

CONCLUSIONS

The IOR is rich in seabed resources, fish, raw materials, oil and natural gas. The economic importance therefore has made it a future epicentre of power balance and economic wars. About 80% of world's oil flows through this ocean, which is the lifeline of most industrialized and developed nations of the world. The future of natural gas is very bright and has increased the strength of energy lifelines in this area.

The ocean has seen militarisation for centuries and has since continued. The area may not in the near future attain a status of a zone of peace in spite of the regional cooperation and future economic interdependence of nations specially the Indian Ocean littorals. The trends of arms proliferation, nuclearisation, drugs trafficking, piracy, pollution and poaching in these waters will only show an upward swing. To have an influence or control of the region, major powers and alliances would continue their hegemonistic methods including gun diplomacy.

India's maritime interests and energy needs meanwhile will increase manifold as a synergised and orchestrated manifestation of national, strategic and economic interests. The exploitation of our vast EEZ and continental shelf, protection of all our island territories and offshore installations, increase in shipping activities and trade, and exploration of oil and natural gas would see the increased presence of India all over the ocean. In keeping pace with this trend, the faster developing nations of South East Asia would also reach out to the seas around them. This century of the seas would therefore see, on this express highway – The IOR – an influx of traffic and military presence to protect each other's vital interests.

The delicate regional security environment would thus be predominantly influenced by clash of interests of most nations of the world. The Chinese threat is looming large with an increased military budget and a gateway to IOR established due to her nexus with Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal close to the Malacca Straits.

From the Chinese force structures, in the immediate future India can expect a sustained assistance to the insurgencies in the North-east and a show of force along the borders. The later will be to assist Pakistan in any of her adventures. In fact, Operation Zulu as visualised in Pakistan: India's Bete Noire will be supported by China, primarily by demonstrations all along the Border with some local incursions in Aksai Chin in support of Pakistan's operations on the Siachen Glacier. In addition, she could also launch a very limited adventure in Arunachal Pradesh, possibly in East Kameng or Lohit Districts.

In the foreseeable future India should not expect a major thrust from China, provided she has an adequately deterrent force located in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and provided she is sure that the threat will be entirely from Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence Directorate who has been having a more or less free run of this region for establishing caches of arms and drugs which are then supplied to meet the requirement of the Indian insurgents in the North-east and the world's drug / heroin bazaars.

The future security milieu would thus mainly be a polycentric or multi polar environment with minor conflicts in isolated pockets, which have a clear potential to turn into a major economic or military wars.

The problem of defence of Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been agitating the minds of Indian authorities for some time, till the media broke the news about the Chinese entry into this region, this area was considered 'way

back of the beyond' or literally the back waters which, according to most of the perceptions, was still the 'Kala Pani'.

It must be realised that Andaman and Nicobar Islands are at a distance from the main land and as such the Lines of Communication are long and vulnerable. Till such time they are secured, the forces located at the Islands must be capable of fighting it out. As such it must have adequate reserves both, in terms of manpower as well as spares and ammunition to face a threat developing from, both seaward side as well as from across Coco Islands from China.

The strategic significance of the A & N islands obtains from their strategic location at the very mouth of the Malacca Straits, the defence in-depth they provide and the richness of the EEZ. The large distance of these islands from the mainland as against their relative proximity to the littorals is the most important factor in threat assessment. Of all the neighbours around the islands, China emerge as the most threatening specially with its nexus with Myanmar. China's maritime growth is commensurate with the designs that the country seems to harbour in this area.

Thus the following threats to the Andaman & Nicobar islands can be drawn out:-

- (a) A direct threat from China as she drives westward to face upto what she considers her rightful role as a world power. Or, alternatively, as a pre-emptive peration, when China feels threatened by any American moves.
- (b) An indirect threat from the US as she asserts her control over the Straits of Malacca.
- (c) A subversive threat from Pakistan, as she uses ISI to further her Grand Strategic Aims, to subvert Indian polity and infrastructure even as

she uses this region for carrying out her operations on the Indian mainland as well as the Indian sub-continent

The Indian Ocean region is geo-strategically the most important region in the world as it overlooks all the choke points and vital areas in the east and the west that regulate the SLOCs which controls the world trade. The region is studded with thousands of archipelagic islands of strategic importance with extensive EEZ around with many of them being strong military bases of global powers.

The maritime power of a nation is not limited to the strength of its navy alone. It includes the merchant fleet, POA facilities and industrial/commercial/communications infrastructure, a seagoing populace and the technological capability to exploit the living and non-living resources of the seabed. The national perception that seas can be utilised to influence other nations through trade, diplomacy, presence and most importantly a fleet-in-being as either an instrument for power projection or for deterrence and diplomacy. The country as a whole must look 'south and out' shed our continental mindset and use the seas to fulfill our aspirations. Being a regional power is a pre-requisite for trade and prosperity.

Future of India also depends on how well she exploits and protects her long coastline and offshore islands. The Andaman and Nicobar Command has an important role to play in fulfilling India's dream of a regional power. While India has to give the desired impetus in the economic development of our island territories, the setting up of A&N Command has been a good beginning to lay a strong foundation towards improving the security of these islands.

The present level of threat may not be alarming, but the development in the region cannot be totally overlooked due to the growing Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean. Also, the proximity of islands to the strategic sea-lanes, an important choke point like Malacca Straits and geo-strategic scenario after

development of Kra canal would further enhance the strategic significance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

It is time for us to establish a new economic and security equation with the region. This equation would also form a suitable foundation for forging new economic relations with the fast developing economies of the Asia-Pacific region. Given a proper direction and impetus, India cannot only remove the fears of domination over South East Asian countries; it can also undertake confidence-building measures and build bridges of understanding.

The United States of America will and has already started to gain access to Aceh in Indonesia. Once she has secured Aceh she will be at hailing distance from Great Nicobar Island and would be dominating all the shipping through the Great Channel, immediately South of the Great Nicobar Island. The final question is, "Is India capable of facing up to the American threat?" If so, how and if not, 'What is the solution?' Diplomatic efforts can only delay the issue and may be used for preparations to face up to the threat. The saving grace about the American operations is that they are not really meant to target Indian interests but to save the American interests which would be threatened by the Chinese operations in this region. In case of choice between China and The United States of America, it would be better to line up with the United States of America. They have more to offer.

While the significance and the implications can be debated upon, what is unmistakable is the importance of these islands to both the gun running agencies, be they be the Liberation Tiger for Tamil Eelam or Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence or for that matter any of the Burmese Insurgent Forces, or any other such agency. The fact that they are sparsely populated and a large number of them are uninhabited, plus that by themselves they are more than 500 in number, makes it that much more difficult to police these Islands, and that they are much more easy for these agencies to operate with impunity. That

source of the weapons is one of the ASEAN countries, and one of the target countries is also from that Group makes it all the more ironic.

The importance of the trade routes surrounding the archipelago is bound to increase as India's trade with China and ASEAN is set to increase in future. India has not fully realized the importance of the 10 Degree Channel and 6 Degree Channel, while China is fully aware of the importance of these two important trade routes. The isolated location of these islands is the major problem that India faces. People are as vital an aspect as they can be in the region and genuine attention needs to be paid to grievances of the tribal people of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The internal political disturbances in South East Asian nations could have a spill over effect on the archipelago. Biological threats, diseases like, malaria, SARS, etc. should also be considered.

The Andaman and Nicobar islands are perhaps best likened to the arms of the human body, with a potential to either extend a handshake to a friend, or deal a tough-fisted blow to an adversary. According to Vice Admiral RB Suri(Retd), "the main characteristics of India's maritime strategy for the twenty-first century should be regional in reach, pro-active in scope and oceanic in outlook". This strategic aim is achievable only through a dedicated commitment towards military up gradation, infrastructure development and social stability, complemented by diplomatic initiatives and sincere political will. It also entails evolving a common regional understanding and harmony, while obviating popular cliches such as hegemonistic ambitions, blue-water capability and 'big brother intervention'. Adoption of synergistic military ties with our maritime neighbours, along with preventive diplomacy against destabilising forces like narco-terrorism, piracy and poaching, mandate a credible military posture, enabling India to make effective use of this facet of its sea power, from a position of strength. Significantly, the ASEAN-India summit in Nov 2002 agreed to address the entire spectrum of trans-national criminal activities in the region.

The sine qua non of the Indian posture in the Andaman & Nicobar region will therefore depend on a coherent maritime policy based on a correct application of the matrix of national power and international relations. It is understood that a draft Maritime Security Policy (MSP 2001) has replaced the Ocean Policy Statement (OPS 1982) for the country. However, optimum security of the Andaman and Nicobar islands would perhaps fructify only with the eventual establishment of the proposed National Maritime Commission, which would finally become the fountainhead of India's maritime posture.

Recommendations

The IOR is definitely a future flash point or hotspot that could erupt without notice. The navy with its sea power and more importantly a truly maritime nation with all its elements backed by a strong economy would play a key role in tilting the balances in the delicate geo strategic and economic environment of IOR to shape the nations destiny in the emerging new world order.

Navy should be structured not only to meet threat perceptions but also to further India's national interests.

It is therefore vital that these Islands are strongly defended and the passage through the waters between Mynamar and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, or through the Andaman Sea is made safe from pirates as well as gun runners.

In respect to these islands, the country needs a two-pronged approach. It must provide for a military build-up in the A & N Command to act as a deterrence and project power without alarming neighbouring countries. On the other hand, it should provide the much-required stimulus of economic growth