

Expansion of Maritime Interests and Naval Modernization of India in the Indo Pacific Region

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Abstract

As importance of the Indo Pacific region grows in the 21st Century, India is expanding its maritime interests and modernizing its naval capabilities in Indo-Pacific Region. India is doing so due to two main factors. First, to counter China's rise. China is rising as a strong Asian power by increasing its power, influence, and sway in the Indian Ocean region. Second, India aspires for becoming a regional hegemon in the Indian Ocean region while expanding its strong influence in the Pacific Ocean. This research paper will explore India's maritime expansion and strong partnership with the Indo Pacific nations which will strengthen Indian footprints in the Indo Pacific Region that challenges the Chinese security concerns in this region. Further, this research paper will explore the evolution of Indian Strategic thinking in the Indo-Pacific Region, identifies rising China and Indo-Sino maritime rivalry as well as examine the countering strategies by India that lead to its maritime expansion and Indian Naval modernization in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific Region, US, China, Asian Power, India, Maritime Expansion, China's rise, Indian Naval Modernization, Indo-Sino Maritime Rivalry

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Introduction:

Indo-Pacific Region consists of two Oceanic Regions; Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Pacific Ocean Region. The Indian Ocean is one of the world's busiest ocean. Mostly, the global trade is occurring through the Indian Ocean. That's why the Indian Ocean is an important trade hub. Indian Ocean region is highly rich in various natural resources such as offshore natural oil and gas, minerals and fisheries. Total 40% world's offshore oil produces in the Indian Ocean Basin. IOR contained world's 15% fisheries. There are very important choke points in the IOR. The first chokepoint of Indian Ocean is Malacca Strait which connects the Pacific Ocean Region with ASEAN nations in the IOR. The second most important chokepoint of IOR is Strait of Hormuz (located in Persian Gulf, Iran). The third important choke point is Bab el Mandeb from Yemen connecting Red Sea Suez Canal to the Mediterranean Sea. Fourth and last is Mozambique Channel which is located between Mozambique and Madagascar connecting to Cape of Good Hope. Cape of Good Hope is the last most important trade route of IOR. Pacific Ocean is the world's biggest ocean. Pacific Ocean is also a major contributor to the world economy. Pacific Ocean is highly rich in offshore oil and gas, fisheries, and minerals.

Indo Pacific Region (IPR) emerges as a key theater of competition between the major powers. As the geostrategic importance of Indo Pacific Region grows, both China & the US, and various nations in IPR are making their own priorities too. China is making strong strategic efforts to increase its influence in the IOR but India is an emerging power in the Indian Ocean Region. India is a good strategic ally of the US and is countering China's growing influence and power in the region. India is the main rival of China in the Indian Ocean Region. Not only in IOR, India is also making its footprints

in Pacific Region with the help of its strategic allies such as ASEAN Nations, Australia, South Korea, and Japan.

Evolution of Indian Strategic Thinking:

After the independence of India, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru views that India should increase and expand its influence in Asia Pacific region. Former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru convened Asian Regional Conference (ARC) in 1948. Jawaharlal Nehru also wrote in his book “The Discovery of India” that the Pacific region will take place of the Atlantic Ocean in the future and become a strong center of the world. (Sana & Akhtar, 2022).

At that time, leading strategic thinkers of India Mr. Panikkar, Mr. K. Vaidya, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru itself. All these three shared the Pan-Oceanic Vision for India in which naval power would play the most significant role in Indian Naval Power Projection and Indian Naval Diplomacy. All these three strategic thinkers considered Indian Ocean as the Ocean of India. Nehru proposed the idea of a strong Indian Navy which was reflected in the Indian First Naval Chief’s ten-years expansion plan to bring India’s Naval Power. After the Indo-Pak War 1971, the importance of Navy in the Indian Strategic thinking was revived again. Indian Naval Strategic thinking re-emerged in India’s security sector with a special focus on the articulating Indian Naval Doctrine and building naval inventory. Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India, focused on the Indian Maritime domain and Indian Naval Modernization. Later, in the 1990s, Look East Policy of India, economic reforms, free trade policies, and transportation opening to the world increased the relevance and importance of the IOR. Hence, the Indian Navy emerged as a key to safeguarding and protecting Indian maritime interests by ensuring the

safety and protection of SLOCs. This has been reflected in the policy documents since the 1990s such as:

- Indian Maritime Doctrine/Indian Naval Doctrine (2004, 2009, 2015).
- Indian Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (2005 &2011).
- Indian Navy Vision Documents (2006 & 2014).
- Indian Maritime Military Strategy (1998, 2007, 2015).
- Strategic Guidance for Transformation (2006, 2015).
- Indian Navy Vision Space (2014).
- Indian Maritime Infrastructure Perspective Plan (2015).
- Indian Naval Indigenization Plan (2015).
- Indian Navy Vision 2020. (Sana &Akhtar, 2022).

These maritime documents give a complete overview & framework of the Indian strategic maritime interests.

India's Emerging Indo-Pacific Strategy:

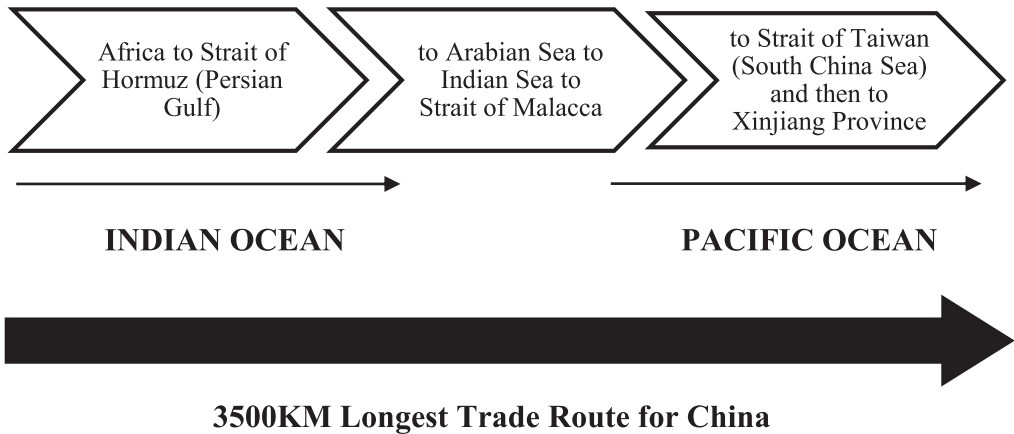
Transformation of the Indian Navy from defending the territorial waters as Green Water Navy in the IOR to ambitious Blue Water Navy possessing power projection capabilities in the Indo Pacific Region. This mega transformation of Indian Navy makes India a strong strategic & leading power not only in IOR but in the Pacific Ocean. India making its strong footprints in the Pacific Region day by day through its strategic partners such as ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea. Due to these Indian growing ambitions in the region, India is regarded as a strong strategic ally and major defense partner by the US. Both US & India have the same strategic interests in IPR. The US renamed the United States Pacific Command as Indo-Pacific Command in order to include India in its Pacific Command. This Indo-Pacific Command is located at Diego Garcia, a US Naval Base where Indian Navy is present for expanding its

maritime interests as well as implementing and adopting its counter strategy against China such as Necklace of Diamond Strategy and Double fish hook strategy. India also established the Indo-Pacific Division and placed the ASEAN Nations & QUAD Countries on the Indo-Pacific dialogues table. India's Naval modernization and policy of extended neighborhood (Act East & Act West) reflected in India's contemporary position in Indo-Pacific Region as a strong player/actor. US Indo Pacific Strategy encourages a vision of Indian Navy about IOR as its primary area of interest and East Asia & South China Sea (Pacific Region) as secondary areas of interest. These both primary and secondary areas of interests are highly significant for India to protect its Blue Water Navy ambitions. (Gahlot, 2022).

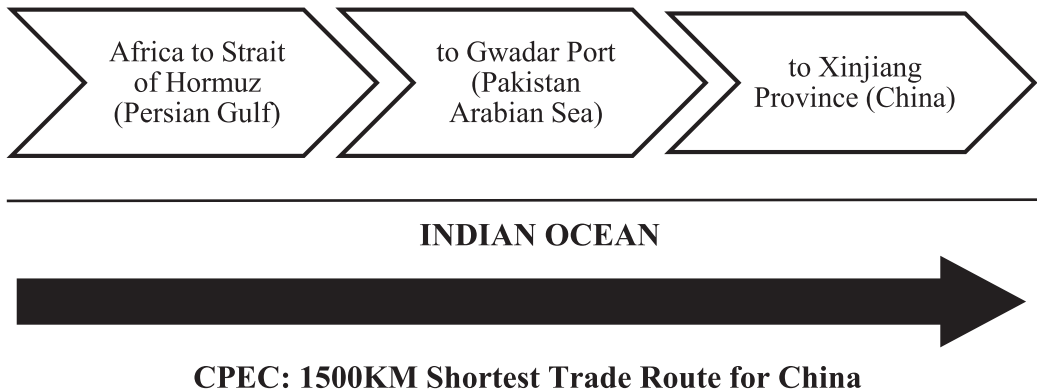
Rising China:

China is rising as a Great Power in the geopolitical theater of Indo Pacific Region. Chinese President Xi announced the BRI and its projects/economic corridors in 2013. BRI is a revival of the ancient Silk Road in this contemporary era. BRI shook the many other major powers of the world. The growing influence of China's BRI is proved to be a blockbuster in the geopolitical sphere which jolted and shake down the US hegemony. This become a great challenge for US and its allies in the Indo Pacific region. To overcome the Malacca strait dilemma, China initiated the CPEC. CPEC is a flagship project of BRI. CPEC is the shortest and safest trade route for China. CPEC venture involves the development of Gwadar as a deep sea port. The port will provide China a direct and shortest access to the IOR. It also improves trade and the economic situation in Pakistan. The Gwadar Port of Pakistan has a very strong potential to fulfill the Chinese trade requirements and to boost the economic position of Pakistan. China also invited many countries such as Russia and Gulf countries for participating in CPEC. (Dollar, 2020).

CPEC is the shortest trade route whereas the Malacca Strait to South China Sea (Pacific Ocean) is the longest trade route for China. China's total trade route distance from



China's total trade route distance from



China is now an economic giant of a world. China has overtake Japan in both economic and military terms. It is also expected that in next 10-20 years China may overtake and cross the US. China has aggressive behaviour based on One China Policy in Pacific Region. China's increasing military modernization and power projection in the Indo Pacific region, make India and its other QUAD partners vigilant in this region. China has a strong navy with

frigates, destroyers, anti missile ships, submarines and aircraft carriers. China following the A2AD Strategy to counter and deter the US and its strategic allies from entering them into Taiwan Strait (located in South China Sea) and East China Sea because China has territorial claims on these two regions in the Pacific Ocean according to its One China Policy. China has territorial disputes with:

- Taiwan (over Taiwan Strait and its regional status).
- Japan on East China Sea.
- And with ASEAN countries on South China Sea.

China has aggressive policy in these regions of Pacific Ocean. China is very sensitive about these areas and its One China Policy. Moreover, China is building artificial islands and implementing its A2AD strategy to deter US and its strategic partners to refrain them from entering this region. Apart from difference/conflicts, China's rise also benefiting its neighbors specially in economic terms. For most states, China is there largest trading partner. There is total 380 Billion Dollars trade between China and ASEAN countries. Southeast Asian economies are integrated with China. China has signed the Free Trade Agreements with Southeast Asian states. Southeast Asian countries are also a part of global supply chain that passes through China to the global markets. China also participating with Southeast states in RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) agreements. Not only with ASEAN nations (such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia), China has also a strong strategic partnership with various states (part of String of Pearls strategy and BRI Project) in the IOR. (Michel & Sticklor, 2012).

Indo-Sino Rivalry and their Counter Strategies in Indo Pacific Region

The rivalry between India and China is not new. Both India and China are rivals since 1962 and recently in 2020 due to the territorial disputes on Sino-Indo borders. The tensions escalated when India was going to build strategic infrastructure along with the Line of Actual Control in disputed Ladakh region. Now both China and India are now open enemies. India also refused to become part of China's BRI. Indian Naval Doctrine declared China as India's threat. Indian Naval Chief Admiral Karambir Singh has serious concerns about Chinese presence in Indian Ocean Region. He stated that "BRI & CPEC of China is a threat to Indian Sovereignty in IOR".

Indo-Pacific is increasingly becoming a geostrategic theatre between China & India as both countries are engaging in a great power competition. China is aiming to secure its access to the important strategic ports in the IOR to gain strategic & economic benefits and advantages while India is acting as a Net Security Provider (given by US) to maintain an international order set up by the United States to contain Chinese growing influence and power in Indo Pacific region. Both China and India are adopting and implementing various strategies to counter each other. (Aneel, 2022).

China's Strategy of String of Pearls

China is adopting and implementing the Strings of Pearls Strategy in Indo Pacific Region to protect its strategic and maritime interests in order to contain India's growing power in the region. Through this strategy, China is encircling the India in IPR. Not only India, this strategy also challenges the US hegemony in this region. Through this strategy, China is holding supremacy in the IOR.

China is implementing this string of pearls strategy in the Indo Pacific Region by building huge and large networks of commercial and naval ports in many states. China is doing so from Hainan Islands (Yulin/Sanya Naval Base) & Woody Islands in South China Sea to littoral states of Malacca Strait, and from Malacca Strait to other countries of IOR. China is building huge transshipment hubs, naval ports building, and infrastructural projects such as Kara Canal (built by China in Thailand that directly links South China Sea (Western Pacific Ocean) to Indian Ocean & Laem Chabang in Thailand, Sihanoukville in Cambodia, Sittwe and Khaukphyu ports in Myanmar, Chittagong port in Bangladesh, and further extended to Sri Lanka (Hambantota Port), Maldives, Pakistan (Gwadar Port), Iran (port city Jask), Oman, Yemen, and to Horn of Africa (Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Somalia, Kenya and in Djibouti). These all are the important pearls in the string for China. Each pearl has important strategic significance for China. China has also invested heavily in Satellite Surveillance Technology. The 'BeiDou-2&3 Satellite Constellation' has increased Chinese Surveillance Capacity in IOR. Hence, China is encircling India through its string of pearls strategy in Indo Pacific Region by playing a smart move. Also, China has a strong hold in Indo Pacific region through this strategy. (Steil, 2022).

Cabbage Strategy of China:

China is adopting and implementing its Cabbage Strategy around Hainan Islands, Woody Islands, Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. This strategy of China is a very smart move or a tactic to seize control of these islands by wrapping and surrounding the islands in protective multiple layers of China's naval ships, frigates, and underwater missiles through implementing the Chinese A2AD Strategy in order to cut off the island from outside involvement and support. The cabbage Strategy is also known as small-

stick diplomacy or salami-slicing strategy. China is applying this strategy in South China Sea around 9 Dash line which is surrounded by multiple security layers to deny access to its rival nations like US, India, South Korea, Australia, Japan, etc.

Counter Strategies of India against China in the Indo-Pacific Region:

India is now expanding its maritime interests & modernizing its naval capabilities in IPR due to two factors:

- Firstly, to counter China's rise. China is rising as a Strong Asian Power with increasing its influence in IOR. The main purpose of India is to counter China increasing power and influence in IOR.
- Secondly, India aspires for becoming a regional hegemon in IOR while expanding its strong influence in Pacific Ocean. India wants to extend and make itself a Blue Water Navy.

India always considered the Indian Ocean as its own Ocean. India considers China as an extra-regional power in IOR. The importance of India as an important actor/player in Indo Pacific Region is increased more due to US Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS). The main purpose of IPS is a Free & Open Indo-Pacific. This strategy considers India as US's strong strategic partner in IPR. This also reinforced India's Strategic thinking about becoming a leading power in the IPR. India is increasing its maritime and strategic relations in the South China Sea which has raised China serious security concerns. China perceives India as an extra-regional power in Pacific Region. India's Act East Policy's main purpose is for building closer strategic relations & partnerships with ASEAN Nations, Japan, and South Korea. China perceives Indian Act East Policy a threat to China regional hegemony in Pacific Region especially because this policy threatened Chinese claim over the disputed regions in

South China Sea. Also, India is supporting its allies (ASEAN, Japan, & South Korea) in these disputed regions against China in the Pacific Ocean. India also signed economic and defense agreements with ASEAN Nations and did military exercises with them such as with Vietnam, Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia in disputed South China Sea. India good bilateral relations with Taiwan and diplomatic support for Taiwanese Independence are also serious concerns for China. China declares it a security threat for China from India. Moreover, India supported Vietnam's claim in South China Sea. Due to this UN gave ruling against China on which China warned India to stay out of internal matters China. (Gahlot, 2022).

India is adopting various counter strategies against China in Indo Pacific Region. These counter strategies of India are as follows: (Thakker, 2018).

India Diamond of Necklace Strategy:

Necklace of Diamond Strategy is garlanding China and to contain China increasing power/influence in IOR. India's first diamond starts from Oman's Duqm port. India and Oman have good strategic relationships. India has military access to Oman's Duqm port which makes a great defense point for India. India also imports crude oil from Duqm port, Oman. The second important strategic diamond of India is Seychelles, a South African country. India's investments in the South African Region such as at the Mozambique Channel and in Seychelles in 2015. Indian Navy is now plan to build a naval base at Assumption Island in Seychelles. India also signed a strategic agreement with Seychelles President to contain China. The third important diamond of India is in Indonesian Sabang Port. India got the military access of Sabang Port in 2018 which is located at the entrance of Malacca Strait. The

fourth important Diamond for India is present in Singapore's Changi Port. Near Strait of Malacca and Strait of Lombok, India has Changi Naval Base. Indian Prime Minister Modi signed a Joint Naval Cooperation Agreement with the government of Singapore in 2018. Now, this base is served as an Indian Naval Base. This agreement provides a direct access in Strait of Malacca and Strait of Lombok to Indian Navy through its Changi Naval Base in Singapore. After that, India has Indo-Vietnam diamond. India has a historically great relationship with Vietnam. India supplies important defense equipment to Vietnam and India signed a strategic agreement and partnership with Vietnam in 2016. So, theoretically, India has a strong firm over Strait of Malacca. There is total 70% of China oil supply and 60% of trade passes through Strait of Malacca. So, choking this point by India is like choking Chinese trade. Then India has an important diamond in Japan. On 9th Sep 2020, both India and Japan signed an agreement called the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement that will allow militaries of both states to exchange supplies and services on a reciprocal basis. Both India and Japan can support each other as per their strategic requirements. It provides India with direct access to mainland China. Then, the strategically important diamond of India is in Mongolia where Indian Prime Minister Modi visited as the first India Prime Minister. India established very strong relations with Mongolia by giving out 1 billion dollars in credit to develop an air corridor from Mongolia to Iran. And the last important diamond of India is in Iran where India is building the Chabahar port. Iran is also a part of Chinese BRI wherein they have a railway line starting from China to Iran which is passing through the Central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and then Iran. India cleverly understands the importance of Iran. In 2015, when Iran was facing crippling economic situations & diplomatic isolation. India agreed to develop a deep water port

Chabahar port in the Persian Gulf. India signed an agreement of 500 million dollars to develop this port. It is not countering China only but also countering Gwadar port of Pakistan. This Necklace of Diamond Strategy of India is to contain China increasing influence in IOR.

Double Fish Hook Strategy of India:

The Double Fish Hook Strategy is another strategy adopted and implemented by India to contain China's growing power and maritime interests in IOR. The Double Fish Hook Strategy consists of two hooks:

- The first hook is known as the Eastern Hook in the Indian Ocean starting from the Indian Andaman & Nicobar Islands extending to Sabang Port (Indonesia), Coco (Keeling) Islands of Australia, and ending at Diego Garcia, a US Naval Base in Chagos Islands.
- The second hook is known as the Western Hook in the Indian Ocean starts from the Duqm Port (Oman) extending to the French Territories (Reunion Islands), Mauritius, and ends again at US Naval Base Diego Garcia. If a connecting line is drawn, both these hooks end at US Naval Base Diego Garcia.

India has strengthened its relations with Eastern Indian Ocean neighbours such as ASEAN nations and Australia. Similarly, India has strong relations with its Southern Indian Ocean Island nations such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and French Territories spread across the Indian Ocean. India is also investing a lot in the Southern Indian Ocean to make its strong footprint in the region. India is also providing military assistance to these island nations of South Africa. Also, India is going to build Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). This corridor will be built through Indo-Japanese Collaboration which will support and invest by the US as well. The US granted

the status of 'Net-Security Provider' to India. France granted the Status of Observer to India in Indian Ocean Commission. Both India and France are engaged in maritime surveillance activities from the French Reunion Islands, near South Africa in the Indian Ocean Region. This hints that the Indian Navy is working on the Double Fish Hook Strategy to counter China expansionist strategy in the Indian Ocean Region. In 2020, the Mutual Logistic Support Agreement (MSLA) was signed between India and Australia. Under this agreement, both India and Australia can use each other naval facilities and each other's island facilities. These islands are the Andaman & Nicobar Islands of India and the Coco (Keeling) Islands of Australia. On the other hand, India signed defense agreements with Indonesia in which India is using the Sabang Port of Indonesia for trade and military (defense) purposes near the strait of Malacca. Now, India is also developing its Andaman and Nicobar Islands by building naval ports on them for defense/military purposes in order to counter China in the IOR. QUAD Partners (US, Japan & Australia) of India along with the help of France and the UK, actively support India in implementing the Double Fish Hook Strategy in IOR in order to contain China increasing maritime and strategic interests in this region.

Strategic Importance of Andaman & Nicobar Islands for India in the IPR:

Nicobar and Andaman Islands are part of Indian Union Territory. These islands are located in south of Bay of Bengal near the entrance of Strait of Malacca. These islands constitute 30% of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of India. On these Islands, India installed its military bases. India is also going to develop these Islands. These Andaman & Nicobar Islands will soon turn India into strong Established Power in the Indian Ocean Region. These Island Chains of Andaman & Nicobar are also considered and known as the 'Great India Wall Against China'. Andaman and Nicobar Islands connect Malacca

Strait to Suez Canal (Indian Ocean Region) to Europe known as East-West International Shipping Corridor. These islands are strategically very important for India and are also known as India's Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier. Due to continuously rising geopolitical tensions in Indo Pacific Region, the geostrategic significance of these islands has increased immensely. In September 2019, China's surveillance vessel Shiyan-1 tried to infiltrate or entered Indian waters near Andaman and Nicobar Islands but was swiftly repelled by the Indian Navy. Even during the Ladakh confrontation in August 2020, the Chinese research vessel Yuan Wang was sent to the Indian Ocean by China as a part of her intimidation policy. Indian Eastern Naval Fleet located at Visakhapatnam and Tri Service Command situated at Andaman and Nicobar Islands that can be mobilized for countering growing Chinese assertiveness in the IOR. India is also utilizing these islands to implement its policy of 'Act-East' and to strengthen its relations with the IOR countries through regional mechanisms such as IOR-ARC, BIMSTEC, etc. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands also have immense economic significance as nearly 80% of global maritime trade passes through Strait of Malacca that is very near about 200 km to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Under the Indian Prime Minister Modi Government, the island group has received a renewed focus. In 2015, under Modi's administration, the Indian government announced to build huge project, India's first maritime hub, worth 100, 000 Million Rupees. In 2019, the Indian Parliament passed the Island Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 2019 under which India is going to build huge Land Reclamation Projects such as ports and harbors at Andaman and Nicobar Island. India will turn these islands into transshipment hubs when the naval bases will be built here. Due to its significant geostrategic location, Transshipment port of India in the Great Nicobar will be given a very tough

competition to Colombo and Singapore ports. Indian Government also finalized a defense plan of 5000 crores for the Andaman Islands in 2019.

These islands are the most strategically located island chains. From these Islands, India can block Chinese trade or cut off oil supplies which will affect Chinese trade. Indian Navy built four Indian Naval Air Stations at Andaman & Nicobar Islands:

- INS Kohassa near Diglipur at North Andaman. This will soon be made operational. INS Kohassa is also known as ‘Bird’s Nest’.
- INS Utkrosh and INS Jarawa at Port Blair on South Andaman Island.
- INS Kardip at Kamorta Island in the Chain of Nicobar Islands.
- INS Baaz at Great Nicobar Island.

Also, Indian Air Force built Air Force station at Car Nicobar Known as Car Nicobar Air Force Station. India has set up the 3rd Naval Fleet and increased the presence of troops and deploy a special force Battalion in the islands for the security of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Indo-Japanese bilateral relations have improved dramatically in the last few years. Japan, a strong strategic partner, and a QUAD partner of India is now investing a lot in Indian Andaman and Nicobar Islands, to contain China increasing power and expansionist strategy in Indo Pacific region. In March 2021, Japan has extended its financial help for establishment of Andaman and Nicobar Islands under its ‘Official Development Assistance Program’. On 31st March 2022, India signed an agreement with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Japan is also going to provide aid of 133 Million Dollars to ensure power supply at these islands. Both India and Japan signed a mutual agreement known as the ‘Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement’. According to this agreement, Japan can use both island and naval facilities of

Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in exchange India gets access to Japan's naval port in Djibouti. So, under this mutual agreement both India and Japan can use each other naval port and island facilities.

In near future, both India and Japan will join the Chennai-Port Blair Optical Fiber Communication Cable in the South Andaman Island with the US-Japan Fish Hook Network to make better surveillance on China's marine and naval activities in Indo Pacific Region.

Thus, both Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also playing an important part in Necklace of Diamond strategy and Double Fish Hook Strategy of India. From these Islands, India is implementing and adopting two more counter strategies in the Indian Ocean Region against China. These two counter strategies are:

- Metal Chain Strategy of India.
- Sea Denial Strategy of India.

Metal Chain Strategy of India:

Andaman and Nicobar Islands is utilized by India to implement and adopt its Metal Chain Strategy against China. India divided this strategy into two counter-strategies:

1. First Metal Chain Strategy:

The first metal chain is made up of a group of the US alliances such as the North Kuril Islands of Japan, Japan, Ryukyu Islands of Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, and Borneo which can block China from the West Pacific Ocean. India has good strategic and defense partnerships/relations with all these states. This First Metal Chain Strategy also shows that India has strong footprints in Western Pacific region.

2. **Second Metal Chain Strategy:**

The second metal chain strategy consists of Island Chains of India known as the Andaman & Nicobar Islands located in the Indian Ocean Region near Malacca Strait. Through these islands, India can block Chinese trade.

Sea Denial Strategy of India:

India can also deploy a Sea Denial Strategy in this region by using Andaman and Nicobar Islands to counter China growing power and influence in Indo Pacific region. Sea Denial is an important strategy in naval warfare. A country tries to deny its adversary to access the surrounding water bodies around it. The strategic location of these islands will play an important role to help India to pursue its strategy. Through this India can economically paralyze China by blocking the Strait of Malacca.

Hence, the strategic location of these islands plays an important role to help India to pursue its strategy. In near future, Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India will be playing a crucial role in geopolitics.

Lakshadweep Islands situated on the west coast of India, are the smallest Indian Union Territory. It is an archipelago of 36 Islands. Lakshadweep has a strategic geopolitical significance. Lakshadweep is key to India's Containment Strategy for China in IOR. Now Indian Government is planning to develop Lakshadweep Islands and to implement its counter strategies against China from these islands. India keeps the hawk eyes from these islands on the International Sea Lane of Communication. India also deploys its Navy. In 2012, the Indian Navy operationalized its naval base known as INS Dweeprakshak on Kavaratti Island which is Capital of Union Territories of Lakshadweep Islands. Also, the Indian Coast Guard maintains a District Headquarters (CGHQ-12) on Kavaratti Island. Indian Navy is also doing

security exercises yearly such as SAGAR KAVACH, Exercise GEMINI, and NEPTUNE Series. Thus, the Lakshadweep islands are a significant theater for India's force projection and a deterrent to Chinese increasing strategic interests and influence in IOR.

Act East Policy of India:

Act East Policy (AEP) is a strategic and diplomatic approach of India to boost its strategic ties economically, politically, and culturally with ASEAN nations in Indo Pacific Region. This policy of India was enacted in 2014 during the first tenure of Indian PM Modi at 12th India-ASEAN summit which was held in Myanmar. Indian Act East Policy is a successor of its Look East Policy. AEP act as a bridge between Northeast India and ASEAN nations. The main aim of this policy is to make Indian footprints strong in the IPR & counter China by developing strategic relations with the Indo-Pacific nations which are based on cultural links, trade, economic cooperation, and connectivity. (Chatterjee, 2020).

Act West Policy of India:

The main purpose of Act West Policy is to increase strong strategic cooperation with West Asia (Gulf Region, Yemen, Turkey), North Africa (Israel, Libya, Egypt), and South African nations. The main aim of this policy is to make Indian footprints strong in the IPR & to counter China by developing strategic relations with these regions. India is also a part of I2U2 (Israel-India-USA-UAE). This is the main achievement of Act West Policy of India. (Bayar, 2022).

India's Regional Activities & Naval Modernization in IPR

<u>India's Regional activities in IPR</u>	<u>Indian Naval Modernization</u>
Member of QUAD	Motivating Factors Behind Indian Naval Modernization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Maritime Interests in IPR. • Indian Act East and Act West Policies. • Indian countering strategies against China.
Member of I2U2	Building Naval Ports, Internationally such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabang Port in Indonesia. • Changi Port in Singapore. • Chabahar Port in Iran
Counter strategies of India against China: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diamond of Necklace Strategy. • Double Fish Hook Strategy. • Metal Chain Strategy (First and Second Metal Chain Strategy). • Sea Denial Strategy. • Act East Policy of India. • Act West Policy of India. 	Developing its remote areas such as Andaman Nicobar Islands. Indian Navy built four Indian Naval Air Stations at Andaman & Nicobar Islands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INS Kohassa near Diglipur at North Andaman. This will soon be made operational. INS Kohassa is also known as 'Bird's Nest'. • INS Utkrosh and INS Jarawa at Port Blair on South Andaman Island. • INS Kardip at Kamorta Island in the Chain of Nicobar Islands.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INS Baaz at Great Nicobar Island. <p>Indian Air Force built Air Force Station at Car Nicobar Known as Car Nicobar Air Force Station.</p> <p>Set up the 3rd Naval Fleet and deploy a special force Battalion in the islands for the security of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.</p>
Supporting AUKUS	Recently building Karwar Port at Karnataka State of India. This port is also known as Sea Bird Project.
Military Exercises: RIMPAC, MILAN, MALABAR, SAGAR, SAGAR KAVACH, Exercise GEMINI & NEPTUNE Series.	Recently building its Indian Submarines. India recently, in 2022, built an aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.
<p>Indian Navy presence in UK-controlled islands and French-controlled Re-Union islands, to counter China in IPR.</p> <p>India signed MLSA (Mutual Logistics Support Agreement) with Australia. Under this, both nations can use each other defense and island facilities.</p> <p>Net-Security Provider, a status given by the USA to India</p> <p>Observer Status in IOR, granted by France to India.</p>	<p>Signed various defense pacts with the USA, the main source for Indian Naval Modernization and increased Defense cooperation between the two states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COMCASA. • LEMOA. • BECA. • NAVCENT

India is a part of various organizations/summits to make its presence strategically strong in IPR and to counter China in IPR:

- ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).
- East Asia Summit (EAS).
- IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association).
- IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium).
- BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).
- Headed SAARC
- Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD).
- Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC).
- Dialogue Partner of ASEAN.

- INS Arihant submarine equipped with twelve K-15 SLBMs.
- It also develop a sea-based version of its Nirbhay and Dhanush cruise missiles.
- India also producing surface combat vessels with advanced structural and capability designs which allow for projecting its military far away from its shores.
- It also operates one nuclear-powered Akula submarine SNN which is on leased from Russia. It was commissioned in Indian Navy as INS Chakra in 2012. There are some talks in a process for another Akula class submarine on lease.
- There are 14 hulls of conventional submarines in Indian Navy. 10 are Russian kilo-class submarines and 4 are German Designed Type-209 submarines that are now modified.
- Indian diesel-electric submarine fleet will be comprised of French Scorpene class submarines.
- Kolkata-class destroyers. It will carry BrahMos cruise missiles, Barak-1 and Barak-8 in short and medium range anti aircraft missiles.
- Kamorta class destroyer.
- India operates 2 aircraft carriers: INS Vikramaditya and INS Viraat.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upcoming Indian nuclear-powered carrier is INS Vishal. • GSAT-7 Satellite allows the Indian Navy to conduct operations in an area of 1000 square km. • Indian Navy plans to build a naval base at Assumption Island in Seychelles.
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Conclusion:

Indo Pacific is an important geopolitical region for the major powers. As the importance of Indo Pacific grows in twenty first century, India is playing a very essential role in the geopolitics of IPR. India is expanding its geopolitical clout in Indo Pacific Region depends on cultural links, trade and economic cooperation as well as strategic connectivity. India's main aim is to counter China increasing power and growing influence in IOR. India aspirations for becoming a regional hegemon in Indian Ocean region while increasing and expanding its strong influence in Pacific Ocean. India is expanding its maritime interests, adopting various counter strategies, and modernizing its navy in order to become an emerging power in Indo Pacific Region.

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