



## Impacts of INDO US Maritime Cooperation on Pakistan



Sahibzada Adil Munir \*

Shahbaz Ahmed †

Warisha Rashid ‡

**Abstract:** *Pakistan's marine security concerns are crucial to maintaining peace in the Indian Ocean area. Beyond its strategic importance in the great power dispute among the USA, India, and China, the Indian Ocean is also a vital commercial shipping lane for international trade. As 95 percent of Pakistan's trade relies on this sea route, the country is immediately affected by any occurrences in the Indian Ocean. We must maintain dependable maritime security since a robust navy is essential for conducting business. It is also a vital communication conduit throughout the world. Pakistan's marine security concerns are crucial to maintaining peace in the Indian Ocean area. Beyond its strategic importance in the great power dispute among the USA, India, and China, the Indian Ocean is also a vital commercial shipping lane for international trade.*

**Key Words:** : Maritime Security, Indian Ocean, Sea Routes, Trade Routes

### Introduction

Pakistan's marine security concerns hold significant implications for regional peace and stability in the Indian Ocean area. Beyond serving as a critical theater in the geopolitical rivalry among major powers such as the USA, India, and China, the Indian Ocean also functions as a vital commercial shipping lane essential for international trade. Given that approximately 95 percent of Pakistan's trade relies on this maritime route, the country is acutely sensitive to any disruptions in the Indian Ocean. Hence, ensuring dependable maritime security is imperative not only for sustaining economic activities but also for upholding peace and stability in the region. This study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of Pakistan's marine security concerns, exploring the strategic, security,

economic, and diplomatic implications thereof. (Ahmed [2021](#))

This paper would explore the research questions i.e. (i) What are the primary security challenges faced by Pakistan in the maritime domain, particularly in the Indian Ocean, and how do they impact the country's national security posture? (ii) How do the evolving naval capabilities and strategic ambitions of neighboring states, especially India, contribute to the maritime security dynamics in the Indian Ocean, and what are the implications for Pakistan's security and regional stability? (iii) What are the economic and diplomatic ramifications of Pakistan's marine security concerns, particularly in light of the Indo-US alliance and the increasing strategic competition in the Indian Ocean region?

The findings suggest that the Pakistan confronts diverse security challenges in the maritime

\* Graduate, Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

† M.Phil Scholar, Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡ PhD Scholar, Department of Strategic Studies, Air University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

domain, including drug trafficking, piracy, illegal migration, and terrorism, which underscore the criticality of robust maritime security measures for national defense and economic prosperity.

The maritime buildup and blue-water naval ambitions of India, coupled with its strategic alignment with the USA, pose significant security implications for Pakistan, necessitating a recalibration of its naval capabilities and defense strategies to maintain a credible deterrence posture.

The economic ramifications of Pakistan's maritime security concerns are profound, potentially disrupting maritime trade routes threatening the country's economic stability and growth. Furthermore, the evolving diplomatic environment especially between India and the US. the agreement calls for a restructuring of Pakistan's foreign policy.

Overall, this study seeks to provide insights into the complex drivers of Pakistan's maritime security concerns and their wider implications for regional peace, security, and economic prosperity in the Indian Ocean region in the 19th century. Maintaining maritime sovereignty, protecting the sea lanes of communication (SLOC), building naval capabilities, and combating India's blue-water naval ambitions. Development of maritime capabilities for Pakistan's economic growth and national security. Protection and safety of energy highways, protect commerce and access channels by securing several choke points. Explorations of sea-based resources in Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone, the development of Gwadar and the exploration of resources in the Indus Delta region and the ongoing efforts to do so can be seen as a manifestation of Pakistan's growing marine interests. In terms of defending its interests in the area and maintaining maritime security, Pakistan faces a number of consequences as a result of the Indo-US naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, including a strategic imbalance and security issues. (Singh, [2023](#))

### **Security Implications**

---

In the maritime realm, Pakistan faces security

challenges such as drug trafficking, piracy, illegal migration, and terrorism. Ensuring peace and stability in the Indian Ocean and safeguarding this energy and trade corridor benefits not just Pakistan but also China, the US, and India. Despite their knowledge that collaboration reaps more benefits, regional actors find it challenging to accomplish common goals due to mutual distrust. (Khalid, [2019](#)). India's hegemonic attitude in the Indian Ocean presents problems to Pakistan due to a history of antagonism, several armed wars, and unresolved issues including the Kashmir dispute, foreign military threats, and New Delhi's evaluations of Pakistan's security (Khalid, [2019](#)).

It is reasonable to argue that, in the context of international relations, South Asia is unique in that there is always a chance of a military confrontation, even in the face of nuclear weapons. India's efforts to develop a sea-based second strike capability have alarmed Pakistan, which has expressed serious concerns about them. India and the United States are now working together to improve India's nuclear technology. In order to maintain a credible nuclear deterrence, Pakistan is thus forced to get a sea-based second-strike capability. Pakistan's national security policy, which aims to preserve peace and a balance of power in the Indian Ocean area, continues to heavily rely on the Navy. This is consistent with the national security policy as a whole, which highlights the need of full-spectrum deterrence. The conventional superiority and navy growth of India provide a further challenge to Pakistan's maritime security. The Indian navy, which is the fifth biggest in the world, is made up of a powerful force that includes modern warships with missile systems, an aircraft carrier, cutting-edge submarines, and other naval vessels. (Noor, [2023](#))

### **Strategic Instability and Arms race**

---

India wants to become a global power, which is why it is working to build a blue-water fleet and have a strong presence in the Indian Ocean and other areas. The enhancement of marine capabilities may be ascribed to a purposeful alignment with the United States and its associated states, driven by the objective of

moderating the increasing influence of China. The build-up is intended to obstruct China's efforts to establish a foothold in the Indian Ocean. Given its strong naval capabilities, India has the potential to become a major player in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal. All nations located along the Indian Ocean's coastline are potentially affected by this circumstance because India possesses the ability to impede access to the region's resources, hinder communication channels, and restrict freedom of movement (Sobia Hanif and Muhammad Khan, [2018](#)).

The main reason for worry is that India has said that it intends to seek nuclearization of the Indian Ocean. All coastal states are seriously threatened by this, with Pakistan being especially at risk. Pakistan's decision to establish a nuclear triad in order to preserve a potent nuclear deterrent against India may be viewed as a dangerous move that exacerbates its security worries regarding India. The strategic equilibrium that now exists between India and Pakistan is expected to be significantly impacted by the planned nuclear upgrades of the Indian navy. In order to rebalance the deterrent dynamics between the two countries, Pakistan could have to work toward developing a nuclear naval capability. Under this situation, military capabilities in the Indian Ocean area can escalate unnecessarily. It is debatable if the idea of a second-strike capacity promoting strategic stability makes sense in light of the India-Pakistan conflict. The spread of nuclear weapons in South Asia is more likely the product of conventional and sub conventional conflicts that have the potential to turn into nuclear wars than it is of a premeditated nuclear assault. (Das, [2023](#))

It might be claimed that an Indian SSBN would not materially improve Pakistan's deterrent capabilities in light of the aforementioned considerations. Pakistan uses its nuclear weapons as a strategic tool to offset India's growing military superiority in conventional warfare and to thwart any possible deployment of nuclear weapons in a preemptive manner in reaction to Indian invasions that would follow the Cold Start doctrine. Neither nation's fundamental problems are addressed by the

development of a naval nuclear capability. As a result, it is impossible to forecast when deterrence will stabilize. (Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, [2018](#)).

Conversely, India's nuclear-capable fleet might spark an arms race. The Indian trio is putting pressure on Pakistan to acquire its own conventional and nuclear seafaring naval capabilities. One analyst believes that states will be less inclined to engage in an arms race if there are no incentives for first use. This change can be ascribed to the attainment of strategic stability, in which case there is no longer any potential military advantage to the placement of more nuclear weapons or systems. Pakistan will remain qualified for first use incentives as long as India persists in pursuing tactics akin to Cold Start or looks for ways to exploit gaps for limited war. Building a sizable SSBN force during the Cold War did not offer security to any side. Despite possessing an assured second strike capability, both superpowers continued to develop new ground and air-based delivery systems, advanced missiles, and upgraded warhead designs. India and Pakistan are likely to keep building up their conventional arsenals, developing new nuclear delivery methods, and improving their nuclear warheads even if they are able to acquire assured second-strike capability. (Shahzad, [2019](#)).

The granting of the export control waiver to India has encouraged tighter bilateral relations between India and the United States. With this action, India will be able to fulfill the goal set out by its leadership to promote indigenous manufacturing through the Make in India program by fortifying its domestic defense industry. It is anticipated that the aforementioned development will have a major impact on the current discrepancies between Pakistan and India. Since India is developing a two-tiered ballistic missile defense system, it needs cutting-edge technologies to improve the propulsion capabilities of its interceptor missiles. (Haidar, [2023](#))

The goal of the STA-1 deal is to assist India in enhancing the capabilities of its cruise, ballistic, and surface-to-surface missiles. India is making a concerted effort to join ASEAN. Iran

would become the primary nuclear-armed naval force in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) if it were to successfully acquire an Aircraft Carrier Strike Group (ASSC) in light of its continuous testing of nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). (Saeed & Javaid, 2017). The growth of STA-1 is concerning with regard to Pakistan. Pakistan has been at the center of Indian naval achievements in the Indian Ocean area. With India now able to more easily acquire and transfer technology from Western nations, the STA-1 designation will help them counter Chinese encroachment in the Indian Ocean region and effectively address security concerns pertaining to Pakistan.

India may threaten Pakistan by using its naval maneuvers or drills. Furthermore, it is well acknowledged that India outperforms Pakistan in all domains, including naval strategy. An attack might happen at any time in an anarchic society. We now know that each nation's right to self-determination depends on what every other nation does (Bano, 2020). The U.S. Department of Defense's marine security projects now have budgetary permission from the Indian government. The goals of these programs aim to improve US partners' capacities in the Indo-Pacific area. It is anticipated that President Trump's \$20 billion purchase of 24 multifunctional MH 60R Seahawk maritime helicopters during his February 2020 visit to India will strengthen India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities. 2018 saw the successful conclusion of India's first nuclear-powered submarine deployment. Conversely, Pakistan continues to lag behind in terms of submarine advancements. Pakistan is now concerned about the balance of power as a result of the imbalance.

India effectively used nuclear submarines in 2019 as a part of its strategic plans. Reducing Pakistan's influence is one of the main goals of this initiative, which might tip the scales of power in the Indian Ocean area. The Pakistani Navy will remain close to the Makraan coast and will not be considered a major player in the Indian Ocean power structure because of the Indian Navy's overwhelming supremacy in all three dimensions. (Tourangbam, 2024)

New Delhi has a strategic edge because of the disparity in conventional naval power between the two South Asian players. US sanctions on Pakistan throughout the 1990s undermined Islamabad's pre-1990s perceived naval edge. New Delhi improved both the quantity and quality of its naval capabilities during this time. The Indian Ocean Region's naval equilibrium has been upset by New Delhi's pursuit of a naval-based second strike capability. It remains impossible to completely rule out the possibility that a significant naval difference between India and Pakistan could cause instability in the region given the ongoing discussions surrounding the likelihood of a potential armed conflict, whether on a smaller or larger scale, between the capitals of New Delhi and Islamabad. (ali, 2020).

### **Economic implications for Pakistan**

Pakistan's economy would be significantly impacted by the India-US cooperation. Arms racing will exacerbate the nation's already severe and unprecedented inflation, which is already causing a major economic catastrophe. To improve the general well-being of its citizens, Pakistan must allocate a sizeable percentage of its budget on social infrastructure and services. Nevertheless, the transfer of resources to military uses would increase the strain on an already unstable economy and social infrastructure. Pakistan is considered one of the major littoral states in the Indian Ocean area, mostly because of its long coastline, which stretches over 1050 kilometers. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean plays a crucial role in Pakistan's economic and commercial activity, making it even more significant in this regard. More than 90% of Pakistan's foreign trade is based on its reliance on the Indian Ocean for its oil imports. The majority of these operations take place inside the port of Karachi, which is vulnerable because of several emerging dangers in the Indian Ocean, especially those related to Indian naval ambitions. (Rana, 2023)

Islamabad has not made the advancement of its marine capabilities a top priority. India is the main source of Pakistan's maritime concerns. The geopolitical struggle for hegemony between

the US, India, Japan, Australia, China, and Pakistan is the subject of this research. An appraisal of the initiatives and defenses put in place by the previously named countries is also part of the review (Latif & Zia, [2021](#)).

In the case of a war or naval conflict, India's naval superiority might potentially blockade Karachi, which may have a serious negative impact on Pakistan's economy as well as its naval and strategic standing in the area. The port of Gwadar currently handles the bulk of Pakistan's marine trade. Pakistan's economy is also stimulated by CPEC. India's maritime commerce with Pakistan would suffer if it were to impose an embargo on sea routes. The marine commerce and oceanic routes are vital to China and other landlocked governments in the region. In order to protect shipping channels, China and Pakistan are proactively stepping up their military posture in the Indian Ocean region. This is mainly being accomplished through the growth and development of Gwadar Port. (Bukhari, [2023](#))

However, given the vital role the Indian Ocean plays in facilitating the trade of oil and other resources, the United States and India share worry over China and Pakistan's possible gain of dominance in the region. The United States has around sixty percent of its naval troops stationed at sea, particularly in the Malacca Strait. (Izuyama & Kurita, [2017](#)). In addition, the space partnership aimed to improve agricultural productivity and predict climate change, allowing India to make more accurate projections for the agricultural sector and the economy as a whole. Pakistan would be forced to the periphery by such an advantage, which gives India a clear edge and produces a stark production disparity.

### **Diplomatic implications for Pakistan**

There are significant ramifications and importance for Pakistan from the bilateral relationship between the United States and India. This carries important ramifications for Pakistan's international goals. For Pakistan, the bilateral partnership between the United States and India has important ramifications. Pakistan's goals for its foreign policy are among the repercussions. Significant changes in the

geopolitical, geo-economics, and geostrategic dynamics of the area have given rise to new players. As a result, new factors will need to be considered while formulating foreign policy. Novel stakes and maybe changed ground realities might emerge. In the event that a foreign country is working with a regional power, it is expected that other foreign countries will try to bring the situation back to balance. Moreover, Pakistan must further advance its national interests. (Clarke, [2019](#)). Pakistan is working to bring several policies—its foreign policy in particular—into line with this paradigm. Because they can more successfully meet the state's geopolitical, strategic, and economic needs than the US, Russia and China might be seen as strong alternatives to the US. Recognizing the importance of China, Russia, and Pakistan in acting as counterbalances to the Indo-US alliance is crucial.

The Indo-American alliance stemmed from a common set of values and objectives. The strategic relationship is based on controlling Pakistan and countering China. Pakistan would have to reconsider its relationship with the US and look for alliance elsewhere if it believes that the Indo-US alliance poses an existential danger. Considering the rising mistrust and hostility between Washington and Islamabad, it is not beyond of the question that Islamabad might choose to pursue a concentrated eastward policy. The current state of relations between China and Pakistan reflects Islamabad's efforts to fortify its long-standing ties with Beijing. (haq, [2021](#)).

Given the state of strategic balance and the strengthening strategic partnership between the US and India, Pakistan may be persuaded to realign its foreign policy, which currently reflects a partial tilt toward China rather than a total alignment with US interests. This is becoming more and more significant in light of the tense ties between the United States and Pakistan and India. Islamabad is entangled on both sides, making the creation of new alliances necessary to bring about equilibrium. Furthermore, the East was viewed by Pakistan's foreign policy strategists as a reasonable way to bridge the nation's trust gap. Pakistan's statehood is essential to its existence. In general, if a partnership does not materialize, the state is not

obligated to it indefinitely. The increasing mutual comprehension between the military of China and Pakistan reveals a desire for existential fortification (Fatima & Maqbool, [2022](#)).

The two countries are collaborating economically as well as strategically and militarily. As evidence of their eastward alliance, they are buying military hardware from China and helping Pakistan consolidate its nuclear installations. A closer bond between China and Pakistan makes the Indo-US alliance more enraged. According to a Pentagon assessment, US concerns are centered over China's growing military might and closer ties with Pakistan, which may undermine US-India strategic cooperation in the area. China is viewed by the US as a possible threat in Southeast and South Asia as well as a strategic adversary. In response, Pakistan may cut relations with the US in favor of China if the US shows a strong desire to distance itself from Pakistan in favor of India. While this may seem like a good idea in the short run, it might not be a wise course of action in the long run. In particular, the United States maintains a strategic presence in Afghanistan. The US's interests in Afghanistan will suffer if Pakistan is abandoned in favor of India. Even though admitting this fact might be difficult, Pakistan is crucial to Afghanistan, India, and the United States' ultimate goals in the country. (Lalwani, [2023](#))

This problem is extremely important, as evidenced by the United States' statement of outrage and Afghan decision-makers' determination that Islamabad be held accountable for promoting peace in Afghanistan. (Ali, [2020](#)). The same is true for China, given how crucial Pakistan may be to achieving China's goals in Afghanistan in the end. As China will use Pakistan as a transit route and channel of connection with the rest of the globe, Pakistan's direction toward the east would therefore benefit China as well as Islamabad.

Pakistan's foreign policy radar has not been oriented eastward beyond shifting gears toward the East. Pakistan has now shown that it is prepared to improve its relations with Moscow

and has made practical steps in that direction. Moscow and Islamabad have frequently come into contact, especially during the Cold War. Despite their sporadic convergence, Moscow and Islamabad lacked a coherent and consistent foreign strategy, driven by their own national interests.

In conclusion, Pakistan's complex maritime security concerns in the Indian Ocean region are closely linked to multilateral geopolitical, economic and diplomatic dynamics as discussed in this paper, at the local level powers such as India, international alliances and growing maritime interests behind Major challenges in security.

Pakistan's security implications are profound, with naval arms races and strategic instability becoming increasingly apparent. India's pursuit of a strategic blue fleet and advanced nuclear capability poses significant challenges to Pakistan's national security calculus especially given India's naval dominance and growing cooperation with the rest of the world powers such as the US.

Moreover, Pakistan's economic ramifications are important, as its dependence on the Indian Ocean for trade and energy imports makes it vulnerable to disruptions due to geopolitical conflicts and naval constraints.

Diplomatically, Pakistan follows the Indo-U.S. the alliance identifies its changing geopolitics in the paper Pakistan's foreign policy priorities to effectively navigate the ongoing geopolitical developments including seeking strategic partnerships and new global players such as China and Russia have emphasized

Specifically, the study highlights the critical importance of maritime security for Pakistan's national interests and the need for a comprehensive security, economic and diplomatic approach to protect its maritime interests in India Emphasis on the sea region. Only a strategic model, policy prioritization and effective diplomacy can enable Pakistan to overcome difficult challenges and seize opportunities at sea to secure its position in a geopolitical a in the ongoing process

## References

- Ali, B., Rahim, N., & Ullah, M. U. (2018). GUAM, THE CENTER OF ASIA PACIFIC: a SOURCE OF GEO-STRATEGIC RIVALRY BETWEEN CHINA AND THE US. *Global Political Review*, 3(2), 52–60. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2018\(iii-ii\).06](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2018(iii-ii).06)
- Ahmed, Z. (2021). Great Power Rivalry in Indo Pacific: Implications for Pakistan implications for Pakistan on JSTOR. Jstor. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48732339>
- Ben Dolven, B. V. (2020). *Indo-Pacific strategies of US allies and partners; issues for congress*. Washington: Congressional Research Service.
- Bukhari, S. R. H. (2023, May 14). *Gwadar Port and CPEC: Transforming Baluchistan's economy for future generations*. The Geopolitics. <https://thegeopolitics.com/gwadar-port-and-cpec-transforming-baluchistans-economy-for-future-generations/>
- Clif, R. (2020). *Anew US strategy for the Indo Pacific*. Washington: the national bureau of asian research.
- Das, D. (2023, September 3). *The state of nuclear instability in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and China*. Default. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/the-state-of-nuclear-instability-in-south-asia-india-pakistan-and-china>
- E. Manyin, D. (2012). *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama administration "rebalancing" towards Asia*. Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>
- Ford, L. (2020, May). The Trump administration, The free and open Indo Pacific. *Foreign Policy*, 1-15. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/fp\\_20200505\\_free\\_open\\_indo\\_pacific.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/fp_20200505_free_open_indo_pacific.pdf)
- Haidar, S. (2023, June 7). *India-U.S. launch dialogue on strategic trade, seek to tighten export controls*. The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-and-us-launch-strategic-trade-dialogue/article66942210.ece>
- Hediuk, W. (2020, July). From Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific significance, implementations and challenges. *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 1-43.
- Jia, C. (2017). New Trends of US Policy toward South Asia: challenges for CPEC. *IPRI journal xvii, Journal XVII No.1*, 95-121. <https://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Article-No.-5w17.pdf>
- Khan, S. H. a. M. (2018). US security strategy for Asia Pacific and India's role. *Strategic Studies*, 38(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.038.01.00158>
- Lai, D. (2013, May). Asia Pacific: Astrategic Assessment. *strategic study institue*, 1-111.
- Lalwani, S. P. (2023, March 29). *A threshold alliance: The China-pakistan military relationship*. United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/threshold-alliance-china-pakistan-military-relationship>
- Noor, S. (2023). Strategic stability in South Asia: the evolving challenges and potential opportunities for India and Pakistan. *Strategic Studies*, 43(1), 64–94. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.043.01.00272>
- Paskal, C. (2021, March). Indo Pacific strategies, perception and partnerships the view from seven countries.
- Rana, S. (2023, September 6). *The promise and peril of Pakistan's economic recovery effort*. United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/09/promise-and-peril-pakistans-economic-recovery-effort>
- Rath, C. S. (n.d.). MARITIME STRATEGY OF INDIA AND CHINA: INFLUENCE OF ALFRED THAYER MAHAN. *Naval War College Journal*, 71-79.
- Saeed, M. S. (2017). From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Sino-U.S. Strategic competition. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 03(04), 499–512. <https://doi.org/10.1142/s2377740017500324>

- Saha, P. (2020, Feb 19). From 'Pivot to Asia' to Trump's ARIA: What drives the US' Current Asia policy? *ORF occasional paper*.
- Snyder, G. H. (2002). Mearsheimer's World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay. *International Security*, 27(1), 149-173. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092155>
- Singh, A. (2023, July 17). *Securing Sea Lines of communication in Asia*. orfonline.org. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/securing-sea-lines-of-communication-in-asia>
- Tourangbam, M. (2024, February 21). *What the US National Defense Industrial Strategy means for the Indo-Pacific*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/what-the-us-national-defense-industrial-strategy-means-for-the-indo-pacific/>