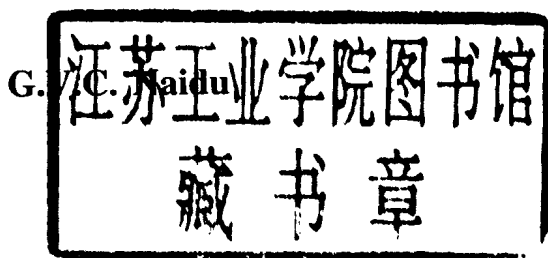


# Indian Navy and Southeast Asia

G.V.C. Naidu



# THE INDIAN NAVY AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



  
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## Acronyms

AAW	Anti-Air Warfare
AEW	Airborne Early Warning
ALH	Advanced Light Helicopter
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASM	Anti-Submarine Missile
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
ATV	Advanced Technology Vessel
BARC	Bhabha Atomic Research Centre
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBG	Carrier Battle Group
CBM	Confidence-Building Measure
CENTCOM	Central Command (U.S.)
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CSL	Cochin Shipyard Ltd.
CVBG	Carrier Vessel Battle Group
CV	Carrier Vessel
DWT	Dead Weight Tonnage
DRDO	Defence Research and Development Organisation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FENC	Far Eastern Naval Command
FOC	Flag Officer Commanding
FORTAN	Fortress Andaman
FPDA	Five-Power Defence Arrangement
FRU	Fleet Requirement Unit
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GRSE	Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers
GRT	Gross Tonnage
GSL	Goa Shipyard Ltd.
HAL	Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd.
HDPE	Hoogly Dock and Port Engineers
HSL	Hindustan Shipyard Ltd.
IGMDP	Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme
IMSF	Indian Marine Special Force

INAS	Indian Naval Air Squadron
IPKF	Indian Peace-Keeping Force
IPV	Inshore Patrol Vessel
LCA	Light Combat Aircraft
LCT	Landing Craft Tank
LCU	Landing Craft Utility
LPD	Landing Platform Dock
LRMP	Long-Range Maritime Patrol
LSM	Landing Ship Medium
LST	Landing Ship Tank
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MCF	Marine Commando Force
MCM	Mine Counter Measures
MDL	Mazagon Dockyard Ltd.
MR	Maritime Reconnaissance
MSDF	Maritime Self-Defence Force
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDO	Naval Design Organisation
NJF	Naval Jet Flight
nm	Nautical Miles
OPV	Offshore Patrol Vessel
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLA-N	People's Liberation Army—Navy
PMC	Post-Ministerial Conference
RDF	Rapid Deployment Force
RIN	Royal Indian Navy
SAR	Search and Rescue
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SIPRI	Stockholm Peace Research Institute
SLOC	Sea Lanes of Communication
SSBN	Nuclear Ballistic Missile Submarine
SSGN	SSN with Non-Missile Launcher
SSN	Nuclear-Fuelled Submarine
STOVL	Short Take-off and Vertical Landing
TMD	Theatre Missile Defence
VDS	Variable Depth Sonar
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality

## Preface

Any attempt to deal with a subject like the Indian Navy and Southeast Asia is fraught with problems, for it at once raises questions about India's interests and ambitions in a region that is geographically close and with which it has had historical links. However, when seen from New Delhi, one gets the impression that India, since independence, never formulated a cogent policy with the idea of building up a long-term relationship with Southeast Asia. Its manifestation could not be better demonstrated in the ups and downs that have been witnessed in India's relations with Southeast Asia. For the first time in the early 1990s, there appeared to be some earnest plans to qualitatively improve relations with Southeast Asia by going beyond political issues that had dominated the earlier four decades of India's policy, with the initiation of the Look East policy. The immediate result was an all round improvement in relations with individual countries of Southeast Asia and with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Even that seemed to have run out of steam by the late 1990s as it became evident that New Delhi had failed to capitalise on the post-Cold War political environment which coincided with India's economic reform programme. But one major offshoot of this new found enthusiasm has been the establishment of strategic links, especially maritime, with several nations of Southeast Asia.

An analysis of the Indian Navy and Southeast Asia, has to be seen from the viewpoint of India's security interests and concerns and the role of the navy in that. Hence, a considerable part of this study is devoted to understanding the Indian Navy and its development in that perspective before examining it in the context of Southeast Asia. Various aspects of India's security are briefly discussed, followed by the evolution of the Indian Navy since independence so that the navy is not viewed in isolation, but in conjunction with other developments in and around India. Although the Indian Navy came into the limelight in the 1980s, owing to its acquisition of power projection-capable ships, and its actions in Sri Lanka and Maldives, what took the Indian policy makers by surprise was the way the ASEAN countries reacted to the expansion of the Indian Navy.

A spate of strategic literature devoted especially to the navy and its possible role in Southeast Asia, even as the superpowers started to militarily disengage from the region, compelled India, to some extent, to initiate measures to rebuild its relations with Southeast Asia. This also coincided with the domestic economic exigencies in the post-liberalisation phase, necessitating that India look at Southeast Asia afresh.

Given the peculiar nature of the Southeast Asian security, which has historically attracted major power intervention in one way or the other, a possible Indian role in Southeast Asia cannot be complete unless the interests and strengths of other Asian powers, such as China and Japan, are taken into account. That has warranted some focus on the navies of these powers and their growth in the recent past. The US continues to be a major factor, but its presence in Southeast Asia today is negligible, and there are clear indications to show that the US is quite unlikely to get involved in the regional disputes, including those of the South China Sea. It is also widely believed that if Japan decides to play a greater political role, which it has clearly indicated since the end of the Cold War, Southeast Asia would be a prime candidate. This is a disconcerting idea because of its role during World War II. China, on the other hand, has been sending mixed signals without renouncing the use of force to realise its territorial claims. While both China and Japan have strong strategic and/or economic interests, India wants Southeast Asia to remain peaceful and stable and not come under the influence of either of these two powers. That is where the strategic objectives of India and the ASEAN countries coincide and have brought about a new era of defence cooperation between India and several Southeast Asian countries.

The Indian Navy is most unlikely to face a threat from any of the Southeast Asian nations, but it would be concerned if a power like China tried to undermine its interests in the Indian Ocean. Two factors that weigh heavily on the minds of Indians are China's military activities in Myanmar and its military assistance to Pakistan. From a naval point of view, India does not want yet another front to constantly worry about because of the Chinese activities in the Indian Ocean. It is in this light that the eastward thrust of the Indian Navy needs to be analysed.

It may be useful to make clear that this study is not necessarily meant for those who are proficient in naval affairs, but is aimed at a wider section of people such as intellectuals, academics, journalists, policy

makers and others interested in the strategic affairs of Southeast Asia, who would like to understand the Indian Navy in a political and strategic perspective rather than worry about minute technical details. Hence, the effort has been to concentrate only on those aspects which are relevant to this perspective.

This study was undertaken several years ago, but could not be completed for one reason or another. I am thankful to a number of persons who shared their views on the subject and offered valuable suggestions to enrich my knowledge about the Indian Navy, its evolution since independence, the basis of its expansion, particularly in the 1980s, and the problems it is beset with. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, which offered me a Fellowship to conduct a study on a broad theme related to India and Southeast Asia. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Jasjit Singh, director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, who encouraged me to complete the study, and Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, Dean Mathew and a couple of officers of the Indian Navy who took pains to go through the manuscript and offer invaluable suggestions. I also owe a lot to my wife Jayanthi and daughter Harisha for their patience and understanding while I was involved in this study. Last, but not the least, are Uday Bhaskar, who helped me meet some senior officers of the navy at Eastern Naval Command, Visakhapatnam, and Rehana Mishra who meticulously went through the manuscript for editorial corrections. The work and opinions expressed here are entirely mine and do not represent any organisation.

New Delhi  
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## Introduction

The history of the last five or so centuries of international relations could not have been the same if the advent of naval power and its use to pursue a nation's foreign policy objectives and economic interests had not taken place. The whole process of colonisation of the present day developing world, and the two devastating World Wars that took place in this century, probably would not have happened if the erstwhile metropolitan powers did not understand the utility and importance of sea power. Notwithstanding the development of nuclear and a variety of ballistic weapons, either during the Cold War or after its end, the role and significance of modern navies has not diminished. Nor has the importance of the seas diminished with the advent of a wide range of technologies. The fact that nearly 70 per cent of humankind lives along sea coasts and the coastal regions continue to be the fastest growing and major engines of growth needs no underlining. Large navies continue to be major factors in global strategic equations, although modern technologies have made it possible for even smaller navies to possess considerable deterrent capability by way of missiles and effective early warning systems.

However, in the context of the emerging international security system after the end of the Cold War, the navies of regional great powers have come into sharper focus. This was particularly conspicuous in the Asia-Pacific which was witness to some of the bloodiest Cold War-related wars and large-scale external intervention. Things did settle down by the late 1980s (though at an enormous cost) and the presence of superpowers did contribute to a kind of political predictability and stability which, in turn, helped many countries in the region to achieve unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. The Cold War, which was thought to be the biggest destabilising factor because of the danger of superpower intervention in one form or another, paradoxically contributed a great deal to the establishment of a regional balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, thus, contributing to regional peace and stability. The unexpected

end of the erstwhile superpower competition, and along with that, of the Cold War, not only severely upset whatever regional balance of power had existed earlier but was also responsible for the strategically fluid situation that had ensued. And hence, a new balance of power in Asia will take a long time to take some concrete shape and the region is expected to face a number of challenges by way of uncertainties and lack of predictability. Besides other complexities that are inherent, Asia has a peculiar mix of continental and maritime powers. Even powerful nations such as China and India, whose interests historically had been primarily continental, have also developed strong maritime interests and stakes which will invariably result in the growth of their sea power in the coming years. The peculiar role that the navy plays in the promotion of a country's national interests needs to be taken into account in any assessment of regional security.

Unlike in the past, and unlike the army and the air force, in modern times the navy is called upon to perform multifaceted roles. Apart from repulsing an external aggression, a modern navy has the additional responsibility of protecting oceanic assets, undertaking exploratory missions, guarding the sea lanes of communication, and is a major instrument of power projection. Hence, the navy of any major power and its expansion (especially in the developing world) should not be viewed merely in a narrow military perspective. It is necessary to keep in mind the interests, concerns, aspirations and ambitions of a developing navy while attempting its evaluation.

Moreover, the emerging technologies have rendered the traditional concepts of sea power and the role of the navy obsolete. Classical modelling or strategies have little relevance in modern naval warfare. The advent of satellites and their critical role, and the invention of a wide array of missiles have fundamentally altered concepts such as maritime strategy and naval warfare. Similarly, the technological advances have rendered the navy the most potent weapon to win wars or influence developments in distant regions. Thus, each navy has different capabilities, objectives, and ambitions, depending on the resources a country can afford and the industrial/technological base it possesses. Hence, it may be not be prudent to try and fit a navy into any categorisation, for each navy is unique in its own way.

While the traditional major naval powers such as the United States,

the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and France, are either stagnating or on the decline, new powers are on the rise, especially in Asia, for instance, China, Japan and India. One can add Pakistan, Indonesia, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and Australia to the list of naval powers which are on the ascendance and possess capabilities that cannot be ignored. Not far behind in their quest to build modern navies are countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, etc. All the above mentioned countries are on the path toward qualitative and quantitative expansion.

Apart from the overall increases in defence allocations across the region, there are perceptible changes in terms of the quality and nature of equipment that are sought to be acquired. This process obviously entails effecting fundamental changes in strategic doctrines concurrently. Advanced and technologically sophisticated equipment and platforms are being acquired which more often than not tend to be offensive in nature with, of course, attendant power projection capabilities. Although it is difficult to categorise the present military modernisation in the Asia-Pacific in terms of an "arms race" in the traditional sense, there is no denying the fact that there is a race for arms build-up.<sup>1</sup> While the defence expenditures in North America, Europe and the Middle East are on the decline, the Asia-Pacific region has been witnessing a steady rise in real terms. It is estimated that in the next one decade, armaments in this part of the world would be worth about US \$100 billion.<sup>2</sup> The current financial turmoil in the Asia-Pacific may have dampened the earlier momentum, but it is widely considered to be a temporary phenomenon. While the defence allocations of most countries have been cut and many planned allocations have been kept on hold, given the geostrategic realities of the Asia-Pacific, this phenomenon is unlikely to last as a major feature.

Apart from general upgradation of the defence forces, most of the countries have also embarked on enlarging their Research and Development (R&D) and defence-related industrial base. Rapid and substantial industrialisation of these economies in the recent past has further contributed to the above process. Even as these countries spend more on defence and procure sophisticated weaponry, greater emphasis on technology transfer and local production under licence is likely to be an important characteristic in the coming years. Generally depressed market conditions for arms exporters are expected to facilitate this process further.

What is most striking in this process of defence modernisation is the

emphasis given to the navies and air forces. Because of a qualitative difference in terms of implications for the rest of the region, the maritime issues of the Asia-Pacific have acquired an important dimension in the emergent regional security for the following reasons.

First, most of the disputes in Southeast Asia and in the larger Asia-Pacific are related to maritime boundary or offshore territorial claims and they completely overshadow other border and boundary disputes. These are:

- the Kurile or Northern Territories issue between Japan and Russia;
- the Senkaku Islands dispute between Japan, China and Taiwan in the East China Sea;
- the Lian Rocks in the Sea of Japan between South Korea and Japan;
- the Straits of Taiwan;
- the Paracel and Spratly Islands dispute involving China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam in the South China Sea;
- the Natuna Islands, again in the South China Sea, between Indonesia and Vietnam (over the demarcation line on the continental shelf), on the one hand,
- and between Indonesia and China, on the other;
- the dispute between Malaysia and Singapore over ownership of Pulau Batu Pith Island in the Straits of Johore;
- the dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia over Sipadan, Sebatik and Ligitan Islands in the Celebes Sea;
- and the province of Sabah and the waters surrounding it between Malaysia and the Philippines.

Second, the sea lanes of communication. Full cognisance has been taken of the fact that the ever-increasing global trade and economic interaction would automatically enhance the strategic significance of sea lanes. This is particularly so in the Asia-Pacific region as most of these countries are critically dependent on sea-borne trade. Some of the world's busiest and most important sea lanes are located in this region: the South China Sea, the Malacca and other straits in Southeast Asia, the Indian

Ocean, etc. The ability to protect/control the sea lanes in times of crises would be the most crucial aspect of future naval developments in the region.

Third, the oceanic resources. The ever increasing dependence on sea assets would only get aggravated as resources on land start diminishing and greater attention is paid to harnessing maritime resources. Although large-scale exploitation of seabed minerals may take some time (because of the heavy costs involved and the lack of appropriate technology), the major concern would be to bring as much ocean as possible under sovereign control which would entail immediate benefit in the form of fishing rights. There have been indications that in the cases of the South China Sea and Senkaku, the reports of huge reserves of oil and gas may be exaggerated, but no one can deny the substantial and immediate benefit in terms of fishing and other activities that would accrue as a result of control of these islands. Protection of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the resources within it has become a major naval concern. The reported finding of massive seabed gas reserves in and around the Natunas has already resulted in China extending its claims to this region too, thus, forcing Indonesia to reappraise its security calculations.

Among the three recognised major flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific—the Korean Peninsula, the China-Taiwan stand-off, and the South China Sea dispute—probably the most troublesome and tricky is the dispute surrounding the islands in the South China Sea. The contest for the islands in the South China Sea has already witnessed several bloody battles since 1974. Even as the disputants gear up their military capabilities, the involvement in, and the intensity of, any future conflict is anticipated to be much greater. It needs no underscoring that this problem would involve regional navies in a big way in the event of a conflict breaking out, in addition to the possibility of some major extra-regional navies taking part.

Given the limitations of the deterrent capabilities of Southeast Asian navies, notwithstanding the current effort at modernisation, and given the clear signs of American disengagement from the region, the navies of the Asian great powers, viz., Japan, China and India, acquire added significance. These powers also happen to be some of the largest and fastest growing economies, have substantial defence industrial bases, and especially have experience in operating large, ocean-going navies. The



problem is further compounded by the lack of transparency in their security interests and strategic doctrines. China maintains complete secrecy about its defence expenditure, security concerns and strategies, and India, although it publishes its defence expenditure details, does not publish any official documents on defence policies. And though Japan publishes an annual Defence White Paper, it is not regarded to be very exhaustive.

There is no doubt that in the changed circumstances, the navies of the major powers in the Asia-Pacific would acquire importance for a number of reasons in the coming years. The Chinese Navy is undergoing a fundamental transformation in its modernisation by way of doctrinal changes, technological upgradation, and building of power projection capabilities; the Japanese Navy continues to expand and remains technologically highly sophisticated; and the Indian Navy, despite recent setbacks because of funding and other constraints, continues to develop its indigenous base of shipbuilding and maintains a limited power projection capability.

The Indian Navy came under close scrutiny in Southeast Asia in the Eighties for the wrong reasons: despite close defence links, India could not have played a second fiddle role even if the Soviets had grand designs in Southeast Asia. Not only would this have seriously undermined India's credibility as an independent sovereign nation and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), but also Indian interests would not have been served. Even after the end of the Cold War, India would not have been competing to extend its influence into Southeast Asia given the colossal domestic social, political and economic problems. Suspicions were fuelled in part by a lack of communication and regular interaction between India and the member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the absence of authoritative strategic literature about India's security interests and defence policies further contributed to these suspicions. The following chapters attempt to deal with the issues of India's security concerns, the evolution of the its navy, its maritime interests and strategies, its current programmes and its relations with Southeast Asia during and after the Cold War.