



THE POLITICS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN: SEYCHELLES IN THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Neha Nikita

PhD Scholar, University of Delhi.

ABSTRACT

The Indian Ocean is crucial for global trade and maritime security. India relies extensively on the region for commercial and defense objectives. Seychelles is a prominent player amongst the Indian Ocean's smaller island nations because of its position of importance at the convergence of critical marine routes, particularly near important chokepoints such as the Mozambique Channel. This article addresses India and Seychelles' rising political, defense, and economic interaction, focusing on India's perception of Seychelles as a critical partner in ensuring regional security, combating piracy, and opposing external geopolitical pressures, particularly those from China. Through defense cooperation, such as the establishment of an Indian naval base on Assumption Island, and economic partnerships, including infrastructure development and maritime resource management, India seeks to strengthen its influence in the western Indian Ocean. Additionally, Seychelles' environmental challenges, like rising sea levels and the need for climate resilience, have prompted India to extend its support in sustainable development initiatives. The article also looks at how Seychelles skillfully regulates its connections with India and China, balancing national interests under rising geopolitical competition. In conclusion, by analyzing India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean region, the article points out Seychelles' role as an important partner in India's regional strategy, ensuring the Indian Ocean's stability and prosperity in the face of shifting global dynamics.



KEYWORDS: Indian Ocean, combating piracy, and opposing external geopolitical pressures.

INTRODUCTION :

The Indian Ocean is one of the world's most geopolitically important oceans, providing a vital conduit for global trade, energy transit, and maritime security. The Indian Ocean, which runs across a wide expanse connecting the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, has vital shipping lanes that convey an important share of the world's oil supply, raw resources, and consumer goods. This region is an important part of India's foreign policy and national security strategy, as well as a trade hub. The importance of the Indian Ocean is amplified by its strategic chokepoints, such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and the Bab el-Mandeb, all of which control vital global maritime traffic and are crucial for India's naval operations.

International power dynamics have established themselves in the Indian Ocean as countries from various parts of the world and the region vie for dominance over crucial maritime routes. India values the region highly as it is crucial for ensuring regional stability, enhancing trade, and securing

energy imports. As it works to protect its maritime interests and reinforce its leadership in the Indian Ocean, India navigates a challenging geopolitical landscape marked by China's growth in the area and the rising influence of other foreign powers. In this context, India's focus on strengthening bilateral relationships with vital Indian Ocean nations has increased, particularly with smaller island countries that occupy strategic positions along key maritime routes.

Seychelles is one such country that is very significant to India. It is an archipelago in the western Indian Ocean, little over 1,000 kilometers off the west coast of India. Seychelles is a small island nation with fewer than 100,000 citizens, yet because of its position, it plays a big part in regional security and stability. The islands of Seychelles sit at the crossroads of important maritime choke points like the Mozambique Channel and the shipping lanes leading to the Arabian Sea. As international maritime trade and geopolitical tensions rise in the Indian Ocean, the strategic importance of Seychelles has become increasingly clear.

By maintaining a non-aligned position, Seychelles has consistently sidestepped involvement in significant territorial conflicts. However, Seychelles has observed that rising security challenges, such as terrorism and piracy around the Horn of Africa, are linking its security concerns more closely with India. Due to India's rich maritime history and influence in the Indian Ocean, it serves as a sensible ally for Seychelles in addressing these challenges. Additionally, the island country of Seychelles has had to seek assistance from India to strengthen its resilience regarding environmental issues and development collaboration.

Seychelles plays the part of a crucial strategic ally for India in safeguarding its maritime interests owing to its geographical closeness and the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean for India's worldwide geopolitical goals. To showcase its leadership in regional stability, economic development, and maritime safety, India views the Indian Ocean as a crucial platform.

The nation's "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) initiative embodies its dedication to fostering a peaceful, prosperous maritime environment where nations collaborate to safeguard security, conserve resources, and improve trade connections. Due to its strategic position, Seychelles aligns perfectly with India's intentions, acting as an essential ally in tackling challenges like piracy, unlawful fishing, and the increasing dominance of foreign powers, notably China, on vital sea routes. Situated at the crossroads of significant global shipping channels, Seychelles' location enhances its tactical significance, particularly regarding India's security goals.

As global powers like China and the United States intensify their presence and interest in the Indian Ocean, Seychelles' ability to balance its relations with these foreign powers while maintaining strong connections with India is becoming increasingly essential. The growing cooperation between India and Seychelles reflects an evolution in the Indian Ocean's geopolitical environment, with small islands playing increasingly important roles in determining regional dynamics and taking significant initiatives to maintain its relations.

The introduction here sets out the framework for comprehending India's intricate and growing relationship with Seychelles, positioned against the background of larger geopolitical upheavals in the Indian Ocean. India's involvement with Seychelles is an important aspect of its plan to bolster regional security, resist external influence, and maintain the stability of critical maritime routes of trade to fight the competition that is extensively expanding worldwide. Further, we will look at each aspect of India's strategic, defense, and economic cooperation with Seychelles, as well as the larger ramifications of their relationship for regional geopolitics.

REALIST THEORY AND INDIA'S VIEWPOINT

Within the framework of realist theory, India's involvement with Seychelles extends beyond mere bilateral cooperation; it also focuses on establishing a strategically favorable position to safeguard its national security. With the Indian Ocean facing heightened contention due to China's expanding naval influence and its attempts to create a network of strategic ports throughout the area, India's military, economic, and diplomatic endeavors in Seychelles correspond with its objective of preserving regional dominance. India can gain accessibility to the Mozambique Channel, a crucial maritime

chokepoint in the Indian Ocean, by fortifying its relations with Seychelles. This chokepoint is strategically significant since it serves as a vital conduit for international trade and the movement of oil, underscoring India's need to protect critical sea lanes. India's defense partnership investments, like the establishment of a military base on Assumption Island, clearly illustrate its quest for dominance and authority over these vital sea routes.

Additionally, Seychelles, being a small island nation, encounters restricted choices regarding external assistance and security. Seychelles sees benefits in working with a regional power like India given its susceptibility to maritime risks including piracy, illegal fishing, and possible geopolitical upheaval. In return, India provides security assistance along with economic and political support. By maintaining robust relations with India, Seychelles can obtain security and advantage amidst China's growing dominance in the Indian Ocean. Viewed from a realist standpoint, this partnership provides both nations with a mutually advantageous setup where India enhances its regional power, while Seychelles ensures its sovereignty and stability. This collaboration, based on national interests, emphasizes how smaller nations such as Seychelles strategically cooperate with larger powers to secure their survival and improve their position in the chaotic international system.

DEFENSE COOPERATION: A STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The defense and security ties between India and Seychelles have developed notably in recent years. Being a small island nation, Seychelles encounters dangers like piracy, unlawful fishing, and possible terrorism from nearby areas, which could disrupt the overall maritime atmosphere. For India, which views the Indian Ocean as a space of paramount importance for its economic and security interests, strengthening its ties with Seychelles in the defense sector is both logical and strategic.

India has demonstrated great support by providing Seychelles with significant assistance in addressing these security issues. This includes conducting cooperative marine patrols, combatting piracy, and providing the Seychelles People's Defence Forces (SPDF) with military assistance and training. The agreement to build a major Indian military facility on Assumption Island, a Seychelles outlying island, is a noteworthy outcome of this security partnership. This station serves as a crucial hub for overseeing marine security operations in the region and administering humanitarian aid programs.

From a realistic perspective, the stationing of Indian troops guarantees Seychelles' protection from outside dangers, especially the widespread piracy near the Horn of Africa, while enabling India to assert control over a crucial area of the Indian Ocean. For Seychelles, this partnership grants access to India's military knowledge and defense resources, which is particularly important given the increasing military influence of China and other global powers in the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, this defense partnership strengthens the wider regional security structure by promoting a more cohesive and collaborative security atmosphere in the Indian Ocean. India and Seychelles enhance their capacity to collaborate and their readiness to tackle emerging issues in the region by organizing and carrying out joint military drills. India's presence on Assumption Island provides vital logistical and intelligence support, allowing for quick deployments in times of crisis, whether they be related to piracy, natural disasters, or potential geopolitical problems. Similarly, its presence strengthens India's position as a regional security provider and helps preserve the balance of power in the face of expanding Chinese supremacy in the Indian Ocean. India's military support in the Seychelles offers both immediate defense and a sense of strategic stability in the face of an increasingly complex regional security landscape. In this sense, defense cooperation is a win-win situation that serves both countries' security needs while furthering their broader geopolitical and strategic objectives.

TRADE AND COMMERCE: ENHANCING ECONOMIC TIES

India and Seychelles' relationship depends heavily on trade and commerce, and both countries benefit greatly from their economic partnership. Despite being a small island nation, Seychelles holds a significant position in the Indian Ocean, serving as a major hub for maritime trade routes and being

situated near vital shipping lanes that connect important international markets. Since Seychelles' increased connectivity solidifies its position as a vital trading hub in the Indian Ocean, the collaboration on these infrastructure projects also aligns with India's broader regional objectives. By funding these initiatives, India not only fosters closer economic ties but also lays the groundwork for long-term cooperation that will be advantageous to both nations.

India is one of Seychelles' primary trading partners, especially in sectors such as tourism, fisheries and pharmaceuticals. The two nations have established strong ties in these industries, with India exporting a range of goods, including pharmaceuticals, machinery and food products to Seychelles, while also providing significant support in the tourism sector. The convenient location of Seychelles gives a passage to trading between the two countries and larger markets in the Indian Ocean region easier. To uphold commerce with regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, India gains from Seychelles' crucial involvement in safeguarding these essential shipping routes.

India's economic influence in Seychelles is further evident in the country's investments in infrastructure development. India has been actively involved in financing and constructing key infrastructure projects in Seychelles, including roads, airports and port facilities. These projects aim to not only enhance Seychelles' economic development but also ensure the stability and security of trade channels that are essential to India's economic growth. Since Seychelles' increased connectivity solidifies its position as a vital trading hub in the Indian Ocean, the collaboration on these infrastructure projects also aligns with India's broader regional objectives. By funding these initiatives, India not only fosters closer economic ties but also lays the groundwork for long-term cooperation that will be advantageous to both nations. Alongside infrastructure, both nations recognize shared advantages in trade and investment related to renewable energy and sustainable fisheries. Seychelles, as an island nation, encounters difficulties like climate change and the reduction of marine resources.

India, leveraging its advanced technological expertise, has collaborated with Seychelles to create sustainable solutions in these areas. By providing support through marine conservation programs and solar energy initiatives, India has helped Seychelles protect its natural resources while also creating new avenues for economic growth. By fostering economic strength and addressing the more general global problems of environmental degradation, these cooperative activities seek to ensure the sustainable development of both countries.

In summary, we can observe that the economic ties between India and Seychelles strengthen the idea that the advancement of both nations depends on a safe and stable Indian Ocean. India and Seychelles are strengthening their partnership and promoting stability and prosperity in the region by improving links in infrastructure, trade, and sustainable development. This economic alliance strengthens the roles of both countries in the Indian Ocean area, aligning their shared interests in safeguarding and boosting trade paths while promoting sustainable economic objectives.

SECURITY: ADDRESSING REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Concerns about security in the Indian Ocean have escalated for all coastal nations, such as India and Seychelles, owing to the increasing variety of maritime threats and shifting regional power dynamics. The Indian Ocean suffers from challenges like piracy, unlawful fishing, human trafficking, and drug smuggling, especially near the coast of Somalia and the Horn of Africa. These challenges have not only interrupted trade pathways but also generated an unstable oceanic atmosphere. Furthermore, China's growing involvement in the area, both through military forces and infrastructure developments, has added new geopolitical challenges. Seychelles, positioned at the intersection of important trade routes and close to maritime chokepoints, is particularly susceptible to these security risks. To ensure the safety and stability of the Indian Ocean, India considers Seychelles a vital partner. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium acts as a platform for cooperation among the regional naval forces, highlighting India's commitment to regional maritime safety. IONS plays an essential function in boosting maritime security by implementing cooperative naval exercises and programs aimed at strengthening member governments' capabilities. India collaborates with Seychelles and other island nations to provide

educational workshops that strengthen their capacity to manage problems like trafficking, piracy, and illicit fishing.

These measures enhance maritime security in the region and foster greater collaboration and dialogue between India's navy and its neighboring forces. The alliance between Seychelles and India advances the island nation's potential to protect its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) while maintaining secure trade routes. In addition to bilateral alliances, Seychelles' participation in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) emphasizes the value of teamwork in addressing security concerns. With the mission to cope with political, economic, and security concerns and improve peace and stability across the Indian Ocean region, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) serves as an essential framework.

India's commitment to regional cooperation and its hard work to protect marine resources are demonstrated by its participation in the IORA. Via this platform, India partners with Seychelles and other IORA nations to boost maritime expertise, formulate strategies to address transnational challenges such as piracy, and strengthen collaborative security initiatives. Through this platform, India collaborates with Seychelles and other IORA countries to enhance maritime skills, develop strategies to tackle transnational issues like piracy, and reinforce joint security measures.

India's growing ties with Seychelles serve as a strategic counterweight to the rising influence of external powers like China. As China expands its military and economic presence in the Indian Ocean, India is positioning itself as the primary protector of security in the region. Through enhancing its collaboration with Seychelles, India is protecting vital shipping routes and ensuring regional stability in the face of outside interference. This partnership not only demonstrates India's naval power but also reinforces its dominance over crucial maritime chokepoints. By doing this, India enhances its regional influence, solidifying its role as the main security player in the Indian Ocean. As maritime threats and geopolitical tensions rise, continued security cooperation between India and Seychelles will be vital for the future stability of the region.

The long-lasting security collaboration between India and Seychelles will be crucial in determining the stability of the region in the future as maritime threats and geopolitical tensions continue to escalate.

India and Seychelles are collaborating to tackle current marine issues and establish a foundation for a secure and sustainable Indian Ocean for the long term. Through collaboration on bilateral initiatives and regional entities such as the IORA, the two countries are enhancing their capacity to address regional challenges and ensure a secure and prosperous maritime future for the entire area.

CONCLUSION:

The swiftly evolving friendship of India with Seychelles throws light on the increasing geopolitical and strategic importance of the Indian Ocean in today's time, where both nations are aligning their interests to make sure that the region remains stable, secure and economically strong. Despite being a small country, Seychelles is crucial to the overall security of the Indian Ocean because of its strategic location at the meeting point of important sea lanes and chokepoints. This puts Seychelles in a strong position to support India, which wants to strengthen its regional policy by emphasizing marine security, promoting economic growth, and safeguarding vital international trade routes.

India's diverse partnership with Seychelles, especially in defense collaboration, has bolstered Seychelles' ability to address modern security issues like piracy, illegal fishing, and the rising geopolitical competition in the area. The deployment of a vital Indian military presence on Assumption Island, along with joint naval patrols and anti-piracy initiatives, bolsters the protective capabilities and regional sway of both nations. Additionally, India's commitment to infrastructure development and sustainable projects demonstrates its readiness to assist Seychelles in enhancing their economic and environmental resilience, particularly in dealing with the effects of climate change and increasing sea levels.

The rapid alliance with India offers Seychelles significant financial and security benefits. Seychelles acknowledges the necessity of collaborating with India, a regional power capable of

providing security, military expertise, and diplomatic assistance, considering the rising concerns over piracy and regional instability. This alliance not only bolsters Seychelles' autonomy but also assists the island nation in managing external pressures, especially from China, which aims to enhance its influence in the Indian Ocean via strategic investments and infrastructure initiatives.

Seychelles, according to India, plays an unavoidable role in its deeper regional strategy to maintain dominance in the Indian Ocean and counteract the growing influence of foreign powers. The partnership promotes India's "Security and Growth for All in the Region" initiative, emphasizing the importance of creating cooperative security mechanisms, enhancing economic relationships, and supporting sustainable development throughout the Indian Ocean. India ensures the safety and efficient functioning of its trade routes and increases its influence in the region by protecting important marine chokepoints like the Mozambique Channel.

With the Indian Ocean emerging as a more contested area amid escalating geopolitical tensions, the strategic partnership between India and Seychelles will significantly influence the future of the region. Through enhancing defense collaborations, reinforcing economic alliances, and a shared commitment to regional security efforts such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), India and Seychelles are establishing a robust foundation for lasting stability and development. Their relationship illustrates how smaller nations can enhance their security and leverage their status to promote increased regional collaboration by actively engaging with regional authorities.

In a nutshell as smaller island nations acquire prominence in world geopolitics, the changing dynamics of the Indian Ocean have been illustrated by an emerging partnership between India and Seychelles. To enhance their own interests and support the overall stability of the region, both countries seek to uphold the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, security, and economic growth through strengthening their partnership. This partnership demonstrates the strength of strategic alliances and how countries, regardless of their size, can influence global affairs when their interests align and they collaborate to achieve common goals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Benedict, P. (2017). *India and the Indian Ocean: Maritime trade and strategic interests*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Choudhury, A. (2019). *The Indian Ocean and India's strategic interests: Challenges and opportunities*. Routledge.
3. Dunne, T., & Schmidt, B. (2017). *Realism and international relations*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Hughes, L. (2016). China's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean: Regional dynamics and security challenges. *International Affairs Review*, 29(4), 567-584.
5. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). (2021). *The role of IORA in strengthening Indian Ocean maritime security*. IORA Annual Report, 18-35.
6. Kapila, S. (2020). *The geopolitics of the Indian Ocean: India's role and strategy*. Ashgate Publishing.
7. Lesser, I. O. (2018). India's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean: A regional overview. *Journal of Asian Security Studies*, 14(2), 223-240.
8. Mohan, C. R. (2015). India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean region. *Asia Policy*, 20, 45-66.
9. Nugent, M. (2022). Seychelles and its role in Indian Ocean security: A small island nation's strategic partnerships. *Journal of Small Island Studies*, 9(3), 122-137.
10. Seychelles Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2018). *Seychelles foreign policy and strategic alliances*. Seychelles Government Publications.
11. Sharma, A. (2021). Piracy, security, and geopolitics in the Indian Ocean: Challenges for Seychelles and India. *International Journal of Maritime Affairs*, 27(2), 211-229.
12. Sikri, R. (2017). *Indian foreign policy: Coping with the changing world*. Sage Publications.