

MAHASAGAR: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION/RELATION

NEWS: INDIAN NAVY'S MAIDEN INITIATIVES OF INDIAN OCEAN SHIP SAGAR (IOS SAGAR) AND AFRICA INDIA KEY MARITIME ENGAGEMENT (AIKEYME)

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India's maritime policy has evolved from SAGAR (2015) to MAHASAGAR (2025), expanding its focus to global regions like Africa, ASEAN, and Latin America while countering China's influence. MAHASAGAR aims to strengthen security, trade, and development cooperation with a broader approach to maritime security and regional engagement.

MAHASAGAR Policy Overview

- **MAHASAGAR (2025)** is India's ambitious strategic vision to enhance security, trade, and development across the Global South (including Africa, ASEAN, Latin America, and Pacific Island nations).
- The vision was unveiled by the Indian Prime Minister during his visit to Mauritius in 2025, reaffirming India's commitment to the Global South.
- The policy comes at a time when China is expanding its influence in the Indian Ocean.

India's Role in the Indo-Pacific and the Global South

- **Medium and Smaller Nations' Demand:** These countries seek reliable partners who offer competence, credibility, and empathy, unlike China's debt trap diplomacy seen in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.
- **India as an Empathetic Partner:** India is viewed as a trustworthy partner, especially in maritime security, sustainable development, and capacity-building, focusing on respect for sovereignty and sustainable growth.

Evolution from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR

- **SAGAR (2015):** Focused on maritime security, regional cooperation, sustainable development, and boosting India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
 - **Key Objectives of SAGAR:**
 - Maritime security (anti-piracy, naval cooperation).
 - Economic growth (trade, fisheries, blue economy).
 - Disaster resilience (aid and response).
 - Regional connectivity (ports, digital links).

- Environmental protection (climate change, marine pollution).
- **Examples of SAGAR Implementation:**
 - Naval partnerships with Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and East African nations.
 - Assistance during oil spills, cyclones, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Joint exercises like MILAN and coordinated patrols (CORPATs).

Shift from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR

- **Need for a Shift:**
 - SAGAR focused only on the Indian Ocean, whereas **MAHASAGAR** broadens India's engagement to multiple regions, including the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Geopolitical Challenges:** Increased Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean, Africa, and Pacific Island nations.
 - **Economic and Trade Considerations:** India aims to enhance blue economy partnerships and trade connectivity.
 - **Holistic Security Approach:** MAHASAGAR responds to modern threats like cyber warfare, piracy, and resource competition.

Geopolitical Implications of MAHASAGAR

- **Alignment with Other Policies:** MAHASAGAR aligns with India's **Indo-Pacific strategy** and complements the **QUAD** vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- **Countering China's Influence:** MAHASAGAR aims to counter China's growing influence through India-led cooperation models.
- **Strengthening India's Position:** MAHASAGAR helps position India as a leader in the Global South, advocating for their interests in global forums like **G20, IORA, and BRICS**.
- **Ties with Island Nations:** Nations like **Mauritius, Maldives, and Seychelles** are key partners in India's broader maritime vision.
- **Mauritius Centrality:** Mauritius remains central to India's strategy, with both SAGAR and MAHASAGAR policies being unveiled there.

Government Initiatives for Maritime Security and Diplomacy

- **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI):** Launched in 2019 to promote maritime security, connectivity, disaster risk management, and sustainable blue economy development in the Indo-Pacific.

- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** Strengthening regional ties in trade, sustainable fisheries, and maritime safety.
- **Quad Maritime Security Initiatives:** India collaborates with the U.S., Japan, and Australia to enhance maritime security and counter illegal fishing.
- **IFC-IOR (Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region):** Established for real-time information exchange to enhance maritime security.
- **India-Africa Maritime Cooperation:** Engaging African coastal states through port development, naval training, and anti-piracy operations.
- **Naval Exercises as Maritime Diplomacy:** Example: MILAN 2024, with 50+ countries participating, strengthening partnerships.
- **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF):** Launched in 2022 to ensure resilient supply chains and digital connectivity in maritime trade.

Challenges for India's Engagement with Global South

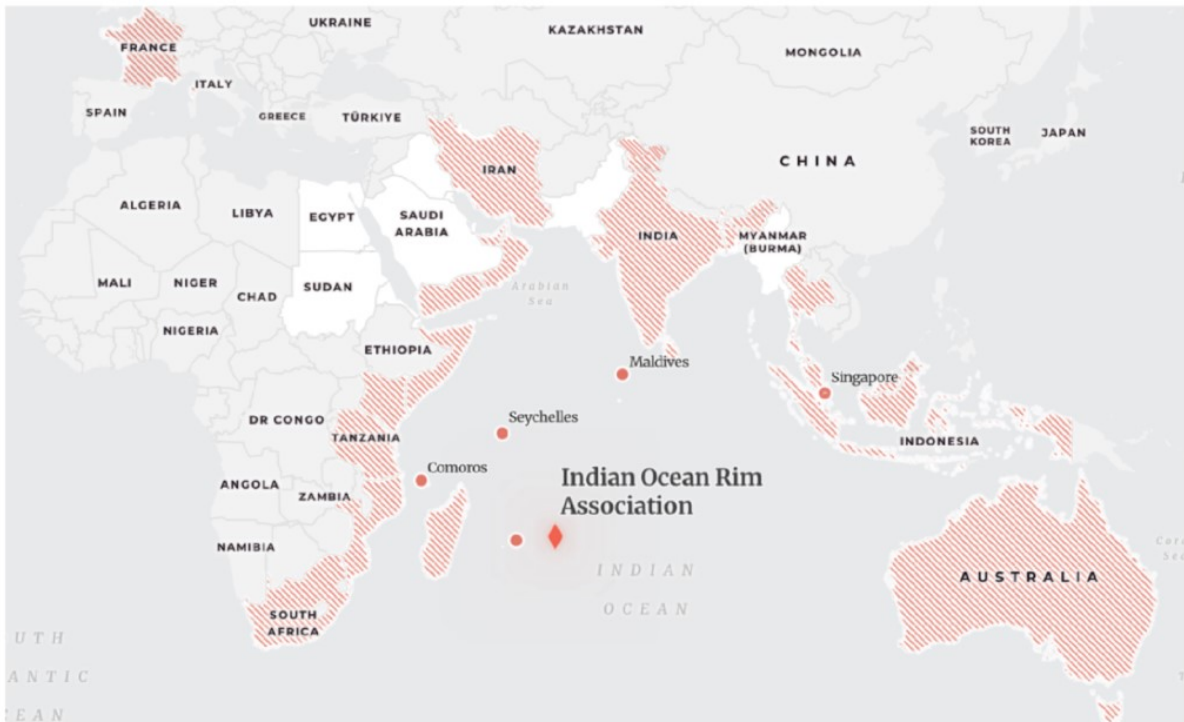
- **Strategic Competition:** The growing Chinese influence through the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** and its expanding naval presence pose strategic challenges.
- **Multiplicity of Regional Organizations:** Mauritius faces overlapping roles and strategic interests across regional bodies like IORA, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and Colombo Security Conclave (CSC).
- **Resource Constraints:** Balancing naval modernization with domestic priorities.
- **Climate Change and Maritime Disasters:** Rising sea levels and extreme weather events require more focus on climate resilience in maritime policies.
- **Regional Political Instabilities:** Political shifts in partner nations may affect long-term cooperation.
- **Militarization of Indian Ocean:** China's expanding naval bases and India's strengthening of its **Andaman & Nicobar Command** increase regional militarization.
- **Violation of Maritime Laws:** Violations of **UNCLOS 1982** by illegal territorial claims threaten regional stability.

Way Forward for India's Maritime Strategy

- **Strengthen Regional Cooperation:** Deepen engagement with Indo-Pacific and Global South nations through diplomatic, economic, and security initiatives.
 - Example: India funded Mauritius' Coastal Surveillance Radar System and built an airstrip and jetty at Agalega Island.

- **Enhance HADR Operations:** Positioning relief supplies at key naval bases like Andaman & Nicobar Islands to respond quickly to disasters.
- **Coordination with Regional Partners:** Expanding cooperation through platforms like **IORA** and **BIMSTEC** to improve disaster preparedness and security.
- **Sustained Naval and Infrastructure Development:** Strengthen maritime surveillance and port infrastructure in strategic locations.
 - Example: Strengthen **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** through cooperative mechanisms like **IFC-IOR**.
- **Upholding UNCLOS 1982:** Advocate for a rules-based maritime order and support **Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs)** to counter illegal territorial claims.

Map of IORA Members



Conclusion

- The shift from **SAGAR** to **MAHASAGAR** reflects India's ambition to expand its maritime leadership beyond South Asia, integrating economic growth, regional security, and sustainable development into a broader framework.

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