

questions begin to be raised about India's strategic purpose.<sup>33</sup> Figures for 1989 show basically the same force layout as in 1988 with the notable difference being that three more conventional submarines have been added to the underwater inventory. In a region such as the Indian Ocean, where most states have weak naval forces and few resources to devote to their expansion, a powerful naval force projection capability obviously has a potentially significant bearing on regional stability. India has by far the largest naval capability of all the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and regional stability will strongly depend on New Delhi's future geopolitical intentions.

India does, of course, have legitimate reasons for maintaining a strong navy. Geography should not be overlooked for India is more than the inverted triangle hanging from the Himalayas. India also has Indian Ocean possessions. The Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi islands, collectively known as Lakshadweep, lie in the Arabian Sea 100 nautical miles off the southwest coast of India. The Andaman and Nicobar islands are close to the Strait of Malacca at the eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal. India also has an important cultural and economic interest in the well-being of the large populations of Indian origin who live throughout the region.<sup>34</sup>

The navy is charged with controlling sea communications and protecting the island territories as well as India's very large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). India's maritime interests cannot but grow with increased exploitation of the resources in and below its EEZ. Indeed, the decision to build-up the navy coincided with popular demands that measures be taken to protect India's sea-lanes and the country's offshore resources. Whatever its ultimate

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<sup>33</sup> There are no public indications as to the future size of the Indian Navy but it is believed that India intends to develop a force centred on three carrier battle groups, supported by six nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines. See: O'Ballance, Edgar. "India's South Asian Doctrine," *Armed Forces*, May 1989 p. 226. Also, McKinley, Michael. *Op. cit.* p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> This interest was explicitly demonstrated by India's intervention on behalf of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. Further afield, India has developed close ties with Mauritius (population 65% Indian origin), has maintained a keen interest in the well-being of the large populations of Indian origin in South Africa and throughout East Africa, as well as in Southeast Asia and Fiji.