

National Security Council of India

BACKGROUND GUIDE FOR DELEGATES

Committee	National Security Council of India
Agenda	Strengthening India's Maritime Security Architecture in the Indian Ocean Region to Counter Chinese Naval Expansion and Grey-Zone Tactics
Conference	SCIMUN 2026 · The Eighth Edition
Venue	The Scindia School, Fort Gwalior
Dates	April 10-13, 2026
Theme	Pretia Imperii: The Cost of Power

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C H A P T E R I

Letter from the Executive Board

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to SCIMUN'26. We are most looking forward to seeing what you, members of the committee, can bring to the table, both in terms of your ideas in debate and your creativity in crafting solutions.

The following Background Guide has been formulated keeping in mind various aspects of the agenda to be discussed in committee. Though this Background Guide lists out the broad facets of the agenda we would like to see being debated upon, it is NOT exhaustive and further reading on the part of delegates is essential. Under no circumstances can the Background Guide be quoted or used as substantial proof in committee sessions.

"...a nation's social and economic well-being is intricately linked to the seas, not only for trade but also how it faces threats to its own security that develop across the seas...our resolve to achieve high growth can be realised only if our maritime frontiers and assets are safe, stable and act as enablers. The Indian Navy, as the primary element of India's maritime power, has the challenging task of safeguarding the country's maritime interests."

— Shri Pranab Mukherjee

Mr. Rahul Menon, Chairperson · Mr. Pratyush Agarwal, Vice Chairperson

C H A P T E R I I

National Security Council of India

The National Security Council of India is the apex executive body responsible for advising the Prime Minister on matters concerning national security, strategic policy, and long-term geopolitical planning. Established in 1998, the Council was created to institutionalise coordinated strategic decision-making in response to the increasingly complex security challenges confronting India in the post-Cold War environment.

The NSC is a domestic executive advisory mechanism operating under the authority of the Prime Minister. Its purpose is to integrate military, diplomatic, intelligence, economic, technological, and internal security perspectives into a coherent national security framework. The Council ensures that policy responses to emerging threats are not fragmented across ministries but instead reflect unified strategic direction.

The institutional structure of the NSC includes the Strategic Policy Group, which brings together senior ministers, service chiefs, and top bureaucratic leadership to deliberate on major security and defence issues. It is supported by the National Security Advisory Board, composed of experts from academia, diplomacy, defence, and strategic studies, who provide long-term assessments and policy recommendations. The National Security Council Secretariat functions as the coordinating and analytical arm of the system, synthesising intelligence inputs and supporting high-level strategic planning. The National Security Adviser plays a central role in this architecture, serving as the principal security advisor to the Prime Minister and coordinating inter-agency policy execution.

The NSC's mandate encompasses the assessment of external and internal threats, formulation of national security doctrine, crisis management coordination, and alignment of defence preparedness with diplomatic and economic strategy. In contemporary strategic discourse, this includes domains such as maritime competition, cyber security, space security, emerging technologies, and grey-zone tactics.

Within the maritime domain, the NSC plays a decisive role in aligning the operational objectives of the Indian Navy with broader diplomatic initiatives such as SAGAR and India's Indo-Pacific engagement strategy. Its deliberations are confidential and executive in nature, and decisions are reached through strategic consultation rather than public debate or voting procedures.

CHAPTER III

Introduction to the Agenda and Key Terms

The maritime domain has emerged as the principal arena of twenty-first century strategic competition. For India, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) constitutes a strategic lifeline that underpins national economic stability, energy security, and geopolitical influence. Nearly 95% of India's trade by volume and the majority of its energy imports are transported via sea lines of communication that traverse the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the wider Indian Ocean (Indian Navy, 2015). The uninterrupted functioning of these maritime routes is integral to India's comprehensive national power.

The strategic environment of the IOR has undergone structural transformation over the past decade. The People's Republic of China has expanded the operational footprint of the People's Liberation Army Navy through sustained deployments, submarine patrols, logistics agreements, and port infrastructure investments across South Asia, the western Indian Ocean, and the eastern African littoral. While these engagements are frequently framed within economic or anti-piracy cooperation narratives, their cumulative strategic effect enhances China's capacity for power projection and sustained presence in India's primary maritime theatre.

Key Terms

- **Grey-Zone Tactics:** Coercive strategies that remain below the threshold of conventional armed conflict and exploit ambiguity, incrementalism, and non-military instruments to alter strategic outcomes (Erickson and Kennedy, 2016; USI, 2021).
- **Maritime Security Architecture:** The integrated framework of naval forces, coast guard operations, maritime domain awareness systems, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, legal instruments, and regional partnerships that collectively secure national maritime interests (Indian Navy, 2015).
- **Dual-Use Infrastructure:** Commercial port and maritime facilities that possess potential military utility, enabling logistics support, surveillance, or replenishment for naval deployments (Pant and Rej, 2018).

CHAPTER IV

Historical Evolution of India's Maritime Strategy

India did not begin as a maritime power in strategic thinking, even though it is geographically maritime by nature. In the decades after independence, national security planning was overwhelmingly shaped by continental threats. Wars with Pakistan and the 1962 conflict with China reinforced the perception that India's primary vulnerabilities lay across land borders. The navy, though professional and capable, remained secondary in strategic prioritisation.

The 1971 war offered an early indication of what maritime power could achieve. Naval operations in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal disrupted Pakistan's logistics and demonstrated the coercive value of sea control and sea denial. Yet even this success did not immediately transform India's long-term force planning.

A meaningful shift began in the early 1990s. Economic liberalisation increased India's integration into global trade networks, making maritime security directly tied to economic growth. Energy imports from West Asia and trade flows through the Malacca Strait and other chokepoints became strategic vulnerabilities. Maritime security was no longer peripheral; it was foundational to economic stability.

The post-Cold War period also saw the articulation of the Look East Policy, which expanded India's strategic imagination beyond the subcontinent. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami marked a turning point — India's rapid humanitarian assistance operations in Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Indonesia demonstrated operational reach and reinforced its credibility as a regional security provider (Brewster, 2018).

Doctrinal clarity followed. The publication of *Freedom to Use the Seas* (2007) and later *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (2015) by the Indian Navy reflected a more self-conscious maritime identity. The 2015 strategy explicitly defined India's primary, secondary, and extended areas of interest, acknowledged the growing presence of extra-regional powers, and framed India as a 'net security provider' in the IOR.

The articulation of *Security and Growth for All in the Region* (SAGAR) in 2015 further integrated maritime security with diplomacy and development. Maritime strategy was no longer purely military — it encompassed infrastructure assistance, coastal surveillance support for island states, capacity building, and sustained presence operations.

Today, India's maritime strategy reflects three cumulative transitions: from a land-centric security mindset to recognition of maritime vulnerability; from defensive coastal protection to active sea control and extended presence; and from navy-led operations to a broader maritime security architecture involving diplomacy, intelligence, technology, and regional partnerships.

CHAPTER V

Nature and Scope of Chinese Naval Expansion in the IOR

| 1. Strategic Drivers: Energy Security and Sea Line Protection

China's expanding maritime presence in the IOR is best understood as part of a broader structural transformation in its grand strategy. As China's economic growth deepened its dependence on maritime trade and imported energy, the security of sea lines of communication linking the Persian Gulf, Africa, and East Asia became central to its national interests (Storey, 2018; Erickson, 2019). A significant proportion of China's crude oil imports transit through the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait, creating what Chinese strategists have termed the 'Malacca dilemma.'

| 2. Institutionalisation of Forward Presence: The Djibouti Base

A watershed moment in China's maritime expansion was the establishment of its overseas military support base in Djibouti in 2017. Academic assessments describe this facility as a logistical hub designed to support escort missions, replenishment, and evacuation operations, but also as a symbolic declaration of China's arrival as an extra-regional military actor (Sun, 2017; Kardon, 2020). The Djibouti base reflects an institutional shift in Chinese policy: acceptance of overseas basing as compatible with national interests, departing from earlier non-interventionist rhetoric.

For India, this marks a structural change in the regional balance. Chinese naval presence is no longer reliant solely on port calls or diplomatic goodwill; it now possesses at least one permanent logistics anchor in proximity to key maritime chokepoints.

| 3. Dual-Use Ports and the Networked Presence

Beyond Djibouti, scholarly debate centres on whether China's port investments under the Belt and Road Initiative constitute a deliberate 'String of Pearls' strategy. Brewster (2018) argues that many of these facilities are commercially motivated and constrained by host-state politics. However, dual-use characteristics cannot be ignored. Long-term leases, Chinese-operated terminals, and familiarity with port infrastructure create latent access options during contingencies. Even without formal military bases, a network of friendly ports can enable replenishment, maintenance, and intelligence collection.

| 4. Submarine Deployments and Undersea Signalling

One of the most strategically consequential developments has been the periodic deployment of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean. Since 2013, both conventional and nuclear-powered submarines have been reported operating in the region (Brewster, 2018). From a naval strategy perspective, submarine

deployments serve three purposes: operational familiarisation with distant waters and acoustic conditions; signalling capability and resolve to regional actors; and testing anti-submarine warfare capacities of potential adversaries. Undersea competition is inherently opaque, which enhances its utility in grey-zone signalling.

| 5. Naval Modernisation and Power Projection Capacity

Chinese naval expansion in the IOR must also be viewed in the context of broader PLAN modernisation. The commissioning of aircraft carriers, advanced destroyers, amphibious assault ships, and replenishment vessels has expanded China's expeditionary envelope (Erickson, 2019). While China does not yet maintain carrier strike group rotations in the Indian Ocean on a permanent basis, the capability increasingly exists.

CHAPTER VI

India's Current Maritime Capabilities

| 1. Doctrinal and Strategic Framework

India's maritime posture is anchored in the Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (Indian Navy, 2015). The document formally identifies India's primary and extended maritime interests and articulates sea control, sea denial, and protection of SLOCs as core objectives. It explicitly recognises the increasing presence of extra-regional powers and frames the Indian Navy as a net security provider in the IOR.

| 2. Blue-Water Fleet and Power Projection

India possesses a diversified blue-water navy capable of sustained operations across the IOR. With INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant, India maintains carrier-based air power that enhances sea control and long-range maritime surveillance. Modern destroyers and frigates equipped with area air defence and anti-ship capabilities enable escort operations. Conventional submarines (Kalvari-class) and the Arihant-class SSBN provide both sea denial and credible minimum deterrence.

| 3. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

India has developed a layered MDA architecture designed to track maritime movements across the IOR. The Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) integrates coastal radar chains, AIS data, and intelligence inputs. The Information Fusion Centre — Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) enhances regional information-sharing with partner navies, improving transparency over vessel movements.

| 4. Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Capability

Given the increasing frequency of Chinese submarine deployments, India has invested significantly in ASW: P-8I maritime patrol aircraft with advanced sonar and surveillance systems; ASW-capable surface combatants and helicopters; and integrated sensor networks linked with aerial reconnaissance.

| 5. Logistics and Sustained Presence

India's fleet support vessels and forward operational deployments enable persistent presence across both the eastern and western Indian Ocean. Logistics agreements and port access arrangements with friendly states extend operational endurance.

CHAPTER VII

Institutional Gaps and Strategic Vulnerabilities

The following table summarises key identified gaps in India's current maritime security architecture vis-à-vis the Chinese challenge:

Domain	Current Condition	Vulnerability	Strategic Implication
Force Structure	Modernising fleet; 2 carriers; expanding surface combatants; limited submarine numbers	Submarine numbers below long-term requirements; procurement delays	Sustained PLAN presence may strain Indian force allocation across eastern and western seabords
Logistics & Overseas Access	Fleet support vessels; SAGAR partnerships; port access agreements	No permanent overseas base comparable to Djibouti	China's fixed logistics node reduces its operational friction in western IOR
Undersea Domain Awareness	P-8I aircraft; ASW frigates; airborne and surface ASW integration	Limited seabed sensor networks; need for persistent underwater surveillance	Regular PLAN submarine patrols may exploit monitoring gaps
Grey-Zone Response Thresholds	Conventional deterrence doctrine well-defined	Lack of clearly articulated response ladder for sub-conventional maritime coercion	Risk of either over-escalation or strategic passivity; ambiguous coercive acts may delay unified response
Industrial Capacity	Indigenous carrier and submarine construction underway	Slow induction cycles; technology dependencies	Long-term maritime competition favours sustained industrial output
Influence in Littoral States	Capacity building; HADR operations; patrol vessel transfers	Competition from Chinese infrastructure financing	Political alignment of smaller IOR states may shift under economic pressure
Maritime Governance	IMAC; Navy-Coast Guard coordination; multi-agency involvement	Jurisdictional fragmentation in grey-zone situations	Ambiguous coercive acts may delay unified response

C H A P T E R V I I I**Points for Discussion**

- Should India prioritise sea control in specific sectors of the Indian Ocean Region, or maintain a distributed presence across the entire theatre?
- Is the current submarine acquisition and induction trajectory adequate to manage sustained PLAN undersea deployments?
- How should India balance investment between carrier-based power projection and sea-denial capabilities such as submarines, anti-ship missiles, and unmanned systems?
- Does the 2015 Maritime Security Strategy require revision to address prolonged extra-regional naval presence and grey-zone competition?
- Should India accelerate development of seabed surveillance systems, underwater sensor networks, and unmanned underwater vehicles to enhance undersea domain awareness?
- How can anti-submarine warfare coordination between air, surface, and sub-surface assets be further institutionalised to ensure rapid response?
- What level of undersea deterrence signalling is strategically appropriate without triggering escalation?
- Should India consider establishing permanent or semi-permanent logistics facilities in the western Indian Ocean to match China's forward logistics model?
- Are current fleet support vessels and logistics agreements sufficient to sustain continuous presence across both eastern and western IOR sectors?

CHAPTER IX

The Executive Board

CHAIRPERSON**Mr. Rahul Menon**

Distinguished academic specialist and political enthusiast. Speaker at W20 under G20 auspices. Over fifteen years' training experience at institutions including KIIT Bhubaneswar, The Lawrence School, and The Scindia School. Students have secured admissions at Caltech, LSE, UCLA and internships at UNICEF and SAARC.

VICE CHAIRPERSON**Mr. Pratyush Agarwal**

'The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.' — Sun Tzu. Deep interest in geopolitics, national defence, and global diplomacy. Views the NSC as the strategic epicentre where a nation's future is secured. Committed to actionable, substantive solutions.

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This Background Guide is a starting point for research — not an exhaustive account, and not a document that may be cited or used as evidence in committee. Delegates are expected to undertake independent research, verify facts through primary sources, and develop well-researched national positions. The quality of preparation will directly shape the depth and direction of debate.

The National Security Council of India at SCIMUN 2026 is designed not merely to test knowledge of the agenda but to develop the capacity for reasoned argument, diplomatic sensitivity, and genuine engagement with the issues at hand. Arrive prepared. Argue with precision. Negotiate with principle.

SUGGESTED READING

- Brewster, David. *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
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