1990

Securing the Barrack: The Logic, Structure and objectives of india's Naval Expansion. Part 1

Ashley J. Tellis

Securing the Barrack:
The Logic, Structure and Objectives
of India's Naval Expansion

Ashley J. Tellis

Editor's note: This is the first part of a two-part article. The second part will appear in the Autumn 1990 issue of this journal.

N early forty years after Independence and amidst the largest expansion in its history, the Indian Navy still struggles to promote the belief that India's political grandeur has always been inextricably linked with its status as a thalassocracy. Indeed, most Indian navalists, irked by the continental outlook of the last two millennia, not only emphasize the decisive role sea power played in the European conquest of the subcontinent during the Columbian era, but also wistfully reminisce about lost glories of an ancient Indian naval tradition where an early invocation (ca. 2500-1500 B.C.)—"Do thou whose countenance is turned to all sides send off our adversaries, as if in a ship to the opposite shores: do convey us in a ship across the sea for our welfare" (*Rig Veda* 1, 97, 7 and 8)—is often adduced to buttress their claim of a long, proud, and antiquarian maritime lineage.[1]

This navalist rhetoric has usually been provoked by the fact that, despite ritual obeisance to India's strategic position astride the most important sea lanes of communication traversing the northern Indian Ocean, neither the British colonizers nor the early post-Independence political leadership paid much attention to maintenance and upkeep of India's naval forces. As a result,

Ashley J. Tellis is a Century Fellow in the graduate program, Department of Political Science, the University of Chicago. Formerly a Visiting Researcher at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., he specializes in international relations theory and defense and security studies. His academic publications have appeared in several journals including *Strategic Review, Defense Analysis, Journal of Strategic Studies*, and *Armed Forces and Society*.

the Navy lagged behind the sister services in financial outlays, technology infusions, operational readiness, and strategic primacy—the discomforts of small budgetary disbursements only exacerbated by the inability of the sea service to provide a satisfactory rationale for its expansion, especially during the trying decades immediately following Independence in 1947. Thus, the predominantly *maritime* justification—long national coastlines, protection of commercial shipping, importance of coast guard, regulatory, patrol and rescue duties—offered by the Navy for additional monies was insufficient to convince civilian leaders so long as a pertinent *naval* justification—the presence of determined seaward threats to Indian independence—remained conspicuously absent. Consequently, India lacked both a potent fleet and a satisfactory rationale for large naval investments for the better part of the 1947-1971 period.[2]

The present naval expansion, manifestly visible since the unveiling of the twenty-year development program in 1978, is expected to bequeath the Navy and Coast Guard a balanced fleet of some 250-300 ships, including capital vessels and associated supporting systems, by the year 2025. The material paucity of the pre-71 years therefore seems to be a thing of the past, but most professional opinion remains puzzled by the absence of a convincing and comprehensive rationale for such a major naval investment program.[3] Present circumstances, then, afford an interesting point of departure: Whereas in the past both capable fleets and persuasive rationales were nonexistent, today a modern fleet is being hastily acquired—even in the absence of a clearly specified rationale—giving rise to widespread fears that the resulting force structure may do more to add to than resolve India's security dilemmas.

This article surveys the technical and operational dimensions of India's naval expansion as predicated by the political objectives of its grand strategy.[4] In seeking to discern the logic and structure of this expansion, it focuses on the Navy as a force instrument as opposed to merely a protective tool concerned with regulatory and custodial duties.[5] Divided into five principal sections, the first section of this article proposes a geopolitical interpretation of India's security perceptions. Viewed through this perspective, the second section reviews the historic exigencies and threats as they have affected the evolution of the Navy's first-order mission of ensuring deterrence. The third section models how the growing Indian Navy has sought to operationalize deterrence, especially as expressed through mutations in its fleet structure and its changing operational objectives. The fourth section specifies the technical dimensions of the present expansion. The fifth section then surveys how the Navy's leaders, combining current force employment strategies at the operational-tactical level, with the ships, aircraft, and equipment now being added, propose to execute the overarching mission of ensuring deterrence. And finally, the conclusion proposes a brief assessment of the

consequences of the naval expansion for India's standing in the regional and global cynosure.

The Geopolitics of Indian Grand Strategy:
The British Legacy and Contemporary Compulsions

From the perspective of five thousand years of repeated foreign invasion and persistent internal strife, the two-century old British *raj* might appear as merely one of many formative incidents in the long history of the Indian polity. But, late though it was in appearance and relatively short though it was in duration, the British imperial episode, more than any other, solidified Indian nationalism, defined India's identity as a nation-state and socialized it into the politics of national survival, bequeathing modern India with a political gestalt that is still at the core of its grand strategy.

The colonization of India, as with Britain's experience elsewhere, was hardly the product of a coherent imperial design. Rather, it emerged out of haphazard and marginal territorial annexations designed to eliminate those "turbulent frontiers" impeding the viability of British trade and commerce within a territory.[6] Such undirected, gradual accretion of territory soon created an "empire" characterized both by extended geography and technically poor communications between London and the provinces. The net result was an imperial system of fairly autonomous and loosely connected colonial possessions, united and coherent perhaps only insofar as system-wide security needs were concerned.[7] Since systemic security was often the only linkage among the disparate colonies, and between these colonies and an insular mother-country, geopolitical imperatives soon came to dominate imperial strategic concerns.

Once acquired and subjugated, India quickly became the chief imperial asset, the "Jewel in the Crown," contributing to the Empire's matchless prestige, wealth and power, and hence deemed vital by all but the most rabid anti-imperialist. Given the realities of geography and technology, the imperial defense system—such as it was—soon came to rest on the twin principles of naval supremacy and the defense of India. While the former clearly implied that England's principal political instrument, the Royal Navy, would be maintained at levels required for complete superiority in both European and extra-European waters, the meaning of the latter depended principally on whether the issue was discussed in London or Delhi. The British imperial perspective consistently rated *external* threats to India as the more important, whereas the British Indian perspective was characterized by an obsession with *internal* threats, and hence, marked by an extreme reticence at meeting Empire-wide security commitments from India's manpower and resource pool.[8] Thus, Lord Salisbury's depiction of India as "an English barrack in the Oriental Seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying

for them,"[9] would not have met with British Indian approval unless it were read to suggest a restless English barrack isolated in treacherous Oriental waters needing all the help it could get from the imperial system outside, without having to be burdened by any more of London's claims on its already overstretched internal commitments.

This dispute notwithstanding, both London and Delhi were agreed that India was, in Lord Curzon's words, "the strategic center of the defensive position of the Empire."[10] Although acknowledged to be "the center of gravity of all British possessions in the East,"[11] India's *geopolitical* importance stemmed principally from the fact that it was ideally located athwart the lines of communication between the European-Mediterranean arc and the East Asian-Southeast Asian provinces of the Empire. Thus, its presence on a geographically separated bastion at the southern extremity of the Asian continent made it the perfect springboard from which Indian resources could be deployed to counter any threat emerging along the Indian Oceanic basin adjacent to the Eurasian-African "World-Island"—a basin which had at any rate become (by 1921) "almost a British lake," and around which lay "almost half the total area of the Empire . . . [and] . . . about four-fifths of its total population."[12] Therefore, if the strategic passes in the Indian subcontinent's mountainous northwestern, northern, and northeastern frontiers could be sealed against penetration, and if the Indian Ocean with its limited gateways of ingress could be exclusively controlled by the Royal Navy, and if the political restlessness of its indigenous populations could be moderated, then India would function as a truly secure and puissant "English barrack in the Oriental Seas," whence Japanese and Chinese ambitions in the east, Russian ambitions in the north, and Italian and German designs in the west could be properly checkmated.[13]

This geopolitical perspective defined India's importance within the landscape of imperial grand strategy. Though in a systemic sense, the defense of India proper was critical largely insofar as it affected the defense of other British assets around the Oceanic periphery, the complexity of this first necessary task soon transformed it into a problem worthy of concentrated attention in its own right. As a result, the defense of India symbolized a united strategic objective, where defending it for its own sake appeared identical to defending it for the sake of the Empire. On this premise, the subcontinent was to be shielded as an impregnable "English barrack in the Oriental Seas," resulting thus in the creation of a security system closely resembling the medieval use of reinforced fortifications. Externally, this implied that all geographic areas whose contiguity affected the barrack's security were to be neutralized. The traditional device consisted of a dual concentric "ring fence," where the inner ring immediately adjacent to the Indian subcontinent and consisting of the northwestern and northeastern borderlands, minor Himalayan states, and contiguous Indian Oceanic waters, was actively

controlled by a policy of dominating political absorption. In turn, the outer ring, consisting of the Persian Gulf sheikdoms, Iraq, Iran (Persia), Afghanistan, Tibet, and Thailand (Siam), was effectively neutered into a gigantic buffer zone by a system of extensive alliances through which the major external powers were prevented from intruding upon the security cynosure of the subcontinent.[14] Since British naval mastery was an acknowledged fact for most of the later colonial era, the seaward approaches to the "ring fence" were deemed secure, and hence, both British Imperial and British Indian administrators expended their energy on a continental stratagem labelled the "Great Game."[15]

This external stratagem of sanitizing all northern landward opponents, with the object of creating a *cordon sanitaire* capable of deflecting any direct threat to the subcontinent, was complemented by a stratagem "within the barrack" as well. India was to be governed not just as another colony, but as an autonomous subject-kingdom, with its own treasury, foreign office, war office, and under a viceroy enjoying a wide latitude of discretion and able to conduct a British Indian strategic policy with respect to the adjacent strategic quadrants, particularly the Persian Gulf and East Africa, which were for all practical purposes governed from Delhi. Such autonomy, it was expected, would reinforce the insulation necessary to moderate Indian aspirations while at the same time ensuring that the barrack's full resources were directed towards attaining the external objectives of the imperial defense system. The condition of the "English barrack" thus soon became, in Hore-Belisha's phrase, an "India obsession" dominating all British strategic thinking.[16] And since English naval superiority and the security offered thereby simply came to be presumed, over time, the maritime insulation of the subcontinent only ensured that the continental dimensions of the "Great Game" would intrude even more dramatically onto the British Indian strategic consciousness and be transferred eventually onto its successors in New Delhi and Islamabad.

Although independence in 1947 marked an administrative and ideological break between India and Great Britain, the same never quite carried over to Indian geostrategic policy. As a result, its chief object has been to continually ensure that no genuinely independent power exists along its borders. Unlike the traditional British policy, however, this objective was not designed to acquire *direct* political control over the inner ring areas in order to service a larger hegemonic design. Rather, with an eye to ensuring the barrack's security, it aimed to prevent—by a combination of diplomatic maneuver and military coercion—the neighboring states within it from pursuing policies inimical to Indian interests. This external objective, cemented by Indian fears of its independence being continually threatened in diverse ways, is complemented by a set of internal objectives as well: The political facet includes pacifying India's numerous minorities and, in general,

aims at preventing its cultural heterogeneity from degenerating into an unmanageable mass of centrifugal ambitions. The economic facet, premised on the suspicion that interdependence is often a fig leaf for imperialism, aims at autarkically developing industrial and technological bases of power, principally with the intent of limiting the potential for external interference. All in all, independent India's grand strategic objective, clearly guided by the vivid image of *Fortress Indica*, is directed toward insulating the subcontinental barrack from every external interference.[17]

To chart these elements of continuity and change between the security policies of British India and those of the modern Indian republic, then, is to see a fascinating prolongation of geopolitical perspective. During the period of British rule, the chief security threats to the subcontinent materialized along three distinct geographic axes: the northeast, where China, perceived as a potential competitor, was ultimately supplanted by the Japanese who moved troops against it during the 1942-44 operations in the Burmese theater; the northwest, where Tsarist and later Soviet (or intermittently, German) ambitions were perceived as threatening, thus resulting in the creation of Afghanistan as a buffer state designed to avert direct external military pressure on India; and finally, through the Indian Ocean which, although generally acknowledged as a British lake, was pervious enough to allow Axis power to be brought to bear against several Indian coastal cities like Vishakhapatnam and Madras during the Second World War.

That the objective of British Indian geopolitics was summarily rejected by independent India's new leadership did not alter the fact that the new security threats to India—Pakistan and China—still emerged from the traditional northwestern and northeastern axes. Thus, despite the idealism conditioning Nehru's rhetorical rejection of power politics, Indian security managers faithfully stayed the British Indian course with minor tactical alterations, consistently attempting to maintain the *cordon sanitaire* by preventing the contiguous neighbors from arriving at mutual alliances directed against India, while simultaneously dissuading them from involving extra-regional great powers in the resolution of intra-subcontinental disputes.[18] Such a task was enormously complicated by Pakistan's refusal of Indian hegemony and China's threatening presence via its territorial claims. But, constructing a *de facto* "regional security system" based on Indian primacy in the service of geopolitical insulation remained the only satisfactory bedrock upon which Indian preeminence within the South Asian context could be assured.[19] The Indian discomfiture at the efforts of Bangladesh and the Himalayan kingdoms to improve ties with China, the wary attitude towards Pakistani attempts at seeking alliances with the United States and the Arab world, the vociferous protests at American decisions to transfer military technology to Pakistan (and since to China), and the recent decision to manipulate Sri Lankan ethnic politics with the intention of neutralizing a

Sinhalese leadership sympathetic to the West, are thus different facets of the traditional security policy undergirding the rhetorical codewords of "national self-determination" and "superpower non-interference."[20]

While the British Indian obsession with the northern frontiers thus seems to have been faithfully duplicated by independent India,[21] the early years of the post-Independence epoch generally suggested a discontinuity as far as threats via the Indian Ocean were concerned. Indian security managers were certainly aware that the most recent wave in the long history of invasions and conquests of the subcontinent came by sea, but the absence of any direct and pointed naval threat, coupled with the early expectation that the British and Americans would continue to protect the Indian Ocean, served to relegate naval modernization to the vagaries of financial availability. As a result, the Indian Navy was the most neglected of the three Indian armed services, had the smallest budgets on both capital and operations accounts, and not seeing any action until the 1971 war, could not develop those domestic constituencies critical for influencing resource allocations.

In retrospect, the elements of continuity and change between British Imperial-British Indian and independent India's security policy are complex, but can nonetheless be discerned: Continuity is manifest in Indian attitudes to threats along the northwestern and northeastern frontiers (despite being shorn of British Imperial geopolitical rationales that attended such attitudes), while change seemed most clearly evident in the Indian decision to deemphasize naval modernization (a posture quite compatible with British Indian proclivities, but unlike the British Imperial posture which was always premised on the ability of the Royal Navy, later supplemented by the Royal Indian Navy, to control the Indian Ocean).[22] Until the mid-70s, this assessment generally held true. The naval enhancements occurring since then lend support, however, to the conclusion that Indian security policy has, perhaps for the first time since Independence, come full circle insofar as the decision to refurbish the Indian Navy constitutes now an element of latent continuity with British Imperial policy—despite large differences between their respective goals—rather than an example of abrupt change.

## Fashioning a Deterrent: The Evolving Indian Naval Mission

If the naval expansion currently embarked upon has any strategic meaning, it is principally as a deterrent to the new threats pervading the *cordon sanitaire* India has assiduously sought to maintain in line with the British Indian security tradition.[23] While the principal national mission of India's armed services has always been specified in terms of deterrence (rather than force projection), the evolution of India's naval posture confirms that the manner in which this first-order objective is put into effect has changed considerably over the years. This section explores the changing meanings of deterrence in the Indian naval

context, while the next section suggests how the second-order operational objectives predicated by these changes have evolved concurrently.

Although India fought three wars with Pakistan and China in the two decades following Independence, these conflicts were—despite their ideological overtones—largely territorial, requiring land and air forces rather than navies for their resolution. The subcontinent's extended western and eastern flanks were relatively quiet, the Indian Ocean still lay within the friendly British zone of influence, and all extra-regional powers either tacitly supported India or at least avoided intervening in a fashion judged detrimental to its regional primacy. Hence, these conflicts were localized tussles in the nature of a limited war, necessitating the use of less than the total military resources available. Limited political goals generally reinforced the neglect of naval forces, as all contestants, exhibiting either inability or unwillingness, tacitly cooperated to avoid attacks that would extend the struggle outside of the disputed land areas.

Until 1965, therefore, the Indian Navy, managing with a heterogenous fleet of antiquated British vessels, contributed to deterrence largely by operating as a custodial force. Its principal task was to ensure the security of India's maritime assets, consisting largely of fishing vessels and commercial ships, while maintaining harbor security and general surveillance against smugglers and poachers. Carrying out these protective tasks was deemed vital to deterring any possible Pakistani adventurism at sea. Indian military planners anticipated that a relatively large, even if untested, naval order of battle would deter Pakistan from extending the scope of conflict by naval means, should unfavorable tactical situations materialize in combat ashore. The limitations of this strategy of *existential deterrence* first became evident during the 1965 war when Pakistan, operating on the assumption of an all-arms conflict with the intent of securing larger diplomatic objectives, sent a naval surface raiding force against Indian ports and installations on the western sea coast. The Indian Navy, its carrier caught refitting and its surface craft found lacking proper doctrine and firepower, proved unable to intercept the raiders. The fleet's poor performance in 1965 resulted in a shift in how India's naval deterrence strategy was to be acted upon.

Realizing that the psychological benefits of possessing a large line-of-battle would not of itself deter Pakistani naval action, the Indian Navy responded by planning for an aggressive campaign that would take the war to the enemy. Several Osa-class missile boats acquired from the Soviet Union during the late 60s were pressed into action as part of the integrated surface raiding groups operated by the service. Indian successes during the 1971 conflict demonstrated the merits of that strategy: While the missile-armed surface forces of the Western Naval Command wreaked havoc at Karachi Harbor where the Pakistani fleet was headquartered, the aircraft carrier *Vikrant*, together with her escorts, bottled up Pakistani surface shipping in the east,
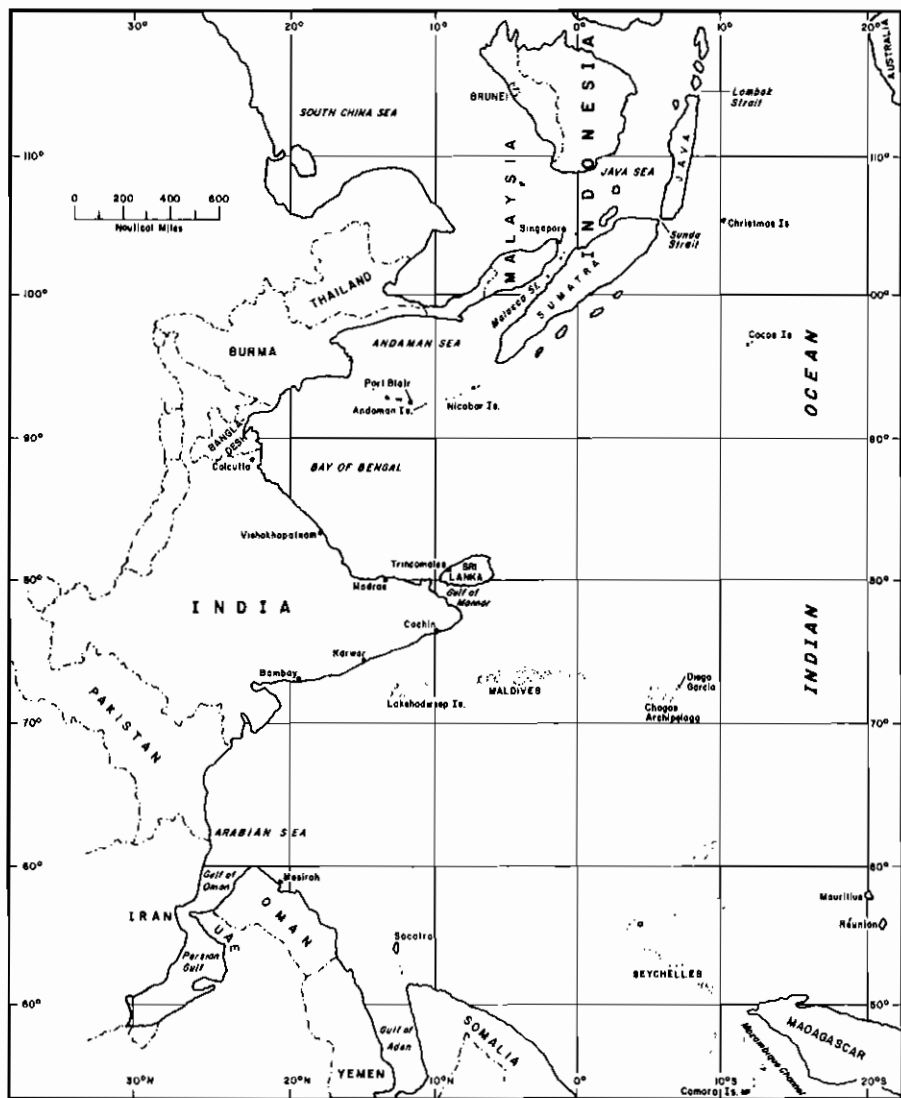
preventing both resupply and evacuation of the beleaguered garrison, thus contributing to the decisive loss of East Pakistan. *Deterrence by denial* was henceforth indelibly etched into India's naval consciousness.

While India struggled to underscore its subcontinental preeminence during this conflict, it was brusquely reminded that the tranquility of the Indian Oceanic waters which it had taken for granted throughout the 1950s and 60s (and thereby the sanctity of the southern approaches to the subcontinent), was slowly dissipating. While the deployment of the U.S.S. *Enterprise* during the 1971 war provided Indian security planners with graphic evidence that

the country could actually become a "victim" of coercive superpower naval diplomacy, that event only seemed to presage—in retrospect—an even more intense superpower involvement in an area of great strategic importance to India. President Nixon's deployment of the *Enterprise*, however, was really the last straw that broke the self-imposed restraints on Indian naval expansion. As one scholar described, "The sailing of the U.S.S. *Enterprise* was the ultimate in symbolic insult, and drove India's fear of regional penetration to new heights just at the moment of its greatest political and military triumph. . . . Years after it occurred, the *Enterprise* episode is invariably raised in discussions with Indian strategists, journalists, and members of the foreign policy community. It had a major impact on military thinking and contributed directly to the present expansion program of the Indian Navy. Above all, it is remembered as a nuclear as well as a military threat."[24] This episode precipitated a new consensus within the security community: It was now believed that diplomatic initiatives required to combat restiveness among the region's nation-states and the potential external threats to Indian integrity were worthwhile only if underwritten by formidable military tools, because the 1971 conflict seemed to demonstrate the futility of attempting to control outcomes by political means alone. As a sign of things to come, the Navy's capital budget, which generally ranked third among the services, dramatically expanded to first place in 1974 with 48.8 percent of the total capital budget and, receiving approximately 52 percent of those funds consistently, has remained in that position ever since.[25]

Other related regional developments further reinforced the Indian intention to expand the Navy. The recurrent oil crises, the disruptive Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia, the chaotic Iranian revolution with the illegal taking of American hostages, and the explosive Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, all confirmed a sharply deteriorating regional environment and finally cemented a reactive U.S. decision to maintain a quasi-permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean, involving both the deployment of a carrier battle group and the expansion of basing facilities at Diego Garcia, barely a thousand miles south of the Indian peninsula. With the last segment of the subcontinental barrack's security cordon suddenly penetrated by large numbers of extra-regional naval vessels, the Indian nightmare of encirclement finally became vivid enough to force New Delhi to expand its own naval fleet with the best available instruments. The failure of the various U.N.-sponsored Indian Ocean conferences, and the gradual realization that key regional actors like Pakistan and Sri Lanka were tacitly converging on security issues vis-à-vis India, provided additional political impetus (if any was still lacking) to modernize the Navy. As the Ministry of Defence rationalized, the key objective was to ensure the "security of India's sprawling coastline and her growing maritime interests," which acquired "added importance in recent times, due primarily to the induction of sophisticated armaments in

the region and the disquieting growth of rivalry and tensions in the Indian Ocean area."[26]

With such perceptions of increased penetration, the operational orientation of the Indian Navy underwent serious alteration. Deterrence by denial still remained the overarching leitmotif of all naval force planning, but its spatial and tactical dimensions, enlarged to counter a congeries of new and diverse threats, were oriented towards progressively "altering the naval balance" in the Ocean littoral.[27] Thus, the Navy's original local sea control and shore defense orientation, which largely emphasized preserving the integrity of India's coastal waters against a Pakistani threat, has given way to a wider assertive naval orientation, including both complete peninsular sea control and preservation of extra-peninsular zones of influence in an all-purpose conception now labelled "defense of the nation's maritime interests."[28] Arguably this implies that the Navy is now expected to defend—besides the country's ports, coastal installations, and seaborne trade—the entire gamut of economic and political interests in the Indian Ocean littoral. In fact, one analyst has mapped Indian security interests along a large inverted triangle with the Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and South Africa constituting the southern node, the Suez Canal-Red Sea-Persian Gulf constituting the western node, and the Straits of Malacca constituting the eastern node of a gigantic seaward defense zone.[29]

While such perimeters no doubt embody ambitious aspirations often chilling regional neighbors, what is generally overlooked is that such planning constitutes a newer, more sophisticated, conception of a southern "ring fence," wherein the Indian Navy is tasked with discharging the seemingly opposing roles of maintaining command of the sea in the event of a conflict with smaller regional adversaries (sea control), while concurrently deploying a modest but effective deterrent against extra-regional powers operating amidst the environs of the Indian subcontinental barrack (sea denial).[30]

It thus seems possible, in retrospect, to suggest that the motive force behind the present expansion is in a systemic sense a continuation of the British Indian defensive strategy made manifest throughout the "Great Game." This logic satisfactorily explains why India has embarked on a naval expansion guaranteeing the sanctity of its contiguous waters. And, as the next section delineates, the evolving fleet structure has generally reflected the defensive logic motivating India's civilian leadership, which is likely to remain salient in the service's near-term outlook as well.

Modelling India's Naval Growth: Past, Present, and Future

Although the Royal Indian Navy grew during the Second World War to approximately 400 ships and craft and some 26,000 men, post-war demobilization reduced the force to a shadow of its former size. The rending

of India which ensued at Independence resulted in the creation of two new
and antagonistic navies, India's and Pakistani's, with the former acquiring
approximately thirty-two assorted vessels, a naval dockyard and some 11,000
men. For reasons explored earlier, the new navy neither caught the fancy
of Indian security planners nor elicited any firm commitments to its
modernization, despite the multiplicity of plans existing for that purpose.[31]
The brute geographical fact of India's long coastline, however, demanded
some minimum level of naval power, and a perfect match between Indian
penury and British generosity resulted in periodic replacement of the
antiquated surface force with some cruiser, destroyer and frigate
replacements from Britain throughout the 1950s. By 1965, the Indian Navy
appeared to be a substantial fleet, even if only on paper, though its absence
in that year's conflict did not augur well for continued expansion. Between
1965 and 1971, the Navy's decision to explore the Soviet Union as a source
of naval supplies (for both political and financial reasons) resulted in the first
injections of "modern" surface and subsurface vessels, some of which were
capable of carrying cruise missilery. Nonetheless, naval growth at this stage
was still incremental rather than exponential, with the now familiar phase
of sustained expansion having to await the unveiling of the Navy's twenty-
year development plan in 1978.

Whereas the previous reluctance to engage in naval modernization was
a function both of political choice as well as confusion about the shape of
appropriate force architecture, the new development plan—encouraged by
both political conditions favoring naval growth and a rapidly growing
economy providing larger military allocations—resolved the latter quandary
by a bureaucratically constructed logic of "more is enough." Thus, the
longstanding debates about the virtue of a "brown water" versus "blue
water" fleet, the submarine versus aircraft carrier, and the "capital" ship
versus "escort," were systematically resolved by a decision to procure
substantial numbers of each of these types (together with the supporting
infrastructural investments) in order to create a large balanced fleet.[32]
Examining the growth profile of the Indian Navy suggests how the fleet has
evolved thus far (table I), and provides a baseline to review and chart the
dimensions of future expansion which are detailed in the next section.

In purely numerical terms, the present fleet, consisting of over a hundred
warships, ranks among the seven or eight largest navies in the world. Even
if its projected growth is overlooked (table II), the Indian Navy is currently
the largest and best balanced fleet in the Indian Ocean region, and the
contemplated expansion promises to leave the next largest regional navies,
operated by Australia and South Africa, far behind, both qualitatively and
quantitatively.[33]

These numerical indices, however, should not obscure the fact that any
evaluation conducted while a force structure is in transition is subject to high

Indian Naval Growth since Independence

1947–48	1965–66	1971–72	1989–90
Total Strength: 11,000	Total Strength: 16,000	Total Strength: 40,000	Total Strength: 53,000
4 sloops	1 carrier	1 carrier	2 carriers
2 frigates	2 cruisers	4 submarines	1 nuclear submarine (SSGN)
1 corvette	3 destroyers	2 cruisers	16 conventional submarines
12 flt minesweepers	5 ASW frigates	3 destroyers	5 destroyers (5)
4 trawlers	3 AAW frigates	9 destroyer escorts	19 frigates (10)
4 mtr minesweepers	6 escort ships	1 gen purpose frigate	8 corvettes (8)
4 mtr launches	6 minesweepers	5 ASW frigates	14 missile craft (12)
1 survey ship	13 lt coastal vessels	3 AAW frigates	12 large patrol craft
	2 amphibious vessels	10 patrol boats (6)	22 mine countermeasures vessels
	5 survey/trg vessels	4 coastal minesweepers	18 amphibious vessels
		4 inshr minesweepers	14 survey/oceanographic ships
		3 landing ship/craft	28 assorted tenders/support
		9 seaward defense boats	7 Coast Guard offshore patrol ships
			22 Coast Guard inshore patrol ships
	Aircraft	Aircraft	Aircraft
	24 Sea Hawk	35 Sea Hawk	26 Sea Harrier
	15 Alizé	12 Alizé	8 Alizé
		2 Sea King	5 Hormone
		10 Alouette III	18 Helix
			35 Sea King
			36 Dornier 228
			11 Alouette III
			5 Bear-F
			3 May
			18 Defender

Table I

1. Data for the years 1947–48 have been excerpted from Lorne J. Kavic (see note 14); data for 1965–66 and 1971–72 has been excerpted from *The Military Balance* (London: IISS). Data for 1989–90 has been collated from *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1989–90*.
2. Figures in parentheses throughout the table indicate number of missile-equipped vessels.

Projected Profile of Principal Naval Combatants during 2000-2010

Total Strength: 80,000

3 carriers

4-6	Oscar (?) or Papa (?) or Charlie SSGNs
4-6	IKL-1500 SSKs
8-20	Kilo submarines
	8 second-line Foxtrots (training/reserve)
6-8	Kashin destroyers (6-8)
6-8	Udaloy or Sovremennyy destroyers (6-8)
	or
6-8	Follow-on Kashin destroyers (6-8)
10-12	Project 15 destroyers (10-12)
3	*Godavari* frigates (3)
6-12	*Godavari* follow-on frigates (6-12)
	6 *Leander* frigates (6) (training/reserve)
24-30	Nanuchka/Tarantul corvettes (24-30)
16-32	*Khukri* corvettes (16-32)
15-30	Seaward defence boats/OPVs
24-40	Natya/Yevgenya minesweepers & Natya
	follow-on minehunters
12-18	Polnocny amphibious vessels
8-12	*Magar* LSTs
30-45	auxiliary & replenishment vessels

Aircraft:		
	60-80	Sea Harrier
	60-80	Sea King
	40	Hormone/Helix
	8-12	Bear
	50-65	DO-228
	18-25	Defender
	30-50	Alouette III/ALH ASW & SAR

Table II

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate numbers of missile-equipped vessels.

margins of judgmental error. Further, crucial qualitative data is always hard to come by and political intentions are, at best, difficult to fathom. The final complication, of course, is that most middle power navies, like India's, belong to an analytical netherworld—their character is more easily defined by what they are not than by what they are, thus making for diffuse rather than pointed assessments. These difficulties notwithstanding, the best methodological approach is to model the Indian Navy's character over the various phases of its existence, with the intention of identifying its capabilities, its limitations, as well as the various second-order operational objectives it has serviced in the pursuit of deterrence.

In abstract terms, three generalized models of middle power naval architecture may be identified.[34] Model I consists of those low-capability fleets possessing only local coastal defense capabilities. Such navies can only survive as great power clients operating within the framework of explicit coalition arrangements or in areas of geopolitical tranquility far removed from the potential trouble spots of the world. They are usually characterized by an ability to carry out only a single custodial task, at which a partial degree of specialization is usually acquired.

Model II fleets, though difficult to define precisely, are usually characterized by their ability to meet naval demands beyond that of mere coastal defense. These fleets tend to fully specialize in at least two or three discrete operational tasks. This category often subsumes three degrees of naval capability: pure coalition participants, specializing in a single naval task like mine warfare or sea lane defense; regional navies, embodying greater capabilities and able to exert region-wide control through their specialization at defensive sea control tasks; and nascent blue-water operators, fleets more sophisticated than mere regional operators and thus capable of maintaining specific zones of naval influence in the face of even strong extra-regional penetration.

In contrast to the complexity of these Model II fleets, Model III navies are simple in character. They are fully blue-water capable, possess a comprehensive range of capabilities even if lacking in substantial depth, and can routinely undertake major independent naval actions of the kind associated with uninhibited sea assertion.

It is useful to perceive these three models as part of a single continuum characterizing both the growth of the Indian Navy and the variety of operational objectives that it has aspired to at various stages over its lifetime. (Read table III in conjunction with table I.)

● The rudimentary fleet bequeathed to the independent Indian Navy in 1947–48 was so pathetic that it cannot even be described as a Model I fleet. While its survival was partly a consequence of the fact that the major adversary, Pakistan, was even worse off, the Navy could afford to maintain such a weak order of battle at this stage only because the sea areas of interest were perceived to be generally tranquil and lay within the sphere of influence of a friendly great power. Under these circumstances, the inshore patrol of its territorial waters and harbor defense, together with regulatory, custodial and other coast guard functions, were all the operational capabilities that could be expected of the fleet.

● The several British acquisitions from Britain that took place during the 1950s and 1960s show up as a refurbished order of battle in the years 1965–66, thus allowing the fleet to be unambiguously classified as a Model I navy capable of sustained coastal defense. While the presence of an aircraft carrier may in fact suggest extra-coastal reach, such inference is deceptive: the vessel

Modelling Indian Naval Growth

	Pre-Model I	Model I	Model II			Model III
Fleet Character		Coastal Defense	Coalition Capable	Regional Navy	Nascent Blue water Capability	Blue Water Fleet
Time Period	1947–55	1955–1968	1968–1978	1978–1990	1990–2025 (?)	2025 + (?)
Operational Objective	Inshore Patrol, Custodial Duties	Contiguous Waters Control	Extended Sea-lane Defense	Peninsular Sea control	Extra-Peninsular Zones of Influence	Hemispheric Projection

Table III

was constantly undergoing refits, the naval air (navair) operating regimes were not established, and the escorts lacked any meaningful kind of offensive firepower. The surface combatants were generally antiquated, possessing no missilery of any kind, and as a rule were more suited for a naval review than a battle. The fleet's abdication during the 1965 conflict with Pakistan clearly suggests that a weak minimum of contiguous waters control was all that could be expected of it at that time.

● The fleet structure during the 1971 conflict exhibits, for the first time following Independence, both decent size and a semblance of balance, suggesting that it could now be confidently classified as a Model II fleet. The 1971 conflict certainly demonstrated that in moving beyond the defense of territorial and contiguous waters, the fleet had transformed itself into a capable instrument for applying power against India's local adversaries. It could boast not only significant tridimensional capabilities, almost all of which were tested in battle with resounding success, but also impressive numbers. Thus, the Navy was able to configure two separate commands and notionally divide the fleet into first- and second-line elements. Although categorizing the naval structure of this period in terms of the subdivisions among Model II navies is slightly difficult, it could be considered as coalition-capable, not because it actually participated (or planned to participate) in coalition warfare arrangements, but because any navy in this category, planning to operate on such assumptions in case of a large war, would mirror the appearance of the Indian Navy in 1971. This appellation may be further justified because this force fairly approximated that which postwar British policymakers sought to create and suborn into unified Imperial defense plans relating to the Indian Ocean. Those British policymakers expected that the Indian Navy would support extended sea-lane defense operations—as indeed its performance in the 1971 war showed that it amply could.

● The Indian Navy today is still a Model II fleet, but its current character justifies its classification as a regional navy. Its numerical preponderance is an established fact, its firepower has grown exponentially, as has its tonnage, range, and endurance, and the proportion of its missile-armed combatants has increased from roughly 16 percent in 1971-72 to 50 percent in 1989-90—a proportion slated to increase even further once the present transition is complete. More interestingly, the bulk of the frontline vessels are between 10-20 years old, suggesting that the Navy has completely solved its previous problems with block obsolescence.

Although maintaining defensive peninsular sea control is now an acknowledged operational achievement, the Navy has still some way to go before extra-peninsular zones of naval influence, at the extended security perimeter, can be permanently sustained. Such capability will begin to emerge only towards the end of the century when completion of the presently contemplated expansion will result in a fleet "somewhere between a

contiguous navy and an ocean-going navy."[35] It bears remembering, however, that even such acquisitions—potent as they are—are insufficient to transform India from a continental power into a true thalassocracy. Maintaining extra-peninsular zones of influence is really an operational objective predicated by the need to refurbish the *cordon sanitaire* around the southern approaches to the subcontinental barrack and hence, merely exhibits the bastion-oriented mentality of a landpower determined to sanitize the threatening axes of approach to the *Fortress Indica*.

As long as the autarkic character of India's economic and political development is consistently reinforced by its policymakers (for very legitimate security reasons), both the force architecture currently deployed and that envisaged for the future—submarines for barrier patrol, sea control ships disguised as aircraft carriers, surface combatants as missile platforms for defensive sea control, and amphibious elements not optimized for forcible entry—will remain the instruments of a frontier-conscious landpower, not that of a true thalassocracy.

● Since the Indian Navy may become a true blue-water fleet only after the first quarter of the 21st century, it might seem premature to speculate about the shape of its Model III character (involving true hemispheric projection and extra-continental lift capabilities). Yet, doing so is instructive for the light it sheds on the present deficiencies in power projection, while also explaining why the claims sometimes made about India's already possessing such capabilities are so often misplaced. Using present naval technology as a baseline, it becomes evident that the Indian Navy cannot be credited with truly hemispheric projection capabilities—defined as the ability to undertake unhampered offensive sea control operations throughout the southern hemispheric Indian Ocean region—until the following conditions are met:

First. It must be able, on a continuous basis, to deploy simultaneously at least three battle groups centered on large conventional aircraft carriers of 40-50,000-tons each. Such is the minimal force size required to patrol the western, southern and eastern Indian Ocean simultaneously, and fulfilling this objective implies that a total of six (and possibly eight) aircraft carriers are required. These carriers, each deploying about 40-50 aircraft of at least the F-18 *Hornet* variety, must be capable of operating independently of the restraining linkages of land-based aviation, especially insofar as critical missions like airborne early warning, tanker support, tactical reconnaissance, and long-range all-weather attack are concerned.

Second. The surface combatants within such battle groups must possess unrefuelled operating ranges in excess of 2,000 miles, and also great combat endurance, including large weapon magazines, multiple reloads (including the ability to rearm and replenish at sea), and sophisticated fire-control systems capable of directing both discrete and massed fires in extended combat

engagements of great intensity. The subsurface vessels must not be simply nuclear boats but a mix of quiet late-generation nuclear and diesel-electric submarines, equipped not only with sophisticated propulsion systems but also with large and balanced torpedo and tactical cruise missile (SLCM) loads slaved to advanced on-board sensors enabling those truly *autonomous* detection, acquisition, and targeting procedures peculiar to "lone wolf" operating regimes.

Third. A capable marine contingent consisting of at least three independently deployable brigades, each possessing its own organic strike aviation, fire support capability, command elements, and requisite beachhead and onshore mobility elements. Besides such capabilities organic to each brigade, various other technologies required for strategic mobility—such as adequate sealift and assorted amphibious vessels (LHD/LHA/LPH/LKA/LST/LPD/LSD)—must be complemented by sufficient numbers of mechanized combat systems required for forcible entry operations either over-the-beach or over-the-horizon. Marine elements, both infantry and mechanized, capable of operating independently in hostile areas far removed from instant reinforcement and supply are ingredients vital to sustaining a formidable offensive sea control and power projection strategy.

Fourth. A particular maritime mindset is required: the Navy's operating regime cannot be merely a spatial extension of the fortress logic traditionally characterizing the various land powers that have episodically reached for the sea on several occasions in history. Rather, it will have to embody a truly offensive sea control mentality that incorporates the freewheeling ability to cruise at will in harm's way in the service of autonomously projecting power. This mammoth operational requirement is obviously predicated upon the creation of an offensive tactical naval doctrine, a domestic economy capable of indigenously supporting all the diverse and manifold force instruments so required, and most importantly, the development of a political world view that legitimizes the creation, maintenance, and deployment of such a deep blue-water capability.

Notes

1. This thesis has received its fullest elaboration in R. K. Mookerji, *Indian Shipping—A History of the Seaborne Trade and Maritime Activity of the Indians from the Earliest Times* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1957). See also, S. N. Kohli, *Sea Power and the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Tata-McGraw Hill, 1978), pp. 1-13; Satyindra Singh, *Under Two Ensigns: The Indian Novy 1945-50* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1986), pp. 1-30; K. M. Pannikar, *India and the Indian Ocean* (Bombay: Allen and Unwin, 1971). The more accurate, albeit dissenting, view can be found in Joel Larus, *Culture and Political-Military Behavior: The Hindus in Pre-Modern India* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1979), pp. 48-95, 172-195. Also, A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 226.

2. The budgetary and strategic compulsions of this period have been detailed in Raju G. C. Thomas, *The Defence of India* (Bombay: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 201-219.

3. See Captain Richard Sharpe's comments in the "Foreword," *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1988-89* and *1989-90*, by the way of example.

4. The technical, operational, and political critiques of Indian naval strategy have been carried out elsewhere. The present article seeks primarily to *explicate* Indian perceptions and rationales underlying its naval expansion from a realist perspective. Hence, preponderant emphasis is placed on interpreting

India's appreciation of foreign capabilities rather than on evaluating the gravity of its threat assessments. For an analysis of the Indian naval predicament taking adversary intentions into account, see Ashley J. Tellis, "India's Naval Expansion: Reflections on History and Strategy," *Comparative Strategy*, v. 6, no. 2, 1987, pp. 185-219. Also, Ashley J. Tellis, "Banking on Deterrence," U.S.N.I. *Proceedings*, March 1988, pp. 148-152.

5. The range of Indian maritime interests has been usefully outlined in Gary L. Sojka, "The Missions of the Indian Navy," *Naval War College Review*, January/February 1983, pp. 2-15. Also, M. K. Roy, "Changing Relations of the Seas to the State," *Journal of the United Services Institution of India*, January/March 1980, pp. 8-12.

6. John S. Galbraith, "The 'Turbulent Frontier' As a Factor in British Expansion," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, January 1960, pp. 150-168.

7. For a provocative reading of this question, see Ged Martin, "Was There a British Empire?" *The Historical Journal*, v. 15, no. 3, 1972, pp. 562-569. Also, T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558-1983* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), p. 138ff.

8. M. E. Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798-1850*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

9. Sir Charles Lucas, ed., *The Empire at War, Vol. I* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1921), pp. 56-57.

10. George N. Curzon, "The Place of India in the Empire" (Address to the Philosophical Institute of Edinburgh, 19 October 1909), p. 11ff.

11. D.H. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography*, 6th ed. (London: Sifton Praed, 1931), p. 82.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

13. D.H. Cole, *Changing Conditions of Imperial Defence* (London: Sifton Praed, 1930), pp. 97-131.

14. This summary of the "ring fence" system is based on Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1967), pp. 1-8.

15. The details of British objectives and tactics in the "Great Game" have been succinctly reviewed in Lloyd I. Rudolph, "The Great Game in Asia: Revisited and Revised," *Crossroads*, no. 16, 1985, pp. 1-46.

16. R.J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 66.

17. This theme is detailed in Raju G. C. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986). Also, Onkar Marwah, "India's Military Power and Policy," in Onkar Marwah and Jonathan D. Pollack, *Military Power and Policy in Asian States: China, India, Japan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), pp. 101-146.

18. Leo E. Rose, "India and its Neighbors: Regional Foreign and Security Policies," in Lawrence Ziring, ed., *The Subcontinent in World Politics* (rev. ed.) (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 35-66.

19. For an excellent review of this "regional security system," see Leo E. Rose and Satish Kumar, "South Asia," in Werner J. Feld and Gavin Boyd, eds., *Comparative Regional Systems* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp. 237-273.

20. The Sri Lankan intervention provides a perfect example of how India has sought to operationalize these security interests. Although the Indian Army-dominated peacekeeping force (IPKF) has attracted the bulk of public attention, it is significant that this assistance was clearly contingent on the Sri Lankan assurance that (1) all external military and intelligence presences would be excluded from the island (implying that British and Israeli counterterrorist assistance was to be terminated), (2) all Sri Lankan ports were to be made unavailable to any power that might use them in a manner prejudicial to Indian interests (implying that American naval interest in Trincomalee and elsewhere was to be discouraged), (3) all foreign broadcasting organizations were to be restricted only to public broadcasting and not used for any intelligence purposes (implying that the Voice of America's activities were to be closely scrutinized and monitored). See Exchange of Letters, Annexure to the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of 29 July 1987.

21. The muted Indian response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan must at first sight appear to violate this general proposition. But, on reconsideration, it was simply a product of constrained choice which did not attenuate Indian discomfort with this development. See Thomas P. Thornton, "India and Afghanistan," in Theodore L. Eliot, Jr. and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., eds., *The Red Army on Pakistan's Border: Policy Implications for the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1986), pp. 44-70.

22. The origins and role of the Royal Indian Navy have been usefully summarized in J. O. Rawson, "The Role of India in Imperial Defense Beyond Indian Frontiers and Home Waters, 1919-39," (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1977), pp. 263-277. See also, D. J. Hastings, *The Royal Indian Navy, 1612-1950* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1988), pp. 79-244 and D. J. E. Collins, *The Royal Indian Navy, 1939-45* (Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, 1964), distributed by Orient Longmans.

23. In fact, the latest force expansion is a consequence of two distinct, but clearly interrelated, apprehensions. First, Indian security managers have finally recognized that the subcontinent's fragility is a strategic fact of life to be countered by both diplomatic and military tools. This fragility, manifested by the vulnerability of the region's nation-states to internal disorder and external penetration, has been

conceptualized in Stephen P. Cohen, "The Strategic Imagery of Elites," in James M. Roberty, *Defense Policy Formulation* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1980), pp. 153–173. Second, the protection of Indian independence and its democratic way of life, clearly a core value in the national consensus, is perceived as being subject to far greater pressure from developments in the extra-regional flanks than was envisaged at Independence, and as a result weakens the security perimeter adjacent to India's political borders. See, Norman D. Palmer, "India's Security Concerns in the 1980s," *International Security Review*, Fall 1981, pp. 307–332.

24. Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Influence, and Weapons Proliferations in South Asia*, Report No. 1722-920184, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State, 20 August 1979, p. 4.

25. *Defence Services Estimates*, 1974–75 to 1987–88, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, New Delhi.

26. Ministry of Defence, Government of India, *Annual Report*, 1983–84, p. 17.

27. Cited in Sojka, p. 11. Also, Ravi Rikhye, "Projecting an Indian Presence in the Indian Ocean," *Vikrant*, May 1979, pp. 32–34.

28. K.C. Khanna, "Indian Navy in Rough Seas," *The Times of India*, 8 November 1983.

29. Maharaj K. Chopra, *India and the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1982), p. 106.

30. The operational imperatives of this strategy from a perspective of force architecture are detailed in Tellis, *Comparative Strategy*.

31. These plans have been detailed in Singh, pp. 21–42. Also, Hastings, pp. 323–332; Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), pp. 116–125, 192–207.

32. The details of the naval expansion appearing here and in the next section have been collated from several sources including conversations with several Indian naval officials. Among the materials appearing in the published record, the following articles appear the most comprehensive: "Indian Navy has wider reach," *The Times of India*, 12 January 1988; "Why a Blue Water Navy," *The Hindu*, 4 May 1988; "Plans to enhance naval fleet," *The Times of India*, 16 April 1988; "India building a blue-water navy," *The Times of India*, 25 May 1988; "A smooth sail for the navy," The Times of India, 15 February 1989.

33. See Ashley J. Tellis, "The Indian Ocean: Changing Strategic Maps, Evolving Naval Balances," *Naval Forces*, v. IX, no. II, 1988, pp. 90–99.

34. Some of the terminology in this framework has been borrowed from that appearing in Catherine M. Kelleher, "Alternative Models for Middle Power Navies," in Geoffrey Till, ed., *The Future of British Seapower* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp. 239–249. Another interesting and more recent effort at modelling naval growth is Michael A. Morris, *Expansion of Third World Navies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

35. R.L. Tahiliani, "Maritime Strategy," *Journal of the United Services Institution of India*, July–September 1981, p. 230.

━━━━━━ ψ ━━━━

If the oceans are part of "the common heritage of all mankind," we may have to face the fact that strategic stability, the kind of military situation where neither side sees an advantage to striking first with its nuclear forces in a political crisis, has to be part of this common heritage.

George H. Quester
Armed Forces & Society
Winter 1987, p. 199