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INDIA'S MARITIME DIPLOMACY AND SAGAR POLICY AS ITS FOCAL POINT

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1. ABSTRACT

Given its extensive coastline of 7516.6 kms and advantageous location in the Indian Ocean, India has come to understand the importance of maritime force in its foreign policy. The significance of marine connectivity and collaboration in the Indo-Pacific area has been emphasized by the nation's "Look East" and "Act East" policies. The complexities of India's maritime diplomacy and its flagship program, "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR), will be examined in this study assignment. As a result of historical developments and shifting geopolitical conditions, India's marine policy has changed dramatically over time. This approach heavily relies on the Indian Ocean, which affects regional collaboration, trade, and security. Gaining knowledge of India's marine diplomacy strategy might help one better understand its goals and difficulties in the Indian Ocean region.

With the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) project at its center, India's marine policy embodies the country's strategic goal to advance sustainable development, strengthen maritime security, and encourage regional collaboration in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Introduced in 2015, the SAGAR policy highlights India's commitment to addressing non-traditional threats including terrorism, climate change, and piracy, as well as to become a net security provider in the IOR and guaranteeing freedom of movement. In order to fully utilize ocean resources while maintaining environmental sustainability, it also emphasizes the significance of infrastructural development, economic integration, and blue economy efforts. India wants to establish a safe, stable, and affluent maritime region by giving priority to alliances with nearby littoral states and international maritime powers.

2. KEYWORDS

Indian Ocean Region, Maritime Diplomacy, SAGAR Policy, Regional Security, Naval Cooperation, Geopolitical Rivalries, Sustainable Maritime Development, Qualitative-Descriptive Design, SWOT, Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy, Persuasive Maritime Diplomacy, Discourse Analysis, Net security provider, Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs).

3. INTRODUCTION

India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and the necessity to protect its military and economic interests have led to a considerable evolution in its maritime diplomacy throughout time. India's marine policy heavily relies on the Indian Ocean, which is an essential conduit for international trade and energy supply. The SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in Region) policy, a pillar of India's marine diplomacy, embodies this approach.

SAGAR Policy: A Maritime Diplomacy Focus Point

The SAGAR strategy was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 and places a strong emphasis on sustainable growth, security, and collaboration among countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). By encouraging economic growth and mutual security, it seeks to improve regional stability and advance a stable maritime environment.

This research article is an attempt to derive the main statement of how SAGAR Policy as a focal point of India's maritime diplomacy has a wide impact on India's geopolitical standing, economic ties, diplomatic relations with other countries and India as a net security provider in the Indo-pacific.

4. HYPOTHESIS:

"The integration of India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policy into its broader maritime strategy has significantly enhanced India's regional influence, economic partnerships, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). By prioritizing cooperative mechanisms, sustainable development, and security initiatives, the SAGAR policy serves as a cornerstone for India's maritime diplomacy, fostering greater regional stability and positioning India as a net security provider in the IOR."

This hypothesis suggests that the SAGAR policy, as a focal point of India's maritime policy, has a measurable impact on India's geopolitical standing, economic ties, and security architecture in the region. It can be tested by analyzing qualitative and quantitative data on India's maritime engagements, regional partnerships, and security outcomes in the IOR.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

This research methodology outlines the approach for analyzing the article titled "India's Maritime Diplomacy: SAGAR Policy as Focal Point." The study focuses on the implications of India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in Region) policy on its maritime diplomacy, assessing its strategic significance in the Indian Ocean region.

- **Research Design:** The research adopts a qualitative descriptive design, enabling an in-depth exploration of maritime diplomacy and the SAGAR policy's impact on India's international relations.
- **Data Collection Methods**:
  i. Primary Sources: Government documents related to maritime strategy and policies, Interviews with diplomats, military officials, and experts in maritime affairs.
  ii. Secondary Sources: Academic journals, dissertations, and articles that discuss maritime diplomacy and the SAGAR policy, Books and publications that provide historical context and theoretical frameworks for understanding maritime diplomacy, Reports from think tanks and international organizations focusing on regional security dynamics.
- **Analytical Framework:** The analysis will utilize a **SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)** framework to evaluate the SAGAR policy. This approach will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of:
  i. Strengths: Identify how the SAGAR policy enhances India's maritime capabilities and diplomatic reach.
  ii. Weaknesses: Analyze potential limitations or challenges faced by India in implementing this policy effectively.
  iii. Opportunities: Explore new avenues for cooperation with neighboring countries and international partners in maritime security and economic development.
  iv. Threats: Assess external factors that could undermine the effectiveness of India's maritime diplomacy under the SAGAR framework.

- **Theoritical Perspectives**: The research will incorporate various theoretical perspectives on maritime diplomacy:
  i. Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy: Examining how India uses its naval assets to build alliances and promote regional stability through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.
  ii. Persuasive Maritime Diplomacy: Analysing India's efforts to project power and influence through naval presence without resorting to coercion.
- **Discourse Analysis:**

To address potential biases in policy interpretation, a discourse analysis will be employed. This method will involve examining how different stakeholders articulate their views on maritime diplomacy and the SAGAR policy, focusing on language use, framing, and narratives.

6. RESEARCH PROBLEMS:

1. Evolving Geopolitical Dynamics

- Problem: How do the geopolitical rivalries in the Indian Ocean, particularly with China and Pakistan, affect India's maritime diplomacy and the implementation of the SAGAR policy?
- Significance: Understanding these dynamics is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of India's diplomatic strategies in countering external pressures.

2. Infrastructure and Capability Gaps

- Problem: What are the infrastructural and capability gaps in India's maritime forces that hinder the effective execution of the SAGAR policy?
- Significance: Analyzing these gaps will help identify areas needing improvement to enhance India's maritime security and diplomatic efforts.

3. Coordination Among Agencies

- Problem: How does the lack of coordination among various government agencies impact India's maritime policy formulation and execution?
- Significance: Investigating this issue will shed light on structural challenges that may impede cohesive maritime strategy development.

4. Non-Traditional Security Threats

- Problem: What are the implications of non-traditional security threats, such as piracy and environmental degradation, on India's maritime diplomacy?
- Significance: This research can help in formulating comprehensive strategies that address both traditional military concerns and emerging non-traditional threats.

5. Influence of External Powers

- Problem: In what ways do external powers, particularly the United States and regional players, influence India's maritime diplomacy under the SAGAR framework?
- Significance: Understanding these influences can provide insights into how India navigates its diplomatic relationships while pursuing its national interests.

6. Historical Context and Future Trajectory

- <u>Problem:</u> How does India's historical maritime strategy inform its current approach to diplomacy in the context of the SAGAR policy?
- <u>Significance:</u> This analysis can reveal patterns and lessons learned that could shape future maritime strategies.

7. Environmental Challenges

- <u>Problem:</u> What role do environmental challenges, including climate change and resource depletion, play in shaping India's maritime diplomacy?
- <u>Significance:</u> Addressing this problem is essential for developing sustainable policies that align with both national security and environmental stewardship.

8. Regional Cooperation Mechanisms

- <u>Problem:</u> How effective are existing regional cooperation mechanisms in enhancing maritime security under the SAGAR policy?
- <u>Significance</u>: Evaluating these mechanisms can identify successes and shortcomings, guiding future collaborative efforts.

These research problems can guide a comprehensive investigation into the complexities of Indian maritime diplomacy within the framework of the SAGAR policy, ultimately contributing to a nuanced understanding of regional security dynamics.

7. INDIA'S MARITIME POLICY AND SAGAR POLICY AS ITS FOCAL POINT:

i. Historical context in India's maritime strategy:

Colonial interests had a significant impact on India's maritime strategy <u>prior to gaining independence in 1947</u>. To safeguard trade routes and keep control of the Indian Ocean, the British built a naval presence. India was an important participant in maritime trade due to its geographic location, and early intellectuals such <u>as K.M. Panikkar</u> stressed the necessity for India to build up its own naval forces in order to protect its interests in the area.

One of the many difficulties India <u>faced after gaining independence</u> was the requirement to build <u>a powerful navy</u>. When the Indian Navy was first established under British control, its main goals were to protect shipping and stop hostile landings. However, limited naval expansion resulted with the primary focus being on mainland defence. India's first domestically constructed aircraft carrier<u>, INS Vikrant</u>, was launched, marking a major advancement in naval capability.

1991 Economic Reforms: The 1991 economic changes changed India's perspective on the sea. India's maritime interests greatly increased when it <u>opened up to international trad</u>e. The nation saw the value of renewing historic maritime ties and started to interact with its neighbours more. This change is comparable to what happened in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, when both countries looked to use their maritime resources to boost their economies. In order to tackle both conventional and unconventional security issues, India's maritime strategy now highlights its position as a <u>"net security provider" in the Indian Ocean region.</u>

ii.   **Significance of India's maritime diplomacy**:

With more than 7,000 kilometers of coastline, India is susceptible to a number of hazards, including illegal fishing, terrorism, smuggling, piracy, and environmental degradation. India must defend its offshore and coastal resources, including ports, fishing grounds, and oil and gas facilities, against these dangers. Since the sea transports consists of approximately 95% of India's commerce volume and more than 70% of its trade value, the sea plays a major role in the country's economy. The majority of India's energy demands are also met by imports, particularly from the Gulf. India's economic development and energy security depend on the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean and beyond being secure and open for travel. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which is home to both some possible enemies and a large number of friendly and cooperative nations, is of strategic importance to India. India is dedicated to preserving the marine ecosystem and halting the effects of climate change on the seas. India wants to use marine diplomacy to increase its influence both locally and internationally. This entails protecting freedom of navigation, encouraging marine cooperation, and developing stronger ties with littoral states.

iii.   **Initiatives taken to enhance Maritime security and SAGAR as the cornerstone:**

The modernization and expansion of the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Police for the Capacity Augmentation of Maritime Security Agencies. It also involves the acquisition of advanced platforms, systems, and equipment such as aircraft carriers, submarines, frigates, helicopters, radars, and satellites.

The implementation of various projects and schemes such as the Coastal Surveillance Network, the National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network, the National Automatic Identification System, and the National Maritime Domain Awareness Project for enhanced technical surveillance of coastal and offshore areas. These aim to provide a comprehensive and integrated picture of the maritime domain and enable timely detection and response to any threats or incidents.

The creation of various bodies and committees such as the National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security, the National Maritime Security Coordinator, the Joint Operations Centres, and the Coastal Security Operations Centres for establishment for mechanisms of inter-agency coordination. These aim to facilitate effective coordination and information sharing among various stakeholders involved in maritime security such as the Navy, Coast Guard, Customs, Intelligence, Fisheries, and Ports.

The implementation of various measures such as the issuance of biometric identity cards, the installation of transponders and distress alert transmitters, the conduct of community awareness and education programs, and the provision of livelihood and welfare schemes for the integration of the fishing and coastal communities. These aim to involve the fishing and coastal communities in the maritime security framework and enhance their security and well-being.

SAGAR INITIATIVE India was just accepted as an observer member of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). India's strategic vision (SAGAR) for the Indian Ocean includes this development as one of its steps.

India unveiled Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), its strategic vision for the Indian Ocean, in 2015. The significance of marine collaboration, maritime commons, and maritime security is becoming more widely acknowledged.

India hopes to strengthen its economic and security connections with its maritime neighbors and help them develop their marine security capacities through SAGAR. India would collaborate on information sharing, coastal monitoring, infrastructure development, and capability enhancement in order to achieve this.

Additionally, India aims to protect its interests as a nation and guarantee that the Indian Ocean region becomes <u>open, cooperative, and respect international law.</u>

iv.   <u>Need and Implementation of the SAGAR Vision:</u>

To leverage **the blue economy**, the SAGAR program is necessary. Through the blue economy, India has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve its national socioeconomic goals (creating livelihoods, achieving energy security, building ecological resilience, etc.) and strengthen its relationships with its neighbours.

The blue economy also presents many opportunities, such as the fact that the <u>seas carry 80% of the world's trade</u> and that a significant portion of the global population depends on them for food and a living. Additionally, the <u>seafloor currently provides 32% of the world's oil supply,</u> and exploration is expanding. Furthermore, the sea offers <u>a wealth of opportunities for the generation of renewable blue energy</u> from thermal, tidal, wind, wave, and biomass sources. New technologies are increasing the possibilities, from bio-prospecting to the exploitation of seabed mineral deposits (poly-metallic nodules).

SAGAR can be an excellent instrument for <u>countering terrorism and non-state piracy,</u> and it can be used to provide <u>humanitarian assistance</u> during natural disasters. In addition, India hopes for an integrated strategy and a cooperative future that would result in sustainable development for all local residents.

China has been expanding its influence in the <u>Indian Ocean area</u> (IOR) through its maritime silk route, which is a component of the Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, Chinese investments in India's neighbours are dual in nature, meaning they have both military and commercial foundations. For India, the pearl thread has raised strategic questions. The SAGAR vision is crucial in addressing these problems in this situation.

"Our vision for the Indian Ocean Region is rooted in advancing cooperation in our region and to use our capabilities for the benefit of all in our common maritime home," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a keynote address to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), outlining his vision for the SAGAR initiative.

The SAGAR initiative's vision can be characterized by the following terms:

Security: Strengthening coastal security to make it easier to protect both land and marine areas.

Capacity building: involves strengthening security and economic collaboration to facilitate maritime security and economic traffic more easily.

Collective action: Encouraging group efforts to address natural disasters and marine dangers such as terrorism, piracy, and emerging non-state actors.

Sustainable Development: Promoting improved cooperation in order to achieve sustainable regional development

Maritime engagement is the process of interacting with nations outside of our borders in an effort to foster mutual respect and a peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Strengths: India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean, which allows for unfettered access to the Indian Ocean Region, is its greatest advantage in the SAGAR program. Strong and competent maritime security forces, shipyards that can build aircraft carriers and submarines, enormous industrial complexes, financial institutions, and space assets are just a few of its many incredible capabilities that it can share with its maritime neighbours. The political leadership has always recognized that bolstering India's marine domain is one of its greatest defences. India has concentrated on issues that are important to smaller countries, such as protecting against natural disasters, ensuring sustainable development, securing natural resources, and reducing the negative impacts of climate change and marine pollution.

8. CHALLENGES IN ADVANCING MARITIME DIPLOMACY AND SAGAR:

A. Hard Security Challenges :

A new aspect of maritime security is brought about by the employment of asymmetrical strategies, such as China's deployment of maritime militias in the South China Sea or Ukraine's activities against Russia in the Black Sea. This calls for unorthodox and surprising techniques that might not adhere to standard military tactics. Effective response is hampered by the employment of grey-zone techniques, which lie between conventional and unorthodox approaches and frequently take advantage of legal and legislative issues. Combat drones give maritime operations a new dimension by allowing both governments and non-state entities to perform surveillance, reconnaissance, and possibly even assaults. Marine security is directly threatened by the use of land attack missiles at sea. Using missiles that can target land-based facilities is one example of this.

B. Unconventional Security Threats:

Illegal fishing practices pose a concern to maritime security because they can deplete marine resources and jeopardize the lives of coastal populations. For instance, Sri Lankan fisherman fishing in Indian waters. Emergency response and maritime security are severely hampered by the growing frequency and severity of natural disasters like tsunamis and cyclones in the marine realm. The maritime industry is threatened economically and environmentally by pollution, which includes plastic trash and oil spills. Insecurity in the marine sector is exacerbated by illegal operations such as drug and people trafficking, which are frequently conducted via maritime channels. Less developed states are disproportionately impacted by climate change, rising sea levels, and other associated issues, rendering them more susceptible to catastrophic weather occurrences and environmental changes.

C. Zero-sum competition in the Indo-Pacific:

One threat, especially for the developing world, is the perceived zero-sum struggle among the Indo-Pacific's major states. Addressing the security issues of littoral governments in Asia, Africa, and the Southern Pacific may lose focus and funding as a result of the rivalry. The view that the US and China's interests and activities in the Indo-Pacific are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable, and that

any win for one side is a loss for the other, is known as "zero-sum competition." According to this viewpoint, the Indo-Pacific region is a zero-sum game in which the two superpowers are engaged in a competition for resources, influence, and security.

  D. **Maritime Governance challenges**:

It is difficult for littoral states in Asia and Africa to coordinate their defenses against maritime threats. Effective cooperation is hampered by disparate security agendas and unequal law enforcement capabilities. For instance, ASEAN nations are frequently reluctant to criticize China's hegemonic practices in the South China Sea. In an effort to lessen their dependency on outside aid, several littoral states oppose marine collaboration with foreign organizations. The creation of thorough and well-coordinated security measures may be hampered by this resistance. Although there is a willingness to exchange information, states frequently simply reveal the bare minimum needed to achieve shared security objectives, limiting the scope of cooperation. For instance. There is still resistance to information sharing because of security and sovereignty concerns, despite the fact that the United States and India have signed multiple accords on the subject.

9. **WAY FORWARD:**
- Strengthening bilateral, trilateral, or multilateral mechanisms like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) to promote marine security cooperation among like-minded nations. Information exchange, cooperative exercises, capacity building, interoperability, and coordinated responses to shared threats are a few examples of this type of collaboration.
- Geopolitical rivalries significantly impact India's maritime diplomacy by creating a competitive environment where India must balance its strategic interests with diplomatic efforts. China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean through infrastructure projects and military deployments poses a challenge to India's influence. India addresses this by strengthening partnerships with regional and global powers, enhancing its naval capabilities, and promoting cooperative maritime security initiatives.
- India faces significant capability gaps, including a smaller naval force compared to China, limited shipbuilding capacity, and inadequate port infrastructure. The Indian Navy's budget constraints and slow pace of modernization hinder its ability to match China's maritime capabilities. Addressing these gaps requires increased investment in indigenous shipbuilding, infrastructure development, and strategic partnerships
- The lack of coordination among agencies leads to operational inefficiencies, delays in project approvals, and inconsistent policy implementation. Establishing a unified authority or a single-window clearance system could streamline decision-making and enhance the effectiveness of maritime policies.
- Non-traditional threats necessitate a comprehensive approach that integrates security, environmental, and economic considerations. India can address these challenges by promoting regional cooperation, enhancing surveillance capabilities, and advocating for sustainable maritime practices. This not only secures India's interests but also fosters a stable maritime environment beneficial to all regional stakeholders.
- External powers influence India's maritime diplomacy through strategic partnerships and collaborative initiatives. The United States, for instance, supports India's role in maintaining a rules-based order in the Indian Ocean. Regional players like ASEAN countries and the Quad

nations enhance India's interoperability and capacity-building efforts. These partnerships amplify India's diplomatic reach and security posture.

- Environmental challenges are increasingly important in maritime diplomacy as they impact both security and economic interests. India can address these issues by promoting sustainable maritime practices, supporting international environmental agreements, and integrating environmental considerations into its maritime policies. This approach enhances India's reputation as a responsible maritime power while ensuring long-term sustainability of its maritime resources.

- Existing regional cooperation mechanisms, such as joint naval exercises and capacity-building programs, are effective in enhancing maritime security by fostering trust and interoperability among regional navies. However, these mechanisms can be further strengthened by expanding participation, improving information sharing, and addressing common security challenges collaboratively.

- Creating a system of standards and guidelines for the marine industry that are based on international law concepts, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). A code of conduct of this kind can aid in managing or preventing conflicts, lowering tensions, and encouraging actions that foster confidence among the maritime parties.

- Since the coast guards and other maritime law enforcement organizations are frequently the first to respond to unconventional threats like pollution, smuggling, trafficking, and piracy, it is important to strengthen their function and skills. Additionally, they can be extremely important in promoting awareness of the maritime domain, protecting the rights and sovereignty of coastal states, and offering disaster relief and humanitarian aid.

10. CONCLUSION:

With programs like SAGAR and IONS, India is dedicated to marine security and can adapt to the changing environment. In addition to safeguarding its coastline, India's capacity building and international collaboration support marine stability worldwide. India is moving toward a future of resilience, adaptation, and cooperation with the help of the secure seas vision. The country is working hard to strengthen its naval capabilities and build partnerships with other nations. By focusing on cooperation and security, India aims to ensure safe trade routes and protect its interests in the region. As challenges continue to arise, India's commitment to maritime diplomacy will be key in shaping a stable and prosperous Indian Ocean. This strategy not only enhances India's role as a leader but also promotes peace and development for all countries in the region.

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