

Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan (MDP): Preserving Freedom of Seas

(Naval Headquarter, Islamabad, 2018, 245 pages)

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The first edition of Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan (MDP), sub titled, *Preserving Freedom of Seas*, was published by Pakistan Navy (Naval Headquarters, Islamabad) in December 2018. The manuscript of MDP was carefully constructed at Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore under the aegis of Naval Headquarters, Islamabad. This was done over a period of some six years in which around eleven (11) comprehensive drafts of the document were prepared and examined before being given the final shape. The development of the Doctrine involved wide ranging internal discussions (both, within the service as well as with other sister services) over and above examination of a variety of national and international peer documents.

Conversations were also held and views from number of accomplished overseas scholars like Professor Geoffrey Till of King's College, London, Stephen Cohen, a Senior Fellow at Brookings Institute, Washington and Dr. Ian Speller of Maynooth University, Ireland were too solicited on specific issues. Foreign office was consulted as well. The Doctrine is the first document released by Pakistan Navy for public readership. Being a foremost effort, the Doctrine reflects collective wisdom, shared beliefs and thoughts of the service. MDP is both, informational and doctrinal. The intended purpose of the document is spelled out in the "Foreword" of the book: "*—shape opinions and be instrumental in galvanizing the maritime sector of Pakistan.*"

Accordingly, the Doctrine at the outset outlines, "*a maritime doctrine lays down fundamental maritime principles on which subsequent actions (non-military and military) in the strategic, operational and tactical realm are founded in pursuit of national objectives*"

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(pp. 2). In a country where traditional national discourse overwhelmingly centres on continental issues; where no political party has ever had a clear vision on maritime issues (much less included these in their respective political manifestos) and the main theatre of war is routinely thought to be the terrain of central and north Punjab, expecting even rudimentary knowledge on ocean affairs or role of navy would be nigh impossible. This is despite the fact that bulk of manpower in all three services (including navy) is drawn from Punjab. In this backdrop, two initiatives of the Pakistan Navy since late 1990s have been praiseworthy. First, was the shifting of what was previously Naval Staff College located at Karachi to Lahore in 1996 and renaming it as PN War College. The second has been the release of inaugural Maritime Doctrine for the country.

MDP is essentially purported to advance the outreach of the service (Pakistan Navy) in public and private sector, particularly amongst intelligentsia and academia of Pakistan. This it does by providing understanding on the “distinctive attributes of National maritime sector and the role of Pakistan Navy in National security. MDP further “aims to develop coherence and uniformity of thought and action within Pakistan Navy and cooperation with the Army, Airforce, Friendly navies as well as Coalition partners” (pp 3).

The Doctrine offers a reader or an academic researcher, the fundamentals and distinctive characteristics associated with the maritime domain in all its vastness; the global interconnectivity provided by oceans and the manner in which a maritime military instrument (i.e. a navy or other maritime Law Enforcement Agencies) operates to protect, preserve and advance a country’s national maritime besides other interests. The document is side by side an expression of the shared beliefs and values of the service. It explains various concepts that govern the application of maritime military power. The Doctrine furthermore provides a summary of the maritime threats that manifest the domain and the manner in which Pakistan Navy operates during peace and war. It likewise shows the intent and manner in which the service believes to prosecute war at sea should that be thrust upon the nation.

MDP has 10 chapters. These are followed by an extensive glossary covering a range of over 400 terms with their explicit and implicit meanings. The first five chapters of the Doctrine being “informational and educational” begins with explaining sea power and various military instruments (platforms) of sea power for better comprehension of common readers. Chapter one alludes to the relationship between National security and place of maritime doctrine therein. This is illustrated schematically (pp6&7) as well. So is the difference between a policy, strategy and doctrine explained in chapter one. The narrative in the chapter further describes how a maritime doctrine differs from military doctrine.

This is in addition to the discourse on significance of maritime domain in twenty first century. Chapter two (2) provides a sweeping scan on the history of the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese, the Dutch, the French eras are examined. The decline of the inward looking Mughals with “obsessive landward concerns” and what the Doctrine states, “developing outsized armies for land battles forsaking the Indian shores or the large coastline” as the British East India Company set foot on Indian soil in garb of trading but steadily grew in strength in quest for plunder of riches, makes a timely and compelling recount. The chapter also gives an account of wars beginning with 1965, 1971, Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Overview on Operation Desert Storm (1991), Enduring Freedom (2001), Iraqi Freedom (2002) and various operations against Somali piracy beginning with Operation Atlanta (2008) is provided.

Chapter 2 is followed by various politico-strategic dimensions of the maritime environment (chapter 3) and maritime security (chapter 4) as it has come to be understood in post-cold war period, especially post September 2001. The “informative” part ends with description of “maritime interests of Pakistan” (chapter 5). Chapter 5 alludes to the areas of interest to Pakistan in the Indian Ocean and beyond, various maritime zones and their description. Alongside, the chapter sketches maritime infrastructure besides available and potential marine resources in the maritime expanse of Pakistan.

The next five chapters (chapter 6 to 10) are quintessentially doctrinal. Chapter 6

illustrates various concepts (some previously established universally) as these are interpreted by the Navy. Sea control, sea denial, force in being, anti-access and area denial (A2AD), littoral operations being few important ones. The chapter on “principles of war” (chapter 7) describes various levels of war and types of modern day warfare. In the types of warfare, sub-conventional, conventional to nuclear war is defined. Also explained are hybrid warfare and gray-zone conflicts over and above littoral warfare.

This chapter (7) then goes on to list 11 (eleven) “principles of war” as defined by Pakistan Navy for itself. “Selection and maintenance of aim, motivation and morale, offensive, surprise, concentration of effort”, are to name just five of the 11 principles. Chapter 8 provides an interesting overview of various commands of Pakistan Navy along with their areas of responsibility, functions and the hierarchical structure of overall command under the Chief of the Naval Staff. Amongst the most important field commands of Pakistan Navy is, “Commander Pakistan Fleet” (COMPAK) who “exercises operational control of all ships, submarines, naval aviation and operational bases of Pakistan Navy and effectively utilizes them in peace and war”, according to the Doctrine.

Chapter (9) on “Threat and role of Maritime forces” alludes to the spectrum of conflict ranging from “low intensity operations to conventional and nuclear war”. It goes on to examine the peacetime and war time roles of Pakistan Navy. The final chapter (10) “Future Aspirations” begins with the “Vision of Pakistan Navy” as a “combat ready multi-dimensional force manned by highly motivated professionally competent human resource--” (pp161). The military strategic environment talks about the “growing influence of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), military nuclearization of the Indian Ocean” and the expanding role of Non State Actors (NSAs). The evolving “character of war” is also discussed. The interesting part in this chapter is what document captions, “Pakistan Navy and the National Security-The Strategic Correlation”. The discourse underscores why preservation of maritime sovereignty in area of interest to Pakistan (Western Indian Ocean, Chapter 5) is indispensable National requirement. *“As of 2018, the monthly national*

consumption of petrol and diesel alone stood at around 800,000 tonnes and 650,000 tonnes respectively” according to the document. This is not to mention significance of Gwadar port under CPEC, the need for preservation and sustainable development of marine and other resources in the country’s Exclusive Economic Zone, EEZ (spanning 290,000 Sq Km), second largest area under country’s jurisdiction, next only to Balochistan (Chap 5).

It is reassuring that Pakistan Navy had made known its presence in Punjab through its Naval War College way back in 1996. Punjab is where ocean and maritime issues must be understood with clarity both, in historical as well as contemporary context. Most invasions to India came from the west and for good or bad, the mainstream National discourse has mostly focused on western borders and neighbouring Afghanistan since 1980. Enormous geopolitical changes have occurred since. A new world order is unraveling before us. In this emerging order, oceans are at the heart of international politics. Pakistan cannot remain oblivious to changes taking place in Indian Ocean. It is time a fresh theme if not thinking was injected in the archaic National dialogue. MDP has done just that. More needs to be done.

An enormous percentage of Pakistan’s strategic goods, particularly fossil fuels, are imported via sea. Exports to destinations like the U.S and Europe too travel by sea while edible oil and military hardware from China is shipped to Pakistan by sea lines from Far East. There are valuable marine resources in the country’s EEZ which are precious for coastal economy and otherwise too. “Preserving Freedom of Seas”, keeping the sea lines, on which travels our national commerce, free from scourge of any conventional or non-conventional threats both, during peace as and war is primary responsibility of Pakistan Navy. It is a strategic necessity for Pakistan and country’s National security. In addition, policing National maritime zones and supplementing efforts of other LEAs to ensure prevention of any illegitimate activity (narco or human trafficking, IUUF, marine pollution, maritime terrorism etc.) is also essentially part of this preservation effort by Pakistan Navy.

India’s significant investments in its navy and developing nexus with United States

besides partnership in alliances like Quad not to mention growing sea based nuclear potential vested in nuclear submarines requires immediate attention of policy makers in Islamabad. It is reliably learnt that Pakistan has neither any well-defined objectives for the Indian Ocean nor any stated policy on Indo-Pacific.

These are the main theatres of what is progressing and in common parlance increasingly called “Great power rivalry”. It would not be out of place to say that MDP has long been in the making. The other two services had published their respective doctrines on periodic basis. Indian navy made a beginning in 2004 with a sub-standard document called Indian Maritime Doctrine. In 2015, Indian navy came up with a refined apex document called, Indian Maritime Security Strategy” (IMSS). The document places all previous documents including Indian Maritime Doctrine and Indian Maritime Military Strategy (2007) as sub-set of IMSS. Our intelligentsia and upcoming generation need to understand and fully grasp the importance of seas and developing geopolitics which are and will continue to be defined in this theatre of planet in twenty first century. More and more countries are now reorienting their policies and turning to seas where future economic prosperity resides and geopolitics converges and diverge.

Navies have traditionally played an important role in the rise and fall of empires. Navies are at the centre stage of developing diplomacy, geopolitics and as instruments of coercion and deterrence in this century. The overly continental centric country that China once was, has now numerically the world’s largest navy surpassing US navy in numbers. The main combat theatre between the US and China is indeed Indo-Pacific and it is in the Indian Ocean segment that a severe contest for dominance over sealines and cross cutting geopolitics can be witnessed today. As the first edition, MDP provides what is called, “essential familiarity with maritime thinking of Pakistan”. It is time for Pakistan Navy to come up with next edition of the MDP.