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The Changes and Implications of Indian Maritime Diplomacy Policy during Modi Administration

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Abstract

During Modi administration, India has attached more importance on maritime diplomacy. With Act East policy, India starts to focus more on Indo-Pacific area and tries to build closer relation with Southeast Asian states. Also, India pays more attention on small island states in South Asia, such as Sri Lanka and Maldives. In this research, I will base on the previous studies about maritime diplomacy and conclude the changes of Indian maritime diplomacy during Modi administration. Economic interdependence makes it difficult to ignore neighbouring states' impact on energy transportation and regional cooperation. Also, non-traditional maritime security problems are increasing, and it is extremely important for littoral states to cooperate to fight against piracy and maritime terrorism. Modi chooses to adopt co-operative maritime diplomacy policy which is beneficial for regional development and the stability of regional order.

Keywords: Maritime Diplomacy, Neo-liberalism, Regional Cooperation; Modi Administration

Introduction

This research seeks to analyse the changes and implications of Indian maritime diplomacy policy during Modi Administration. Maritime diplomacy is the management of international relations through the maritime domain. The function of maritime diplomacy can also be provided by multilateral cooperation with the management of international institutions. With the Act East policy, Modi focuses more on bilateral and multilateral maritime cooperation in Asia Pacific area, including East Asia and Southeast Asia. By using the theory of neo-liberalism, it is easier to understand Indian maritime diplomacy policy and the tenets of neoliberalism can explain the drives of the changing policy. Also, it explores the influence of the policy on regional order and maritime security, especially in Indo-Pacific region.

The next section is literature review. From various theoretical perspectives, there are different factors that can change Indian maritime diplomatic policy. However, most of them focus on geopolitical strategy and zero-sum game. By using the realism, they ignore the essence of maritime diplomacy and the impact of economic interdependence, which is an important aspect of Indian maritime diplomacy during Modi administration. The aim of this research is to provide a new theoretical aspect of the study of Indian maritime security. From the perspectives of Indian leaders, initial engagement with the IOR states also provides a credible springboard for cooperative projects and an increased Indian presence in the IOR. With more ongoing cooperation operations,

Indian maritime diplomacy policy can further validate Indian centrality in Indo-Pacific strategic affairs (Gamage, 2017).

The methodology section outlines the dissertation's approach to analyse Indian maritime diplomacy during Modi administration. This research tries to use causal analysis to find the factors that can determine the changes of Indian maritime diplomacy policy. The analysis of the research is divided into two main parts, which is central to answering all the research questions. One part is about the context of Indian maritime diplomacy, including the changes and implementation of maritime diplomacy during Modi administration. The other part is about the subtext of Indian maritime diplomacy and analysing the drives of the changes using neo-liberalism.

Literature Review

Some scholars give their own definition of maritime diplomacy and analyse the motives of maritime diplomacy. Christian Le Mière (2014) redefines maritime diplomacy in 21st century. Maritime diplomacy encompasses a wide range of activities, from co-operative measures such as port visits, cooperative maritime exercises and humanitarian assistance to persuasive deployment and coercion. There are mainly three forms of maritime diplomacy, including gunboat diplomacy, co-operative maritime diplomacy and persuasive maritime diplomacy. Gunboat diplomacy seems to be a cruel term used by powerful states to veil their bullying in an era with military inequality and insufficient international law (Le Mière, 2014). As its name shows, co-operative maritime diplomacy is a more friendly term. It uses co-option rather than coercion and it can attract others to a point of view or singular policy. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions are both seen as essential parts of co-operative diplomacy, which are supported by Indian maritime diplomacy. About persuasive maritime diplomacy, this concept is also used to explain naval activities and "it sits in a subtle sliver of space between co-operative maritime diplomacy and coercive maritime diplomacy" (Le Mière, 2014). Its aim can be complicated by the fact that it aims neither to deter nor compel. Persuasive maritime diplomacy is not about targeting a specific state and competing with others.

Some scholars try to use the definition and factors of maritime diplomacy to explain states' behaviour. For instance, Rayang Amiriyanti (2017) uses neorealism and bilateralism theory to explain how China and India collaborate to transform their common interests to maritime diplomacy. Angela Merici (2017) explains the goals and definition of cooperative maritime diplomacy and applies the theory of competitive control on cooperative maritime diplomacy of United States of America towards piracy. J. J. Widen (2011) explains the differences between gun boat diplomacy and other forms of maritime diplomacy.

About Indian maritime diplomacy, G. Padmaja (2015) believes that Indian maritime diplomacy policy is a strategic opportunity. Many scholars are interested in the factors that make India change its maritime strategy and pay more importance on maritime diplomacy. Gurpreet S Khurana (2017) aims to analyse India's maritime security strategy and understands it from four aspects, including historical and societal factors, maritime geography, political geography and the China factor. Shiv Shankar Menon (2010) explains maritime imperatives in Indian foreign policy and how they are reflected in the policy. Some focus more on the challenges that Indian maritime policy is facing with. Cdr. P K Ghosh (2004) analyses maritime security challenges in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and he provides some potential respond strategies. Nevertheless, some commentators would argue that the rise of India and China and their deployment of naval power in the Indian Ocean constitute the most important aspect of 21st century maritime security developments in the IOR (Sticklor, 2012). Energy transportation is extremely important for China's economy development and it is the same for India. With India's economic growth, India's navy is also growing to ensure the safety of the SLOCs (Kabir & Ahmad, 2015).

There are some scholars who are interested in the maritime security issues and the implications of maritime policy of India. For instance, Jha (2020) studies about India's policy towards South Pacific, and it mentions that South Pacific has three major objectives catering to its Act East policy. Also, Scott (2007) researches about strategic imperatives of India as an emerging player in the Pacific Asia. Prabhakar and Lawrence (2009) analyse

from an Indian perspective about the maritime security triangulation of ASEAN-Australia-India. Jivanta Schöttli (2019) argues that India is slow to deliver on the promises of maritime diplomacy, and he studies about the frame that SAGAR has set for Indian ocean policy. Some scholars tend to study about the political aim and practice of Indian maritime strategy and maritime diplomacy. Rehman (2017) provides a deeper understanding of the context of India's naval rise and its military strategy. Collin (2013) aims to examine the dynamics of ASEAN-Indian defense cooperation in the naval sphere, using the case studies of Singapore and Vietnam. Moreover, Mishra (2013) analyzes India's maritime diplomacy in Southeast Asia with the assessment of the INS Sudarshini expedition. However, few of them discuss from the aspect of maritime diplomacy and its impact on regional order.

Some used the theory of liberalism to analyse the economic integration and the free trade agreement between India and ASEAN countries (Lee, 2007; Babu, 2013). Ajaya Kumar Das (2013) lists a timeline about India's defense-related agreements with ASEAN States. Khan (2010) discusses major issues of India-ASEAN cooperation and maritime concerns, such as multilateral and bilateral strategies and non-conventional security concerns' impact on China. Mohan (2013) believes that Southeast Asia has reached the inflection point in its security politics and he studies about the security cooperation between India and Southeast Asia. David Brewster (2013) studies about Indian defense strategy and the India-ASEAN relationship, and he uses the threat perception theory to explain the Sino-Indian rivalry has an influence on India-ASEAN relationship. Theva and Mukherji (2015) try to find India's geo-political orientation and have a critical historical analysis of the trajectory of geo-political and economic relations between India and Singapore. Above all, lots of scholars focus on maritime strategy and maritime security, but there is a lack of study about Indian maritime diplomacy.

Research Design and Research Method

To get a better understanding of the drives of Indian maritime diplomacy policy, I believe it is crucial to begin with neo-liberalism theory. Neo-liberalists believe that international institutions can facilitate bilateral and multilateral trade, and states will be motivated to work together. Keohane (1984) mentions that states adjust their behaviour to preferences of others to achieve cooperation. To achieve their common interests, states need to spend a great deal of time to negotiate with others to understand their interests and find ways to achieve their goals. States with disagreement can still cooperate with the regulation of international institutions and their common interests. To obtain a specific objective in cooperation, states have created international regimes and institutional arrangements (Krasner, 1983).

Interdependence makes states' behaviour and interests entwined and breaking this relation may lead to undesirable outcomes. It also promotes international cooperation and gives more meaning of international institutions. In this case, maritime cooperation can help India achieve their interests in maritime strategy and have more influence in Indo-Pacific region. Also, neoliberalism criticizes the statement of hegemonic stability and argues that interdependence provides a strategic incentive for international cooperation (Keohane, 1984). Some states may become defectors or free riders, and this possibility makes states afraid of cooperating with others. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore (2004) point out that institutional staff must oversee their daily activities and tasks, but states do not need to. They have to transform broad mandates into workable procedures and then "leaders and policy makers can hold meetings to exchange ideas, which allows them to know others' preferences and discover their common interests". Therefore, one of the barriers of international institutions is the bureaucratic pathologies.

This research applies a qualitative research design and a case study. The method used in this research is based on the elaboration of some causal-process observations. Causal analysis seeks to provide insight into the relationships among the explanatory variables and can make deep inferences. The case of BIMSTEC can offer close analysis and deep inspection of Indian maritime diplomacy in these years. It is also easier to observe the causal mechanism in this case. The use of neo-liberalism can explain the logic of changing Indian maritime diplomacy policy during Modi administration. By combining official data and neo-liberalism, this dissertation hopes to provide a new way of understanding Indian maritime diplomacy and the regional order in IOR.

The Changes of Indian Maritime Diplomacy During Modi Administration

In 2014, Prime Minister Modi announced the “Act East” policy to replace the former “Look East” policy. Also, in 2017, India published its new maritime strategy and changed some of its prioritized strategic areas. This also means that Indian maritime diplomacy focuses more on Indo-Pacific area rather than only prioritize Indian Ocean. Also, India revitalizes the relations with Southeast Asian states and some small island states. At the political level, Indian Navy undertakes bilateral visits with littoral states at the highest level. The security relations and defence content in these relationships have deepened and maritime issues are interwoven into these issues. Moreover, India focuses more on maritime diplomacy in multilateral organizations and aims for a collaborative and cooperative approach in the maritime domain. It is engaged with regional mechanisms such as IORA and BIMSTEC, which deal with maritime issues as part of a broader set of issues. Maritime safety and security are put on the first place. At the cultural level, the “Spice Route Project” and “Project Mausam” have been initiated where the focus is on maritime linkages and the shared maritime history (Padmaja, 2015).

First about the priority of Indian maritime diplomacy, the Indian Ocean is regarded as the backyard of India and of extreme strategic importance. As the third largest ocean in the world, Indian Ocean is the main area of maritime transportation and it occupies approximately 20 percent of the sea surface on earth. It is considered to have great geopolitical importance for littoral states. In addition, the Indian Ocean is both facilitated and potentially constrained by chokepoints. The seven key chokepoints in the IOR are the Mozambique Channel, the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el Mandeb, the Suez Canal, the Malacca Straits, the Sunda Strait and the Lombok Strait (Sticklor, 2012). There are many states that depend on these choke points for trade and energy. Modi has put the importance of IOR in the highest level and tries to discuss broader issues with littoral states.

Another landmark change of Indian maritime diplomacy is the announce of new maritime security strategy, which can guide the practice of Indian maritime diplomacy policy. In October 2015, Indian Navy promulgated India’s maritime security strategy which had some essential changes compared with the case in 2007. The Indian Navy has not been attached importance on and there was not enough financial fund for the renew of maritime military forces, compared with other Indian armies. However, during Modi administration, Indian Navy is regarded as a much more essential part in national defence, compared with the case in history. Indian Navy is becoming more active in developing security relationships with other states and enhancing navy to navy communication as well. Given that the Indian Ocean is an enclosed sea, the Indian Navy has given more focus to neighbouring states and the choke points compared with the case in history. The main choke points are at entrances to the ocean around southern Africa, such as the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok straits (Brewster, 2010). Furthermore, Prime Minister Modi asserted that the highest priority is the modernization of defence forces and developing strategic defence relations, because lots of Indian naval equipment is old and exported from other countries. Indian Navy is also involved in many military activities, such as MILAN exercise with other Asian Navies (Samaranayake, 2014). In conclusion, India is willing to cooperate with littoral states and international institutions for the safety and stability of the Indian Ocean.

India and other littoral states engaged in wide-ranging discussions on a variety of topics and had made some progress in several fields. They share valuable insights on various subjects including: the implications of maritime terrorists and ongoing piracy’s attack to commercial shipping throughout the IOR; the exploitation and development of the IOR’s vast and scarce wealth of maritime resource; and the governance capacity of regional institutions to respond effectively to policy challenges and cope with security threats currently facing the IOR (Sticklor, 2012). The projection of naval and air forces in IOR waters by both regional and extra-regional powers is also essential for Indian maritime security. Stakeholders include great powers and small island states, and their cooperative naval activities can have great influence on the attendant maritime security and diplomatic impacts can reach beyond this region.

Neoliberalism concurs with structural realism that international cooperation is difficult to obtain in anarchic international environment. It argues that states can find their common ground to cooperate. National interests of different states cannot be the same but usually there are something in common. International cooperation is

about ensuring collective interests. When it comes to the national interests of India, more than 77 percent of India's external trade by value is maritime transit through the Indian Ocean (Roy, 2013). Clearly, a secure maritime environment is essential for the pursuit of economic development (MOD, 2017). As a result, India regards the Indian Ocean as its backyard with great strategic importance.

With its growing economy and huge domestic demand of energy, it is important for India to build a strong navy and have more cooperative patrols with littoral countries to protect their trade. The prioritized areas in Indo-Pacific region for India include the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean (Indian Navy, 2015). India believes that it plays the role of a security provider for small states in Indian Ocean, and providing a stable maritime environment is for the interests of all neighbouring states. Besides, Modi has the aim to develop a "blue economy" and utilize the ocean resources better. Blue economy is not only about maritime resources but also about maritime infrastructure building. This can foster cooperation with neighbouring countries, and it can be seen as an alternative project to China's maritime silk road (Saint-Mezard, 2016). Moreover, marine life arguably offers more economic value than the mineral resources. Indian Ocean countries such as Bangladesh and Indonesia account for a significant proportion of world fisheries. Some scholars argue that India has the ambition of taking a dominant role in IOR and cooperation is for gaining more geopolitical interests (Agnihotri, 2014). It is undeniable that Indian Ocean Region is like an arena for great powers. There is still lots of room for cooperation and maritime diplomacy can be the way to reduce conflicts.

For small littoral countries, this is also an opportunity for their internal development. This strategic opportunity is pushing these countries to increase connectivity and modernize their infrastructures. After Modi became the Prime Minister, India has enhanced defence relationship with many island states in South Asia, such as Sri Lanka and Maldives. India and Sri Lanka enjoy a strong investment and trade relationship as well. The latter is India's largest trading partner in South Asia and Colombo cooperates with India on disaster-relief and infrastructure building. Also, Modi visited the three nearest Indian Ocean neighbours of Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka (Padmaja, 2015). The emphasis on small littoral states is different from Indian maritime diplomacy in history.

The Drives of the Changes of Indian Maritime Diplomacy Policy in Neo-liberalism

For centuries past, the Indian Ocean connected people with the rest of the world and was primarily an international through-route. Its international status is being noticed by the world. For India, the international environment has changed in these years and the India Ocean region is now facing a more complex challenge. Also, regional and extra-regional players are eager to focus increasing attention on institutionalism and Indian Ocean issues within a complex geopolitical and geo-economic framework where foreign powers (such as China and US) and local actors' strategic interests and objectives inextricably intermingle. India has adopted cooperative maritime diplomacy policy which focus more on cooperation, compared with coercive maritime diplomacy. India and other states have common interests and focus on sketching the emerging socio-economic, geopolitical, security, commercial, marine resource and environmental trends that will shape the region in the coming decades.

Economic interdependence is an important tenant of neo-liberalism, which explains why states are willing to cooperate to gain their common interests. Also, it is one of the drivers of Indian maritime diplomacy during Modi administration. In fact, India is highly dependent on importing energy and most of the energy is transported by sea. In 2013, more than 75% of its oil was imported by sea, specifically by the Indian Ocean (Hughes, 2014). Also, maritime connectivity is extremely important for relations between states and people to people communication. Indeed, regional developments are expanding into more fields and now reverberate far beyond the Indian Ocean's shores (Sticklor, 2012). India also cooperate with European states and African countries for maritime energy and maritime technology.

As for the smaller nations in its neighbourhood, they are also dependent on the waters for their trade. Maritime security and maritime resources are even more important for their development compared with bigger states. For

Modi, the small littoral states have huge geo-political and geo-economic importance. During Modi's visits to Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka during March 10–14, 2015, he showed his strategic interests of this region and enunciated his Indian Ocean policy, which he termed SAGAR (security and growth for all in the region). This policy has been reiterated by other officials and it can explain why India chooses to cooperate with small states. India will work to use its capabilities for the benefit of all in the region and will deepen economic and security cooperation with island states (Padmaja, 2015).

There are some re-emerging multilateral regional organizations that India is refocusing on. For example, BIMSTEC emphasizes on transport connectivity between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Modi sponsors the construction of new roads and new ports with littoral countries, including Bangladesh and Thailand. Of all the Bay states, Bangladesh is different than others and by far the most determined and assertive in leading the discourse on the "Blue Economy". The development of blue economy demands lots of money, time and technology. It is a key cooperative field among littoral states, and it is about the sustainable use of ocean resources for national economic development. Besides this, Bangladesh has taken an irreplaceable role in resolving its maritime disputes with India through international arbitration (Gamage, 2017). In the future, India can also consider cooperate with China to invest in exploiting marine resources in the Bay of Bengal. This can also reduce the tensions in the South China Sea and distract their attention on conflicts.

Neoliberalism believes that states cannot fully understand others' intentions, therefore they are afraid of being cheated. The same happens between India and small littoral states because they have different interests and preferences. India are eager to gain more control on the choke points of Indian Ocean and straits that are essential for the security of transportation. Some of the straits are under control of small littoral states, so India has the motivation to maintain close relations with them. At the same time, China is also trying to build close connection with island states and conduct infrastructure projects for them. Therefore, India is not willing with China's presence and regard it as a way of expansion in Indian Ocean. With the Belt and Road Initiative, Sri Lanka shares robust ties with China. China provided loans for projects such as Hambantota port and expressway. For Sri Lanka, this is a good opportunity to develop its trading ports in Bay of Bengal (Goodman, 2014). Myanmar is also of great strategic importance for both India and China. Many Indian companies invest in trade and infrastructure, for example the upgrading of the Kalewa-Yargyi road (Ramaswamy & Maini, 2014). In return, Myanmar can provide marine resources and energy. At the same time, the pipelines through Myanmar can reduce China's dependence on the Strait of Malacca, which can cope with the security dilemma. Maritime diplomacy is sometimes regarded as a tool of getting more interests. With China, India has many geopolitical concerns and cannot fully understand China's intention in Indian Ocean. The two emerging countries are both developing quickly in these years, and they have the capability to cooperate in certain fields, such as projects about climate change, marine resources and anti-piracy. China would like to join in the BIMSTEC and let Yunnan province connect deeper with South Asian countries. India could consider take a more active part in the Maritime Silk Road and get investments in infrastructure building projects.

Non-traditional security threats also promote the international cooperation among states. Maritime terrorism and piracies are threats to human security and national security. After the Bombay attack, India attaches great importance in counter terrorism. Protecting the stability of choke points and sea routes is related with not only littoral states but also inland states, because trade and energy transportation is highly dependent on ocean. India's maritime doctrine and maritime strategy include new missions about counter-terrorism and anti-piracy. Also, India seeks network-centric operations, and India wants to play the role of "net security provider" in IOR (Vines, 2012). Enhancing good relations with small island states is also essential in Indian maritime diplomacy policy. With cooperative maritime diplomacy, the trade between states can be promoted and the sea lines can be more secure than before.

International institutions are taking an essential part in Indian Ocean region. Neo-liberalism believes international institutions can be a positive factor of promoting and regulating international cooperation. With multilateral cooperation, there has been some progress on promoting blue economy and ensuring maritime security. Also, global problems such as degradation of critical habitats, pollution and deteriorating water quality

are changing littoral states' environment and reshaping the Bay. The breadth of them is wide, so it requires regional cooperation in IOR. States need to put aside their disagreement and start to stop the environment of getting worse. International institutions encourage the countries around the Indian Ocean to raise their awareness and rise above their political fault-lines to work together.

These institutions aim at achieving regional cooperation among states and Indian maritime diplomacy attaches great importance on encouraging maritime cooperation. Successful regional cooperation can facilitate regional integration, mediate conflicts and promote healthy competition with neighbouring states and extra-regional states. Cooperation through an institutional body could not only promote their economic development but also build closer cultural connection among states. For example, the migration of people through the Bay of Bengal has brought Indian culture to Southeast Asian states. This is the communication of maritime culture as well and can bring people from different states closer to each other. Moreover, it could assist the member countries of regional institutions in strengthening their external competitiveness and reach higher international status. This could take the various forms of cooperation, including trade facilitation, infrastructure building, joint operation, cultural exchange and technical assistance for complying with international standards.

Although it is often difficult to achieve in practice, especially in IOR, the process of addressing common security challenges with different states is still very essential for maritime diplomacy. For example, piracy, human trafficking and maritime terrorism may also create a positive momentum on which to build a working relationship with other states in IOR. Regional cooperation in IOR is complicated so it needs states to try to understand each other and have the same intention to cooperate without fraud. It will require strong political will of political leaders and trust among member states, especially of the great powers such as US and India (Gamage, 2017). There are also some daily bureaucratic tasks for international institutions to operate, so it takes lots of efforts to make sure international cooperation is successful and efficient.

The Implications of Indian Maritime Diplomacy During Modi Administration

For India, building a stronger relation with other South Asian and Southeast Asian states is beneficial for its maritime security and economic development. The changes of maritime diplomacy policy can provide a stable maritime environment for all adjacent states. It can also enhance India's international influence and build a closer connection with Southeast Asia and East Asia. Cooperative maritime diplomacy can improve the quality of naval equipment and increase the frequency of bilateral and multilateral maritime cooperation. India acts as the dominant role in several institutions, such as BIMSTEC and IORA. Therefore, it is beneficial for providing a secure and stable maritime environment for India's domestic development and international communication. With navy to navy communication and annual patrols, the problem of piracy and maritime terrorism has been reduced. With the cooperation of humanitarian activities and disaster management, many lives have been saved. For small littoral countries, they share significant trade relations with India. India also provided lots of infrastructure projects for them, including building ports and bridges. However, they are also facing political pressure from India and China because of the competition between the two regional powers. Sometimes, they have to give up part of their interests to manage the strategic competition between India and China, and they need to use the competition to get more advantage to their engagement with great powers (Sakhuja 2010). India and China can consider cooperate in the field of maritime technology and disaster management. India is concerned about China's true intention in the Indian Ocean and is seeking to develop a security presence around the Malacca Strait to emphasize on maritime choke points (Brewster, 2010). The Malacca Strait is a choke point with significant geopolitical importance for both China and India. In the future, India can think about cooperating with China in non-tradition area. International institutions can also be the platform for leaders to discuss about their concerns and try to reduce the possibilities of conflicts.

Indian maritime diplomacy is also influenced by America, and US wants India to become a more active role in IOR. The US naval presence in the region has been substantial, and served several key purposes, including protecting the sea lines; ensuring the freedom of navigation for energy exports from or via the region; and conducting maritime security operations (MSO) with other states. However, no single state will be able to

dominate the complex region. Therefore, a multilateral setup rather than bilateral relations will emerge to allow each country to protect their own interests and pursue its goals on equal terms. In geo-political realities, the US will have to change its attitude and position from dominance to partnership with the smaller regional powers. It may, in the future, change the balance of world power and act as a 'balancer' between China and India (Kabir & Ahmad, 2015). Hopefully, US can facilitate India to develop maritime technology and military equipment.

The implications for non-traditional threats are obvious, which is another essential factor of regional cooperation. Modi administration has increased the frequency of anti-piracy operations and naval patrol. Piracy and armed robbery at sea have been an unsolved issue for years and remain as top maritime security concerns in the IOR. As a result, many merchant vessels have implemented their own anti-piracy measures when they have to take the risks of transiting through the western Indian Ocean, including the hiring of their own professional private-armed security teams. While piracy and armed robbery have earned the most attention in terms of increasing non-traditional security threats in the Indian Ocean. Trafficking of illicit weapons and people via the Indian Ocean will likely continue in the long term because there are numerous sources of supply, a large number of points of export, and a wide array of sea transportation available to service the sites of consumption (Sticklor, 2012). There is still a long way to go for India to concur non-traditional security problems.

Discussion

I will use the case of BIMSTEC to explain the changes of Indian maritime diplomacy, which can be a good represent of analysing maritime cooperation and Indian maritime diplomacy policy. According to Indian maritime strategy, India has put the Bay of Bengal into a prioritized position. Indeed, the Bay of Bengal has unreplaceable strategic importance and has been described as an area that 'is fast becoming a key zone of strategic competition in Asia' (Brewster, 2015). India also pays more attention on the development of BIMSTEC during Modi's administration. In neo-liberalists' idea, international organization can facilitate cooperation among states, and different countries are able to find their common interests to gain from the cooperation. Therefore, BIMSTEC can be a great example of regional organization in IOR, and Modi has attached strategic importance on it.

Apart from this, its waters are rich in fisheries and hydrocarbons, and many states are willing to invest more in this region. Driven by the growing economies of India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar, further underlie the increasing strategic importance of the sub-region and the importance of cooperation (Gamage, 2017). The case of BIMSTEC can also better explain the drives of these changes of Indian maritime diplomacy in Indo-Pacific region. BIMSTEC assumes significance in more than one sense in neo-liberalists' idea. Firstly, it is the regional arrangement that was formed by members from South Asia and two of the member states of ASEAN. The range of member states has never been reached before. Therefore, it symbolizes the cooperation with various countries in a wide field. BIMSTEC filled the geopolitical void that exist in SAARC (Rao 2003). It also provides a great opportunity for India to communicate with Southeast Asian states. It broadly identified sub-regional cooperation in six areas managed by different member states. For instance, India with technology and Myanmar with energy (Batabyal,2006). India has taken the leading role in BIMSTEC which shows India's positive attitude towards regional cooperation.

In these years, there has been some progress of cooperation regulated by BIMSTEC. Disaster management and humanitarianism operation have been at India's recent engagement with the Bay states and the various institutions led by it. Maritime connectivity is another key issue of common interest, as the enhancement of maritime connectivity in BoB has long-term benefits on regionalization. It is expected to have impacts on economic growth and may contribute to narrowing development gaps among the Bay states (Gamage, 2017). To be sure about the success of Indian maritime diplomacy policy, India needs to take all the factors into consideration, and it has placed India in the central position in the Indian Ocean region. While India is not to exert power through military means, it may be able to do so with soft power or as a provider of public goods. This is also the aim of Indian maritime diplomacy and the current approach of the Indian Navy, which emphasizes its ability to provide anti- piracy and anti-terrorism functions (David Brewster, 2010).

However, there are still many challenges facing the BIMSTEC. The Bay of Bengal is not working functionally and highly under-institutionalized. It is also unable to compare with more comprehensive mechanisms such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association. BIMSTEC addresses maritime security and diplomacy only to a limited extent and mostly ineffective at multilateral cooperation (Gamage, 2017). The IOR is an extremely wide region, which comprises a large number of sub-regions, including the BoB and the Andaman Sea. To treat it as a whole is not a wise solution to traditional and non-traditional problems, it is more practical to proceed with maritime cooperation within its sub-regional units, with the aim of developing a “common denominator” for the entire region (Singh, 2001).

Conclusion

Cooperation is an efficient way to gain more benefits and it is also for the best of the peaceful environment in IOR. Indian maritime diplomacy also encourages maritime cooperation with other states. There are many fields that need states to cooperate with each other, such as humanitarian disaster relief, maritime policing and counter terrorism. Moreover, maritime security is India’s focused area in maritime diplomacy. By conducting more cooperative naval operations and patrols, the security threats in IOR can be reduced. By avoiding conflicts, states can secure SLOCs, attain energy security and get investment of exploiting scarce resources. This is the ideal situation in this region, and states can also find a way to protect their economic interests.

There is no denying that India will face many challenges. There is also a possibility that regional cooperation in Indian Ocean region can be a failure. Both countries have shown their ambition to project their power across Indian Ocean. India has been building military power in the Bay of Bengal, including air and naval facilities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It allows India to have the potential to dominate the Malacca Strait and the surrounding waters (Brewster, 2014). Therefore, it is important for both countries to cooperate with each other and release their tensions.

All the involved actors need to realize that Indian Ocean is the central theatre of International relations in this century (Kaplan, 2010). Even the small island countries should not be ignored, because they are an essential part of IOR. A geopolitical shift has been emerging in this region, especially in the Bay of Bengal. Hopefully, India and China can exist together in Indian Ocean peacefully and focus more on their common interests. The Indian Ocean especially the BoB will require close attention from the globe in the coming years. As the Bay involves great powers including China, India and US, and will become a playground in a nascent multi-polar world order, it is of the utmost necessity and importance to establish governance frameworks in this region. It will change the balance between states and facilitate the integration of rising powers in regulating this new world order and upholding the principles of an open world economy (Kaplan, 2010).

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