



The Indian Government's Response to Chinese Maritime Activities

OE Watch Commentary: As the government of China continues to develop the capabilities of its naval forces and expands its maritime economic reach (such as the agreement with the government of Sri Lanka for a majority control of the Hambantota Port), there has been a harsh reaction from the government of India and Indian defense and security analysts (the latter are equally critical of China and of the Indian government for not acting quickly enough to counter Chinese activities). The accompanying excerpted articles from Indian news sources report on the forces under the Andaman and Nicobar Command (the island chain in between the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, east of India) and a recent agreement between the governments of India and Seychelles over the development of a naval base on Seychelles' Assumption Island. The articles provide a look at a couple of things that the Indian government is doing in response to Chinese maritime activities.

The article from the online version of *Force*, an English-language monthly magazine that focuses on defense issues in India, features an interview with Vice Admiral Bimal Verma about his role as Commander in Chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command and the capabilities of the Indian forces on the island. Admiral Vera discusses the "Long Term Perspective Plan" for the naval contingent on the island, including "more and larger amphibious ships, more weapon carrying platforms, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capable and missile carrying platforms" and that this would complement the current units there, which are "suited for surveillance." He also notes the army's contingent as having "two infantry battalions and one Territorial Army battalion" and that there is a plan for another army battalion (presumably infantry). Admiral Verma also talks about "mission-based deployment in the Straits of Malacca," which appears to be centered on maintaining an active presence in the straits, as well as a recent exercise focused on a scenario of defending the island, which the interviewer notes, "got a bit of a traction in the Chinese press." There have been previous reports that the Indian government has not put enough of a priority on funding for the Andaman and Nicobar Command, but this could be changing.

The article from *The Wire*, an English-language news website in India, reports on the agreement between the governments of India and Seychelles "on a project to develop a naval base at Assumption Island." The two sides initially reached an agreement for the base earlier this year, only for it to be rejected in the parliament of Seychelles amid a protest from the country's political opposition and public. For now, it appears that this agreement will go through and it represents another step, alongside the continuing development of the forces in the Andaman and Nicobar Command, which the Indian government is taking in response to Chinese maritime activities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: "Interview | Commander in Chief Andaman and Nicobar Command, Vice Admiral Bimal Verma AVSM, ADC," *Force*, 12 June 2018. <http://forceindia.net/interview/commander-chief-andaman-nicobar-command-vice-admiral-bimal-verma-avsm-adc/>

(Force): Given the tasks this command has — from defence of the Andaman and Nicobar island chain to keeping a watch on what moves around in this area — what assets would you ideally want, in terms of amphibious vessels, surveillance systems etc?

(Vice Admiral Bimal Verma): When the Andaman and Nicobar Command was created in 2001, it was planned to induct a range of assets into the (Order of Battle) of the newly raised Command. However, the build-up of force levels is still work in progress...There is a blueprint under consideration, it has gone through several iterations and the planned assets could be expected to materialise over the next two Plan periods.

(Force): What are these assets?

(Verma): You would be aware of the Long Term Perspective Plan (LTPP) of the services...as far as the surface component of navy is concerned, more and larger amphibious ships, more weapon carrying platforms, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capable and missile carrying platforms are planned. Currently, the assets that we have are suited for surveillance. Recently, some more platforms including a weapon platform have been added.

As far as the army is concerned, right now we have two infantry battalions and one Territorial Army battalion...The induction of a third army battalion is part of the long term plan. Also, in due course, 108 Mountain Brigade at ANC (Andaman and Nicobar Command) will become comprehensively independent; which will result in certain additional assets such as integral air defence...

(Force): The CNS (Chief of Naval Staff) has been speaking about the mission-based deployments...What assets have been deployed for that?

(Verma): The mission-based deployment in the Straits of Malacca is steered by ANC. We, at ANC and the Eastern Naval Command, jointly deploy assets to maintain a constant presence there. The assets with long sea legs, helicopter carrying capability and good sensors are being deployed in the mouth of Malacca straits...

(Force): What were the lessons learnt in Defence of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Exercise (DANX) conducted last year which also got a bit of a traction in the Chinese press?

(Verma): All services conduct annual major exercises, be it TROPEX by the Navy or Gagan Shakti of the IAF. While each service participates in some form or the other in these exercises, including forces from ANC; these exercises are conceived by the respective service headquarters. What sets DANX apart is that the exercise was conceived by us at ANC for the defence of A&N islands. Besides all our assets, we got certain force accretion from the three services in the mainland which included the Special Forces too...

(Force): Today you have amphibious capability for about two battalions. What is it that ideally you should be looking for in your area of responsibility?

(Verma): The ANC has a defensive role and I think for that the brigade-level is adequate for the time being.

Force: Is there anything else you would like to share?

(Verma): This is the only joint operational command in the country...I have all the operational assets of the armed forces directly under me and we operate seamlessly...I am a naval officer, but here I don the camouflage uniform of our sister service. I would say that the last two-three years have been quite productive for us...While the army has given some of its assets from its existing kitty (inventory); the IAF has increased the number of Mi-17 helicopters in the islands. And the navy has provided weapon carrying platforms...

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Continued: The Indian Government's Response to Chinese Maritime Activities

“The assets with long sea legs, helicopter carrying capability and good sensors are being deployed in the mouth of Malacca straits.”

Source: “India, Seychelles Agree to Work on Assumption Island Project,” *The Wire*, 25 June 2018. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-seychelles-assumption-island-project>

India and Seychelles today agreed to work together on a project to develop a naval base at the Assumption Island keeping each other's concerns in mind after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Danny Faure...

The visit comes just days after Faure said that a joint project with New Delhi to develop a naval base at Assumption Island in his country would not move forward...India also announced a \$100-million credit to Seychelles for augmenting its defence capabilities...

On the project to develop a naval facility at the island, which would give India a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean Region, Modi said, “We have agreed to work together on the Assumption Island project based on each other's rights.”...



Indian Navy Ships.

Source: Michael Scalet (Flickr), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vran/441968765>, CC 2.0.