

**Full Length Research Paper****Indo-EU Cooperation in the Indian Ocean****Uday Pratap Singh***Research Fellow, Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, University of Allahabad, Allahabad (U.P.), India.***Article history***Received: 13-06-2016**Revised: 22-06-2016**Accepted: 27-06-2016***Corresponding Author:****Uday Pratap Singh***Research Fellow,**Department of Defence & Strategic Studies,**University of Allahabad,**Allahabad (U.P.), India.***Abstract**

*After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there has been remarkable change in relations between India and Europe. Both the regions have cooperated in various areas. One such area is Indian Ocean. The importance of Indian Ocean is because of its geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic situations. Half of the world trade passes through this ocean. It connects East Asian economies to Middle East oil and European markets. The author tries to focus on the compulsion of Indo-European relations and its importance to play a more dynamic role in Indian Ocean region. As such issues like strategic thinking of both Indo-EU in Indian Ocean, Modi's idea of Ocean in Make in India, maritime cooperation and potential for cooperation, thus, become importance in analyzing the Indo-European relations.*

**Keywords:** *Geo-political, geo-strategic, geo-economics, cradle of globalization, piracy, extra regional powers, economic globalization, Made in India, strategic partnership, Operation Atlanta, Critical Maritime Routes.*

**Introduction**

The cooperation between India and the European Union in the Indian Ocean assumes much importance when both focused on the geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic significance of the Indian Ocean. There was an element of continuity and change in the politico-strategic relations and economic transactions between India and the European states from colonial times right up to the twenty-first century. The Indian Ocean is often referred as the 'cradle of globalization'. It is the main link between east and west for centuries. Half of all the world's trade and two-thirds of its oil pass through its busy waterways. It also connects East Asian economies to Middle Eastern oil terminals and European markets. In spite of having enormous economic and strategic importance, the third-largest ocean in the world remains largely ungoverned.

The emergence of piracy off the Horn of Africa has demonstrated the insecurity situation in the Indian Ocean and thus, attracted the interest and presence of all major regional and extra-regional powers. Though counter-piracy efforts have been successful but it also resulted in power rivalries and transformed the Indian Ocean into the zone of strategic competition between India, China, and the US.

India is striving had to assert its supremacy in its maritime neighborhood. But India cannot alone provide regional security. The EU has heavily invested in the western Indian Ocean. It is developing the capacity of local maritime agencies and focusing more on maritime situational awareness to counter piracy, as well as other transnational security threats. On the issue of revitalizing the EU-India strategic partnership, since 2004, the primary need is the maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean is an important region for global trade and sphere for global security. Rising prosperity in Asia, growing dependence on natural resource flows linking producers and consumers across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and globalized supply chains and distribution networks are knitting the region ever more closely together by sea. At the same time, emerging problems ranging from piracy and territorial disputes in the regional seas to global environmental pressures on coastal and marine resources pose significant governance challenges for maritime policymakers around the Indian Ocean region (IOR).<sup>1</sup>

**Geopolitical Setting of the Indian Ocean:**

The Indian Ocean region is mainly a vast maritime-littoral area of geo-political, geo-economic and geostrategic significance. The region is characterized by globalization, maritime trade, an extra-regional naval presence, asymmetric actors and non-traditional maritime security challenges. More important is that economic and security issues have been the twin drivers that have influenced historical and contemporary politics in the region. In terms of historical geo-economic trend, the Indian Ocean proved to be the link between the maritime trading systems of the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Jews, Arabs, Indians and Chinese. In recent years because of trade and energy the Indian Ocean region has been linked to global economies of the Asia-Pacific, Europe, and North and South America.

Geostrategically, the Indian Ocean region has over the centuries had proved to the great-power navies seeking hegimonistic design. This desire of great powers still an ambition that persist even today. Today, the region has become more important to such countries

like the United States, China, Japan, and European Union countries who are engaged in the region to safeguard the sea lanes so that there can be ease flow of energy supplies, raw materials and markets all over the globe.

The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world (after the Pacific and the Atlantic). It occupies approximately 20 percent of the Earth's sea surface and covers a total area of 73.56 million square miles. It is surrounded by the Indian subcontinent in north by the east African coast and Arabian Peninsula in west and north west. Respectively, by Thailand, the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, and Australia in east and by the oceanic margin with the Southern Ocean in the south.

The northernmost extent of the Indian Ocean is the Iranian port of Bandar Imam Khomeini in the Persian Gulf. In addition, the Indian Ocean encompasses several regional seas and sea areas: the Andaman Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, the Great Australian Bight, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Mannar, the Gulf of Oman, the Laccadive Sea, the Mozambique Channel, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Travel across the Indian Ocean and passage from its waters into neighboring seas is both facilitated and potentially constrained by chokepoints. The seven key chokepoints in the IOR are the Mozambique Channel, the Bab el Mandeb, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, the Malacca Straits, the Sunda Strait, and the Lombok Strait.

It is true that some regional countries have welcomed the presence of extra-regional powers patrolling the ocean, but there is an element of suspicions that prohibits cooperation with extra-regional powers because these powers are perceived as hegemonic. Their presence has added insecurity to the region. At the functional-operational level, several extra-regional navies are deployed forward in the region in support of the war on terror and to counter piracy off Somalia. In essence, the Indian Ocean region has become a region of both competition and cooperation.

#### **History of Indo-European trading relations:**

Since ancient times, the Indian Ocean has facilitated a thriving maritime trading system among several states. These trading relations were not necessarily always peaceful and competition arose with one state attempting to outdo the other, but the competition was generally non-violent. This lack of violence, which lasted over several centuries, was suddenly disrupted by the appearance of the Portuguese, heralding the first ever presence of an extra-regional naval power in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese ventured into the Indian Ocean in support of the state policy of the Portuguese kings who looked upon the seas as their possession.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding initial resistance, the Portuguese established themselves as the only naval power in the Indian Ocean to exert sway across the entire swath of the Indian Ocean as far as Macao in China. It was their naval capability that allowed the Portuguese to monopolies the Indian Ocean trade and maintain their domination over the next one hundred and fifty years.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the Dutch were also interested in commerce but controlling the Indian Ocean was not on their agenda. The French and the British made their presence in the Indian Ocean region as traders and rivalry between them powers resulted naval bases in the Indian Ocean. But the French got the set back when their forces were annihilated at Trafalgar in 1805. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, showed British supremacy in the Indian Ocean. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the Indian Ocean was turned into a 'British lake', with the British Royal Navy holding supreme command over the oceanic trade. It was also supported by the colonies that served as the source of raw materials. It was observed by the strategic experts that Britain ruled the waves of the sea. The mere presence of the British Gunboat anywhere in the seven seas had decisive effects both for maintenance of peace and enforcement of policy'.<sup>4</sup> The Indian Ocean was an important where they ruled for more than centuries and had deep-rooted historical memories of subjugation of these countries from the sea.

#### **Strategic Thinking of India and EU in the Indian Ocean:**

In the twenty-first century, the Indian Ocean still continues to be an important region for both India and the European countries. Both are increasingly dependent on trade. Protection of sea-based commerce and merchant shipping is vital for economic growth and is perhaps what drives economic globalisation.<sup>5</sup> The centrality of the Indian Ocean in India's strategic thinking revolves around the geo-strategic significance and the impact of globalization and economic growth on India and EU. Over 97 percent of India's trade by volume and 75 percent of its trade by value is sea-borne. Therefore, safety and security of sea lanes and energy supply chains through the Indian Ocean, particularly through the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb-Strait of Hormuz-Straits of Malacca and around the Cape of Good Hope, become important for sustaining India's economic growth and prosperity. Furthermore, India's Military Maritime Strategy recognize Indian Ocean region as the primary source of interest and operations.

From the European perspective, its shores extend into the Indian Ocean in the form of French territories, i.e. Mayotte (a French protectorate since 1841 and officially an overseas department of France as of 31 March 2011), Reunion Island, and the Scattered Islands. In 1978, France established an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 640,400 square kilometers around these islands and it maintains a sizeable naval capability in the Indian Ocean to safeguard its maritime interests. The European Security Strategy (ESS) adopted in December 2003 establishes principles and sets out objectives for advancing the EU's security interests. The strategy also defines the EU's specific interests and objectives with regard to distinct issues or regions. The Petersburg Tasks detail various operations in which the EU can be expected to engage, and the Headline Goals (2003 and 2008) specify the capabilities that the EU Member States agree to provide.

In the past decade (1999-2009), the EU has engaged in 23 missions; four military operations<sup>6</sup> and six civilian-military missions<sup>7</sup> have been completed. There are 11 civilian-military missions<sup>8</sup> and two military operations ongoing.<sup>9</sup> These operations are important, because these operations were successful in achieving the objectives.

Among the ongoing EU military operations, Operation Atalanta was the first ever naval operation conducted by the EU. The sphere of operation in the Indian Ocean is in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia, and the objective is to check piracy. EU naval and air units are also in constant touch with NATO, US-led Task Force (TF) 150 and TF 151, and other navies from a number of Asian countries, including India. Operation Atalanta was also important from the perspective of maritime multilateralism.

### **An Ocean ‘Made in India’**

Since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, maritime security policy aimed at the Indian Ocean region has become utmost important in India’s domestic and foreign security policy. One is aware of the fact that India is virtually dependent on the ocean’s sea lanes, which carry 90% of its foreign trade. It is also well in line with India’s effort to assert its position as a global power and net security provider in its neighborhood and beyond at a time when most sources of tension and potential conflict in Asia lie at sea. Lately, we have seen the emergence of China as a major power and has increased its military activities in the Indian Ocean region. For a long time, India was accused for ignoring the importance of sea as it focused mainly on land-based defence against China and Pakistan. Thus it neglected its maritime potential. In order to play more positive and active role in the region it has started developing indigenous capabilities. Thus to a great extent has slowed down the development of its maritime power. In line with Modi’s ‘Make in India’ doctrine, India is ready to promote indigenous production and the aim is to boost its domestic economy. India’s ‘blue water’ ambitions were first drafted in its 2007 Maritime Security Strategy. After that it acquired a number of capabilities, including amphibious surface ships and nuclear-powered submarines.

With the acquisition of the *Vikramaditya* aircraft carrier, India is now the only power in Asia (apart from the US) in possession of two such landing platforms. In 2013, it also launched its first indigenous naval communication satellite, which further enhanced its capacity to monitor the entire Indian Ocean. In January, India hosted the 2016 International Fleet Review (IFR) – a series of events including an international military exercise, a prestigious parade and a set of conferences, bringing together navies from over 50 countries. With the theme ‘United through Oceans’, the IFR traditionally aims at promoting trust and cooperation among neighboring navies. This year, however, it was also an opportunity to demonstrate India’s new operational capabilities and assets, as well as underline its new-found maritime might and determination to set the rules in the Indian Ocean. Although official discourses on land are full of mutual reassurance, tensions under the (sea) surface are growing.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Indo-EU Strategic Partnership:**

The 2004 communication on the EU-Indian Strategic Partnership lays the foundation of a robust engagement between India and the EU which is based on the ‘shared values and convictions and their commitment to democracy, pluralism, the rule of law and multilateralism in international relations, which contribute to stability and peace in the world.’ In the last seven years, the partnership has witnessed convergence and moved ahead in select areas such as trade and counter-terrorism, including the 2010 Joint Declaration on International Terrorism, etc.<sup>11</sup> However, there is ample scope and potential to develop the partnership into a multi-dimensional engagement in several domains including the political, economic and strategic spheres, science and technology, and culture. The India-EU Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plans (2005, 2008 and 2016) offer the framework for dialogue and cooperation in the security domain on thematic and specific issues such as global and regional security threats and challenges, and cooperation in a number of areas, including (i) counter-terrorism, (ii) organized crime, including piracy, (iii) counter drug and illegal arms trafficking, (iv) cyber-terrorism, (v) non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. Furthermore, both partners are endowed with a highly developed space technology complex that offers wide scope for new areas and projects of cooperation. Their security interest could be properly guarded when Indian Ocean region is free from power rivalry.

### **Indo-EU maritime cooperation:**

Both India and EU countries have a long history of seafaring and possess modern navies equipped with sophisticated weapons. The areas of operation of the Indian and the EU navies were quite distinct in the past but are fast converging. The Indian Ocean is the primary area of operation of the Indian Navy and the EU countries’ navies have been more focused on the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, barring the deployment of their navies for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and, since August 2009, Operation Atalanta in the Gulf of Aden. At another level, India is equally engaged on a bilateral basis with the navies of several EU countries. The Indian and the French navies annually are engaged annually in the joint military exercise Varuna. Similarly, the Indian Navy has undertaken joint naval exercises with the British Royal Navy as part of the Konkan series. There have been regular military exercises with the Spanish Navy, Italian Navy, and several other European navies that have engaged in passage exercises in the Indian Ocean and Atlantic waters.<sup>12</sup>

### **Potential for Indo-EU cooperation:**

Power rivalries and functional maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean need to be addressed. This can be done by managing effective international cooperation through inter-agency coordination and international cooperation necessary. By its trust many operational problems also can be solved through sufficient financial resources by human and technical capacity-building. The EU was

actively involved in the Western Indian Ocean since it launched its counter-piracy operations in 2008. Since then, significant economic and human resources have been deployed by EU institutions and member states to enhance maritime security and safety in the region. Promoting a holistic approach to maritime security, it has been investing into training, enhancing national legislation, information-sharing and maritime domain awareness through its Critical Maritime Routes Programme (CMR).<sup>13</sup>

Specifically, the EU supported the implementation of the IMO Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCOC), signed by 21 coastal states on the Western Indian Ocean rim. It also facilitated the creation of three information-sharing centers in Kenya, Tanzania and Yemen, along with a Regional Maritime Training Centre in Djibouti. The EU MASE Programme was launched in 2013 with a budget of €37.5 million. The goal has been to set up to ensure coordination and continuity between its various capacity-building projects in the Indian Ocean such its CSDP missions, law enforcement (CRIMLEA) and inland economic development and governance projects.

The EU also provides 80% of the budget (over €80 million) of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), a body which builds capacity in regional fisheries management, small island state development and marine biodiversity protection. The latest CMR initiative is the EU CRIMARIO project (Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean). It was launched in July 2015, and the objective was to increase aims to enhance maritime situational awareness throughout the Indian Ocean by providing technical assistance to coastal states in realms of information sharing, capacity building (providing inter-agency training) and operational policies and governance. The plan is to connect East African countries and small island states with other countries along the rim, including those in South-East Asia.

The first Asian countries which showed immense interest in the initiative was Malaysia and Bangladesh and India, the major regional player, has largely ignored it. Although, the EU and India have been '*strategic partners*' since 2004, but little progress has been made in security cooperation. The ongoing diplomatic standoff between Italy and India over the Enrica Lexie case does not help in the field of maritime security. However, the basic problems is cultural differences between India and European Union and hence threat perceptions differs from country to country.

The Indian leadership tends to view maritime security in purely traditional terms. It want alliances to deter possible threats from China and Pakistan. It does not whole heartedly acknowledges the EU as a security partner. If Delhi really wants to work for long-term stability in the Indian Ocean, it will have to look into the technical problems related to its governance, and hence the EU can be an invaluable partner. Meanwhile, the EU could try to listen better to India's needs, and India to overcome its 'EU blindness'.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

There are a numerous problems that need to be properly addressed for India-EU cooperation in the maritime domain. Firstly, India should follow the policy of non-alignment and become a party of any alliance or coalition or grouping that served military purpose. This was seen during the US-led attack on Iraq in 2001 and recently India's abstention during the vote on UN Security Council resolution 1973 for a no-fly-zone in Libya. Second, only-UN backed military operations are welcomed by India. Third, the EU is seen through the prism of NATO and is viewed as an alliance with a history of intervention. Fourth, it appears that India it well content with bilateral military cooperation and still has to think of involving the EU as an entity for bilateral security cooperation. This is best reflected in the nature of the engagement between India and the EU in counter-piracy operations off Somalia. Lastly, at the tactical level, India and the EU have not properly explored the possibility of joint naval exercises though the Indian navy has been engaged in naval cooperation with France and Britain. The level of cooperation between India and the EU in the ongoing counter-piracy operations off Somalia is noteworthy but it is important to keep in mind that it is taking place in a much broader multilateral framework. It can be a model for future India-EU maritime cooperation which could include joint exercises to address counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation and counter-gun running and drug smuggling. For that to succeed, the two partners must develop operational interoperability, build mutual trust and enhance understanding. At the tactical level, it is essential that they develop a common doctrine and standard operating procedures for greater cooperation and to improve communications. Finally, in today's context, maritime multilateralism is a tool for nations which consider using sea power for cooperation in their national interests.<sup>15</sup> The much awaited European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) was approved in June 2014 by the General Affairs Council of the European Union (EU).<sup>16</sup> Finally, the EUMSS offers a number of opportunities for India and the EU to identify issues of cooperation and build synergies under its aegis to address complex maritime threats and challenges in the Indian Ocean.

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