

Foreword

The Indian Ocean Region has, for millennia, been the veritable melting pot of civilisations, engendering comprehensive people-to-people contact from diverse cultures through business ventures and other economic activities across the seas. It is also instructive to note that wholesome seaborne economic activities – the very lifeblood of a nation’s prosperity and consequent national strength – depend on a peaceful and secure maritime environment. However, there are always certain malevolent players who, driven either by their geopolitical interests or criminal motives towards illicit profit-making, seek to disrupt the vibrant economic activities of nations and their seafarers with an aim to weaken them and their constituents. These could manifest either in conventional war-fighting by nations using their naval forces, or non-state actors engaging in illegal and unlawful means like piracy and armed robbery at sea. Regrettably, these convoluted dynamics have not changed one bit – rather only exacerbated in scale and scope – in the contemporary era too.

In this geopolitically charged, if not overtly volatile region, India, by the very virtue of its natural geographical centrality, is left with no choice but to play a proactive role in all aspects relating to the Indian Ocean – including the maintenance of its own maritime security, as also of the proximate region. This very imperative was succinctly articulated by KM Panikkar, the reputed Indian historian and maritime thinker, in his seminal essay of 1945 entitled ‘India and the Indian Ocean’, in the following words: *“India’s security lies on the Indian Ocean. Without a well-considered and effective naval policy, India’s position in the world will be weak, dependent on others and her freedom at the mercy of any country capable of controlling the Indian Ocean.”*

In the context of its own national security, the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) archipelago, as a proverbial arm stretching far eastwards of the Indian mainland, offers a natural vantage point for the country to develop it as the first line of defence against conventional threats from the East, and also leverage it as a ‘springboard’

to project the Indian influence all the way to the Southeast Asia and beyond. The fact that the southernmost island of Great Nicobar virtually sits astride the vital international trade and energy sea lane, also provides options and opportunities to India for strategic signalling and display of proactive intent, when the circumstances so demand.

This book accordingly, seeks to evaluate the geostrategic significance of the A&N Islands and offers recommendations for maximising their strategic potential toward the preservation of India's economic and maritime security from threats that may arise in-, from- and through the proximate waters of the Bay of Bengal and the extended IOR continuum to the east. While the first chapter sets the strategic context and lays down the problem statement with regard to the inherently existent traditional and non-traditional threats and risks, the second chapter delves deeper into the historical background and details of their geographical spread, geological formation, flora, fauna, forests and marine resources in the islands. A brief insight into the demographics, economy, and agricultural and industrial pursuits of the local populace has also been afforded therein.

The third chapter elaborates upon the geostrategic significance of the A&N Islands, wherein their security and economic importance have been separately dealt with, along with the imperative of credibly defending the islands and their vast maritime zones from external threats. The fourth chapter undertakes a detailed analysis of the broader external environment in the proximate maritime neighbourhood of India – which may impinge on India's national security, and consequently that of these islands too. This also includes the situation arising from the presence of extra-regional players in India's primary areas of maritime interest.

A detailed assessment of the threat perception facing the A&N Islands from the whole spectrum of threats, is carried out in the fifth chapter. A probable pattern of growing Chinese naval force deployment in the Indian Ocean in future, the consequent impact on India's national security, and options available to India to face up to that challenge – particularly in collaboration with like-minded partners present in the region – is also covered in some detail. The sixth chapter seeks to situate the maritime security imperatives of the A&N islands, within the broader Indian maritime strategy as articulated in the Indian Navy's 2015 document titled "*Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*". This chapter largely

focuses on militarily leveraging the locational advantage of the A&N islands to ensure India's national security. The main argument towards the fulfilment of the above requirement revolves around the capacity accretion and capability enhancement of the unified tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC).

The seventh chapter carries out an analysis of various aspects related to holistic maritime security environment in and around the A&N Islands, by using the 'Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats' (SWOT) methodology. It juxtaposes these variables against one-another to arrive at certain informed and viable options for India. An effort is also made to forecast four probable maritime security scenarios that may develop in the medium-term (2030 and beyond). These cover the whole range of possibilities from end to end. Chapter Eight comprises a detailed set of suggested policy recommendations for the maritime security and economic development of the A&N Islands.

Chapter Nine concludes by stressing that the immense potential of the A&N Islands to be a prominent contributor to India's national security has not been adequately acknowledged in the past. However, in view of the threat that may manifest on account of a clear westward push by a revisionist adversary – with serious security connotations for India – further procrastination on this issue is no longer an option. Therefore, the situation demands resolute action and firmness of intent from the Indian national security establishment.

The Author, having served for more than 34 years in the Indian Navy, commanded a landing ship based in the A&N Islands and also served in staff and intelligence-related appointments in the tri-services Headquarters, has utilised his long domain experience to write this book. This unique expertise, further built up over a decade and a half of research work on matters maritime – including hard-security issues concerning China – has enabled him to comment credibly on the existing security environment in and around the A&N islands, analyse the issues from an insider's perspective, highlight the deficiencies and shortfalls therein, and offer informed recommendations to better secure the Indian national interests and security in future.

It must however be appreciated that national security is too serious a matter to be left to one person's imagination and recommendations – however accomplished

he may be. Since the ultimate responsibility for India's national security and the preservation of its national interests rests with the government; the entire national security apparatus would surely be working to address such a vital issue. Since multifarious resources – including human, operational, intelligence, technological, financial and such like – can be brought to bear towards achieving this objective, the government will obviously have a much more updated picture of the situation, comprehensive assessment of the security challenges facing the nation, and a well-considered plan of action to address them.

In contrast, this book and its contents have been derived from the survey of literature in the open domain only. Therefore, this book only seeks to supplement the Indian government's efforts from outside in a veritable 'whole of nation' approach, plug in the inadvertent information gaps if any, and offer certain revolutionary recommendations which may appear to be unviable and unrealistic ab-initio, but may be worth considering when viewed with an open mind.

It is also noteworthy to mention that the National Maritime Foundation, as a premier maritime think tank of India, has taken it upon itself to promote the maritime thought-process amongst the largely land-centric citizenry and propagate the much-required sense of '*maritimity*' within the ever-expanding community of strategist, scholars, academics and analysts, both, internally and internationally. In that wider context, this book themed on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands – which lie far beyond the cognitive horizon of most Indians as regards their security and potential – is presented as a small, albeit important contribution. It is hoped that the book will generate adequate interest and measure up to the noble objective with which it was written.

Jai Hind! Sam no Varunah!!!

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