



A Secure Indian Ocean

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Why in News

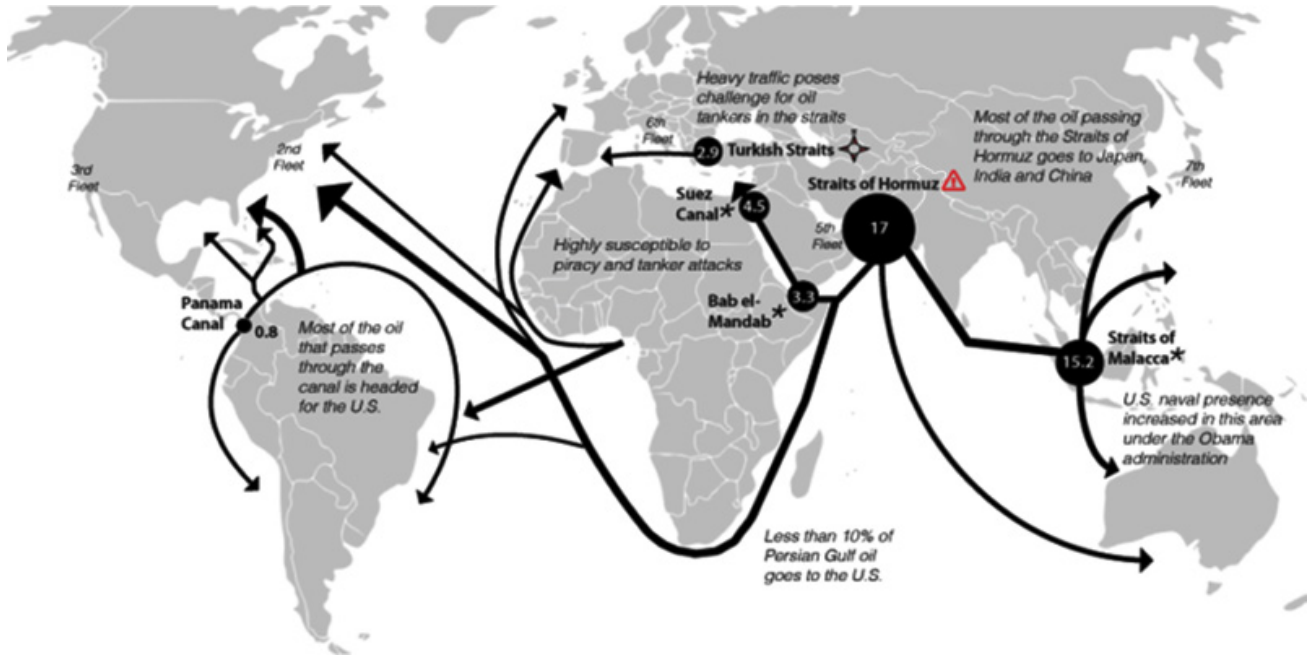
Recently, India has proposed to convene an open debate of the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** on enhancing maritime security.

- The objective of this debate is to **highlight effective international maritime cooperation** to respond holistically to natural and manmade threats to maritime security.
- It also reflects **India's international evolution as a maritime nation.**

Key Points

Importance of Indian Ocean for India:

- **Long Maritime Boundary:** With a coastline of over **7,500 km**, India has a natural interest in enhancing maritime security.
- **Securing Sea lanes of Communication:** In the Indian Ocean, **three major Sea Lanes Of Communication (SLOCS)** play a crucial role in the energy security and economic prosperity:
 - SLOC connecting the **Red Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Bab al-Mandab** (that transports the bulk of Asia's international trade with its major trading partners in Europe and America),
 - SLOC connecting the **Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Hormuz** (transporting the bulk of energy exports to major import destinations like India, **ASEAN**, and East Asia),
 - SLOC connecting the **Indian and Pacific Oceans through the Straits of Malacca** (integral to the smooth flow of trade with ASEAN, East Asia, Russia's Far East and the US).
 - The Indian Ocean region transports **75% of the world's maritime trade and 50% of daily global oil consumption.**



India's Maritime Initiatives:

- **Disaster Management:** The fallout of the 2004 tsunami, which took a heavy toll on human and natural resources, led to the creation of an **Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System** by the UN in 2005.

Through this, an international network seeks to prevent a recurrence of such devastation.
- **Anti-Piracy Operations:** Faced with the increased threat from piracy originating off the coast of Somalia since 2007 to shipping in the western Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy participated robustly as part of a **UNSC mandated 60-country Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia**.
- **Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) Policy:** India's SAGAR policy is an integrated regional framework, unveiled by **Indian Prime Minister during a visit to Mauritius** in March 2015. The pillars of SAGAR are:
 - India's role as a **net security provider** in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).
 - India would continue to **enhance the maritime security capacities and economic resilience** of friendly countries in IOR.
 - A more integrated and cooperative focus on the future of the IOR, which would enhance the prospects for the **sustainable development** of all countries in the region.
 - The primary responsibility for **peace, stability and prosperity in the IOR would be on those "who live in this region"**.
- **Abiding by the International Law:** India accepted an **United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** tribunal award on the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh.

It envisaged contributing a new impulse to effective international economic cooperation among the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal (**BIMSTEC**).
- **Data Sharing:** Sharing data on threats to commercial shipping is an important component of enhancing maritime security.
 - In this context, India established an **International Fusion Centre (IFC) for the Indian Ocean region** in Gurugram in 2018.
 - IFC is jointly administered by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard.
 - IFC serves the objective of generating Maritime Domain Awareness on safety and security issues.

Way Forward

- **International Cooperation:** Sustaining international cooperation to enhance maritime security requires two supportive frameworks in the policy and operational areas.
 - **Rule-of-law Based Approach:** There is a need to review the operational effectiveness of the UNCLOS.

Especially regarding the enforcement of its provisions on freedom of navigation, the sustainable exploitation of maritime resources, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.
 - **Securing the Sea Lanes of Communication:** Securing SLOCs that traverse the oceans is of central importance to enhancing maritime security.

Thus, the global debate must focus on ensuring equal and unrestricted access to SLOCs by states while resolving differences through peaceful means.
- **Engaging Private Sector:** There is a need for an increasing role of the private sector in the maritime domain, whether it is in shipping, sustainable development through the **Blue Economy**.

Further, the use of the maritime domain can be leveraged to provide the critical submarine fibre-optic cables supporting the **Digital Economy**.
- The ability of the UNSC to respond to the debate by endorsing a multiple stakeholder approach to enhancing maritime security would be a significant outcome, setting a paradigm for upholding “**multi-dimensional**” security in the 21st century.

Source: IE