

# The Protection of Sea Lines of Communication during 1971 War

*Somita Chakraborty\**

*As the bulk of India's foreign trade transits through sea, it turns sea lines of communication through the Indian Ocean strategically important for India. The newly independent India did not pay adequate attention to this factor. Consequently, within two decades of independence continuous flow of unprotected large volume of India's sea trade had become a strategic target for its adversaries. In this context, during the 1971 India–Pakistan war, India efficiently protected its vital sea lanes, ensuring that goods and commodities continued to reach Indian ports. Geostrategic and political calculations played a major role behind this success.*

Keywords: 1971 war, India, Pakistan, sea lines of communication, Indian Ocean, geostrategy

## INTRODUCTION

Continuous flow of essential commodities in domestic market is one of the most crucial requirements for the survival of a country. In the modern world, as no country is self-sufficient, effective disruption of the supply chain can bring about terrible economic and political upheaval and change in peacetime, while shrinking economic strength as well as war effort of a belligerent at the time of war. As a result, protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) has always been an important part of military strategy. Before the World War II era, protection of sea lanes was mainly a naval affair. In a multipolar world, where the economic

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\* Dr Somita Chakraborty is Former Research Scholar, School of Social Science, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).



and military capacity of major powers was near about equal, military solution was a natural and preferred option. However, after World War II, diplomacy gained prominence and led to change in the protection system of sea lanes. The wide gap between the superpowers and other powers, regarding economic and military strength, opened up the new arena of diplomatic initiative. In the post-war era, the process of protection of sea lanes, therefore, includes policymaking and foreign policy along with defence strategy.

The geographic location and maritime history of India shows the inviolable relation between sea trade and economic strength. Independent India, for a long time, failed to combine its geostrategic advantage with regional and international politics to guard the prime source of its economic security, that is, sea routes. In the 1960s, India faced two wars with two of its neighbours, China and Pakistan. Both the 1962 and 1965 wars had crucial impact on India's economic condition, military build-up and foreign policy. In this context, the article attempts to trace India's strategy and effort to protect its sea lanes and continuous flow of shipment during the 1971 war.

#### INDIA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Geographically, India has open access to one of the biggest oceans of the world, the Indian Ocean. The long coastline of the Indian Peninsula is surrounded by the Indian Ocean and two of its large marginal seas, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Enriched by this geographical advantage, prosperous maritime trade has become an intrinsic part of maritime history of India. By the thirteenth century, India's sea trade was well established over a vast area, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the South China Sea.<sup>1</sup> Within that time, the Chola Empire of India, with its vigorous naval strength, set up a precedence of protection chain for India's sea trade through the Strait of Malacca.

Decline of the Chola naval power reduced security of the shipping lanes and ended an era of Indian naval superiority over the Indian Ocean. Two hundred years later, when the European traders reached the Indian Ocean and deployed patrolling to harass both Indian and Arab shipment under a strategy to monopolise the sea routes to India,<sup>2</sup> the established Indian kingdoms of that time, such as the Mughals, Calicut and Maratha power, hardly could do anything to protect Indian trade. With their coastal naval power, they had capacity to hamper European

trade near Indian coast, but could not secure Indian trade in the high seas.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain had established its monopoly over sea routes to India, as well as a protection chain from the Strait of Malacca to the Suez Canal (1869). In this protection chain, India played the key role. Taking the peninsula of India and Colombo and Trincomalee of Sri Lanka as the main points, Britain established a protection chain including Aden, Egypt, Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena to protect trade routes through the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and round the Cape route.<sup>4</sup> To protect eastbound trade, it established hold over Myanmar and had a small security facility in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&N Islands). This British strategy of inadequate protection for eastbound trade was mainly influenced by the geopolitical condition of the Western Pacific. By the late nineteenth century, Britain had control over Malaysia, a strong naval base in Singapore as well as firm grip over Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, France had control over Indochina; the United States (US) had control over the Philippines; and Japan had control over Korea. In case of China, all these powers had heavy influence in its economic, military and political affairs. In 1904, Britain entered into an alliance with France and Japan; and it had already established a close relation with the US by then. As Russia and Germany had little presence in this region, this made the framework more favourable for Britain and protected its eastward trade till World War II.

In the beginning of 1940s, this geopolitical arrangement received a shattering blow. Japan's victory march in the Western Pacific, failure of British allies, fall of Singapore and presence of Japan in Myanmar shook the British strategy. Realising the consequence, in 1942, Britain evacuated A&N Islands, leaving India's eastern shore and trade routes near about unprotected. Japan captured the islands and turned it into a base. The short-lived Japanese war effort in the Indian Ocean followed the strategy of control over trade routes. For that, it continued attacks on British merchant ships in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, raided Colombo and Trincomalee and established submarine patrolling up to Madagascar.<sup>5</sup> Success of the US in the Midway (1942) restricted Japan, but its war effort established the strategic importance of India to protect the vital sea lanes through the Indian Ocean.

The end of World War II led to major changes in the international political structure. Long military engagements had exhausted the

economic might of Britain and other European powers. In comparison, geographical isolation and gigantic industrial strength saved the US from any major economic scar. Besides that, with the know-how of nuclear device, the US maintained the position of the sole superpower of the world till 1949, when the Soviet Union exploded a nuclear device.

Against this background, Britain decided to transfer power to India. During this process, the main focus of apex British administration was the security of British sea trade through the Indian Ocean. Knowing the strategic importance of India, a lot of hesitation and discussion prevailed among the British administrators regarding transfer of A&N to India. Hold over the islands, with a strong base in Singapore, would make the Strait of Malacca a private canal for Britain. Interestingly, during that period, Lord Wavell, the then Secretary of State of India, while writing a letter on the security of independent India, prophetically predicted the future deciding factors of independent India's foreign policy. He was sure that, growing industrialisation and increasing seaborne trade, with inadequate naval power, would push India either towards Russia or the Western powers.<sup>6</sup>

This historical discussion establishes that, for centuries, India's position has remained a pivotal point for trade and protection chain in the Indian Ocean. Geographically, India is situated close to the Malacca Strait and is adjacent to several important trade routes through the Indian Ocean. In this regard, the geographic location of the two island chains, that is, the A&N in the Bay of Bengal and Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea, is highly significant. In the Bay of Bengal, several busy sea lanes are located adjacent to the A&N Islands. Among them, the Preparis Channel and the Coco Channel are situated to the north of A&N and the Great Channel or the Six Degree Channel is in the south. Three more channels, that is, the Duncan Passage, the Ten Degree Channel and the Sombrero Channel, pass through A&N. Among the three, the Ten Degree Channel is the most important because of its busy traffic. In the same way, the Nine Degree Channel, one of the most important shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean, passes through the Lakshadweep chain of islands in the Arabian Sea. Another important sea route, the Eight Degree Channel, is located to the south of the Lakshadweep Islands. Ships in the Indian Ocean, between the Suez and the Malacca, are bound to use these channels according to their destination. Alongside these trade routes, besides some small groups of islands—for example, the Seychelles, Maldives, Lakshadweep and A&N—and single island

country, Sri Lanka, the large Indian Peninsula is the only available landmass which stretches into the Indian Ocean and is positioned parallel to the Strait of Malacca and the Red Sea. While the geographic position places it in the vicinity of several busy trade routes, the large landmass increases the capacity of India to sustain any war effort. This exclusive geostrategic dimension of India, historically, has made it a centre point for trade, transshipping and protection chain.

#### ECONOMIC CONDITION OF INDIA AND SECURITY STRUCTURE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TILL 1965

The colonial exploitation and drainage of resources, mainly at the time of two world wars, exhausted India's economic condition. The British policy during World War II caused large-scale shortage of food grains and led to famine in Bengal (1943). Four years later, India became independent as one of the poorest countries of the world, with majority population struggling with poverty and hunger. Thus, improving the economic condition became priority for the policymakers. They also had the responsibility to protect a large landmass and long coastline. In this defence–development dichotomy, considering the incontestable military supremacy of the superpowers and weak military strength of the close neighbours, Indian policymakers chose development over defence and tried to secure territorial sovereignty through diplomacy.<sup>7</sup> However, in the immediate years after independence, when India was building its defence through diplomacy policy, it did not pay much attention to its own dependence on the seaborne trade and the security structure of the Indian Ocean.

After Partition, India lost its traditional trade route connections, through land and internal waterways, with other parts of Asia, for example, Western Asia and Southeast Asia. Hostile relations with Pakistan reduced the possibility even further. This left sea routes as the only option for India's foreign trade. Besides this geographic factor, scarcity of mineral oil and other oil products, such as diesel and kerosene, was another factor for the increasing importance of sea lanes. Sea route was the cheapest and safest mode of transportation for these commodities, which were crucial for the rapidly growing industrial and transport sector of the newly independent India. Despite growing strategic importance, India's shipbuilding sector was in a disastrous condition. The colonial rulers, for their own economic benefit, did not allow India's shipbuilding sector to grow. Later, during World War II, Japan's trade warfare considerably

shrunk India's merchant fleet structure. Consequently, independent India had less than 60 ships to carry its huge seaborne trade. This resulted in more than 95 per cent of India's overseas trade dependent on foreign, mainly Western, ships.<sup>8</sup>

In the post-war era, the decline of Europe and the rise of the US and the Soviet Union as superpowers signalled the possible change of international system. Though the possibility did not disturb the already established British security structure, the growth of a new structure was clearly visible in the Indian Ocean. After 1947, the British protection chain in the Indian Ocean continued with several places and bases, including Madagascar, Kenya, Seychelles, Aden, several air bases in the Persian Gulf, Mauritius and Sri Lanka (Trincomalee till 1957),<sup>9</sup> along with small US presence in Bahrain (1949), to protect sea routes from round the Cape and Bab-el-Mandab to the Strait of Malacca. The trade routes through the Western Pacific, due to British hold over Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, along with presence of the US in Japan, the Philippines (Subic Bay and Clark Bay), Vietnam (Da Nang) and its influence on Taiwan (after 1949), Australia and New Zealand, carried on with Western domination. Thus, in the immediate years after World War II, the vast region of the Indo-Pacific remained under the influence of Western powers. Geographically, to reach the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea is the shortest corridor for the US, just as the Suez is the shortest route for Europe. Therefore, continuation of the aforementioned security structure was a critical requirement for both the US and Britain. However, growing Soviet influence in the Western Pacific (China, North Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia), and in the vicinity of the Suez (Egypt), was a clear threat for Western commercial interests.

In the changed geostrategic framework, it was believed that India could serve as a key point for the Western camp to counter the Soviet influence. Failing to convince a non-aligned India, the US and Britain began to assist Pakistan in defence build-up. Thus, in the 1950s, Pakistan strengthened its defence and diplomatic capability through economic and military aid from the US. Also, its membership in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) brought Pakistan close to the US, Britain, Iran and Turkey. India, which chose defence through diplomacy policy, overlooked the overwhelming US economic and military aid to Pakistan and latter's growing relation with Britain. Besides that, during the 1950s, India took a pro-Soviet stand on several occasions: for example, in 1956, India, along

with other non-aligned countries, out-and-out disapproved the Franco-British–Israeli aggression on Egypt on the Suez crisis, but simultaneously only expressed distress on the tragedy of the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Therefore, when the security structure of the Indian Ocean, India's seaborne trade and naval build-up was dominated by the West, diplomatically India was tilting towards the Soviet Union. In a nutshell, India neglected its vital source of economic strength through the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, both diplomatically and militarily.

In the late 1950s, India's economic condition was also deteriorating rapidly. At independence, India had received a large sterling deposit in exchange of war requirements it supplied to Britain and allied forces at the time of World War II. Besides that, Britain also committed to bear India's war expenditure partially. However, the 1949 devaluation of rupee, increasing import bill, rapid outflow of foreign exchange due to moderate naval build-up and dependence on Western shipping, accompanied by insufficient growth of export, evaporated the large sterling deposit within ten years. This resulted in extensive balance of payment crisis, which limited India's economic strength.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, in the 1960s, India fought two wars against two of its close neighbours. The 1962 India–China War was mainly land-based and did not affect India's seaborne trade, though it restrained India's economic growth considerably. The sudden attack challenged India's defence with diplomacy strategy and questioned its neglect towards defence build-up. The war also revealed the unpreparedness of India's economic and military set-up to handle any unexpected defence crisis. Considering the land-based threat of 1962 Chinese aggression, India strengthened its army and air force. For this, in the next financial year, budgetary allocation for defence build-up became near about double. This immediate requirement was fulfilled by imposing heavy taxation and import duties. Imposition of import duties, on the one hand, increased prices of essential raw materials for the industrial sector. On the other hand, tax burden on petrol, diesel and income tax increased transport charges, prices of kerosene and other essential commodities of daily life.<sup>11</sup> Altogether, it affected every Indian household.

After the 1962 war, threat towards India's sea trade increased rapidly. Growing relations of Pakistan and Sri Lanka with China and the capacity of Chinese submarine to reach the Bay of Bengal became a concern for India. Meanwhile, India–Indonesia relation was also deteriorating. At that point, the US leased one submarine to Pakistan. It suddenly posed

a two-way security threat to India's seaborne trade, from both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, as China, Pakistan and Indonesia were all armed with submarine—a well-proven threat to the merchant fleet. Till 1962, India's own security was unacceptably insufficient for its valuable sea trade. India had an inadequate naval strength, mainly concentrated in the western waters, and the Indian Army was responsible for the security of the A&N. After the 1962 war, the responsibility of the A&N was handed over to the Indian Navy and naval facilities on the islands were increased to improve patrolling capacity of the navy. In 1964, a Five Year Defence Plan was formulated. Though the navy did not get adequate share in this plan, the policymakers began their quest for submarine around this time. A sincere long-term strategy for protection of sea lanes, however, materialised only after the 1965 war.

#### THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WARS, 1965–71

The 1965 war fully exposed India's security neglect of its eastern shore, ports and sea trade. In September 1965, when a number of Indian naval ships were present in the Bay of Bengal to protect A&N from Indonesian naval intrusions, Pakistan launched an attack on India's western front. With the beginning of war, all ships present in the eastern waters were recalled, leaving the eastern shore and ports completely unprotected. It was sheer luck that Pakistan had neglected its eastern wing; China, which had issued a warning, did not get involved in the war; and the Indonesian submarine reached Pakistan after the ceasefire. Indian sea trade, however, was not so fortunate. At that time, India owned 250 ships and had a large volume of trade with the US and Europe. In addition, due to the geographic location, all the merchant ships carrying both Indian and Pakistani cargo first visited Pakistan either in the Bay of Bengal or in the Arabian Sea.<sup>12</sup> India also had trade links with eastern wing of Pakistan through internal waterways. Therefore, at the time of the sudden outbreak of war, a number of ships and small vessels that were carrying Indian cargo were either already present in Pakistani ports and internal waters or on the way towards it.

In spite of that, initially, the policymakers did not extend protection at sea and tried utmost to confine the hostility within the nature of an armed conflict.<sup>13</sup> This lack of perception regarding the economic consequences of unprotected sea trade during conflict period, when the belligerent was a close maritime neighbour with considerable naval strength, left a large number of defenceless Indian vessels at the mercy of

the adversary. It enabled Pakistan to detain three Indian merchant ships in Karachi Port, and also offload a large amount of Indian import cargo from the Indian, Pakistani and neutral ships presents in both East and West Pakistan at the time of war.<sup>14</sup> Later, when India began to retaliate militarily, it was too late. Diplomatically, India protested before the United Nations, where Pakistan justified its actions as its 'right of self-defence'.<sup>15</sup> Realising the growing maritime threats towards India's territorial and economic security, a number of leaders from the opposition and ruling party expressed their concern and proposed to build an independent fleet on the eastern shore.<sup>16</sup>

The war put additional strain on India's economic condition. Immediately after the war started, the US stopped aid to both India and Pakistan. India also experienced large-scale drought in 1965 and 1966, which worsened the situation. Inadequate agricultural output and consequent unavailability of food grains in the market led to mass dissatisfaction in several parts of the country.<sup>17</sup> In financial year (FY) 1965–66, India's export also experienced a downward slide.<sup>18</sup> To stabilise the economy, 'plan holiday' was declared for FY 1966–67, 1967–68 and 1968–69. The deteriorating trade growth, poor agrarian output, severe foreign exchange crisis, along with international pressure, led India to devalue rupee. Despite severe criticism even within the ruling party, it was assumed that devaluation would reduce the price of Indian products and make it more competitive in the international market.<sup>19</sup> However, after the 1967 Six Day War, Egypt closed the Suez for an indefinite period. This compelled all the ships bound for European and transatlantic market to take a detour around the Cape. The extra miles increased the cost of shipping as well as products. India had to pay US\$ 200 million extra per annum for this detour.<sup>20</sup> The only relief, in the late 1960s, came from the agrarian sector, which witnessed remarkable growth in agrarian output due to the introduction of high-yielding varieties (HYV) of seeds.

Here, taking a pause from the topic under discussion, let us take a look at the security structure in the Indian Ocean and the political situation of the subcontinent between 1965 and 1971. In the post-war period, deteriorating economic condition of Britain restricted its military deployments and colonial engagements in different parts of the world. Further, the 1956 Suez debacle revealed the political position of Britain in the post-war international system. After Egypt nationalised the Suez, Britain, along with France and Israel invaded Egypt, but forced to withdraw under heavy pressure from both the superpowers. The incident

sharply divided the world between the superpowers and the other powers and placed Britain, politically, with the latter. The British departure from Trincomalee (Sri Lanka), Kenya and South Arabia (including Aden) also was a clear sign of rolling back of the empire. In this background, in order to reduce the economic burden, Britain hastened withdrawal from its former bases in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. By the mid-1960s, the US had a strong presence in the Western Pacific and a small naval force stationed in Bahrain. In 1966, Britain leased Diego Garcia to the US and paved the way for the latter to dominate the Indian Ocean. After the 1967 Arab–Israel crisis, the Soviet Union also increased its naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Further, the political condition of the subcontinent was changing rapidly. After the US stopped aid to both the belligerents of 1965 war, Pakistan quickly turned to its close friend, China, and received a large amount as aid. To restrict China, the Soviet Union reached out to Pakistan and brought the subcontinent under its aid diplomacy. In 1969, the Nixon administration came to power in the US. Realising the growing Soviet influence in the subcontinent, it immediately turned towards Pakistan and gradually increased its interest towards China. This created a peculiar situation for India, which had already established an in-depth dependence on the Soviet Union to fulfil its naval requirements.

During the same period, India's sea trade witnessed a steady growth. While in 1960–61 India's total trade was near about Rs 1,800 crore, within ten years, it rose to more than Rs 3,000 crore. In that period, India's dependence on petroleum and oil products also increased sharply. In 1971, India spent Rs 193.9 crore to import petroleum and oil products.<sup>21</sup> Moderate investment in shipbuilding, on the other hand, increased the number of Indian ships. In spite of rapid growth of volume of trade, in 1969, 15 per cent of India's overseas trade was being carried by Indian ships, compared to 8.2 per cent in 1961.<sup>22</sup> Considering all these aspects, India decided to increase its naval capability to protect its sea lanes through the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Backed by strong public opinion, and upheld by the navy, print media and political leaders, a favourable environment had developed for strong naval build-up,<sup>23</sup> including a separate major base in the eastern shore. This, in turn, increased India's defence expenditure, which crossed Rs 1,000 crore per annum from 1969 onwards. In 1971, with an increase of Rs 169 crore, the revised estimate stood at more than Rs 1,400 crore.<sup>24</sup> Guarding

the strongest source of India's economic security, therefore, became a necessity.

#### PROTECTION OF SEA LANES DURING THE 1971 WAR

The western and eastern wings of Pakistan were located in the two marginal seas of the Indian Ocean, namely, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, respectively. India was the only land connection between the two wings. After independence, because of hostile relationship with India, Pakistan lost this only land connection. The other options were not viable as the distance between the two wings of Pakistan by air (via Sri Lanka) was 2,400 miles and through sea route, it was a journey of two weeks.<sup>25</sup> In 1971, amid growing tension between the two countries and the East Pakistan crisis, India carefully exploited this geostrategic advantage.

In January 1971, following the hijack and destruction of an Indian Airbus F-27, India cancelled overflight facilities of Pakistani aviation. To continue connectivity, Pakistan requested Sri Lanka, and was granted permission, for overflight, landing and refuelling facility for both civil and military aviation. Strategically and politically, it was not a welcome situation for India. Since 1963, Sri Lanka's pro-China approach and its growing maritime relation with China, was a concern for India.<sup>26</sup> Considering the situation, a growing Sri Lanka–Pakistan relation was a clear strategic gain for Pakistan. Moreover, during that time, Pakistan was transferring a large number of troops, arms and ammunitions from West Pakistan to its eastern wing, mainly by ship; but it was allegedly using aviation for the same purpose.<sup>27</sup>

Against this background, in the beginning of April 1971, an armed uprising was organised in Sri Lanka by a leftist terrorist group. Considering the request of Sri Lankan government, India immediately sent military assistance, which included naval patrolling and surveillance, along with assistance from Indian Air Force and Indian Army.<sup>28</sup> The US, Soviet Union, Britain and Pakistan also sent assistance. In short, Sri Lanka received prompt support from all those countries which were standing against each other on the East Pakistan crisis. Later, Sri Lanka remained silent on the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty and maintained strict neutrality at the time of war.

Also, by April 1971, millions of East Pakistani crossed international border and entered India as refugees. In spite of continuous diplomatic protests by India, the inactivity of the Western powers proved their silent

support for Pakistan. At that juncture, in July 1971, using Pakistan's mediation and territory, the US reached out to China. Realising the emerging US–China–Pakistan triangle and its impact on India amid the East Pakistan crisis, within a month India signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. Though the possibility of cooperation between the two was already there, the timing and Article IX of the treaty, which declared mutual military assistance in face of any threat on peace and security, indicated clear Soviet support to India. From early October onwards, Pakistan began to concentrate troops near the western border of India, making the war inevitable.

Further, in 1971, India's economic condition was facing the burden of increasing imports, defence expenditure and spending on refugees. Any hampering of the flow of shipment or act of offloading import cargo, in that situation, could bring about severe economic problems for India. Politically, Pakistan already had close relations with China, and the Western powers had also shown their 'tilt'. In this context, how far did the Indo-Soviet treaty work for India, regarding protection of sea trade, at the time of war? In 1971, Britain had a strong naval and air power presence in the Arabian Sea, capable enough to endanger India's trade and security. The US, in turn, had a strong presence in the Western Pacific and its nuclear-powered attack carrier, *USS Enterprise*, was stationed off the coast of Vietnam;<sup>29</sup> and it maintained a small naval force in the Bahrain and its complete entry in the Diego Garcia was still awaited. Since the mid-1960s, the Soviet Union too had increased its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and it also had a strong Pacific Fleet stationed at Vladivostok. Any misadventure, by any superpower, had the possibility to proliferate the crisis. After the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), both the superpowers and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) powers were highly sensitive regarding this issue. By signing the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, India therefore managed to restrict the intervention of all external powers, leaving Pakistan alone to confront the Indian naval power.

Different decisions of the policymakers, since 1965, including: introduction of the submarine arm; building a separate naval base at eastern shore and its inauguration just before the war; cancellation of overflight facilities for Pakistani aviation; signing friendship treaty with the Soviet Union; and empowering Indian Navy to control Indian merchant shipping through Naval Control of Shipping Act of 1971, set the stage, gave ample scope and better chance to Indian Navy to implement

its design to secure the flow of shipment during wartime. Submarine and air bombing are the two major wartime threats for merchant fleet. Capacity of submarines against merchant fleet was well proven in both the world wars and during World War II, Japan and the US established the importance of air cover for merchant ships.

In 1971, Pakistan had a strong submarine arm with four submarines, along with strong air power armed with US, French and Chinese aircraft. Pakistan, however, did not have any naval facilities in its eastern wing, and also had very few aircraft there. Considering all the merits and demerits of the adversary, the Indian Navy prepared a plan to protect important Indian ports, control the routes of merchant ships and establish patrols in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea to secure nearby vital sea lanes. To protect important ports of the western and eastern coasts, naval and air reconnaissance was established up to a particular extent and special care was taken to prevent any sabotage in the Indian harbours. Protection of shipping was established by coordinating routing and programming of ships, directing to keep them away from Pakistani coasts and by recalling Indian ships from the Gulf. To protect the sea lanes in the eastern water, patrolling was deployed from east of Sri Lanka to the Chittagong Port (Bangladesh). In the western part, patrolling was deployed from Colombo to the Eight Degree Channel and the Nine Degree Channel. Later, another patrolling was deployed in the west of the Nine Degree Channel to cover both the channels.

During that fateful fortnight, mysterious sinking of Pakistani submarine, *Ghazi*, in the vicinity of Vishakhapatnam, headquarter of Eastern Naval Command, together with successful blockade in the Bay of Bengal, air strike in East Pakistan, missile attack on Karachi Port and 'Operation Falcon' (launched by Indian Navy in the Arabian Sea, in search of Pakistani submarine which torpedoed and sunk *INS Khukri*), completely disabled Pakistan's capacity to attack India's vital sea lanes.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, not a single Indian merchant ship was either captured or damaged. The foreign merchant ships, which initially expressed some hesitation regarding safety and security, continued to supply goods and commodities to the Indian ports.<sup>31</sup> During the war period, a total of 130 ships sailed through both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea to reach the Indian ports.<sup>32</sup> Even the supply of the war materials, such as crude oil tankers, reached the Indian ports completely unscathed and undisturbed.<sup>33</sup>

The war and its massive geostrategic effect resulted in several economic burdens. With the declaration of war, the US suspended development aid to India. Performance of Indian Navy and near about zero effect of the Task Force 74 on it hastened the US' naval entry in the Indian Ocean after the war. Besides that, the US–China–Pakistan triangle increased India's defence budget in the successive years. In a background of excessive refugee burden, a war and continuous growing defence expenditure, increasing price of goods and commodities, therefore, was an expected market scenario. However, a continuous flow of essential commodities controlled the expected scarcity of materials and consequent incapacity in agricultural, industrial and transport sectors. Availability of products in the domestic market, on the other hand, minimised the price hike. This economic scenario, in turn, strengthened the position of the policymakers at the time of further political bargain with its close neighbour after the war.

#### CONCLUSION

During the 1971 war, India, through a blitzkrieg campaign, achieved a decisive victory and permanently halved Pakistan's political and economic capability. Continuous flow of resources during the war period, through protected sea lanes, was one of the major strategic successes of this war. The most important factor of this well-designed strategy was its long-planned surprises, built during peacetime. From 1965 to 1971, India seriously observed the changing political and security structure in the region, particularly in the Indian Ocean, and acted accordingly. Gradual building of a base on the eastern shore and its inauguration just few weeks before the war suddenly increased the capability of the Indian Navy in the Bay of Bengal. It helped India to project equal strength to protect its sea trade in both the eastern and western waters. Signing a treaty with the Soviet Union was another factor. Gaining Soviet naval support in a bipolar world was a huge strategic win for India. Altogether, in the 1971 war, India achieved unprecedented success with regard to protection of SLOCs, when the foreign policy and defence strategy worked together.

The maritime history of India established the geostrategic importance of the country. Independent India, to reduce expenditure decided to defend its territorial sovereignty through diplomacy and ironically, left the strongest source of its economic security near about unprotected. The 1965 war revealed the consequence of this deliberate neglect. In spite of that, till 1971, India did not make any attempt to build maritime

relations with countries strategically located adjacent to its vital sea lanes. It was sheer luck that, Sri Lanka turned neutral. Except this small blot, in 1971, both the military and political units of the country complemented each other's objectives and strategies and brought a watershed moment for the protection of SLOCs in independent India.

#### NOTES

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