



August 2022

India in the Indian Ocean Region: Development in HADR

Atri Patel

Edited by: Aryan Gupta

About the Author

Atri Patel is an undergraduate graduate student at the Jindal Global Law School and is a Senior Research Analyst at the Centre for Security Studies, JSIA.

About the Centre for Security Studies

The Centre for Security Studies (CSS) was established in 2020 as the Jindal School of International Affairs' first student-run research centre under the aegis of Prof Dr Pankaj K Jha. Researchers at CSS – through in-depth analysis briefs and events, reports, policy briefs and print publications – explore both regional and thematic topics in the broader field of international security studies. The concept of international security has been expanded to reflect not merely the study of state security, but also include topics like ethnic, sectarian and religious conflict; civil wars and state failure; cyber and space warfare; resource related security issues; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; defence economics and also the role of ethics or morality in the formulation of security policies. The complexity of these matters is what the Centre for Security Studies attempts to unfold. Please refer to www.cssjsia.com for further details, and follow the Centre's social media platforms for critical news and research updates:

 www.linkedin.com/company/jindal-centre-for-security-studies/

 www.instagram.com/css_jsia/

 <https://twitter.com/Css Jsia>

Important Disclaimer

All views expressed in this publication belong to the author and do not reflect the opinions or positions of the Centre for Security Studies. While researchers and editors at CSS strive towards any instances, CSS as an organisation does not take any responsibility for any instance of plagiarism committed by any authors. The onus to ensure plagiarism-free work lies with authors themselves.

IB2208007

Abstract

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief withholds a significant value for under-developed or developing countries who often suffer from natural calamities, disturbing the local environment of the region alongside losses incurred by mankind. Small Island countries along with India's neighbouring nations situated in the Indian Ocean Region are very much prone to such natural calamities. Therefore, India's involvement in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) programmes plays a vital role for maintaining peace and ensuring progress for all (*Subka Vikas*) in the region. Also, recently India, under its 'neighbourhood first' policy has increased its capabilities of ensuring its efficiency to extend a 'helping hand' to all countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Keywords: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), India, Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Neighbourhood First Policy.

Introduction

Human Beings are bound to coexist with nature peacefully. However, with the alarming growth of human population at a disproportional rate, it gets arduous to maintain sustainability and respect nature and its habitats. Significant proportion of forest area is chopped off for settlement of increasing human population, oil is heavily extracted from the land, creating a vacuum underground, which results in earthquakes and landslides. The mismanagement of resources across all spheres of governance, be it the central government or local authorities, has resulted in scarcity of several vital resources such as water. Water levels have been depleting and rivers are polluted. Alongside this, natural calamities, and disasters such as volcanoes, earthquakes, floods have hampered civilization to a great extent.

Therefore, to provide immediate assistance, a rapid action task known as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) is constituted by organisations and countries willing to extend helping hand in such situations. The idea of such a relief team has its roots embodied in the 1986 earthquake of Mexico and volcano eruption in Columbia, where various NGOs, relief donors and Governments across the Americas came together to formalise policies to extend relief to the affected region as quickly as possible.¹ Soon after this initiative, the idea of extending HADR to any country in need was taken up by international NGOs, United Nations bodies, and other countries with adequate resources available to provide immediate assistance in such an emergency.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is also referred to as the ‘World’s Hazard Belt’ because it is prone to natural and man-made disasters. The region is affected by natural disasters caused due to climatological (Cyclones and droughts), geological (geographically based catastrophes), tectonic imbalances (earthquakes and tsunamis), and hydrological imbalances (floods and tidal surges). Also, man-made disasters caused by human actions or ignorance, as seen in the case of oil spills, fires, leakage of poisonous and mass destructive substances, illegal dumping of waste, uncontrolled fishing, etc, have been directly responsible for disasters in the region of Indian Ocean.² Therefore, management of disaster risks is particularly urgent in the Indian ocean region, as it is home to several island nation states and developing littoral countries with high population density. Such locations are more exposed to the destruction caused by such calamities because of lack of resources and assets to deal with the calamities.

Adding to it, the region is experiencing a spike in such calamities due to climate change and increase in sea level, making the Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief programs an area of utmost importance for the region. Although the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is prone to natural calamities, the strategic importance of IOR is ever increasing for the world order in general and for the Indian sub-continent in general. The region is a major conduit for international trade, especially trade of

¹Redrock, Alberto. “Humanitarian Assistance in Disaster Situations.” Pan American Health Organization. World Health Organization (WHO), 1999. <https://www.paho.org/disasters/dmdocuments/pedhuman.pdf>.

² Ibid 1.

energy. The vast littoral of IOR, alongside it being the world's largest growing region, great potential of fishing and mineral sources, showcases the potential possessed by the region. Thus, it is equally significant as well as dangerous to gain a withhold over the region and maintain it overpassing all the threats and barriers as mentioned above.

The Indian Ocean Basin is of greater importance for India, as the country situated at the keystone over the region and with its growing economic strength is struggling to establish itself as a prominent and reliable power across the globe. For doing so, maintaining peace and tranquillity in the region, and providing regional assistance to all the countries in the region for growing and humanitarian assistance in the time of emergence, should be the key pillars of Indian policymakers to sustainably achieve the ambitions of New Delhi.

A new Indian Ocean Strategy is getting shaped, which conforms closely to global priorities of preserving the region as a shared resource. The Indian Ocean will be an important trade route, a sustainable resource base for all in the region, and a region devoid from heightened military aggressions with full-fledged potential of combating catastrophic natural disasters. The importance of the region for India and India's seriousness towards the IOR can be reflected from the Indian Prime Minister's statement which states, 'India is at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean Region, and it tops over policy priorities.'³

Therefore, as said by Dr. S Jaishankar, India's rise in the global order needs to be transparent and must avoid opaqueness, by identifying and exploiting opportunities created by global contradictions. The first step towards it must be nurturing New Delhi's relations with its immediate neighbours. Such initiative would include a stronger sense of a bottom line and a willingness to do what it takes to defend it from unprecedented aggression. India, according to the External Affairs ministers, needs to demonstrate a more forthcoming posture when it comes to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR).

³ "Text of the PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda," NarendraModi.in, March 12, 2015.

India has heightened its cooperation with nations situated in the Indian ocean region under several prominent policies, missions and programs like Neighbourhood First Policy, mission SAGAR and Vaccine Maitri in the recent time of COVID 19 pandemic when the world was in exigency for the supply of vaccine.

SAGAR: India’s mission of HADR in the Indian ocean

Non-traditional threats such as higher instance of natural disasters and calamities, in the region of Indian ocean has increased the deployment of Indian navy for most prominent role of providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) support, Non-Combatant Evacuation (NEO), and Search and Rescue Operations (SRO). Indian Rapid Action Forces, such as the Navy and other organisations, have assumed a benign role and deployed valuable assets, to provide HADR support in the region. Worthwhile, New Delhi’s vision of a safe and secured Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is encapsulated by the successful concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).⁴

SAGAR aims to address both distinct, inter-related and sustainable regional development goals, such as promoting collective action against non-traditional threats like natural calamities, piracy, economic and security cooperation in the littorals, blue economy, etc. While each of these elements of SAGAR requires equal attention, developing an effective response mechanism to address humanitarian crises and natural disasters is one of the most visible elements in India’s evolving Indian Ocean strategy. Under mission SAGAR, Indian Navy has time and again proved that it is committed to stand against man-made and natural calamities and safeguard the interest of all the partners of the IOR in times of crises and has absolutely incorporated HADR operations in its vision for the region with utmost priority.

⁴ Kumar, Lieutenant Colonel Dhiraj. “Indian Ocean Region (IOR) : India as a Net Security Provider- The Way Ahead.” THE UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION OF INDIA (USI), June 2019. <https://usiofindia.org/publication/usi-journal/indian-ocean-region-ior-india-as-a-net-security-provider-the-way-ahead/>.

Alongside this visionary mission, India has also sustained operations such as ‘Operation Blossom’ in African countries, rescued netizens from threat zones and provided economic assistance to many nations.⁵ The commitment of New Delhi is showcased by the deployment of naval ships across the region, with each ship containing a considerable amount of first aid, assistance and relief kits and HADR related goods. Such moves, alongside the availability of HADR, assures India as a ‘Net Security Provider’ for the region.

Vaccine Maitri: A Saviour for the region in Pandemic

The COVID-19 resulted in the emergence of the worst possible outcomes in 21st century. Developed countries throughout the world irrespective of their economic strength were unable to fend off the disastrous effects of the pandemic induced lockdowns. Countries within the Indian Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean Region were not spared of the same impacts.⁶ In fact, countries in the region surrounding India have significantly weaker economies to repulse the restrictive measures and as a result, many countries either failed to restrict the spread of the pandemic or their economy succumbed to the restriction.

One such example is the island nation of Sri Lanka. Due to several internal political decisions, aided by the lockdown severely restricted tourism in the state. A major chunk of the Sri Lankan economy was massively dependent on the revenue generated from tourism. Such a situation pushed the country into a serious economic crisis which further triggered a political crisis and internal disturbances. Maldives is another South Asian country largely dependent on tourism to fuel its economy. The country closed its border for more than a third of the year in 2021, resulting

⁵ Ibid 4.

⁶ Mishra, Abhishek. “India’s Vision of SAGAR: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operations in the Indian Ocean Region.” Observer Research Foundation, February 3, 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-vision-of-sagar-humanitarian-assistance-and-disaster-relief-operations-in-the-indian-ocean-region-61000/>.

in a severe hit to its economy. World Bank data suggests that the Maldivian economy received just half of the revenue it generated from tourists in 2019, combined of the past 2 years.⁷

Also, it was least likely for the Indian Ocean Countries to withhold the health crisis with their fragile medical institutions and large population patches spread across the region from Indian Subcontinent to Sri Lanka and other nations like Seychelles and Maldives. Another country that succumbed to the Pandemic was the country of Afghanistan. With political instability and grave Human Rights violations, the country had no medical infrastructure and some of the weakest economic conditions. Also, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh lacked the capacity to withhold the blow of the pandemic over the country's development and progress. Such circumstances had put the whole region in a critical situation with very little or no scope of proper vaccine availability, management and distribution for the people residing in the region.

Such economic and medical frailness in the region resulted in a Humanitarian crisis which required large-scale assistance and relief via donated funds or relief missions by providing essential equipment to deal with the crisis. In such a situation, India came forward with its 'Vaccine Maitri' mission in the early 2021 as a humanitarian initiative undertaken by the Indian government to provide aid and assistance to friendly countries, especially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with an aim of providing COVID-19 vaccines to the needy countries of the region. With the ideology of inclusive growth of all in the region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has started to supply vaccines as a goodwill gesture to the worst crisis facing countries of IOR such as Maldives and Afghanistan.⁸

New Delhi, under the idea of HADR, has also extended vaccines to Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Seychelles and other IOR countries, following the requests from the governments of the respective countries. India's act was strongly appraised because of its timing and dedication to providing equal importance to others as well as its own citizens. India itself was facing a humanitarian crisis

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/maldives/overview>

⁸ Jaishankar, Dhruva. "Indian Ocean Region: A Pivot for India's Growth." Brookings, September 12, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/indian-ocean-region-a-pivot-for-indias-growth/>.

in its own country and was struggling to establish a concrete passage of vaccination for its own netizens.⁹ Despite such tragic conditions, India managed to overcome the crisis to a considerable extent and extended its humanitarian assistance and relief to the Indian Ocean Region countries as well as several other countries such as Brazil and Morocco, who were a major recipient of vaccines manufactured in India.

Coexistence of human beings with nature is a necessary element of sustenance of life. The current global world has witnessed an extremely high population growth which has made it arduous to maintain sustainability and strike a balance with our natural habitat. A perennial cycle of deforestation in order to make space for human dwellings and oil extraction is rising to meet human needs, and lastly the underground vacuum has led to frequency in earthquakes and landslides in settlement areas. Governments across the world have failed to efficiently allocate, utilize, and distribute natural resources leading to their stark depletion as well as a crisis-like situation due to their rising prices. Natural calamities and disasters such as volcanoes, earthquakes, floods have hampered and caused massive destruction in human civilisations.

As a preventive measure to this chaos and for ensuring immediate assistance a rapid action task known as the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) has been formulated by countries and organisations who are willing to lend a helping hand in such situations as dwelled into the paper. Also, India's contribution has been of very much importance. India, since its independence, has always registered its presence in the Indian Ocean region in times of emergency. Although, there has been an increase in New Delhi's attention towards the region in the past few years. One of the major reasons behind such stance from South Asian giants is its swift involvement in the neighbourhood first policy, fuelled by the competition to gain dominance in the region of Indian Ocean between People's Republic of China and Republic of India.

Also, New Delhi possesses a little advantage due to its geographical position, situated right at the top of the Indian Ocean, allowing access to the ocean. Although, to withhold its grip in the region

⁹ Thakkar, Aman. "A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy." Center for Security and International Studies (CSIS), October 2021. <https://www.csis.org/nfpf/rising-india-indian-ocean-needs-strong-navy>.

and deny access of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the region, Indian Naval Forces requires significant scaling up of its HADR capabilities as because the numbers involved in HADR are far larger in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) due to the burgeoning population that get affected in such natural calamities and disasters.

Currently, India is advancing its naval capabilities of assistance by replacing the Small and Medium Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) with Large Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs). Also, Indian Naval Forces is also considering the manufacturing of indigenously designed and constructed to cater to requirements arising in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), such as the vessels can be utilized as a revenue generating coastal passenger ships when not on HADR missions.

Hence, it is sufficient to state that the neighbours of India and other countries in the Indian Ocean region are at a situation where they must unhesitatingly come to depend upon India's ability to provide rapid relief and Humanitarian assistance via its naval assets in the time of natural calamities.