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**THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE**

**SPECIAL SESSIONS - SESSION 6**

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**DEPUTY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR, INDIA**

**Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, Senior Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy, IISS**

Let me now turn to our second speaker, India's Deputy National Security Advisor, Vikram Misri. A career diplomat, Vikram Misri has served as Private Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and as Ambassador of India to Spain, Myanmar and most recently China. He has been Deputy National Security Advisor in the Prime Minister's Office in India for the past two and a half years.

**Vikram Misri, Deputy National Security Advisor, India**

Thank you, Rahul. Good afternoon. I would like to thank the IISS for inviting me to be here and share some thoughts on India's approaches to the Indian Ocean region.

As Rahul alluded to as well, in recent years the world has got used to the vocabulary of the Indo-Pacific, which has been at the centre of contemporary geo-economic and geostrategic discourse. The Pacific portion of this construct has seen considerable flux in recent times, as all of you attending this conference will already have realised, transforming this region's dynamics in multiple fields including security, the state of the global commons and preservation of international law.

There are perhaps few better vantage points to observe these dynamics than Singapore. But given that Singapore also in some senses sits at the fulcrum of the Indian and Pacific oceans, this is a particularly apposite venue to dwell on the other key constituent of the Indo-Pacific construct, namely the Indian Ocean region. The Indian Ocean is one of the busiest waterways in the world, but also is perhaps the only one in which great-power contestation is defined by some structural factors related to the ocean. This is an ocean where entry is regulated through choke points, which theoretically can be controlled in certain situations and possibly become friction points. Island territories in this ocean also work to shape the security architecture and play a vital role along the sea lanes of communication by providing logistics and staging posts for navies.

India's approach to the region is based on the theme of SAGAR, the Hindi word for ocean, but also standing for Security and Growth for All in the Region. This theme was first articulated by our Prime Minister in 2015 in Mauritius and it also figured in his historic address at the Shangri-La Dialogue right here in 2018. SAGAR is broad based and goes beyond defence. It includes the aspects of security, capacity building, collective action, sustainable development, maritime engagement and regional connectivity.

India views the Indian Ocean as an asset of the countries that border it. Our Indian Ocean approach is therefore one that is rooted in advancing cooperation in the region by using bilateral, plurilateral and regional tools and mechanisms, and by deploying our capabilities, as our Prime Minister has said, for the 'benefit of all'. The problems that the countries of the Indian Ocean littoral face are well known and they have been referred to already in some cases: piracy, illegal fishing, human trafficking, drug and weapon smuggling, terrorism, natural disasters and climate change. These problems are compounded in many countries on account of the lack of adequate capacity or capability. And India is often the first responder to crises and aims to be a net security provider in the region.

The countries of the Indian Ocean also have common interests. Maritime safety and security is at the top of the list and is seeing greater exchange of information on white shipping, for instance. We are cooperating on coastal surveillance, collaborating in enhancing maritime domain awareness and building the missing capacities wherever required. One of the ways for doing this is the International Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region near New Delhi, which acts as a major platform for the sharing of maritime-domain-awareness information. It is supported by the exchange of white

shipping information with more than 22 countries and several multilateral groups and has overseas liaison officers deputed to it from nearly a dozen countries.

Connectivity and development are other shared areas of interest, based on an understanding that such initiatives must be transparent; socially, environmentally and financially viable; and conform with the local development agenda, as also with the principles of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Important as these substantive elements of cooperation are, they need the underpinning of a normative framework. That is why we regard the preservation of peace and security and the possibilities of development as being indivisible from the need of adhering to law, observing norms and respecting rules, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas, and refraining from unilateral measures to change the status quo. Respect for such foundational principles and regimes is essential for the credibility of the global order, because when nations disregard their legal obligations or violate long-standing agreements, the damage to trust and confidence is immense.

The Indian Ocean countries are using multiple institutional building blocks to advance cooperation. Two of the most prominent examples are the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. Both seek to enhance maritime cooperation among the littoral states by providing open and inclusive forums for discussion of regionally relevant issues, including maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean region. Recently, under India's lead, an IORA Outlook on the Indo-Pacific has been adopted to guide the association's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative was announced by our Prime Minister at the 14th East Asia Summit in November 2019. Its focus is on collaboration to better manage, conserve, sustain and secure the maritime domain. And cooperation here is envisaged under seven pillars, namely, Maritime Security; Ecology; Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport. Notably, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative is an appropriate fit for the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific.

Last but not the least, I should make a mention of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC), which brings together some of India's immediate maritime neighbours on issues related to maritime safety and security, terror and radicalisation, trafficking and transnational organised crime, cyber security, and the protection of critical infrastructure and humanitarian assistance and disaster response. The CSC is young as an organisation, but its cooperative activities thus far have been found to be extremely useful by all participants.

Let me conclude by emphasising that the responsibility for security in the Indian Ocean region is first and foremost a task of the countries of its littoral. This calls for sustained engagement with a view to strengthening communications and inter-operability. It also requires us to take the long-term view and work to sustain and reinforce the building blocks of deeper cooperation that are already in place in the Indian Ocean region. Thank you.

**Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, Senior Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy, IISS**

Thank you, Mr Misri, for highlighting India's role as a first responder, a net security provider but also talking about IORA. And I think we may come back to how effective the IORA actually is in the question and answer session.

