

## **Pakistan and Indian Ocean Region Geopolitics: Strategies and Counter Strategies**

**Prof. Dr. Shabnam Gul<sup>1</sup>, Hira Shakir<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Pakistan's strategies and counter strategies in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are influenced by various factors such as geographical context, economic linkages, and changing threat perceptions. The IOR is considered crucial due to its oil and gas reserves, choke points, and nautical traffic, attracting the interests of major powers like the USA, China, and India. China's presence in the IOR has increased through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan and China have developed mutually beneficial cooperation in the IOR. As far as India's increased maritime influence is concerned it poses challenges and requires Pakistan to upgrade its naval potential, establish strategic cooperation with China, and focus on Blue Economy to counter the maritime strategy of India which imposes a severe threat to Pakistan's presence in the IOR. This research paper examines India's maritime partnerships in the IOR, and countermeasures taken by Pakistan to restrict the Indian influence in the IOR.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Ocean Region, CPEC, Maritime Strategy, Geopolitics, BRI, Blue Economy.*

### **Introduction**

In today's rapidly changing world, the significance of accurate geopolitical analysis and understanding cannot be overstated, particularly in regions that are of strategic importance. One such region is the Indian Ocean, which has historically played a crucial role in global politics and continues to do so today. The Indian Ocean is a vast body of water that connects various continents and serves as a major maritime trade route. Consequently, the Indian Ocean Region does not yet appear a clear and coherent geopolitical system even if some region-wide cooperation is slowly developing, as, for instance, on economic matters with the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation and maritime security through initiatives like

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<sup>1</sup> Chairperson, Department of International Relations, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: shabnam.gul@icwu.edu.pk

<sup>2</sup> Visiting Lecturer and Ph.D. scholar, Department of International Relations, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: hirashakir.ir@gmail.com.

the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (Bachraty, 2009).

The Indian Ocean region has become a focal point for geopolitical strategies and counterstrategies, particularly involving major powers such as China, India, Pakistan, and the United States. The South-West Indian Ocean Ridge has been identified as a conduit for dispersal between the Mid-Atlantic and Western Pacific fields, indicating the interconnectedness of the Indian Ocean with global geology and biogeography (Nawaz, 2023). Pakistan's geopolitical position in South Asia, surrounded by key players such as Russia, China, India, and Iran, underscores its significance in its geopolitical landscape (Bouchard, 2010). The Indian Ocean Region is witnessing an intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States, India, and China, focusing on securing access to Persian Gulf oil and strategic sea lanes, leading to a complex geopolitical framework (Brewster, 2014). China's "String of Pearls" strategy, aimed at creating strongholds along the Indian Ocean littoral, the Persian Gulf, and the Mediterranean Sea, has contributed to increased geopolitical influence in the region. Furthermore, the geopolitical vision and economic logic are the principal drivers of China's policy, particularly in initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to access the Indian Ocean region.

India's response to these geopolitical shifts includes establishing its naval reach and influence on counter adversaries like China and securing resources and trade routes. India sees itself as a net security provider and aims to promote security and growth in its neighborhood. India is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. India is also establishing security amenities in Tajikistan and Mongolia, indicating a counter-encirclement strategy vis-à-vis China's Central Asia and North Asia (Harutyunyan, 2020). The emergence of a new geopolitical era in the Indian Ocean, termed the "Indian oceanic order," has been highlighted, emphasizing the evolving nature of the region's geopolitical dynamics. Additionally, the Indian Ocean Region's maritime security cooperation and the role of the Indian Navy have been underscored as crucial for maintaining a favorable balance of power amidst rising geopolitical tensions. The Indian Ocean Region has become a major focus of international security, with the proximity of maritime chokepoints providing strategic advantages for India. These developments have led to an emerging security architecture in the Indian Ocean Region, prompting the exploration of policy options for India (Paul, 2011).

This research paper highlights significant geopolitical shifts and power struggles, with major powers vying for influence and control witnessed by the Indian

Ocean Region. In this regard, case study of Pakistan and India is discussed. This paper describes the Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan and recommendations to counter Indian Maritime strategy are discussed to restrict increasing Indian influence in the IOR. Geo-politically, Pakistan is one of the important littoral states of the Indian Ocean. It is the geographical proximity of Pakistan that makes it an important country. Pakistan is rewarded with the Gwadar Port which is a naturally occurring deep seaport. Due to the involvement of global powers in the geopolitics of IOR, this region has become a center of focus. To counter the US influence in IOR China is engaged in an alliance with Pakistan (Kurian, 2021). This alliance has raised concerns for India. As a result, in collaboration with regional and extra-regional actors US, India is developing a strong maritime strategy. Pakistan being an old rival of India needs to counter the naval expansion of India.

### **India's Geopolitical Strategies in the IOR**

India is one of the largest littoral states in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Given the increasing Sino-India competition in the Indian Ocean, India's defense strategy is gradually narrowing to the IOR. Though the first naval strategy for the area from India appeared in 2004, later records show that India's view of the IOR has altered since then. China is becoming a power in the region to counter it India has completely transformed its maritime strategic environment (Nawaz, 2023). There are three stages in India's evolution as a maritime power.

#### ✓ **India's Maritime Strategy (2004-2015)**

The first period spans from 2004 to 2007 and is described by India's first maritime military strategy released in 2004.

#### ✓ **Free Rider Model**

At this stage, India took the role of a free rider as described in Holmes and Yoshihara's model of naval power. The model says that states with limited national ambitions need low-level naval forces to take advantage of the sea, as well as low-level threats arising from the sea. The Indian Navy published its first maritime doctrine "Freedom of use of seas-Indian maritime military strategy" in 2004, which was subsequently updated in 2007 (Upadhyaya, 2014).

#### **The freedom of the use of seas-Maritime military strategy in India**

This doctrine saw the concept of an Indian Navy providing India with

the right to “employ” Indian Ocean waters in its interests. A hotly contested geopolitical landscape when the twenty-first century began, India regarded the IOR as a pivotal hub in global maritime commerce, but certainly not in this way. By that period, India still regarded itself as an emerging power with little naval capability outside of coastal waters. But Indian strategists were painfully aware of the altered situation in the IOR, and China’s rising military clout combined with worsening relations between China and America.

✓ **The Constable Model**

The second model described by Holmes and Yoshihara is the constable. This describes the second step in India's sea power doctrine. States seeking to attain military capabilities with the limited objective of preventing foreign powers from getting mired in its waters belong to this class. Only after introducing a third change in 2009 with the publication of another high-level strategic document did India move into “the constable model” (Ali, 2023).

✓ **Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian maritime security strategy**

Ensuring Secure Seas, that is, Indian maritime security strategy using the word “doctrine” instead of “strategy”; replacing the use of waters in the Indian Ocean with secure waters in fact. But in addition to its more forceful language about the use of force, this doctrine also defined the Indian navy’s areas of interest. Waters adjacent to the Indian territories were known as the primary areas of interest, while far-flung regions in Africa and Australia were said to be the secondary areas of interest.

✓ **The Strongman Model**

The third model, the strongman, needs massive naval capability to hold sway over primary regions of interest by keeping other powerful states out of their waters. The changing regional security dynamics and India’s response, though, have led Indian strategy in the IOR to shift from one in which the naval force used seas for economic development into one where its role was far more defensive, protecting seas from potential invasions by outside actors. The other overarching imperative driving New Delhi's need to have a more assertive maritime presence was to ensure nuclear credibility or second-strike capability.

India has had to modify its previous doctrine to deal with the challenges posed by growing Chinese military power. The steady rise of

China and intensive involvement in India's area of interest have forced New Delhi's hand. India's most recent maritime doctrine, formulated in 2015, not only stresses becoming a regional strongman but also explicitly calls for countering the increasing Chinese presence in IOR. More recently, events have suggested further that India has fixed its maritime strategy as one of the strongmen in the IOR. Its maritime doctrine has been updated no more (Hanif, 2017).

✓ **Indian Maritime Strategy 2015**

The 2009 Indian Maritime Doctrine was updated and reworked into the 2015 version. The 2015 modification to the 2009 doctrine places more emphasis on India's role as the IOR's strongman than the 2009 version, which concentrated on changes about India's status as a constable. Below is a description of this doctrine's three basic tenets.

- ✓ **Act East Policy:** First, according to India's Chief of Naval Staff, RK Dhowan, "the repositioning of economic and military posture towards Asia and the shift in world view from Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus has resulted in significant economic, political, and social changes in the Indian Ocean region and has tangibly impacted the Indian maritime environment." India used the phrase "Indo-Pacific" for the first time in the 2015 document. India's increased prominence in regional affairs is demonstrated by the shift from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific. While India needs strong partners to continue playing the role of "constable," the United States and the European Union initially looked for regional allies to safeguard their interests in this area. India is currently working to become a "strongman" and to implement a more independent military strategy.
- ✓ **Revival of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation):** Second, based on the 2009 concept, India's areas of interest were broadened. The southern section of the Indian Ocean between Australia and South Africa was designated as a secondary area of interest, while the areas next to Indian territories, such as the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, were designated as primary areas of interest. India improved both of these areas of interest in the 2015 doctrine revision. The principal regions of interest included the major choke points on the Western and Eastern sides: the Straits of Hormuz, Bab el Mandab, Malacca, Lombok, Sunda, and Ombai in South-Eastern, in particular. Conversely, distant regions

of the Pacific, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea were referred to as secondary areas of interest.

- ✓ Thirdly, the concept emphasized India's role as a net security provider, providing security to other stakeholders in the area. India described the strategies it will employ to forge security relationships under this strategy, although it did not specifically name its allies. In order to achieve this, India is growing its own military sector and testing out novel strategies and technology, as seen by the Malabar naval drills in which Indonesia and the other QUAD members took part. India demonstrated its resilience and ability to take on a net security provider role in the IOR with its good performance in these exercises (Karim, 2023).

### **India and Regional Stakeholders: A net security provider**

India has pursued its goals of strengthening defense cooperation with the US and littoral states through several bilateral and multilateral agreements. The primary goal of these accords is to strengthen defense cooperation in the naval sphere, especially considering China's increasing influence in the IOR.

- ✓ Signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). (2016)
- ✓ Signing of the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). (2018)
- ✓ The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) (2020) is one of the agreements that India has carried out with littoral states for naval cooperation in military matters.
- ✓ In 2018, India and Singapore reached an agreement to use Changi Base for naval operations.
- ✓ Deal for the ports of Sabang in Indonesia and Duqm in Oman. (2018)
- ✓ India is also extending its tentacles through multilateral forums, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Security and Growth for All in Region (SAGAR), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium.

### **• QUAD**

The United States of America (USA), India, Japan, and Australia are the four countries that make up the informal strategic forum known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or QUAD. It was established in 2007 as a result of a tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean, which prompted the US, Australia, Japan, and India to form an unofficial alliance to work together on relief operations during natural disasters.

Australia withdrew from the group in 2008 but returned in 2020 when the US, Japan, and India trio conducted their first combined Malabar naval exercise. The effort for the unhindered use of important and strategically important sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific region is the driving force behind the QUAD group to ensure freedom of navigation, a liberal economic system, and a rules-based international order, to combat policies that promote predatory trade and economics and to provide financial assistance to debt-ridden countries in the Indo-Pacific area.

- **SAGAR**

The SAGAR mission was initially presented by Indian Prime Minister Modi in 2016 when he visited Mauritius and spoke to all the IOR's littoral governments. It fosters collaboration amongst state actors and establishes a tranquil and stable atmosphere. It stands for the intersection of naval security, marine cooperation, and economic growth. It also highlights the significance of the littoral governments' Coast Guard agencies in thwarting non-state actors' attempts at piracy. It encourages sustainable development of the area by strengthening cooperation in trade, tourism, and infrastructure while bearing in mind the issues associated with climate change. Modi's more assertive foreign policy includes the SAGAR initiative. It is a very calculated action to protect the interests of India. To achieve marine peace and cooperation, India takes great pride in strengthening its bilateral connections and partnerships with the IOR littoral states. India must establish cordial relations with its maritime neighbors if it hopes to rise to the position of leading decision-maker in the region. The SAGAR strategy is an essential component of the Neighborhood First strategy and operates through regional organizations such as BIMSTEC and ASEAN.

- **IONS**

The Indian Navy established the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in 2008 with the goal of fostering greater maritime cooperation between the navigators of the littoral states that make up the Indian Ocean Region. This is to be achieved by offering an inclusive and transparent forum for discussions on maritime issues that are pertinent to the region and leading to a shared understanding of the way forward. The Indian Navy served as the chair for the first two years of the IONS, which took place in February 2008 in New Delhi (2008 - 2010). Through the provision of an inclusive and transparent platform for the debate of maritime problems pertinent to the Indian Ocean region, this voluntary initiative aims to enhance maritime cooperation among the fleets of the littoral states. In the process, it aims to create a communication

channel amongst naval experts to facilitate mutual understanding and maybe joint solutions in the future. It was a singular occurrence that the introduction of a regional endeavor of such significance could garner such widespread support throughout the whole Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean's 36 littoral regions are divided geographically into the following four sub-regions (Tahir, 2020).

### **Blue Economy: Part of Indian Maritime Strategy**

"A modern economy that encompasses the sustainable use of marine resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and employment while maintaining a healthy marine ecosystem" is how the World Bank describes the blue economy. At the Rio de Janeiro-hosted United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, the phrase "Blue Economy" was first used. The blue economy was emphasized as one of the ten essential components of growth in the Indian government's New India agenda. The sixth feature of the vision was identified as the "blue economy," which highlights the need for a comprehensive policy that unifies various industries to enhance the quality of life for coastal communities while simultaneously spurring economic growth and job creation. A framework for accurately measuring blue economy activities and their contribution to national income, safeguarding the welfare, safety, and means of subsistence of fishermen in coastal areas, innovation to ensure zero waste, low carbon technologies, and securing balanced international engagement are all part of India's strategy to maximize the socioeconomic potential of the blue economy, according to the draft policy framework. India has demonstrated a desire to fortify the security, sustainability, and economic prosperity, the three pillars of the BE (Upadhyay, 2020).

### **Maritime Strategy of Pakistan**

On December 20, 2018, the first "Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, Preserving Freedom of Seas" was publicly launched during a ceremony that marked the conclusion of a nine-day "maritime security workshop" (MARSEW). Dr. Arif Alvi, the President of Pakistan, was the primary guest. Every year, under the sponsorship of the Pakistan Navy (PN), MARSEW is held at the Pakistan Navy War College (PNWC). It brings together participants from the public and private sectors, as well as lawmakers and the media, to have conversations on issues related to maritime security and the economy (Gul, 2021).

- Pakistan, like many other coastal states worldwide, has always experienced "sea blindness," often referred to as "maritime blindness."



- The goal of the "Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, Preserving Freedom of Seas" (MDP) is to spread comprehensive information on the country's maritime industry and maritime economy. The goal of the "Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, Preserving Freedom of Seas" (MDP) is to increase public awareness of the country's marine industry and maritime economy.
- The intricacy of maritime security concerns is emphasized, along with the dangers and the Pakistan Navy's function as a sentinel of the country's maritime borders.
- In the "foreword," Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi articulates the purpose of Pakistan's MDP, which is divided into ten chapters. The program's objective is to "act as a catalyst for synergizing efforts and resources of various stakeholders in the development of the country's maritime sector, which has lacked vitality despite vast potential."
- The MDP also states, "MDP calls for cooperative efforts in preserving order at sea for the greater good of human race and outlines the broad contours of employment of naval and maritime power in support of national objectives."
- Both "informational" and "doctrinal" narratives are present in MDP.
- It highlights the important part the Pakistani Navy played in "preserving freedom of seas" in the years following 9/11 using cooperative and autonomous activities.
- It explains the various sea power military tools and situates itself within the larger framework of national security.
- Although military doctrine is futuristic, it is based on historical lessons, real-world encounters, conflicts, and battles, as well as current and projected technological advancements.
- In addition, it is anticipated that CPEC and a fully operational Gwadar Port will "expand maritime commercial activities in the region."
- The political-strategic aspect, Indian Ocean's sea lines of communication, and international interests in these vital intercontinental energy highways are examined.
- The MDP explains how maritime forces are used in military operations and how the Pakistan Navy carries out its prescribed duties via a number of command structures that are overseen by the Chief of Naval Staff.
- MDP claims that although war is universally viewed as "counterproductive" for the security and prosperity of the larger global community, it nevertheless

satisfies "some actors' interests." War "remains a distinct possibility" as a result, it states.

- Pakistan may face a wide range of difficulties in the Indian Ocean, according to a chapter on the "threat and role of maritime forces" and the strategic environment there.
- It talks about how the "induction of strategic platforms and weapon systems in the Indian Ocean with other advanced weapons systems" is a constant threat to the security of the area.
- It is important to remember that the Pakistan Navy is tasked with guarding Gwadar Port and seaward approaches to the port.
- In this regard, a specially equipped task force has been established to safeguard port infrastructure and provide protection to employees operating within port boundaries.
- The "threat spectrum" in the MDP cautions readers about the growing size, scope, and intensity of threats in Pakistan's area of interest.
- It lays out a range of scenarios between war and peace, tension, crisis, hostilities, and conflict.
- It also issues a warning over the significant presence of both regional and extra-regional naval forces in the North Arabian Sea, stating that this presents both opportunities and difficulties.
- "Preserving the Nation's freedom at and from the sea during peace, uneasy peace, crisis, and war" is the doctrine's "guiding creed." This is to be accomplished by "deterrence," and if this fails, the statement continues, "Pakistan navy remains poised to fight the war."
- Eleven "principles of warfighting" are listed in the MDP. It does, however, issue a warning to practitioners on the tactful application of these concepts during operations.
- The "core values" that PN uses to direct its efforts are defined as faith, character, courage, and commitment. MDP sets the bar high.
- It aims to bring Pakistan's maritime industry back into balance and reinvigorate it.
- It alerts policymakers to the enormous oceanic potential in Pakistan's marine zones that has not yet been realized because it is a flagship paper of the Pakistan Navy that is in the public domain.
- This possibility has the potential to yield significant financial rewards for the country's economy with the right investment.

- MDP is also a standard for shared knowledge of PN and tri-services maritime security concerns.
- Most importantly, it gives interested parties and practitioners a better understanding of the Navy's mission, values, and warfighting strategy in a nuclearized Indian Ocean (Khan, 2019).

### **Recommendations for Pakistan to Counter Indian Maritime Security in IOR**

To counter Indian influence in IOR, Pakistan should adopt the following countermeasures.

- **Bilateral Cooperation (CPEC)**

CPEC stands for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a source of regional connectivity. It will connect the autonomous region of China known as Xinjiang to Gwadar city in Baluchistan province of Pakistan, which relates to the Indian Ocean and is also near the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz that is the hub of world oil transportation. CPEC provides the shortest route and safest heavens to China instead of the South China Sea. The Original value of CPEC was \$46 billion but as of 2017, the value of CPEC projects is worth \$62 billion. CPEC is a network of rail, road, infrastructure projects, and other projects like energy projects.

Pakistan is among those countries that are facing severe economic crisis. In this situation, China's investment of 62 billion dollars is a ray of hope for the betterment of Pakistan's economy. CPEC not only affects the economy of Pakistan but also impacts its geopolitics, as it makes Gwadar a flash point of economic activities in the world. Through CPEC, Pakistan will allow China to counter the Indian influence in the IOR. Pakistan needs to complete this project by removing the upcoming delays to get a timely advantage of this project.

- **Blue Economy**

Pakistan ought to give importance to growing its Blue Economy so that it can fully use its sea resources and the benefits of where it is located. This means using ocean resources wisely to improve the economy. There are various ways Pakistan can effectively harness its Blue Economy, including:

- ✓ Improving and updating the fish industry is important for sustainable methods and to raise the number of fish. We can do this by starting projects in aquaculture so

we can keep up with more people wanting seafood and improve our ability to sell it to other countries.

- ✓ Increasing the business of sea trade and transport, there is a plan to make it bigger and improve current ports like Karachi and Gwadar.
- ✓ Promoting the development of shipbuilding and repair industries to support the shipping sector.
- ✓ Creating tourist spots along the coast, like beach hotels, activities on the water, and places with cultural interest to make sea-related travel better.
- ✓ Putting money into cruise travel to bring in global cruise ships and increase local sea tourism.

If Pakistan focuses on growing its Blue Economy, it can make good use of its sea resources and help in creating stable and lasting economic progress. It is important to get energy from the wind at sea and the movement of tides for making clean electricity. We should pay attention to learning more about technology that helps us use the ocean's renewable energy better. Exploration and taking out minerals and valuable metals from the ocean floor must respect environmental rules. Putting money into technology for mining deep in the sea can be pushed to help with getting these resources. To advance the study of the sea and new ideas, it is important to put money into research centers and programs that concentrate on life in the ocean, studying oceans, and protecting nature. Also, we should encourage progress in creating new technologies for marine use like robots that can work underwater and devices for detecting things there. The possibility of using sea creatures for biotech uses, like medicine and bio goods, is something we should look into and put money into. Also, services that keep the ocean safe, such as companies providing security for ships at sea, need to be grown so they can safeguard trade paths and fight against pirates.

- **Maritime Regional Alliance with Muslim Countries**

To counter the Act East policy, Net Security Provider policy, BIMSTEC, QUAD, and SAGAR, Pakistan should collaborate with Muslim countries like Iran and Persian Gulf states. It will also halt the Indian plan to replace Gwadar Port with Chabahar Port.

- **Import of Hybrid Maritime technology from developed Countries**

Pakistan needs to enhance naval equipment with Hybrid technology with the collaboration of China.

## **Conclusion**

The Indian Ocean is a vast body of water that connects various continents and serves as a major maritime trade route. The Indian Ocean region has become a focal point for geopolitical strategies and counterstrategies, particularly involving major powers such as China, India, Pakistan, and the United States. With the advancement in the Maritime Strategy of India, the presence of Pakistan in the IOR is at stake due to multilateral cooperation by India in the form of QUAD. Currently, Pakistan's evolving maritime strategy is not enough to counter the Indian maritime strategy. In this regard, Pakistan should seek China's support by completing CPEC on war footing. Pakistan should focus on Blue Economy by adding hybrid technology in the navy and must collaborate with Muslim countries in Maritime security.

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