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Examining the Sino-Indian Maritime Competition: Part 4 – India's Maritime Strategy

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Key Points

- India is modernising its navy.
- This is an outcome of a perceived maritime threat posed by China's naval growth.
- Another dimension of this modernisation, however, is the hard-power and naval capacity India is now able to project in the IOR.
- India is simultaneously developing relationships with states in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, causing some in China to question its motives.
- India is, essentially, pursuing a Mahanian policy in its maritime relations.

Summary

India has adopted a policy of upgrading its naval capacity since the 1980s. Given China's growing presence in the IOR and its long-standing power competition with India, this section will consider whether India's on-going naval modernisation aims to achieve an active force posture driven by its strategic intent to have secure open-ocean access or if China's growing naval ambitions compel New Delhi to respond. It will do this by examining India's naval growth, its force posture and its maritime policy in relation to extending its influence in South-East and East Asia.

Analysis

India's Maritime Tradition

Indian strategic culture parallels China's. Whereas Buddhist and Jain ideals of tolerance, restraint and idealism influenced Gandhi and Nehru, realist principles increasingly influence its security and foreign policy today. Increasingly, the ancient Indian text on strategy and military thought, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a complex work which lends itself to interpretation, is quoted by Indian strategists.¹ It espouses the pursuit of power through *realpolitik* and offensive force, stating that conquest and hegemony is the proper policy of the good leader, that power is the objective of inter-state relations, and "dissension and force" are the state of international relations.² A second classical Indian text, the *Mahabharata*, emphasises the annihilation of an enemy through systematic attrition,³ leading one writer to allege it remains relevant today, with its views of force-on-force attrition warfare influencing elements of Indian military doctrine.⁴ Given this strategic culture, it is no surprise that India, like China, has a realist outlook.

India boasts a long-established maritime tradition. But just as the Ming Dynasty scrapped Admiral Zheng He's fleet after his seven voyages to trade with and explore the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, by the fourteenth century Hindu rulers in India similarly prohibited their citizens from sailing beyond the immediate environs of the subcontinent. As retired Indian Admiral Rakesh Sharma observes,

Quasi-religious orders prohibited Indians from making voyages overseas ostensibly to stem the brain drain of Indian mathematicians and philosophers migrating to Baghdad, the Silicon Valley of the times (*sic*).⁵

Nevertheless, India profoundly influenced South-east Asia. Its export of religion and culture over the centuries to that region has led to it being seen as a distinctly non-threatening state. Lucian W. Pye distinguishes between the Indian and Chinese influences, noting,

Not only did India introduce Buddhism to Tibet, Central Asia, China, Japan and Southeast Asia, but its Hindu and Mogul cultures introduced the concept of god-kings and sultanates which shaped the traditional systems of Southeast Asia. Although Sinic culture has had an impressive impact on Korea, Japan and Vietnam, it has come in a poor second to the Indian culture in attracting other peoples.⁶

As previously seen, these concepts, religions (Buddhism and Hinduism) and cultures were conveyed to Southeast Asia via marine routes by the Chola Empire of South India and others.⁷ Indian kingdoms traded with those of Southeast Asia. In time, though, this trade ceased and India turned inward. Consequently, trade with other regions was left to Arabs in the west and other civilisations in the east. In colonial times, the British Raj, too, was more concerned with continental issues than maritime, leading to the further neglect of the navy.

India's Naval Modernisation

Between 1980 and 2009, however, the Indian Navy progressed from being a "brown-water" to almost a "blue-water" force; i.e. from one relatively bound to a land base to one almost

capable of projecting power at considerable distances from its bases. In 1980 the Indian Navy's core comprised of ten Soviet-origin *Petya*-class frigates, two *Whitby*-class frigates, five *Leander*-class frigates, and three *Nanuchka*-class corvettes. In total, there were twenty three major warships, including one aging aircraft carrier.⁸ Unsurprisingly, when during the so-called "Tanker War" period of the Iran-Iraq War of 1980 – 1997 the largest number of tankers to be hit in the Persian Gulf were Indian, the Indian Navy did not deploy, leave alone take action to protect them. While government policy may have been responsible to some extent for this lack of action, the fact that long-range ships were so scarce as to make any retaliatory action impossible provides a better reason.⁹

By 2010, however, these older ships had been decommissioned. In their place are one more modern aircraft carrier, fourteen operational submarines and 34 major war ships. There are also eight world-class hydrography vessels, which have completed several major oceanographic surveys in the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans for the Indian Navy.¹⁰ However, the planned 140-ship navy is still a far way off, since various Indian governments have allocated more of the defence budget to the air force and army.¹¹ Nonetheless, the modernisation of the Indian Navy has advanced considerably.

By 2013, ninety five per cent of India's foreign trade by volume and seventy five per cent by value was conducted by sea; also, more than seventy per cent of its oil was imported by sea.¹² With India's economic growth, its navy has grown in importance. This growth may be measured by three parameters: the number of ships, their size and the number of missile batteries per ship.¹³ The following Table gives an indication of the Indian navy's growth.

Indian Navy in 1991 - 2012

1991			2012		
	Tonnage	Missile Batteries		Tonnage	Missile Batteries
Aircraft Carriers X 2	48,800	0	Aircraft Carrier X 1	29,000	0
Destroyers X 5	25,000	30	Destroyers X 8	43,470	134
Frigates x 18	43,862	42	Frigates X 14	55,291	130
Submarines X 17	35,500	0	Submarines X 16	39,150	52
Amphibious Craft X 9	14,625	0	Amphibious Craft X 11	50,515	0
Total tonnage	167,787		Total tonnage	217,426	

Figures obtained from editions of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Military Balance*¹⁴

The Indian Navy has remained more or less static in the number of its ships. It is the number of ship-borne missile cells available today that indicate its modernisation. This begs the question, why is India modernising its navy? Does it, like China, seek regional hegemony? Does it conform to Mahan's theory of sea power and Mearsheimer's offensive-realism? These questions are best answered by examining its process of modernisation, the types of vessels being built and acquired, and its maritime strategy.

Missiles first made their appearance in the Indian Navy in 1971 during the Indo-Pakistani War, when they were used in Operations *Trident* and *Python* to effectively neutralise the Pakistani Navy in Karachi for the term of the war.¹⁵ This success led the Indian Navy to convert the main armament of their ships to missiles. More recently, the *Shivalik* and *Talwar*-class ships have been fitted with modern *Klub* (Russian Novator KH-54 TE) active radar-homing missiles as well as the Russo-Indian supersonic Brahmos missiles. The *Klubs* have been replaced by the Brahmos missiles on the very latest *Talwar*-class ships being built in Russia.¹⁶ However, missiles are a standard part of a ship's armament today and can be offensive or defensive in nature, making it difficult to gauge India's strategic maritime intent from their numbers alone; other facets of the Indian Navy's modernisation must be examined to reach a reasonable conclusion.

Building an aircraft carrier is one of the biggest and most complex tasks of any navy. India planned to build a twenty thousand ton carrier, but its tonnage was soon expanded to forty thousand. Additionally, the Indian Navy has purchased the refitted Russian aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Gorshkov*, as its second carrier. A third carrier, designed to accommodate thirty fighter aircraft, is being built at the Kochi Shipyard in Kerala, India.¹⁷

Aircraft carriers are the most conspicuous symbol of a nation's ability to project maritime power. They carry fighter aircraft, primarily to take the battle to an enemy and move it away from the homeland. As such, they are offensive by their very nature. The Indian Navy plans to operate three carriers by 2017.¹⁸ This demonstrates India's desire to be acknowledged as a maritime power and, more broadly, a rising world power. To an extent, it also demonstrates India's aspirations towards projecting its power over distances, which could demonstrate aspirations towards regional hegemony. However, while the general contours of a move towards regional hegemony are discernible, further examination is needed to determine if this is the case.

India's ship-building industry is no match for China's. Nevertheless, it is a collaboration between shipyards, ship designers, technical specialists, equipment suppliers and an arm of the Indian Navy called the Weapons Electronics System Engineering Establishment (WESEE).¹⁹ This body was established to ensure the compatibility between Russian-supplied missiles and Western electronics systems. The Indian Navy also has engineers at Mazagaon Docks in Mumbai, where the *Godavari*-class ships were designed and built from 1983, and the previously-noted facility at Kochi.

There is an obvious mismatch between China's and India's ship-building capacities. Since ship-building is an important facet of seapower, the question must be asked: does this mean India has no aspirations to regional hegemony? Up to this point, this study shows that the Indian Navy has not increased in size but has been modernised, it has plans to obtain three

aircraft carriers, and it has a comparatively minor ship-building industry. These observations produce conflicting signals, making it difficult to determine if India has regional naval aspirations. This study must examine its maritime doctrine to make a determination.

The Indian Navy's Changing Force Posture

Despite traditionally being perceived as adhering to pacifist principles, India has undergone a dramatic shift in its stance on self-defence. Correspondingly, its military doctrine has also undergone significant change. India has fought four wars since independence in 1947 and as its economic and political power grew, its military situated these experiences into its doctrine. For instance, in 2004 the Indian Army began to roll out its “Cold Start” doctrine. This grew from political and military frustration with India’s inability to deter or respond to incursions such as those which led to the 1999 Kargil incident and terror attacks like that which occurred in December 2001 on the Indian Parliament. Indian leaders wanted the military to rapidly mass its troops on the Pakistani border, threatening overwhelming conventional attack on that country if it did not cease its support for attacks on India by groups based there. The military, however, was incapable of such rapid deployment.²⁰ Cold Start emphasised forward deployment, decisive offensive strikes launched from a standing start with a minimal mobilisation period, and pre-emptive strikes on enemy forces.²¹ It had three main objectives: 1) to avoid triggering an enemy’s nuclear response; 2) to move so fast that Indian political leaders could not halt or terminate it; and 3) to secure India’s objectives before the international community could intervene.²²

Concomitant with this change in the Army, the Indian Navy’s *Maritime Doctrine* released in 2004 also shows a major change in its outlook.²³ Echoing the statement of Indian strategist, K. M. Panikkar, the document implies that the Indian Ocean is, in a singular way, Indian.²⁴ Thus, Admiral Mehta, the Navy Chief of Staff remarked, “The Indian Ocean is named after us. ... If required in this IOR, we will undertake humanitarian missions, stop piracy and gun running, and all those kinds of things in asymmetric warfare.”²⁵ Left unstated was the role of aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines in achieving these goals.

The Maritime Doctrine is designed to maintain Indian autonomy and security against any regional threat.²⁶ China is defined as a competitor, but as Sakhuja writes, the Navy is required to “provide maritime security in all directions – the classical doctrine of ‘tous azimuths’”, a clear reference to the US, which, unlike China, is accepted as a comparatively benign presence in the region.²⁷ However, the Indian Navy does not see itself as primarily a defensive force. Specific undertakings of the Indian Navy include exercising sea control in designated areas of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal and at the entry/exit points of the IOR; in case of war to carry the conflict to the enemy’s territory, to strangle his trade/oil arteries, to destroy his war waging potential and naval assets and to ensure a decisive victory; to provide power projection force; and to work in conjunction with the two other services to preserve, protect and promote India’s national interests.²⁸

The 2004 Maritime Doctrine notes China’s naval-building and pays close attention to its submarine acquisition. It also considers the PLANs power projection abilities using aircraft carriers. The 2007 Maritime Military Strategy emphasises three new issues: power projection including the development of expeditionary forces, securing Indian interests in a

wide arc including the Indian Ocean, the Middle East / Persian Gulf and East Asia, and strike capabilities in littoral warfare to support land forces in war.²⁹ It also lays emphasis on developing a sea-based nuclear deterrent.

The Indian Navy is primarily focussed on a possible confrontation with Pakistan. This was made evident during the Kargil Crisis in 1999 when it was used to blockade the Pakistani Navy, preventing vital supplies from reaching Karachi. Margolis believes it could be used in any future confrontation to overwhelm Pakistan's aging navy.³⁰ He further notes, "Pakistan could not fight for longer than a week in the face of an Indian naval blockade – unless the U.S. Navy challenged it."³¹ This assertion appears to have its roots embedded in history; many Indians believe that a US carrier group in the Arabian Sea to support Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War forced New Delhi to halt its plan to crush West Pakistan.³² This has led for calls ever since for a naval build-up to counter any future US intervention.

Pakistan aside, Indian strategists are today very aware of China's increasing activity in the IOR. China's development of a blue-water navy has caused a great deal of concern in New Delhi. Margolis again observes,

In coming decades, geopolitical tensions between the two uneasy neighbours and rivals easily could intensify as they vie for hegemony over South and Central Asia, Indonesia and even the South China Sea, political influence, oil, resources and markets.³³

In India's perception the IOR holds the same interests for itself as Central America and the Caribbean do for the USA.³⁴ As such, China's activity in the region causes India concern. This concern partly stems from the Communist takeover of China in 1949, when the Indian politician, Vallabhbhai Patel, enunciated his concerns with China in the IOR.³⁵ This concern grew after India's defeat by China in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Since relations were normalised in 1988, this view has been modified to an extent but fundamentally remains the same.³⁶ As Indian strategists see it, any Chinese activity in the IOR diminishes India's security. These concerns have been compounded over the last twenty years with five categories of Chinese activity in the IOR. These are (1) covert and overt assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile development, assistance to its military development and enhancement of its military-industrial capability, (2) initiation of defence relations and intelligence-sharing with Nepal, (3) military and deep economic co-operation with Myanmar including development of its transport and maritime infrastructure, (4) growing PLAN activity in the IOR including ship visits and the creation of electronic monitoring facilities, and (5) the cultivation of ties with Bangladesh and the normalisation of ties with Bhutan.³⁷

It is likely with this in mind that the Indian strategist, C. Raja Mohan, conceives of an Indian maritime strategy premised on three concentric geographic circles.³⁸ The innermost circle contains India and its immediate neighbourhood, a view consistent with that of the Indian Navy's doctrinal statement, *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy*.³⁹ The neighbourhood also contains Bangladesh, the Maldives, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Mohan alleges that India's goals in this region are to ensure its primacy and to retain the capacity to veto actions seen as infringing on India's interests. Needless to add, this is not stated in the Navy's public document. Primacy implies India's capacity to impose

its will and influence the states of the region, including militarily.⁴⁰ While the naval document is less aggressively stated than Mohan's article, the section titled "Strategy for Employment in Conflict" envisions the conduct of sea-control and sea-denial operations in wartime in India's vicinity, including at the entry/exit points of the IOR. This appears to be aimed at China, it being a prerequisite to denying China's ships access to and from the Straits of Malacca. Such an action would shut off China's and other "hostile extra-regional powers with inimical intentions"⁴¹ access to India's immediate maritime neighbourhood.

Mohan's middle circle encompasses the rest of continental Asia, including China. Again the naval document does not treat this area in as starkly plain terms as Mohan does. It instead emphasises its role in naval diplomacy and maritime cooperation so as to prevent "incursions by powers inimical to India's national interests by actively engaging countries in the IO littoral and rendering speedy and quality assistance in fields of interest to them."⁴² This clearly alludes to China's increasing activity in East Africa, Persian Gulf, and the rest of the IO littoral. It was likely this thinking which saw the Indian Navy dispatch four warships on a two-month journey along the coast of East Africa to engage in "naval diplomacy" and offer a counter to China's influence and activity there.⁴³

Mohan's third circle, consisting of the rest of the world, envisions India as a world-power in maintaining international peace and security. Prime Minister Singh endorses this view in his introduction to the doctrinal statement, stating "current power projections indicate that India will be among the foremost centres of power".⁴⁴ He also notes that military capacity will be a critical component of India's increased power.

Given India's interests in acquiring aircraft carriers and its doctrinal statements regarding sea-control and sea-denial, it appears that India, like China, seeks regional hegemony. It could be argued, however, that the acquisition of aircraft carriers is purely deterrent in nature and cannot be construed as being offensive in this case. To place the matter beyond reasonable doubt, therefore, it will be instructive to examine India's activities in this regard to determine if its intentions are defensive or offensive in nature.

India has emphasised its requirement for a dominant position in the north-eastern IOR and more so towards the western approach to the Malacca Strait since the 1990s. This, according to Brewster, is part of a broader strategy of projecting power into the main entry and exit choke points of the Indian Ocean. These points include the Mozambique Channel, the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb around the Arabian Peninsula and the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits in the east. These choke points, recognised as being vital to the control of the Indian Ocean, apparently guide India's regional maritime strategy.⁴⁵ This may also be gauged from the Indian Navy's doctrinal document, *Freedom to Use the Seas*:

By virtue of geography, we are ... in a position to greatly influence the movement/security of shipping along the [sea lines of communication] in the [IOR] provided we have the maritime power to do so. Control of the choke points could be useful as a bargaining chip in the international power game, where the currency of military power remains a stark reality.⁴⁶

Over the last two decades, India has constructed a new base for the Eastern Fleet south of Vishakhapatnam and sophisticated naval and air force facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These islands constitute a seven-hundred mile chain at the western approaches to the Malacca Strait, and provide the perfect basis for projecting power into the Malacca Strait. The Eastern Fleet apart, the aircraft stationed at this base have an operational radius sufficient to project power into the Malacca Strait and into extensive areas of the South China Sea.⁴⁷ Additionally, Indian Special Forces conduct regular training operations from the Andaman Islands base.⁴⁸ The islands have received much attention in Beijing, with one Chinese analyst describing them as a “metal chain” which could lock the western end of the Malacca Strait.⁴⁹ The militarisation of India’s east coast and the approaches to the Strait of Malacca are a clearer indication of India’s intention to be the predominant power in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.⁵⁰

India’s maritime Engagements

The potential power of the Indian Navy is not the only aspect of sea power which is growing increasingly visible. It has also undertaken several functions to prove itself a useful partner to South-east Asian states in dealing with instances of disaster relief, piracy, smuggling, refugee issues and terrorism. Since 1995 it has also conducted the biennial MILAN (Togetherness) naval meetings at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. In 2012 the five-day meet had fourteen participating countries including Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore and the Seychelles. This meeting is not a naval exercise, *per se*, but an opportunity to increase military-to-military relationships with the navies of regional states. Neither China nor the USA is invited, presumably to assert India’s regional primacy. Since 2008 the Indian Navy has also sponsored the biennial Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) at which the heads of the navies of littoral states may express issues of concern.⁵¹ The Indian Navy has emphasised its strengths in maritime policing and counter-terrorism since 2001. It has interdicted supply routes in the Andaman Sea by Indonesian and Thai separatists, drug smugglers and refugees. It made a strong contribution to disaster relief in the wake of the December 2004 tsunami. Furthermore, joint India-Indonesia naval patrols off Sumatra and similar patrols (and training) between the Indian and Thai navies (as “funnel states” to the Malacca Strait) arguably demonstrate a general acceptance of India’s role in Southeast Asia.⁵²

In 2002, India began to provide naval escorts to high-value commercial shipping through the Malacca Strait, after being requested to do so by the USA, as part of Operation *Enduring Freedom*. Singapore, which hosted Indian naval ships, supported this request. India consulted with Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Australia.⁵³ Indonesia, however, rebuffed India’s request for a more permanent role in the Strait, stating that the strait’s safety lay with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. This led Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Arun Prakash, to deny India had any intention of patrolling the Strait.⁵⁴ Malaysia has since accepted an Indian presence in the Strait and was ready to accept a strategic relationship with India, provided India’s security ties with Thailand are scaled down.⁵⁵ Malaysia, however, agreed to an Indian aircraft presence in the “Eye in the Sky” project to provide air surveillance over the Strait.⁵⁶ In return India has offered to provide training and support for

Malaysia's MiG-29 aircraft and Scorpène submarines. This has led some analysts to believe Malaysia is now more amenable to an Indian presence in the Malacca Strait.⁵⁷

It would be naïve, however, to believe India's interests remain confined to the Indian Ocean. It also has strategic ambitions in the West Pacific region including the South China Sea.⁵⁸ Daly, for instance, claims India is a factor in the balance of power as far as the Taiwan Strait.⁵⁹ Likewise, Mohan believes that India will become an East Asian power because of its military and economic growth.⁶⁰ More importantly, the Indian Navy, agreeing with Mohan's three circles, itself identifies the South China Sea as an area of interest after the Indian Ocean.⁶¹ This, though, is not new. In 1945 K.M. Panikkar recognised Vietnam's importance in controlling China's entry into the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea,⁶² probably underscoring India's attempts to secure a deep security relationship with Vietnam.

Since 2000, India has extended its reach into the South China Sea through regular naval visits, unilateral exercises, and bilateral exercises with regional states. In 2000, Indian warships visited ports in Vietnam, China, the Philippines, South Korea and Japan.⁶³ In 2004 the Indian Navy deployed ships to the South China Sea on "presence cum surveillance" missions on three occasions, and in 2005 the aircraft carrier, *INS Vikraant*, and a task force visited Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Perhaps as a sign of China's concern, in September 2011 an Indian Navy ship, sailing from Nha Trang port in Vietnam to Haiphong, was challenged by an unidentified radio call in which the announcer identified himself as the "Chinese Navy".⁶⁴ Early this century India sought long-term access to Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay air force and naval bases. The then Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandes, suggested Indian ships could patrol local sea lanes and contain local conflicts.⁶⁵ More recently, it was reported that India would train around five hundred Vietnamese submariners as part of the expansion of their military ties.⁶⁶

In October 2013 the Indian External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid, visited the Philippines to upgrade Indo-Filipino ties to a comprehensive partnership prior to Indian President Pranab Mukherjee's visit in 2014.⁶⁷ Khurshid and his Filipino counterpart, Albert del Rosario, agreed to expand defence cooperation between the two countries; reportedly Manila may purchase two frigates from India.⁶⁸ Saliiently, their joint statement calls the South China Sea the West Philippines Sea, by which name Manila refers to the disputed sea, contradicting India's policy until now of calling the area the South China Sea so as to avoid upsetting Beijing.⁶⁹

India has had a fairly stable relationship with Japan, despite Japanese debate on whether India is Asian.⁷⁰ During the Cold War, Japan saw India's non-alignment as untenable and its economic policies unattractive to investment. This has changed. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement in 2007 that the India-Japan relationship "will be the most important bilateral relationship [for Japan] in the world" gives some indication of the extent of the change in perception.⁷¹ Despite a brief interregnum after India's 1998 nuclear tests, Japan enhanced its ties with India because Japanese officials realised they could be left isolated due to India's growing regional relationships. A strategic relationship was proclaimed in 2005 and was extended to include the formalisation of defence ties, especially maritime co-operation, in

2006. Foreign Minister Taro Aso proposed closer ties with India, Australia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) states on the basis of shared values.⁷²

This translated into the proposal by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for a “Quadrilateral” initiative in which Australia, India, Japan and the USA would hold a security dialogue. April 2007 saw the first trilateral naval exercise between India, Japan and the USA in the Western Pacific, and in August of that year, the annual India-USA Malabar exercise was transformed into large-scale exercises involving Australian, Indian, Japanese, Singaporean and US ships. Speaking in the Indian parliament in the same year, Prime Minister Abe referred to an India-Japan relationship which could “evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the US and Australia”.⁷³ In 2008 the Indian and Japanese Prime Ministers formalised an India-Japan Joint Security Declaration, “an essential pillar for the future architecture of the region”.⁷⁴

Both Prime Ministers emphasised that these treaties did not seek to isolate or contain China. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the April – May 2013 border stand-off between China and India, and barely a week after Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited New Delhi on his first international trip as Premier to calm the situation, Prime Minister Singh visited Japan. During this visit the stand-off was discussed by the USA, India, and Japan at their fourth trilateral dialogue, emphasising “greater security cooperation at a time all three countries are facing what they perceive to be an increasingly belligerent China”.⁷⁵ Though not a formal ally, India has reportedly “signed up for the dialogue that goes beyond security cooperation.”⁷⁶

The relationship has grown since late 2013. Prime Minister Abe was Chief Guest at India’s Republic Day parade on 26 January 2014. Japan has, furthermore, been asked to invest in areas that are strictly off-limits to China, notably in the north-eastern states. This is all the more telling since China, which claims the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, worked to deny an Asia Development Bank loan in 2007 to Arunachal Pradesh, claiming it was ‘disputed territory’. Furthermore, Japanese organisations have been invited to construct a new port in Chennai.⁷⁷ The two countries will hold their third 2 + 2 Dialogue and fourth Defence Policy Dialogue later this year (2014). Also, in the immediate wake of the Imperial visit to India by the Emperor and Empress of Japan, Japanese Defence Minister Itsonuri Onodera spent four days in India, which culminated in a joint statement with his Indian counterpart, A. K. Antony, that Japan and India will “further consolidate and strengthen their strategic and global partnership in the defence arena through measures ranging from regular joint combat exercises and military exchanges to cooperation in anti-piracy, maritime security and counter-terrorism.”⁷⁸

As with Japan, India seeks to develop closer strategic ties with South Korea and Taiwan. Though not as sophisticated and formalised as Indo-Japanese ties, these are being gradually developed. South Korea sees India as a potential market for its defence and civil nuclear technology and, importantly, as an important security provider in the Indian Ocean.⁷⁹ India has sought to deepen its defence ties with South Korea by purchasing eight mine-sweeper ships from Seoul.⁸⁰ Similarly, India and Taiwan have increased their non-official and non-public security contacts in recent years.⁸¹ The non-official description of these contacts

enables India to maintain its claim of non-alignment and non-interference in the affairs of other states. It also enables India to maintain its façade of adhering to a one-China policy.

It comes as little surprise, then, that some Chinese observers see these actions as a subtle Indian attempt to encircle China by itself and together with the United States and Japan.⁸²

To conclude, this study notes that while India does not display Mahanian principles as overtly as China does, these are observable upon closer examination. For instance, while India's modernisation of its navy may be seen as a step towards ensuring its own maritime security, the use of the navy to project force into and beyond the Strait of Malacca is not defensive. This is the action of a state which seeks a degree of power beyond that which is purely defensive in nature. Similarly, while India's ship-building capacity may not match China's, its actions – political and maritime – in the Western Pacific demonstrate a trend towards countering China's actions in the Indian Ocean. The principles behind these actions may be discerned by an examination of the Indian Navy's doctrinal statements published over the years. Furthermore, formalised agreements between India, Japan and the USA, naval exercises between these three states, and further nascent relationships between India and South Korea and India and Taiwan, point to at least indirect or consequential Indian efforts to encircle China, just as it believes China is attempting to do to it.⁸³ These actions are not defensive in any way. These are Mahanian principles cloaked in politics and security ties. They are, furthermore, the actions of a state which, recognising its maritime shortcomings, seeks to alleviate those through shared security relationships against a perceived common (potential) enemy.

By seeking to project its power through the Strait of Malacca and into the Western Pacific, India demonstrates its adherence to Mahan's principles of sea power and Mearsheimer's tenets of offensive realism. Its actions are aggressive in nature, which lead this examination to conclude that it seeks to counter China's emphasis on regional hegemony by firstly securing its own region, the Indian Ocean, and then projecting its power while taking into account its presently limited ability to do so, into the Western Pacific region. To this extent, at least, India also seeks a degree of regional hegemony and, again like China, seeks to use its modernised and upgraded navy to achieve this end.

Notes

1. Mitra, Subrata, "Engaging the World: The Ambiguity of India's Power", in Mitra, Subrata, and Rill, Bernd, (eds.), *India's New Dynamics of Foreign Policy*, Hans Seidel Foundation, Munich, 2006
2. Boesche, Roger, "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India", *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 9 - 37
3. Although ancient texts by themselves do not constitute a state's strategic culture, they give a good indication of the state's tendency towards using force

4. Bakshi, G.D., *The Indian Art of War: The Mahabharata Paradigm (Quest for an Indian Strategic Culture)*, Sharada Press, New Delhi, 2002
5. Chopra, Rakesh, "The Indian Navy and Seapower", *Maritime Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Winter 2007, p. 35
6. Pye, Lucian W., *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 133
7. Osborne, Milton, *South East Asia: An Introductory History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2004, pp. 23 - 34
8. Raja Menon, K., "Technology and the Indian Navy", in Pant, Harsh K., (ed.), *The Rise of the Indian Navy: Internal Vulnerabilities, External Challenges*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, England, 2012, p. 81
9. The *Rishi Vishwamitra* was hit in 1981, the *Varuna* in April 1983, the *Archana* in November 1983, the *Jag Pani* in October 1984 and the *Kanchanjunga* in December 1984
10. Raja Menon K., *op. cit.*, p. 82
11. An over-developed Indian bureaucracy must be held as much - if not more - responsible for this state of affairs. See for instance, Pandit, Rajat, "Tangled in red tape, India's submarine fleet sinking", *The Times of India*, 9 June 2013, accessible online at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Tangled-in-red-tape-Indias-submarine-fleet-sinking/articleshow/20500247.cms>
12. Bajpae, Chietigj, "Reaffirming India's South China Sea Credentials", *The Diplomat*, 14.08.2013; available online at <http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/14/reaffirming-indias-south-china-sea-credentials/>
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Any opinions or views expressed in this paper are those of the individual author, unless stated to be those of Future Directions International.

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