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SAGAR Initiatives And Andaman And Nicobar Command (ANC)

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Abstract

Security is fundamental to a nation like India having with common boundaries and diversified neighbours. To check threat menace emanates from various sources within geopolitical and strategic realm, the need to increase recognition of the maritime security in terms of its significance. One such attempt was that Prime Minister Shri. Modiji vision of Security and Growth For All in the Region (SAGAR) Initiative has been an integrated maritime initiative that prioritises the Indian Ocean region to ensure India's peace, stability, and prosperity. Vision SAGAR unveiled in 2015 to signify the maritime cooperation and geopolitical- economic security ties with maritime neighbors while assisting them in developing maritime security capabilities. India is well aware that the challenges are multi-dimensional and without cooperation from neighbouring countries, India cannot secure its boundaries and therefore India seeks to deepen economic and security ties with its maritime neighbours especially Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries and assist in building their maritime security capabilities through SAGAR initiatives. SAGAR initiative is a part of Modi's greater proactive foreign policy to guard India's national interests.

In this context Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) has significantly playing vital role in maintaining maritime security ties and protecting its national interest as it has a coastline of over and above 7,000 kms. With advancement in technology, physical threats in the maritime region have now been overshadowed by technological threats including maritime concerns ranging from piracy at sea to illegal immigration and weapon smugglings. ANC is India's only operational joint service command was established in the year 2001 during the Kargil war to cope up with the challenges emerged from

territorial states of Bay of Bengal region including China. ANC initiated to act as an advance base towards supporting military operations in the region over the years and it has playing a significant role in nurturing successive government's policies and act according to "Look East Policy" and subsequently "Act East policy". This article explores the significance of SAGAR initiatives assert India's comprehensive maritime engagement through Andaman and Nicobar Command. Further it examines how India has dealt with the use of maritime diplomacy to achieve its objectives to increase maritime cooperation.

Introduction

Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) is India's proactive foreign policy or doctrine of maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The policy was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 12, 2015. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), or Vision Sagar, is India's strategic vision for engaging the Indian Ocean countries for mutual benefits. The importance of maritime cooperation and security is becoming more widely recognized in the last couple of decades especially in the aftermath of multi-polar world. The Vision Sagar goal is to strengthen economic and security ties with its maritime neighbours while also assisting them in developing maritime security capabilities. India is instrumental in giving shape to the idea behind SAGAR to expand its plans to engage proactively with Western Indian Ocean (WIO) countries especially Arab world, which connects the Indian Ocean to Africa's southeastern coast and beyond and also want to reconnect with Indian Ocean Region countries especially.

Background of Vision SAGAR

Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) or Vision SAGAR is a term used by the Indian Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi to describe India's vision and geopolitical structure for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. In 2015, Prime Minister conveyed a vision for the SAGAR initiative in a keynote speech to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), saying, "Our vision for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is rooted in advancing cooperation in our region and using our capabilities for the benefit of all in our common maritime home." SAGAR is a term coined by Prime Minister Shri. Modi in 2015 during his Mauritius visit with a focus on the blue economy. It is a maritime initiative which gives priority to the Indian Ocean region (IOR) for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity.

Objectives of SAGAR:

- To seek a climate of trust and transparency,
- Respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries,
- Sensitivity to(towards) each other's interests
- Peaceful resolution of maritime issues
- Increase in maritime cooperation.

Initially, India needs to issue an official report or outline for Vision SAGAR. The Ten Principles of India-Africa Cooperation were mentioned in speeches but have not been officially published. Finally, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi referred to the doctrine as a “blueprint for cooperation” in the Maldivian Parliament in June 2019.

The SAGAR doctrine is defined as follows:

- Maritime Security
- Maritime Cooperation
- Economic Cooperation
- Capacity Building
- Sustainable Development
- Collective Action

Maritime Security and Maritime cooperation

Maritime security is a prominent feature of India's relations with Indian Ocean littoral states. India has a major stakeholder in the Indian Ocean and it should continue to pursue its interests and tackle maritime security challenges through SAGAR, which is an integrated regional framework for maritime promotion. The following are the pillars of SAGAR:

- India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).
- India would continue to enhance the maritime security capacities and economic resilience of friendly countries in IOR.
- A more integrated and cooperative focus on the future of the IOR, which would enhance the prospects for the sustainable development of all countries in the region.
- The primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the IOR would be on those “who live in this region”.

India enhancing its relations and bilateral ties with the IOR littoral states is a great step towards achieving maritime peace and cooperation in the region. In this context ANC has entrusted with the task of developing friendly relations with littoral states especially through the channels of regional organizations like BIMSTEC, ASEAN and IOR. Indeed A & N Islands territory has geo-strategic potential and ANC has key role to support military operations in the region. Since inception of ANC, it brings together the Indian Ocean States to a common platform through “MILAN” a bi-annual event to promote maritime safety and cooperation between the nations. ANC has also made some outstanding contributions in humanitarian assistance and other relief activities in the IOR. Indeed Indian Navy has demonstrated itself as the first responder in the area with regards to its rescue operations and naval assistance missions in times of crisis. The aspect of collaborative development comes into play along the lines of comprehensive maritime diplomacy to strengthen the implementation of the SAGAR initiative. Further, it has made extensive efforts to promote regional cooperation and renewed engagement under ‘**Act East**’ Policy. It considers IOR countries as a crucial stepping stone for promoting regional cooperation. It shall further promote tourism and cultural exchanges and shape the notion of the Blue economy. Therefore ANC has mandated to act prime actor in the IOR due to its geostrategic placement. With the help of ANC, Indian government has emerged a major regional power in the region and influences the course of relations for future trajectory of maritime diplomacy. It has the potential to create a strong impact on littoral states to intermediate and promote maritime cooperation and in particular in disaster management operations. Under SAGAR initiatives, the ANC emphasizes the role of facilitator for easy access to International Shipping Lines (ISLs) passing through A& N Islands. The maritime security activities have a strong foundation, but they require support from additional regional actors too. If India seeks to calibrate its SAGAR strategy, it must support the sub-regional efforts such as those of the IOR. Indeed ANC has willing to create a transparent maritime environment via its mandate in capacity building and capability enhancement programs.

The SAGAR doctrine has been instrumental in influential in maritime cooperation between member countries of IOR. The future of India’s maritime cooperation seems promising and needs more proactive engagements. Further India needs to demonstrate as a forerunner of regional maritime cooperation integration through a pragmatic approach towards the IOR. India could play a key role in infusing dynamism through SAGAR initiatives by offering littoral states to cooperate in the military exercises. Recently ANC conducted “SAGAR KAVACH” with an aim to validate Coastal Security Standard Operating Procedures and bring together all 17 stakeholders of the coastal security construct to enhance synergy for a more secure coastline. Additionally, the ANC is responsible for the protection of the vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about six lakh square kms around the archipelago, making up roughly 30 per cent of India's total EEZ. The unique location of ANC offers the ideal combination of the first tri-Services command, where the dependency of the land, air and sea forces upon one another is imperative to achieve the optimal security objectives. Initially ANC's primary role

was the safety and security of the Andaman Sea region, but in the recent past it has grown as multi-dimensional mechanism of security. Besides defending the sovereignty of the islands, ANC has mandated to foster good relations with neighbours to remain free from threats for shipping and patrolling the EEZ particularly three straits - Malacca, Lombok and Sunda and also actively involved in curtailment of poaching besides providing humanitarian assistance and conducting relief operations during disasters within the realm of IOR.

Mission SAGAR

Mission SAGAR scheme has been launched in the backdrop of COVID pandemic was a mission working in tandem with SAGAR doctrine policy. India has launched this mission in the year 2020 to provide relief aid to Indian Ocean countries, which were eagerly waiting for assistance in the times of pandemic. This initiative aims to establishing a geo-political framework for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) covers Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles. This mission represents India's response to support nations in the Indian Ocean Littorals states during COVID pandemic. In this initiative the Indian Navy has shown exemplary commitment towards Indian government policy and undertaken 215 days at sea as part of its deployment which has contributed 40,000 nautical miles of distance to deliver and provided rescue, medical care and relief approximately 3000 MT food and other life support oxygen to needy countries of the region. Some of the objectives of the Mission SAGAR as follow:

1. During the pandemic several nations were fighting for survival. During such tough times the Indian government devised an initiative when the pandemic hit. Coastal countries were provided with essential and basic needs for their survival;
2. Under this mission food Aid, Oxygen concentrators , ISO and LMO containers, Food and Medicine were provided
3. Fulfilling the SAGAR policy's goal of economic and security cooperation between India and its neighbours is also one of its objectives.

Conclusion

In the years to come, the dynamics of Indian Foreign Policy shall witness tremendous changes in its adoption due to leading role assigned to India within its ambit of Indian Ocean Region. In view of above, the maritime issues especially the critical link between maritime security, maritime cooperation and the blue economy appears promising in future discourse. SAGAR initiatives increasingly collaborating with regional powers and it did influence maritime governance in the region to promote sustainable development and balanced growth in the IOR. Hence, India needs to improve its maritime capabilities and act pragmatically to fully harness the benefits of SAGAR initiatives. Further India has committed to sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, better livelihoods and jobs and the health of ocean ecosystems and also betterment of the world. The SAGAR initiatives can be benefit IOR counties by providing a framework for cooperation on regional issues, maritime security and maritime economy.

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