

BOOK REVIEW

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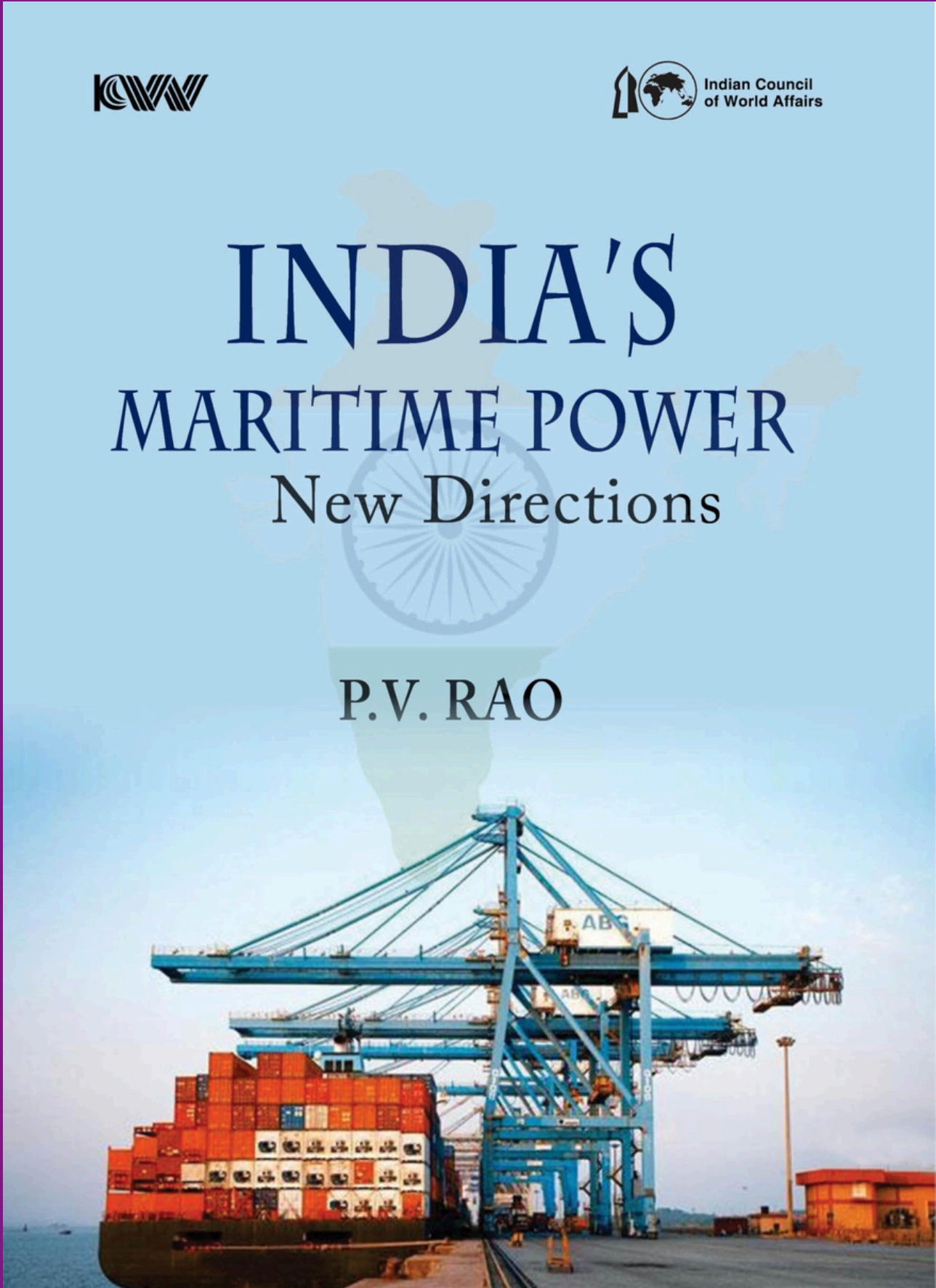
India's Maritime Power: New Directions

by P V RAO



INDIA'S MARITIME POWER New Directions

P.V. RAO



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Prof P.V. Rao effortlessly builds in the book from the narrative of contemporary India, being a maritime conscious nation which is proven to be no longer as "Sea Blind". It reflects on the rise of a maritime driven power which is not only dependent on the strength of naval forces alone but also on key pillars of coastal industrialization, maritime tourism, blue economy, marine hydrocarbons and river sea port links. Redefining the quadrants of the strategic sea domain, the author establishes a strong foundation by providing a deep-rooted analysis differentiating between naval power and maritime power of a nation, both requiring integrated strategic blueprints that require sustained strategic oversight, driven by differing outlooks. He also presses upon the significance of civilian capabilities in respect to naval security, such as coast guard merchant shipping, which we also observe in the later chapters of the book.

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A New Maritime India Vision for 2030 and SAGARMALA POLICY

Prof PV Rao breaks down India's Sagarmala and provides a succinct review of the policy and the port centric policy framework with a 2030 vision forward for the nation.

With a deep-rooted analysis of the SagarMala policy i.e. the nation's port development model, we observe challenges highlighted in the book, to reach the policy's main targets by the ending year of 2025 which can be supported by limited organisational resources, lack of implementation and financing clarity and project monitoring. 'The Maritime Vision 2030', a reformed SagarMala port centric policy framework was introduced, under which fresh reforms have been imposed enabling transshipment hubs, thrusting ideas and vision of maritime driven governance and technology driven ship building and development, which can be noted as a transformational milestone in India's coastal topography.

One of the key takeaways from the book is its focus on civilian-led maritime capabilities, especially the merchant marine, which is described as a strategic asset that complements the navy's functions. It highlights how commercial maritime agencies, with their vast global networks, often have a wider operational reach than traditional naval actors. These agencies gather valuable information and insights from regions where naval ships are not permitted, allowing access to foreign coastal zones through regular trade activity. The book also points to India's growing investment in shipbuilding infrastructure and efforts to strengthen overseas trade linkages beyond the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In this sense, the merchant vessel is portrayed not just as a medium of trade, but as a reflection of the nation's economic vitality, outward ambition, and competitive edge, a key component in building a broader and more secure maritime presence.

A Domestic Focus : Maritime Federalism

A complex interplay of domestic and foreign factors is a necessary criteria for assessing a domain and the maritime domain is no exception to the author. The section provides light on the significant role of Centre-State Partnerships in development of a federal framework to India's national maritime policy called as bharatmala. Cooperative federalism with India's coastal states has fostered the creation of State Maritime Boards — key institutional mechanisms which drive maritime development and governance at the domestic level.

India's naval supremacy: and its evolving naval engagements

The outlook towards expanding India's maritime security with its outlook more oriented towards wider Asia Pacific region and the recent construct of the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is the beacon for India's outreach diplomacy and a gratifying event. From South Africa, since 1994, it provides a historical timeline of India's bilateral engagements in the region through naval exercises which has been seen as an effort to counterbalance Chinese maritime expansionism, projecting the Indian navy as an instrument of foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific as we know it to be today. Navy multilateralism is proven to be a significant corollary to encourage a multilateral approach to foreign affairs. Especially with its increased engagements with the QUAD.

Navy's Soft Power Roles

The Naval soft- power is also a significant feature of this book, a perspective which often is overlooked. Modern navies today are known to be projected as a peacetime extension of state power and presence abroad. The Indian navy has established a sterling tradition of extending soft services to boats, ships, radars and helicopters to nations such as Mauritius and Maldives, going even far as in extending a helping hand to countries such as Bangladesh navy and Indonesian navy in hydrographic survey of waters and salvaging huge quantities of illegal arms and ammunition. Soft services are growing as we observe the Chinese influence growing in the region.

Building on India's growing strength in the Indo-Pacific, the Deep Ocean Mission (DOM) stands as a major step forward in developing homegrown technologies and exploring the ocean's depths. By tackling both human and undersea challenges, the initiative strengthens India's maritime capability and reflects its broader ambition to emerge as a leading power in the region.

Space as An Enabler in Modern Warfare : The example of Maritime Security

The expansion of technological capabilities has widened the arena of inter-state rivalry and a show of power, extending from the depths of the oceans to the expanse of outer space.

As the book reaches to an end, the author provides a fresh analytical linkage between space and maritime security. The author's efforts to build a interconnected threadline between space technologies- which he has termed as space assets, stands as a crucial pinnacle of power, enhancing the capabilities of the Indian Navy, in intelligence, identifying ships , gathering crucial data on baseline graphing, monitoring coastal hazards and climate-related impacts such as sea rise.

He specifically mentions nano satellites, which have also been used previously to track ships by the deployment of Indian Regional Navigation System, a constellation of several satellites providing navigational guidance and tracking services of naval forces. He also profoundly underscored the growing prominence of naval communication satellites in bolstering ship tracking and surveillance. Space, being termed as a dominant element of the NAVAL forces, is highlighted to be the ultimate symbol of India's growing leveraging maritime power.

“In a just maritime order, there are no winners and losers in the IOR or the Indo-Pacific”. At the ending conclusion, the book briefly mentions concerns for India, highlighting the increasingly growing influence of China in the Indian OCEAN region, and its usage of its mineral monopoly into a strategic weapons powerplay. As a powerhouse of mineral resources, posing a worry to India. With its growing trade imbalances and dependence on the Dragon, India must leverage its regional opportunities beyond the sea, serving the country's future growth agenda.

Sustainable ocean development and effective ocean governance need cooperation across multiple sectors and scales that could –and should– facilitate a new maritime regionalism in the Indian Ocean, with the sub-regional scale playing an important complementary role in ensuring that the living habitat of both humans and non-humans remains free from international discord and geopolitical rivalries. In the commonly shared, forward-looking vision of an open, rule-based, inclusive, peaceful and socially just maritime order for the Indian Ocean and the wider Indo-Pacific space, there are no winners and losers per se.

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