

## Tri-Polar Competition in the Indian Ocean and Role of Pakistan

Syed Husnain Haider Ph.D Scholar at Minhaj University Lahore,

Email ID husnainofficialdoc@gmail.com

### Abstract

*The Indian Ocean is one of the world's largest bodies of water. It accounts for almost one-quarter of the world's oceans. East and west are connected by an ocean that runs across the Asian continent and connects the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Regional and international powers are interested in the Indian Ocean area. The goal of American policy is to prevent China from being ruled by a government or coalition of governments that may be dangerous to the United States of America. At the very least, India's participation in the revival of the Quad seems to be motivated by a desire for improved collaboration. Pakistan should be cautious while dealing with bilateral relations with these two crucial countries. In this regard, the United States looks uninterested. The interests of major nations in this area are enormous. It's no secret that Pakistan pays close attention to what's going on in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Pakistan is included since it is a coastline country on the Indian Ocean. Pakistan and the Arabian Sea have a combined coastline of about 1,000 kilometers. It has a substantial quantity of marine economic resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which borders the Gulf of Mexico on the western coast. Chinese efforts such as "One Belt, One Road" and the "China Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) have increased Pakistan's reliance on the Indian Ocean.*

**Keywords:** Strategy, Economy, CPEC, EZZ, OBOR

### Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the dynamics of global politics are quickly changing, and countries are taking the right steps to protect their national interests to deal with the problems that are coming up. They might fight in the Indian Ocean, which this article is going to talk about. China has been getting help from small South Asian countries that are close to the Indian Ocean to keep its economic interests safe. When China has bases in these states, they form a "string of pearls" that encircles India. China has an advantage in the South Asian market because smaller countries rely on it for economic and commercial help. In Sri Lanka, China got a 99-year lease on the Hambantota seaport. This was an example of the debt trap that China has. American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan says that "whoever dominates the Indian Ocean will conquer Asia, and the fate of trade through this area is in their hands (Gupta, 2006)."

Some of the world's most important chokepoints are in the Indian Ocean. They are both in the northwest part of the area. China relies on the Malacca Strait, which connects the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. The Djibouti Strait, or Bab el Mandeb, connects the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea. This is the third major choke point. Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands and Obock in Djibouti are both important military bases that need to be kept in good

shape. India and Australia, the third most powerful country in the Indian Ocean, are now working together to make sure that the two countries stay safe (Perwita, 2020).

### **Objectives**

- To view the tri-polar game in Indian ocean and also explores the role of Pakistan.
- This article explains the Indian Grand Strategy for IOR and Asia Pivot Strategy of U.S.
- This study also describes the importance of CPEC and BRI for rebalancing the competition in IOR.

### **China Strategic Policies towards the Indian Ocean**

#### **String of Pearls**

The western and eastern parts of the string can be cut apart. In Djibouti, China has set up a military station in the Obock region. This means that China can keep an eye on the Bab el Mandab region and the western Indian Ocean from there. The next stop on this route is Gwadar, the most important deep harbor in the region. For India, China-Pakistani naval cooperation is one of the most important things to watch out for. This Pakistani port is both a commercial port and a naval observation point (Shahzad, 2019). The Feydhoo and Finolhu islands in the Maldives are the third and last main base of operations for the group of people who live there. The port of Chittagong in Bangladesh is the eastern half of the string. Coco Island in Myanmar is a very important place to set up camp.

The existence of China's Kyaukpyu commercial port in Myanmar makes the string even more important. This port will bring oil from Myanmar to China, cutting China's dependence on the Malacca Strait (Shahzad, 2019). In addition to Kuantan, Malaysia, and Maura, Mauritania, there are a lot of big bases all over the world (Brunei). The fate of the world is decided by the rivers that surround it. By having so much oil move around, the Persian Gulf is even more important as a strategic point. The maritime routes that connect it to other parts of the world help make this happen smoothly (Shahzad, 2021).

#### **Maritime Silk Route**

People in China have long wanted to bring back the ancient Silk Road, which connects South Asian countries to European markets. President Xi Jinping has been trying for a long time to do this. If you think it's a debt trap, you're wrong.

#### **Wings of Sea**

"Sea Wings" is a project that China started in December 2019. It has put underwater autonomous submarines and research ships in the Indian Ocean. These submarines can pick up on electronic signals sent by Indian warships and submarines (Nazir, 2020).

#### **India Grand Strategy for the Indian Ocean**

To fight China's pearl-string strategy, India is also encircling the country. Indians built the Chabahar port in Iran as a way to lessen the impact of Gwadar. The goal hasn't been met yet. A fifth naval command center will be built in Andaman and Nicobar Islands to keep

China at a distance. This will also help protect the Bay of Bengal. This plan also has Indian bases in places like Singapore, Indonesia, Oman, and Seychelles (Smaranayake, 2012).

### **Double Hook Strategy**

With help from France, Australia, Japan, and the United States, India's naval forces came up with the "twin fishhook" strategy to fight China's growing military power. The Diego Garcia naval base, as well as the Andaman Islands, are to the east of Sabang, Indonesia, which is in Indonesia. Following a trip through Oman's Duqm base and Seychelles' Assumption base, the western hook would end up at Iran's Chabahar port (Javaid, 2020).

### **Military Modernization and Alliances**

As a result of the nuclear agreement being signed in 2008, the US can now send military weapons to India from the US. It was in 2018 that India's ground warfare doctrine came up with new ideas for how to fight with both Pakistan and China (northern border). Under the new ground warfare plan, more units work together. There is no way to overstate how important India and China are in the Indian Ocean (Naomi, 2021). In this great game, the United States makes the rivalry even stronger. As a way to protect other trade routes, India and the U.S don't like China's growth in South Asia as much as they used to. As a response to China's military moves into Indian Ocean waters, India is modernizing its military. The United States, on the other hand, backs this.

### **Re-Balancing Indian Ocean**

In the Indian Ocean area, three big countries are fighting for power. India, China, and the United States each have their geostrategic framework for looking at the region, which means that at the very least, there will be a lot of rivalry or conflict. There are two ways India looks at the world: "Act East" and "Think West." This way, India looks at the world both ways. It is part of China's Silk Road maritime trade route. The BRI is an extension of that route, too. The United States has two main Indo-Pacific strategies: the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and the "Asia-Pacific Rebalance Strategy". Both of these strategies are important to the United States (Burgess, 2015).

Southern (Dis) Comfort will be a series of events in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi, Beijing, and Washington will keep fighting in the Indian Ocean. Because of the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy, which has a bipolar vision of the world, is not the same as this vision (US vs. China and India against. India). Each country has its history, economy, and geography when it comes to the Indian Ocean. They disagree about the Middle East, the role of Pakistan in the region, and how military and non-military foreign policy tools should be used to get things done. It's possible that any of these countries' plans for the Indian Ocean could be put on hold by a geo-strategic split. When it comes to strategy, the Chinese integration plan may give it an advantage over the U.S. and India's less integrated plans (Kosteka, 2015).

### **India Taking Part in the Indian Ocean**

From Africa to Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean can be seen. India is in the middle of the ocean and can be seen from the African coast. In 2015, Indian P.M Mr. Narendra Modi said that "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) was a Top-level way to show what India wants. This is how India's External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, talked about

this area in 2017: It goes west from the Gulf of Aden to the port of Chabahar in southwest Iran, then east to Burma and Thailand (Baqai, 2021). India, for example, sees Pakistan as an enemy rather than a partner in its regional cooperation strategy. Even though New Delhi is worried about fighting Beijing, the country is trying to separate its history of territorial and border conflicts with China from its larger policy for the Indian Ocean, which it sees as a whole. The Indian Ocean has been a big part of Indian policy since the 1990s (Yung, 2010).

When India became an independent country in 1947, it was focused on protecting its borders from Pakistan and China, leaving little time or energy to look outside its borders. To deal with the big economic crisis and the loss of its most important strategic partner, the USSR, India had to move a lot farther away in the early 1990s to find new ways to help itself (Wroe, 2010). New Delhi was the first to start the "Look East" policy, which has been very important to India's economic and geopolitical rise. As India's economy grows, it needs more energy, and it wants to make sure it has enough of it from countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Oman and Iran (Erickson, 2010). These countries are also home to a lot of people from India who work there and send money back home. India has changed its strategy over the last 25 years from one that was more military to the more economic one.

To that end, the administration in New Delhi has put a lot of emphasis on commercial investment, infrastructure development, and international relations. India's economy and politics will continue to grow if it has good trade and commercial ties with other countries, as well as if it imports energy. As China grows its military presence in the IOR, military, and security concerns are becoming more and more important. A lot of attention is being paid to the Indian Navy's efforts to fight the Chinese Navy (Nazir, 2020). In most cases, the military won't play a big role if there isn't a direct hit. Because India's military policy is very much controlled by its army, it's hard for the US to work with India as a strategic partner in the Indian Ocean. Many people think that the Indian navy and air force, as well as the Indian press and think tanks, don't do much to defend themselves.

The US will keep trying to get more weapons sales and new partnerships quickly, but Indian caution is expected to be the norm. How long it will take the Indian government to follow through on promises to improve ties with the US and modernize its military shows how long it will take. Finally, the two partners have different views on the subject because they prefer safety over profit. The US is still looking at the Indian Ocean Region through a military lens. India, on the other hand, is looking to expand its economic presence in the IOR.

### **Chinese aims and Developments in IOR**

China takes a more complete look at things. It thinks of South Asia and the Indian Ocean as part of its Maritime Silk Road, which is a trade and infrastructure corridor that connects China's coast to other parts of Asia and the world. People in China are working on two parts of the BRI: the sea Silk Road and the land-based Belt and Road Initiative. According to Chinese thought, this area includes all of Southeast Asia, as well as the Arabian Peninsula and the coast of Africa, which includes China's coast. For example, China has a much bigger geo-economic and geostrategic strategy for China and the rest of the world than India. The

Silk Road Economic Belt connects Western China, Central Asia, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Russia (Holmes, 2008).

This part of the Belt and Road Initiative is called the Silk Road Economic Belt. In Europe, both axes come to an end. China's Belt and Road Initiative seems to be its most ambitious plan for taking over Eurasia. A wide range of economic, diplomatic, and military efforts are all driven by Beijing's broad geopolitical vision. This includes efforts in the South China Sea, as well as in Africa and the Middle East. The original goals of the Belt and Road Initiative were trade and business, not military ones. Beijing is worried about the safety of Xinjiang and Tibet, and the project aims to address these concerns while also increasing trade and improving China's internal infrastructure. A military facility in Djibouti shows that military concerns have become more important recently, as shown by the building of the facility in the country (Brewster, 2014).

These things aren't as important as China's economy and stability. Beijing and New Delhi should be the main focus of regional policy when it comes to trade and business. China sees Pakistan as an important part of the BRI, which connects the maritime and continental parts. India sees Pakistan as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy. They think Pakistan should be cut off from the rest of the world because it backs terrorism. As part of the BRI, one of the most important parts is the CPEC (Burgess, 2015). It is a land connection from China to the Arabian Sea, and it helps move goods and services between the two countries. Since China has already invested a lot in Pakistan's energy and transportation infrastructure, like Gwadar in Sindh, its \$60 billion investment is a clear sign of what it wants to do. China is giving a lot of importance to Pakistan in its regional policy, even though some people don't think some of these programs will work in the long run.

### **U.S Strategy in IOR**

Based on more than 70 years of US leadership and presence in East Asia, the US strategy in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region is part of a larger "Asia-Pacific strategy". There was a "rebalance," or "pivot," to Asia in 2011 as a result of this strategy. The Indo-Pacific Strategy is a natural next step in that direction. To understand why this is important, you need to know that the policy ties together the growing US-India relationship with the greater Asia-Pacific region. Increasing economic, commercial, and diplomatic links between Indian Ocean nations and countries in Southeast and East Asia may be seen in this. In contrast, the Indo-Pacific Strategy encompasses a large area (Naomi, 2021). The India-Pakistan border to Antarctica is the starting point. As a consequence, the United States excludes Pakistan, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, and the African coast from its conception of the Indo-Pacific. The United States has worked tirelessly for the last 15 years to remove the gap between India and Pakistan. For starters, unlike China, the United States does not consider Pakistan an integral element of its anti-terrorism strategy in South Asia (Naomi, 2021).

This perspective views Iran as an issue in the Middle East or Africa, together with the Arabian Peninsula and the African coastline. The method in which this industry has operated has been dramatically reshaped by energy, counterterrorism, and other security-related challenges. America's long-term commitment to Afghanistan, its strategic interests in the

Middle East, and its global position make this true. In contrast, the viewpoints of India and China are opposites. CENTCOM and Indo-Pacific Command (INDO-PACOM) have been two different military commands in the United States for more than 40 years now. This command has been responsible for over a portion of the African coastline (AFRICOM). India and China were able to achieve this because they were better at integrating geopolitical considerations into their concepts (Burgess, 2015).

The United States' reliance on military power is in part due to the country's rigorous adherence to the military's geographic description while formulating its Indo-Pacific Strategy. A disparity in resources and effort favors the military over the civilian sector of the United States. That the Indo-Pacific Strategy is growing increasingly militarized is terrible for everyone, according to *War on the Rocks* by Jean-Loup Samaan. Subsequently, it seems that the administration is placing an increasing emphasis on military might. To counter China's influence on Asia's smaller nations, a collection of Asian countries came together to establish a framework for trade, commerce, and economics. Even though the Asia-Pacific portion spanned South Asia and the Indian Ocean, there were no firm underpinnings to keep it in place (Maitra, 2018).

There have been frequent changes in key posts due to a lack of diplomats in the United States, and other nations doubt the United States' ability to remain a global leader. Consequently, the United States has no choice except to use military action in dealing with these nations. Because of a lengthy history of military strength and a desire to counter China's expanding influence, this strategy has become a militarized one. Defeating Chinese investments in infrastructure and economic cooperation would be more difficult for the United States if this were the case. As a result, China would be able to make political inroads in countries that are interested in working with China. The United States and China are currently entangled in a trade conflict as a result of this military posture. As a result, relations between the two nations have become even more hostile than before (Nazir, 2020).

### **Role of Pakistan in Tri-Polar Competition**

Pakistan has a good reputation for having good geography, but its strategy for the Indian Ocean seems to be coming to a halt. Each of these two projects aims to connect China's western Xinjiang province to Pakistan's southern belt. The first is a land economic Silk Route, and the second is a sea Silk Route. They both go through China. BRI used to be called "One Belt and One Road," but now it's known as "One Road." As far back as history can remember, a network of roads known as the Silk Road connected Central Asia with Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan (Shahzad, 2019). Roman and Byzantine Empires, as well as the Tang Dynasty in China, were early examples of a term called "globalization."

Trade between countries in the same region is being held back by economic differences, but the new Silk Road aims to close that gap. The collaboration between China and Pakistan has been seen as a sign that Pakistan has joined China in the upcoming (new) cold war. This new Cold War between the United States and China has been the most important thing for India, Japan, and the United States to worry about. Graham Allison's description of the 'Thucydides Trap' is very accurate when it comes to the US-China situation. As Foreign

Policy quotes him in 2017, "War almost always happens when one big power threatens another." But it doesn't have to happen, he says. The fight between the United States and China has moved to the Indian Ocean after this announcement. In realist terms, an established power uses regional states to keep or fight off countries that aren't like them. Through India, the United States has done a good job of balancing its overseas investments (Nazir, 2020).

During the IMSS, India says that it is a "Net Security Provider," which is what they do. All of India's goals after the successful deterrent patrol of the SSBNArihant point to a ratio of interests that could make it hard for them to work together to grow the region. This could make it hard for them to build a shared base of regional growth. When it comes to regional projects like the IORA, BIMSTEC, SAGAR-Security, and Growth for All, Pakistan and India compete with each other. It was Modi's first official trip after being re-elected (Perwita, 2020). He went to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. A naval base with Japan will be built in Djibouti, Sri Lanka, and the Assumption Islands, Seychelles, he told us today at the meeting. There is a good reason why governments like the United States, France, and others want to set up military outposts in remote places. The Indian Ocean has become more militarized because India is a big player there, but that only makes it more dangerous, this means that Pakistan can't follow the Indian Ocean's currents because it doesn't have the right structures in place to do so (Naomi, 2021).

Xi Jinping went to India and Imran Khan went to China, but there's a hidden message or a contradiction. There is no reason why trade and war can't go together. Policy in the Indian Ocean is a Panikkar version of the Monroe Doctrine, which is why it is orange in color. When Pakistan tried to connect with countries in East Africa, Mauritius, and Southeast Asia instead of the Indian Ocean, it didn't come up with a clear strategy. Panikkar's books about the Indian Ocean, which are as important to India as they are to Pakistan, could help Pakistan change its focus (Liu Jinxen, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan's cooperation with China has been seen as a sign that the country has joined China in the upcoming (new) cold war. Each of these two projects aims to connect China's western Xinjiang province to Pakistan's southern belt. Trade between countries in the same region is being held back by economic differences, but the new Silk Road aims to close that gap. There is a good reason why governments like the United States, France, and others want to set up military outposts in remote places. It only helps that India is a big part of the Indian Ocean. Pakistan hasn't been able to come up with a comprehensive Indian Ocean policy because it doesn't have a plan in place. A lot of people say that the United States wants to be replaced in the region by China, which is expanding its state-run economy and reorganizing the region in its favor.

Defense-oriented Pakistan's maritime policy shows how quickly changes can be made. A summit on the Indian Ocean was held in November 2017. People from Australia, India, Japan, and the United States came together to talk about the Indian Ocean. When countries are worried about China's possible threat to their interests, they form a group called the Quad. According to some experts, trade, investment, and the building of new infrastructure

will set the stage for a new Indian Ocean great game. Some people think China is willing to have more power over India's security in exchange for better Chinese security. Julian Zelizer, an American actor, says that the United States needs to change its economic and development policy in Asia to fight China's growing power. There must be changes made to the US's As, he says. Pakistan wants to keep the Indian Ocean calm and safe. There are a lot of things the United States of America wants to make sure happen in the sea. Some people in the U.S. are worried about China's new policies and investments in Gwadar because the city has a good economy. In his study, researchers look into how important CPEC and Pakistan's ports are.

## References

- Asian Defence Journal*. (2005). Interview with Admiral Arun Prakash, Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy, October, p. 22.
- Baqai, H. (2021). The Tripolar Great Game in the IOR Competition, Cooperation or Acute Confrontation. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 4(2).
- Brar, B. (2003). SAARC: If functionalism has failed, will realism work?. *South Asian Survey*, 10(1), 31-41.
- Brewster, D. (2014b). Beyond the string of pearls: Is there a Sino-Indian Security Dilemma in the Indian Ocean? *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 10(2), 133–149. doi:10.1080/19480881.2014.922350 [Taylor & Francis Online],
- Brewster, D. (2014c, November 26). Sri Lanka tilts to China. *East Asia Forum*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/11/26/sri-lanka-tilts-to-beijing>.
- Burgess, S. (2015). The US pivot to Asia and renewal of the US–India strategic partnership. *Comparative Strategy*, 34(4), 367-379.
- D'Souza, S. M. (2009). Afghanistan in South Asia: Regional Cooperation or Competition?. *South Asian Survey*, 16(1), 23-42.
- Erickson, A. S., & Collins, G. B. (2010). China's oil security pipe dream. *Naval War College Review*, 63(2), 91–92.
- Gupta, A. (2006). US. India. China: Assessing Tripolarity. *China Report*, 42(1), 69-83.
- Hauck, L. S., Trombini, M. E., Jorge, M., & Liu, Y. Democracy, Development and Security: Looking East to Understand the Indo-Pacific. *INDO-PACIFIC*, 173.
- Holmes, J. R., & Yoshihara, T. (2008). China's naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31, 367–394. doi:10.1080/01402390802024700 [Taylor & Francis Online].
- Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation under the security dilemma. *World Politics*, 30, 167–214. doi:10.2307/2009958.
- Kaplan, R. D. (2009). Center stage for the twenty-first century. *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 16–29.



- Kong, B. (2010, September). The geopolitics of the Myanmar-China oil and gas pipelines. In M. E. Herberg (Ed.), *Pipeline politics in Asia: Energy nationalism and energy markets* (pp. 55–66). (NPB Special Report No.2).
- Kostecka, D. J. (2015). The Chinese Navy's emerging support network in the Indian Ocean. *China Brief*, 10(15), 3–5.
- Liu Jinxen. (2013, November 16). China's bridgehead strategy and Yunnan province. *East by Southeast*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastbysoutheast.com/chinas-bridgehead-strategy-Yunnan-province/#comments>
- Maitra, R. (2018, October 19). India bids to rule the waves. *Asia Times*.
- Nadeem, S., & Askari, M. U. Strategic Maritime Environment in Indian Ocean: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan.
- Naomi, S. S., Zaidi, S. M. S., & Saud, A. (2021). The great polarized game in the Indian Ocean: Options for US, China and Pakistan. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 5(2), 236-249.
- Nazir, R. (2020). Development Planning or Planning for the Loyal Partisans: A Case of Annual Development Plans in Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Business & Economics*, 12(1), 1-25.
- Perrett, B. (2011, October 14). China expands its military reach. *Aviation Week & Space Technology*. p. 20.
- Perwita, A. A. (2020). The Implementation of People's Republic of China's Maritime Security Strategy to Protect Its Energy Security in the Indian Ocean Region (2015-2019). *Jurnal Asia Pacific Studies*, 4(2), 86-99.
- Shahzad, S. M. (2016). Development of Shipping Sector in Pakistan: Options and Proposed Strategy. *Journal of Political Studies*, 23(2).
- Shahzad, S. M. (2019). Gwadar Port Growing Beyond Economic Glory. *Int. J. of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 7.
- Shahzad, S. M. (2021). The string of Pearls: Chinese Economic Strategy Concerning the IOR Amid Growing Security Dilemma, with an Emphasis on the CPEC. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)*, 41(2), 399-408.
- Smaranayake, N. (2012, September). The long littoral project: Bay of Bengal. *Center for Naval Analyses*.
- Storey, I. (2006). China's Malacca dilemma. *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, 6(8).
- Sun, Y. (2012). China's strategic Misjudgement in Myanmar. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 31(1), 73–96.

- US Congressional Research Service. (2014, 5 August). *China naval modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy capabilities – Background and issues for congress*. Washington D.C: Congressional Research Service, 2014.
- US Department of Defense. (2012). *Annual report to congress: Military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China*. Washington D.C: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2012.
- US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Report. (2014, March 14). China's Navy extends its combat reach to the Indian Ocean. Retrieved August 30, 2014, from <http://www.uscc.gov/Research/china%E2%80%99s-navy-extends-its-combat-reach-Indian-ocean>
- Wroe, D. (2014, February 15). China's military might is Australia's new defense reality. *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Yung, C. D., & Rustici, R. with Kardon, I & Wiseman, J. 2010. *China's out of area naval operations: Case studies, trajectories, obstacles, and potential solutions*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press.
- Zeenews.com*. (2009, August 13). China afraid of India's naval presence in the Ocean. *Zeenews.com*.