

India's Maritime Diplomacy: SAGAR Policy as Focal Point

Srikar Srivatsa Dahagam

Student, Symbiosis School of Economics, Pune

Abstract:

The paper titled as “*India's maritime diplomacy: SAGAR mission as focal point*” aims to look at the effect that SAGAR mission has on the maritime diplomatic assets of India. The SAGAR mission was a landmark mission which virtually formalised India's maritime diplomatic goals. The paper also defines maritime diplomacy in India's point of time & also explains how maritime diplomacy is extremely important for India's security interests in both short & long run.

The paper adopts a pragmatic, optimistic view about India's neighbourhood. The paper also has carried out a Strength-Limitations-Opportunity-Suggestion Analysis of SAGAR policy.

Keywords: SAGAR, Maritime diplomacy, India, Blue Economy, Multilateralism

Introduction:

Maritime diplomacy is the way of managing of one's diplomatic alliances using the ocean assets of a country. The thought of maritime diplomacy is not new to India however, it got a new way of thinking when the SAGAR mission abbreviated for the full form Security & Growth for All in Region was launched by the PM Narendra Modi in 2015 in an international level meet where India was ably represented.

This study analyses the SAGAR policy through a multi-pronged lens of maritime diplomacy as well as from the military lens and the economic lens of a country. The study has meticulously forecasted the impact of SAGAR scheme on securing India's maritime interests in the long run.

The findings of this study indicate that India must strive to increase its cooperation in the Indian ocean region at the same time create a diplomatic streamlining of the maritime diplomacy in the multilateral organizations of which India is a very important member, so as to improve India's strategic leverage & Economic leverage in its immediate neighbourhood which would help India achieve the status of Vishwaguru which every proud Indian has always dreamt of.

SAGAR mission

In 2015, there were 2 major policies that were started in India which have had considerable impact on the people of India. One of Make In India scheme which changed the direction of Indian economy & the other was SAGAR mission which has ushered in a new era in India's maritime diplomacy. SAGAR is very important for securing India's national interest in the Indian Ocean region and ensuring the development of blue economy of India which will play a vital role in the future.

SAGAR mission stands for Security And Growth for All in Region is India's policy or doctrine for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region(IOR), this was first proposed by Shri Narendra Modi in 2015.(BYJUS IAS)

SAGAR initiative can be defined in the following terms:

1. Security: Enhancement of coastal security that land & maritime territories can be safeguarded with relative ease.
2. Capacity Building: During economic & security cooperation for smooth facilitation of economic trade & maritime security.
3. Collective Action: Promoting collective action to deal with natural disasters & maritime threats like piracy, terrorism & emergent non state actors.
4. Sustainable development: Works towards sustainable development through balanced development.
5. Maritime engagement: Engaging with countries beyond our shores with the aim of greater trust building & promoting respect for maritime rules, norms & peaceful dispute resolution.

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi signalled the world through his speech in Mauritius about India's renewed & reinvigorated policy towards Indian Ocean. During the round of visit he visited strategically important leaders of Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius & Seychelles. The speech by PM Narendra Modi was considered as a landmark in the India's maritime diplomacy mission. This is envisaged to be done by pursuing bilateral diplomatic track along with military might of India combined by the economic diplomacy of India. Many experts believe that the step by the current dispensation about SAGAR is a step in the right direction. Blue Economy is also an indispensable part of the SAGAR scheme recently introduced. Some scholars tend to study the political aim & practice of India's maritime diplomacy, which is also a part of the extension of Act East policy of the Indian administration. This is the changing contours of India's diplomatic policy which is also including maritime strategy as a part of it. (Journal of Strategic Security)

SAGAR is an extension of Act East policy, further engaging with ASEAN countries, further engaging with QUAD, BIMSTEC.

The SAGAR mission has the very important blue economy for whose promotion the government of India has taken multiple steps for its strengthening in the last few years like deep water mission which will give India's security infrastructure a strong economic edge in the Indian ocean region.

2.2.2: The blue economy

The concept of blue economy was started by Gunter Pauli in 2010 book- **The Blue economy: 10 years, 100 innovations & 100 million jobs**. It is defined by the World Bank as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihood & jobs & ocean health ecosystem. It is referred to as a marine economy in the literature, the concept is at a nascent stage & is yet to be encapsulated in a comprehensive definition from an operational perspective. It is the decoupling of socio-economic development from environmental degradation. (ORF)

Ocean economy or blue economy also means that the ocean resources are used as inputs to virtually start the production process. It is in this high backdrop It is sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods & jobs, and, ocean ecosystem health. Basics of ocean economy also include facets like ports-shipment management, marine ICT.

Blue economy emphasizes on integration of development of ocean economy with social inclusion, environment sustainability, combined with innovative business models.

It encompasses-

- Renewable energy: Sustainable marine energy can play a vital role in socio-economic development.
- Fisheries: Sustainable fisheries can generate more revenue, more fish & help restore fish stocks.
- Maritime transport: Over 80% of goods are transported using sea.

- Tourism: Ocean & climate tourism can bring jobs & Economic growth.
- Climate change: Oceans are an important carbon sink (blue carbon) & help mitigate climate change.
- Waste management: Better waste management on land can help oceans recover.

It goes without saying that the blue marine economy of nations like Australia contribute up to 3.6% of their nation's GDP in 2004 which has given them a very big strategic leverage in the Pacific ocean with nations like Tuvalu, Fiji Islands, Seychelles to the extent that the Australian government is responsible for the existence of these nations as has been exemplified by the speeches of the Tuvalu president who on multiple times has said that his nation's existence depends on Australia's funds & its commitment towards global warming. (UN)

The New Zealand which enjoys a per capita income of 45,400PPP dollars has the blue economy contributing almost 5% of its economy in 2016.

Moreover, who can deny the importance of the ocean with respect to the trade which has helped the nations to develop its resources over a period of time. Multiple issues in the world have been started to trade wars which have also led to the currency wars.

SAGAR is successfully blending Green Theory along with cooperation focused in Maldives, ASEAN countries.

2.2.3: Steps taken by GoI to improve blue economy:

1. Deep blue mission: The union government in budget 2021 announced the deep blue ocean mission to harness & develop technologies to harness the living & non-living resources from deep oceans. (IAS)
2. India-Norway Task force on blue economy: It seeks on strengthening bilateral diplomacy, it intends to manage the ocean resources in an eco-friendly manner.
3. SAGARMALA: It seeks to develop smart ports & integrate modern technologies for development of ports which will in turn develop India's maritime economy.
4. National Fisheries policy: Different support schemes for fishermen is provided under the scheme like PM-Matsya Sampada Yojana.

3. Maritime diplomacy

Maritime diplomacy is the way of managing one's economic relations using oceanic waters as a source for major activities, primarily taking using Navy, coast guard, marine policies for securing of national interest. (Zhao)

Maritime diplomacy is the form of diplomacy which is primarily focused on those countries surrounded with oceans if we go according to the simplistic definition of a layman, however maritime diplomacy is more deep rooted and is operational since time immemorial in every nations. Maritime diplomacy is not limited to naval diplomacy or diplomacy used by Navies, it also implies diplomacy carried out using coast guards of nations, engagements at levels of shipping companies, engagement at level of civilian merchant navy & engagements at the level of diplomats with all those countries who depend upon maritime routes for securing their national interest in the long run. It can be used both as a soft power & hard power tool, India is one of the best examples of using maritime diplomacy as a soft power tool which has extended multiple credit lines to the debt ridden Sri Lanka during the economic crisis it faced recently along with getting important port deals in the nation of Madagascar, it is also used as a tool for hard power whose use has been done most prominently by China by successfully completing port acquisition in strategically located nations like Sri Lanka where it bought the important Hambantota Port which is a further

commitment of the Chinese deep state towards strengthening its maritime resources in Indian Ocean Region. (Firstpost)

Hence, simply put maritime diplomacy is not only limited to the oceanic countries its related with all those countries who depend on the maritime routes for the securing of their national interest, economic relations & cultural issues. The maritime diplomacy of any country evolves over time with changing geopolitical needs & national interest goals. (Brittanica)

The use of such diplomacy can be interesting not just for the parochial effects of any activity, but because any event can reflect changes in the international order, while acting as an excellent gauge for severity & existence of international tension. Further, maritime diplomacy can act as a valve through which any tension can be released without resort to conflict. Written in an accessible but authoritative style, this book describes the continued use of coercion outside of war by navies, while also situating it more clearly within the various roles and effects that maritime forces have on the national interests of any nation. Maritime boundaries of a nation is till 22 nautical miles after the last sea city which falls under the economic exclusive zone where all kinds of economic activities are permitted

About 97% of the earth is made up of oceans, more than 65% of world trade takes places through the maritime routes, almost 91% of the world's population lives in countries enjoying a maritime boundary, most of the resources of the world are concentrated in the seas/oceans which gives a country enormous political leverage coupled with economics in the world, more than 120 countries in the world share maritime boundaries with each other, this itself is a testimony of the importance of maritime diplomacy which implies if one nation controls the maritime routes it will control then it can control the trade routes which are imperative for survival for other nations along with a full control over the survival instincts of people hence placing that country in a position of advantage with respect to others which it can exploit either positively or negatively. Hence securing maritime boundaries for a nation is extremely important for a nation's economic survival, the securing can be done through many means like economic measures, security measures & diplomacy being the prime source of securing maritime interests.

The best example of explaining this phenomenon is the security deal of China with the Solomon islands which is strategically located near the lower USA border, lies in Pacific & gives China an enormous opportunity to gain a strategic stronghold in the immediate neighbourhood of the Western nations along with access to oil-petroleum mines, fisheries reserves which it will use to control the world's economy. (Sengupta, India -China)

There are 4 major types of maritime diplomacy: cooperative maritime diplomacy, persuasive maritime diplomacy, coercive maritime diplomacy. Coercive maritime diplomacy implies that the nation directly looks at war as an option. Persuasive maritime diplomacy implies creating an artificial pressure either externally or internally, in military circles this technique is called as defensive offence & cooperative means economic cooperation, defense cooperation to just name a few.

India in the short run faces multiple challenges in its maritime border for which SAGAR can be a gamechanger for securing India's national interests:

3.1.1: SAGAR & its benefits for India's maritime diplomacy

Briefly put SAGAR scheme brings a lot of benefits to India's maritime diplomacy, which will strengthen India's position in the maritime sector in the following ways:

1. More focus given to maritime security which will lead to India adopt a counterattacking stance against China's string of pearls policy, in fact India already has a Diamond Necklace policy against China which can be very successfully.
2. Promotion of Blue economy which will give India more leverage In the Indian Ocean region which will impact India's maritime diplomacy in the positive way. As we have studied that economic security is very important for diplomacy of a nation. (IIGL)
3. It will also boost India's trade policies.
4. Boost in India's soft power.
5. India also has taken proactive steps in engaging with ASEAN, BIMSTEC countries in last 8 years which is definitely a plus point in India's favor.

3.1.2: Strengths of India in SAGAR mission

- Geographical location: India is surrounded with 7 nations along with a direct access to the palk strait and the important Indo-Pacific region which acts as a plus point for India.
- Naval strength: Indian Navy is the fourth largest navy in the world along with an impressive number of nuclear submarines, coordination with other countries.
- Blue economy: The Government of India is taking different approaches which will help India's development of blue economy. The islands of Lakshadweep & Andaman Nicobar Islands also present strategically importance to blue economy.
- Confidence with other island nations: India's engagement with the island nations of Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Seychelles, Fiji Islands is no less than a model state. India has invested heavily in the infrastructure projects of Maldives along with the generous loans extended for the purpose of sustainable development, the people of Maldives still remember the Operation Cactus which India did to save Maldives democracy in the year of 1989. (Times of India, NMF, Full Spectrum book). The domestic companies of these nations gain a direct access to the Indian markets.
- SAGAR will also boost India-Japan relations in the long run which has already started to happen, with the signing of ACSA, the trade from Japan to India has grown from 861 billion Yens to almost 1423 billion yens meaning Japan is a very important partner in India's foreign policy.

3.1.3: Limitations of SAGAR Mission in Maritime Diplomacy:

- Lack of synergy with other institutions in the Asian regions like ASEAN, ADB, BRICS, BIMSTEC etc.
- Lack of policy mention related to hard power like navy.
- India lacks a strong blue economy policy which is very required in this field of maritime diplomacy.

4. Ways ahead

SAGAR scheme has some very obvious limitations however it can be overcome if strategic increments are done in the commitment towards SAGAR mission which is mainly focused on cooperative maritime diplomacy.

Some of the suggestions that can be implemented:

- Greater synergy with BIMSTEC, ASEAN+1 type forums where India can streamline its maritime diplomacy goals.
- Converting Lakshadweep & Andaman-Nicobar Islands into model islands which can attract lot of tourism, private industries related to fisheries.
- Empowering Nuclear submarines in the Indian Navy.

5. Conclusion

It can be safely concluded that SAGAR as a mission is quite new whose success depends upon multiple geopolitical factors which will change over time however it has brought in a new freshness of thinking in the maritime diplomacy which was being neglected by the Indian establishment from a very long period of time. The SAGAR mission though has some weaknesses but as Indian economy grows & as the nation moves ahead with firm resolutions on targets for next 25 years in the period of Amritkaal, SAGAR may just prove to be India's gamechanger policy in the field of foreign affairs.

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