

RETHINKING INDIA'S NAVAL STRATEGY

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THE recent confabulations between Indian and American admirals and the joint Indo-Australian naval exercises appear to herald a new era in Indian and western military cooperation. The birth of an Indo-Western alliance may be premature considering western concern over India's regional ambitions. As an American defence analyst argues in the July issue of the prestigious *Proceeding* journal, "The Indian Navy is embarking on a vast naval expansion programme that will further destabilise the region and give them respectable power projection ability and capability to interfere with US and allied interests."

"With the impotence of the USSR, a major lesson of the Gulf War is that regional powers like India need the blessing of America to conduct a militaristic foreign policy. In the absence of such a blessing, India may well have to confront America in the future."

The US navy, centred around its nuclear carrier groups, wields the stick of American military and diplomatic coercion. Since World War Two, the US navy has been geared towards attacking a hostile coastline, particularly the Soviet Union. To implement this strategy, the US navy has gone in for nuclear-powered Nimitz-class aircraft carriers, each embarking 85-110 assorted aircraft of which approximately 75 are interceptors and strike aircraft. The carriers along with their escort ships form the offensive arm of the

US navy. To counter the American naval threat, the Soviet navy, under the late Admiral Gorshkov, concentrated on submarines and long-range shore-based strike aircraft instead of acquiring task force capability.

In analysing the failure of German maritime operations in World War Two, Admiral Gorshkov in *Red Star Rising At Sea*, argues that the German Navy should have attacked allied convoys and taskforces with a combination of submarines and shore-based aircraft, instead of solely relying on submarines. Mr Khrushchev, in his memoirs, derided Soviet admirals for their fondness for acquiring large, expensive ships instead of emphasising the less glamorous but more cost-effective submarines.

Submarines play an important role in neutralising carriers. The recently published results of a US-Japanese naval exercise is revealing. American carrier groups were pitted against 'hostile' submarines. While four 'enemy' submarines were destroyed, a single nuclear-powered submarine was able to sink two of the three carriers, along with eight lesser ships.

Although the Indian Navy has 17 submarines, eight of which are the obsolete Foxtrot submarines, India has concentrated on acquiring capital ships — INS Viraat, Godavari-class and Kashin-class frigates and Project-15 destroyers. With the acquisition of its second carrier and plans to indigenously design and build a third carrier, the Indian Navy is planning for limited task force capability.

Indian carriers embark one-

tenth the aircraft of their American counterparts and, although the Harrier proved itself in the Falklands, in comparison to fixed-wing aircraft, Harriers have limited range and weapon payload capabilities.

Port facilities are limited for Indian carriers. The INS Viraat is unable to drydock in Bombay and Cochin harbour had to be dredged to accommodate it. Moreover, no Indian harbour on the west coast can dock a 60,000 ton-carrier which India originally planned for; we, therefore, had to settle to indigenously design a 25,000 ton-carrier.

In the Gulf war, the US navy deployed six carriers having a fighter strength which will approximately equal the effective strength of the entire Indian air force.

While Indian carriers can suc-

If India follows a militaristic foreign policy without the blessings of the Americans, it may well find itself in an extremely unequal confrontation with America

cessfully threaten our neighbours, in the event of an Indo-American confrontation, they will be easy targets for American submarines and carrier-based aircraft which will bottle up Indian ships in their harbours. In the 1982 Falklands War, the Argentine ship, General Belgrano, was detected by an American space satellite and subsequently sunk by a British nuclear submarine. This single act confined the Argentine fleet to port for the duration of the conflict.

As a further deterrence to the US task force, Indian sub-

marines should have missile capability. Under-water launched anti-shipping missiles pose a serious threat to surface vessels. The Pakistan navy, to counter the Indian task force, retrofitted its old Daphne and Augusta-class submarines with the under-water-launched Harpoon missile.

In the absence of this technology resulting from the reluctance of the USSR and the West to export it, India must indigenously develop it. India already has a successful missile development programme under Dr Abdul Kalaam. However, according to published reports, the programme appears to be concentrating on developing missiles for the army and the airforce. Anti-shipping missiles, including the underwater-launched version, should be developed by the Integrated Missile Development Programme.

The peculiar characteristics of the Indian Ocean provide an advantage for submarines. Water temperature is one of the key factors in detecting submarines. In the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, temperature variations fluctuate and layers are shallow posing a problem for submarine detection. India already has a laboratory in Cochin which collects and analyses oceanographic data to study the peculiarities of the Indian Ocean. The Indian navy needs more oceanographic vessels to constantly monitor the waters.

The Indian naval strategy needs rethinking in the light of the present international environment. India can no longer depend on the Soviet Union as it did in 1971 to protect herself against the US 7th Fleet.

In the ongoing flirtation with the West, India must remember the Western humiliation of Iraq which was nurtured to serve Western interests and was subsequently destroyed when it discarded the Western yoke. In the event of an Indo-American confrontation, no Indian city must be allowed to suffer the fate of Baghdad. □