

Presence of extra regional forces history essay



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The world we live in is covered with 70 percent water divided into oceans, seas, rivers, estuaries, etc. Indian Ocean, surrounded by 3 continents, is the third largest ocean and has been the focus of attention, since long, as it contains the vital sea lanes that provide for some of the largest economies of the world.[1]To the north of Indian Ocean is the Arabian Sea which serves as the main conduit for the shipping of oil and other goods to both the Gulf Region and rest of the world. Acting as a gateway to the largest oil supplying region of the world, the Arabian Sea is crucial to both the regional states and the International World.

2. The Gulf in itself is one of the most important geo-strategic regions in the world with 15 million barrels/day of oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz, at the mouth of the Gulf.[2]The world is dependent on energy supplies from the Gulf, which is also a vital transit zone for commercial activities linking Asia, Africa and Europe. The Gulf region has for decades been faced with unrest and instability.[3]It has seen many wars, and provocative actions by some Gulf States have only added to the instability plaguing the region. Hence, the security of the narrow waterway is a matter of high priority.

3. Subsequently, security in the Gulf and Arabian Sea is not only a regional concern, but an International one.[4]The presence of a military superpower to safeguard the production and shipping of the region's oil supplies is a given especially in an age where terrorism has emerged as an imminent threat.

MARITIME SECURITY

4. The maritime security domain has changed drastically in the aftermath of 9/11.[5]Also, it has been realized that no one nation can single handedly cope with the threat borne in the maritime environment. The main focus being on illegal maritime activities and its consequences thereof, the leading maritime nations have adapted quickly in order to counter this growing threat. Navies of the world are conscious and increasingly focused on maritime security operations which has led to joint effort on global scale based on common understanding.

CHALLENGES POSED

5. The geo strategic importance of Arabian Sea, the Gulf and its instability goes hand in hand. The Arabian Sea is also home to more than half the world's arms conflict. It is home to two of the world's declared nuclear armed states with Iran striving to join this restricted list. It's also the base of operations from where US supports its mission in Iraq and Afghanistan, and last but not least, home to the growing trend of piracy.[6]The result is the deployment of substantial military forces in and around the Arabian Sea and Gulf.

PRESENCE OF EXTRA REGIONAL FORCES

6. For long, US has had the biggest and most permanent presence in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of the extra regional naval forces. The US fifth fleet operates in the region from their headquarters in Bahrain and is responsible for the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea and Red Sea.[7]The very substantial US naval presence in the region has been necessitated for several key reasons. The most important is to maintain the Arabian Sea and Gulf region as a

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secure highway for International Commerce between the oil rich Gulf States and rest of the world. The second and immediate concern is to maintain freedom of navigation through the chokepoints in the region.[8]Finally, the Indian Ocean region is important to the United States and U. S. allies because it could become a secondary arena for great power strategic competition in Asia, particularly between India and China.[9]Moreover, US has been using the region for its global war on terror as well as monitoring Iranian and Chinese military expansion, which the US considers a major threat to its power projection in the region.[10]

7. The rise and development of Chinese Naval power and deployment in and around the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is arguably the most important aspect of current maritime scenario in the region.[11]The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy has progressively increased its maritime influence by transforming from a coastal defense Navy to a force capable of sustained open ocean operation.[12]As China progresses to fulfill its aspiration of blue-water capable navy, the primary concern for them still is securing the extensive sea lines of communication, a belief enforced by the recent commissioning of their first aircraft carrier.[13]With considerable increases in government defense spending, China, in no time will be capable of having the kind of power projection that can and will be sent to the Indian Ocean to protect its interests.

8. The French Navy and British Royal Navy also maintain a relatively robust presence in the IOR. The British Royal Navy operates through the US Fifth Fleet while French Navy maintains its presence through bases at Djibouti and Abu Dhabi.[14]

9. Aside from these, major navies of the world, under the umbrella of CTF 152, aimed at safeguarding the flow of oil through the Persian Gulf, CTF 150, tasked with Maritime Security and Counter-Terrorism and CTF 151 tasked with countering piracy in the IOR,[15]have continuous presence in the region throughout the year. The extra regional states that have had (or still have) warships and other maritime assets in the IOR include Canada, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Israel, Indonesia and Turkey.

REGIONAL FORCES PRESENT

10. Of the regional forces, Pakistan, India and Iran are the states that have discernable strategic interests in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy has generally been configured mostly for coastal defense and littoral operations in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Iran may not have a substantial traditional surface warfare capability; however, their effectiveness as a disruptive force in the region remains critical. The Iran Navy's experience in utilizing its small craft force in the asymmetric capacity effectively, the strategic location of its bases (Bandar Abbas and Char Bahar) and military facilities on key islands in the Gulf, the possession of Kilo Class submarines and modernization of its Naval capacity are reasons enough to consider Iran navy a viable force in the region.[16]Moreover, its standoff with the rest of the world on its nuclear program is further indication of its growing ability.

11. India not only has by far the largest navy in the region, but it is indeed one of the largest navies of the world, and it wants to keep it that way. India

considers IOR as its backyard and considers China's ingress and growing influence in the region as a threat. To fulfill its wider strategic objectives, India has embarked on the road for its naval expansion.[17]It is also bridging alliances with the smaller nations in the region to have a better control on the changing environment of IOR. In addition, due to the ever increasing bilateral relations, between India and US, it is fast turning into a global player in the maritime sector.

12. Pakistan has adapted very quickly to the changing maritime scenario in the Arabian Sea and Gulf. The primary interest of Pakistan in the maritime sector is the assurance of national security, which it can effectively achieve through seaward defense and safeguarding its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Pakistan Navy, as a result, has undergone a remarkable transformation in the past decade to fulfill this strategic interest.[18]The recent commissioning of AZMAT Class Fast Attack Craft (Missile), addition of F-22P Frigates and induction of Oliver Hazard Perry Class Frigates in the PN arsenal are steps in the right direction to help protect Pakistan's maritime interest.

PAKISTAN NAVY AND COALITION OPERATIONS

13. Pakistan Navy's participation in coalition operations has helped to enhance its International profile and gives PN a greater credibility for its role in the regional maritime order.[19]Furthermore, it directly contributes in maintaining a sustained military presence in the strategically vital area of national interest as any vacuum would have been filled by forces hostile to it.

EFFORTS BY PAKISTAN NAVY

14. In addition to participation in the coalition forces, Pakistan Navy has also been proactive in encouraging the process of collaborative maritime security between regional and extra regional navies. In this regard, AMAN exercise has been held biennially since 2007 in the region whose main participants have been UK, US, China France, Turkey, Bangladesh and Malaysia. The successful hosting of the AMAN exercises is a testament of Pakistan being a responsible country contributing towards peace and stability in the region. [20]Likewise, the interest shown by the extra regional and regional navies in AMAN is a clear indication that these efforts are being recognized.

CONCLUSION

15. The Arabian Sea and Gulf region is all set to play a crucial role in the coming years. The region is likely to remain a source of threats and other security challenges. The US will continue to invest in the region so as to maintain its dominance over the global maritime commons. Moreover, US will likely continue to invest in Indian Navy to keep the Chinese growing influence under check. China, on the other hand, will remain proactive in achieving their strategic objectives in the region. India is likely to maintain diplomacy on all fronts and fulfill their own objective of local hegemony. The outcome of Iran's nuclear crisis is another factor that will determine the future of the region.[21]

16. In all this, a transformed and formidable Pakistan Navy can play an integral role, in addition to protecting and preserving the national maritime interests, to help achieve Pakistan's strategic objective and image building. PN is capable of projecting its power across the conflict spectrum through its

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potential, skill and self assurance. Moreover, PN in the near future will be capable of shoring up a strategic deterrence in addition to the conventional one.

17. The region is likely to remain under military observance for long as each country tries to fulfill their objectives. Thus, Pakistan Navy has to remain proactive and constantly adapt to the changing environment. Only then will it be able to maintain its credibility as a major regional force and remain an important player in the ever varying dynamics of the Arabian Sea and the Gulf region.