

INDIA'S AEROSPACE FOOTPRINT IN THE IOR

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SUMMARY

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), while being a major source for energy security and trade, is also a cauldron of instability due to conflicts, piracy and terrorism. The major powers consider the IOR to be of great strategic significance. China, too, is steadily enhancing its footprint in the IOR. India's geographical location gives it a natural influential position over the major sea lines of communication and choke points in the Indian Ocean. Its aerospace capabilities are vital elements of national power for securing its interests in the region. Hence, these capabilities need to be developed and acquired to match the imperatives of the time.

Fig 1: Indian Ocean Region



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INTRODUCTION

Long before the larger Atlantic and Pacific Oceans had been well explored, the Indian Ocean was a bustling region of travel and trade. There is evidence that the Egyptians explored the Indian Ocean as early as about 2300 BC, when they sent maritime expeditions to the “land of Punt,” which was somewhere on the Somali coast.¹ More than 2,000 years ago, traders sailed the ocean to exchange goods between India and Africa and Arabia.² The Indian Ocean, the world’s third largest ocean, covers 73.556 million sq. km.

of area and includes a number of seas, bays, gulfs, straits and channels³. The major choke points include Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, Lombok Strait, Strait of Malacca and Palk Strait. Through these waters, nearly 70 percent of the world’s energy trade and half of its container traffic transits each year. The Indian Ocean has become the primary passage for the 21st century economic balance shift from the West to the East.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with 35 states (29 littoral and six island states), is one of the most complex regions in the world, spread over three continents and having a wide variety of races, cultures and religions, as well as being well endowed with natural resources. In percentage terms, the region has the largest population in the world. The people coexist at different levels of economic development, with different types of governments of varying levels of political stability and quality of governance, demographic pressures, ethnic and sectarian tensions.⁴ The region is a cauldron of instability due to persistent conflict situations and the spread of terrorism. The IOR also has the unique distinction of hosting the major powers of

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1. Retrieved at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/285876/Indian-Ocean>
 2. Retrieved at <http://kids.britannica.com/elementary/article-346145/Indian-Ocean?#9346145.toc>
 3. Retrieved at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Ocean
 4. Leighton G Luke, Ciara O’Loughlin, *Indian Ocean: A Sea of Uncertainty* (West Perth, Australia: Future Directions International, 2012).

the world, far away from their mainland, either through island territories or leased bases on the territories of the IOR countries. All the major powers have a considerable military presence in the IOR. This ocean is expected to play a critical role in the US' Asia pivot strategy. India has a prominent and unique geographical position in the IOR, halfway between Africa and Australasia. The Indian peninsula juts into the Indian Ocean, giving the country an inherent influential presence in the region. Its island territories of Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar group enhance its reach further into the ocean. India, if it continues its focussed growth in the economic and military dimensions, will be sought by the major powers to play a role of immense strategic significance in the region. The Indian Ocean will play an important role in India's progress towards being in the same league as the world powers. India would need to balance its focus between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean to secure its national interests.

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It is, therefore, essential for the nation to possess a potent instrument of national power capable of deterring conflict and maintaining peace. Aerospace power has enabled nations to exercise their power and influence across vast distances in a rapid response to a dynamic strategic environment. Aerospace power can be defined as the total ability of a nation to assert its will through the medium of air and space. It includes both civil and military capabilities. Aerospace power enables surface forces to undertake operations beyond their physical operating mediums.⁵

This paper aims to assess the present scope of India's aerospace power footprint in the Indian Ocean Region in securing its national interests. It will discuss only the aerospace capabilities of the country to first detect, and then counter, the threats to national interests in the IOR. However, it is

5. *Basic Doctrine of the Indian Air Force* (New Delhi: Air Headquarters Vayu Bhawan, 2012).

The International Seabed Authority had allotted India and China a large area in the central Indian Ocean for seabed exploration.

After surrendering some of the blocks due to inaction, India has once again put forward a claim for additional allotment of seabed blocks as a response to the Chinese efforts.

an acknowledged fact that any counter-action would necessarily be a joint operation and, thus, need an all round capability, without overdependence on a single arm or Service of the defence forces.

INDIAN INTERESTS IN THE IOR

Writing in the 1940s, K. M. Pannikar had argued that "while to other countries, the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas, to India, it is a vital sea. Her lifelines are concentrated in that area, her freedom is dependent on the freedom of that water surface. No industrial development, no commercial growth, no stable political structure is possible for her unless her shores are protected."⁶ Indian interests in the IOR may be broadly classified as economic, diplomatic and military.

Economic

India has a coastline of more than 7,500 km, 1,197 island territories and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of more than 2.3 million sq km. It sits astride vital Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) which provide it with the shortest and most economical means of overseas trade. Ninety percent of the country's trade by volume and 77 percent by value is seaborne. India's need for energy for its economic growth is dependent on an assured supply of coal, crude oil and natural gas. These energy resources are mostly imported as indigenous production is limited. The country's major oil and gas fields are located offshore. As overland natural resources are getting depleted, the focus is now shifting to deep seabed mining. Inter-state competition over seabed minerals is emerging as a major strategic issue, given the region's vast mineral deposits containing valuable metals such as

6. Retrieved at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/111008/k-m-panikkar/india-and-the-indian-ocean>

silver, gold, copper, manganese, cobalt, and zinc.⁷ The International Seabed Authority had allotted India and China a large area in the central Indian Ocean for seabed exploration. After surrendering some of the blocks due to inaction, India has once again put forward a claim for additional allotment of seabed blocks as a response to the Chinese efforts. Certain rare earth minerals are also found in near-shore sand bodies in India's coast. One such mineral is 'thorium' found in the sands of the Kerala coast which is also a source for nuclear energy. India's exports of marine products not only contribute to its economic growth, the seas are also a source of livelihood for a large part of its populace.

Diplomatic

The Indian diplomatic footprint in the IOR is fairly strong even though the overall strength of its diplomatic corps is limited as compared to even smaller nations. This reflects its focus on the countries of this region due to the following factors which are of considerable importance to India's national interests:

- Energy security.
- Natural resources.
- Markets for Indian manufactured goods and services.
- Indian diaspora.
- Indian immigrants repatriating large amount of remittances.

India does not have the money power or the military prowess to spearhead its diplomacy. Hence, it has chosen its 'soft power' capabilities to build friendly relationships with other countries. India had undertaken good initiatives like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme way back in 1964 to assist developing nations in training select individuals in various fields, including defence. Most of the IOR countries have benefited through this programme. The pan-African E-Network project initiated by India to e-connect 48 African nations to provide

7. Retrieved at <http://chellaney.net/2013/11/29/bridge-between-europe-and-asia-strategic-challenges-in-the-Indian-Ocean>

tele-education and tele-medicine has many IOR littoral African states as members.⁸ Such initiatives have helped India garner diplomatic support at various fora and would also be needed in the future if India aspires for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). India's attempt to raise the level of diplomatic relations with the Islamic states of the IOR is to cater to the social and economic needs of its Muslim population as also to counter Pakistan's efforts against Indian interests.

Military

India's military diplomacy in the IOR, though limited in scope, has led to considerable goodwill and helped enhance bilateral relations. India's security relations in the region are anchored by its close relationships with many countries on the eastern seaboard of Africa, the island nations in the IOR, and those of the Persian Gulf. These countries have received military equipment from India as also training for security personnel. Also, the Indian defence forces have, in the past, assisted various state governments against possible coups, in peace-keeping operations under the UN flag, in disaster relief, and maritime security during regional and world conclaves, e.g., naval ships patrolled off the coast of Mozambique during the African Union Summit in 2003 and World Economic Forum Meet in 2004. In reciprocation, India has been allowed to set up communication monitoring facilities, and its military aircraft—even fighter aircraft—have been permitted to stage through on long distance transit, with logistics support and berthing facilities for naval ships. While India is averse to creating offshore military bases and has been voicing its concern against other countries' attempts in this regard, it needs to create and sustain a friendly environment which could facilitate its future military operations, if needed, and, as far as possible, negate the efforts of those inimical to Indian interests to gain any foothold.

ASSESSMENT OF THREATS

The late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru summed up India's concerns regarding threats from the maritime front when he stated, "History has

8. Retrieved at <http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation>

shown that whatever power controls the Indian Ocean has, in the first instance, India's seaborne trade at her mercy and, in the second, India's very independence itself."⁹ Successive governments in Delhi have recognised the fact that the Indian Ocean has security implications in all its dimensions for the country. India's new 'maritime doctrine' is quite explicit on the central status of the Indian Ocean in Indian strategic thought and on India's determination to constitute the most important influence in the region as a whole. The key security considerations include:

- Accessibility of the Indian Ocean to the naval fleets of the world's most powerful states. Steady rise in the Chinese naval footprint in the IOR.
- Proliferation of conventional military power and nuclear weapons among the region's states.
- The large Islamic populations on the shores of the ocean and in its hinterland which have come under the influence of the radical and extremist leadership.
- Illegal immigrants and human trafficking.
- India being made a conduit for illegal trade in arms and narcotics.
- The oil wealth of the Persian Gulf. Critical dependency for energy security by many developed and developing countries.
- Importance of key straits for world trade and their possible effect as choke points.

As the third largest economy in the world and one largely dependent on foreign oil, India's primary strategic concern in the foreseeable future will be energy security. India will not only have to protect its offshore oil and gas assets but also the extensive investments of both its public and private sector oil companies in oil concessions in foreign countries, many of them in the IOR. These investments are perceived to need military protection as the criticality of the resource rises or instability spreads in the region.

Piracy, originating in Somalia in the early 1990s, has become an industry earning millions of dollars in ransom money for the perpetrators of the crime. Initially only affecting the coastal waters, the pirates' success has

9. Brahma Chellany *Asian Juggernaut* (Noida, India: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).

The pirates' reach has now extended much closer to the Indian coast, leading to higher security concerns. In the broad expanses of the Indian Ocean, the distances involved are simply too vast to be monitored comprehensively.

meant that, with better weaponry and "mother ship" vessels, their operations were able to move progressively further out from the coast and were able to accost substantially larger ships, even super-tankers. Pirates have even attacked patrolling foreign naval vessels. The pirates' reach has now extended much closer to the Indian coast, leading to higher security concerns.¹⁰ In the broad expanses of the Indian Ocean, the distances involved are simply too vast to be monitored comprehensively. Although in recent years, there has been considerable decrease in piracy incidents due to the combined

effort by many nations, and laudable actions by the Indian Navy too, the situation can easily deteriorate with new players entering this business.

Maritime terrorism is likely to gain primacy in the future. The distinct advantage of using the seas as a supply chain link for terror attacks on land was made quite evident by the Mumbai attacks of 2008. An important adjunct to maritime terrorism is drug trafficking and gun-running. The increasing container transport by sea and lax security checks at ports have facilitated the carriage of human terrorist cargo, arms and ammunition, and narcotic drugs. India, by virtue of geography, lies at the pivot of the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent, the two infamous drug-producing areas.¹¹ The large number of fishing ports and beaches along its coast, coupled with an utterly deficient coastal security apparatus, make India a most suitable location for all kinds of activities detrimental to national security and interests.

The Indian Ocean is potentially an arena for geo-strategic rivalry among the great powers, resulting in "Indian-Oceanic arc of militarisation" stretching from Egypt to Indonesia and further to Australia". Almost half of the Indian Ocean states have armed forces in excess of 100,000 and /

10. Probal Ghosh, "Security Challenges from Non-State Actors in the Indian Ocean", *Strategic Trends, South Asia Series*, vol 1, issue 3, December 2011 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation).

11. Ibid.

or military expenditure in excess of 3 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Most of the West Asian portion of the IOR has been characterised as “the global zone of percolating violence” and “is likely to be a major battlefield, both for wars among nation-states and, more likely, for protracted ethnic and religious violence”¹² There is, moreover, “an increasing tendency of extra-regional powers of military intervention in IO littoral countries to contain what they see as a conflict situation.” Such actions add to the prevalent political instability in the region.

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Chinese sea-faring interest in the IOR for trade dates back to the early 15th century when Adm Zeng He led large fleets of the Ming dynasty on several voyages through the Indian Ocean to the coastal countries of East Africa.¹³ In the later half of the 20th century, China steadily increased its military footprint in the IOR, ostensibly to secure its national interests. Chinese assistance to the countries of South Asia to develop their maritime infrastructure, with an eye for future basing facilities for its navy, is perceived by India as a potential threat. This is of critical significance considering the fast pace of modernisation of, and large scale accretion to, the Chinese blue water naval capabilities

PRESENT AEROSPACE FOOTPRINT

Supplementing its diplomatic and political initiatives, India is shaping its growing military capability for envisaged threats emanating from and in the IOR. These forces should be able, should the need arise, to undertake the following tasks:

- Prevent militaries, especially the air forces and navies of hostile nations to have freedom of operation in the Indian Ocean.

12. Z Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books 1997).

13. Edward L Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405-1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).

- Operate in distant waters with impunity to safeguard Indian maritime and economic interests. If need be, project power over the mainland of hostile nations.
- Have all round surveillance, interception and interdiction capability over key choke points, on vital islands, around the littoral, and along key sea routes.

Effective accomplishment of these tasks would need all round capability development of the three components of the security set-up: the army, the navy and the air force. However, this paper will discuss only the aerospace capabilities of the country.

Indian Air Force

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has steadily developed its capabilities from being a small tactical air force to a credible strategic force. Its asset acquisition programme has focussed on multi-role, long range modern technology platforms, with adequate scope for indigenous development. A critical capability combination of the Air Superiority Fighter (ASF) Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) aircraft has been operationalised, enabling extension of the nation's offensive air capability from the eastern coast of Africa to western Australia. Enhancing of infrastructure in peninsular India, as also on the island territories, has further contributed to extension of air power influence over larger areas. However, fighter operations deep into the oceans and seas need dedicated and continuous training. The crews have to be physically fit and psychologically attuned for long flights over alien environments. The co-development with Russia of the Brahmos supersonic cruise missile for India's air and naval forces introduces a highly lethal capability that is most likely to be used as a conventional counter-force weapon. The limited strategic airlift capability acquired through the IL-76 aircraft procured in the early 1980s was put to good use in 1988 when a para battalion was airlifted at short notice from Agra to Male, the capital of the island nation of Maldives.¹⁴ India's quick

14. Retrieved at <http://indianairforce.nic.in>

response had saved the legitimate government from being overthrown in a coup attempt. The recent acquisition of the C-17 Globemaster and C-130J Super Hercules has incrementally enhanced this capability. While the IAF has a large fleet of medium lift helicopters, these are not suitable for operations from naval ships. However, these could be airlifted in the C-17 aircraft in disassembled form for any “out of area” contingency.

The IAF has been actively associated with military diplomacy undertaken by the country.

It has been participating in multi-nation air exercises regularly, both within and outside India. This has enabled its air crew to be aware of international procedures and learn operational practices from modern air forces. They have also gained experience in long distance flights with multiple mid-air refuelling. The IAF has participated in disaster relief operations in many parts of the world, including the IOR, and was involved in ‘coercive diplomacy’ adopted by India against Sri Lanka when it undertook air-drops of aid material for humanitarian reasons over Jaffna in 1987.

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Indian Naval Air Arm

India’s naval fighter aircraft, operating from the INS *Vikrant*, had, for the first time in independent India, projected a potent and lethal capability during the 1971 Indo-Pak War on the eastern seaboard. During the same war, the country’s political and military leadership had come under tremendous pressure following reports of the US carrier task force, led by the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise*, heading towards the Bay of Bengal.¹⁵ Other maritime operations the world over, involving use of aircraft, have reinforced the point of a robust naval air arm being a necessity and not a mere luxury, to the national leadership. Hence, the focus on a two-aircraft carrier-based navy, supplemented by land-based long-range maritime aircraft. The induction of

15. Retrieved at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Enterprise_\(CVN-65\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Enterprise_(CVN-65))

the aircraft carrier INS *Vikramaditya* with its MiG 29K fighter aircraft has enhanced the offensive reach as well as the sea control capability of the Indian Navy. Procurement of one Landing Platform Dock (LPD), the INS *Jal Ashwa*, and plans for constructing more such units will give a fillip to heliborne capability from the seas. Recently, the navy has inducted the Boeing P-8I aircraft, which is a long-range, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, capable of broad-area, maritime and littoral operations. The older TU-142M long-range anti-submarine aircraft is still in operation, as is the IL-38 maritime patrol aircraft. These would need replacement in the near future. The navy has a limited number of various types of helicopters optimised for different roles ranging from early warning, anti-submarine, air assault and search and rescue. These helicopters have been procured from different countries. Onboard helicopters were effectively used by Indian naval ships in the anti-piracy role in the Gulf of Aden. Some Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) have also been procured. These add to the surveillance capability of the navy.

Indian Coast Guard Air Arm

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) is a maritime armed force operating under the Ministry of Defence. The force was constituted in August 1978 under the Coast Guard Act, 1978, and is mandated to protect the maritime and other national interests of India in the maritime zones of India. Its ships, air cushion vehicles and aircraft constantly patrol the Indian EEZ. The air arm is equipped with Dornier DO-228 aircraft for reconnaissance missions while the fleet of Chetaks and Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALHs) carries out search and rescue, tracking suspect vessels in anti-poaching and anti-smuggling tasks. The air arm is also tasked for monitoring oil spills. These assets are limited in number as well as capability considering the expanse of India's coastline and EEZ, and the likely threats. The aircraft are not weaponised, but the helicopters can carry armed personnel.

Indian Satellites

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is the premier organisation

responsible for ensuring that the country's space-based assets capabilities match the growing demand for economic growth, and the security of national interests. It has been able to develop such capabilities with international assistance as well as indigenous technological prowess. ISRO has established two major systems, the Indian National Satellite (INSAT) series of geo-stationary satellites for communication, television broadcasting and meteorological services, and the Indian Remote Sensing (IRS) satellites which are the Earth Observation (EO) satellites for resource monitoring and management. IRS is the largest civilian remote sensing satellite constellation in the world, providing imageries in a variety of spatial resolutions, spectral bands and swaths. The Radar Satellite-1 (RISAT-1) is a state-of-the-art microwave remote sensing satellite carrying a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) payload with resolution of one metre which enables imaging of the surface features during both day and night under all weather conditions. The RISAT will be used extensively for purposes like mapping, managing natural disasters and surveying the seas. It can also see through camouflage or foliage used to conceal camps or vehicles and even track ships at sea. The RISAT has reduced India's dependence on foreign agencies for satellite imagery.¹⁶ India has taken steps to develop an independent regional navigation satellite system. It is designed to provide an accurate position information service to users in India as well as the region extending up to 1,500 km from its boundary, which is its primary service area. The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) will provide two types of service, namely, Standard Positioning Service (SPS) and Restricted Service (RS) and is expected to provide a position accuracy of better than 20 m in the primary service

16. Retrieved at <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/india-launches-spy-satellite-risat2>

India may need to develop its “over the horizon” look capability to complement its air and space-based assets to monitor and track foreign aircraft and ships, both civil and military, at further ranges than normally detectable through other types of radars.

area.¹⁷ Even with such concerted effort to build space-based capabilities, India does not have continuous surveillance, tracking and mapping coverage over the IOR. The glaring deficiency in all round surveillance and tracking got highlighted when the MT *Pavit*, a ship which was drifting after being abandoned by its crew near Oman, ran aground at one of the beaches of Mumbai in 2011.¹⁸ Such an incident is a wake-up call for the nation still trying to shore up its security post 2008 Mumbai attacks by the terrorists.

NEED FOR FUTURE ACCRETIONS

The Indian efforts to keep as much area of the Indian Ocean under its watch as is possible are being incrementally enhanced by the acquisition of wide-ranging capabilities. These capabilities are spread over offensive and non-offensive assets. However, some distinctive capabilities could be added to make the country's response more time-sensitive and effective. Such capabilities are described in the subsequent paragraphs.

Amphibious Aircraft: India, with more than 1,100 island territories many of them uninhabited and quite distant from the mainland, needs capability to ensure their security. Such capability has to be quick to respond, with minimal operating constraints. The main advantage of the amphibious aircraft is its versatility to operate from land as well as water. These aircraft are generally built for long range and extended endurance to operate over a vast expanse of seas and also be capable of carrying passengers and evacuating stretcher casualties. Their Short Take-off and Landing (STOL) capability enables these aircraft to operate from restricted space on land and over water. These may be equipped with a plethora of

17. Retrieved at <http://www.isro.org/satellites/navigationssatellites.aspx>

18. Retrieved at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national>

electronic equipment for reconnaissance and surveillance, and are capable of day and night operations. While they may not be able to hover over a designated spot like a helicopter, their operational capabilities far exceed those of shipborne or land-based helicopters. Large amphibious aircraft like the Shimaywa US-2 can also operate in deteriorating sea conditions which would normally ground any other aircraft or helicopter.¹⁹ The incident of January 2011 when a Somali pirate mother ship the *Prantalay 14*, was detected by an Indian Coast Guard Dornier aircraft about 200 miles from Kochi, leading to its interception by navy and coast guard ships after about seven hours of tracking, emphasises the need for large amphibious aircraft for a quicker response.²⁰ Such incidents have been occurring with alarming regularity.

Over the Horizon Radar: India may need to develop its “over the horizon” look capability to complement its air and space-based assets to monitor and track foreign aircraft and ships, both civil and military, at further ranges than normally detectable through other types of radars. The extended ranges would give adequate response time.

Amphibious Assault Ship / Landing Platform Helicopter (LPH): The Indian Navy has embarked on capability enhancement based on the concept of a carrier task force. It also has plans to build more Landing Platform Docks (LPDs) like the INS *Jal Ashwa* which has the capacity of accomodating six helicopters. Most of the naval ships are capable of accommodating at least two light utility helicopters. However, what is required is a ship that is able to embark a large number of heavy and medium lift helicopters for conducting vertical envelopment operations from the seas. And, if the need arises, attack helicopters could also be carried on board. A modern-day example of such an operation was the one by the HMS *Ocean* during the Libyan crisis of 2011.²¹ During the April 2015 emergency evacuation of more than 5,000 Indians and foreign nationals from Yemen by Indian ships and aircraft, an LPD/LPH type of ship with a large component of heavy or

19. Retrieved at <http://www.shinmaywa.co.jp/aircraft/english/us2>

20. Retrieved at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/navy-destroys-pirate-mother-ship-arrest-pirates/article1137420.ece>

21. Retrieved at <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/>

The interests of outside powers in the IOR may grow to such a level as to be in direct confrontation with those of India. It would then depend upon the wisdom and diplomatic acumen of the national leadership whether India stands firm or acquiesces to the adversary.

medium lift helicopters may have facilitated the operation in a more effective manner. In the future too, India is likely to be involved in such evacuations from the IOR littorals as a large number of its citizens are working in these countries.

CONCLUSION

India seems to be playing a catch up game in terms of its capacity building to counter likely threats to its interests in the IOR. It has to be very clearly understood by the policy-makers that the strategic scenario may not unfold as envisaged and, hence, the nation needs to be prepared for the unexpected. The interests of outside powers in the IOR may grow to such a level as to be in direct confrontation with those of India. It would then depend upon the wisdom and diplomatic acumen of the national leadership whether India stands firm or acquiesces to the adversary. However, it is quite apparent that there is no escape from building adequate deterrence, and a credible and effective military response. Air and space assets would, firstly, be an effective diplomatic tool to avoid escalation through the display of resolve and, secondly, enforce the will of the nation to defend its interests by offensive action, if the situation so demands. Hence, if India sees the IOR as a primary area to pursue its national interests, it is essential to acquire adequate capacities of aerospace power to cover the whole region.