Assessing Navy's Potentials

What is the issue?

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The evolving geopolitical scenario demands an assessment of India's strengths and weaknesses in the sea to take appropriate measures.

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What are the recent developments?

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- India’s security interests are becoming increasingly **focused on the sea.**
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- In the context of possible adversaries, the Indian Navy is **prepared to respond** immediately to any misadventures by Pakistan.
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- This includes incidents of the type that took place in the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai through the coastal route.
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- The meeting with ASEAN leaders and the recent one with French president, all had **maritime security** highest on the agenda.
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- **Indian Ocean Region** (IOR) taking centre-stage in these, reflects its increasing importance in the global arena.
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- The activities of **Chinese** naval units in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are closely watched by the Navy.
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- In the **South China Sea** (SCS), due to proximity and numbers, the Chinese are obviously better placed.
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- The Indian Navy had increased its deployments in the **Indo-Pacific**.
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What are the strengths?

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- China's ventures into the IOR are well known.
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- Nevertheless, India's ability to **locate and track its ships** and submarines in these waters is also quite substantial.
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- The dozens of **airfields** on the two coasts and in southern India facilitates largest **surveillance** and **attack aircraft operation**.
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- Added to this are the airfields in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and reconnaissance satellites.
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- These together can allow India to keep the **northern Indian Ocean** under watch.
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- Besides, **interfaces** with countries like Oman, Seychelles and France further extend this reach.
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- Our ability to deal with Chinese energy lifelines is not something that can be ignored.
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- Both operationally and logistically, the Chinese will be hard put to match India in the IOR.
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- But, investment in the navy largely decides the worth of these several advantages.
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What are the challenges and weaknesses?

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- **Budget allocations** - There is an increasing interface with the US, Japan and Australia and enhancement of security interests.
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- But these are not reflected in defence budget allocations.
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- For the military to modernise in keeping with the challenges faced, resources are needed.
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- The defence budget falls well short of what is needed.
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- **Strategy** - Budget allocations are weak because of the inability to crystallise a holistic national security strategy.
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- A strategy to identify what our interests are and how they can be best safeguarded or enhanced has to be devised.
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- **Pakistan** - At sea, India is superior over the Pakistan.
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- But, vigilance along the long coastline is important.
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- **Submarines** - The Navy is ahead of the other two services in Make in India.
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- But the submarine scenario is worrying with poor availability.
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- The first Scorpene submarine built at Mazagon Docks is delivered after a delay of several years.
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- However, the total number of submarines stands at just over a dozen; but all are more than 20 years old.
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- Some have undergone modernisation but that does not equip them for current needs.
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- **Delays** - The plan to continue beyond the Scorpenes and the urgently needed replacements for multi-role helicopters continue to languish.
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- The decision-making process is slow and no improvement has been visible in the past four years.
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What is the way forward?

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- **Allocation** - Its existing 15% share of the budget is not encouraging for the Navy.
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- But reality is that any great enhancement in allocation to meet all the requirements is just not possible, given the competing needs.
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- There is no option but to operate within this constraint.
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- **Revamp** - So it calls for several of its segments to be revisited to have a

modern military of the type that India needs.
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- Deadwood, especially manpower, should be identified and eliminated.
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- Similarly, the Air Force needs more resources and the Army needs to revisits its present strength.
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- Army notably operates with nearly 68% of its equipment being old and only 8% of it suited to the needs of today.
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- **Political will** - Every year, services go before parliamentary committees and complain about their inadequacies.
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- There is thus the need for strong political will at the highest level.
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- This is extremely essential to have the security concerns reviewed critically.
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Source: Business Standard

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