

Key Takeaways

4th International Relations Conference

India and the Indian Ocean: Sustainability, Security and Development

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SYMBIOSIS SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Foreword

This publication provides key takeaways that emerged from the deliberations that took place during the International Relations Conference 2016 titled “India and the Indian Ocean: Sustainability, Security and Development” which was organized by the Symbiosis School of International Studies on 18-19 December 2016.

These insights, it is hoped, would contribute to the ongoing discourse, both in India and the Indian Ocean Region as a whole, on the theme of the conference. We also trust that this publication could serve as a set of useful suggestions for developing future plans of action by the various stakeholders- government, academia, NGOs and the corporate sector- with regard to key elements of this important area of India's foreign policy.

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Introduction

The International Relations Conference 2016 titled “India and the Indian Ocean: Sustainability, Security and Development” was organized by the Symbiosis School of International Studies on 18-19 December 2016 at the Symbiosis International University, Pune.

The emerging dynamics of international diplomacy has put the spotlight on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The doyen of Indian maritime strategy Mr. KM Panikkar stressed on the need to “assess the importance of the Indian Ocean countries and envision a grouping of countries bordering the Indian Ocean that could help one another in tackling common challenges.

Movement across the Indian Ocean is both facilitated and potentially constrained by several key choke points. The Indian Ocean acts as a vital channel for Western military supplies and the Persian Gulf hydrocarbon resources. Most international commerce flows through this route.

Today, new technologies are opening frontiers of marine resource development from bio-prospecting to mining of seabed mineral resources. The sea also offers vast potential for renewable “blue energy” production from wind, wave, tidal, thermal and biomass sources. The volatile socio-political environment in the region and the rise of India and China as major powers has made this an area of crucial geo-strategic

importance. High rates of population growth and youth unemployment coupled with extremism and weak governance add to instability and migration issues.

There are multifarious challenges as well as opportunities facing the IOR, stemming from the interests of the regional and extra regional players. The IOR which is presently a pivot for contemporary geopolitics and geo-economics is at the top of India's foreign policy priorities.

Inaugural Session

1. This conference is a platform to push for *Vichar Manthan* on issues relevant to India and Indian Ocean Region (IOR). *Vichar Manthan* i.e. churning of thoughts is necessary to promote an exchange of thoughts, ideas and the strategies.
2. The focus should be on Indo-Pacific movement of trade and hydrocarbons; and security perspectives (traditional and non-traditional). The role of the Indian navy acquires salience in the region for the maintenance of maritime security and achievement of economic progress.
3. There is a need to focus on harnessing the blue economy along with fisheries, renewable energy, aquaculture, seabed exploration, maritime biology, and tourism.
4. The focus of foreign policy should not be limited to national interests and need to project power but also include aspects on freedom of navigation and maritime security.
5. Defence cooperation, bilateral strategic relations among countries of the region, trade, maritime and human security, and climate change issues in the Indian Ocean need close study and analysis.

Session 1: Trade, Investment and Economic Growth

1. The shift of global economic gravity towards Asia over the past decade has resulted in significant growth for regional and global trade as well as cross-border investment flows in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) which experiences a high degree of trade complementarity among the economies. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) provides a platform to facilitate economic cooperation among member states.
2. IORA has been the leading regional organization in spearheading economic progress in IOR. Its association with G7 nations and G20 economies has helped the organization to play an important role.
3. IORA is organising its first ever summit in Jakarta in March 2017. This summit could help in expediting the process of closer economic cooperation among IOR countries.
4. PM Modi has enunciated a policy called SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) during his visit to Mauritius in 2015. The policy is specifically focused on the IOR. IORA is also helping to shape the economic aspect of the SAGAR.
5. There is a need for understanding the climate change issue from the unique Indian Ocean perspective. Academic groups in the IOR can usefully contribute towards this end.
6. Ecological economics have largely focused on the terrestrial area; it is time to move the focus to oceans too. Ecological economics refers to a field of academic research that aims to address the interdependence

and coevolution of human economies and natural ecosystems over time and space. Ecological Economics is especially essential for building a sustainable future in IOR

7. The Bay of Bengal is an important region for Bangladesh and presents an enormous opportunity for India to collaborate with Bangladesh in the areas of fisheries, coastal forests, seabed mining and education.

Session 2: Defence and Security

1. Maritime sea routes remain the essential highways for trade. Given the location of the Indian Ocean, freedom of navigation and that of the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) in Indian Ocean is vital for the sustenance and progress of the global economy.
2. Creating ability within India to promote collective security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is the aim that needs to be worked on. This could lead to strengthening India's capability as the net security provider in the IOR.
3. Regional engagement should become the priority agenda and there should be a shift from insular policy to regional policy formation.
4. There is a growing need for good connectivity in the region. Developing people to people exchanges and harnessing technology to bring people together should be a mutual goal for the IOR countries.

Session 3: Civilizational linkages and soft power diplomacy

1. There has always been a substantial movement of diaspora among the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries as the result of which the region has been integrated – economically, politically and culturally since time immemorial. Despite close civilizational linkages for thousands of years, there are however still many gaps to be bridged such as the lack of mutual knowledge and understanding. The IOR thus needs a “geocivilizational” level of analysis.
2. The IOR shares a resilient cultural ethos that is structured on these past exchanges. India should use its culture as leverage –as soft power – and strengthen diplomacy through tourism.
3. Saudi Arabia and Iran are two very important countries in the region. India, starting from a Track II level and moving towards Track I, could be involved in leading a diplomatic initiative to promote confidence building between Iran and Saudi Arabia.
4. Efforts should be made in India to establish and sponsor more professorships of Indian chairs in foreign and especially IOR countries and also organize festivals which will project India's soft power even further.
5. Strong educational linkages such as an Indian Ocean University (IOU) among IOR countries will go a long way in achieving common objectives and interests. It is thus essential to sensitize universities and make education a bigger priority in foreign policy. Educational diplomacy is thus a key to propagating our soft power.
6. We should use our common civilizational linkages to form economic linkages which in turn will lead to strategic linkages.

Session 4: Development Cooperation

1. There is a growing need for better coordination and efficiency at national and regional levels in government for effective maritime security, customs, and administration.
2. The blue economy as a concept can open up a new era of partnerships between countries of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for sustainable growth.
3. The IOR is a significant area for not only Asian countries but has growing significance in the global trade sector as well.
4. Cooperation and development are effective tools in India's soft diplomacy in the geo-economics of the IOR and need to be given due importance.
5. An investment protection framework needs to be implemented in order to shield projects from political disorder and violence in countries of the IOR.
6. There are good opportunities for global investors but the countries in IOR have to target policy reforms to ensure predictability for investors.

Session 5: Blue Economy

1. Conservation of oceans and sustainable use of its resources must be taken seriously and collectively implemented at the international, national, regional and local level.
2. Marine industries such as shipping, ports construction, aquaculture, fishing, seabed mining, offshore oil extraction and tourism need to be promoted to take advantage of the enormous potential offered by the blue economy.
3. Oceanic energy is a vast and rich field that must be thoroughly researched as it could aid in generating energy through renewable sources like tidal energy, wave energy, thermal energy etc.
4. Issues of terrorism, piracy, human trafficking, drug trafficking, environmental degradation and negative effects of climate change need to be simultaneously tackled to avoid losses in the blue economy sector.
5. A common set of measures needs to be employed by countries and organizations used to estimate the size and potential of blue economies of nations all over the world.
6. Development of ports and sea routes must be promoted as they have high economic benefits in terms of trade. The coastal areas and maritime industry will be the future engines of growth and the Indian government has thus taken deliberate initiative like the Sagar Mala project to promote ports.

7. Community ownership of the blue economy at regional levels must be promoted to encourage preservation of small-scale industries.
8. Environmental conditions and shared environment stresses must be seen as challenges to arrive at common resolutions and mutually beneficial partnerships with the parties involved, instead as dividing factors.
9. Sustainable fishing measures must be employed by governments in order to avoid overfishing and look after the sustenance and livelihoods of traditional farmers.



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