

Indian Defence Priorities in the Indian Ocean

With a population of some 800,000,000 and an area of subcontinental proportions to defend, it is not unreasonable that India should maintain a substantial military capability. There has been steady growth in all departments of the Indian armed forces. Since 1965 the army has expanded from 825,000 men to 1,100,000 in 1989, the air force from 28,000 to 110,000, and the navy from 16,000 to 47,000. These are undoubtedly huge increases but do not seem unreasonable when it is noted that the population of India has grown from 470,000,000 to its present size in the same period.²⁴

India has the world's fourth largest armed forces, the fifth largest air force and the sixth largest navy. These facts aside, India's defence spending is not excessive -- some 3.5% of its GNP -- in comparison with Pakistan (6.5%) and the United States (6.7%).²⁵ Nevertheless, the steady growth of India's economy means that defence spending will continue to increase in absolute terms. If the present rate of 3.5% of GNP remains stable, the Indian military budget will double in twenty years.²⁶ India has also had the highest average growth in military spending in the world at 7% per year since 1975²⁷ and the military build-up is continuing. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) lists India as the largest importer of modern weapons in the world, second only to Iraq, for the period 1983-87.²⁸ Despite such

²⁴ All figures from *The Military Balance*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1965-66, 1989-90.

²⁵ Figures as of 1986. Source: *The Military Balance*, 1988-89. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1988, pp. 224-226. Later estimates put the Indian defence budget at 4.7% of GNP, which is still not excessive by global standards. See: Cheung, Tai-Ming. "Build-up Backlash," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 27, 1989. p. 18.

²⁶ "Rising Regional Powers: India and China: Comparing Two Developing Powers Out Twenty Years". *Bulletin*, Washington: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, No.3, November 1988, p.15.

²⁷ As reported in *India Abroad*, February 10, 1989.

²⁸ Quoted in, *India Abroad*, November 11 1988. In 1987 alone, Indian arms imports reportedly totalled US\$5.2 billion. Cheung, Tai-Ming. "Build-up Backlash," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 27, 1989, p. 18.