkink's research work, DD can contribute to craft 'standard of appropriate behavior for actions with a given identity' (1998). The process of crafting these standards of appropriate behaviour is defined as norms entrepreneurship in a given context (Finnemore and Sikkink 1996). According to Cass Robert Sunstein, 'norm entrepreneurs can alter people [it implies to any actor, state, organization, etc.] to the existence of a shared complaint and can suggest a collective solution' (1996). In the context of international norms dynamics, norm entrepreneurship is defined as deliberative and sustainable dialogue to create shared social purpose, maintain shared vision, and change intersubjective understanding, practices, and principles to manage conflicts and enable collective security and cooperation (Sunstein 1996).

This results in constituting, regulating, and legitimising an order; and, norms infuse collective consciousness, constraints freedom of action, and streamlines cognitive sense about complex realities (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). In this way, norms play three important functions through state socialisation – regulative, constitutive, and legitimising (Ibid).

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

Therefore, the security-seeking-actors [state or regional organisations] use DD to influence existing structures highlighting salient key security issues and finding solutions through strategic dialogue (Flockhart 2006, Lakshmana 2012). Thus, the shift and transformation of normative ideas determines the shape of international/regional structures. For instance, Andrew Carr and Daniel Baldino illustrate how Australia uses DD to frame, institutionalise, and internalise certain security norms in the Indo-Pacific (2015). Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink put it aptly, 'shared ideas, expectations, and beliefs about appropriate behavior are what give the world structure, order, and stability' (1996).

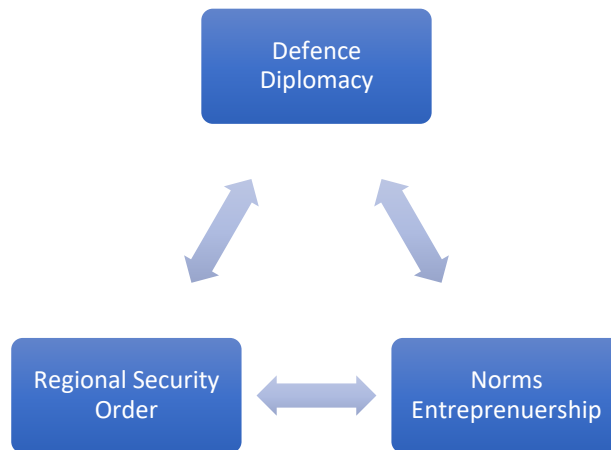
From this vantage point, joint military exercises and strategic partnerships help in the creation of security norms for member states. Sustained engagements develop shared vision and perspectives, shed misunderstandings, and promote mutual trust and confidence on common strategic and security concerns. In this vein, India uses DD to promote, frame, and legitimise its vision of security order in the Indo-Pacific. This has proceeded in four phases of norm entrepreneurship – incentivising cooperative partnership, institutionalising mechanisms for it, socialising participants, and accommodating new members and reforms.

India's DD is structured 'to accommodate concerns of neighbouring states and is employed by the national representatives to project India's benign role in the region', as well as to contain China's offensive posture (Jha 2011). P. V. Rao argues that Indo-Pacific states are keen to accept Indian Navy's greater role to build maritime security architecture and manage crises (Rao 2022). Therefore, the DD is gaining prominence in India's approach within the Indo-Pacific.

India's DD includes providing professional military education and training to friendly nations, defence exports, friendly military exchanges and visits, conferences and workshops, and joint exercises (Jha 2011). It gained prominence in the post-Cold War era with intensified bilateral and multilateral defence dialogues and cooperation. These activities nurtured cooperative security thinking and architecture (Dutta 2009). Roby Thomas, a former Indian naval officer, asserts that DD develops new political language to devise cooperative mechanism between various political entities (Thomas 2021). Before examining these assertions, it is important to

## India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?

understand the competing visions of the Indo-Pacific order to contextualise the role of India's DD in the region.



*Figure 1:* Conceptual relationship between variables  
(*Source:* Author's conceptualisation)

### Indo-Pacific Regional Security Order: Competing Visions

The conception of regional orders is more a result of mental maps than geographical proximity, cultural commonalty, or formal agreements. It emerges, transforms and submerges with changing power dynamics. Notwithstanding, regional order necessitates building communities, forming collective identities, creating peace zones, and functional links to contain conflicts and preserve peace and prosperity (Rana 1977). It can be interpreted as a set of values, principles, cultural traits, identities, and ideologies that help in the construction of an order within spatio-temporal conditions. Thus, the concept of region varies with great powers and emerging regional powers, as does the concept of regional order (Alagappa 2003).

In this context, the Indo-Pacific is an evolving regional security order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Though a German strategist has used the term 'Indo-Pacific' in 1942, organisation of the Indo-Pacific as a single maritime space however, can be traced back to Japan's initiative of Asia South Pacific Cooperation (ASPAC) forum in 1964 to contain China and the USSR (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2019). Further, it has been a ground for convergence of security interests of the U.S.-China-Japan-ASEAN in the late 1970s aligning to counter Soviet influence in the region (Menon 2021). This strategic alignment concluded with the end of the Cold War,

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

when priorities of the partners differed, thus pursuing different pathways. Contemporarily, the growing influence of China has forced its immediate neighbours and great powers to form new alliances. The Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) along with the String of Pearls Strategy, are a few examples. India's former National Security Advisor (NSA) and an acclaimed scholar on China, Shivshankar Menon, underlines that Chinese assertion in the Indo-Pacific is ambitious, non-negotiable and unilateral (Menon 2021). This indicates China's reluctance at building security through consultation, be it neighbours or peripheral states like Japan, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, and South Korea.

Consequently, China's strategy calls for a consolidated relationship of US and Japan with regional actors to sustain peace and security within the Asia-Pacific region by constructing Indo-Pacific as one geostrategic space (Muni 2019). From 2007 onwards, the US devised collective and multilateral strategies for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific from 2007 onwards (Mohan 2012). Later, President Trump spoke about Indo-Pacific at APEC summit (2017), with Pacific Command being renamed as Indo-Pacific Command (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2019). In this backdrop, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, at the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Ocean Conference (2019), stated that, 'the Indo-Pacific has been tossed around in the naval thinking' of India much before Japanese and American conceptualisation (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2019). Therefore, major stakeholders visualise scope and Indo-Pacific strategy differently (Roy-Chaudhary and Sullivan de Estrada 2018). Moreover, differences of nature, rationale and scope in shaping Indo-Pacific RSO vary in content and intent between the US, China and India, as summarised in Table 1.

<b>Parameters</b>	<b>The US</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>India</b>
Goals	Shared Vision	Shared Destiny	Shared Understanding
Nature	Open and Free	Fair and Just	Just, equal and inclusive

## India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?

Scope	Rule-based universal engagement	Extra-regional power out	Engage and accommodate extra-regional powers
Ways	Collective capability building	Engaged multilateralism for win-win to all	Enabling the regional actors
Means	Flexible and modernised alliances for integrated deterrence	Collective security and common development	Institutionalised Cooperative security

**Table 1:** Variation in Conceptualising Indo-Pacific RSO

(Source: Author's compilation from various sources, Yi-zhong, 2022; Hall, 2020).

Table 1 locates India's vision of Indo-Pacific RSO as key players are making efforts to change the existing security and strategic norms for building a new security order. The remaining part of this article examines India's role in this endeavour.

### **India's DD and the Indo-Pacific Regional Security Order: A Historical Overview**

India is ideating, observing, and moderating developments in the Indo-Pacific since the civilisational era (Hall 2022). S. D. Muni and Rahul Mishra (2019) have outlined seven phases of India's Indo-Pacific engagement – Ancient Hindu-Buddhist influences (till 12<sup>th</sup> Century), Islamic Interactions (12-16<sup>th</sup> Century), British rule and freedom movement (1600 to 1947), Nehruvian era (1947-1964), post-Nehru Phase (1964-1992), Look East Phase (1992-2014), Act East Phase (2014-present).

### **Early Indian Thinking and Indo-Pacific RSO**

India's perception of regional order evolved in several phases in various dimensions and spheres. The early engagements provided ideational and normative foundations to the Indian



## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

concept – exploring cultural, civilisational, and political linkages. For instance, an Indian historian, Kalidas Nag, elucidates, India and the Pacific world had evolved together with fundamental principles of fellowship and universal well-being since many centuries (Ghoshal 1942). Similarly, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, imagined the concept of Indo-Pacific regional order as:

The Pacific is likely to take the place of the Atlantic in the future as a nerve centre of the world. Though not directly a Pacific state, India will inevitably exercise an important influence there. India will also develop as the centre of economic and political activity in the Indian Ocean, in Southeast Asia and right up to the Middle East. Her position gives an economic and strategic importance in a part of the world which is going to develop rapidly in future (Nehru 2004)

During the late 1940s, Indian maritime thinker, K. M. Panikkar, visualised the need for multilateral maritime cooperation by creating a 'regional council' in the Indian Ocean. According to him, this regional council 'should work in close association with other powers having an interest in the peace and security of the area', and 'should [also] devote itself to the general development of political freedom, social consciousness, economic progress and betterment of living conditions of the masses' within the wider Indo-Pacific region (Panikkar 1945). In the first of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, certain Indian political leaders advocated the setting up of 'a regional organization from Suez to Australia with a defence council' (Menon 2021). India's engagements in this direction were proactive in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, India's adversarial relations with China and Pakistan, domestic political issues, and complexities of the Cold War limited its ability to shape the regional order of Asia-Pacific until the 1990s (Menon 2021). During the Cold War, Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi's geopolitical vision conceived different versions of regional orders (Ministry of External Affairs 2022). For instance, Zorawar Daulet Singh (2019) argues that Nehru's intention was to develop alternative regional orders, establishing zones of peace and mitigating security dilemma in Asia and globally; whereas, Indira Gandhi focused on building India-centric regional orders, restraining and limiting involvement of external powers at sub-regional level.

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

Later, India played a key role in institutionalising the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) in 1997 (Mukherjee 2014). However, India reluctantly discussed security related issues at this platform until 2011. India's security interests in the IOR and beyond became a priority as the US started recognising India's potential role as a 'net security provider' in the region (Chacko 2014). Along with this, emerging Chinese influence in the region and shifting political priorities of current political dispensation reorients India's Indo-Pacific policy and strategy. For instance, variables such as ideational continuity, pragmatic normative considerations, evolving balancing tactics, changing role conception are being analysed to figure out India's orientation towards the region (2003). Moreover, these civilisational and cultural linkages as well as strategic necessities rationalises the need to investigate India's role as a norm entrepreneur in the region.

In this endeavour, the political leadership and strategic elites play a critical role constituting four security norms through DD in the Indo-Pacific region. The thrust areas of cooperation are capacity building through education and training, facilitating defence industry and state apparatus, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. The following sub-sections analyse key roles of DD and its norms entrepreneurship. Table 2 summarises key roles and its normative contribution to shape Indo-Pacific RSO.

### **Defence and Security Related Capacity Building to Endure Equity**

Enhancing the defence capacity potential of friendly countries is a key function of DD. India's defence capacity building initiatives under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITECP), Special Aid Programme and International Military Training Cooperation (IMTC), are aimed at building foundations for regional cooperation and construct common values (Roy-Chaudhary 2019). It ranges from providing defence related consultancy, education, and training, to defence reforms and institution building. Therefore, it is considered a focal point of India's DD. India has exceptional expertise to provide military training to neighbouring states and the Indian Ocean littoral countries, given its geopolitical positioning, pool of experts, and professional military institutions and ethos (Ministry of Defense 2022). The Indian Navy's First Training Squadron (1TS) and personnel have been deployed to various Indo-Pacific countries for professional education, training and maritime domain awareness

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

(Ministry of External Affairs 2013). Moreover, India has been sending teams of military experts to establish defence institutions in friendly countries on the Indian Model. The military training of personnel of Indo-Pacific countries has substantially uplifted their capabilities, enhanced reliance of these partner countries on India, and reduced dependency levels on China.

Further, India has been providing technical assistance for maintenance and repairs to Russian aircrafts used by various Indo-Pacific countries since 1994 (Ministry of Defense 2022). Since then, these countries have been discussing and deepening defence cooperation under various strategic partnership agreements to receive defence aid and export. The Malaysia India Defence Cooperation Meeting (MIDCOM) framework is a case in point. Thus, DD recognises the needs of a country and provides appropriate capacity building measures.

### **Defence Aid and Export to Enable Partners**

Indian Defence Secretary, Ajay Kumar, stated that India's 'total defence export in 2021-2022 stands at Rs 13,000 Crores', increasing from Rs 4682 Crores in financial year 2017-18 (Nair 2021). Majority of this has been to countries of the Indo-Pacific region. Export orders includes mostly non-lethal defence products – 'personal protective items, Offshore Patrol Vessels, ALH Helicopter, SU Avionics, Bharati Radio, Coastal Surveillance Systems, Kavach MoD II Launcher and FCS, Spares for Radar, Electronic System and Light Engineering Mechanical Parts etc' (Jha 2011).

India has established bilateral defence cooperation with several countries to deepen defence relations. For instance, India and Singapore have had several defence agreements since 2007 to facilitate use of military facilities on payment basis as well as establishing joint ventures for defence R&D and production (Philip 2022). India has been exporting arms to Myanmar since 1949. For instance, in 1950, it exported six Dakota airplanes to Myanmar in the wake of its Karen crisis. They have been undertaking joint operations and sharing intelligence in counter-insurgency operations on India's Eastern borders. Post-1991, DD has revitalised relations through sale of military hardware and training for operating sophisticated defence equipment and aircraft. In fact, Myanmar has been the biggest beneficiary of India's defence exports from

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

2017-2021 (Jha 2011). India's DD with Vietnam has been at work since 1980s, with posting of its military attaches to Vietnam; this was upgraded by offering defence technologies to overhaul its defence infrastructure, extending to various domains of military from guerrilla warfare to naval and air defence. In June 2005, India exported 150 tonnes of warship components and other spare parts to Vietnam (Sahu 2020). Indian and Vietnamese navies are coordinating the establishment of satellite imagery stations worth \$0.5 million along with use of civilian nuclear technology.

India's defence relations with Indonesia have been revived through various MoUs and agreements for supplying defence related products, technologies, and joint training and operations since 1990s (Peri 2018). Since 2007, the two countries have been engaged in military-to-military dialogues, producing several defence technologies and weapons in critical areas such as cyber security and network centric warfare.

India has signed logistics support agreements with various countries of the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>1</sup> India also provides line of credit (LoC) for enhancing defence capabilities; for instance, it has given a \$500-million LoC to Bangladesh for enabling its defence acquisition capabilities. C. Raja Mohan illustrates that India has provided major defence support to the ASEAN countries to deal with regional conflicts and power confrontation (Mohan 2013). Former Vice Admiral A. K. Chawla, while assessing India's outreach, asserts that its DD has enabled partners through providing logistics and other operational supports (Chawla 2022).

### **Bilateral and Multilateral Joint Exercises to Institutionalise Inter-operability**

The end of the Cold War allowed India to shed its 'long-standing defence isolation', and the Indian Navy harnessed the opportunity by undertaking multilateral confidence-building measures (Mohan 2012). It has articulated its DD to convince the neighbours about its benign stature in the Indian Ocean region. More importantly, joint exercises, frequent port calls and naval exchanges have created transparency, and a shared sense of responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific (Roche 2019). Joint exercises have advanced operational effectiveness and interoperability on common regional problems such as piracy, terrorism, and humanitarian

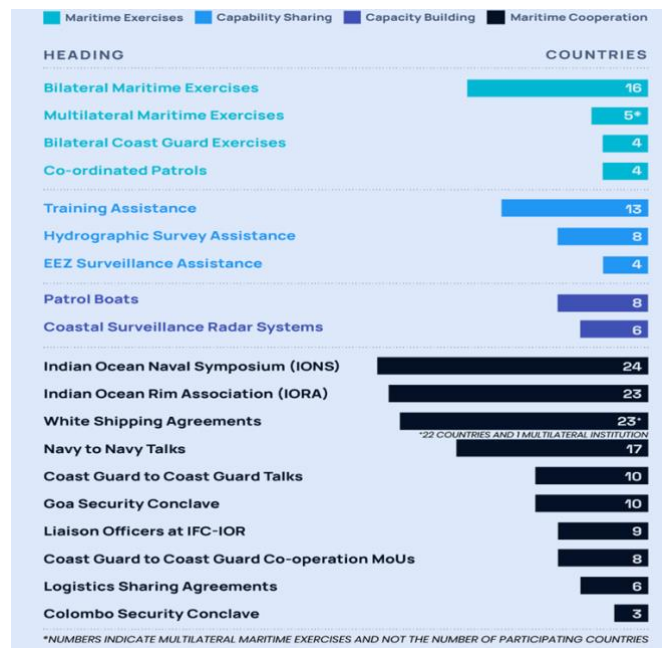
## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

assistance. These efforts contribute to build bridges with regional countries (Sachar 2003). Official declassified data reveals that India has institutionalised more than 30 bilateral and multilateral naval exercises that cover diverse maritime spaces and countries. Figure 2 depicts a range of India's DD activities including joint exercises. A survey of the press release of these exercises spotlights institutionalisation of interoperability as a key objective (Ministry of Defense 2022). The Malabar exercise with the US Navy and Milan Exercises with other navies of Southeast Asia and IOR were key initiatives for shaping regional security order. These are 'not merely military interactions but also contained powerful political message' (Chawla 2022).

According to the official statement of the Indian Navy on the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the Malabar, the exercise saw 'complex exercises including anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare drills, and other manoeuvres and tactical exercises' (Kaushik 2021). Strategic analyst, Prashanth Parameswaran, states that Malabar signifies 'broader platform for Indo-Pacific defence cooperation' (Parameswaran 2016). It has helped evolve 'a principled security network' in the region (The Diplomat 2016). The Indian Navy's official press release states, Milan exercise aims 'to hone operational skills, imbibe best practices and procedures, and enable doctrinal learning in the maritime domain, through professional interaction between friendly navies' (Ministry of Defense 2022). A formal naval officer, Abhijit Singh, argues that in its evolutionary phase, the Milan was aimed to ensure 'good order at sea' through sharing 'best practices, protocols and procedures and visualising cooperation in non-traditional maritime arenas (Singh 2018).

The joint military exercises have been useful to 'retune operational procedures, doctrines and maritime thinking' as well as predicating possible threat scenarios, states former Commodore R. S. Vasan (2022). Commodore Vasan further states, collective aim of these exercises is ensuring 'a stable, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific'.

## India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?



**Figure 2: India's Maritime DD Initiatives**

(Source: Gateway House Research: <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/indo-pacific-4.png>)

The official statement on the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the exercise underlines that ‘a series of complex and advanced exercises were undertaken in all three dimensions of naval operations to enhance compatibility, interoperability, mutual understanding, and maritime cooperation amongst the partner navies’ (The Hindu 2022). It strengthens regionalisation and interregional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, and underlines the benign role of Indian Navy and its diplomatic outreach. It also fosters bonds of friendship for security and prosperity. These joint exercises underline attaining security by cultivating trust and confidence among strategic partners and friends. As naval power is inherently flexible, versatile, and unobtrusive, joint exercises have facilitated the emergence of several other bilateral and multilateral engagements as shown in figure 2.

### **Assistance in Disasters and Crises to Institutionalise Credibility and Pooled Information**

The Indian Navy is recognised as ‘first responder in the maritime domain’ in the IOR, which is an outcome of India’s collaborative efforts in assisting various countries in maritime disasters and crises. India has been using naval force for humanitarian assistance through co-

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

opting and fostering partnerships. After providing crucial assistance during the 2004 tsunami, the Indian Navy established a Directorate of Foreign Cooperation in its Naval Headquarter (NHQ); India considers the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions as maritime variants of UN Peacekeeping missions (Ministry of External Affairs 2019). The Indian Navy has undertaken a range of complex Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations in the Indo-Pacific, and beyond (Ministry of Defense 2022). In this way, India has devised an alternative rationale for use of naval power and need for maritime information sharing.

India has built a coastal radar system for surveillance in Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Indonesia, Myanmar, Mauritius, and Thailand (Bagchi 2019). The information received from the satellite system is processed at the Information Fusion Centre at Gurugram, jointly managed by the navy and coast guard, since December 2018. It is a regional cooperative security initiative in the IOR (Ministry of Defense 2022). India appoints the International Liaison Officers (ILOs) that facilitates a multitude of cooperative security mechanisms from capacity enhancement to information sharing in the Indo-Pacific.

India has also used the IONS to develop a cooperative security framework 'pooling resources, exchanging information and building capacities as needed' (Muralidharan 2019). Since 2015, the Indian government has concluded a large number of 'white-shipping' (non-military commercial shipping) information sharing agreements to extend its maritime outreach to institutionalise credible connects (Gopal 2020). Under the SAGAR project, India is proactively engaging with countries of the Indian Ocean Region 'for coordinated Patrols, cooperation in EEZ Surveillance, Passage exercise, towards enhancing regional maritime security' (Ministry of Defence 2022).

In sum, India's bilateral and multilateral maritime engagement has strengthened its partnership and diversified its reach. Moreover, these initiatives have amplified India's inclusive approach to 'shape favourable and positive maritime environment' (Parmar 2022).

These roles have made the IN a responsible maritime power, since it keeps the threat level low by preventing and containing emerging threats. Further, this norm entrepreneurship would

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

intensify cooperation in critical and emerging technologies sector in the Indo-Pacific as visualized by QUAD partners. For instance, it helps in technical standardisation, resilient technology supply chain and figuring out operational feasibilities.

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Norms</b>	<b>Implications for RSO</b>
Defence and Security related capacity building	Endure equity	Consolidating shared understanding
Defence Aid and Export	Enabled partners	Bolstering trust and confidence
Joint exercises	Institutionalised interoperability	Minimising operational unpredictability and uncertainty
Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster relief (HADR) and pooled information system	Credible first responder	Ensuring favourable and positive maritime environment

**Table 2:** India's Defence Diplomacy and Norm Entrepreneurship  
(*Source:* Author's formulation)

### **Analysing Nature and Impact of Strategic Norms on Regional Security Order**

India's security engagement in the Indo-Pacific had made phenomenal progress from being an irrelevant actor in the 'ordering of Asia-Pacific security' to 'a new strategic factor' in the region (Mohan 2009). India has become, 'a significant but not a dominant' player in Asian geopolitics (Menon 2021). Moreover, the thrust of India's conception of regional orders is to attain polycentric world order and seek issue-based coalition (Menon 2021).

In this regard, naval power has enormous potential to influence political and security dynamics not only 'to maintain good order at sea, but also shaping major foreign policy courses, if properly employed (Booth 1977). With this frame of reference, the Indian Navy has played a



## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

central role in shaping regional order in the IOR and beyond (Parmar 2020). Years of sustained engagement through multiple channels have resulted in establishing communication systems, formalising institutional structures, improved confidence-building measures, and better understanding on a range of traditional and non-traditional maritime security issues (Devare 2006). For instance, a former Deputy National Security Advisor illustrates how India has intensified its DD to shape favourable strategic neighbourhood and security order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond (Gupta 2019).

Cambodia based newspaper, *The Phnom Penh Post*, highlights how India's joint military exercises with ASEAN countries have increased significantly in the last thirty years, promoting solidarity and harmonious security (Sochan 2022). Further, the newspaper report asserts that the established defence cooperation between India and ASEAN provides new direction 'to build a credible collective defence against outside aggressors' in the Indo-Pacific (Sochan 2022).

The navy's press briefs on joint military exercises with Indo-Pacific countries reiterate its intentions to strengthen existing bonds for building cooperative security order (Peri 2018). Though multilateralism 'does not automatically guarantee a reduction of distrust among rival powers' (Mohan 2012), it does however, facilitate construction of ideational and normative frameworks to organise interactions and rule-making procedures.

To meet this objective, one of the Indian Navy's guiding principles is maritime cooperation, implying 'the Navy will effectively engage friendly maritime forces in the IOR and beyond through port visits, bilateral interactions, training initiatives, operational exercises and technical support arrangements, in order to establish a cooperative framework that promotes mutual understanding and enhances security and stability in the region' (Ministry of Defense n.d.). The Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS - 2015) joint military exercises contributes to improve operational skills, to projection of capabilities, to imbibe best practices and procedures, to enhance doctrinal learning, to promote benign role and to develop mutual trust, comradeship and respect (Ministry of Defense n.d.).

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

Contextually, Malabar, Milan and SAGAR are the architect for organising the Indo-Pacific RSO in multiple ways. First, these joint exercises and policies contribute towards freedom of navigations in Strategic Choke points, such as Malacca Strait. Second, these exercises establish equality between small and large sophisticated navies as they operate on the same platform, thereby facilitating mutual learning. Third, it has broken maritime isolation of many regional countries; put differently, it provides avenues for new maritime regionalisation. For example, during Milan 2006, Myanmar shed its maritime isolation and allowed visits to their ports and maritime sites. Fourth, it contributes to inventing a common maritime security vocabulary by sustaining cooperation in the nautical commons.

For instance, one of the major contributions of the Milan is conceptualisation of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) (2008) (Jha 2011). This platform is instrumental in seeking regional cohesion on local problems of littoral island countries; therefore, it is a key platform formulating 'Indian Ocean Identity' to make basic governing rules and to check ambition and intentions of the extra-regional powers (Prakash 2010).

Commander David Catterall, incumbent commanding officer of USS Fitzgerald of the Pacific Fleet of US Navy, states that 'Milan provides an opportunity for like-minded navies that sharing a common vision of a more stable, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific, to operate and train alongside one another' (Rahmat 2022). Chief of Australian Navy, Vice Admiral Michael Noonan, who attended the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Milan exercise, asserted that this exercise 'provided valuable opportunities to build relationships and mutual understanding among regional naval leaders' (Herring 2022). Thus, various forms of DD expands 'cooperation and teamwork' to tackle regional security concerns (Singh 2018).

The theme of DD has evolved over the years, from conventional and customary to complex and advanced operational exchanges; from promotion of cooperation in maritime security and humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) to international cooperation in naval warfare strategy, 2+2 Dialogue, and strategic partnership. Most of these initiatives have overlapping and reinforcing objectives. This weaves a complex interdependence between the nation-states based on shared security norms.

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

Within the Indian strategic thinking community, even the prospects of a trilateral calibrated cooperation between India-China-US have been explored to avoid confrontation in the Indo-Pacific (Mehta 2015). From an Indian perspective, Malabar, Milan and SAGAR are key security initiatives of India to counter aggressive maritime posturing or unilateral initiatives in Indo-Pacific, rather than getting conformational and making military alliances. Notwithstanding, India's cooperative regional security initiatives have stimulated China to engage in multilateral military diplomacy in the region.

Put differently, DD enables strategic dialogues to set an agenda for future security governance norms. As, the 'aim of norm entrepreneurs is to develop a normative structure and supportive framework (such as relevant institutions, laws and codes appropriate to requirements) which identify an agenda and then establish rules for conduct, therefore creating potential expectations that can facilitate improved relations in a wider context' (Carr 2019). Thus, India's maritime security initiatives are intended to shape the Indo-Pacific RSO by cultivating security norms. Further, these norms building initiatives would enhance the prospects of QUAD leaders' policy for the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPPMDA). At a global level, during India's Presidency of the UNSC in August 2021, India advocated for enhancing maritime security by establishing cooperative norms for maritime connectivity, preservation of maritime resources, management of natural disasters, legal settlement of disputes, and legitimising trade facilitating regimes (Government of India 2021).

Despite normative progressions, India is facing certain internal and external limitations to cascade these regional security norms. On the internal front, India needs to develop comprehensive conceptualisation of maritime security and its operational aspects (Gopal 2021). It needs to integrate maritime security concerns in its national security discourse and architecture. A former Indian naval officer argues that India is lagging behind in the development of a maritime governance system to cope with emerging maritime challenges (Rao 2021). India needs to adopt adequate legislation to govern federal coastal maritime issues, distribution of responsibilities of the Union and the nine coastal states, and allocation of appropriate funds, as well as other laws on maritime issues such as piracy law. Moreover, India

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

has to upgrade the infrastructure and security of major ports. India's shipbuilding industry also needs political attention in order for it to reach world-class standards.

On the external front, India must engage the irritants in the Indo-Pacific to build a cooperative regional security order. First and foremost is China's diplomatic charm offensive in the region. Despite this, many regional countries regard 'China as a benign' power and welcome its presence (Kurlantzick 2006). Further, the China-Pakistan nexus limits as well as provokes India's maritime activism (Tarapore 2021). Therefore, to counter Chinese narrative and material incentives, India needs to upgrade the scale and scope of its DD.

### **Conclusion**

Despite limitations, DD is used to expand India's regional influence and dissuading war. India's Indo-Pacific DD demonstrates its quest to develop shared values and understanding of the region. India's efforts motivate regional countries to cooperate, thus moulding cooperative regional security order by building trust and dissipating potential conflicts. Joint exercises expand strategic choices of the states, between hegemonic, competitive, power-driven China and benign, cooperative, values-driven India. It is pertinent to underline India's major role as a norms entrepreneur in the IOR. However, this sustained role can be extended to the Indo-Pacific through norm bandwagoning and norm cascading. Therefore, India and other allies need more politico-diplomatic investment to drag poor and authoritarian regimes away from Chinese influence. Therefore, the proponents of liberal international order must increase their protective presence to sustain India's efforts at building regional security order.

## **India's Defence Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Shaping a New Regional Security Order?**

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