



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the major challenges for India in framing a credible Maritime Doctrine.

27 May, 2021 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the need for a maritime doctrine.
- Discuss main challenges in India's Maritime Doctrine.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

China's assertiveness in the Indian ocean region, India's engagement with Quad in Indi-pacific region, foreign policy imperative for India to emerge as net security provider in the region, these are factors that point out the need for India to play a more dominant role in the maritime sphere.

This highlights the need for a maritime doctrine, but there are many challenges in the current geo-political scenario.

Body

Challenges in India's Maritime Doctrine

- **Silos Approach in the Indian Ocean:** India's political class has divided the Indian ocean into many sub-regions.
 - In terms of sub-regions, the priority is in the northern (Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal), and eastern Indian Ocean (the Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca).
 - Due to this, the western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa still continue to be in the maritime periphery in India's foreign policy.
- **Lesser Hold on Strategic Chokepoint:** China's first overseas military base was set up in the western Indian Ocean, in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.
 - Russia too recently acquired a base in Sudan, on the Red Sea coast, between the Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandeb — a strategic chokepoint in the Indian Ocean.
 - However, beyond the anti-piracy mission, India's presence and maritime engagements with the African coast have been largely ad hoc.
- **Increasing Chinese Assertiveness:** Through the Maritime Silk Road, China engages with littorals and islands across the Ocean.
 - China has consistently aimed to improve its diplomatic, political, and military engagements in the region from Sri Lanka to Comoros, spanning the Indian Ocean in its entirety.
- **Continental Bias:** India's reorientation toward the maritime domain has not been easy, with generations of foreign and defense service officials focusing and training on continental issues.
 - Further, the Indian Navy is allotted approximately 14% of the defense budget speaks clearly to the defense establishment's priorities.

Conclusion

While this is not to discount India's continental troubles, seen in recent crises such as Doklam and Ladakh, there is a need to understand the importance of maritime geography and its link to India's strategic interests and growing competition in the region.

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