

## **Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean: Australia's Maritime Security amid the Sandison's Vulnerability**

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### **Abstract**

*The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the “century of seas” and increasingly recognizes the maritime security and stability of states that are directly or indirectly connected to maritime interest projection. This research examines the maritime security concept and Australia's position in the Indo-Pacific region especially in the Indian Ocean. It also analyzes Australia's partnership with India and Indonesia to secure and maintain sea control over key strategic chokepoints, islands, and overseas territories against the defiance of its rivals. In a follow up, Australia's strategic partnerships are also viewed in tandem to China's increasing regional ties with Indian Ocean littoral states through the Belt and Road Initiative and its continued military modernization in the region creating a non-permissive area for other states. Additionally, this research provides insight into Australia's potential role as a central player in the evolving Indo-Pacific region and the way it will create a deterrent effect to its “Sandison vulnerability”.*

**Keywords:** Sandison Vulnerability, Indian Ocean, Maritime Security, Indo-Pacific, Belt and Road Initiative

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## **Introduction**

Australia is an island nation, and the sea is its most important utility. Words matter a lot as they define the meaning, and thoughts of people, nations, and individuals. Oceans are the very foundation of life where civilizations were created. The history of major nations demonstrates the importance of maritime strength in their development and prosperity. Their national anthem lyrics also highlighted the importance of the seas by stating that their homeland is surrounded by sea. “Australians all let us rejoice, for we are one and Free; We’ve golden soil and wealth for toil; Our home is girt by sea; Our land abounds in nature’s gifts of beauty rich and rare; In history’s page, let every stage Advance Australia Fair. In joyful strains then let us sing, Advance Australia fair” (Australian National Anthem, 2021).

## **Significance of Indian ocean through Australian Defence white papers**

On a map, the Indo-Pacific immediately unites the powerful nations and economies that are influencing a large portion of the world's economic and security system. It is a hotly debated idea that involves the dominant nations of North Asia, Japan, and China, as well as the Pacific superpower, the United States and India’s expanding strategic and economic influence. The Indian Ocean remains the main theatre of interest for the states. Australia has the largest coastline with the Indian ocean and emphasizes on its significance of through white papers. The defence white paper of 2000 emphasizes maritime strategy, which focus on managing air and sea accesses to their continent and gives Australian forces freedom of action. It also emphasizes self-reliance in force structure.

The 2009 defense white paper used the term sea control for military strategy of Australia for primary operational environment areas within the region such as southeast Asia, Indian and Pacific Ocean etc. India and Indonesia remain the main partners for trade, maritime interest, maritime cooperation and global security order. It also emphasis on the open and secure Indian ocean, and Chinese economic growth, military modernization, maritime piracy, and improvement of Australian offshore maritime warfare and anti-submarine warfare capabilities (Defence White Paper, 2013).

To address new security threats and challenges, the 2016 defence white paper places a strong emphasis on secured maritime defense, ruled-based order open sea lanes of communication, and regional collaboration in the region as by 2050 half of global output passed through it, and Australian national security is dependent on it. The Indian Ocean region will face competition between major powers and become a key maritime space in upcoming years and India will be the key partner for regional stability within that area. Fostering international cooperation with South Pacific and Southeast Asian nations. defense cooperation with Pacific Island states, the US, France, New Zealand, Japan, Timor-Leste, PNG, and maritime Southeast Asia (Department of Defence, 2016).

The 2021 defence white paper defines securing the maritime environment and denying opponent attacks, securing vital sea lines of communication as well as adversary forces, access to forward operating bases, and their ability to strike Australia's mainland.

In addition to it, three main strategic goals for defense planning update 2020 are as follows: The ability to actively and adamantly argue for regional

stability, security, and sovereignty which will help to shape Australia's strategic environment. Discouragement of coercive and gray zone activities of enemies, avoiding conventional confrontation that affects its regional resilience. In addition to that, supporting the US and other allies by using credible military force in response, and being ready to engage in a war of high intensity if necessary. The immediate region of Australia is described as "ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland Southeast Asia to Papua New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific" (2020 Defence Strategic Update, 2020).

The 2023 Defense Strategic Review defines that the Indo-Pacific region faces major power competition, and the US is no longer a sole regional unipolar power which is the ultimate reality for Australia and other actors. Australia is in the decisive period of 80 years, therefore Australia has to rethink, reshape, and redirect its policies, principles, and objectives to secure national interests and to deal with upcoming regional strategic threats. Economic growth and regional military modernization have made it possible for more nations to deploy combat power over longer distances in all combat domains: marine, air, space, cyber and land. Military capability is being swiftly adapted to emerging and disruptive technology. Australian northern bases remain the most important for Australian security and it was stressed to upgrade the northern bases and there must be a network among these. Indian ocean, Southeast, immediate neighbors in the Pacific Ocean remains the vital area for securing its national interest and deepening its ties with important nations like the US, Japan, India, and other regional actors and investing in conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines through the AUKUS

alliance, enhancing the ADF's capacity (National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023, 2023).

### **Theoretical Understanding of Maritime Security**

In International Relations, Maritime security is the latest buzzword, and it is reflected in official documents of countries especially the US after the 9/11 attacks. The danger of piracy on international trade, the development of blue water navies, and regional as well as interstate conflicts in the South, and East China Sea, Arctic have developed oceans in the security sphere.

According to Christian Bueger, maritime security can be accessed through different frameworks. The first way of understanding maritime security is semiotic, the way it can be different from different terms and their meanings such as sea power, blue economy, marine safety, and human resilience. Sea power links with the traditional national security of the states and how naval warfare will project power within and outside its waters at the international as well as regional levels. Marine safety focuses on ship and maritime installation safety with the main goal of safeguarding the marine environment and maritime professionals. This initiative was taken after the Titanic accident oil spills of the Gulf War at sea. International maritime organization and its maritime safety committee are responsible for the marine safety of the oceans. Blue growth which is the blue economy concept was proposed at the 2012 Rio+20 summit. Its core dimensions are resilience of the coastal population and food security, which are directly linked with human resilience or human security. Furthermore, this concept is linked with the economic development of countries by utilizing sea, sustainable management strategies, managing marine resources, and maritime environmental problems.

Human security focuses on food, shelter, sustainable livelihoods, safe employment, and the safety of seafarers and the coastal population. All these problems, needs, and threats create a marmite security matrix that revolves around different terms and concepts that are utilized by different actors in the international system according to their high-end tasks. The maritime security matrix developed by Bueger describes how different actors perceived issues related to their interests and problems by placing maritime security at the center.

He further describes threat perception and what actors exclude or include in their maritime security concept by scrutinizing the “maritime security matrix” under the securitization framework. This framework was originally designed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wever (2003) focuses on threat construction. Threats are elaborated by a series of claims that draw on certain general grammar. In this grammar the issue is presented as an external threat to certain objects such as piracy is a threat to international trade. Threat construction, projection, and measures are created by actors who have the authority to speak about and formulate counted measures. He further explains that to study maritime security in that framework we need to answer questions about why oceans have become a source of insecurity and the way different issues have been securitized to form maritime security agendas. For example, the international actor United Nations General Secretary Report on “Oceans and the Law of the Sea” defines different threats such as terrorist acts, illicit trafficking, illicit trafficking of narcotics, arms, and weapons of mass destruction, smuggling and trafficking of a person by sea, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, international and unlawful marine environment,

piracy. Furthermore, the European Union maritime strategy focuses on things related to cyber security, territorial maritime disputes, the low potential of growth and jobs for coastal areas, climate change, etc. The securitization framework implies that top pirated issues are given high prices and resources are utilized for it. So, if we want to put maritime security under the securitization framework we need to understand which international actors consider the issue as a threat to its security. It is also worth considering how they project that threat and what resources are located around it. The third framework for understanding Maritime security under security studies is security practice theory. This perspective can be based on securitization analysis in which actions and saying or practical steps are the unit of analysis. The first spectrum of practices will be based on two insights, one of them being the routine such as maritime domain awareness and the other one is contentious practices such as naval diplomacy and warfare, maritime capacity building, etc. Maritime security is considered a transnational task so maritime security communities will best serve the actors to deal with their respective objectives and needs what threats they need to deal with and how collectively they can deal with these threats.

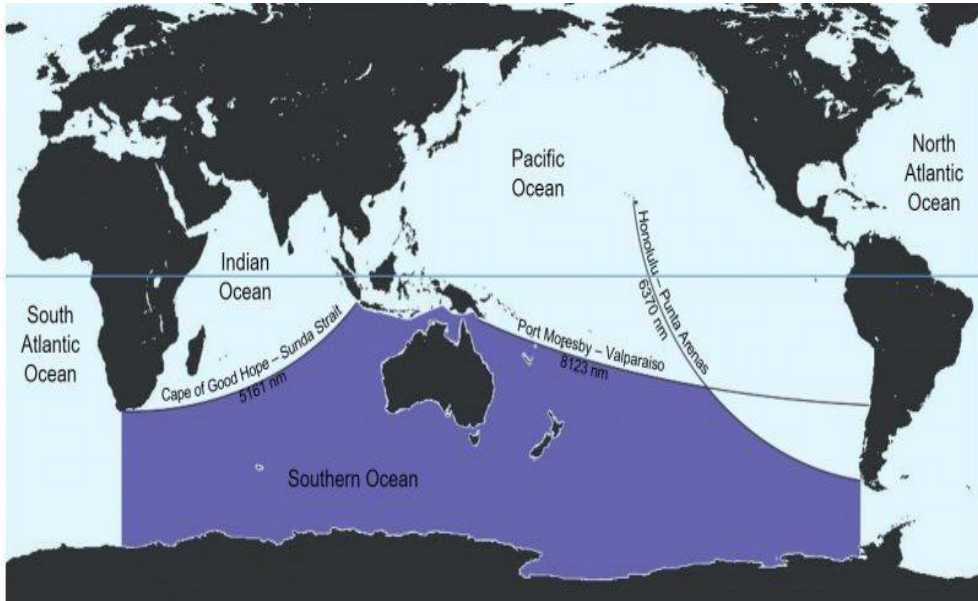
So, we can conclude that maritime security is an emerging concept which is an interlinked security complex arena that covers terrorism, illegal fishing, environmental threats, illegal trafficking of goods, and operational threats along with a spectrum of activities such as naval warfare, maritime domain awareness, diplomatic and economic initiatives, etc (Bueger, 2015).

### **Mapping out Australia's strategic geography**

The region's defining physical feature is the sea. The fact that Australia

has no land borders is of utmost importance. To prevent it from turning into a strategic liability, it is important to comprehend this strategic advantage. Australia's strategic geography is complex and vital for its survival. Over 10% of the Earth's surface falls under the direct security interest region of Australia. The Pacific Ocean borders Australia, the Southeast Asian archipelago to the west, the Indian Ocean to the east, the Northern Ocean to the north, and, occasionally, the Southern Ocean to the south. The maritime jurisdictional area is about twice the size of mainland Australia, or more than 14 million km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of the largest in the entire globe. Even though the aggregate coastline of mainland and offshore regions is more than 47,000 kilometers. Australia relies heavily on sea communications, yet they have two noteworthy weaknesses. The first is that shipping must travel through numerous ports to get to and from main trading partners in the northern hemisphere as well as pass through archipelagic choke spots, especially through the islands of the Indonesian archipelago. The second weakness is the distance and time of shipping through the Indian and Pacific oceans. This long-distance overseas shipping route is a major concern for Australia because these choke points and fleets can be identified and targeted by potential adversaries and hence interdict Australian national security. This boundary is known as the "Sandison line" (Australia Department of Defence, 2010).





*Fig 1: Sandison Line Source: Australian Naval Institut*

<https://navalinstitute.com.au/why-navy-needs-maritime-health-doctrine/>.

### **Australia Exclusive Economic Zones**

Australia's EEZ is one of the largest in the world with estimated marine area of around 10 million square kilometers. Australian EEZ constitutes 8.2 million square kilometers off the coast of Australia and its far-flung offshore territories, as well as 2 million square km off the Antarctic territory of Australia. Heard and McDonald Islands area comprises an area of 410722 km<sup>2</sup>, Cocos Islands 463,371km<sup>2</sup>, Christmas Islands 325,021km<sup>2</sup>, Norfolk Island 428,618km<sup>2</sup>, Macquarie 471,837km<sup>2</sup>, Australia 6048681km<sup>2</sup> (Oceans and Seas, 2014).

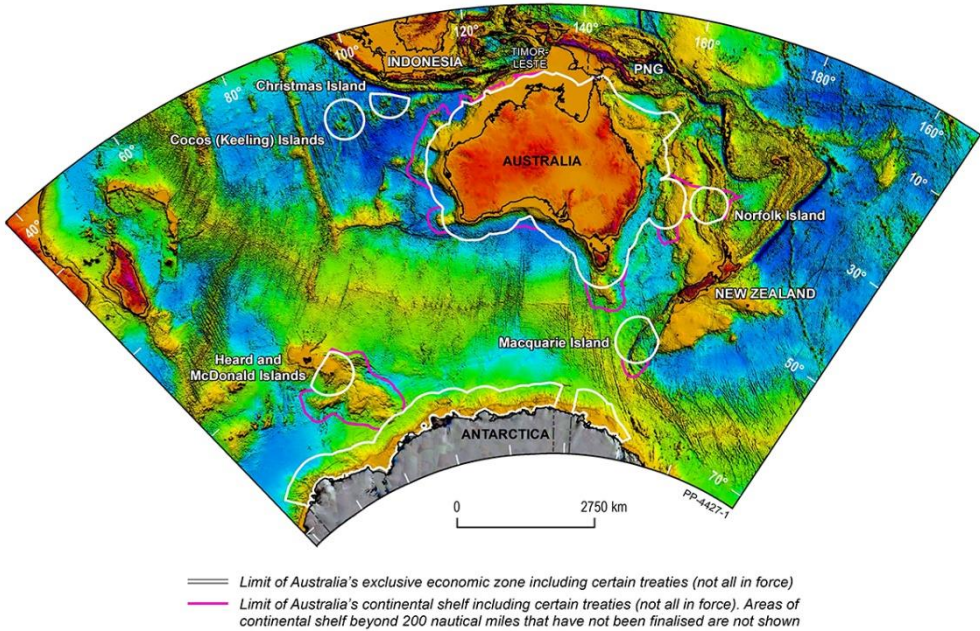
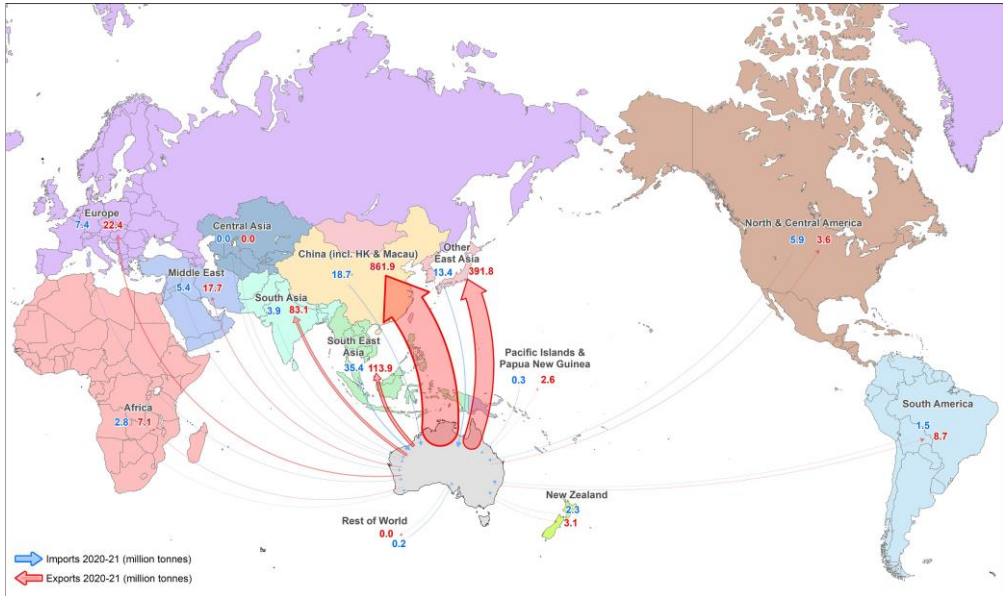


Fig 2: Source: Australia, "Oceans and Seas," June 7, 2023.

The majority of Australians live in metropolitan areas, many of which are on or near the coast and are concentrated in Australia's south-eastern region. All of Australia's imports and exports are transported by sea, at a rate of 99 percent by weight and 76 percent by value. The commerce and energy routes of many of Australia's most significant economic partners pass across the Indian Ocean, which is also crucial for Australian trade. Around forty percent of the world's bulk freight and one-third of its container traffic pass across the Indian Ocean. Additionally, this region produces 40 % of the world's offshore oil. Primary products are valuable export commodities, with iron ore, coal, gold, heavy crude oil, liquefied natural gas, and wheat leading the pack. Our most valuable imports are light crude oil, motor vehicles, food automobiles, and petroleum-refined goods (Australian Maritime Operations (2017), 2024).



**Fig 3: Source:** Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics

<https://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/2023/australian-sea-freight-2020-21>.

### Australia maritime jurisdiction

Geographically speaking, the largest state in the Indian Ocean is Australia. With more than 14,000 kilometers of shoreline, it is the single-largest maritime jurisdictional area of any IO state, covering almost 5.9 million square kilometers., including a 3.88 million square kilometer exclusive economic zone and an extended continental shelf—2,002,000 square km (Brewster, 2019).

Australia covers 5% of the Earth's surface, land, and 27 450,000 square kilometers of maritime jurisdiction. The northwestern territory of Australia is important for its natural gas export. Australia's maritime jurisdiction stretches from the mid-Indian Ocean, north near the equator, to the east to the continent

of Australia, and to the south and along the Antarctica coast. This area is also known as the “Australia Search and Rescue Region” or “Australian Security Forces Authority Area”. In addition to it, the external territories of Australia include Heard Island and McDonald Islands (southern Indian Ocean) at a distance of 2200 nautical miles southwest of Perth. Cocos (Keeling Islands, northeastern Indian Ocean) are 1600 nautical miles northwest of Perth and Christmas Islands (northeastern Indian Ocean) are 1400 nautical miles north of Perth. Ashmore and Cartier islands are 450 nautical miles west of Darwin and the Coral Sea islands are off the Queensland (Guide to Australian Maritime Security Arrangements, 2013).

### **Australian Bases**

To ensure its military presence, Australian forces established the “Two Ocean Basing Plan” which established the Royal Australian Navy Major fleet unit and submarine presence in Western Australia, India, and the Pacific oceans. The most crucial bases are “Fleet Base West” (“HMAS Stirling”) and “Fleet Base East” (“HMAS Kuttabul”) are the names of the two fleet bases (Bases and Locations, 2024). HMAS Stirling is a RAN base, a fleet base situated on the Indian Ocean west coast of Australia. This base is located near Perth, on Garden Island. This base has been expanded and established as one of the six Submarine Escape Training Facilities in the world. The helicopter support facility at the southern end of Garden Island is extended to the submarine training and system center. The 12<sup>th</sup> fleet units along with the 70<sup>th</sup> units are stationed there such as Anzac class Frigates , Collins Class submarines, submarine training and systems center, AUSCDT Four, and Defense Communications Station. HMAS Albatross is located in New South Wales

near Nowra the largest naval establishment and navy's air station which supports the five naval squadrons and air support to the fleets along with EC-135T2+Helicopters, MH-60R Seahawk helicopters, unmanned aerial systems. HMAS Cairns is located adjacent to Trinity Bay in Cairns, Queensland Australia which is responsible for naval activities off northeastern Australia and provides refit and training to the neighboring Pacific island countries. It serves as a home base for Armidale class petrol boat, cape class patrol boats ADV Cape Fourcroy (310), ADV Cape Inscription (320), and hydrographic survey along with survey motor launches. A Royal Australian Navy base called HMAS Cerberus is situated south of Melbourne City Centre in Victoria, next to Crib Point on the Mornington Peninsula. Air naval, and army personnel are trained there after the establishment of the tri-service school. Navy training includes School of survivability and ship safety. The specialization was provided for firefighting, nuclear, chemical, and biological defense, seamanship, weapons training, and damage control. HMAS Coonawarra is a RAN base and home to seventh fleet units located in Darwin, northern territory. This base has immense importance for Australian northern neighbors as well as for multinational exercises and operations, especially border integrity operations.

In addition, Royal Australian Air Force bases were located in different parts of its territories as well as in Malaysian territory as well. RAAF Darwin base is located north-east of Darwin and major exercises are held on northern territory most notably pitch black and Diamond Storm. RAAF's youngest operational base is Tindal, which is 320 km south-east of Darwin. Its location and proximity to Delamere air weapons range and weather conditions make it

exceptional for training and sorties. Edinburgh base is located 25km north of Adelaide and is home to the air warfare center and No 92 Wing's P-8A Poseidon aircraft. Woomera base and complex is located northwest of the Pastoral region of South Australia. The test range includes fully instrumented air weapons, live firing and demolition range as well as target areas for aircraft and artillery (Bases, 2017). The strategically important presence of Australia to exert sea control is at Base Butterworth Royal Malaysian Air Force. The state of Penang is situated by the Strait of Malacca on Peninsular Malaysia's northwest coast. With a land area of 1,048 square kilometers, it is the second-smallest state in Malaysia. The installation serves as the Five Power Defence Arrangements Integrated Area Defence System, headquarters as well as an Air Force Station of the RMAF. ADF soldiers are stationed at RMAF Butterworth in numbers ranging from 50 to 350 during exercises (Kuper, 2018).

## **The role of India and Indonesia in Maritime theater of Indian Ocean**

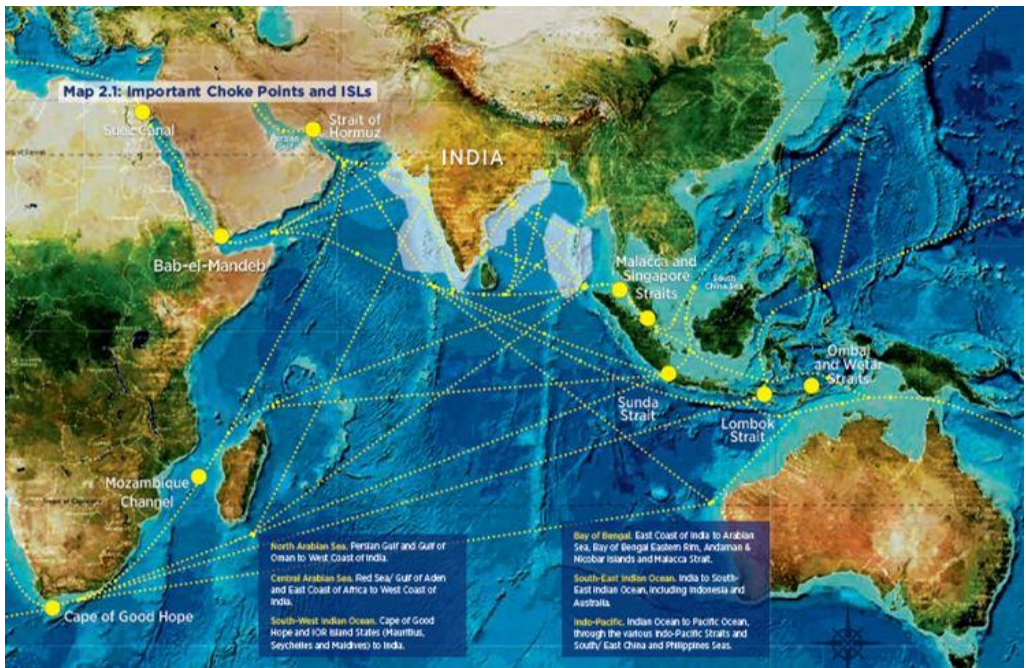
### **India's maritime interests**

The Indian Ministry of Defence published a document in 2015 known as "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" which defines India's naval thinking and key strategic areas of national interests. India is the main actor in the Indian Ocean region and lies at the center of the international trading hub because it flanks two regions Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea and can check on the southern Indian Ocean region. It has the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest coastline in the Indian Ocean extending to more than 7500 km along with exclusive economic zones of about two million sq. km, with more th1200 islands and most importantly Nicobar and Andaman Islands. India has a key interest in the Arabian sea, strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf,

Lombok and Sunda, **Combat and Wetar** strait is also important for India especially The Indonesian choke point Ombai and Wetar have enormous strategic significance for India on the eastern shore of the Indian Ocean because it is the only strait whose hydrography allows nuclear powered submarines to safely sail through it especially it will be important in upcoming years for indo-pacific route. India's national development depends significantly on the oceans for its energy security. The ISLs across the Indian Ocean are used to import around 80% of the nation's crude oil needs by sea. An additional 11% of the country's crude oil needs are supplied by energy produced offshore and within the Indian EEZ. Also, offshore gas fields 80% of India's domestic natural gas production comes from these countries. Along its East and West coasts, India also has 200 minor ports, 12 large ports, and their islands. India's primary area of interest includes India's coastal, territorial waters, internal sea waters, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones, continental shelf, Bay of Bengal, Arabian and Andaman Sea, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Aden, southwest India, Africa eastern coast and all these littoral regions. The choke points that are vital for India's security are the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>-degree Channel, Hormuz Strait, Bab-el-Mandeb, Malacca, Singapore, Sunda and Lombok, Mozambique Channel, cape of Good Hope and other encompassing sea lanes of communication. India's second area of interest includes the Southeast Indian Ocean including the Pacific Ocean and its littoral regions, south East China Seas, the Western Pacific Ocean southern Indian Ocean, Antarctica, the Mediterranean Sea, the west coast of Africa, and the encompassing littoral regions. In addition to it, to support three carrier combat groups, naval power will be increased. Submarines equipped with ballistic missiles will contribute to assured nuclear deterrence and assured destruction. The paper recognizes



the complex web of shifting geopolitical connections. Natural disasters, organized crime, and climate change have all been taken into account. “Project Mausam” and “SAGAR” are two further national projects and initiatives that are briefly listed in the text. Maritime engagement will be based on port visits, personal exchanges, staff talks, and interactions, exercises with foreign navies, maritime assistance, foreign assistance, and high-level maritime strategic interactions (Athreya, Vasan, & Chauhan, 2020).



*Fig 4: “India’s Maritime Wall in the Indo-Pacific Region*

*Source: <http://www.sirjournal.org/research/2019/7/1/indias-maritime-wall-in-the-indo-pacific-region>.*

Moreover, Premier Narendra Modi introduced the “Act East Policy” in 2014 during the “East Asia Summit” in Myanmar. The “Look East Policy” was established in 1991 which enables to strengthening of Indian ties with ASEAN



countries and integrated development, creating cultural, political cooperation economic ties with the nations of Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, and South Korea (Sheliya & Joshi, 2019).

This policy remained the key diplomatic, political, and military economic engagement of India with southeast Asian nations under its broader Indo-Pacific strategy. The key component of Act East policy is relations with ASEAN states. India declared 2022 as the year of “ASEAN-India year of friendship. India increased its regional footprint in Southeast Asia by joining the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The third ASEAN-India summit was held in 2004 and both parties signed the ASEAN-India partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity” (Bajpae, 2022). In 2020 “ASEAN-India vision” document was published that projects long-lasting cooperation. Jakarta, Indonesia, established a distinct Indian Mission to ASEAN in 2015, Singapore helped India to be part of the ASEAN-plus framework, and the first naval exercise of India was held in the South China Sea in 2000 and maritime security partner in 2012. In addition, Modi introduced “Security and growth for all in the region” for the blue economy and regional connectivity which also includes western Pacific and ASEAN. Other than the ASEAN forum, bilateral level, India supplied the Missile corvette INS Kirpan to Vietnam. Vietnam's defense minister visited India in July 2023 where discussions were held to train Vietnamese military personnel, operate submarines, and fighter jets, and cooperate on electronic warfare and cybersecurity. Indian counterparts also acknowledge their security concerns and India also accepted the validity of the permanent court of arbitration decision of Philippine claims on South China Sea areas (SAHA, 2023).

### **India's new naval base in the Andaman Islands**

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have historically been utilized by maritime powers as a vital base for eastward expeditions as well as a means of projecting dominance in the Indian Ocean. The Chola empire's first ruler, Rajendra Chola I, capitalized on these strategic advantages. One of the most powerful dynasties in South India's history, the Cholas' formidable navy used the Andaman islands as a base to conquer modern-day Sri Lanka and its navy captured the ports of the Srivijaya empire modern-day Indonesia. British Empire used these islands to reach the subcontinent and Indian Ocean, the Japanese Empire utilized these areas for strategic uphold in World War two, and allied powers lost control of Burma and other strategic areas (BARUAH, 2018).

Andaman and the Nicobar Islands are the Indian Navy primarily controlled areas near the Bay of Bengal. These islands are close to Indonesia, and the Malacca Strait which connects the Andaman Sea to the South China Sea. The militarization of these islands dates back to 2019 when 5,650 Indian crore military infrastructure development was developed to increase the Andaman and Nicobar Command's capability by allowing the deployment of more troops, planes, cruisers, missile batteries, and to facilitate operations at INS Baaz, Campbell Bay and INS Kohassa, Shibpur air and naval installations were upgraded” (PANT & BOSE, 2023).

### **Indonesia's geostrategic centrality**

Indonesia is an archipelagic nation, also referred to as the Archipelagic State. Several nations, including Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Australia, border Indonesia on all sides. Indonesia is aware that there is a substantial

strategic transformation taking place in the twenty-first century. The economic and geopolitical center of the world is shifting towards Asia. Additionally, Indonesia serves as a bridge between the Pacific and Indian oceans. Every year, 2,500 liquefied natural gas carriers and a third of the world's shipping pass through its seas. Whether Indonesia likes it or not, it serves as a worldwide maritime axis or fulcrum. The Indonesian archipelago has developed into a point where sea transportation corridors connect the eastern and western hemispheres. President Joko Widodo shaped the Global Maritime Fulcrum, a national grand plan and program that revitalized Indonesia's maritime tradition by making the seas the country's main growth focus during his administration. This strategy was based on constructing and organizing the sea, which will serve as the center of development, and infrastructure to achieve national development and increase inter-island connectivity protection and development of maritime resources five primary pillars make up this framework: maritime security, maritime connectivity, maritime diplomacy, and economy. First and foremost, this marine cultural pillar emphasizes creating a national identity through identifying as a coastal nation. Secondly, the protection of marine assets of Indonesia for economic boost. Third, infrastructural development for tourism, sea travel better connectivity to the world. Fourth, marine diplomacy enhances state performance, using diplomatic means to address regional coercions and foster bilateral and multilateral collaboration in the marine sector. Fifth, maritime security, aims to increase the nation's ability to grow and increase the security of the nation's borders (Alda As'ad & Nafilah, 2022).

## **Indian Ocean Choke points**

The region of Southeast Asia lies between South Asia, China, Northern Australia, and East Asia. Its area makes up around 3% of the world and 14% of Asia. Due to its location at the convergence of the Pacific and Indian seas, Southeast Asia is an area of enormous importance in terms of world politics and security. The main channel of communication for products moving between the West and the East is this one. Important for the global economy as a whole, Southeast Asian Sea lines of communication significantly impact the economies of developing and established Asian countries (Ladjide, 2020).

The Sunda Strait, connects Indian Ocean and Java sea with the waters of East Asia. It lies between the Indonesian islands of Sumatra and Java. At its narrowest, it is around 50 miles long and 13.8 miles wide. The islands of Lombok and Bali are divided by the Lombok Strait. Due to its depth, it offers deep-draft ships the best alternate route to the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (Navigational Regimes of Particular Straits, Sunda and Lombok Case Study, 2021).

The Strait of Malacca is the crucial chokepoint where one-third of the world trade is traversed. It is the swiftest route between the Far East, Europe and also connects Persian Gulf countries and Asian markets through Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia through the Indo-Pacific oceans.

Another other shipping route that passes through Indonesian archipelagic waters is the Ombai–Wetar Straits route. These are the second-most important straits for the US after Gibraltar Strait and mostly used by ships voyages between Java and Australian seas. The exceptionally deep waterways of these

straits offer submarine covert access routes between Pacific and Indian oceans (RUSLI, 2023).

## **China's Belligerence in Indian Ocean**

### **China Two-Ocean Strategy**

Chinese two-ocean strategy appeared in literature in 2005 by the Communist Chinese Party of China. This strategic narrative was followed to end the Chinese “century of humiliation” and again gain global power status. The Near Sea consists of the Yellow, South and East Sea. Far seas stretch from the western Pacific and global SLOC. The military aspect of it is the modernization of China People's Republic's navy and army. During the Mao era, the Chinese focused on coastal defense. Under the command of Liu Huaqing, Chinese went to modernization of PLAN and they worked on offshore defense or near seas strategies. This modernization focused on four phases training of personnel, upgradation of ships, second phase focuses on upgradation of PLAN combat capabilities in near seas, and the construction of carrier fleets third phase and fourth phases remain unclear but they are focused on blue water naval capabilities and reached operational power to the far seas. Liu also stressed the economic and political aspects of the strategy by saying “Nautical aims must be enfolded within China's national strategy”. Through this, we can understand that these two oceans are also important for Chinese economic and national survival as the majority of China's supply routes for energy and commerce are located in the Pacific and Indian oceans. China imports around 80% of its oil through these two ocean basins. Furthermore, in a larger global context, these two regions are crossed by more than 25% of all marine cargo and 1/3 of all maritime activity. For economic and geopolitical connectivity, OBOR strategy

was launched by China which aimed at creating an economic network across the Eurasian continent and eastern Africa. The belt portion consists of road network. Land routes focused on rail networks, highways, and road portions focused on maritime routes which focused on ports and harbors construction of the Eurasian continent (Sun & Payette, 2017).



*Fig 5: Source: CHINA'S TWO OCEAN STRATEGY: Controlling waterways and the new silk road*

### **Grey zone activities**

A range of actions that take place between peace and war is referred to as the “grey zone”. Gray-zone operations are characterized as gradualist campaigns

that take place below the threshold of armed confrontation and involve both state and non-state actors. They also combine non-military and quasi-military tools. They are frequently designed to take advantage of the weaknesses of the target state and are intended to frustrate, destabilize, undermine, or attack an enemy. China has used the Grey zone activities under its unrestricted warfare and three warfare strategies to pressure, coerce, destabilize its enemies, and achieve its national objectives without risking conventional escalation (Forward Defense Experts, 2022). According to Indian officials since 2015, 600 Chinese vessels traveled in the Indian Ocean region. Some academics view Chinese fishing vessels as "auxiliary naval forces" of the PLAN. They are a component of China's maritime militia, which is an element of Beijing's maritime enforcement organization. Additionally, even though all fishing vessels are required by international law to maintain their Automatic Identification Systems activated, recent investigations have shown that these vessels frequently do not. In 2019, ten Chinese vessels were found in illegal fishing in Indian exclusive economic zones near the Maharashtra coast as well a Chinese research vessel was also found near Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Bhatt, 2020).

### **Illegal Fishing**

The FAO report "The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture" from 2020 states that although China reported 2.26 million tons from its "distant-water fishery" in 2018, only 40% of the country's "distant water catch" had species and fishing area details mentioned. According to the report around 450 vessels have entered the Indian Ocean, probably this 60% catch of illegal fishing was from the Indo-Pacific region, the eastern Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea.

Chinese fishing trawlers are highly equipped with surveillance systems sighted near Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bay of Bengal as well as the Indian Ocean. Illegal fishing not only exploits EEZ but also damages the coral reefs through dynamite blasts, LED lights as well and bottom trawling (Chinese Trawlers Jeopardise India's Maritime Security, 2021).

### **New Map of the South China Sea**

In addition to this, the Chinese claimed that they controlled the water for centuries. Han dynasty of China sent voyages to explore the waters of Asia through the South China Sea. Territorial claims on the Spratly Islands and Paracel Islands are named Nansha, Xisha islands from the Song dynasty. In addition, during the Ming dynasty, Chinese explorers traveled to Indonesia, Borneo, Malay peninsula (Zhang, 2023). On 28 August 2023, china's Ministry of Natural Resources released a new "standard map" that drew a 10th dash line claim of China in the South China Sea which is also known as the 9<sup>th</sup> dash line which encompasses the EEZ of Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Brunei (Alfiansyah & Malufti, 2023).

### **Chinese Deterrence approach**

According to Thomas Shugart 2021 in his article "Australia and the growing reach of chinses military", Chinese military capabilities, and rapid expansion of maritime and aerospace capabilities have broadened the Chinese strategic horizons. This buildup appears to be planned to first threaten the United States with ejection from the western Pacific before establishing control in the Indo-Pacific, based on its extent, scale, and the specific capabilities being developed. The PLA is on pace to be able to directly exert coercive control over Australia's



economic well-being by endangering its access to global markets and energy sources. PLAN along with the approval of Chinese leadership designed goals such as 2000 developing force sufficient to exert control over the first island chain, by 2020 extending control out to the second island chain which stretches from Papua New Guinea up to the Mariana Islands to the northern Japan and by 2050 to a develop global navy. Chinese ballistic missile force has increased tremendously; Chinese DF-26 inter-range ballistic missiles are the most important missiles. According to US 2020 government military and security developments involving the PRC's publication reports suggested that DF-26 ICBM 200 more launchers are being made. China has significantly improved the capacity of its fleet of long-range strike aircraft in recent years. A brand-new, long-range aircraft that appears to have been purpose-built<sup>29</sup> to attack US and allied bases and to overwhelm US and allied carrier strike groups on the open seas has been produced by China, which has the sole operational bomber production line in the world. Since then, the H-6J, a marine strike-focused variant of the PLAAF's H-6K PLAN, has been added. H-6J is capable of carrying six YJ-12 long-range supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles and the latest version as of 2020 H-6N is capable of carrying single air-launched ballistic missile which appears to be like hypersonic glide vehicle. Moreover, the Chinese military focused on structural and organizational reforms such as from army-dominated military regions to joint theater commands, establishing PLA strategic support force, elevating the Chinese missile force, etc (Shugart, 2021).

### **China naval modernization**

According to a congressional research report on Chinese naval modernization,

China's navy is the largest in Southeast Asia and it surpassed the number of battle force ships between 2015 and 2020. In addition, it is becoming the largest navy with a battle force of approximately 340 platforms, including surface combatants, aircraft carriers, fleets, nuclear submarines, aircraft weapons, command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance C4ISR programs, updated training and exercise and doctrine improvement. China's influence is increasing in the near seas, especially the South China Sea, Taiwan, and beyond. China wants its navy to be able to participate in an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) force that can prevent American intervention in a conflict in China's near-seas region over Taiwan or another issue, or if that is not possible, delay the arrival of or lessen the impact of American forces that are intervening. 13 *SONG class SS (Type 039)* have been delivered by Chinese shipyards. Attack submarines of the 17 *YUAN class* with diesel-electric air-independent propulsion (*SSP (039A/B Type)*). The PRC is anticipated to construct at least 25 *YUAN-class* submarines, overall by 2025. The PLAN has built 12 nuclear submarines over the past 15 years: 2 *SHANG I class SSNs (Type 093)*, 4 *SHANG II class SSNs (Type 093A)*, and 6 *JIN class SSBNs (Type 094)*. The PLAN's six operational *JIN class SSBNs* are outfitted with the *CSS-N-14 (JL-2) submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM)*, which has a range of 7,200 kilometers. The first reliable nuclear deterrent based at sea. The first of a new class of SS, smaller than the Yuan design, was reported in February 2022, but it is unclear if this design is intended for the Chinese navy, for export to other countries, or for both (O'Rourke, 2010).

## **China submarine presence**

Since 2013, Chinese submarines have been present in the Indian Ocean, claiming to be deployed for anti-piracy duties. To reach the Indian Ocean, Chinese submarines use the Malacca, Lombok, or Sunda Straits. The deployment of submarines, along with PLAN's survey and hydrographic ships, has become a regular occurrence since 2017. In 2017, the PLAN's top naval survey ship - the *Type 636A* hydrographic survey ship *Haiyang Class 22* - was surveying the waters of the Indian Ocean, most likely charting for better submarine operations. In 2018, the PLAN's modern *Type 625C Shiyan 3* Oceanographic Survey Ship surveyed the Makran Trench in the Persian Gulf as part of its maritime exercise with the Pakistan Navy. In the same year, the *Xiang Yang Hong 10* was deployed in the Indian Ocean to survey the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association contract zone in the Southwest Indian Ocean. Since 2019, Chinese survey ships like the *Xiang Yang Hong 03* have surveyed the deep waters of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the water west of Indonesia - considered an important area of submarine operations for both India and Australia. China has also deployed a fleet of underwater drones in the Indian Ocean to study the aquatic environment, hydrography, bathymetric conditions, and sea-water temperature and salinity. These studies can be used for military applications to improve the detection capability of Chinese anti-submarine warfare assets in these waters and get better sonar performance of Chinese submarines. The use of a sea glider by China garnered global media attention when one of the Haiyi gliders was captured by an Indonesian fisherman off Selayar Island in South Sulawesi province in December 2019. China is also focusing on building new

generations of underwater gliders and Argo floats for specific military purposes. An underwater acoustic glider, which is currently under development, can be a game-changer for China in detecting and tracking submarines in the Indian Ocean (Panneerselvam, 2022).

Apart from this, for almost 20 years, Myanmar has been attempting to develop submarine capabilities. The *UMS Min Ye Theinkhathu*, the Myanmar Navy's first submarine, was put into service in 2020. It was noteworthy that India had transferred that submarine. In 2017, it gave Bangladesh two *Type-035 Ming Class submarines* that were once part of the PLAN. Through the Malacca Strait, Chinese submariners arrived at the Myanmar Yangon River in 2021 and it was commissioned into the Myanmar Navy as *UMS Minye Kyaw Hti* (Sutton, 2021).

China also reached the Great Coco Islands of Myanmar. These islands are 11 km in length located in the Bay of Bengal 55km from India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands and have proximity to the Malacca Strait. Chinese heavily invested in Myanmar Kyaukphyu port on the western side, which provided China access to the Indian Ocean for the transportation of liquefied gas. According to the Chatham House report, satellite images show a new 2300-meter runway, radar station, and two new hangars on Cocos Islands however there is a lack of proper evidence for it<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ratcliffe, Rebecca, and south-east Asia correspondent. 2023. "Military Construction on Myanmar's Great Coco Island Prompts Fears of Chinese Involvement." *The Guardian*, May 1, 2023, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/01/military-construction-on-myanmars-great-coco-island-prompts-fears-of-chinese-involvement>.

## **China in Indonesian waters**

China also reached out to Indonesia. In 2014 China announced the creation of a 40\$ billion Silk Road Fund at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and 20\$ billion Maritime Silk Road Fund in Indonesia. In addition to it, One of the BRI's main projects is the 142-kilometer (88-mile) high-speed railway between Jakarta and Bandung<sup>4</sup>. The China-Indonesia Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, the China-Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, and the China-Indonesia JuLong Agricultural Industry Cooperation Zone are three of the eight overseas industrial parks that China has established across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states, and they are all located in Indonesia. At the first Belt and Road Forum in 2017, Indonesia joined a total of 27 nations in endorsing Beijing's "Guiding Principles on Financing the Development of the Belt and Road," which included the promotion of "infrastructure connectivity" and the development of "natural resources," among other things (Oratmangun, n.d.).

Indonesia is concerned about the Natuna Sea because it is located near the Chinese-claimed 9th dash line. The Riau Islands Province, Batam, and Bintan Islands of Indonesia are situated close to the Natuna Sea, and the Natuna Island cluster is located in its southern part. The Natunas fall within Indonesia's 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone, as per the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was ratified by over 160 states in 1982, including China and Indonesia. The North Natuna Sea gas field, also known as Tuna

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<sup>4</sup> Yuen Yee, William. 2023. "Ten Years On, How Is the Belt and Road Initiative Faring in Indonesia?" *Jamestown*, March 3, 2023. <https://jamestown.org/program/ten-years-on-how-is-the-belt-and-road-initiative-faring-in-indonesia/>.



Nations' right of self-determination. It is situated in the Lesser Sunda Islands at the eastern tip of the Indonesian archipelago in Southeast Asia, northwest of Australia. The Timor Sea is the natural boundary between these two countries, bounded by Timor–Leste to the north and by Australia to the south. This area is rich in natural resources and became a disputed area “Timor Gap” between both countries after the discovery of oil in the 1970s (The Importance of Sea Geopolitics, n.d.).

Greater Sunrise fields, also called the Sunrise and Troubadour gas and condensate fields, are located 450 kilometers northwest of Darwin, Northern Territory, and 150 kilometers southeast of Timor-Leste. The fields were found in 1974 and have a combined contingent resource of 225.9 million barrels of condensate and 5.13 Tcf of dry gas. Once produced, these volumes, which were independently approved in 2010, will greatly increase Woodside's reserves. The Joint Petroleum Development Area, which is jointly run by the governments of Australia and Timor-Leste, is credited with 20% of the Greater Sunrise fields, while Australia is given credit for the remaining 80%, according to the International Unitisation Agreement that was signed by Timor-Leste and Australia (Woodside/Sunrise Articles, 2023).

To solve the issue between both countries and to explore oil and other reserves, maritime boundary settlement agreement and a stable legal framework for the development of oil and gas resources were signed between the two parties (Geoscience Australia, 2023).

China is one of the first countries that develop diplomatic relations with the newly independent Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste signed various agreements with China in air services, healthcare, and economic and technical cooperation

including digitization of TV and radio signals (Chinese-built Tibar Bay deepwater port, 2022).

During the year 2022, China sponsored Tibar Bay Deepwater Port China Harbour Engineering Company which became fully operational. It was inaugurated by the President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos Horta. It is 12 kilometers from the capital Dili and intends to boost Timor-Leste's logistical services and adapt to recent changes in the maritime and port industries. It is outfitted with the newest generation of handling equipment, including two STS gantries and four e-RTG gantries produced by Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries, and has a 630-meter-long quay with 16 meters of draught.

### **China's presence in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar**

China has considered Sri Lanka to be a crucial state in the Indian Ocean Rim. Furthermore, it offers a strategic perspective on China's total maritime footprint in the Indo-Pacific area. One key component of China's maritime policy to safeguard its strategic choke points in the Indian Ocean region is Sri Lanka. Because of this, Chinese investment in the long-term economic and naval interest in the area is explained by Hambantota Port. At first, Loans from the Chinese Exim Bank were provided for the building of the Hambantota port, but ultimately in 2017, The Chinese and Sri Lankan governments negotiated a lease arrangement wherein Merchants Port Holdings was granted a 99-year lease on the Hambantota port by China. Company Limited, a \$1.12 billion asset based in China. In addition to it, a Chinese submarine was docked in Colombo. Bangladesh is an important part of the string of pearls, a potential market for Chinese goods and for countering Indian hegemony in the Bay of Bengal. In 2008 missile launch pad was installed near Chittagong. China, massive



undertakings such as the construction of the \$3.75 billion Padma Bridge, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, and investments in SEZs in Bangladesh (Azam, Shahzad, & Falki, 2022).

Above all, China is reaching Cambodia. Their defense ties were increasing; maiden exercises were held there. According to reports, under BRI China is modernizing and upgrading the port of Ream in Cambodia located in the Gulf of Thailand. The upgrade includes a dry dock, slipway, two new piers, command Centre, meeting and dining halls, and dredging for larger vessels. The second strategic concern for India is China's presence in Myanmar through the China-Myanmar economic corridor. This corridor connects Yunnan province in southern China to the Bay of Bengal (Gurjar, 2023).

### **Maritime Strategic Trinity: Australia, Indonesia and India maritime security endeavors**

Australia, India, and Indonesia have been increasing their security cooperation with ASEAN countries. The collaboration is expected to cover discussions on security, information exchange, military capacity building, technology sharing, agenda framing for regional forums, and coordinated diplomatic activities.



**Fig 7:** Indian Ocean area **Source:** <https://www.loc.gov/item/86695650/>

- Indonesia and Australia are collaborating in the maritime domain as well after signing different agreements between them. Ashmore and Cartier Islands are strategically important islands between Australia and Indonesia. The West, Middle, and East Islands of Ashmore Reef, along with Cartier Island and the surrounding 12 nautical mile Territorial Sea, are all included in the territory of Ashmore and Cartier Islands. The Territory is situated 170 kilometers south of the Indonesian island of Roti and 320 kilometers off the northwest coast of Australia on the outer edge of the continental shelf in the Timor Sea and the Indian Ocean. At 122°59'E, 12°11'S, Ashmore Reef is located 840 km west of Darwin and 610 km north of Broome. At 12°31'50.8" S, 123°33'18.8" E, Cartier Island is situated in the West Sahul area of the Indian Ocean. The island is located around 300 kilometers off the coast of Kimberley, Australia, 200 kilometers south of Roti, Indonesia, and 70 kilometers from Ashmore Reef. Both countries

signed an MOU which allowed Indonesian fishermen to visit these reefs (Geoscience Australia, 2023).

- India and Australia had a Bilateral strategic partnership since 2009 and in 2020 it had transformed into a Strategic partnership to strengthen their defense ties and mutual security interests. Their practical collaboration includes military drills AUSINDEX, Kakadu, Pitch Black, MILAN, and Malabar military drills. Further, participation in the IONS, two-plus-two ministerial talks, a Joint Working group to investigate the advancement of the defense sector and accords on reciprocal logistics and the sharing and support of intelligence. As partners in the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, Australia and India address a wide range of challenges including marine pollution, marine plastics, illegal fishing, marine research for conservation, and marine ecology (Das, 2023).
- At the tactical level, India and Australia show their anti-submarine warfare capabilities at 'AUSINDEX 2023', in which Indian Navy submarine INS Vagir reached the Fremantle base of Australia (Sharma, 2023).
- According to a Press release of 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021, the naval chiefs of India and Australia virtually signed a “Joint Guidance for the Australia- India Navy to Navy Relationship” paper. This paper focuses on bilateral, multilateral collaboration among both countries, promoting mutual understanding, collaboration regional security, and joint interoperability (“‘Joint Guidance for the Australia – India Navy to Navy Relationship’ Signed between Indian Navy and Australian Navy | Indian Navy,” 2021).
- Moreover, Australian PM Hon Scoot and Modi talked at a virtual summit held in 2020. The joint declaration of the meeting focuses on peace

security, safety, and constancy of the Indo-Pacific along with safe and open sea lanes of communication, collaboration on the navy-to-navy coloration, commitment to ASEAN, and will step up their coordination in regional and multilateral fora, such as the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, and the International Maritime Organisation (“Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific between the Republic of India and the Government of Australia,” 2020).

- Furthermore, in June 2020 Australia and India signed a mutual logistic agreement. The agreement permits access to maintenance facilities and refueling for military planes and ships of each other (Miglani & Packham, 2020).

To deal with Chinese assertiveness in seas, the AUKUS agreement was signed. Under the AUKUS, the Australian base western HMAS Stirling will be upgraded and utilized to secure sea control and sea power projection for Indian Ocean operations. Along with collaboration on advanced cyber mechanisms, AI and autonomy, quantum technologies, underwater capabilities, hypersonic and counter-hypersonic, electronic warfare, innovation, and information exchanges (Bajkowski, 2023). Australia will be able to host the nuclear-powered submarines of its allies as part of submarine rotational force west" (Kahn, 2023).

- Furthermore, Indonesian leadership in 2021 introduced their military modernization program to deal with the upcoming Maritime security challenges and significantly increase the size of its submarine and corvette

fleet. India and Indonesia formed a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018 and this strong partnership is shown through the acquisition of Brahmos missiles and other defense-related technologies as well as Samudrasakti naval exercises (“A Minilateral Defence Triad between Indonesia, Australia, and India?,” n.d.).

- In response to exerting China’s sovereignty near the Natuna islands and surrounding waters near the 9<sup>th</sup> dash line, Indonesia decided to develop a tuna oil and gas field, revive of alpha d block, and develop of Natuna besar base. There are 272 islands in the Natuna Archipelago, with the largest being Natuna Island, which is 1,992.79 square kilometers in area more than twice the size of Singapore. The island is positioned strategically between Borneo Island and the Malaysian Peninsula in the center of the South China Sea. Labuan Naval Base / Air Base is located 777 km to the east, while RMAF Kuantan and Gong Kedak Airbase (Su-30) are located 687 km and 575 km to the west, respectively. The distances are 565 km to Singapore in the southwest and 655 km (353 nm) to the contested Spratly Islands in the northeast (“Natuna – Midway of South China Sea,” 2014).
- To secure the outer islands of Indonesia, on 18 December 2019, Indonesian military commander Air Marshall Tjahjanto inaugurated the Natuna Besar's base near the islands of the southern fringe of the South China Sea. The tri-service unit on the base will be functional and it will not only host battalions from the army, marines, submarines, warships, missile systems, UAV’S. The other integrated units planned for eastern Indonesia, near the Celebes Sea, Arafura Sea, Timor Sea, and Pacific Ocean, will also benefit from the development of the Natuna unit. The new defense approach of Indonesia not only covered the continental approach and eastern balancing

approach covering international security threats, Malacca Strait threats as well as eastern areas of Indonesia.

- Last but not the least, the Indian and Royal Australian Navy collaborated to undertake the fifth iteration of the biennial AUSINDEX maritime exercise, which took place in Sydney, Australia, from August 22 to August 25, 2023. The Indian Navy's INS Sahyadri and Kolkata, as well as the RAN's HMAS Choules and HMAS Brisbane, were among the participating ships. Along with the ships and their helicopters, fighter and maritime patrol aircraft were also involved in the drill. AUSINDEX comprised a series of intricate exercises spanning all three maritime operational domains over four days (“Indian Navy Participates in 5th ‘AUSINDEX-23’ Held in Australia,” 2023).
- The Royal Australian Navy hosted the Multilateral exercise Kakadu in 2022. Throughout the two-week exercise, ships, and maritime aircraft from 14 navies were present in both the harbor and the sea. Indian navy joined the exercise and its NS Satpura frigate and P8 I Maritime Patrol Aircraft participated in the exercise at the Darwin base of Australia's northern territory (“INS Satpura, P8I Maritime Patrol Aircraft Taking Part in Multinational Naval Exercise Kakadu-2022,” 2022).
- On June 30, 2023, an Australian Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA - P8A) arrived at INS Rajali for combined training with P8I aircraft of the Indian Navy (“India - Australia Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) Coordinated Operations | Indian Navy,” n.d.).

- In addition, in 2023 Coco's Islands airfield, runway, and taxiway are being upgraded for deployments of massive aircraft, like the MC-55A electronic intelligence collecting platform and the RAAF's P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft (Pittaway, 2023).
- A C-130 cargo aircraft from the Indian Air Force and a Dornier maritime patrol aircraft from the Indian Navy visited Cocos Islands, the southern Indian Ocean, near Darwin Australia close to Indonesia to enhance communication and broaden the military's strategic reach (Brewster & Bashfield, 2023).
- Moreover, on February 2023, the Indonesian Navy tweeted “In a bid to strengthen bilateral ties, the Indonesian Navy warmly welcomes the arrival of the Indian submarine INS Shindukesari in Jakarta,” The first Indian submarine crossed the Sunda strait and docked in Indonesia (Indian Submarine INS Sindhukesari Docks in Indonesia amid South China Sea Tensions, 2023).
- The United States Study Center report “ Bolstering the QUAD: The Case for a Collective Approach to Maritime Security” highlights the MALABAR exercises expansion of geographic scope in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Philippine Sea, off the coast of Guam. The 2018 and 2019 drills centered on expert instruction and less complicated joint operations involving the US, India, and Japan. These exercises now focus on integrated maritime operations and working on the maritime dimension of surveillance of QUAD to combat illegal activities and cross-check maritime vessels' movements of the vessels (Corben, Townshend, Herzinger, Baruah, & Satake, 2023).

- Lastly, according to the Indian Ministry of Defense, India, and Indonesia's maritime exchanges have increased significantly as a result of regular port visits, joint and multilateral exercises, and training exchanges. Since 2002, the navies of the two countries have been conducting Coordinated Patrols annually along the International Maritime Boundary Line. These patrols are carried out under the broad auspices of their strong maritime relationship. The primary objective of these exercises is to ensure the safety and security of this crucial portion of the Indian Ocean Region for commercial shipping and international trade. The Indian Navy and Indonesian Navy participated in the 38th edition of the India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT) from June 13–24, 2022. While the Indonesian Navy was represented by KRI Cut Nyak Dien, a Kapitan Pattimura (PARCHIM I) class Corvette, the Indian Navy participated in the CORPAT with the Andaman and Nicobar Command-based Missile Corvette INS Karmuk and a Dornier Maritime Patrol (38th India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol Begins in Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca, 2022).

### **Ensuring Maritime Security Through Sea Control**

A nation's unfettered and unhindered marine operations are promoted by the absolute principle known as "command of the sea," while averting a potential opponent from using the sea to any extent. The term "Sea Control" is defined as a situation in which an individual has the liberty to utilize a segment of the sea for their purposes and, if required, to impede an adversary from utilizing it. Sea Control has multiple dimensions since it includes commanding the air; commanding the surface of control over the ocean, the underwater water column, and control over the littoral and spectrum of electromagnetism. For



Australia, Sea Control is crucial especially before the deployment of maritime power, particularly for the operation of marine and amphibious transport activities and to support soldiers working ashore (Semaphore: Australia's Need for Sea Control, 2007).

Sir Julian Corbett, 2022 was the preeminent Blue Water civilian thinker. He was a strong supporter of the command of the sea and is of the view that the object of naval warfare is to secure the command of the sea by preventing the enemy from securing it. In addition, for military and commercial purposes control of maritime communications is essential because it is the ultimate essence of naval influence. The navy's strategic goal would be to maintain open channels of communication and lines of operation. The supply lines that connected bases to theatres of operations, lateral lines that connected theatres, and lines of retreat, or supply lines held in reserve, were the battlegrounds. Corbett wrote that the command of the sea "means one own ability to move through the sea without opposition from the enemy while preventing the enemy from doing the same". He argued that if one side loses control of the sea, it does not necessarily mean that the other side will take it over. According to him, neither side having the command is the most typical scenario in a maritime conflict. Consequently, the state of the sea is generally uncommented. In addition to it, Corbett, stated "What are you to do if the enemy refuses to permit you to destroy his fleets? You cannot leave your trade exposed to squadron or cruiser raids. At the same time, you await your opportunity and the more you concentrate your forces and efforts to secure the desired decision the more you will expose your trade to sporadic attack". So Corbett exerts that it is more advantageous to proclaim that destroying the

enemy's fleet is the only sensible approach to safeguard trade (Vego, 2009).

Historically, the sea lanes of communication and island states remain important for forward power projection and for state national survival for goods, natural resources, etc. Imperial Japan was dependent on exported oil and raw materials to survive in the war. The most important areas were the petroleum-rich Indonesia (Dutch East Indies), and British Malaya's tin mines and rubber plantations. Japanese penetrated the Pacific islands through a defensive perimeter and captured a strong hold on Formosa and the Philippines. Another route was through French Indo-China then to Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Japanese controlled the Truk base and seized the Rabaul base on the island of New Britain New Guinea. Japan also controlled the central Pacific island chain such as the Solomon Islands, and ports in Guinea. By capturing key maritime space or global commons Japan reached Pearl Harbor and attacked the American base in Hawaii islands. Due to the surprise attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbour and the sinking of HM Ships Repulse as well as Prince of Wales in Southeast Asian waters, the Japanese were able to achieve Sea Control early in the Second World War. With this dominance, the Japanese were able to stay ahead of the game which enabled them to move quickly through Asia and reach the Pacific front as well. In the 21st century, we can analyze the predominant role of the black sea. The black sea has immense strategic importance for Russia and Ukraine. Russia exerts its influence in southern Europe, north Africa, the Mediterranean, Middle East, and its deep water of Sevastopol is utilized for military purposes even during winter as well as for its export. A third of Russia's crude oil exports, or over 60 million barrels, go through the Novorossiysk port. In the Black Sea, Ukraine targeted and

damaged an oil tanker flying the Russian flag using an unmanned maritime drone. Ukraine also depends on the black sea for its exports through Odesa port. Russia constantly attacks the merchant ships of Ukraine which is devastating for the already war-torn state's economic and human security. Ukraine used alternative routes such as Romania and Russia used the Arctic route for its supplies. However, this current example explains why maritime communication control is important. As Corbett said these bases, supply lines, and other supply lines act as reservoirs for war and channels for theaters of operation. So in the current geopolitical tug of war, to exert sea control, Australia can utilize its Malaysian base as well as Indian Andaman Nicobar Islands. Australian Cocos Islands are close to the strait of Malacca, Lombok, and obtain Ombai and Wetar Strait which will be beneficial for submarine transit in upcoming years. Ombai and Wetar Straits have proximity to the Timor-Leste so, Australia can engage with it in order to exert sea control in upcoming years. The Natuna base in Indonesia has the potential to be used as a surveillance base at the heart of Chinese territory. Thus utilizing these small dots (islands) on the world map, and regional, and technological collaboration Australia can exert its control by utilizing its strategic location at the Indian Ocean exit point and Pacific Ocean entry point. By doing so Australia can overcome its geographical vulnerability known as sandison line. India will be able to control Chinese expansion in the eastern Indian ocean area which is the primary security area for India and also increase its approach to reach second ocean or second area of interest which is the Pacific Ocean. Indonesia will be able to upgrade its defensive capabilities, secure its security interests and upcoming potential conflicts as well as standoffs.

## **Conclusion**

There is increasing competition in the Indian ocean, which includes Australia, on several fronts, including nautical, economic, military, geopolitical, and diplomatic. These tiers are interrelated and are all distinguished by an intense competition for narratives and ideals. In addition to multilateralism and maritime diplomacy, the three states share a common understanding of the sustainable use of the ocean and its resources, communication, and cooperative defense of UNCLOS-based maritime order in the Indian and Pacific oceans. India supports freedom of navigation and Australia supports ruled-based order in the indo-pacific region and oceans, whereas Indonesia also supports free navigation of seas under the global maritime fulcrum Australia first needs to collaborate and reinforce its force within the region and it has the potential in upcoming years to not only be a great maritime nation but also plays a great role in becoming the most influential middle power.

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