CHAPTER -IV
MARITIME SECURITY AND SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE NORTH-EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN

INTRODUCTION

Maritime Security is slowly but surely emerging as one of the dominant geopolitical-strategic discourses in India-ASEAN relations. The rationale for a focus on the north-eastern Indian Ocean emerges in the present context, given its increasing importance as an oceanic basin for maritime trade, energy supplies and sea-lane security combined with other traditional and non-traditional issues. As Raghavan and Prabhakar (2008: 1) point out so insightfully, “The Indian Ocean has emerged as a vital maritime space in the Asia-Pacific littoral in view of the transformed strategic, security and economic significance of the region... The Indo-Asia-Pacific region is the largest maritime space that has the concentration of the largest population, resources, developing economies, congested sea lanes, contested territorial spaces and hence is significant in a geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic sense” (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: The Indian Ocean

Source: Centre for the Study of Geopolitics, Department of Political Science, Panjab University.

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The analysis attempted in this chapter is based on the assumption that India’s ‘Look East’ policy in general, and India-ASEAN relations in particular, need to be re-assessed and re-examined within such a broader context.

Maritime security and the protection of sea lanes of communication, energy security (discussed at length in the last chapter), long Indian coastline, dependence on sea-borne trade, strategic location of island territories, a large Exclusive Economic Zone, and the deep sea fishing industry are all compelling factors in India’s attempt to broaden and deepen security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. We would like to argue in this chapter that from a geopolitical perspective, the strategic horizons of many of the (South)East Asian countries converge with those of India in the north eastern Indian Ocean. India has common maritime boundaries with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia and it is the north eastern Indian Ocean space that knits together India and Southeast Asia.

Yet another key argument of this chapter is that the Indian Ocean signifies a paradigm shift in maritime security that came with the end of the Cold War, for India as well as the countries of Southeast Asia. When viewed from the standpoint of “Maritime Regional Security Complex”, maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean (both traditional and non-traditional) inevitably affect the security of Southeast Asian maritime domain and vice versa. Issues of maritime security therefore make the waters of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean fall in the same maritime regional security complex. During the Cold War period, maritime security in the Indian Ocean was largely constructed in terms of Sea Control/Sea Denial strategies of the Mahanian paradigm. The central issue was the projection of power from the Land to the Sea, with the key emphasis on issues of debate at Sea (Ibid.). Whereas in the post-Cold War period the emphasis of maritime security has shifted considerably to the littoral—the spatial interface between the sea and the land. The sub-regional cooperative initiatives in the North-Eastern quadrant of the Indian Ocean, like Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC), which was renamed as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation (BBIMTEC), when Bhutan and Nepal joined in 2005, need to be approached and analyzed within such a littoral-sea perspective. The same needs to be done with the initiatives aimed at the so-called Bay of Bengal Community (BOBCOM).
DEFINING MARITIME SECURITY

There appears to be no commonly accepted definition of what constitutes maritime security that might be used as a basis for regional or sub-regional cooperation (Banlaoi, 2005: 59). The collective maritime security environment could possibly be conceptualised as a composite of sea power and the naval arms build up, island and maritime boundary issues, navigational regimes, activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), competition over resources and the maintenance of law and order at sea, including the protection of Sea Lanes of communication (SLOCs) (Paik, 2005).

To the above mentioned essential elements we could also add the ones associated primarily with the political-economic stability and integrity of ocean littoral states, the (in)security role of non-state actors and the question of maritime environmental security. Furthermore, the attainment of ‘great power’ status has long been associated with control over the seas and especially with the maintenance of an internally secure set of sea lanes of communication within imperial domains at various scales (for example, Mahan, 1890). Such an understanding of sea power was not only perceived as essential to obtaining and selling commodities (which reinforced state economic power) but also exemplified various designs and strategies over the use and control of maritime space.

Some analysts differentiate the term ‘sea power’ from ‘naval mastery’, with the latter implying influence at a global rather than a regional level and indicating,

A situation in which a country has so developed its maritime strength that it is superior to any rival power, and that its predominance is or could be exerted far outside its home waters, with the result that it is extremely difficult for other, lesser states to undertake maritime operations or trade without at least its tacit consent (Kennedy, 1983: 9).

Throughout recent history, the condition of naval mastery could be applied to very few states. It was possessed by Britain in the nineteenth century and clearly is now possessed by the United States. The United States relies on the control of the oceans and SLOCs to implement its strategic objectives, but realizing these objectives in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) would require access to appropriate maritime infrastructure such as basing facilities, ports, and, of course, vessels (Stasinopoulos, 2003). Realizing IOR strategic objectives, as far as India is concerned, would also require pro-active engagement in
bilateral cooperation with regional states and regional navies. Furthermore, from an Indian as well as a regional perspective, maritime security has assumed a much higher level of priority post-9/11.

Up until relatively recently, much of the sea power debate has concentrated almost exclusively on its military definition and thus states have been aiming at the development of maritime strategies and maritime security policies which ignore or undermine a wide range of non-military factors and forces. From a military perspective, for example, “a modern maritime strategy involves air, sea and land forces operating jointly to influence events in the littoral together with traditional blue water maritime concepts of sea denial and sea control” (Australian Parliament, 2004: 8). However, besides the military component, a much more broadly-based maritime security strategy would necessarily incorporate a wide range of economic, environmental, political and social considerations and thus require greater inter-organisational collaboration within states and the amelioration of “bureaucratic inertia” for its effective implementation (Roy-Chaudhury, 2000: 187). Furthermore, while ocean littoral states will continue to aim at developing their individual maritime security strategies, in the final analysis, securing the maritime environment, which among other things involves the building of an internationally stable maritime regime as well as the implementation of maritime confidence-building measures, at a minimum will need, global, regional and even sub-regional cooperation in the twenty-first century (Grey, 1993; Singh, 1993).

MARITIME SECURITY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS

For the purposes of this chapter it will be useful to begin by elaborating briefly the notion of “Maritime Regional Security Complex” (MRSC) as described by Rommel C. Banlaoi (2008), with the help of insights borrowed from Barry Buzan’s concept of “regional security complex” (Buzan, 1988; 1991). In simple words, a regional security complex (RSC) describes “a group of states who primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security can not realistically be considered apart from another another” (Ibid.). In his later works, Buzan reformulated the concept of RSC to mean, “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems can not be reasonably analyzed or resolved apart from one another”. In short, the key to the notion of RSC or MRSC is the
observation that the states concerned are enmeshed in a complex web of security interdependence, which tends to be regionally focused.

To a considerable degree, Maritime insecurity is also linked to the degree of stability of Ocean states and sub-regions. Of late, much of the Indian Ocean Region has been portrayed by geopolitical analysts as exhibiting increasing levels of instability. For example, most of the West Asian portion of the Indian Ocean Region has been imagined as “the (emphasis added) global zone of percolating violence” and “is likely to be a major battlefield, both for wars among nation-states and, more likely, for protracted ethnic and religious violence” (Brzezinski, 1997: 52-53). In addition, most of the Northern half of the Indian Ocean Region, including India, has been incorporated into a US-designated “Southern Belt of Strategic Instability” which stretches from southern Japan in the east to northern Italy in the west (Flanagan, Frost and Kugler, 2001: 17). At times, not only do such socio-political constructions tend to be self-reinforcing and self-fulfilling, they can also come to be widely regarded as ‘legitimate’ templates for policy-making (Rumley and Gopal, 2006).

The differential regional impact of globalisation processes has exacerbated levels of Indian Ocean poverty in a region already characterised as the “heart of the Third World” (Chaturvedi, 1998). Increasing regional economic security threats in turn create an environment likely to facilitate the growth of non-conventional threats such as civil unrest, terrorism and unregulated population movements. The lack of any robust regional regime of maritime security cooperation ensures that this environment will inevitably lead to an increase in environmental security threats. Such developments potentially threaten the long-term sustainability of the Indian Ocean itself.

**Traditional Threats and Remilitarization of the Indian Ocean: Mahan Revisited?**

To a degree, increasing regional instability has been aggravated by the impact of extra-regional states. During the Cold War period, for example, regional competition for power and influence was especially evident since the Indian Ocean Region possesses significant littoral space which provides the potential for maritime access and basing. In the post-Cold War period, however, the power projection role of extra-regional states, especially China (to be discussed by us in chapter 5 of this thesis), France and the United States, regional nuclear proliferation and the evolution of sea-based deterrence as well as the
emergence of “asymmetric threats” are all additional ingredients of the relatively unstable contemporary maritime security environment (Prabhakar, 2005: 82-3).

The ‘great base race’ has started in the Indian Ocean after a decade of lull in the post-Cold war period (Berlin, 2004; 2002). This has once again made the Indian Ocean Region dynamic and volatile (see Berlin, 2006). According to Berlin (2004: 251), militarily, the great base race will make war, at least among Indian Ocean nations, a more practicable option than previously. Much more so than in the past, these states will have the capacity to overcome distance and wage war against one another...The bases also will decrease the time necessary to effect war preparations, thereby reducing the time available to third parties to bring potential belligerents to the bargaining table to avoid conflict.

According to Berlin (2004: 251), in terms of a geo-strategic-military space, these naval facilities and advances are linking states (e.g. India and Malaysia), which in recent history were relatively separate from one another. More importantly, at the same time, “the advent and strategic reach of these installations will blur the boundaries and weaken the salience of some of Asia’s traditional sub-regions; that is Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia” (Ibid.). In so doing, argues Berlin, “the Indian Ocean region itself will grow, absorbing once peripheral zones. As the ocean figuratively overflows its banks, capital cities from Asmara to Dushanbe (Tajikistan) to Kuala Lumpur will be incorporated in various degrees into this enlarged global subsystem. This process could be driving the region toward a status reminiscent of the large, highly interactive zone that existed in the centuries before the final triumph of the West in these waters beginning in the mid-eighteenth century” (Ibid.).

Some observers have even gone to the extent of arguing that it is India’s Grand Strategy to make the Indian Ocean ‘India’s ocean’ (Scott, 2006). India’s presence in various zones of the Indian Ocean is no doubt increasing, be it the Bay of Bengal, the African littoral and the Arabian Sea (Chaturvedi, 2007). The Andaman Sea is also home to the problems like piracy, narcotics trade and gun running. The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) was established in October 2001. The main objectives of ANC are the security of islands, SLOCs and air space, surveillance over the Indian EEZ and the establishment of air defence and identification zones (Kumar, 2005). According to Cohen (2001), these islands are a gateway to build relations with Southeast Asia. At the
same time, the islands can check the ongoing Chinese soft incursions in Southeast Asia. India, according to some analysts, is planning to use these islands as forward bases for submarines that are capable of launching cruise missiles (see Kumar, 2005; Berlin, 2004).

As mentioned in chapter two, that there has been a shift in the previously land-centric orientation of the Indian Establishment towards oceanic paradigm. The Annual Report of the Indian Ministry of Defence, 2004-2005 (Internet Source) says, “India is strategically located vis-à-vis both continental Asia as well as the Indian Ocean Region.” India has been moving from its Pakistan-centric fixations in the Western Indian Ocean towards other directions while attaching a great deal of importance to its east. As India-ASEAN relations transcend the narrow confines of the Cold War geographies, the maritime dimension becomes very significant. It has been on a high ever since the two got on to establish multifaceted relations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, maritime cooperation between India and ASEAN countries in the Indian Ocean offers a valuable site of mutual collaboration.

Since independence, the Indian establishment had not paid adequate attention to the naval power. It was only with the coming of the BJP government in 1998 that the Indian Navy was brought to the limelight when a substantial amount was earmarked for the navy in the defence budget (Scott, 2006). Indian navy has made significant strides forward over the years. According to the Indian Navy, the strategic objective of the Indian establishment is to be a major maritime power in the Indian Ocean and a strong and well-maintained navy is an essential requirement for this (Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2004). Scott (2006) argues that Mahan’s vision of yesteryears that ‘who rules the Indian Ocean, rules Asia, is now becoming salient’ in India’s maritime visions. According to Scott (Ibid.: 98), “The strategic background for India is Mahanian-style seapower through control and access to key points, be it territorial possession or secure access, bringing with it power projection, the denial of access to rivals, and control of choke points”.

Pakistan, in pursuit of its perceived traditional naval/maritime security objectives has created bases at Ormara and Gwadar. In the east, Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore are also involved in the great base race. Myanmar, with and without China’s help, looks inclined to acquire a meaningful foot hold in the Indian Ocean. Beijing is investing
immensely in the naval and air base development in Myanmar. Dandyawaddy Naval Base at Sittwe and Kyaukpyu Naval Base at Ramree Island have been upgraded with China’s help. A new naval base at Hainggyi Island has also been built. Another naval base at the Great Coco Islands (India’s until their transfer to Burma in the 1950s) in the Bay of Bengal has also been constructed with China’s aid, which according to a number of strategic experts, would enable Myanmar to keep an eye on the Indian military-naval operations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as well as monitor the traffic through the Malacca Straits. China is also helping in upgrading the Number 58 Naval Base at Zadetkyi Kyun (Berlin, 2004). Malaysia too is building naval bases at Langkawi and at Sitiawan. Whereas Singapore has constructed naval bases at Tuas and the process of upgradation of Changi Base is still on (Ibid.).

According to some analysts (Kumar, 2005), China has been following the strategy of encircling India in South Asia. Countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have become accomplices of China in this respect. China’s bases and facilities on the Hainggyi Island and the Coco Island of Myanmar are alarming developments. China is also modernizing the existing bases facilities at Akyab, Mergui and Sittwe in Myanmar. China is on the way to get a foothold on Trincomalee in Sri Lanka. These developments could result in the Bay of Bengal turning into a Chinese lake. With the control over the Coco Island, Mergui and Matthew Island, there is every possibility that the Andaman Sea metamorphosizes into a choke point. In another major development, China has connected its Yunnan province with Shelwi on the Myanmar border. This road could be further extended to Sinkham, thus providing access to Irrawady River flowing into the Andaman Sea. Southeast Asia, according to some observers, is quite apprehensive about the overtly growing Chinese influence in the (Kumar, 2005; Pherson, 2006). The so-called ‘String of Pearls’ strategy, as adopted by China, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Non-Traditional Threats to Maritime Security

The aftermath of the Cold War and the increasing pace of globalization marked by rapid advances in information and communication technologies are forcing a resolute rethinking of the traditional notion of security. Currently, the agenda of security has broadened and deepened to include wide-ranging issues that are now labeled as non-traditional.
The modern geopolitical imagination, which has for long focused on the security aspects in terms of territory and borders, is now grappling with the challenges of deterritorialized threats, which, in some ways are connected to postmodern geopolitics. These deterritorialized threats include proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, environmental hazards, so on and so forth. According to Beck (2006: Internet Source), in a world risk society, we must distinguish between ecological and financial dangers, which can be conceptualized as side effects, and the threat from terrorist networks as intentional catastrophes; the principle of deliberately exploiting the vulnerability of modern civil society replaces the principle of chance and accident (Ibid.).

In today’s risk society, a range of non-conventional threats like common theft, illegal fishing, intentional pollution, armed robbery on sea or piracy, illegal trafficking in arms, drugs and humans, hijacking, sabotage, transnational oil spills, incidents at sea, terrorism, mercenary activities and maritime insurgency operations have come up. Other threats include: exploitation of national resources by unauthorized persons, for example, illegal fishery; attempt to intentionally pollute the sea thereby leading to ecological damage. These threats can, in no way, be dealt by individual countries and require greater regional cooperation among the littoral states (see Biswas, 2007; Valencia, 2005a; Singh, 2001; Berlin, 2005a; Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2004; Kearney, 2004; Laimou-Maniati; Internet Source;).

The Indian Ocean Region becomes an important space for cooperation in today’s risk society where numerous deterritorialized threats are looming large and call for maritime cooperation among the littoral states to overcome these dangers. According to Rumley and Chaturvedi (2004), in spite of political, economic, military, social, cultural and different national interests, countries of the Indian Ocean Region should cooperate on the issue of maritime security. More than bilateral or trilateral, multilateral efforts and greater cooperation are needed to tackle the threats to maritime security (Ibid.). Thus, India and ASEAN, faced with the same threat, could work together on solving this problem. Let us now turn a more detailed discussion of some of the non-traditional threats to security.
Sea Lane Security in the Straits of Malacca

The increasing use of the Indian Ocean as a routeway takes on a new significance, especially in a global environment of increasing competition over energy and one in which non-state security threats have become increasingly prevalent. In this fundamentally changed geopolitical context, securing the sea lanes of communication has become an issue of global importance and thus requires a collective response. Today, more than 93 per cent of global trade, in terms of volume, moves by sea and over a third moves via sea lanes passing through the Indian Ocean. Japan has about US $260 billion of its trade passing through the SLOCs. Chinese trade worth US $100 billion passes through the Malacca Straits. Over 90% of India’s trade by volume and 77% by value is sea borne (Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2004).

Among the most widely used sea-lanes is the one traversing the east-west axis linking the Andaman Sea and the Strait of Malacca (SOM), which some analysts would also refer to as “SOM-Andaman Link”. The SOM-Andaman Sea can be seen as coherent maritime space under the sovereignty of no less than five littoral states. The Straits of Malacca (see Figure 14), transited by over 72 per cent east-bound loaded tankers on a global basis from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, is one of the busiest and longest waterways in the world. The Straits is approximately 520 miles in length and varies in width from 200 miles in the north to 11 miles at the southern extremity. The greater part of the navigational channels goes through the territorial seas of Indonesia and Malaysia. Together, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, form the main seaway connecting the Indian Ocean with the China Sea.

Figure 14: The Straits of Malacca

Source: Capt. Mat Taib Bin Yasin, Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA).
On an average, more than 600 vessels above 300 GRT use this maritime space daily. This includes vessels carrying 10.5 million barrels of oil from the Middle East to East Asia. It is estimated that number of oil tankers transiting through the SOM daily will increase to 59 by 2010 compared to 45 in 2000. Similarly, the number of LPG traffic is likely to increase to 7 per day from 5 in 2000. Since the straits are an international waterway, the ever increasing burden of costs of maintaining them is borne by the coastal states.

It is important to take note of the manner in which transnational criminal activities around the “northern approaches” to the Straits of Malacca have posed a significant threat to India as well ASEAN countries. This is due principally to the nature of the region’s geopolitical environment that has facilitated a longstanding illegal trade in drugs, firearms and human smuggling. According to Mat Taib Bin Yassin (2008: 188), the SOM-Andaman Sea area has become, “the regional ‘melting pot’ for organized gunrunning and drug trafficking activities operated by international criminal gangs. While drugs originate from the “Golden Triangle”, firearms are sourced mainly from Cambodia and China. These arms and drugs flow southwards into the SOM and eventually find their way to terror markets all over the world.”

Within the region, despite the presence of ASEAN cooperative security mechanisms against non-state sponsored crimes, genuine cooperation is still lacking. As far as the SOM is concerned, besides being considered as one of the world’s most ‘over used’ straits, it has also gained the reputation of an insecure strait. According to a leading Malaysian expert on this subject, “With its inherent strategic value, the security of SOM is of course a concern to all trading nations. The only issue is how it could best be addressed. It is not enough for the major maritime users to only hype up the threat. Neither the suggestion for military intervention, nor the use of commercial instruments like Lloyd’s JWC to pressure the littoral states to shoulder more than their fair share of the security burden, can offer a long term solution to the problem…differences aside, all stakeholders should now come to terms with the fact that enduring security can only be achieved through cooperation premised on mutual trust, respect and a sense of responsibility. Burden, including the enforcement of security in the SOM, must be proportionally shared based on the benefits gained by each and every stakeholder” (Ibid.: 201).
It is important for both India and ASEAN not to lose sight of the fact that the Straits of Malacca are much more than a strategic choke point on the face of the globe, perceived by some as highly vulnerable to piracy and maritime terrorism. For example, overwhelmingly military-strategic discourses often overshadow the fact that pollution notwithstanding, some 70 per cent fishermen in Peninsular Malaysia, including those inhabiting 139 fishing villages located along the Straits of Malacca, are dependent on the Straits (Chaturvedi, 2007).

The natural resource endowment of Straits of Malacca as well as the richness of mangrove wetland complexes is also well-known. The Strait also borders large expanse of mangroves in Peninsular Malaysia, Acheh, North Sumatera and Riau. There are also a number of coral reefs in both Malaysia and Indonesia. The sites in Malaysia include the islands around Pulau Langkawi and Pulau Paya; Pulau Pangkor; and the Pulau Sembilan group of islands; as well as areas of Tanjung Tuan. Over the years, and in tune with the overall growing concerns with environmental degradation in various parts of the globe, the coastal pollution in the Straits of Malacca has emerged as a significant issue affecting human health and a broad spectrum of activities in the region, including tourism, fisheries and other industries dependent on marine water quality. Needless to say solutions will require enforcement and possibly revisions of existing regulations and cooperation among agencies and between state and local governments, funding and political will. This in turn would call for an obligation on the part of both the users and the Strait states to uphold a pollution free marine environment that will promote the sustainable development of the Straits (Ibid.).

**Piracy and Armed Robberies**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, sea lanes of communication are constantly vulnerable to the maritime crime including piracy, drug trafficking, gun running, human smuggling and pollution. (Chaturvedi, Yassin and Rumley, 2007). The Council of Security and Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Memorandum (2001: Internet Source) defines maritime crime as comprising “a criminal offence connected to the sea or to ships. It is frequently transnational by nature with more than one national jurisdiction involved.” Maritime crime disturbs law and order at sea. The breach of this law and order at sea consists of various activities such as piracy, maritime terrorism,
drug trafficking, human smuggling, maritime theft and fraud (including container crime), illegal fishing, and offences against the marine environment (Ibid.).

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, various transnational threats pervade the entire Indian Ocean. The attacks on USS Cole and Limburg, the hijacking of the ship Alondra Rainbow, a Japanese owned ship, and the unearthing by the Singapore authorities of a plot in December 2001 of a terrorist threat to the military vessels of the United States in Singapore port are some examples of the maritime threat faced today. International trade also gets affected by maritime terrorism. A terror attack can using containers could paralyze trade by shutting down a major port which would cause other major ports worldwide to delay cargoes for security checks (Devare, 2006).

Different kinds of attacks take place on the ships in the Southeast Asian waters. These are hijack, robbery, violent boarding, boarding and discharge of firearms. These attacks on ships declined in 2005 (see Figure 15). Piracy has been a long standing concern in Southeast Asia and it continues to be an enormous problem in Southeast Asia especially in the Indonesian waters along the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. In fact, Southeast Asia has the “long standing reputation of being the piracy hotspot of the world” and continues to be the most prone region to acts of piracy; accounting for around 50 percent of almost all attacks worldwide (Banlaoi, 2008: 244).

![Figure 15: Number of Maritime Attacks, 1995-2005](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/IDSS0412006.pdf)

**Figure 15: Number of Maritime Attacks, 1995-2005**


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Pirates can be armed with weapons ranging from knives to rocket launchers, AK47 and M16 rifles. There occur more sophisticated and violent pirate attacks in the waters of Indonesia and the Malacca Straits rather than in the waters of Bangladesh. All these developments make it obligatory for the littoral countries to take care of the problem of piracy in the Malacca Straits. Major users of the region’s waterways must accept a greater responsibility for enhancing maritime security (Raymond, 2005). According to Sakhuja (2005),

A number of solutions are in place and there is potential for further developments. Some vessels have electric fences or high pressure hoses to try and fend off pirates, but without these, a simple grapping hook is often good enough and practical to get on board the relatively lightly crewed ships...There are also fears that the Malacca Strait could be the target of terrorists hoping to paralyze global trade—perhaps by seizing an oil tanker and using it as a vast explosive device, in the same way planes were used in the 11 September attacks on the US (Ibid.).

In 2004, at the first summit of BIMST-EC, the member countries agreed upon enlarging the scope of cooperation to include issues such as piracy, terrorism and transnational crime. Japan’s coast guard has undertaken joint exercises with its counterparts in Brunei, India, South Korea and Malaysia. An anti-piracy meeting was held in Tokyo in September 2003 involving ASEAN, Bangladesh, China, India, South Korea and Sri Lanka and these countries agreed upon sharing information, cooperation among national maritime safety agencies in maritime surveillance, and the establishment of a regional anti-piracy centre (Devare, 2006).

It has been argued and illustrated at length by Robert Beckman (2002) that, the problem of piracy and armed robbery against ships in Southeast Asia defies simple and straightforward answers. One good sign, however, is that there is a growing realisation in favour of enhanced regional and sub-regional cooperation. According to Beckman (Ibid.), the governments in the region should cooperate with the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Reporting Centre in Kuala Lumpur, which should serve as the nodal reporting centre for all incidents of piracy and maritime robbery in the region. Cooperation between the International Maritime Organization (IMO)), national governments and the shipping community is equally vital, which could also result in the setting up of a broad-based expert group for the purposes of reviewing legal issues

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(including domestic legislation) that arise from enhanced cooperation at bilateral and regional levels to prevent and suppress piracy.

**Maritime Terrorism**

Maritime terrorism is another issue gaining ground in recent times, especially after 9/11. Perhaps foremost among the risk factors associated with maritime transport is the sheer volume and number of goods moving by sea. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that 5.8 billion tons of goods were traded by sea in 2001. Sea-going vessels can be the target for attacks. They can also facilitate other attacks and/or raise revenue for terrorist organizations. The principal risk factors related to shipping – cargo, vessels, people and financing – are also linked to the broader risk of major disruptions in world trade and increased economic costs linked to heightened security (OECD Report, 2003: Internet Source).

The first ever incident of maritime terrorism happened in 1985 when an Italian cruise liner *Achille Lauro* was hijacked by the Palestinian terrorists in the Egyptian territorial waters. Other terrorist groups which are supposed to possess maritime capability are Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), Polisario, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Palestinian Groups, LTTE, and so on and so forth (Raymond, 2005: Internet Source).

In January 2002, a US naval vessel revealed that a group of Al Qaeda terrorists had been hiding inside a shipping container. The group escaped from the container a short time before the ship was searched. This discovery prompted an increase in surveillance on ships as well as trucks carrying shipping containers leaving Afghanistan for Pakistani ports. After September 11, port infrastructure and merchant shipping have become vulnerable to terrorist attacks (Sakhuja, 2001: Internet Source).

It can be argued that most of the terrorist activities take place on land rather than at sea. There are a large number of terrorist groups located in the Middle East region and have a presence all over the globe. Such activities defy all kinds of geographical barriers and terrorist have struck in Latin America, Europe, Middle East, Asia-Pacific and in South and Southeast Asia. Among the two dozen terrorist groups identified to have been
engaged in maritime terrorism, approximately nine are currently active and five of these operate in the Asia Pacific region (Sakhuja: Internet Source).

The maritime transport system is also vulnerable to terrorist attacks. It is vulnerable because the system is largely open and porous enough for terrorists to enter and/or manipulate it according to their purposes. This is especially true of the container transport system where the velocity of trade, the use of anonymous and uniform containers and the relative ease with which the contents of the latter can be willfully misrepresented. The system is already targeted by pirates and criminals with some success in various parts of the world and seafarers often bear the brunt of these attacks. But some seafarers themselves, or people posing as such, are implicated in some acts of piracy, just as some port workers are implicated in cargo theft. (OECD Report, 2003: Internet Source).

Transnational narco networks is another major threat in the Indian Ocean Region as the two major areas— the ‘Golden Crescent’ and the ‘Golden Triangle’— in the Indian Ocean region. Thus, narco-terrorism is one of the major threats in the Indian Ocean Region. The Indian Ocean still lacks an overarching security framework to tackle such threats (Biswas, 2007). In the post 9/11 times, the United States and Indian navies exercised their transit passage rights to escort large tankers and warships through the Strait on a few occasions and this has lead to certain misgivings among some of the Southeast Asian countries. India agreed to provide escort duties to the United States for dealing with the problem of pirates and terrorists. This has led some of the ASEAN countries to doubt that joint Indian and American patrols could probably be an effort at establishing the Indian naval presence, so as to checkmate the Chinese naval set up (Valencia, 2005 a).

September 11 attacks have added a new dimension to the maritime terrorism. These attacks indicated that the simple facilitative means of transportation can be misused for very dangerous purposes. The SLOCs and ports become very vulnerable under such circumstances. It is important to point out that in order to be considered a threat, it is not necessary for a terrorist group to have already carried out a terrorist attack against shipping and port facilities, or even displayed an interest in carrying out a maritime attack. September 11 highlights that terrorist groups are very unpredictable and should not be underestimated (Raymond, 2005: Internet Source). Certain international
initiatives have been adopted in the post-9/11 times in order to fight maritime terrorism at both bilateral and multilateral levels through International Maritime Organization (IMO) and at unilateral levels (Devarre, 2006). We would return to the issue of maritime terrorism will be taken up in detail in chapter six.

INDIA’ MARITIME VISION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh, points out in the foreword of the Indian Maritime Doctrine (2004: ii), “If we are to fulfill our maritime destiny, all of us – the government, the armed forces, the civil services, the media and the public — must have a maritime vision and a thorough understanding of the maritime concepts outlined in this doctrine.” Strategically, India today views itself as both a continental and maritime power. The Ministry of Defence is an important site of knowledge production regarding maritime cooperation in general and between India and ASEAN countries in particular. The former Defence Minister of India, Pranab Mukherjee (who is now the External Affairs Minister), in one of his addresses delivered in Washington is reported to have said (2005a: Internet Source),

“The maritime security environment requires more attention. As already indicated, the Indian Ocean region from East Africa to Southeast Asia is an area busy with fundamentalist, terrorist, and militant, separatist or extremist organizations, and criminal syndicates involved in trafficking in drugs, arms and humans, and piracy. 60,000 ships, and much of the energy from the Gulf to East Asia, transit through the Straits of Malacca every year...These security concerns are not unique to India. To some degree, most nations face them in some degree or the other. But few face them all together like India does. But what they underline is a convergence of our security concerns with those of the international community at large, and with the US in particular, over fundamentalist activism and terrorism; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; security of shipping, energy and the sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean region; and peace and stability in Asia. In all these, India finds itself at the front-line.

In the post-Cold War period, the Atlantic-Pacific Ocean combine has given way to a new visualization of the Pacific-Indian Ocean. The geo-economic drive has pushed the North America-Western Europe to North America-Asia Pacific rim. Japan, China and the Asian Tigers are booming economically. There is a growing realization in New Delhi that India’s economy and its development are critically dependent on its success in
maritime domain and diplomacy. In addition to this, economic resources in the oceans are rightly being perceived as significant. To quote the *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2004),

> The Indian maritime vision for the first quarter of the 21st century must look at the arc from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca as a legitimate area of interest. Some degree of flexibility is assumed, and indeed essential, when dealing with the oceans for they cannot be demarcated into specific regions since freedom of the high seas is enshrined in the global consensus (Ibid.: 56)... To the east is the steadily growing economy of the ASEAN states coupled with China’s growing influence that tends to spill over into our maritime zone... In addition to the long-established threat on our Western Seaboard, there has emerged strategic requirement to look east as well. This has largely been the outcome of neo-economic powers of the ASEAN region and China aiming to strengthen their naval power (Ibid.: 71).

India’s maritime doctrine mentions that the main aim of the Indian state is national security. However, this security is not only confined to safeguarding the coastline and islands but should also look at the geoeconomic dimension far more seriously and systematically. The Doctrine envisions the geostrategic significance of the sea lanes for India’s trade.

> India’s primary maritime interest is to assure national security. This is not restricted to just guarding the coastline and island territories, but also extends to safeguarding our interests in the EEZ as well as protecting our trade. This creates an environment that is conducive to rapid economic growth of the country. Since trade is the lifeblood of India, keeping out SLOCs open in times of peace, tension or hostilities is a primary national maritime interest (Ibid.: 63).

Scott (2006) argues that Mahan’s visions are becoming real today in the Indian context. About a century ago, Mahan had envisioned massive American presence in the Pacific Ocean and its turning into an American lake. It can be argued the same today for India in the Indian Ocean. He says that the American presence in the Indian Ocean is on a decline and the United States is focusing more and more on the Pacific Ocean.

The Indian Navy’s internal study entitled, *Strategic Defence Review: The Maritime Dimension – A Naval Vision* (1998), observes that all over the globe navies are
engaged in maritime cooperation through various confidence building measures (CBMs) and India is no exception to this growing trend in maritime cooperation. India is involved in various international fora for this purpose and is a signatory to the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea and a member of several organisations dealing with maritime issues like IOR-ARC, IOMC, BIMST-EC, CSACP and IOC. The Review also emphasizes that the Indian Navy must have sufficient maritime power to defend and to enhance India’s maritime interests. The Navy should be able to stand up to any challenge posed by any littoral nation(s) in and outside the Indian Ocean Region (Ibid.). It is to this important dimension of India’s maritime strategy, namely Naval diplomacy in pursuit of confidence building measures at sea, that we turn next.

**NAVAL DIPLOMACY: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AT SEA**

There are scholars who believe that India’s ‘Look East’ policy was largely embedded in geostrategic imperatives of the post-Cold War period, as pointed out in chapter two. Naidu (2004a; 2003a; 2003b) has argued that the main motive behind India’s ‘Look East’ policy was geostrategic, far more than the geopolitical or the geoeconomic. He argues that the roots of the ‘Look East’ policy can be found in the initiatives taken by the Indian Navy in the late 1980s. After the end of the Cold War, Southeast Asia began to look at India as a balancer. To quote Naidu (2004 a),

> It is however on the defence and strategic front that India has made impressive progress. A sea change in the political atmosphere that Southeast Asia witnessed in the aftermath of the cold war, especially after the Cambodian issue was settled and looking at Vietnam as a potential ally of ASEAN, contributed to this in a big way. Moreover, India’s military might in the emergent Asian balance of power could not be ignored any longer. The Southeast Asian nations began to look upon India as a power that could play a kind of ‘balancing role’ vis-à-vis China in particular. On the other hand, it was in India’s interest to ensure that Southeast Asia would not be dominated by a regional great power once it became obvious that the superpowers were going to build-down their presence, which coincided with a similar thinking within Southeast Asia. The upshot of convergence of interests was the genesis of a new strategic interaction with several of the ASEAN nations.

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Under the rubric of India’s ‘Look East’ policy, particularly in the second phase of the policy, India has been paying greater attention towards the maritime security with Southeast Asia in the Asia-Pacific region (see Bradford, 2005: Internet Source; Sinha, 2003: Internet Source).

To quote the then Defence Minister of India, Pranab Mukherjee (2005a: Internet Source), with respect to the maritime security and maritime cooperation in the region,

Our approach to it is essentially cooperative. We now have coordinated maritime patrolling arrangements with Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Our Navy has been providing hydrographic assistance to Indonesia, Seychelles and Mauritius, and maritime security cover for Summit Conferences in Mozambique. The Coast Guard and Navy have been active in anti-piracy, disaster relief, and environmental management and response operations. The Navy has also been conducting joint exercises in the Indian Ocean with the US, France, Singapore, Russia and Oman amongst others. In 2002, we provided escort operations for high value US naval assets passing through the Malacca Straits. The Indian Navy holds the MILAN Naval Exercises off Andaman and Nicobar islands every two years. On the security of the Malaccas, we are comfortable with its management by the littoral states and would be happy to join a regional initiative, if necessary, and if the littoral states are comfortable with our participation (Ibid.).

The text of the speech apparently reveals the changing mental maps of the Indian defence establishment in the post-Cold War era. India’s security paradigm has been undergoing a change as is made clear by the above mentioned text.

In 1995, the Indian Navy initiated the annual congregation of the Bay of Bengal navies --India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand-- near the Andamans, called Milan. Apart from naval exercises, this event includes coordination of search and rescue operations at sea and establishment of inter-operability with other navies (Naidu, 2003b). This conduct of frequent joint naval exercises has been seen as an important step in the direction of giving a practical shape and meaning to India’s ‘Look East’ policy. The Indian Navy also conducted ‘Milan 2006’, a meeting of Indian Ocean regional navies (9-14 January 2006) in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Naval warships of different types and capabilities from Bangladesh, Myanmar,
India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand sailed to Port Blair for this exercise (Milan, 2006: Internet Source).

The Indian Navy takes pride in announcing that it possesses the capability to cooperate with the countries ashore the Malacca Straits to contain piracy and terrorism. Indian Navy's 15 warships are (eight landing crafts utility, four amphibious landing ships and three fast attack craft) permanently based at Port Blair and can be mobilized to join the other littorals of the region. So far Indian Navy has had only bilateral cooperation and is now looking at multilateral cooperation for the safety and security of the straits. In September 2005, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand launched the 'Eye in the Sky' initiative which aimed at air patrols over the Malacca Straits. Under this initiative, the Malacca Straits states make available two maritime aircraft each to patrol the Straits (Sakhuja, 2006: Internet Source).

During Milan 2006, the Indian Navy had put up a proposal to patrol jointly the Malacca Straits. This proposal holds good value at the time when India's regional status has been accepted to an extent. India’s willingness to patrol the straits came as a pointer towards India’s keenness to be active in the Indian Ocean. Particularly after Tsunami, Indian Navy has been on a lookout for developing relations with the regional navies with new kinds of naval diplomacy (Kumar: Internet Source). India organized bilateral naval exercises, Milan-2007, with Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Bhattacharya, 2007: Internet Source).

The Indian aircraft carrier, Virat, and four other ships paid a goodwill visit to Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia in July 2005. The scope of these exercises has been expanded to include disciplines like Maritime Interdiction, Air Defence and Gunnery aspects also (Devare, 2006). The Indian Navy has ‘IndoIndon’ bilateral agreement with Indonesia, which involves the joint patrolling of the Malacca Straits. In the same way, the Indian Navy has conducted a cooperative exercise called ‘IndIndoCorpat’ (India Indonesia Coordinated Patrol) in the region with the Indonesian Navy (Sakhuja, 2005). India also engages in joint ASW (anti-submarine warfare) training with Singapore and bilateral naval exercises with Vietnam. The bilateral exercises are a manifestation of a more strategic ‘Look East’ policy. India has also been holding unilateral naval exercises.
in the South China Sea involving several warships, a submarine and a maritime reconnaissance aircraft (Bahroo, 2000).

**Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Initiative (INOS): Growing Focus on Naval Diplomacy**

A joint initiative of the Indian Navy and the National Maritime Foundation (based in New Delhi), the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (INOS; the word itself connotes movement) can be described as a major step in ‘naval diplomacy’ by India in the Indian Ocean Region. The initiative was inaugurated at the first IONS Seminar held in New Delhi on the 8 February 2008 and attended by as many as 26 Chiefs of the Navy of the Indian Ocean littoral states. It is based on the highly laudable assumption that the maritime domain is ‘demanding and deserving of continuous study, discussion and debate’. It is both interesting and revealing to note the geopolitical visions underlying the inaugural address delivered by the Defence Minister of India, A.K. Anthony (2008: Internet Source) who began by saying,

\[\text{I would like to exhort all present and future members of the 'IONS Initiative' to resist the temptation of trying either to provide a prescriptive set of answers to a prescribed set of problems or challenges. I would caution them against seeking to import extra-regional template. I would, instead, ask them to tap the huge intellectual and innovative resources available within the IOR littoral. I encourage them to explore a variety of regionally-relevant and regionally-sensitive solutions to problems whose very definition is given form and shape – not by extra-regional players often pursuing, agendas of their own – but by the regional players themselves, acting in close consultation with one another and cooperating freely for the common good of all (Ibid.).}\]

The Defense Minister also said that whereas the navies of the region were the principal interlocutors of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, it will be vital to ensure a much wider and more dispersed representation of young or mid-level officers and sailors, engaging and interacting with one another to their mutual benefit. To quote the Minister (Ibid.),
It is, after all, they who will have to face the nebulous but nevertheless deadly threats of the future and it is, consequently, they who must be prepared and armed to face them... The threats facing present day law-abiding states are not arising from the territorial or ideological ambitions of other nation-states. They are, instead, a bewildering variety of manifestations of malevolent non-state entities. Within the maritime environment, thieves and robbers, illegal traffickers in guns, drugs and human beings, poachers, polluters, pirates, warlords, terrorists are establishing pan-oceanic and trans-oceanic connectivities that lend to make a mockery of our boundaries and borders. To these problems must be added natural disasters and manmade catastrophes such as cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, floods, tsunamis, and the very real threat of widespread coastal inundation caused by global warming. These are common threats and demand common approaches and common solutions.

Statements such as these are no doubt a brave acknowledgement of immensely challenging nature of de-territorialized threats that India and its neighboring countries collectively encounter in the domain of maritime security, are no doubt most laudable and worthy of further reflection and action. However, whether such threats could be met only by the navies of the region alone is rather doubtful. Equally doubtful is perhaps the assumption that both traditional and non-traditional threats to maritime security can be chased and tackled through a single strategic planning or model.

Coast Guard Cooperation
The idea of cooperation among the coast guards of India and ASEAN countries demands and deserves some attention in the context of confidence building measures and ‘good order’ at sea. Sam Bateman (2008) has forcefully argued that cooperation between coast guards may offer benefits not available with naval cooperation. Due to their sheer size, technology and firepower, warships from major maritime powers can overwhelm vessels from small navies with relative ease. On the other hand, coast guard vessels not only appear less intimidating and provocative, they are also able to carry out exercises and training with other states that might not be possible on a navy-to-navy basis.

The Role of Ports
Ports have a major role to play in maritime law enforcement, particularly the suppression of piracy and armed attacks against ships. While no doubt piratical attacks are committed against ships, offshore installations and their crews, the causal factors as well as most
effective solutions are found onshore. Patrols at sea by maritime or marine police forces, possibly with the support or direct involvement of regional navies, may be effective in deterring illegal activity at sea but the reality is that very few criminals are actually caught at sea. The most effective solutions for coastal and port states, therefore, lie in traditional policing methods onshore, including investigation of possible links with organised crime, and in measures to improve the security of ports and harbour (Bateman, Zara, and Ho, 2006: Internet Source).

Port security is an important consideration but there is a difference between the security of a ship and the security of a port. The former is largely the responsibility of the shipmaster and his crew, except when the ship is in port, and certain other considerations apply, while the latter is entirely the responsibility of the port or coastal State. Security in wharf areas, ports, harbours and anchorages requires active patrolling both ashore and afloat, and the institution of physical measures (that is, effective fencing and access controls, including personal identity documentation) to prevent unauthorised access.

According to Sam Bateman (2008), ports contribute to maritime security in two major ways. The first is by conformity with the requirements of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code developed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Following the 9/11 attacks, the IMO has given high priority to the review of existing international legal and technical measures to prevent and suppress terrorist attacks against ships and improve security aboard and ashore. The aim is to reduce the risk to passengers, crews and port personnel both onboard ships and in port areas and to vessels and their cargoes. The ISPS Code, which entered into force on 1 July 2004, lays down certain requirements for ships and port facilities such as the provision of security plans and officers, onboard equipment and arrangements for monitoring and controlling access. The second is by participating in networks of information exchange, particularly those that provide information on the movements of ships and a historical record of incidents of illegal activity. Comprehensive knowledge of what is happening at sea is an essential element of maritime security and ports have an important role in providing that information.
SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION AT WORK: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ‘SOUTH’ AND ‘SOUTHEAST’ ASIA

BIMST-EC

The end of the Cold War has facilitated the rise of regional integration arrangements (RIAs), as pointed out in chapter one. Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) also falls under the same category. These RIAs aim at helping neighboring countries stabilize and prosper; which is for both kind-hearted purposes and also for containing spillover of unrest and forced political migration. Keeping in mind objectives such as these, BIMST-EC was launched. BIMST-EC was launched in June 1997, in Bangkok, as a result of Thai initiative aiming at fostering economic cooperation between parts of these regions. The member countries were chosen on the basis of their geographical proximity. This is also known as the Bay of Bengal Community, as the Bay of Bengal meets the shores of these countries (De and Ghosh, 2003).

Figure 16: BIMST – EC Countries

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image.BIMSTEC_Map.png

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The new reincarnation of BIMST-EC came into existence in 2005 in the form of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation (BBIMTEC), with Bhutan and Nepal joining (see Figure 16). BIMST-EC had initially identified six areas of cooperation, for which the respective ‘lead’ countries were designated: trade and investment (Bangladesh), technology (Sri Lanka), transport and communication (India), energy (Myanmar), tourism (India), and fisheries (Thailand) (see Bhaskar, 2006: Internet Source; and Bay Of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation: Internet Source).

The BIMST-EC FTA was signed by the member countries on 8 February 2004 in Phuket (Framework Agreement on the BIMST-EC Free Trade Area, 2004: Internet Source). At the 8th Ministerial Meeting of BIMST-EC, the member countries agreed to put in place a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) for trade in goods by July 2006, and an FTA accord on services and investment by July 2007 (Ahmed, 2005: Internet Source).

There are various sectors dealt with by different BIMST-EC countries (Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation: Internet Source) (see Table 3)

Table 3: BIMST-EC: Sectors of Cooperation and the Lead Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Lead/Chair Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade &amp; Investment</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Communication</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Cooperation</td>
<td>Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Disaster Management</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-to-People Contact</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Alleviation</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-Terrorism and Trans-national Crime</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.bimstec.org/lead_chair_countries.asp

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One geopolitical advantage of forming such a grouping is that India has long been perceived by Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as confined within the South Asian parameters. BIMST-EC could give all these countries an entirely new vision for each other (Murthy, 2000). Late J.N. Dixit (2001) has argued that India's interests in fostering the establishment of BIMST-EC opened up possibilities of enhancing its trade linkages with Myanmar and Thailand as well as the opportunity to counter China's strategic designs within the region. Myanmar is geostrategically important to India because it lies parallel to the north-eastern Indian states and parts of Bangladesh including a significant border with China (Ibid.).

Moreover, Myanmar is also strategically placed along the Bay of Bengal and is situated astride India's south eastern sea trade routes close to the Indian territories in the Nicobar and Andaman islands. Myanmar shares a long boundary of 1634 km with India. Myanmar is important to China as a westward link through the 'southwest silk road' to Bangladesh and India. Chinese influence in Myanmar is visible as the Chinese have already built an all-weather road from Kunming in China to Mandalay in Myanmar. In this regard, China is developing Kunming as a regional energy and transportation hub. In collaboration with Myanmar, China is also constructing infrastructure along the Kunming region towards Southeast Asia. Discretely, China has built logistical facilities for its navy on the south western coast of Myanmar. This will also probably help Beijing to mitigate the economic disparities between China's affluent coastal states and its poorer inland economies. Noting Indian concerns that China is trying to gain access to the Bay of Bengal, Myanmar has tried to adopt a balanced approach to appease both China and India. For example, Myanmar had invited India to build the Tamu to Kalewa road that runs parallel to the Kunming to Lashio to Mandalay roads (Policy Brief, 2004: Internet Source; Dixit, 2001).

Thailand and India have been most influential in the BIMST-EC grouping, respectively located within the ASEAN and SAARC groupings. The creation of BIMST-EC came at a critical junction as an important link between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It could be argued that the roots of BIMST-EC can be located even before the economic agreement (Bangkok Agreement) which was signed in 1976. Thailand is the most influential of the Indochinese ASEAN members. Moreover, Vietnam being a rival to Thailand, BIMST-EC provides the latter a platform to strengthen its ties with the other
Indochinese members like Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. As to the Indian context, owing to the India-Pakistan quagmire within the context of SAARC, India started looking towards different regional groupings (Rao, 2005: 158). To add, there have been bilateral tensions among various members of SAARC, such as between India and Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, and so on and so forth. There began a search on India’s part for new regional allies in the changing world scenario after the end of the Cold War, as pointed out in chapter two. India’s reorientation towards its east was the result of the larger reorientation processes taking place all over the globe. To make up for the unachieved success at the level of SAARC, India considered new regional options like the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), BIMST-EC and the Mekong-Ganga Initiative. Thus, BIMST-EC has the potential to act as a link between South and Southeast Asia. Another factor that could be said to have motivated India to forge such an alliance is the awareness that the eastern states of India, like, eastern Uttar Pradesh, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, which form nearly a third of its population but which constitutes the most underdeveloped areas, could benefit from BIMST-EC (see Yahya, 2005; and Verghese, 2001; Baru, 2001: Internet Source).

Another advantage of this grouping is that the geographical region covering the BIMST-EC countries is endowed with vast untapped resources of energy. The development, distribution and efficient utilization of these resources will require cooperation and trade among the countries of the region. The prime objective of energy cooperation between the BIMSTEC nations would be to ensure energy security of member countries. The region combines countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar having large gas reserves beyond their short and medium term domestic requirements and those with immense untapped potential of hydropower such as Nepal and Bhutan and countries that are net importers of energy such as India and Sri Lanka. It can be argued that the energy demand-supply sectors in the countries of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan offer a potential for regional resource cooperation, which could go beyond export-import trade relations and link the region in a Bay of Bengal Energy Community and thus contribute to the process of regional integration (Policy Brief, 2004: Internet Source).
The former Prime Minister of Thailand (Joint Press Statement, 2001: Internet Source) remarked,

We can both take part in our joint cooperation in founding the BIMST-EC and Mekong Ganga cooperation frameworks. We now have the important task to work with our friends in Myanmar to make land travel between South and Southeast Asia a reality by linking our road networks...In terms of regional cooperation, Thailand feels there is a need to inaugurate a forum for promoting an Asian identity in international affairs. This could take the form of an “Asia Cooperation Dialogue” (ACD)—an informal forum for Asian countries to exchange views on issues of common interest, especially trade, investment, tourism, and financial cooperation (2001: Internet Source).

As far as economic cooperation among the BIMST-EC members is concerned, a preparatory meeting for the establishment of a BIMST-EC Economic Forum was held in Dhaka in November 1999 and a concept paper outlining its functions was finalized. The main objectives of the forum as outlined in the concept paper were: to provide strategic leadership in initiating economic activities to benefit the group as a whole; facilitate implementation of development projects undertaken by the group; develop mechanisms for greater private sector BIMST-EC activities; enhance the quality of information flows besides promoting institutional linkages and networking; and generate increased participation by the business community in the identified sectors of BIMST-EC (Reddy, 2006).

At the BIMST-EC India-Business Forum, organized by the ASSOCHAM in association with CII and FICCI, India called for intensifying economic cooperation by organizing more trade missions and exhibitions and an exchange of investments promotion mission. An important development for the BIMST-EC countries took place in February 2004 during the BIMST-EC Ministerial Meeting. The BIMST-EC Free Trade Area was concluded which was supposed to come into force by 30 June 2004 and the member countries undertook to follow the internal procedures to implement it. However, the Free Trade Area is yet to be implemented (Ibid.).

While talking about the sub-regional cooperation, it must be mentioned that China is also involved with Southeast Asia. China’s sub-regional initiative with
Southeast Asia, Kunming Initiative, has received well deserved attention from the Indian establishment. Many analysts feel that the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) came up as a counterweight to the Kunming Initiative on the Chinese side, to which we turn next.

**Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC): Southeast via Northeast?**

At the very first India-ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh on 5 November 2002, the then Indian Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, sounded quite optimistic regarding the scope for further development of economic and cultural links between India and ASEAN, especially the five riparian states of Mekong region through MGC initiative. MGC could be an important mechanism to achieve convergence in the areas of stability, security and economic development of member countries (Reddy, 2003).

The Mekong is the longest river in Southeast Asia and one of the largest rivers in the world. In terms of drainage area, which is 795,000 square kilometers, it ranks the twenty first in the world and the twelfth in terms of its length (4,800 kilometers). In 1957, the four riparian countries of the Lower Mekong Basin, namely Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam agreed to join their efforts in developing the water and related resources of the Mekong river basin by establishing the Committee of Coordination and Investigation of the Lower Mekong River Basin (Mekong River Commission Secretariat Database and Information System: Internet Source). India extended economic and technical assistance for this project. In that sense, the efforts to develop Mekong sub-region began even before the formation of ASEAN.

With the end of the Cold War, Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Forum was launched in 1992 (Reddy, 2003). Following this, an agreement on the cooperation for the sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin was signed by the four riparian countries—Cambodia, Lao, Thailand and Vietnam— in April 1995, and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established to cooperate in a constructive and mutually beneficial manner for sustainable development, utilization, conservation and management of the water and related resources of the Mekong Basin for social and economic development and the well-being of all riparian states (Mekong River Commission Secretariat Database and Information System: Internet Source). Figure 17 shows the map of the Mekong river basin.
The Mekong committee had identified four tributary projects in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. A 150 MW Nam Ngum hydroelectric scheme in Laos was commissioned in 1971 as a power export project and a symbol of regional cooperation. Some time later, Thailand was also included. Cambodia withdrew from the Mekong Committee in 1975. However, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam established an Interim Mekong Committee in 1978. In 1991, Cambodia joined back. In April 1995, Mekong River Commission was established under a policy-making ministerial council, with a joint committee to implement decisions and a secretariat to provide technical and administrative support. The basin development plan is periodically updated. The 18 multipurpose projects completed on Mekong tributaries had by 1995 augmented dry
season flows by 20\%. Among other projects which are under consideration is a project that aims at directing Mekong flood flows to the Sirkit reservoir on the river Chao Phraya for irrigation, power generation and urban water supply. Other projects for fishery, navigation, watershed and forestry have also been undertaken keeping in mind environmental safeguards. Mekong Basin development has encouraged a lot of other initiatives for overall development of the region as a whole rather than just the Mekong (Verghese, 2001).

India floated in 2002 a new cooperative forum called Mekong Ganga Cooperation with five of its eastern neighbours. It was formally launched by the three Foreign Ministers— Jaswant Singh (India), Lengsavad (Laos) and Nguyen Dy Nien (Vietnam) and the three Tourism Ministers—Saw Lwin (Myanmar), Adisai Bodharamik (Thailand) and Veng Seryvuth (Cambodia) by issuing the Vientiane Declaration on 10 November 2000. The Declaration said that the MGC was designed to develop “closer relations and better understanding among the six countries to enhance friendship, solidarity and cooperation” (cited in Reddy, 2003). However, the then Indian Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, underscored that this initiative was in no way meant to marginalize China or to project India as a powerful entity in the region (Ibid.). It sets out a vision for cooperation with a view to developing closer relations and better understanding among the six countries; Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Vientiane Declaration identifies a number of areas for cooperation, namely tourism, culture, education, and transport and communication. Mekong-Ganga cooperation in tourism is supposed to develop in areas such as tourism policy planning, human resource development, marketing, and environmental preservation through the strengthening of existing linkages as, well as the development of new collaborative actions in the tourism sector of member countries. It makes effort to develop tourist destinations that combine and link more than one member country. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation in the cultural domain aims at preserving and promoting the shared cultural and traditional values of member countries so as to enhance mutual understanding. It also looks at promoting closer interaction in the areas of distance education, information technology, capacity building in key areas of e-development, and education planning, research, and language training. MGC also focuses on facilitating transport and communication for the movement of people and goods among MGC member countries for their socio-economic development, development of trade and the promotion of better
As mentioned in the previous chapters, India, despite rich historical and cultural links in the past, had ignored Southeast Asia for long and lost upon the opportunities in the Mekong Delta. All through the Cold War, this region was infested with wars and conflicts. But now the MGC provides India and its private sector the opportunity to build on the past and create a niche in the region. However, agriculture is not included in this cooperative framework. Since the Mekong basin has the potential to emerge as a granary and offers some of the most fertile lands, there is a lot that India and Thailand can do together to tame the Mekong, enhance cultivation and spread irrigation. India could share the fruits of its Green Revolution as well as the benefits of weather forecasting to help the farmers. (Baruah, 2001). Other areas of cooperation for India and ASEAN countries are science and technology, Human Resource Development, education, small and medium sectors (SMEs), health and pharmaceuticals, and tourism and culture. There should be emphasis on capacity building through science and technology, human resource development and building infrastructure and promoting connectivity (De, 2005b).

The decision to restrict the membership of the MGC to six countries did invite some criticism. However, the selection of the countries was done keeping in mind the geographical contiguity of these countries for sub-regional cooperation. Myanmar, an immediate neighbor of India, was an obvious choice as it directly connects Indian boundary with Southeast Asia. Thailand, in turn, is juxtaposed with Myanmar, acting as a ‘gateway to Indochina’. Bangladesh and China were left out of the grouping, the reasons being Bangladesh is already a part of BIMST-EC, while China was fully engaged in the Mekong Basin projects through a parallel sub-regional platform (see Irom, 2002: Internet Source; Jayanth, 2000).

China is involved in the Kunming Initiative which links up the Yunnan province of China with Myanmar, India’s Northeast and Thailand in sub-regional programmes. So the two countries were conveniently left out to make the new body more homogeneous and close-knit. Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos offer very attractive tourist sites which are of cultural, religious and historical importance. So tourism offers significant opportunities for cooperation between India and these countries. Umbilical Buddhist
relations with Southeast Asia, particularly the Mekong Basin, could also serve as substantial links. These countries are major sites of Buddhist pilgrimage. Good rail and road links with these countries was also given priority in the MGC programme (Ibid.).

Some scholars argue that the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was launched as a counter balance to the Chinese Kunming Initiative with ASEAN. The Mekong basin has often been perceived as an arena of geopolitical interest for both India and China by some analysts (see Raja Mohan, 2003e; Irom, 2002: Internet Source). China was already promoting plans for the development of what it called the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) that included Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Yunnan province in South West China. Thus, according to some scholars, began the ‘Great Game’ in the Mekong region for gaining access to the rich resources, markets and building trade routes. The management of the waters of the Mekong led to geopolitical clashes in the region. Chinese plans to build a large number of dams in the upper Mekong continue to raise deep anxieties in the lower riparian states (Raja Mohan, 2003e).

As P.V. Rao (2005: 162) puts it so aptly,

The shared histories and geographical contiguity of these Mekong basis countries with India and China complemented by the current politico-economic drive of the latter two into dynamic Asia, accord a new strategic value to the Mekong region. For both India and China, Mekong countries provide strategic accessibility to reach into the heartland of Asia-Pacific. Development assistance and transport linkages are the two key areas through which India and China can constructively engage in the Mekong region.

Whereas, another expert, Amit Baruah (2000), feels that the Mekong region is in no way meant as a geopolitical move against China. In fact, China also welcomed the move. The then Indian Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, was asked in Hanoi on November 7, 2000 about the omission of China in the Mekong initiative as China was traditionally included in such ventures and whether the project was intended to increase India's ‘influence’ in the region. Mr. Singh repeatedly remarked that it was a gross misinterpretation of the initiative (Ibid.).

Some senior Indian diplomats in Southeast Asia believe that without the development of the northeastern States, cooperation with Southeast Asia cannot be
meaningful. For the Mekong-Ganga Project to be effective, the Brahmaputra valley is a crucial factor. If there exists sufficient trade and industry in this region, overland trade via Myanmar to many MGC countries will become a worthwhile proposition for India (Irom, 2002: Internet Source). However, as argued in chapter two, certain Indian senior diplomats believe that before reaching Southeast Asia through India's Northeast, New Delhi has to reach Northeast first (Ram, 2004).

There are ample opportunities in infrastructure sector between the countries of Mekong-Ganga region and an MGC Infrastructure Fund has been set up. There could be establishment of direct air link between India and Mekong countries. There could also be facilitation of trade and transport by strengthening shipping fleets, modernization of ports and networking among custom authorities, standardization of infrastructure facilities, gauge conversion and civil aviation facilities. Other avenues of opportunities could include networking among infrastructure service providers through public–private partnership and strengthening human capital and faster implementation of Hanoi Plan of Action for MGC transport and communication, which was adopted in July 2001 (De, 2005 a).

For trade outlets there are no direct air links, water links and overland links between India and Mekong countries. Bangkok (Thailand) is well-connected with Vientiane (Vietnam), Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Ho Chi Min through land and airways. However, good land links between Thailand and Myanmar are yet to be established and similar is the case between India and Myanmar. As far as waterways are concerned, merchandise between India and Mekong countries is transshipped twice—once at Klang port (Singapore) and at Laem Chabang (Vietnam). There have been agreements between India and some Mekong countries on road links, for example, India, Myanmar, and Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMTTH) and East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) under the aegis of BIMST-EC and Greater Mekong Sub-regionalism, respectively. An agreement on Delhi- Hanoi Railway link has also been signed (Ibid.).

A number of initiatives that aim at investment from India in the Mekong countries have been taken up. But the Indian investment is not very high in the Mekong region. There always remains much scope for enhanced investment avenues in the region. There is a provision of technical expertise and training to Cambodia under MGC and there is bilateral cooperation in economics, trade, investment, industry, credit,
technology science, tourism, culture, telecommunications, aviation, education and training with Vietnam. Certain steps could be taken for more sub-regional cooperation between India and the Mekong countries, for instance, enhancing the liberalized trade regime which is a part of the framework agreement with ASEAN and various special concessions offered to Mekong countries; removal of non-tariff barriers; harmonization of customs procedures; promoting trade information and business contacts; institutionalizing the annual ASEAN-India trade fairs with special incentive for Mekong countries; and Indian technology exhibitions in Mekong (Joseph, 2005).

The Bay of Bengal Community

The Bay of Bengal, a sub-body of the larger Indian Ocean, washes the coasts of Sri Lanka and India on the west and Bangladesh and Myanmar on the north. To the east lie Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The Bay of Bengal has a long history of flows across the region. Berlin (2005) argues that ‘it was probably among the first places on the planet characterized by significant interaction among peoples over relatively long distances’ (Ibid.).

The Bay of Bengal region is becoming increasingly important in terms of a strategic competition among China, India, Japan and the United States. India’s efforts of merging the boundaries between South and Southeast Asia, is an alarming move for other powers interested in the region (Ibid.).

The Bay of Bengal region can be an appropriate region for extending maritime cooperation among the littoral states. In terms of a maritime region the Bay of Bengal is geopolitically much advantageous being a compact water body enclosed from three sides with geostrategically located sea lanes of communication traversing through it either via Malacca Strait to Southeast Asia and the Far East or to Australia. Also it is closely connected via the Andaman Sea to the strategically important Malacca Strait. Moreover, an additional advantage that could be a success line to regional maritime cooperation in this area is that there are no major disputes among countries in the region. Though there are maritime boundary disputes between India, Bangladesh and Myanmar (Singh, 2001a).
Bilateral relationships between the countries of the Bay of Bengal region are on a high. India has been increasing its commitment to Sri Lanka’s security and territorial integrity. In 2005, Than Shwe, head of Burma’s ruling military junta, visited India and signed three agreements, including a ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Non-Traditional Security Issues’, including terrorism, arms smuggling, money laundering, drug trafficking, organized crime, international economic crime and cyber crime. The general, the first Burmese head of state to visit India in several decades, also assured the Indian leadership that Myanmar would not permit its territory to be used by any hostile element for harming Indian interests. Soon after that, India and Burma launched coordinated military operations against rebels operating along the Indo-Burmese frontier. With Singapore, India forged a pact in 2003 in which the two nations extended their existing program of combined naval exercises to encompass air and ground force maneuvers and to initiate a high-level security dialogue and intelligence exchange. The two sides followed through with their first combined air exercises together from February to April 2005 in India. The joint naval exercises have been discussed later in this chapter. With Bangladesh, India had some fruitful discussions over the matters of boundary and rivers. The developing Indian relationship with Thailand has been facilitated by virtue of Bangkok’s growing concern with Islamic militants in the south of Thailand. The two sides signed (Ibid.).

A major supporter of the concept of the Bay of Bengal Community, V. Suryanarayan, feels that unlike the South China Sea, the Bay of Bengal region is an area which is comparatively peaceful. India has settled its maritime boundaries with all its Southeast Asian neighbors. The only unsettled maritime dispute is with Bangladesh. Cooperation among Bay of Bengal community would pave the way for confidence building in security related issues. Making up for the doubts India gave rise to in 19960s and 70s, in 19980s and 1990s, India has taken up welcome initiatives about the Indian Navy’s intentions and capabilities. The idea of the Bay of Bengal community would enable India to come out of the India-Pakistan quagmire. In addition to this, China factor is also an important dimension here. Southeast Asia has engaged China out of fear and so has India (Suryanarayan, 2000).

It was the India-Pakistan War in 1965 which brought into sharp focus Indonesia’s proximity to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the need for a substantial naval presence
in the long forgotten islands. During that time, India and Indonesia had differing world views. Indonesia was an ally of China and India favored the formation of Malaysia and New Delhi’s active diplomacy in mobilizing international support to get Malaysia elected to the UN Security Council. Pakistan, China and Indonesia were allies and there was some kind of Indonesian naval threat for India. Sukarno had supposedly offered to divert Indian attention from Pakistan by seizing Andaman and Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal. Apparently, President Sukarno also wanted the Indian Ocean to be renamed as the Indonesian Ocean. Such clandestine operations against India were an eye opener for New Delhi and after independence, the Indian establishment paid heed to the Bay of Bengal for the first time. India felt the need of naval presence in the bay (Suryanarayan, 2003: Internet Source).

This cooperative framework of a ‘Bay of Bengal Community’ (BOBCOM), with the inclusion of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia in BIMST-EC, deserves a special mention here (Surayanarayan, 2000: 60), “The underlying idea is not to replace SAARC or ASEAN but to have an additional organization, which will bring together India and its southern and eastern neighbors” (Ibid.). Within such a framework, the littoral states of Southern Asia could cooperate with one another for common well being. The tasks of exploitation of living and non-living maritime resources, development of maritime communications, ship building, weather forecasting, prevention of pollution and combating maritime terrorism can best be accomplished through such regional cooperation. Whether BOBCOM would be able to initiate and sustain co-operation in above mentioned areas, and thereby eventually turn the ‘extended’ neighborhood into ‘immediate’ neighborhood, remains to be explored.

Suryanarayan (2002a) has been one of the ardent supporters of the Bay of Bengal Community. According to him the first major step towards this kind of cooperation was the establishment of BIMST-EC. One key argument that Suryanarayan gives in support of the Bay of Bengal Community is that since Pakistan is not an integral part of the Bay of Bengal region, India-Pakistan relations, which had been a constant complicating factor in South Asian regional cooperation, will stay out of the way (Ibid.). Suryanarayan further argues that the Bay of Bengal Community should include the Andaman Sea and the Malacca Straits so that India and the maritime neighbors to its east come closer (Suryanarayan, 2005).
CONCLUSION

It emerges fairly obviously from this chapter that India and Southeast Asian countries can and should be seen as belonging to the same ‘regional security maritime complex’. Whether this regionalism will be forward-looking or not would also depend on the extent to which India is willing as well as able to play a positive and pro-active role in various cooperative endeavors. What Goh Chok Tong, the former Prime Minister of Singapore (2005: Internet Source) has to say in this regard is worth citing at some length: “The basic macro-strategic issue that ASEAN must squarely confront is the nature of East Asian regionalism. Will East Asian regionalism inward-looking, narrowly premised on traditional geographical notions? Or will East Asian regionalism be forward-looking, adapting to and co-opting new developments, not the least of which is India's rise? I believe it would be short-sighted and self-defeating for ASEAN to choose a direction that cuts itself off from a dynamic India. India is now a vital link in global production chains. Its economic and political interactions with ASEAN are multiplying and deepening. India is a full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. India and Pakistan are members of the ASEAN Regional Forum. India has proposed an FTA with ASEAN. In time, India's military and strategic links with Southeast Asian countries must grow further.”

*India-ASEAN Vision 2020* (2004) also underlines the need for maritime cooperation between India and ASEAN countries. To quote from the document (Ibid.: 23),

With rising coastal trade between ASEAN and India, Andaman Island (of India) and/or Dawei (in Myanmar) can be developed as regional coastal shipping hubs. Strengthening shipping links with Indian ports could be beneficial for ASEAN ports as cargo generated to and from India is substantial and is growing at 10% per annum. The vision puts forth the idea of India and ASEAN sharing their experiences in handling bulk cargoes and implementing ISPS Codes to monitor the traffic and security to protect environment. India is planning to set up maritime universities on both the east and the west sea coast. For better maritime facilities between the two, a maritime association might be established. Many more maritime linkages of cooperative nature could be realized by encouraging passenger network and shipping between ports, training of human resources, improvement of maritime security measures, particularly in the Malacca Straits and mutual exploration of exclusive economic zones.
The increasing importance of the Indian Ocean as a global maritime trade facilitator is quite obvious from the fact that the bulk of the world’s shipping passes through the region. Against the backdrop of trade liberalization, India’s emergence as an economic power, with a population of more than a billion, provides a tremendous opportunity for further economic and trade growth in the Indian Ocean region. Looking ahead, much enhanced investment in port facilities and upgrading shipping infrastructure in the Indian Ocean Region would significantly boost regional trade. The projected upward trend in cargo traffic worldwide will require massive investments for developing and improving port and shipping facilities in the region to cope with the growth. Is India ready to play its due role in the emerging international maritime economy in this part of the globe?

The chapter has emphasized the growing importance of the Straits of Malacca and the common stake of India and ASEAN countries in keeping it open to all stakeholders. Any disruption in traffic flow through these geostrategic choke points is likely to have disastrous consequences. The disruption of energy flows in particular is a considerable security concern not only for littoral states, as a majority of their energy lifelines are sea-based, but also for India, China and Japan (Ghosh, 2004). Differences notwithstanding, what is important is that all stakeholders should now come to terms with the fact that enduring and comprehensive security (including human-environmental security) can only be achieved through cooperation based on mutual trust, respect and a sense of responsibility. The idea that burdens, including the enforcement of security in the SOM, should be proportionally shared, based on the benefits gained by each and every stakeholder is worthy of further attention and analysis.

The chapter also made an attempt to study various sub-regional initiatives going on between India and ASEAN countries. The chapter brings out that it is both geoeconomic and geostrategic imperatives that call for sub-regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, energy security also calls for both regional and sub-regional maritime cooperation. As P. V. Rao (2005: 169) puts it so aptly and insightfully, “For India, sub-regional arrangements offer the most practical strategy of dealing with ASEAN. Engaging all the ten countries in a uniform manner is neither possible nor desirable, given the different levels of development among the ASEAN members. Sub-regionalism is a mid-way between
bilateralism and multilateralism.” It will be in the best interests of all the parties to these sub-regional initiatives to place and promote maritime security issues as a top priority on their agenda.

The Indian Ocean has become an important site of maritime cooperation for India and ASEAN countries owing to the fact that maritime threats are on an increase. To make maritime cooperation more meaningful, cooperation must take place between navies and coastguards. The navies should work with an aim of cooperating in order to maintain peace and stability and not with that of preparing for war in order to maintain peace. This makes maritime cooperation all the more important in the region. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is a right step in the right direction. Conceived within the ambit of Article 52 of UN Charter, inspired by the initial successes of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and modeled on the lines of the West Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), IONS has the potential to successfully coalesce the geopolitical-strategic imagination of regional states, and serve as a valuable platform to synergise their perceptions resources and energies towards maintaining ‘good order’ in the Indian Ocean. One can at best hope that this regional-level initiative can comprehensively respond to the maritime security threats (especially the so-called non-traditional) that can be found in all the sub-regions contained within the IOR. Furthermore, such an expanded cooperative arrangement would need to be contextualised in terms of the larger Asian, and even global construct, through coordination with similar security groupings elsewhere in the world. The imperative to include extra-regional powers as observers in IONS is expected to stem from this inclusive geopolitical reasoning, besides the need to obviate suspicions and geo-political schisms.

In order to maximise co-operative and comprehensive and sustainable maritime security what needs to be critiqued at the very outset is the ‘great void’ construction and the perceived (constructed) placelessness of the Indian Ocean. In such a geo-economic vision the Indian Ocean is idealized as a space of flows, devoid of nature, society or geographical differentiation. As Philip E. Steinberg (2001: 165) puts it so succinctly:

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The new intensity of the great void ideal of ocean-space (and indeed transportation space in general) is epitomized by the triumph of the container ship and automated, internodal container port. With containerisation, movement by sea, rail and truck is constructed as one continuous flow. The aim is to annihilate any unique characteristics of the environment across which the containers move. The vehicle carrying the container is obscured, as are the commodities within the containers; trade is reduced to movement. Labor in the port and on the ship is hidden from view. There is no longer a popular image of a sailor, maritime worker, or stevedore; work connections between port and city, formerly evident in the gritty, odorous maritime service area near the city centre, now are hidden within the sterile robotic gantry cranes of the remote container port.

The imagination of maritime life is restricted to consumption sites glorifying mercantilist pasts, and these sites rarely contain any cues to assist the tourist in connecting historic memories with functioning ports. Of course, outside this image lies an empirically rich world of individuals whose everyday lives revolve around entirely different encounters with the ocean as a friction surface (e.g., refugees whose lives are dictated by the agonizingly slow movements of smugglers ships) and a space of nature (e.g., fishers whose lives revolve around knowledge of distinct fish-rich places within the ocean). However, the existence of individuals and their alternate constructions of the ocean as a space of representation are denied by the representations of ocean-space that emanate from postmodern capitalism’s dominant spatial practices.

The fact also remains, as this chapter has shown and illustrated at some length, that geostrategic visualizations of the Indian Ocean space remain pre-dominant despite growing realization of non-traditional threats to maritime security. The United States, India and Australia are not the only states with concern about Indian Ocean maritime security, in its traditional-geopolitical sense. Others concerned (even worried) states include China (the focus on the next chapter), Russia, Iran and Burma. Some prolific writers on the subject like Donald L. Berlin (2008: 44) would even go to the extent of saying that the basis argument of Mackinder’s geopolitics, is still relevant: “The great geographical realities remain: land power versus sea power, heartland versus rim land, centre versus periphery...maritime security, or at least the apposition of sea and land power, is one of the key defining attributes of the international systems today — and particularly so in the Indian Ocean region.”