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RESPONDING TO US PIVOT TO THE INDO-PACIFIC  
**INDIA'S PRO-ACTIVE ROLE**  
IN MEETING EMERGING SECURITY CHALLENGES

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India

Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

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### **Author Background**

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Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd) commanded an infantry brigade on the Line of Control (Operation Parakram, 2001-03) and an artillery regiment in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir Valley (Operation Rakshak, 1993-94). A former Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), Brigadier Kanwal has authored several books including *Nuclear Defence: Shaping the Arsenal*; *Indian Army: Vision 2020*; *Pakistan's Proxy War*; *Heroes of Kargil*; *Kargil '99: Blood, Guts and Firepower* and *Artillery: Honour and Glory*. He writes on national security issues for leading national newspapers and is a TV commentator and regular speaker at well known international think tanks and military institutions. At present he is Adjunct Fellow, Wadhvani Chair, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, D.C.

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### ***Introduction by Dr. Ivan Welch, FMSO***

The U.S. rebalancing to the Asia Pacific, first announced by the President in 2011, continues to be a topic of analysis and discussion in the nations of that realm. Listening to these voices is essential in understanding the regional perceptions of the policy by our friends, allies, and cooperating nations. The views of foreign military, academic, and political leaders are important to the practical outcomes of this rebalancing in terms of force posture, overseas basing, and cooperative security.

Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal's (Retd.) article is one such voice. His insight into India's military capabilities and emerging strategic doctrine provides a valuable glimpse into a major regional player's potential response to the latest U.S. geostrategic initiative. This presentation also reminds us of the wider area now in consideration, the Indo-Pacific Asia.





# RESPONDING TO US PIVOT TO THE INDO-PACIFIC INDIA'S PRO-ACTIVE ROLE IN MEETING EMERGING SECURITY CHALLENGES

BY GURMEET KANWAL

The security environment in the Indo-Pacific region has been vitiated by territorial disputes on land, in the South China Sea and the East China Sea as well as terrorism, the proliferation of small arms and piracy in the Malacca Strait. Freedom of navigation on the high seas is of critical importance for the economies of most Asian countries. Maintaining peace and stability and ensuring the unfettered flow of trade and energy supplies through the sea lanes of communications (SLOCs) will pose major challenges for the Asian powers as well as the United States (US). Only cooperative security architecture can provide long-term stability and mutual reassurance.

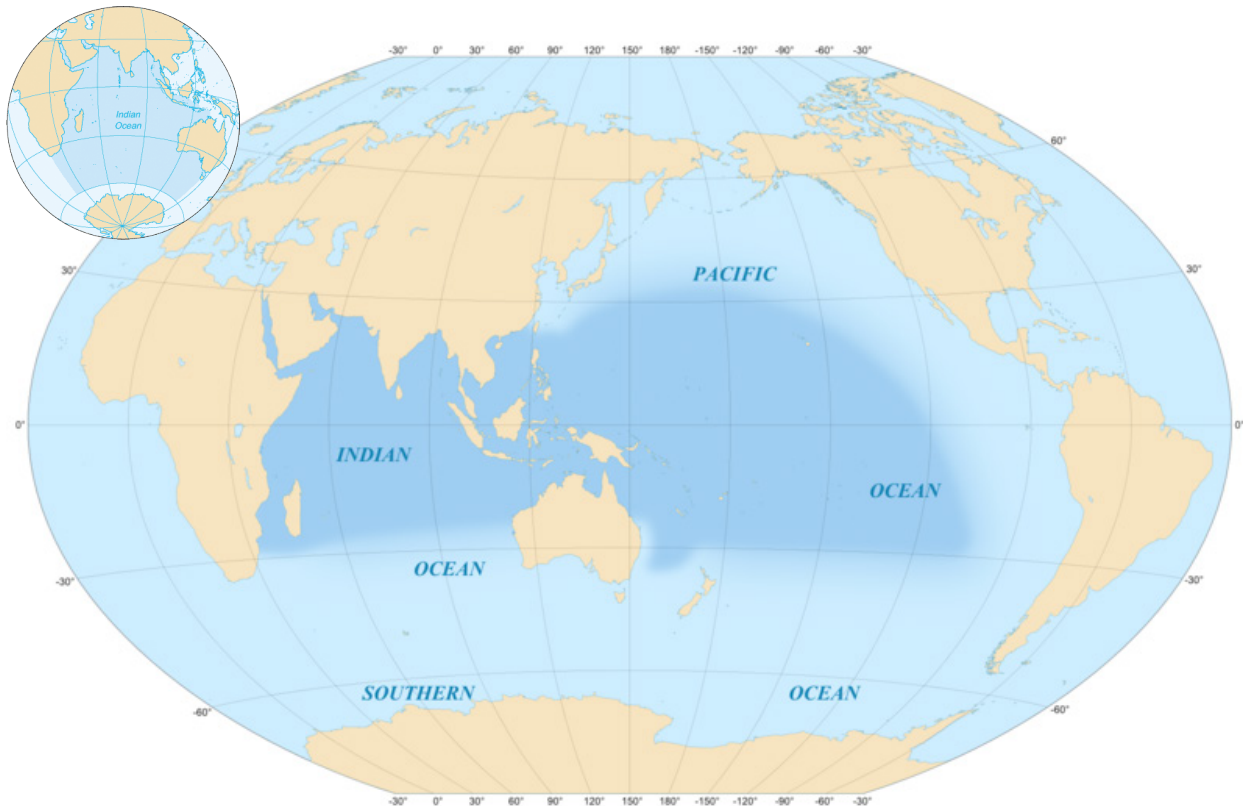
Through its forward military presence and its abiding military alliances, the US has played a key role providing stability in the Indo-Pacific region through many decades of turbulence during and after the Cold War. The US is now re-balancing or 'pivoting' from the Euro-Atlantic zone to the Indo-Pacific in tune with its changing geo-strategic priorities and the rise of emerging powers. It is also simultaneously downsizing its forces and will need new strategic partners to help it to maintain order and stability. According to Rory Medcalf, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, Washington, "the choreography of this geopolitical interplay will depend on the quality of leadership and decision-making in Beijing, New Delhi and Washington."





As C Raja Mohan has averred in his book *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*, the major powers in the region, including Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan and the US, need to work creatively to frame acceptable rules for the commons in the Indo-Pacific. Unless such realisation comes about, subterranean tensions will continue to hamper stability. China has so far been ambivalent in seeking to join a cooperative framework and has preferred to stand apart. It has failed to realise that its growing trade and massive dependence on energy imports through the Indian Ocean make it imperative for it to join the efforts being made to establish such a framework.

It would be in India's interest to readily join cooperative efforts aimed at maintaining stability. India has acquired robust military intervention capabilities and is formulating suitable tri-Service doctrine for joint operations while dealing with out of area contingencies. A draft paper for such



(Small map) Boundaries of the Indian Ocean.  
(Large map) The Indo-Pacific region.





operations has been prepared by HQ Integrated Defence Staff under the guidance of the Chiefs of Staff committee (CoSC). Though India has a pacifist strategic culture rather than a pro-active one that nips emerging challenges in the bud through pre-emption, India has not hesitated to intervene militarily in the past when its national interests warranted intervention, both internally and beyond India's shores. The army was asked to forcibly integrate the states of Goa, Hyderabad and Junagadh into the Indian Union soon after the country's independence as part of the nation building process. The Indian armed forces created the new nation of Bangladesh after the Pakistan army conducted mass killings in East Pakistan in 1971.

India intervened in the Maldives and Sri Lanka at the behest of the governments of these countries and was ready to do so in Mauritius in 1983 when the threat to the government there passed. India had airlifted 150,000 civilian workers from Iraq through Jordan during Gulf War I in what became known as the largest airlift after the Berlin airlift. Also, almost 5,000 civilian workers were evacuated by ship from Lebanon in 2006. After the 2004 South East Asian tsunami, 72 naval ships had set sail within three days to join international rescue and relief operations even though India's eastern sea board had itself suffered extensive loss of life and damage. For many years now, the Indian Navy has successfully participated in the multi-national naval effort to keep Somalian piracy at bay off the Horn of Africa.

*Indian Naval amphibious ship INS Jalashwa.*





India's limited military presence overseas has been mostly benign. According to Shyam Saran, former Indian Foreign secretary, "...most Southeast Asian countries and Japan welcome a larger presence of Indian naval assets in the region." As part of Indo-US defence cooperation, joint patrolling of the SLOCs in the Indian Ocean is already being undertaken up to the western mouth of the Malacca Strait as part of joint naval exercises. Other military exercises have led to a broad understanding of each other's military capabilities and limitations and many interoperability challenges have been ironed out.

The Indian army has designated one infantry division as a rapid reaction division, with an amphibious brigade, an air assault brigade and an infantry brigade. The army also has an independent parachute brigade that can be deployed at short notice. The Indian Navy now possesses the INS Jalashva (USS Trenton) that can carry one infantry battalion with full operational loads and is in the process of acquiring additional landing ships. Besides long-range fighter-bomber aircraft with air-to-air refuelling capability like the SU-30MKI, the Indian Air Force has acquired fairly substantive strategic airlift capabilities, including six C-130 Super Hercules aircraft for the Special Forces. A permanent Corps-level tri-Service planning HQ with all-weather reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities needs to be set up under the aegis of HQ Integrated Defence Staff to monitor emerging situations on a regular basis and to act as a control HQ for intervention operations.



*SU-30MKI pictured.*



In future, India may undertake joint military operations in its area of strategic interest if the country's major national interests are at stake. Such a campaign may take the form of an intervention under the UN flag – something that India would prefer – or even a “coalition of the willing” in a contingency in which India's vital national interests are threatened. There will naturally be several caveats to such cooperation as India will not join any military alliance.

It will also be necessary to work with other strategic partners and friendly countries in India's extended neighbourhood and with organisations like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and, when possible, even the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The aim should be to establish consultative mechanisms through diplomatic channels for the exchange of ideas, and conduct joint training and reconnaissance. Small-scale joint military exercises with likely coalition partners help to eliminate interoperability and command and control challenges and enable strategic partners to operate together during crises.







## Images

1. India Air Force C-130s during military exercise  
Source: <http://asian-defence-news.blogspot.com/2012/05/indian-air-force-in-action-during-war.html>
2. Map of Indian Ocean  
Source: Wikipedia.org
3. Map of The Indo-Pacific region.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons
4. Indian Naval amphibious ship INS Jalashwa.  
Source: <http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/09/10091417.jpg>
5. An India Air Force Sukhoi Su-30MKI.  
Source: <http://avioners.net/2011/03/sukhoi-su-30mki-indian-air-force.html/>

