

UN Debate: Maritime Security: RSTV - Big Picture

Rajya Sabha TV programs and discussions are very insightful and informative from a UPSC perspective. In this article, we provide a gist of the RSTV Big Picture debate on the UN debate on maritime security. This topic is important for the international relations section under the [UPSC syllabus](#).

Anchor:

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Participants:

1. Abhijit Singh, Head, Maritime Policy Initiative, ORF
2. Dr. Sreeram Chaulia, Foreign Affairs Expert

Context:

India is currently a non-permanent member of the UNSC (its 8th stint) and is chairing the UNSC for the month of August 2021. For the first time in history, an Indian Prime Minister has chaired a UNSC high-level debate which was on the issue of 'Enhancing Maritime Security - A Case for International Cooperation' and the topic of discussion was Maritime Security.

Significance of the Prime Minister chairing the Debate

- Chairing the UNSC meet on Maritime Security shows the importance of the sea route, its Economic Importance (Blue Economy) as well as threats by both state and non-state actors.
- It is also aligned with our **National Interest** as more than 90% of Indian trade passes through the sea route. The country also has more than 7500 km of coastline.
- It highlights the gravity of the issue and thus it was attended by other heads of state like the Russian president (Mr. Putin) and the US Secretary of State (Mr. Antony Blinken).
- Making strategic use of the UN and putting forward a narrative against the rising Chinese muscle power in the maritime domain, China bullying its neighbours, and also highlighting the non-transparent nature of the [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#).
- It also shows India's commitment to free and open trade routes and to the leadership role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The PM highlighted the humanitarian role played by India and the need to make the maritime domain inclusive so that the whole of humanity can get benefited. Thus India equally focused on the development and humanitarian aspects rather than making the issue just China-centric.
- It also highlights the importance of the sea for sustainable growth as well as tackling environmental pollution.

Dimension of Maritime Security:

- Maritime security means facing and tackling threats from both traditional and non-traditional sources. India holistically highlighted both types of threats and was also advised to use the blue economy sustainably and inclusively.
- **Traditional threats:-** Threats from state actors like China flexing its muscle in the Indo-Pacific region, also its debt-trap diplomacy, all of which are threats to the sovereignty of many countries in the region.
- **Non-traditional threats:-**
 - Natural Disasters: Tsunami, cyclone, flood
 - Environmental pollution: Oil spill, plastics, dumping of waste
 - Economic challenges: poverty, inequality, unemployment
 - Transnational Crime and Terrorism: Sea piracy, drug trafficking, illegal fishing

India's effort in ensuring Maritime Security:

- Expansion of Hard Power - Building submarines and aircraft carriers, increased budget on the Navy, 'Double Fish Hook' strategy to counter China's 'string of pearls'.
- Bilateral and multilateral naval exercises like [Malabar](#) (India, Japan, US, Australia).
- The vision of SAGAR given by the PM in 2015– security and growth for all in the region.
- Working on the Indo-Pacific geopolitical construct with like-minded countries like [QUAD](#).
- India has been the first responder in providing humanitarian assistance during disasters such as cyclones, etc.
- Mr. Modi highlighted India's effort in the peaceful sea border dispute settlement with Bangladesh.
- **Infrastructural development** like the Asia-Africa Growth corridor (AAGF) with Japan.
- Building and accessing ports like:-
 - **Iran** - [Chabahar Port](#) in the Persian Gulf
 - **Indonesia** - Sabang Port near the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Islands
 - **Myanmar** - Built the Sittwe Port
 - **Bangladesh** - Helped in building the Mongla Port
 - **Oman** - Signed agreement to access the Duqm Port near the Strait of Hormuz
 - **Singapore** - Agreement to access Changi naval base

Outcomes of the Debate

5 Principles of Maritime Security

1. Peaceful Settlement of maritime dispute on the basis of international law (directed towards China's aggression in the South China Sea).
2. Free and open maritime trade without any barrier so as to establish legitimate maritime security.
3. The global community should come together to tackle natural disasters and maritime threats posed by non-state actors.
4. Preserving and protecting the maritime environment and maritime resources.

5. Responsible and accountable maritime connectivity which ensures financial sustainability (indicates China's debt-trap diplomacy and BRI).

Way forward:

- India should push for the adoption of universally accepted maritime governance with an equal focus on inclusiveness, maritime environment, marine resources, and humanitarian assistance.
 - India should work with like-minded countries (Japan, EU, USA) to develop connectivity and infrastructure projects in developing countries to save them from China's debt-trap diplomacy.
 - India should participate in the ongoing global effort in financing infrastructural projects in developing countries to save them from getting trapped in the hegemonic BRI projects. Some ongoing projects where India can participate are:-
 - **Blue Dot Network initiative** by the US, Japan, and Australia.
 - **Build Back Better World (BBBW)** which is a G7 initiative that has committed to invest \$100 billion in immediate investments in developing and poor countries.
 - In the words of **Thucydides**, "What matters is power and not appeal to justice, even God doesn't help, only self help works". Thus, India should invest heavily in developing naval **hard power** like aircraft carriers, submarines, frigates, and battleships to match the naval strength of China rather than just depending on the moral appeal and mercy of western countries.
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