

**Report on Indian Navy's Maritime Diplomacy in the IOR by Commodore Srikant Kesnur on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

The Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS), University of Mumbai, had organised an online lecture on *Indian Navy's Maritime Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean Region* by Cmde Srikant Kesnur (PhD, VSM), Director, Maritime Warfare Centre (Mumbai), Indian Navy, on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022 as part of the MMIAS International Interdisciplinary Lecture Series. The lecture was chaired by Dr. Kajari Kamal, Adjunct Faculty Fellow, Takshashila Institution, Bangalore.

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, MMIAS, welcomed the participants and introduced the topic of the lecture. Professor Bharucha began by giving a brief history of the Indian Ocean and the interest MMIAS has in maritime issues in order to do interdisciplinary research on it. She spoke about how India's trading and cultural ties with the Indian Ocean go back thousands of years. Indian coastal communities have engaged in trade and commerce with different parts of the world as is evident from the artefacts found in the ruins of the Harappan cities of Dholavira and Lothal along the banks of the now lost river Saraswati. Professor Bharucha spoke about how the maritime connection went beyond conquests and extended to diplomatic relations and exchange of culture and religion. She mentioned how this resulted in a pre-European diaspora that continues to have an influence in these regions. Professor Bharucha brought out how indentured labour was connected to the Indian Ocean Region during the British colonial period. She also touched upon how after India's independence, India established diplomatic ties with the newly independent African nations. Professor Bharucha further said how India is the preferred security partner in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Moreover, India's geostrategic significance and its struggle to maintain the balance of power in an environment that poses unique challenges cannot be overlooked. India has made efforts in maintaining maritime diplomatic ties through its initiatives SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and by joining the QUAD.



Professor Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, MMIAS

After these initial remarks, Professor Bharucha welcomed Cmde Kesnur and gave a very brief introduction and spoke about his long-standing association with the MMIAS (formerly, CoHaB IDC). She then introduced the Chairperson of the talk, Dr. Kajari Kamal and handed over the proceedings of the lecture to her.



**Dr. Kajari Kamal**

Before introducing the Commodore, Dr. Kamal in her opening remarks spoke about the broad trajectory of strategic naval thinking in the last century. She mentioned Alfred Mahan and how strategic naval thinking has military connotations and over emphasis on the same. She also connected Sir Corbett's views on strategic naval thinking and his focus on naval and economic blockades, alluding to coercive naval diplomacy. It was in 1977 that Ken Booth who talked about the trinity of naval functions and he used the term 'diplomatic' to talk about the third aspect of the navy, the first two being 'military' and 'policing', respectively. His use of the term 'naval influence politics' alludes to a less coercive spectrum of the naval strength. It was however only after the Cold War that the term 'naval diplomacy' and the expansion of its meaning came to be in use. In relation to India, after the economic liberalisation in the 1990s, India needed to protect its overseas trade and maritime interests for unhindered growth. Following her brief remarks, Dr. Kamal introduced Cmde Srikant Kesnur and invited him to begin his lecture.

The Commodore thanked the organisers, chair and participants and then started his talk by linking Dr. Kamal's comments to his topic. He gave a brief world history starting from the Cold War to frame his talk - from a unipolar world to a multipolar one. He mentioned how different events shaped the world as it is today. All the issues and challenges that the world is facing now has a direct or indirect maritime connect. He expanded on the role of oceans and seas and how it is all connected to diplomacy. The Commodore gave a brief snapshot of how the littoral states exert political and economic influence on the trade that is carried out via the seas and oceans. The submarine cables that connect India with the world are very important as the connectivity rests on them and any damage to them cuts one off from the world. Sea is a commons for participation and a way of life.



**Commodore Srikant Kesnur**

Around 40% of the world's trade is carried out through the Indian Ocean that translates to approximately 60% of world's GDP. International shipping lines that

are critical for trade and energy security go across the Indian Ocean. The entry and exit points into the Indian Ocean are through choke points and India's geostrategic position makes it an important player in this region.

After setting the tone for the lecture, Cmde Kesnur then went on to explain the role of Navy in furthering India's diplomatic relations with other nations. He spoke about how navies have a great organic capability and they provide flexibility by remaining in the area of interest without being threatening. However, as an example of the complexity in the maritime domain, he spoke about the piracy and how there are multiple issues involved when it comes to jurisdiction. This can and is handled by collaborating with other nations diplomatically. Moving forward, the Commodore mentioned the characteristics of Indian military and how formidable it is in the event of traditional and/or non-traditional threats. India's military represents the country's diversity.

Cmde Kesnur then spoke about how the Indian Navy has been practising diplomacy since India's independence in 1947. India has been a role model for other smaller countries as the former has managed to develop and strengthen its naval forces. In the last three decades the navy is rapidly bolstering its diplomatic efforts by having a greater institutional focus and in setting up directorates for foreign cooperation. The Indian Navy's diplomatic efforts are a part of its broader strategy in ensuring maritime security and stability by enhancing cooperation with friendly nations. India's maritime interests lie where India's interests lie and sea is the medium to reach those. To add to his point, Cmde Kesnur spoke about Indian Navy's cooperation efforts - capacity building, capability enhancement, constructive engagement and collaborative efforts. Indian Navy is also the first responder when it comes to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions. Apart from conducting HADR missions, the Indian Navy's diplomatic efforts range from training, refit of ships to patrols, cultural links, information sharing and so on. He further expanded on how the Indian Navy conducts joint exercises with several countries that involve different levels of complexities. Indian Navy is also the preferred security partner in the Indian Ocean region.

India also has world class hydrography infrastructure and many countries seek assistance in conducting surveys which are in turn beneficial to India as well. Apart from conducting surveys, India imparts hydrography training to different countries too, thereby enhancing the capabilities of those countries.

India has in fact gone a step ahead and created a tech marvel - Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) that focusses on strengthening its collaborative efforts in the maritime domain with partner nations through information sharing.

The Commodore further mentioned the different initiatives started by India in the Indian Ocean Region such as IONS, IFR and MILAN. The Commodore then spoke in detail about the different HADR missions carried out by the Indian Navy.

Rounding up the Indian Navy's several achievements, Commodore Kesnur spoke about how in the last few years India has managed to emerge as a key player in the IOR, especially with regard to Blue Economy.

In conclusion, he mentioned how military and maritime diplomacy impact on policy and national strategy. Naval/maritime diplomacy works in India's favour at

the same as not having added economic implications. Maritime diplomacy is part of almost every country's agenda on collaboration. The navy's ability to showcase hard and soft powers when required make it advantageous to India.

The chair then rounded off the talk with her remarks on how the Indian Navy carries out diplomacy in a nuanced manner. Dr. Kamal then brought out the similarities that the topic had with her field of study.

The talk was followed by a Question and Answer session.

The talk ended with a vote of thanks by Ms. Kirti Risbud, Research Associate, MMIAS.



**Ms. Kirti Risbud**

Participants from all over the world attended this lecture.

To view the entire lecture, visit the link given below:

[Indian Navy's Maritime Diplomacy in the IOR](#)

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