

Converging Interests through Maritime Cooperation: Andaman-Nicobar Islands as a Strategic Player in India-Indonesia Relations

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Abstract

A similar mindset is being shared by India and Indonesia regarding the sphere of maritime, with a desire to become credible maritime players in the region of Indo-Pacific. In this scenario, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have evolved as a crucial feature for India and Indonesia's strategic partnership in the 21st century. The islands have emerged as an 'eastern fish hook' in the quest between these two nations to control the most crucial trade routes that will help them appear as a superpower. Amidst the aggressive policy of China in the Indo-Pacific region, this 'fish hook' is a new challenge that has emerged for countering it. It is worth the need of the hour to give a glimpse of the strategic importance of the islands becoming an 'eastern fish hook'. With 572 islands, the archipelago's northernmost point is just 22 nautical miles from Myanmar, while its southernmost point is about 90 nautical miles from Indonesia. As a result, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands can become India's strategic catch in countering China's 'Strings of Pearl' strategy because of their closeness to the 'Strait of Malacca' chokehold. The global oil trade in the marine region, which travels via the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), accounts for around 80 per cent, covering the nearby six-degree channel and the Strait of Malacca. If India develops its major naval base in the vicinity of this strait, there can be a colossal strategic and prudent advantage that it can achieve in the entire IOR. In light of this, the purpose of this article is to comprehend the strategic significance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in advancing India and Indonesia's shared interests in the Indo-Pacific area. The expansion of the maritime viewpoint in both nations' strategic

thinking will also be highlighted in the paper. Both nations' engrossment in their common mindset of 'matters maritime', which has the potential to transform their image in the maritime world order, will be analysed.

Introduction

Cooperation facilitates countries' accumulation of resources and works in collaboration to deal with the prevalent threats and obstacles while leveraging them to grow together in the maritime space. India and Indonesia are such crucial neighbors in diplomatic ties who are well-oriented to collectively work in their common interests (Behera 2021: 191). Converging interests between both nations have been evolving for a variety of reasons. First, with the term 'Indo-Pacific' gaining momentum, both India and Indonesia need to bolster their appropriate geo-strategies to stand out as a player of vital significance in the region. Second, in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, the recent surge in China's movements has led to a situation of scepticism among both nations, resulting in closer ties like never before. Third, both the leaders of India and Indonesia, after assuming powers in 2014, have revitalized their visions of diplomatic relations. While, the "Act East Policy", (AEB) has been propagated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to get revitalised, it has created momentum in the geopolitical approach of India towards Southeast Asia and beyond. At the same time, Prime Minister Joko Widodo actualized the resurgence of "Global Maritime Fulcrum", for Indonesia's vision of geo-political maritime supremacy. Collaboration of these visions of India and Indonesia can be mutually reinforcing. Fourth, since both nations are immediate maritime neighbors, maritime safety and security can substantiate collaboratively. (Behera 2021: 191; Mougdil 2021: 1). With the significance of these visions, the evolving engagement over Andaman and Nicobar Island as a strategic player calls for a nuanced delineation. The first section will delineate the Indo-Pacific region's congenial utility followed by the PRC's geo-strategic expansion in the second section. The third section analyses India's and Indonesia's strategic possibilities arising in the Indo-Pacific Region. Further, it explains how a judicious maturation of maritime cooperation between the two nations in the region could expedite an arena of maritime security. This will be explained in the fourth section. The fifth section outlines the strategic significance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, analysing the growing significance of marine collaboration in the conclusion.

The Significance of the Indo-Pacific Region

As a geopolitical region that ranges between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the Indo-Pacific region emanates as one of the crucial coliseums of inter-state competition and contestation, along with cooperation (Sarkar, Chaudhary, Ghosh 2022: 2). In reference to geo-spatiality, the region of the Indo-Pacific can be understood in terms of an associated space between the oceans of Indian and Pacific. When viewed from the spheres of strategic connotation, the Indo-Pacific region has been perceived as a continuity between the two oceans through the one of the world's busiest trade link, the Strait of Malacca runs through (Das 2019: 1).

The term "Indo-Pacific" was coined by some of the major players in the region, which include the United States, Japan, India, Australia, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and ASEAN. The region has recently seen significant strategic changes in the areas that border the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Various island states in the Pacific rim (also known as littoral states) also become prominent players in the region (Sarkar, Chaudhary, Ghosh 2022: 2; Pascal 2021: 3). Because of China's increasing expansion of its military and economic sphere, these shifts have become evident (US Department of Defence 2019: 1). The region has become a policy symbol of regional commitments that have emerged with actions to formulate 'Indo-Pacific' as an ideal region for the countries emanating from their values (Haruko 2020: 1).

Comprehending the region on a more functional note, Udayan Das (2019) in his article, "What is the Indo-Pacific?", has explained that the growing consequences of globalization, trade, and changing equations among multiple actors around the world, have led to disintegrating older peripheries and has unlocked new avenues culminating towards the unified integrations and interrelationship between the two oceans (Das 2019: 1).

The region of the Indo-Pacific has gained currency in the spheres of political, economic, and strategic terms in recent times for two reasons. First, the changing presence of China throughout the Asia Pacific region and beyond. Other global powers have been prompted to alter the balance of power in the area by China's surge to prominence. Rising claims of China over the East and South China Sea have led to a tussle between various nations over the region's exclusive economic zones and islands. Moreover, through the Strait of Malacca, China's oil and LNG exports, accounting for more than 70% are shipped through. Almost 60 per cent of the total trade routes occur through this route (Rajput 2022:1). Thus, this dependency has become immensely important for China. China's increasing importance in this area is due to the fact that, should an unfavourable

circumstance arise, the US and India might strategically use this area by collaborating with their neighbours to block one of China's busiest trade routes.

Second, the US influence in the region has relatively declined, and there is an ardent desire for a resurgence (Das 2019:1; Sarkar, Chaudhary, Ghosh 2022: 2). To counter China's strategic progress, the US has been using India to gain influence in the Indo-Pacific area in recent years. However, cautious steps have been pitched by India to circumscribe all the powerful nations for an inclusive vision in the region.

China's Growing Importance in the Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific area has grown in importance for China's "strategic calculus" in terms of politics, security, and the economy (Scott 2019: 95). China aims to exert sovereignty over the South and East China Seas, as the territory extends from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, encompassing the intervening waters of the South China Sea. Through this control, the nation seeks to penetrate into the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean giving an effective consequence with two-seas control followed by the presence of two oceans and its subsequent impact (Scott 2019: 95).

China announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which aims to fabricate connectivity and collaboration between Asia with Africa and Europe through the land and maritime grid (ebrd). A sea route connecting China's coastal regions with southeast and south Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, and Eastern Africa, all the way to Europe, is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Silk Road Economic Belt is a transcontinental route that connects China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe by land (ebrd). The BRI project is aimed to get constructed in twenty-seven years with its major priorities in policy coordination, unimpeded trade, infrastructure connectivity, financial unification, and connecting people (ebrd; Rajput: 2022). With the completion of this project, China will obtain greater power in the Indian Ocean culminating in a strategic upper hand over India (Rajput 2022).

At the moment Shanghai Port, Hingkong Port, and Tianjin Port are China's major ports which are all situated in the other eastern peripheral of China. Despite the significance of these routes, China does not directly benefit from them because they are not part of the commercial route through the Indian Ocean. China's largest external energy supplier is the Middle East, from which energy imports travel through the Strait of Malacca, over the Indian Ocean, and up into the South China Sea and China (Scott 2019: 96; Rajput 2022). The Strait of Malacca falls in the territorial waters of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. India and the United States have strong strategic alliances

with these territories, making this the area where China is most at risk. As already mentioned, a significant amount of China's trade happens through the Strait of Malacca. Because of this dependency, the region of the Indo-Pacific has become extremely important for China. In any adverse situation, utilizing their strategic connections with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and the US can stifle Chinese trade, exposing China. Because of these trade vulnerabilities China initiated the BRI project to have its jurisdiction and dominance over the passage of trade and in due course to gain supremacy over India and the US (Rajput 2022).

China started initiating its partnership with some unstable, and economically weak governments like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Djibouti, and Myanmar. China has identified these countries as potential targets for acquiring jurisdiction in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. In the rhetoric development scenario, China offers loans in billions for a very short period of time, and when they fail to repay their loans, China acquires its jurisdiction over their ports. For example, for ten to fifteen years, China provided loans to Sri Lanka for the construction of the Hambantota Port, which is situated in the country's south and near the east-west sea route. Phase I and Phase II of the port construction was completed, however, by 2016, Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA), which owned the Hambantota Port, has suffered losses (Gupta 2022).

Until a "suitable" study concluded that this was economically "feasible," it was clear that this costly undertaking was not financially practical, as had been shown in preliminary experiments (Gupta 2022). An intricate plan was developed to allow China to obtain ownership of this port for 99 years under the guise of an investment into a Public Private Partnership to manage and run the Port, under the pretense of recurring losses (Gupta 2022). Similarly, China acquired important trade routes of few other nations and with the BRI, China is definitely acquiring superiority over India. Addressing these rising threats and possibilities, this section discusses how India and Indonesia are utilising the Indo-Pacific as a theatre of possibility.

Indo-Pacific Region: A Stage of Opportunities for India and Indonesia

Strategic competition in the Indian Ocean did not seem to exist after the Cold War ended. In this hollow space of strategic unity between nations, India evolved as a prominent player ensuring and securing the Indian Ocean for its judicious interest (Baruah 2020: 2). However, China's emergence as a substitute security supplier forced India to take centre stage in the area. As a result, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's arrival, India has made changing its foreign policy effort towards

the area a top priority. In the Indo-Pacific, India has become a crucial player. In order to actualize this vision India has advocated the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All the Region) and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) (Banerjee 2017: 1; Sarkar, Chaudhary, Ghosh 2022: 2). These initiatives in the Indian foreign policy has evolved due to various reasons. Firstly, a Free and Open Indo-Pacific has been actively championed by India. The United States, Australia, and every ASEAN member have firmly expressed a shared opinion towards India's use of the country to gain a larger role in the region (Sangi and Zomuanthanga 2022; Bedi and Mahavir 2023). India's perspective of the Indo-Pacific region is centred on, "Inclusive, openness, and ASEAN centrality and Unity" (PIB 2018; Saha 2022).

Second, New Delhi has made use of its alliance with like-minded countries as the region's beacon of peace and stability. Half of the Indian trade transpires within this region and around 95 percent of India's trade occurs in the Indian Ocean and ensures its energy sources (Ministry of Shipping 2014-2015: p.4). In the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), efforts to secure choke points, guarantee freedom of movement, resolve disputes amicably, and confront non-traditional security concerns have compelled India to collaborate with other nations (isababa 2022). Third, India's geopolitical goals to establish its own foothold in the area. New Delhi's partnership with the powers of the West has helped India to address the capability gaps. These partnerships have largely shaped the new security environment established by India along with the Indo-Pacific approach, island countries, and littoral states (Baruah 2020). The maritime security environment in the region and India is at risk due to China's expanding cooperation with island nations including Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka. This has fuelled Sino-Indian competition in the marine area. Due to this alarming situation, the islands for the geographic locations which were long forgotten during the geopolitics of the cold war time have been reinitiated by the incumbent Government of India (Baruah 2020). The appearance of this situation has led to the maritime security of India's partnerships which has become an aspect that is otherwise dominated by China's threat in the continental borders.

The largest country in South-East Asia, Indonesia has developed its own concept of Indo-Pacific and advanced its cooperation in the region which has been constructed on the Global Maritime Falcum Vision (Febrica 2021: 239). In order to defuse tensions between the judicious rivalry between nations, the prospects of Indo-Pacific cooperation have been promoted by Indonesia. Together with major countries including the US, Australia, Japan, India, and China, Indonesia

supports the idea of an open, free, cooperative, and pluralistic Indo-Pacific. In this regard, Indonesia is strengthening the legitimacy of its Indo-Pacific Global Maritime Fulcrum goal (Febrica 2023). For Indonesia, “the largest archipelagic state in the world, amid its archipelagic waters, are found some of the most strategic sea-lanes in the world: connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Serving as highways for the movement of global trade, as well as of people and the associated ideas and cultural expressions they bring forth” (Natalegawa, 2013).

Natalegawa has highlighted Indonesia’s strategic geographical location in the Indo-Pacific region as a future prospect that has a significant interest. The evolving sharp lack of trust and the attendant cycle of tension arising in the Korean peninsula, the conflicting maritime disputes in the South-China Sea, and major power rivalry between nations have been recognized as a challenge in the Indo-Pacific for which a major treaty of friendship and cooperation is the need of the hour (Natalegawa 2013). The views of Indonesia toward the Indo-Pacific are connected to wider international views on economic and political neutrality and a market mechanism-based approach (Verico 2021).

Promoted by the Jokowi administration to improve the connectivity of the maritime zone, the Indo-Pacific cooperation of Indonesia is based on the Global Maritime Fulcrum which has been utilized to address the problems posed by the IUU (Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fishing) and settlement of disputes. Additionally, ASEAN is positioned as the "driving seat" of Indo-Pacific cooperation under Indonesia's Indo-Pacific idea (Febrica 2021). Indonesia did so to prevent the organisations in the regional sphere from being sidelined by the big power rivalry between the US and China, and at the same time to ensure that every country, including China itself, is included (Febrica 2021: 250).

India and Indonesia Maritime Trade Relation

India is always keen on improving its multilateral link with ASEAN and for this India considered Indonesia an important strategic partner. As the dominant powers both the countries can be partners with security, trust and confidence in the region (Trivedi 2010). Specially, a stronger India-Indonesia strategic partnership in the marine area might help in stabilizing the Indo-Pacific region.

Understanding the relation between these two countries is crucial to comprehend the concerns of both nations' maritime security. It is worth noting that since the mid-1990s, Indonesia has provided

India with substantial support in achieving its objectives of enhancing security and improving political relations with the region (Brewster 2011; Sengupta 2025). In keeping with its long-standing stance, Indonesia has contributed significantly to fostering the growth of India's institutional ties with ASEAN. Since 2000, the relation between Indonesia and India has undergone significant changes, with a corresponding increase in the number of meetings and visits by high-level leaders. Much focus has been placed on the growth of an economic relation. India is a good market for Indonesian agricultural products and funding. However, the development of economic ties has been somewhat sluggish, and genuine Indian investment in Indonesia has been minuscule thus far. Since 2005, a bilateral free trade agreement has been inactive due to disagreements about how Indonesian palm oil and other important agricultural exports can access Indian markets. Yet, the 2009 ratification of the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement may have given this developing economic partnership new life. The then President of Indonesia, Yudhoyono's 2011 Republic Day visit to India as the prime guest indicates a revived interest in the relationship (Mukhopadhaya, 2016). By 2015, it was intended for bilateral trade and significant Indian investments in Indonesia were revealed.

Significant changes in the bilateral security environment, such as terrorism, defence cooperation, and agreements, have occurred since the turn of the twenty-first century (Brewster 2011). The Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh and Yudhoyono, then President of Indonesia, signed a 'New Strategic Partnership' in 2005 (Brewster 2011; Mukhopadhaya, 2016). This partnership strongly emphasised security cooperation and political, military establishment. However maritime security continued to be the main priority.

More cooperation between India and Indonesia is necessary for several compelling reasons, notably in the maritime sector. They have much to gain from keeping the local maritime commons in good condition because they are maritime neighbours and rely primarily on maritime trade for economic prosperity. These nations should emphasised on ensuring maritime security for two main reasons. First, to maintain economic growth and meet the socioeconomic expectations of their population, both nations need open access to the global commons. Second, to use the oceans for economic activity—which is expensive for both parties—is in danger due to serious security concerns in this region.

There are a number of reasons why India and Indonesia should increase their maritime security cooperation, but the most compelling one is probably the increased awareness of vulnerabilities and the limitations in state capacities to respond to attacks in a timely and efficient manner.

Moreover, India and Indonesia are physically situated on the main shipping routes that cross the Indo-Pacific area. Most energy supplies going to East and Southeast Asia are transported over vital sea lines near the Indian peninsula (Rahman, 2013, p. 3). The expansion of these communication routes into the South China Sea and the Western Pacific Ocean is made possible by the navigable straits inside the Indonesian archipelago. For the energy-starved economies of East and Southeast Asia, the susceptibility of these maritime lanes to numerous security risks is a key cause for concern (Cordner, 2011, p. 73). Therefore, India and Indonesia must be able to preserve good maritime orders and the free flow of business along these shipping lanes.

Regarding marine risks, India and Indonesia also have similar perspectives (Indian Government: Ministry of External Affairs, 2013). Unresolved maritime conflicts in the South China Sea and China's overt assertion of its rights therein would rank highly on the list of concerns for Indonesia, even though it does not explicitly include its perceived threats from state actors (Gindarsah & Priamarizki, 2015).

India and Indonesia are both familiar with China's aggressive actions. China's naval operations and military infrastructure are expanding, dramatically expanding its influence in the South China Sea. Furthermore, Indonesia is concerned about Beijing's "nine-dash line"¹ being close to the Natuna Islands and about recent Chinese provocations in and near the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (Zou 2023). Similarly, India is experiencing considerable concerns due to China's increasing strategic footprint in the Indian Ocean and its developing partnership with the Pakistani Navy. In order to effectively combat these shared risks, India and Indonesia should maximise their relationship. (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019, p. 837).

The ability of each of these nations to address dangers that they consider important in the maritime realm is a connected and essential element. With the "Global Maritime Fulcrum" doctrine (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2014) and its amplifying sea policy document

¹ The nine-dash line, which has also been referred to as the ten-dash line and the eleven-dash line (by the ROC), is a group of line segments that appeared on different maps alongside the claims made in the South China Sea by the People's Republic of China (PRC, also known as "mainland China") and the Republic of China (ROC, also known as "Taiwan")

(Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2017), the Indonesian government under Jokowi has set an ambitious national maritime agenda. These clearly state the ends, but they are somewhat mute on achieving them.

A lack of necessary competence also affects India's maritime security system. The Indian Navy, which oversees the nation's maritime security, struggles to carry out its declared mission in the area due to a lack of suitable platforms (Gopal, 2020). Despite India's military-industrial complex's relative superiority, it has been plagued by development problems, making expensive imports the primary method of fleet growth. The concurrent need to concentrate on low-intensity maritime activities, like as law enforcement in its littoral, is another factor that partially restricts India's goal to be a regional maritime power (Gopal, 2018). Therefore, it is clear that both nations need to increase their capacities. Possibly the easiest way to address these deficiencies is cooperation.

In the Indo-Pacific area, which is one of the centre of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and nine of the world's top ten busiest seaports, India and Indonesia are two of the most significant maritime powers. Furthermore, the region serves as the transit point for almost 60% of global maritime traffic. Both nations stand to gain from collaboration and cooperation even if neither has reached its full maritime potential. A greater India-Indonesia strategic relationship in the maritime sphere might stabilize the region.

Given their geographical positions, India and Indonesia can be seen as the Indo-Pacific's gatekeepers. With the Indian Ocean to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east, Indonesia acts as the strategic hub of the Indo-Pacific. In a similar vein, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands are located close to the western entrance of the crucial Strait of Malacca, one of the important water routes in the world, and are situated at the meeting point of South Asia and Southeast Asia. It's interesting to note that Indonesia is only 90 nautical miles away from the southernmost point of the islands.

Numerous firsts of India-Indonesia strategic cooperation occurred in 2018. By transforming their relation into a comprehensive strategic partnership and launching a new initiative exercise called the Samudera Shakti, both nations chose to intensify their defence cooperation in the area of maritime security. This recently developed exercise considerably enhances the CORPAT's focus on maritime law enforcement and gives the nations' maritime cooperation a warfighting component.

The combined effort between Indonesia and India to build a sea port in Sabang to improve regional marine connectivity adds to these significant bilateral advancements. Sabang is strategically situated as it is placed on the tip of Indonesia's Sumatra Island and between India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands and also at the mouth of the Malacca Strait,. By intensifying such cooperative projects, both nations will be able to increase their marine presence and significantly contribute to regional security.

Andaman and Nicobar: As an Anchor of Tactical Significance in the Region?

India has worked hard to developed a solid maritime security partnership with Indonesia. India started putting confidence-boosting measures in place for maritime security even before the Cold War ended, including holding joint naval drills with Indonesia and other regional allies. In 1989, off Surabaya, and in the Andaman Sea, north of Sumatra and west of the Malay Peninsula, India and Indonesia started conducting bilateral naval drills. A few years later, India organised the annual naval gathering with the Indonesian Navy and other regional forces in the Andaman Islands (Brewster 2011).

In an attempt to ease Indonesia's worries about their outposts, India also extended an invitation to top Indonesian navy officers to see Indian military facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The separatist issue in Indonesia's Aceh Province was an important factor in the early years of this decade's development of the Indian-Indonesian security partnership. About 150 kilometres from India's Nicobar Islands, Aceh is located on the western tip of Sumatra (Brewster 2011).

Large, ethnically and religiously diverse states like India and Indonesia have long shared an interest in preventing separatism within one another's borders. In actuality, they have supported one another politically and diplomatically on territorial integrity concerns ever since their independence.

In Aceh, the Islamic insurgency gained momentum when East Timor seceded in 1999. It became the main topic of Prime Minister Vajpayee's January 2001 visit to Jakarta, where he stressed India's backing for Indonesia's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Brewster 2011).

In the past, Aceh Province's possible breakaway from Indonesia posed an existential risk. But since the 2005 peace agreement², which gave Indonesia a large deal of autonomy, this threat has

² Over 30 years of violent confrontation between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) came to an end in 2005 when the Aceh peace treaty was signed in Helsinki, Finland.

significantly decreased. As serious as those issues are, Aceh's significance to India lies more in the fact that Aceh controls the western entry to the Malacca Strait in addition to being a case of secession and a potential hotbed of Islamic terrorism.

Some fear that an independent and fundamentalist Aceh may obstruct international usage of the canal, or that China will purchase port infrastructure in an autonomous or independent province (Brewster 2011). The abduction of commercial ships off Sumatra was thought to have been a political act and a source of finance for Acehnese insurgents, at least prior to 2005. India's contribution to mediating the Aceh conflict was quite small. In 2003, the international joint security committee monitoring mission included Indian weapons inspectors. Following the tsunami in December 2004, the Indian Navy played a vital role in the rescue operations in Aceh (Brewster 2011). Indian delegates did not, however, take part in the international monitoring mission for Aceh, which was constituted following the 2005 peace agreement.

However, the Aceh conflict has made it possible for the Indian Navy to deepen its naval cooperation with Indonesia. The Andaman Sea provides extremist groups in the area with a means of communication and transportation. Megawati Sukarnoputri, the President of Indonesia, voiced concern over Aceh rebels receiving support from India in April 2002. The Inter-Services Intelligence agency of Pakistan was allegedly linked to Aceh militants, and secluded islands in the Nicobar group were being used to smuggle weapons into Aceh, according to the Indians, who in turn pressured Indonesia to respond cooperatively. As a result, an agreement was made, and the Indian and Indonesian navies started doing 'coordinated' naval patrols at the northern approach to the Malacca Strait and in the Andaman Sea twice a year (Brewster 2011). The naval exercises have increased since 2002. Since 2002, Indian and Indonesian ships and aircraft have participated in these patrols, which are coordinated out of India's joint operations centre in the Andaman Islands. Although insignificant in terms of practicality, such collaborative military missions have enormous symbolic significance.

Since the 2005 peace agreement, the Aceh Province's security problems and related piracy in the Malacca Strait have considerably diminished, but the Indonesian military remains concerned about the region (Brewster 2011). In February 2009, Indonesian Army Chief of Staff General Agustadi Sasongko Purnomo suggested that direct lines be established between the Indonesian Military Command in Aceh and the Indian Military Command in Andaman to enable direct contact between army troops operating in the area (Brewster 2011). In order to prevent Sri Lankan Tamil Tiger

insurgents from taking sanctuary on Indonesian territory, joint patrols were also increased in March 2009.

Given the ongoing geopolitical situation, the Islands of Andaman and Nicobar are evolving as a critical figure in the strategic partnership of India with Indonesia and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands now becomes the most important place for the Indian government. The solution is the Double Fish Hook Strategy, used by India to increase its military presence in the Indian Ocean. The first hook begins at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and travels to Diego Garcia, a US military facility, Sabang port in Indonesia, and Coco Islands in Australia. These organisations all have agreements with India, including the port project agreements with Indonesia, the Mutual Logistic Support Agreement (MLSA) with Australia, and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the United States, allowing both nations to utilise one another's facilities. The second hook connects Mauritius to Oman at the Duqm Port and then continues to French territory in the Reunion Islands. India has made military pacts with Oman, France, and Mauritius, as it has done in the past.

The Andaman Nicobar island have emerged as an 'eastern fish hook' in the quest between India and Indonesia to control the most crucial trade routes that will help them appear as a superpower. This has also brought new issues in the Indo-Pacific region amidst China's aggressive policy across the region. Before embarking on what can be achieved, a glimpse of the judicious importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands becoming an 'eastern fish hook' is noteworthy. Hence, the islands can become India's strategic catch in countering China's 'Strings of Pearl' strategy because of its closeness to the 'Strait of Malacca' chokehold. Approximately 80% of the global marine oil trade travels via the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which includes the Strait of Malacca and the nearby six-degree channel. India may gain a huge strategic and practical edge over the rest of the Indian Ocean region if it establishes its main navy station near this passage.

The bilateral agreement to construct marine connectivity between Aceh and the Andaman and Nicobar islands is a new development in regard to Indo-Indonesia relation (Septiari, 2019). It is a significant strategic investment in bilateral interaction for both nations because the port on Sabang island, which is the Indonesian node in this proposed maritime link, is being built in collaboration with India (Chaudhury, 2019). Unquestionably, improved trade and people-to-people exchange will result from increased maritime connectivity, and both of these outcomes will need increased security cooperation between maritime agencies in both countries.

Conclusion

A close connection with Indonesia is likely to become more and more important to India as its aspirations for Southeast Asia grow. Given its location and leadership in Southeast Asia Indonesia is an important partner India's efforts to influence the Asia-Pacific region. Indonesia has tried to improve India's relations with ASEAN, but it has also been maintaining its own strong hold in Southeast Asia. Additionally, Indonesia may view India as a useful check on the emergence of Chinese influence in the area and as a replacement for Indonesia's external security dependency on the United States.

More cooperation between India and Indonesia is necessary for several compelling reasons, notably in the maritime sector. They have a lot to gain from keeping the local maritime commons in good condition because they are maritime neighbours and both rely largely on maritime trade for economic prosperity. One of the main pillars of the developmental goals achieved by the current administration of these countries has been the ability of these states to use the oceans for economic and social development. Due to individual capacity gaps, both countries face formidable marine concerns that are unlikely to be resolved by either nation acting alone. In order to create a cooperative maritime security, it could be beneficial for India and Indonesia to begin with simple goals and progressively increase the frequency and complexity of interactions.

Although the push in the India-Indonesia strategic alliance has recently grown significantly, there is still a great deal of room for furthering bilateral relation of Indo-Pacific maritime security. Despite the presence of bilateral frameworks, both nations must work together consistently to improve and operationalize them. In addition, other aspects of marine cooperation, such as domain awareness, interoperability, information sharing, and maritime law enforcement, need to be investigated. These will give both nations the advantage as they work to solve the region's new traditional and non-traditional security issues. A stronger and more proactive India-Indonesia strategic collaboration in the maritime sphere will be extremely advantageous and contribute to the Indo-Pacific region's security. In this regard Andaman-Nicobar Island is definitely emerging as a significant Strategic player in the bilateral Relation.

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