



## Defence Diplomacy

**For Prelims:** Milan exercise, Brahmos supersonic cruise missile, Arjun MK2, HADR Operations

**For Mains:** Defence Diplomacy and its significance

### Why in News?

Defence Diplomacy is becoming an increasingly popular tool used by countries today to further their national interests.

### What is Defence Diplomacy?

- Defence diplomacy is **broadly understood as military-to-military interactions, activities and policies** to build and maintain national security.
- This **diplomacy includes a more advanced naval engagement, greater military exercises,** and enhanced efforts for defence exports.

### How is India increasing its Defence Diplomacy?

- **SAGAR Initiative:**
  - The unveiling of the [SAGAR \(security and growth for all in the region\)](#) doctrine by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a speech in Mauritius in 2015 which sought to bolster India's commitment and presence in the strategic Indian Ocean Region (IOR) envisaged the active presence of the Indian Navy as playing the role of a potential security provider and security giver.
    - The **Indian Navy is one of the largest navies in the world** and boasts of a potent and lethal naval arsenal of over 120 ships which includes stealth frigates, destroyers, submarines (both conventional and nuclear powered), coastal vessels etc.
    - The Navy has since **2017 played a crucial role in carrying out military diplomacy particularly in the form of promoting a free open and inclusive [Indo-Pacific region](#).**
  - It has, through the plethora of naval exercises such as Milan and Malabar, demonstrated that it is committed not just to the protection of India's own territories and [Exclusive Economic Zone \(EEZ\)](#) but also would quickly come to the aid of its allies and would not desist from playing an offensive role against rivals most notably Pakistan and China.
- **Engagement with Southeast Asia:**
  - A key driver for **India's defence diplomacy has been China's persistent aggressiveness** in the region, particularly in the South China Sea.
  - In recent years, **India has intensified collaboration with many Southeast Asian states.** They, too, are keen to expand their security ties with India to balance China and bolster their maritime security.
    - The [Milan exercise's](#) **expanding size of participants and complexity of drills**

is symbolic of India's expanding defence diplomacy imprint from West to Southeast Asia.

▪ **Defence Exports:**

- **With a target of USD 5 billion for defence exports by 2024**, India has intensified its efforts to sell weapons to Southeast Asia and Africa, where Chinese defence companies dominate.
  - India's intense military diplomacy has been paying off with the **Philippines becoming the first country in the world to procure the [Brahmos supersonic cruise missile batteries](#)** for a deal worth USD375 million.
  - Similarly, Bahrain has evinced interest in buying the new upgraded and more lethal **[Arjun Mark 2 tanks](#)** from India.

▪ **Strengthening the role of Defence attaches located in Indian Embassies:**

- Besides the measures to expand the domestic defence industrial base and boost exports, the government has **strengthened the role of defence attaches located in Indian embassies abroad**.
  - A Defence Attache (DA) is a **member of the armed forces** who serves in an embassy as a representative of his/her country's defence establishment abroad and in this capacity enjoys diplomatic status and immunity.
- The government has allocated them an annual budget of up to USD 50,000 to promote Indian defence equipment in their respective markets.
- Moreover, to reinforce their sales pitch, **the government has cleared multiple 'Made-in-India' equipment**, including the Tejas combat aircraft and Astra missile for export to friendly countries.

▪ **Helping Neighbours:**

- Beyond exports, India has also helped its **immediate neighbours to build their naval capability** by donating and transferring equipment.
- This includes **offshore patrol vessels** to Mauritius (2015), Sri Lanka (2018), Maldives (2019), and Seychelles (2021), as well as two Dornier aircraft to Seychelles (2013 & 2018).
- Although small, with these steps, **India hopes to buttress its role as a 'net security provider' for the region**.

▪ **Humanitarian Assistance:**

- A key element of **being a 'net security provider' is the ability to launch [Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief \(HADR\) operations](#)** in the region.
- For a long, **India has been leading on the HADR operations front**, as seen during the 2004 **[Indian Ocean tsunami](#)**, 2015 **[Nepal earthquake](#)**, and 2020 **floods in Madagascar**.
- Moreover, as extreme weather events in the region increase the propensity for natural disasters, particularly in the Bay of Bengal region, India is coordinating with partner countries to enhance its response mechanism.
- HADR remains an important focus area within the **Quad**, but India has also undertaken initiatives like the **[PANEX-21 exercise](#)** with the **[BIMSTEC \(Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation\)](#)** countries to envisage contingencies for such operations in the backdrop of the pandemic.

▪ **Building Relationships on India's West:**

- Long viewed through the prism of its relations with Pakistan, India has now **crafted a distinct partnership with the West Asian monarchies**.
  - Defence diplomacy has constituted a critical part of this relationship.
- When the **region is witnessing epochal shifts with the [Abraham Accords](#)** and a growing profile of China, India has advanced its security cooperation by focusing on naval engagement.
- For instance, in August 2021, **India conducted back-to-back joint naval exercises** with the United Arab Emirates (Zayed Talwar exercise), Bahrain (Maritime Partnership Exercise), and Saudi Arabia (Al-Mohed Al-Hindi exercise).
- India has been a **net gainer as it conducted back-to-back joint naval exercises** with the UAE (Zayed Talwar exercise), Bahrain (Maritime Partnership Exercise) and Saudi Arabia (Al-Mohed Al-Hindi exercise).
  - Notably, the India-Saudi Arabia exercise was the first joint exercise between the two.

## Way Forward

- With a focus on containing the adverse regional fallout of the unfolding security situation in Afghanistan while simultaneously tackling the growing Chinese maritime assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, **India has increasingly leveraged its defence forces to shape regional diplomacy.**
- These initiatives are **helping India build a sustained cooperative engagement and create a web of partnerships throughout the region.** Sustaining these partnerships will require India to invest more in its naval, expeditionary, and logistic capabilities.
- The **world is currently in a state of flux particularly due to the [Russo-Ukraine war](#)** which has turned the west and the world's attention to the security situation in Europe.
  - While the outcome of the war is the key for India, it is absolutely crucial from the defence perspective.
  - The sinking of the mammoth Moskva and the reverses that Russia suffered in its march towards Kiev showed that India needs to expeditiously expand its defence basket.
- As a result, India is increasingly using indigenous technology for important programs like fighter jets and aircraft carriers.
- But **defence diplomacy is not exclusive to foreign policy.** Hence, instead of pursuing an independent course per se both the foreign and defence policies should work in tandem and should ensure that the national interests of the country are placed first.

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