

Maritime Security: A Case Study of Pakistan

Dr Sajid Mahmood Shahzad and Dr Aleem Gillani

Abstract

Maritime has been long neglected in Pakistan. Unfortunately, we also mixed the naval and maritime strategy. Gaining control of the Sea Lanes of Communication SLOC plays a critical role in any conflict with a maritime component. Pakistan Navy has become a very active force and is the defender of the maritime borders. In recent years, their engagement in the region has grown. CPEC under BRI has further changed the contours of maritime security in Pakistan. The PN's reliance on the west in terms of the military is diminishing because of its larger reliance on China and other states like Turkey. PN has become a very important actor on national and international forums. It has led various maritime missions like CTF 151 and is part of CTF150. It also initiated Regional Maritime Security Patrols and launched its first formal maritime doctrine showing its seriousness towards defending and preserving freedom of the seas. Moreover, it is also very active in terms of diplomacy. It is engaged with various African states and thus maintaining its relevance. It is now ardently working to build up its naval capabilities in collaboration with China and Turkey as well. It has emerged as a more responsive force eager to maintain peace and stability in the region and thus is complying with international norms and regulations.

Keywords: CPEC, BRI, Maritime Security, RMS, CTF 150, CTF 151

Introduction

In the realm of international relations, Maritime Security emerged as a new but eye-catching term. Various scholars across the globe started to include maritime security in their mandate. Undoubtedly, Maritime security helped a lot in highlighting new challenges and rallying support for addressing these. Keeping the delicate nature of maritime security in mind, it can be studied in conjunction with other terms i.e., resilience, marine safety, blue economy, and sea power.

Maritime has remained quite a neglected domain in Pakistan in both military and economic terms. The land-oriented mindset of the policymakers has left this field hollow. Recently we have viewed the shift of mindset both nationally and internationally. Pakistan over the years has become a very active state and recently in 2018, it launched an initiative called Regional Maritime Security Patrols. Furthermore, it was the 1971 war that marked a huge shift in Pakistan's response to maritime when Indian forces used both the land and waterfront to win the war. CPEC further added the importance of maritime security in Pakistan. To expand the 'maritime cooperative continuum,' it has led the CTF 150. After the maritime doctrine of Pakistan was unveiled its positioning became clearer in terms of maritime security as it was the first formal maritime doctrine of the country.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is rooted in the realist approach. Realism suggests that all outcomes be it related to trade negotiations, violation of human rights, or

getting militarily involved depend on the relative powers of the involved actors. In this pursuit of getting control of the sea lanes of communication, SLOC plays a decisive role in every war which has some sort of maritime component. Military planners would do well to focus on what they can plan to accomplish i.e., SLOC control, and treat naval battles as important contingency plans that may or may not result from their actions. In short, one man's gain is another man's loss.

Methodology

Maintaining the intricate nature of the existing study, considering its complicated implications, and convoluted security dynamics, the approach adopted for a comprehensible outcome is mainly quantitative. The deductive method is used for conceptual clarity particularly to make political and security perspectives distinct. The empirical argument in this respect is shrouded by ambiguity as most literature observed to define the security issues and problems of the IOR was largely speculative which infuses difficulties in evaluating and confirming linked details. Further, the politically driven literature, which contains a noticeable impression of propaganda, was not disregarded, or ignored, because this included futuristic characteristics regarding politics, regional security, and military. Such complications made deductive reasoning the safest course of action. The methodology opted for this research largely uses desk research complemented by a case study. This is primarily to find out what has been covered in the existing literature on maritime security. Subsequently, the research thoroughly dwells upon a case study of Pakistan. It explores in-depth aspects of desk research based on credible literature and uses both primary and secondary sources of data.

Deciphering Maritime Security

It is very important to understand the concept and term maritime security. Geoffrey Till writes that the biggest threat to maritime in the future is the ignorance and negligence amongst the public and some parts of governments.

The lack of understanding of the maritime realm is highly prevalent in Pakistan and that is one of the reasons that it has not been able to fully exploit and tap its resources. The lack of understanding has led to equating both maritime strategy and naval strategy. However, for a long time, we are using this term synonymously.

Maritime security is a multi-faceted term that can be deciphered both in terms of security and commercial domain. It can also be said that maritime security for one nation can be the source of insecurity for the other one. Furthermore, Klein and Mossop draw a line of difference between maritime safety and maritime security where one refers to minimizing the occurrence of certain accidents in the sea under the guidance and principles of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the other refers to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for the settlement of disputes and conflicts regarding the maritime (United Nations).

Today the threats in the maritime domain are not confined to the military only rather they have become more complex. The threats now vary which is explained by Barry Buzan as well as starting from the military, economy, societal cleavages, and environmental threats (Buzan, 1991). In the same way, Pakistan is not only challenged in terms of the military in the sea but

also in terms of economy (Gwadar) and environment (marine pollution) and this can be a potential threat to the national security and stability of Pakistan.

Evolving Maritime Security in Pakistan

Geoffrey Till, in his book 'The Changing Maritime Scene in Asia (2015)', believes that Asia would see a gradual rise in naval and coast guard cooperation to improve maritime security in the region as he contends that "maritime Asia appears to be the scene of both continuity and substantial change" (Azmi, 2019). This shows that maritime security has become a pertinent aspect of the military strategy and after the US Indo-Pacific strategy this has become even more obvious.

In Pakistan maritime security remained neglected but as mentioned above, the recent events marked a huge change in the collective national response towards maritime. The Navy became more active not only in military terms but also in terms of soft power projection. It started joint ventures with China and Turkey. Its reliance in terms of military equipment decreased in the USA, especially after the Pressler Amendment. That is when Pakistan went to look up new partners in this realm (Akhtar, 2017).

Moving further with the developments of CPEC under the emblem of BRI, strengthening maritime security became very pertinent. The strategic location of Gwadar, with proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, can attract many non-conventional threats like drug and human trafficking, maritime terrorism, robbery, and piracy. So, this area required more effort for the stability of the whole economy (Nawaz, 2020).

Strategic Significance of Pakistan's Coastline

Pakistan has a coastline of 1046 km divided into the eastern and the western coast. The west coast is about 750km long called Makran Coast, close to the Strait of Hormuz and the eastern coast is 296 km long which is the hub of commercial activities of Pakistan.

The strategic location of Pakistan in the Indian Ocean has compelled it to take extraordinary measures for the security of its maritime borders. Unlike land borders, it has no major issue with India at sea but Sir Creek on the eastern side of the coast has long remained a source of tensions in the maritime realm. The dispute on this marshy land is also one of the bones of contention between both states. Both states have deployed their battalions in this region in Pakistan. The Sir Creek Battalion is responsible for the security of this area (EurAsian Times Desk, 2019).

Besides, the recent development and engagement of India, the Indian Ocean has pressed Pakistan to develop its maritime capabilities as well and that is why this region in the recent decade has witnessed the massive development of naval capabilities. Both the regional and extra-regional powers are involved in the region like the USA, Japan, Australia, Britain France, and China as well. The rise of some powers and the shifts of alliances in the region has given rise to new competition in the Indian Ocean. Under these circumstances, it has become important for Pakistan to use its EEZ and Continental Shelves more wisely, thus, increasing maritime connectivity in the region via Gwadar Port.

The Significance of Gwadar Port and CPEC under the Emblem of BRI

The grand Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) China's nostalgic notion is a resumption of the historical commercial route from 206 BCE to 220 CE (Belt & Road News, 2020). China's Han Dynasty at that time strengthened this route that was used to trade silk across the Mediterranean which was in high demand there and very precious as well. Thus, it was given the name of the Silk Route that connected the East and West at that time. Later this route became a strong network of communication that was not only used for trade, but it also became a path to cultural exchange, knowledge, and expertise transference. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the roads of China and the Mediterranean are converging again. Now it is yet to be decided whether Xi's vision play a similar role in reshaping the global supply and chain network, and will it impact the social and political structures around the globe?

China's BRI- grand global vision was first put forth in 2013 that seems very pervasive engulfing 70 countries from Southern Asia to Western Europe, most of them were the developing states. China states that there are four basic aims of this mega-vision: (CGTN, 2018)

- Policy Coordination
- Facilities Connectivity
- Unimpeded Trade
- Financial Integration
- People to People Bonds

Under these ambitions, CPEC became one of the important projects which focuses on China and Gwadar Port, through highway, railroads, and gas pipelines. This project is way more significant for Pakistan than China as it envisions upholding the stability of the region. This project has raised concerns for India. For Pakistan, this is an important strategic project under the circumstances where India's naval aspirations are clear (Hafeez, 2019). CPEC can thus further aid seriousness and tensions in the region thus increasing maritime politics in the region. Pakistan must critically evaluate these circumstances with the readiness of dynamic response. It needs to develop its naval capability and maintain closer maritime relations with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region. This will minimize the Indian influence in the region which may grow multifold in the coming times, and in retrospect debilitate Pakistan's core national interests in the region.

Pakistan's Naval Capability and Development Plans

With the Indian threat on one side and the range of non-conventional threats on the other side, the response of Pakistan in general and the Navy in specific now needs to be more responsive and dynamic at the sea. It has become important for Pakistan to develop its naval capabilities to mitigate these threats effectively. Furthermore, it has continuous engagement with states like Turkey, China, and Romania for its recent naval buildup (Asia Military Review, 2018). In this regard, its partnership with China is very important which is now building and upgrading Pakistan's naval build-up. It will act as a force multiplier and enhance the naval capabilities of Pakistan (Bano, 2020). Pakistan has also increased its ties with Turkey

recently and now is in collaboration with Turkey in modernizing its warships. Pakistan in coordination with Turkey will construct a MILGEM ADA-class Corvette, and with these developments in mind, Islamabad will be looking for technology transfer in the future as well. These initiatives of naval build-ups will enhance Pakistan's position in the region and maintain credible deterrence as well.

Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan

In the Maritime Security Workshop 2018 (MARSEW 18), the President of Pakistan unveiled the first formal Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan. This was the foundation stone and a trendsetter that led to more consciousness among the people regarding maritime (Pakistan Today, 2018). The doctrine stress upon maintaining conventional and nuclear capability with the ability to overcome other non-conventional and cyber threats as well. The doctrine aims to provide and establish principles and provide guidance in these persistent issues. It will further help and develop credible solutions to the prevailing problems and will be effective in the overall maritime sector. The doctrine has laid stress on CPEC as that will be an important component of the overall maritime security (The Dawn Staff Reporter, 2018). Thus, this doctrine will be effective for bureaucracy, academia, and policymakers in understanding maritime affairs. It is also a framework for PN for their future course of action in times of war and peace. This will lead to eradicating paucity in the policy-making realm and ultimately creating an inducive environment for sea blindness to end. This will be the conceptual framework that will guide the practicality to protect the maritime interest in IOR and respond to conventional, sub-conventional, and non-conventional threats. It will bring coherence and uniformity of thought in overall PN as an institution, as said by Senior Research Fellow of Pakistan Navy War College and author of the doctrine retired Commander Muhammad Azam Khan, at the Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS) (The Dawn Staff Reporter, 2016).

Multilateral Measures and Role of Pakistan

Pakistan has proved itself a very responsible state in maintaining peace and stability in the region. It has taken significant steps to ensure maritime security in the Arabian Sea, promoting a peaceful environment for the unhampered and safe movement of trade and commerce. The navy has not only remained active in securing Pakistan's national interests and maritime borders but has also remained very vigilant on the multilateral forums.

To seize illicit activities in the region such as maritime terrorism it became a member of CTF 150 in 2004 (Ansari, 2017). In 2009, it joined the CTF 151 to counter piracy in the Gulf of Aden (The Nation, 2020). Since then, it has been a very active member of both the task forces. Moreover, PN has also initiated the Maritime Security Initiative of Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP) to abide by the international obligations and secure the national interests in parallel (Pakistan Today, 2018). These patrols aim to guard the important choke points and maritime routes and curb any illicit activities in the sea.

Challenges for Pakistan at Sea

Pakistan is an important littoral state in IOR. Its strategic location is both a blessing and a problem as well but most important is how well it places itself in the region. Pakistan

must face a bunch of challenges in the Indian Ocean because of potential threat vis a vis India. Besides that, it must also face threats from the western side, especially the Strait of Hormuz which remains a constant bone of contention throughout the year due to the US-Iran factor. Besides all these threats, the major threats are the Indian naval build-up and blue navy aspiration that is not only confined to this region but has spread its tentacles in regions like the South China Sea (The Economic Times, 2020).

The challenges are not confined to the traditional threats only. Other aspects including the non-conventional threats like piracy, maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, etc., are also the menace that Pakistan needs to fight. Economic crunch due to maritime, coastal developments, and marine pollution are also of growing concern that needs a collective and synchronized response. The region also faces threats from its western side from the African state that has been long fighting the menace of piracy. This is a potential threat to Pakistan as well. Pakistan has actively participated in combating piracy and took part in the Combined Task Force (CTF-150). Moreover, the region also faces the threat of maritime terrorism and proxies. It came into the limelight in 2000 when US Cole was targeted by Al-Qaeda while it was refuelling in Yemen's port of Aden (BBC, 2019). In South and specifically, Pakistan maritime terrorism first became the hotspot when PNS Mehran and PNS Zulfiqar showed the intentions of the militant organizations (Shah & Hasan, 2014). These events paved way for the military organization to stand up for the defence of the countries and take some serious and proactive steps to mitigate these threats.

Conclusion

Pakistan has emerged as a very important littoral state in the Indian Ocean. That is why maritime has become a very pertinent domain in terms of security. Securing SLOC is of immense importance. For this reason, the response of PN is very significant. It is slowly and gradually building itself in all domains. It is striving to keep its relevance and it is also constantly evolving to meet the ever-increasing challenges in this realm. Furthermore, naval diplomacy in recent years has also remained praiseworthy. The rise of Indian aspirations became a metabolic factor for Pakistan which was then sufficiently countered by engaging with different states and then becoming vibrant members of different forums throughout the world. The Indian presence in the Indian Ocean and their influence have raised the competition and chances of a conflict. China too has become a very important factor in the region, busy in shaping and molding the politics. Thus, the competition and conflict seem to be unavoidable with the rise of military and naval build-up, making the region highly volatile. Furthermore, the threats are not only limited to conventional mode rather it is spread over a wide spectrum where the organizations need to be more active to counter these threats. The non-conventional threats in the region can badly impact the national interest of the nation. For this, we need to sensitize this domain and mitigate operational gaps and interoperability. We need to focus, understand, and monitor the present and future endeavours in the region with enhanced assessment and operational planning.

References

- Akhtar, R. (2017, June 15). *Reading into the Pressler amendment*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from Daily Times: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/6566/reading-into-the-pressler-amendment/>
- Ansari, U. (2017, February 15). *Pak-Navy: Epitome of Peace*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from The Nation: <https://nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2017/pak-navy-epitome-of-peace>
- Asia Military Review. (2018, November 27). *Pakistan Navy modernizes Submarine capabilities*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from Asia Military Review: <https://www.asianmilitaryreview.com/2018/11/pakistan-navy-modernises-submarine-capabilities/>
- Azmie, S. (2019, June 28). *Pakistan Navy's Evolving Maritime Security Concept*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from The Nation: <https://nation.com.pk/28-Jun-2019/pakistan-navy-s-evolving-maritime-security-concept>
- Bano, S. (2020, July 29). PNS Yarmook: An Upgrade for Pakistan's Naval Capability. *Modern Diplomacy*. Retrieved from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/07/29/pns-yarmook-an-upgrade-for-pakistans-naval-capability/>
- BBC. (2019, January 6). *USS Cole bomber died in Yemen air strike - Trump*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from British Broadcast: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46776626>
- Belt & Road News. (2020, February 8). *Belt & Road Initiative Energises Global Construction Industry*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://www.beltandroad.news/2020/02/08/belt-road-initiative-energises-global-construction-industry/>
- Buzan, B. (1991). *Peoples, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in Post-Cold War Era*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- CGTN. (2018, August 19). China's Belt and Road Initiative at Five Years I: Domestic Impact. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AemOwjDLtQ>
- EurAsian Times Desk. (2019, September 2). *India-Pakistan Dispute Over Sir Creek Intensifies As Pakistan Deploys Additional Battalions Of Marines*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://eurasianimes.com/india-pakistan-dispute-over-sir-creek-intensifies-as-pakistan-deploys-additional-battalions-of-marines/>
- Freedman, L. (1983). Book Review: Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (London: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983, 262pp., £14.50). *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 12(3), 287-289. Retrieved 11 22, 2021, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/03058298830120030807>
- Hafeez, Q. t. (2019, January 16). Pakistan Securing its Maritime Interest and CPEC. *South Asia Journal*. Retrieved from <http://southasiajournal.net/pakistan-securing-its-maritime-interest-and-cpec%ef%bb%bf/>

- Nawaz, A. (2020, September 7). *The Role Of Pakistan's Naval Strategy In Balancing The Strategic Paradigm Of The Region*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from Modern Diplomacy: <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/09/07/the-role-of-pakistans-naval-strategy-in-balancing-the-strategic-paradigm-of-the-region/>
- Pakistan Today. (2018, December 21). *President Launches First Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/12/21/president-launches-first-maritime-doctrine-of-pakistan/>
- Pakistan Today. (2018, September 9). *Regional Maritime Security Patrols (RMSP)*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from Pakistan Today: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/06/03/regional-maritime-security-patrols-rmsp/>
- Shah, S., & Hasan, S. S. (2014, November 11). Pakistan Arrests Al-Qaeda Militants Ahead of Alleged Planned Raid on Naval Dockyard. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistan-arrests-al-qaeda-operatives-ahead-of-planned-naval-dockyard-1418334599>
- The Dawn Staff Reporter. (2016, September 6). *Pakistan Developing Maritime Doctrine*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from The Dawn: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1282336>
- The Dawn Staff Reporter. (2018, December 21). *Alvi Unveils Pakistan's First Maritime Doctrine*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from The Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1452739>
- The Economic Times. (2020, September 9). *India Is Interested in Navigation in the South China Sea Region: the Philippines*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-is-interested-in-navigation-in-the-s-china-sea-region-philippines/articleshow/76825668.cms>
- The Nation. (2020, September 9). *Pak Navy Takes over Command of Combined Task Force 151 for the 8th Time*. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://nation.com.pk/12-Nov-2016/pak-navy-takes-over-command-of-combined-task-force-151-for-the-8th-time>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from UN.ORG: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf