

INDIA'S OCEANOPOLITICS: A PILGRIMAGE TO THE SEA

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ABSTRACT

The increasing dependence of sea-imported oil, as well as the increasing presence of China in the Indian Ocean region, led India to also focus its attention on the sea. This interest became clearer in the diplomatic initiative called Sagar Yatra. India's rise in the Indian Ocean seems like a natural destiny due to the prominent position of the Hindustanic Peninsula in the basin and its rich maritime history built in Antiquity. This rich sea trade network fueled by the monsoon system is recovered now by the Mausam Project. This paper analyses the oceanopolitics of the Modi government. The theoretical framework is provided by historian K. M. Panikkar. As source, we used all available and reachable material, such as books, journals, or websites.

Keywords: India. Indian Ocean. Sagar Yatra. Mausam Project.

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“The Indian Ocean region is one of my main political priorities. Our approach is evident in our ‘Sagar’ view, which means ‘ocean’ and represents security and growth for all in the region. We will continue to pursue and promote our geopolitical, strategic, and economic interests in the seas, especially in the Indian Ocean” – Narendra Modi

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean is of paramount importance to the global economic system, since in a portion of its waters lies the Persian Gulf, the main world oil region, and through the Arabian Sea much of this oil production is sold to the European and American markets.

China’s rise has introduced a new major oil consumer to import from the Gulf waters the black gold that fuels the contemporary economy and conferred economic and strategic importance to the Indian Ocean in its entirety. Considering this dependence of its maritime supply lines, China devised a geostrategy aiming at the containment of India, whom it perceives as its greatest threat in the Indian Ocean, called String of Pearls, whose measures includes the construction of a series of ports and maritime infrastructures in countries neighboring India.

For a long time, successive Indian governments have been more concerned about the vulnerabilities of the land frontier with China and Pakistan. However, Narendra Modi’s rise to power represented the arrival of an ‘oceanic breeze’ in the atmosphere of New Delhi, whose political winds began to blow now toward the Indian Ocean, as in the winter monsoon.

This happened because the historical perception is that India’s northwestern border, through which the Muslim invaders arrived, would be the most vulnerable point of the Indian Territory. Nevertheless, with the higher value attributed to the Indian Ocean, the school of thought of Lord Curzon (1859–1925), more focused on the land borders, loses strength, in favor of that of historian and diplomat K. M. Panikkar (1894–1963), a supporter of the maritime power theses of Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840–1914). Panikkar draws attention to the fact that India’s last invaders – Portuguese and British – came by the sea, and that India’s greatest territorial weakness was, then, its immense coastline.

The Indian Ocean challenge requires that the Indian Navy, to date a brown-water navy, gears up and prepares to be a blue-water navy. This modernization has been carried out with the construction of national

aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines, such as the INS Vikrant, Vishal, and Arihant, so that India will become a security provider State in the Indian Ocean, able to replace the role of the U.S., and preventing the Chinese from leveraging this role to penetrate the region.

HISTORY OF INDIA'S MARITIME POWER

India, due to the peninsular nature of its territory, has always had a great dependence on the sea. The sea controls the monsoon system and blows damp winds to the continent at the end of India's scorching summer, bringing rains that refresh the people and irrigate the crops, transforming the dry land into a green expanse of abundant life, in a society whose basic territorial unit was the rural village. The sea stirs the monsoon winds, generating the driving force of the maritime trade across the Indian Ocean, feeding the economic strength of the great Indian ports.

Although there may have been certain prejudice among members of the Brahmin caste that the sea would be polluted by the remains cast into the waters of the Ganges, it was restricted to those who lived on the plains of northern India, far from the sea. South India, with its large ports, was very connected to trade in the Indian Ocean, and had a completely different relation with the sea than North India (, Panikkar p. 29). In the North, national life revolved around the waters of the Ganges; in the South, around the waters of the Indian Ocean.

The importance of the sea was not merely its economic prominence. It also reached the philosophical field, serving as inspiration for lessons in the political sphere. In the Hindu view of the political universe, the rules of the worldly game of power were the same that prevailed in the depths of the oceans, that is, the *Matsyanyaya*, or the Law of the Fish, better known in the west by the adage "big fish eats small fish." In domestic politics the sovereign should fight it, but in international politics it was impossible to be abolished and the king should adopt a classical realism in the molds of power politics (REGIANI, 2014, p. 645–646).

Throughout history, several empires ventured into the waters of the Indian Ocean, such as those of the Maurya (322 B.C.–185 B.C.), Andhra (271 B.C.–220 A.D.) and Pallava (VI–IX centuries) dynasties, some even with some success. If in the western Indian Ocean navigation was relatively free and geared towards trade, given the lack of a naval power in the region – its Indian, Persian, Arab navigators, etc. ventured into it

more for individual entrepreneurship than for underlying State politics –, in the eastern Indian Ocean, the situation was reversed, and political power was associated with projects to colonize shores and control trade routes (Panikkar, p. 28). That is why the two most prominent maritime powers emerged in it: the empires of Sri Vijaya (650–1377) and Chola (300 B.C.–1279 A.D.).

Sri Vijaya was a kingdom located at the islands of Sumatra and Java, currently Indonesia. It rose as an empire by controlling the Strait of Malacca, between the V and VI centuries, driving away pirates and corsairs who operated in the region, and monopolizing control over the strait using its navy. All ships passing through the region were forced to visit the capital of Sri Vijaya, while the maritime administration monitored ship traffic through the commercial route (Idem, p. 33–34).

The Chola Empire built its power center around the fertile mouth of the Kaveri River, wherefrom it expanded toward south of India. In 1007 King Rajendra built a fleet capable of challenging that of Sri Vijaya. After managing to establish colonies on the Malay Peninsula, the Cholas began to fight the kings of Sri Vijaya in their own waters of the Strait of Malacca, in a naval rivalry that lasted about a century (Idem, loc. cit.).

India's maritime power began to decay with the Islamic invasion from the Northwest border. Of nomadic culture, coming from Central Asia, they were skilled horsemen. However, the successive Muslim dynasties, whether of Turkish, Afghan or Mughal origin, were not concerned as to developing a navy, as they had no tradition of sailing, leaving the Indian Ocean unprotected against Portuguese domination when Europeans arrived in these waters (Idem, p. 8).

The Lusitanians, after arriving in the Indian city of Calicut, confronted its sovereign in order to settle in India. However, the Zamorin of Calicut had a considerable maritime power

and resisted. Although smaller than the Portuguese caravels, their boats were faster and more agile, inflicting losses in the Portuguese fleet and being difficult to pursue. The Portuguese decided to move further to the north, settling in Goa, which was a weaker kingdom and easier to defeat (Idem, p. 52).

Portuguese India, or the State of India, as it was called, comprised a series of factories and fortresses, with Goa as capital. In 1640, there were around 26 localities, from Sofala, in Mozambique, to Macao, in China, and

which generally did not extend more than a few miles inland. Thus, the State of India was not a single country, but an archipelago of Portuguese enclaves, and so it also referred to India in plural, as in Indies. Established at various points on the coast of the Indian Basin and adjacencies, the State of India was only bordered by the sea, only had territorial contiguity through the sea, and could only be maintained through dominion of the sea. This is why the geoideology of Portuguese India was that of a thalassocracy in Maritime Asia. (BOXER, p. 11–12)

The Portuguese geostrategy consisted in controlling the Indian Ocean choke points to monopolize the maritime trade of spices of the Indies. This plan, devised by Alfonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515), was executed by seizing key locations to control the access to the Indian Ocean and establishing Portuguese garrisons in them. Beginning by seizing the Cape of Good Hope, then the island of Socotra and Ormuz in

Western Indian Ocean, and finishing with Malacca, in the Eastern Indian Ocean (Pannikar, p. 53).

The decline of the Portuguese maritime power, and the still incipient British powers, provided opportunity for the rise of the Maratha naval powers on the Malabar coast, also taking advantage of the Mogol Empire's disinterest in the sea. The Maratha naval power was strengthened due to the leadership of Kanhoji (1669–1729). Coming from a family of sailors, Kanhoji joined the Maratha Empire navy while still young, and from the reign of Balaji I, Kanhoji was assigned control of the Maratha naval policy, which he leveraged to strengthen its naval power (Idem, p. 58–59).

Kanhoji's first act was to fortify its naval base in Vijaydurg, a well-protected site, located in an estuary; as such, it enabled the light and fast ships of the Marathas to hide by going up the river so that European boats could not reach them. After eliminating the Sidis – Afro-Indians who provided maritime services to the Mughal Empire – and reducing the Portuguese to a lesser power, Kanhoji focused on confronting the British. The Hindu admiral imposed a one-quarter tax on ships sailing in Marathas territorial waters, which upset the East India Company. British expeditions organized to combat Kanhoji's maritime power were unsuccessful. The second of them, together with the Portuguese, in Kolaba, confirmed the Maratha Empire's dominion on the Malabar coast. The Dutch also sent expeditions, but were equally defeated, and for having retained their naval invincibility against the Portuguese, British, and Dutch, Kanhoji is considered one of the greatest heroes of the Indian Seas (Idem., p. 59–62).

Unlike the Portuguese India, the British India had a terrestrial nature. The geoideology of the British Raj was that India was nothing more than an aggregate of several territories in which several peoples lived, so his geostrategy was to define the boundaries of this geographic construction called India with scientific boundaries in order to ensure the security and defense of the territory. Lord Curzon tended to see in the sea the ideal frontier, and therefore he saw territories separated by the sea as independent by nature. The result is that Ceylon and Yemen were put under separate administrations from India; unfortunately, according to Pannikar (1951), who sees as negative the loss of control of the Strait of Bal elMandeb and the Island of Socotra (1951, p. 17-18).

India's naval vulnerability within the British Empire was evident in World War II, when the Japanese seized Singapore in 1942, opening one of the Indian Ocean entrances. The Andaman and Nicobar archipelagos were occupied and Burma's maritime communications with India were cut, which allowed Japan's overland advancement from Southeast Asia to Imphal in northeastern India. By sea, the Japanese Imperial Navy ships advanced in the Bay of Bengal and bombed the British fleet stationed in Trincomalee, Ceylon. The arrival of the Americans by the Pacific Ocean curbed the Japanese expansion in the Indian Ocean, but Japanese submarines still appeared even in the Arabian Sea to intercept allied supply ships. (Idem., p. 81)

Panikkar concludes based on the observation of modern history that "those that control the Indian Ocean have India at their mercy," and that, therefore, "while for other countries the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas, for India it is the vital sea." Then, the author advocates the establishment of a strong navy capable of protecting the freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean, and, consequently, the sovereignty of India. (1951, p. 84-85).

After independence, amid the Cold War, the India of Jawaharlal Nehru, with a weak navy and a pacifist ideology, adopted as oceanopolitics a posture of trying to keep out opposing powers, such as Britain and France. Therefore, it supported anti-colonialist national liberation movements in Africa and Asia, because the new countries would naturally be weak and would not threaten India. (PANDE, p. 96-97) And to protect itself from the eventual aggression of one of the superpowers, it allied with the other. At the time of the independence of Bangladesh – former East Pakistan – the United States, allied of the latter, sent Task Force 74, under leadership of the USS Enterprise, to the Bay of Bengal threatening to nuclearly bomb India in

the event of an invasion. The Indian response was to request support from the USSR, which by tracking the American aircraft carrier with a nuclear submarine, made it deviate from the route, thus avoiding a confrontation with the Indian aircraft carrier INS Viraat that was executing the naval blockade of the bay.

Even before adopting the current maritime policy, India has always shown a great capacity for intervention in the island States of the Indian Ocean, a region in which it considers vital for its security. In 1983, Operation Lal Dora of R&AW prevented an attempted coup in Mauritius against Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth. In June 1986, the INS Vindhyagiri was sent to the port of Victoria in Operation Flowers are Blooming to prevent a coup attempt against socialist President France-Albert René. In 1988, India acted quickly in operation Cactus landing troops in Maldives to abort an attempted coup of Tamil mercenaries against President Maamoon Abdul Gayoon. It is also worth mentioning the peace force led by India in the Civil War of Sri Lanka for 3 years (1987–1990).

BLUE ECONOMY

For much of India's recent history, new Delhi's position has influenced policies more concerned as to safeguarding borders with China and Pakistan, whose focal point was the territory of Kashmir, of which control was vital for India to overcome its regional isolation and access the energy resources of Central Asia (REGIANI, 2015, p. 63–64). This same inward orientation reverberated over the economy through the Green Revolution, economic policy characterized by great application of scientific and technological innovations in the field, such as fertilizers, pesticides and machinery, which boosted the Indian agricultural production, and focused on food self-sufficiency.

However, Narendra Modi's rise to power brought a change in the geopolitical orientation of new Delhi, which began to see the sea as a strategic space through which to overcome its isolation imposed by Pakistan and connect with the rest of Asia and the world. The port of Chabahar, in the Iranian Sistan and Baluchestan Province, is an example of this attempt to gain access to Afghanistan and Central Asia through maritime lines (Idem, 2017, p. 115). Economic policy was also affected by this change and is moving towards the Blue Revolution today.

In general, the countries of the Indian basin have a strong

orientation toward coastal economy for geographic or historical reasons. Observing the map and combining it with the knowledge of regional history enables us to classify this group of countries as follows: there are those that are insular by nature, such as Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros, etc., whose economies are strongly associated with maritime activities such as fishing and cruise tourism. There are others that are also insular States, but of larger size, enabling them to develop an urban network and larger economic activities; however, as they possess, in general, mountainous and wild inland area, they concentrate their cities on the coast and develop ports, as is the case in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar. The third set consists of peninsular States, whose territories are heavily projected into the sea, such as India, Malaysia, and Qatar. A fourth group of countries consists of those that are located on the continent, but with a desert inland area they end up concentrating their population on the coast: Oman, Somalia, Baluchestan, and Western Australia. And the last group of countries consists of those that possess a fertile inland area, habitable and able to develop, but that, as they were colonized from the coast, they have their richest and most populated area there: South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Myanmar.

The greater or lesser dependence of the Indian Ocean is what unites them all, and the Blue Economy is a model of development grounded on the economic potential of the ocean, and able to generate mutual gains for all countries of this basin. After the Cold War, while the world was globalized led by the US, Germany, and Japan triad, the Indian Ocean countries, out of the influence of the three, organized themselves regionally, promoting the meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative, held in Mauritius in March 1995, with participation of Australia, India, Kenya,

Mauritius, Oman, Singapore, and South Africa. At the meeting, the representatives considered as common points:

- the existence of a common history associating commercial and economic interests that surpassed the regional level to relate at the world level;

- seeking, in cooperation, to make better use of their human potential, valuing the exploitation of the natural resources of the Indian Ocean;

- being always based on respect for the sovereignty of the States, their territorial integrity, non-intervention in domestic affairs, and peaceful coexistence;

- maintaining bilateral or multinational relationships, extending the forum to all neighboring States. (CASTRO, p. 12–13)

Two years later, the founding core consisting of seven Indian Ocean countries was expanded with the inclusion of Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Tanzania, Madagascar, and Mozambique to formalize the regional body as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) under “The Principles of open regionalism and inclusivism of members, with objectives of liberalization of trade and promotion of trade cooperation. Activities would focus on trade facilitation, investment promotion, and economic cooperation” (INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION, 2016, our translation).

IORA defines Blue Economy as the integration of Oceanic Economy with principles of social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and innovative and dynamic business models. It is expected that due to the fact that the Indian Ocean is a great maritime route of world trade, in addition to its unexplored natural resources, the Blue Economy brings benefits to member countries, such as: increasing the national and coastal economy; generating jobs, skills and capacities; promoting entrepreneurship in new areas of economic activity; facilitating the interconnectivity of the regional economy; and utilizing the vast and untapped potential of the Indian Ocean. Eight priority areas for cooperation in the Blue Economy have been traced by the IORA department: (1) Fishing and Aquaculture; 2) Oceanic Renewable Energy; 3) Ports and Navigation; 4) Exploitation of Marine Bed Minerals; 5) Research and Development of Marine Biotechnology; 6) Tourism; 7) Clusters of Oceanic Knowledge; 8) Insular States in Development and Less Developed Countries. (INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION, 2016, our translation)

Between October 26 and 29, 2015, New Delhi hosted the III Summit of the India-Africa Forum. The Delhi Declaration resulting from the meeting provides for cooperation in the framework of the Blue Economy with special emphasis on the following actions: development of sustainable fishing, combating illegal and unregulated fishing, marine resource management, exploitation of non-marine resources, conducting oceanographic surveys, promoting ecotourism, developing renewable energy, reducing disaster risk through modern early warning systems, pollution control and other coastal and oceanic studies. Narendra Modi invited the leaders present during the summit to cooperate with one another to develop the Blue Economy:

“We will cooperate for the sustainable development of the Blue Economy, which will become an important stimulus, in the future, for our prosperity. To me, it is part of a broader Blue Revolution, in the sense of recovering our blue skies and our blue waters, as we advance along the path of clean development.” (CHAND, 2016, p. 19).

There is potential for cooperation between India’s Blue Revolution economic policies and Brazil’s Blue Amazon marine resource exploitation project. A leader in deepwater oil prospecting, Brazil could help India develop its marine energy deposits. Poor in hydrocarbons and avid for energy, most of its natural gas reserves are at sea, such as those in the Krishna-Godavari basin, although these are in shallow waters.

MAUSAM PROJECT

At the economic and cultural level, Indian initiatives in the Indian Ocean region are focused on the Mausam Project. Officially titled Mausam: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes, this project is an initiative of the Ministry of Culture and aims to recover the old bonds that India built with the nations of the region at the time of pre-modern navigation, when ships used the seasonal monsoon winds to cross with agility the Indian Ocean, hence its name.

The project focuses on two levels of action. At the macro level, it aims to reconnect the Indian countries in a way that leads to greater understanding of the common values and concerns of this group of countries; at the micro level, their goal is to understand the national cultures in their regional maritime milieu. (MINISTRY OF CULTURE, 2017, our translation). To that end, its actions are divided into four fields of action: reviving lost bonds with nations; creating bonds to existing world heritage sites; redefining ‘cultural landscapes’; and obtaining transnational nomination as a World Heritage Site. The research subjects covered by the project are: Learning and Knowledge Network Centers: transformations from the third millennium before Christ to the colonial period; Oral Traditions and Literary Writings: conceptualizing the Indian Ocean; Mobile Heritages and Artifacts: inscriptions, memorial stones, and archaeological objects; Religious Journeys and Pilgrimages along the Indian Ocean; and Spices and Cultural Products Associated to It: rites,

rituals, and cuisine (INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS, 2017, our translation).

The Mausam project was appropriately launched at the 38th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held between June 15 and 25, 2014, in Doha, Qatar. Its goal is to explore the multifaceted world of the Indian Ocean, gathering the archaeological and historical researches in order to document the diversity of cultural, commercial, and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean. Documenting and celebrating common cultural values and the economic relations of Indicus Mundi, the project aims to transcend the current ethnic and national boundaries in order to strengthen the bonds between the countries of the Indian basin and establish a precedent for the emergence of new bridges of continuous cooperation and interactions. (Índia Perspectivas, 2015, p. 18)

And recovering this rich shared history built requires the preservation of the monuments and landscapes that constituted the ancient routes of spices, and which serve as living memories of that period (Figure 1). Therefore, the Mausam project has a strategic and cultural dimension.

Figure 1 – Archaeological and natural sites of the Indicus Mundi



Source: MINISTRY OF CULTURE.

SAGAR YATRA

Between March 10 and 14, 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited three Indian Ocean insular States: Seychelles Islands, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka. The diplomatic initiative called SAGAR Yatra was the first travel of the type carried out by an Indian head of government, and aimed to intensify the cooperation of India with States of the region in the economic and security areas.

In the Seychelles, Modi met with President James Alix Michel, in what was the first visit of an Indian prime minister to the country since 1981. With this archipelago located south of the Arabian Sea, India established agreements in several areas of the economic sphere, such as hydrography, renewable energies, infrastructure development, and sales of navigation maps. As for security, a coast guard interceptor boat and a second unit of the Indian marine patrol plane HAL Dornier Do228 were donated, and the project of the Coastal Surveillance Radar was inaugurated (CHAND, 2015, p. 7).

In Mauritius, Modi met with his counterpart Aneerood Jugnauth. For this Republic, India opened a US\$500 million credit line for infrastructure projects, signed agreements for the Blue Economy, and committed to modernizing the maritime and air transport network in the Agaléga island. In addition, India presented its little insular sister with the coast patrol boat Barracuda, manufactured by a shipyard in Kolkata. The ship, although having modest size, has great symbolic significance because it is the first military ship exported by India, by which it demonstrates its capacity to be a provider of defense means for the security systems of countries in the Indian Basin (Ibid. , p. 7-8).

At the last stop, in Sri Lanka, Modi and President Maithripala Sirisena met in what was the first visit of an Indian prime minister to the country in 28 years. Agreements in several areas were signed, in addition to India's concession of a US\$318 million credit line for railroad construction, as well as the promise of transforming the Trincomalee port into an oil center (Ibid., p. 8).

One of the most important movements of the SAGAR Yatra was the memoranda of understanding to develop the port and airport infrastructure in the Agaléga Assumption Islands, two small islands almost unnoticed on the map of the Indian Ocean. Due to the distance in relation to the island-capital of the archipelago they can be considered as

peripheral islands of their respective countries. Agaléga is located more than 1000 Km north of Mauritius, while Assumption is located more than 600 nautical miles southwest of Seychelles. These facilities are now combined with other facilities that India already had in the South Indian Ocean, such as the surveillance post established in northern Madagascar in 2007 to monitor the activities of foreign navies in the region.

PIRACY, MARITIME DISPUTES AND STRATEGIC STRINGS

According to Fernand Braudel, historically piracy is a form of secondary warfare that intensifies in the periods of interregnum between two maritime and international orders imposed by two powers (Apud KAPLAN, p. 299). If on the one hand the display of maritime power in the world ocean is considered a symbol of global power, on the other hand when this power goes into decline its global maritime power also declines, opening power gaps that are filled whether by a regional power or leveraged by pirates and sea terrorists. This is the case of the United States, which after moving its forces to the Pacific in order to restrain China left a vacuum in the Indian Ocean that the weak navies in the region could not fill.

Examples of the American failure to project power in the Gulf of Aden region, one of the most affected by piracy, are the failed intervention in Somalia in 1993, and the boat bomb attack against the USS Cole destroyer while refueling at the port of Aden in Yemen in 2000. Even Yemen, which during the Cold War saw its southern portion – maritime, and which revolves around Aden – adopt the only Marxist regime of the Arab world and become a Soviet ally. More recently, a campaign of attacks with American drones against Al Qaeda targets of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) showed no efficacy in combating terrorist cells of the group operating in the country. And to complete the American disaster in the region, Washington saw its Saudi ally, using modern American armaments, suffer losses in its campaign against the less armed and organized militia of the Houthis.

In contrast to the Americans, India successfully executed Operation Raahata, aimed at evacuate its citizens from the country immersed in conflict. With agility India moved ships and aircraft to the country, and even other nations requested that Indian forces also evacuated their citizens from Yemen. Between April 1 and 11, 2015, India was able

to rescue more than 5,600 people including about 4,640 Indians and 960 foreigners of 41 different nationalities, including American and British, for example. Of this total, more than 2,900 citizens were transported using 18 special flights departing from Sanaa aboard the Boeing C-17 Globemaster carriers of the Indian Air Force or Airbus A320 of the Air India company, while other 1,670 were withdrawn by ships of the Indian Navy from four Yemeni ports (The Hindu, April 10, 2015).

Showing the capacity to quickly withdraw its citizens from one place is a necessity for a country that has an even greater number of workers in the Persian Gulf region, and which could be at risk in the event of an armed conflict in the region involving Iran and Saudi Arabia, or USA.

Piracy is not the only sea evil that affects India in its ambition to control the Indian Ocean. In addition to piracy, New Delhi also faces problems of delimiting its maritime boundaries, similarly to what occurs in the terrestrial ones, with its neighbors.

With Pakistan there is discord as to the estuary of Sir Creek, a border strip of 96 km that when considered with its associated EEZ becomes an area of more than 8,000 km² (VÁZQUEZ, p. 170). India argues that the limit adopted should be the division of the channel in half between the parties, but Pakistan claims that estuaries in marshlands such as Kuch undergo changes in shape over time and claim the whole channel.

Bangladesh diverges from India and Myanmar in relation to its EEZ. The convex shape of the Bay of Bengal causes an overlap of the corresponding EEZs of the three countries. The position of India, and also of Myanmar, is to use the bisector of the overlapped area to divide it and accommodate the claims of the three. Bangladesh claims that its coastline, because it is entirely formed by mangroves – Sundarbans, the largest system of the kind in the world – at the mouth of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers undergoes changes in the coast line, and argues for using the depth line of 10 meters as reference to delimit the EEZ. Figure 2 shows the Bangladeshi EEZ according to the two positions.

And with Sri Lanka there are claims on the small island of Kachchativu. This 1.15 Km² islet was transferred from India to Sri Lanka in 1974. However, doubts as to the legal procedure for the transfer open spaces for disputes.

To protect its maritime supply lines, as well as provide logistical support to its merchant navy in the Indian Ocean, China funded and built a number of facilities that became known among American and Indian

strategists as 'String of Pearls.' Dependent of oil imported from the Persian Gulf to fuel its economy, China seeks to ensure access to the Indian Ocean by passing around the Strait of Malacca, its 'Achilles heel,' through road systems that connect its interior provinces directly with the Indian Ocean. These are the cases of the provinces of Sinkhiang, which connects to the Arabian Sea through the port of Gwadar, funded by China in the Pakistani province of Baluchestan, and of Yunnan, which connects to the Bay of Bengal through the port of Kyukpyu in Myanmar.

India insists that the String of Pearls has the goal of surrounding it and keeping it confined in the Indian Subcontinent, but China denies it and says that its interests in the region are only commercial. India's claim is based on the visit of Chinese submarines and intelligence ships to ports in the Indian Ocean region. China says that they are only part of anti-piracy operations, but India questions that these types of ships are not the most suitable for this type of operation (KUKREJA, 2016).

Indian's response was to circumvent the Chinese string by forming its own strategic network of ports and airports in the Indian Ocean, which aim to maintain India's access to all the Indian Ocean's entry/exit choke points and make it able to deny foreign powers access to the basin. It should be observed that this geostrategy is nothing more than a reenactment of that made by the Portuguese in the 16th century.

Oman, a country washed by the Gulf of Oman, at the exit of the Strait of Ormuz, is one of the most faithful partners. The first Arab country with which India established relations, its importance increases with the Chinese presence in Gwadar. The expansion of the Pakistani navy bases, hitherto concentrated in Karachi, along the coast of Baluchestan with the assistance of The Chinese awakens in New Delhi the fear of creating an 'Ormuz dilemma' for importing oil from the Persian Gulf similar to the 'Malacca dilemma' that China faces. Oman, being on the opposite margin, allows India to balance the Sino-Pakistani alliance, through a series of maritime relations that include mooring rights in Omani ports, use of its naval bases to conduct anti-piracy operations, surveillance post in Ras Al-Hadd to monitor the Chinese movement in Gwadar, and the biannual naval exercises called *Naseem Al-Bahr* (Sea Breeze, in Arabic).

At the other end of the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Malacca, India is best positioned for its defense, since it controls the archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar, at the exit of this strait. Because of its extreme importance to bar a foreign power from entering the Indian Ocean, these

islands have their own, unique Regional command in the Indian Armed Forces that integrates in one hierarchy the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. India's strategic presence in Malacca is completed through naval exercises with Singapore, an island State located at the other extreme point of the passage. Every two years the navies of both carry out the Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) naval exercise.

Maldives and Sri Lanka fluctuate between China and India as to their maritime relations, and the same can also be said of Myanmar. The Burmese port of Sittwe was reformed by the Indians and serves as a form of access to the semi-isolated northeast of India, having a similar role to that of Chabahar in relation to Central Asia, since the Bangladeshi port of Chittagong, which would be the natural exit to the northeastern states, has its access denied to Indian ships.

In Sri Lanka, while Indian investments are concentrated in the northern region of the country, where the Hindu Tamil minority is concentrated, the Chinese invest more in the southern portion of the island, inhabited by the Buddhist Sinhalese majority. The port of Kankesanthurai, whose reform was funded by India, is the closest to the island for trade with that country, and also houses a base of the Sri Lanka Navy. The island is also India's largest trading partner in the SAARC. Together with Maldives, Sri Lanka and India are part of a trilateral defense agreement that provides, among other things, for the execution of exercises between coastguards called DOSTI ('friendship' in Hindi). The Chinese are already present through the port of Hambantotta, in the far south.

In Maldives, an archipelago of Islamic majority, India's concern is the limitation of its security forces, which could make it the target of terrorists with sophisticated armaments, such as what happened in the failed attempt prevented by Operation Cactus in 1988. India fears that the archipelago becomes a base for infiltrations of terrorists on its shores, as in the case of the Mumbai attacks of November 26, whose terrorists entered through the sea.

Recently, in the diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, accompanying the other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council under Saudi influence, Maldives joined the choir and cut its relations with Doha, in what serves as an example of the diffusion of Wahhabi fundamentalism in the north of the archipelago, which drags it into the orbit of Riyadh's influence. The islands were even in the original road map of the SAGAR Yatra, but problems of political instability caused by Islamists made Narendra Modi cancel the visit (KUKREJA, 2016).

That is why New Delhi tries to convince Malé of the interdependence of security between them, and maintains presence in the country through joint surveillance and anti-piracy actions and training of local forces (KUKREJA, 2016). In the economic sphere, Maldives made offers to India to fund the construction of the IHavan project, which aims to make the atoll where it is located a point of passage of the very valuable traffic of the Indian Ocean. Strategically, there is interest in the former British air base of Gan, whose location makes it ideal to counterbalance the American presence in Diego Garcia (BREWSTER, p. 59).

The only critical point that escapes the reach of India is the Mozambique Channel, the gateway of the Indian Ocean through the Cabo route, in South Africa. The transformation of the Indian Navy into a blue-water navy aims mainly to make it able to operate on the Mozambique Channel. Thus, Figure 2 shows that the States targeted by the Indian naval diplomacy in the SAGAR Yatra are concentrated halfway between India and Mozambique, aiming to form a kind of base bridge that connects the peninsula to the channel, a geostrategy called 'String of Flowers' (UNNITHAN, 2015).

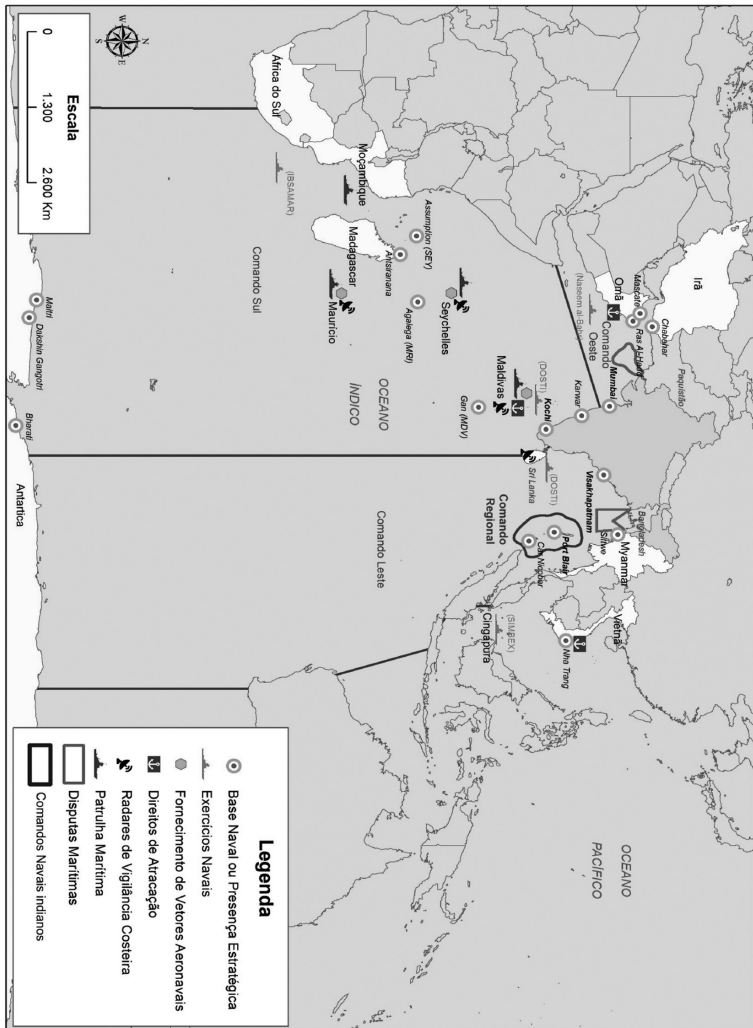
In addition to the lease of islands for the establishment of bases, India supplements its strategic presence in the Mozambique channel through other actions, such as conducting naval exercises, case of IBSAMAR, carried out between the navies of India and its two IBAS Partners – Brazil and South Africa –, in addition to patrolling with its ships the territorial waters of Mozambique to repress piracy and provide security to authorities, such as India did during meetings of the African Union in 2003, and the World Economic Forum in 2004.

The Indian strategic circle in the Indian Ocean is completed with the strategic presence in Antarctica. Opened in 1983, Dakshin Gangotri was India's first base on the icy continent. However, soil subsidence problems led to its abandonment and to the construction of a new base named Maitri in 1989. The researches developed in Maitri involve the areas of geography, geology, and medicine. Dakshin Gangotri today is used only as a supply base. More recently, a new base, called Bharati, was inaugurated in 2012. Located 3000 kilometers from Maitri, its research covers the fields of geology and oceanography (NATIONAL CENTRE FOR ANTARCTIC AND OCEAN RESEARCH, 2017).

In order to protect its maritime supply lines and to be a security-providing power in the Indian Basin, India needs a navy to match its

ambitions, that is, to establish a blue-water navy that is able to operate at any point in this ocean. That is why the naval industry will be one of the major beneficiaries of the Modi government, as it fits the goals of the ‘Make in India,’ of the Blue Revolution, and of the Mausam project.

Figure 2 – Map of India’s Oceanopolitics



Source: prepared by the author.

MODERNIZATION AND EXPANSION OF THE NAVY

China's entry into the Indian Ocean raises concern in India. Nevertheless, China will never be able to fully acquire prominence in this ocean while busy trying to defend its own waters in the Pacific Ocean. India tries to take advantage of this distraction of the Chinese to gain an advantage over them in the Indian Ocean, empowering its navy to provide a satisfactory response to the Chinese challenge in the region.

The Indian Navy's 2005 Maritime Capabilities Perspective Plans provides for a navy with 160 ships, with 90 capital vessels such as frigates and destroyers, the construction of a third aircraft carrier, in addition to 6 nuclear submarines to protect the 3 aircraft carrier groupings (UNNITHAN, 2015).

The Indian Navy intends to create three groups of aircraft carriers: one in the east, one in the west, and one for reserve. There are also three aerodromes acquired by the force or in development.

The first of these is the former Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov. Reformed by the Russians for a value of US\$ 2.33 billion, the INS Vikramaditya, as it was renamed, has a mass of 44,000 tons propelled by a diesel engine capable of navigating for 7,000 nautical miles before needing to refuel. With a 284-meter runway, it houses a crew consisting of 110 officers and 1,500 sailors, in addition to being able to carry 34 aircraft including MiG-29K and helicopters (Indian Navy, 2016).

The second aerodrome ship is the INS Vikrant, which will be the first ship of the type manufactured nationally by India. Designed to replace the INS Viraat, the oldest ship of its kind operating in the world, the INS Vikrant is expected to initiate operation in 2018. Also using a diesel engine, it will be able to propel its 40,000 tons to a distance of 7,800 nautical miles. Its runway will have 260 meters of extension to launch the 12 MiG 29K, 8 LCA Tejas and 10 helicopters that it will carry when ready, manned by the crew of 160 officers and 1,400 sailors (Ibid.)

Still in a previous development stage, there is the INS Vishal, another nationally manufactured aircraft carrier. However, unlike the previous ones, this one, according to the criteria established by the Indian Navy, should have nuclear propulsion to move its estimated weight of 65,000 tons. The 300-meter length and 60-meter width should be sufficient to carry 50 aircraft including those with fixed and rotating wings. Its estimated cost is US\$ 1.5 billion, about double the Vikrant.

In addition to nuclear propulsion, the INS Vishal is intended to have a CATOBAR electromagnetic catapult system to launch its planes. The Americans offered assistance to the Indian Navy in the development of this launch system, which could be of the same type used in the USS Gerald Ford. A possible partnership with the US in the construction of the Vishal maintains the multi-alignment orientation of the Modi government, after the Russians have already collaborated in the reform of the INS Vikramaditya, and can also give Americans the preference in aircraft to supply it, because the naval version of the LCA Tejas has faced difficulties in fulfilling the requirements of the Indian Navy, which could opt for a foreign aircraft (The Diplomat, Nov 9, 16).

There is also the possibility of Russia building another nuclear airdrome ship for India. Referred to as Project 23000E Storm, it would weigh 100,000 tons and its runway would have a length of 330 meters, being able to carry up to 100 aircraft, including versions of the fifth generation Russian fighter PAK FA, naval LCA Tejas, and a crew of 4,000 to 5,000 men, and autonomy to spend about 120 days at sea before needing to refuel (RussiaToday, March 1, 16).

In case this all becomes reality, India will be the second country with more aircraft carriers in the world, with four (Figure 3), only behind the US.



Figure 3 – From left to right, clockwise: 1) INS Vikramaditya; 2) INS Vikrant; 3) artistic representation of INS Vishal; and 4) Storm model. Source: 1) and 2): INDIAN NAVY; 3) The Diplomat; 4) RussiaToday.

If on the surface the aircraft carriers enable Indian air power to extend its reach to the entire Indian Ocean, underwater India completes the nuclear triad with the construction of its first SSBN INS Arihant. At a cost of US\$ 2.9 billion, it aims to give greater credibility to India's capacity to conduct a nuclear attack in response to an enemy, which its nuclear doctrine of 'no-first use' requires. This submarine makes it capable of launching nuclear missiles by land, sea, and air; a capacity possessed by all countries that are permanent members of the UN Security Council, which India seeks to be.

The INS Arihant has 112 meters and weighs 6,000 tons. All this mass is manned by a crew of 110 men and propelled by a 83 MW reactor. Its armaments include K-15 missiles and in the future K-4 missiles. Its four launching tubes support firing up to 12 K-15 missiles, or 4 K-4 missiles. The short range of 750 Km of the K-15 means that the submarine needs to approach the adversary shore to reach its target, but the K-4 missile, in development, can reach targets up to 3,000 Km from the launching point. (National Interest, Sep 16, 17).

Greater than the INS Arihant, the INS Aridhaman will be the second national nuclear submarine, of the six that India intends to build as part of the ATV (Advanced Technologically Vessel) program, submitted directly to the Prime Minister. It is designed to be more powerful than the Arihant, and so it will have eight launching tubes in its turret – which gives it the capacity to carry double the number of missiles compared with the INS Arihant (24 K-15 and 8 K-4) – and a more powerful nuclear propeller (Ibid).

Figure 4 – Nuclear ballistic submarine Arihant.



Source: The Hindu, Dec 15, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Environmental factors such as the regime of winds favorable to navigation, existence of raw material for construction of ships, and a privileged position in relation to the sea, in addition to cultural factors such as the caste system, which ensured an order of professionals dedicated to the construction of ships, enabled the various kingdoms of ancient India to build the naval power with which they conquered other kingdoms of the Indian basin, and exported their faith by building Hindu and Buddhist temples, especially in Southeast Asia. However, as these kingdoms constantly waged war against one another fighting for hegemony in the subcontinent, they grew weaker, and disappeared, also making their naval power cease.

Modern India, with a unified State, has better conditions to exploit all the maritime potential of its shores and islands than any kingdom of antiquity. However, building a modern naval power is much more complex from the industrial and technological point of view, a difficulty it must overcome by establishing partnerships and co-operations with other powers in the field.

The shift of focus from the land frontier with Pakistan to the security of its maritime communication lines will further increase the naval asymmetry between India and its Islamic archrival, which, similarly to the Mughal Empire, lacks the same maritime power. This imbalance of naval forces leads Pakistan to seek China as an ally that protects it from India's superior maritime power, opening the doors of the Indian Ocean to Chinese penetration in Gwadar. India's response to China's entry into the Indian Ocean is its recent approach to the USA.

In addition to the strategic alliances, India's maritime power is supplemented by diplomatic initiatives in the economic and cultural fields, cases of the SAGAR Yatra and the Mausam Project. Despite an imperial purpose in viewing the Indian Ocean as an Indian lake, India wants to become a benevolent power in the region, inviting the countries of the Indian basin to dialogue in regional organizations such as the IORA, in order to stimulate them to establish a security and economic cooperation system without interference of powers that are external to the region.

With all the elements present, it is only a matter of time for India to become a maritime power again as it was at the time of the Cholas. Time that will also be a crucial factor in defining who wins the competition

between China and India. The winner will be the country that builds a considerable fleet of aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines in the shortest time. And this depends on the agility of each State. In this regard, the Indian State, which is democratic but bureaucratic, is behind the Chinese State, which is dictatorial but agile. Will the Modi government be able to correct these defects?

Luckily for New Delhi, as long as Beijing is busy with the unsinkable aircraft carrier represented by Taiwan, it will hardly be able to concentrate forces in the Indian, and put India's sovereignty at risk as would warn K. M. Panikkar.

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