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Abstract

Over the last decade, China has increased its footprint and economic power in the Indian Ocean by expanding its influence there. Critical concerns in the Indian Ocean pose a danger to regional security, according to this research. Realist theory assesses China's economic and military achievements. There is a real possibility that unchecked Chinese development into the Indian Ocean would turn the entire ocean into a "Chinese lake," opening up trade along the Maritime Silk Road. A coalition of impacted and compatible governments is necessary to safeguard maritime interests against China's aggressiveness. The mixed approach employed literature and survey data for qualitative and quantitative research. Basic random sampling was used to sample 150 Lahore residents. Those who are active in policymaking and marine governance are the target audience for these findings, which are meant to educate them on the geopolitical shifts and what they represent for the future of the sector.

Keywords: China, Indian Ocean, Regional security, Maritime, Silk Road

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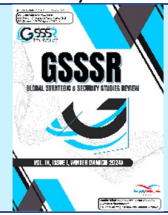
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Abstract

Over the last decade, China has increased its footprint and economic power in the Indian Ocean by expanding its influence there. Critical concerns in the Indian Ocean pose a danger to regional security, according to this research. Realist theory assesses China's economic and military achievements. There is a real possibility that unchecked Chinese development into the Indian Ocean would turn the entire ocean into a "Chinese lake," opening up trade along the Maritime Silk Road. A coalition of impacted and compatible governments is necessary to safeguard maritime interests against China's aggressiveness. The mixed approach employed literature and survey data for qualitative and quantitative research. Basic random sampling was used to sample 150 Lahore residents. Those who are active in policymaking and marine governance are the target audience for these findings, which are meant to educate them on the geopolitical shifts and what they represent for the future of the sector.

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Keywords: [China](#), [Indian Ocean](#), [Regional security](#), [Maritime](#), [Silk Road](#)

Introduction

In 2010, the Indian Ocean's 2.49 billion people and 73.56 million square kilometers generated USD 10,131 billion collective GDP in 2010 (Michel et al., 2012). Forty percent of crude oil bound for marine waterways passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a tiny route where seaborne traffic flows from the Persian Gulf into the huge ocean. Half of the world's merchant fleet rushes to the eastern ocean through the Strait of Malacca (Hassan, 2019).

The economic rebound has increased major maritime powers' emphasis on the region due to

improved global commercial connection through sea lines of communications (SLOCs). Coastal states are sovereign entities from Asia, Africa, and Australia to extra-regional states. The U.S. and EU affect regional geopolitics and the economy (Fernando, 2012). Official U.S. and Indian policy and maritime theories favor Indo-Pacific. Due to its geostrategic location, India should have developed its historical access to the Indian Ocean after independence to strengthen its economic, cultural, and traditional security (Li, 2017).



The Indian Ocean marine trade has pushed naval forces into competitive and cooperative alliances. China is a big economic ambition to be the future superpower with USD 14.14 trillion GDP in 2019. Making domestic industries create more and export more will help the country grow. Energy-intensive enterprises need hydrocarbons to run. West Asian oil imports meet industrial demand. Important marine gates, and narrow straits, transport oil in large containers. Hydrocarbons from these chokepoints supply China's energy. The narrow Strait of Hormuz lets the Persian Gulf trade escape (Khan, 2020).

China's massive China-Pakistan Commercial Corridor (C-PEC) connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan to China for commercial and strategic warm water access. Baluchistan, Pakistan, on the Arabian Sea's northern shore, is the world's deepest marine port. China wants to make the port a worldwide shipping center by accessing it. The IOR is difficult since several nations control the global commons. Naval powers strive for cooperation in zones of influence based on each country's capabilities. To redress the power imbalance, friendly states must coordinate geopolitical tactics, align interests, and converge aims to defeat the aggressor (Lou, 2012).

In 2017, China momentarily sparked border tension at Doklam, a trijunction border between India, Bhutan, and China. China attempted to change the border around Pangong Lake in Ladakh in May 2020, killing soldiers on both sides since the 1962 war. It began with the Clinton administration's assessment that India's liberal economy and geopolitics favored a strong India-US relationship. During the Bush presidency, China's growth dominated strategic relations, and India-US defense cooperation deepened. The U.S. engaged India through nuclear accords. When Obama announced the rebalancing plan or pivot to Asia, strategic literature utilized the term Indo-Pacific to emphasize IOR's relevance for the U.S. (Mahadevan, 2014).

Marine watercraft and boats were used for trade in the Indus Valley civilization. The Lothal dock excavation displays Harrapans' advanced construction. Lothal, an important township that served as a ship landing place, has the largest brick buildings that have survived nature. It looks like the pier can handle freight. The fact that this dock was created over 4400 years ago is important.

Indian, Arab, and African merchants had created complex maritime mercantile trade across distant nations using monsoon sea winds before China explored the Indian Ocean (Michel et al., 2012).

Satapatha Brahmana, from the 9th BCE, contains the first evidence of oceanic water circulation. Most coastal societies now demonstrate the ocean's influence on civilizations. In the shadow of sea trade, many kingdoms thrived. To preserve and encourage international trade, these kingdoms used their Navy. The region relied on naval might for generations. In his Arthashastra, Kautilya mentions protecting the kingdom's shipping and destroying its enemies. Pirates may attack ships (Sidhu & Rogers, 2015). Chandragupta Maurya's War Office included the navadhyaksha, Chief of Ships.

Samudragupta, whose name means 'Samudra', had a powerful navy to fight Satavahanas. He raided Sri Vijaya in Indonesia and expanded the Chola Empire's eastern reach. Some Indian art forms still rule South East Asia thanks to Cholas. After Cholas, Arab merchants entered maritime discussions (Suri, Gopal, 2017). Chinese naval parity with other kingdoms was not delayed. Despite evidence that Qin Shi Huang (247 BCE – 221 BCE), the founder of the Qin dynasty, despatched ships to find elixir,²⁷ Hans created the first 12th-century navy. The Chinese sought affluence through marine commerce. Zhen He, China's most famous medieval explorer, tried to cross Calicut. After leaving Hormuz, the captain was in the Red Sea, an access to the Mediterranean and Europe. Later missions took Zheng He to Iran, eastern Africa, and Mogadishu (White, 2020).

Zheng He initially visited the African Coast. The Zheng He fleet visited Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Swahili. Zheng He returned to China on July 15, 1419, after his successful Africa mission. He traded Chinese ceramics on a peaceful cruise. All six 'treasure ships' journeys were accompanied by firepower, but most visits were friendly. Military force was deployed against pirates blocking the Straits of Malacca. After the mid-19th century opium wars, a strong navy was crucial. When Japan attacked Taiwan, China recognized the need for maritime defense. In the fierce conflict, Japanese fleets blocked harbors, used torpedo vessels, and faced Chinese fleets like the Dingyuan. China strengthened its imperial navy to protect its seas

against the growing maritime threat (Suri, China's Maritime Military Activity in the IOR, 2017).

They cut the 'Chinese melon' in the mid-19th century by establishing deep linkages in southern China. Other powers' sea combat technology and the World Wars decimated Britain. British forces withdrew after losing the Indian Subcontinent to liberation fight and nationalism. The Chinese Red Revolution prevails as the British-backed Chaing-kai-Shek is imprisoned in Taiwan. The British gave over naval duties east of Suez. After 1965, Britain withdrew and the U.S. assumed liability. The US broke out from isolationism in the Indian Ocean and became a world power. In the Indo-Pacific, US strategic goals were met. The US used this approach to increase its grip over South Asia to defend its economic value in the Persian Gulf. Cold War ideology was battled in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. used its containment strategy and alliances to prevent Moscow from gaining dominos and oppose Soviet influence. 2017 (Suri & Gopal, 2017).

Soviet Indo-Pacific strategy was shaped by U.S. limits and goals. The Soviet Union used the Indian Ocean to project power and become a superpower. Since the Soviet Union was comparable to the U.S. in strategic flexibility, expertise, and military power, its strategy was unpredictable. India's maritime security was weak. When the USS Enterprise threatened India with nuclear weapons, Cold War politics and alliances were on display. India realized it needed oceanic security to shield itself from foreign threats when the threat of Soviet intervention and war escalation faded (Alpers, 2014).

With tensions stemming from historical events like China's annexation of Tibet and the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, Indian strategic agencies are alarmed by the regularity of Chinese submarine excursions to the ports of India's neighbors. The two countries' ongoing mistrust is made worse by China's backing of Pakistan and India's allegiance to the United States, notwithstanding diplomatic efforts to improve relations. The burden is increased by economic issues such as China's slowing economy and competition over resources, and it also worries Indian defense planners due to China's military build-up, particularly in its naval capabilities (Malik, 1995).

China intends to increase its maritime influence through its strategic initiatives, such as the Maritime Silk Road, which may have an impact on the stability of the surrounding area. India's concerns are heightened by the tight Sino-Pakistani connection and China's participation in infrastructure projects in the Indian Ocean, especially concerning the potential for Chinese intervention in a confrontation with Pakistan. India forms partnerships with countries such as Japan and ASEAN states in an attempt to balance out China (Wei, Susanto, & Fang, 2019). However, improving China-Indian relations is difficult due to ingrained disparities in political, social, and economic interests.

China's objectives and India's desire for regional leadership collide, resulting in divergent opinions on world politics and territorial claims. While accepting the need for a robust land-based defense against China's logistical advantages in Tibet, Indian strategists propose using the Indian Ocean to counter China. China's assertive foreign policy, exemplified by its territorial conflicts and partnerships with Pakistan, may amplify should the country experience economic downturns. The state of affairs highlights the intricate dynamics and conflicting interests influencing China-Indian relations, as the two countries attempt to strike a careful balance between cooperation and rivalry (Frankel, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Since the time of Thucydides and John Locke, the paradigms of liberalism and realism have evolved (Oliver, 2009.) Key figures in historical realism include Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, while Locke and Kant are prominent in the liberal tradition. Both paradigms have influenced various scholarly endeavors, with periods of significant success in the mid-twentieth century (Zhiming, 2014). Major theories such as the balance-of-power model, power transition theory, and intergroup contact theory blend aspects of liberalism and realism.

Additionally, 20th-century international relations saw the development of constructivism, the English School, and other opposing viewpoints (Nathaniel & Winter, 2011).

Realism, the oldest framework in international relations, focuses on relative gains, power dynamics, and a negative view of global affairs (Wohlforth, 2009, 2008). It posits that states are rational actors prioritizing self-preservation and power dynamics determine their interactions. Hans Morgenthau's "Politics Amongst Nations" and Kenneth Waltz's neorealism are notable contributions. Morgenthau emphasizes human nature's role in politics and the pursuit of power, while Waltz introduced a structural approach, emphasizing the system's organization over individual state actions (Waltz, 1979).

Offensive realism, advocated by John Mearsheimer, proposes that states should continually seek to expand their power and pursue hegemony in individuals (Michael, 2008). Mearsheimer argues that states aim to maximize power due to systemic instability and uncertainty. He distinguishes between "real powers" and "potential powers," emphasizing military capabilities, resources, and population size. Despite defensive realists like Waltz arguing for balancing against overly dominant states, Mearsheimer contends that realignment is infrequent and hegemony is difficult to maintain due to systemic challenges (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 83). Defensive realists view hegemony as irresponsible, advocating for state security and survival (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 78).

Neorealism evolved with the collapse of bipolarity and the rise of American dominance (Mearsheimer & Brzezinski, 2005). Mearsheimer suggests that the USA, having secured dominance in the Western Hemisphere, seeks to expand its influence globally (Mearsheimer & Brzezinski, 2005). Despite being the sole hegemon in the Americas, the USA faces challenges from other powerful nations like Japan, Germany, and France, indicating the complexities of maintaining hegemony.

Realists often speculate about whether China's rise will challenge the current unipolar system, potentially leading to a more multipolar world order (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 91). While some argue that China's ascent may result in relative peace akin to the Cold War, others suggest that it could lead to increased regional tensions and challenges to American hegemony territory (Li, 2004, 25). China's expanding military and economic capabilities raise

concerns about its intentions and potential impact on regional security, with some realists positing that China seeks to undermine American hegemony in the Asia Pacific (Mearsheimer & Brzezinski, 2005).

In Northeast Asia, scholars (Rozman, 2010) analyze the region's dynamics through the lens of realism, emphasizing power balancing and regional alliances. The potential for conflict remains high, particularly as China seeks to assert its interests and expand its naval capabilities in South Asia (Li, 2014). China's strategic moves in the Indian Ocean region are driven by a desire to secure energy resources and counter perceived threats from India and the United States (EIA, 2014).

The offensive realist perspective suggests that China's actions in South Asia aim to establish regional dominance and secure vital sea lanes, aligning with its long-term goal of achieving hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2008). Scholars (Daojiong, 2006) argue that China's naval expansion is essential for protecting its economic interests and securing energy supplies, highlighting the importance of securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs) for economic growth (Daojiong, 2006).

In contrast, liberals argue that China's increasing integration into the global economy promotes peace and stability. They suggest that economic interdependence reduces the likelihood of conflict, as states have a shared interest in maintaining prosperity (Doyle, W., 2008). China's participation in international institutions and its emphasis on economic interdependence indicate a willingness to cooperate and avoid conflict (Ikenberry, 2011). However, liberals also acknowledge the potential for conflict in areas where economic interests intersect with political tensions, such as China's relations with Japan and Taiwan (Li, 2014).

Ultimately, both realist and liberal perspectives offer insights into China's role in the 21st-century global order. Realists highlight the potential for conflict and power struggles, particularly as China seeks to assert its interests and expand its influence in the Asia Pacific. Liberals, on the other hand, emphasize the role of economic interdependence in promoting cooperation and reducing the likelihood of conflict. However, both perspectives acknowledge the complex challenges and potential

flashpoints that characterize China's interactions with the rest of the world.

Methodology

The research design is a framework that has been created to find the answers to the research question. Keeping in view the nature of the problem and objectives of the study, a method research design was considered for research work. Both Qualitative and Quantitative design was adopted. The researcher will use purposive sampling. There will be 50 respondents. The simple random sampling selected one division, Lahore. 2 Public and 2 private organizations will be selected equally for data collection. Their demographic information such as gender, educational level, income, and job type will be included.

The questionnaire was prepared to elicit the responses of employees. The tool included only close-ended questions that the respondents asked.

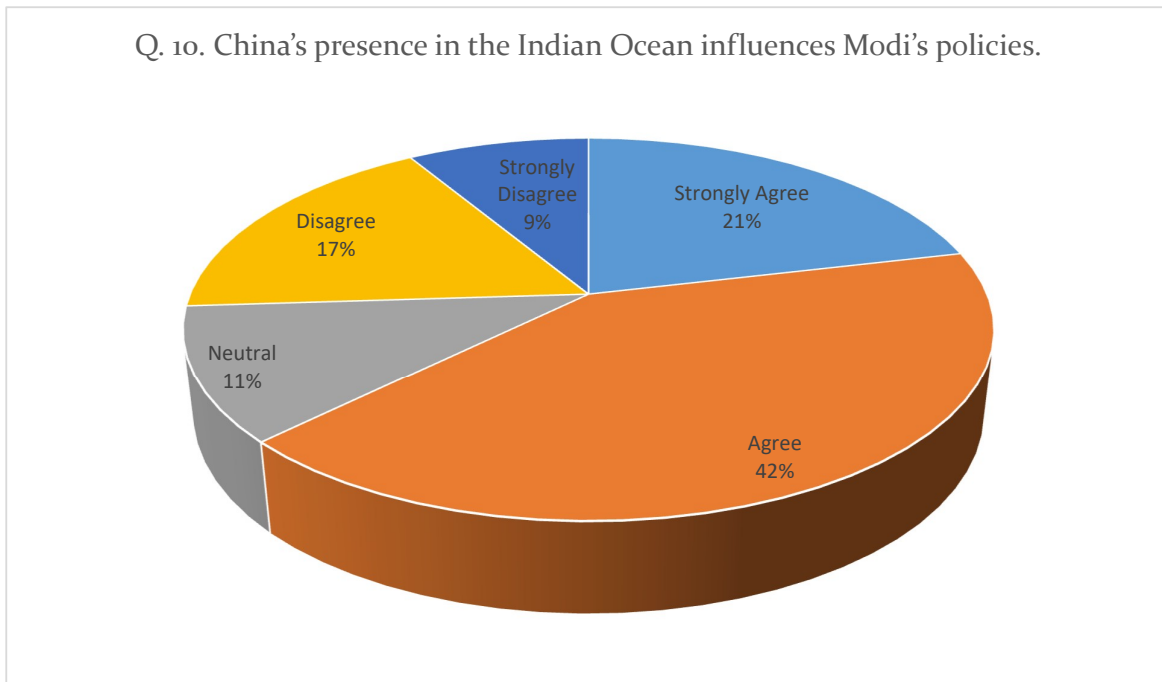
A 5-point Likert scale designed by Vagias (2006) was also used in the questionnaire to measure the responses. To measure the responses from employees 5-point Likert scale is used to manage the statement as; 0= strongly disagree, 1= disagree, 2= neutral, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

Researchers visit the Public and Private Organizations for data collection from respondents. It took one month to collect data from selected respondents. The researcher personally visited the places and collected data. To analyze the results of the collected data, tests were run on the IMB-SPSS (version 23.0) a statistical software for social sciences researchers. A bar chart graphical representation was used for the description of the statement's responses and to identify the outliers. Cross-tabulation tables were also used to illustrate the results of the performed analysis.

Results

Figure 1

Frequency Distribution of "China's presence in the Indian Ocean influences Modi's policies."



The following pie chart shows that China's presence in the Indian Ocean influences Modi's

policies. Out of 150 respondents, 21% of participants strongly agreed, 42% agreed, 11% were neutral, 17%

disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed. Among which the most frequently opt. The option was

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of “The Indian Ocean is the hub for geo-strategic competition and challenges for China and India.”

Statement		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	44	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Agree	46	30.7	30.7	60.0
	Neutral	23	15.3	15.3	75.3
	Disagree	22	14.7	14.7	90.0
	Strongly Disagree	15	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The following table illustrates the frequency distribution of the statement that the Indian Ocean is the hub for geo-strategic competition and challenges for China and India. Among the 150

participants, strongly agreed was 44, agreed was 46, neutral was 23, disagreed was 22, and strongly disagreed was 15.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of “There are strategic and economic implications for India regarding China's Maritime Silk Road initiative.”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	39	26.0	26.0	26.0
	Agree	48	32.0	32.0	58.0
	Neutral	20	13.3	13.3	71.3
	Disagree	26	17.3	17.3	88.7
	Strongly Disagree	17	11.3	11.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The following table illustrates the frequency distribution of the statement that There are strategic and economic implications for India regarding China's Maritime Silk Road initiative. Among the 150 participants, strongly agreed was 39, agreed was 48, neutral was 20, disagreed was 26, and strongly disagreed was 17.

given the region's vital shipping lanes for the import of gas and oil, China's involvement in the Indian Ocean is motivated by its desire to guarantee energy security. This widely held belief emphasizes the knowledge that China's infrastructure projects and investments in the area are not just for economic gain but also serve as a geopolitical tool for expanding its power and influence.

Discussion

Perceptions of China's Strategic Priorities

According to the survey, most participants acknowledge the Indian Ocean's strategic significance to China's larger geopolitical and economic objectives. Everyone agrees that China's actions in the area are consistent with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to secure important trade routes and strengthen its maritime economy. The respondents also recognize that,

Potential for Sino-Indian Cooperation

The assessment shows that there is a great deal of room for collaboration between China and India in the Indian Ocean, even in spite of the competing dynamics. Numerous participants hold the view that cooperative endeavors in domains like maritime safety, counter-piracy measures, and the environmentally sound advancement of marine

assets would be advantageous for both nations. Despite the existence of rivalry, this pragmatic viewpoint contends that overlapping interests might promote bilateral collaboration. The acknowledgment of reciprocal advantages is indicative of a pragmatic perspective on regional geopolitics, wherein both countries may discover points of agreement to tackle mutual issues and capitalize on chances for cooperative development projects.

Maritime Power Politics

The Indian Ocean is seen as a crucial stage for maritime power politics as both China and India want to strengthen their naval strength and influence. The study's respondents highlight the strategic competition between the two nations, seeing the region as a pivotal arena for asserting naval superiority. Building ports and military facilities is a key component of China's effort to establish supremacy. These projects, which are a component of the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), facilitate trade while simultaneously projecting military might. The construction of the Gwadar port in Pakistan and the naval facility in Djibouti are two notable instances. These installations are interpreted as China's attempts to protect vital maritime lanes, guarantee energy security by defending routes used for the transportation of oil, and broaden its geopolitical influence. Regional observers understand these actions as attempts to establish a network of logistical centers capable of supporting a significant and continuous naval presence, therefore converting the Indian Ocean into a "Chinese lake."

India has responded to China's maritime advances in a variety of ways. Understanding the geopolitical ramifications of China's expanding influence, India has started a massive modernization program for its navy. This entails improving its capacities for surveillance and reconnaissance in addition to putting new warships, submarines, and aircraft carriers into service. India has also worked to form strategic partnerships with other regional and international powers. India, for example, is strategically counterbalancing China's influence by participating in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the US, Japan, and Australia. Furthermore, in an

effort to promote regional security cooperation, India has increased its military assistance and joint exercises with littoral governments such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and the Seychelles.

China and India's competing relationship in the Indian Ocean reflects their larger geopolitical goals. To secure its maritime trade routes and extend its global influence, China must create a dominating marine presence in the Indian Ocean. For India's national security and aspirations to lead the region, it is imperative that the balance of power in the area be maintained. In addition to naval prowess, other factors in this struggle include soft power, economic clout, and strategic alliances.

The Indian Ocean's importance to global trade and energy flows highlights the ocean's role in global naval strategy. An important conduit for global energy security, the Indian Ocean transports around 80% of the world's marine oil commerce. The constant movement of products and oil is dependent upon the region's major chokepoints, which include the Bab el-Mandeb, the Malacca Strait, and the Strait of Hormuz. In global geopolitics, control over these chokepoints offers substantial influence.

The significance of the Indian Ocean in the fight for maritime dominance is shown by this competitive dynamic. Global naval tactics are being impacted by China and India's continuous strategic maneuvers, which are also changing the security architecture in the area. The Indian Ocean is expected to remain a key arena of geopolitical conflict as both countries develop their naval might and forge strategic alliances, with profound consequences for both regional and international security.

Strategic Interaction Between China and India

The study's findings demonstrate that China's actions in the Indian Ocean have a significant influence on Indian policy and strategic thinking. As per the participants, the strategic partnership between China and India has a noteworthy impact on the viewpoints of both nations regarding economic progress and regional security. The relationship is a mix of competitiveness and cautious participation due to the dynamic's sharp awareness of each other's maneuvers and

countermoves. This flexible and responsive partnership is shown by India's answers to China's ambitions in the Indian Ocean. India has strengthened its naval capabilities and improved its strategic relationships in response to China's increasing military and economic influence. Modernizing its fleet, obtaining cutting-edge planes, battleships, and submarines, as well as stepping up its monitoring and reconnaissance activities in the area, are some of these actions. India has also established strategic alliances with other regional and extra-regional nations in an effort to offset China's dominance.

India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which is composed of the US, Japan, and Australia, is one noteworthy component of its approach. As a reaction to China's sweeping maritime claims and infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this alliance seeks to promote an open, free, and inclusive Indo-Pacific area. In order to improve regional security cooperation, India has also strengthened its ties with littoral states like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and the Seychelles by providing military assistance and holding cooperative naval drills. The strategic relationship that exists between China and India in the Indian Ocean underscores the significance of this region as a key arena for geopolitical competition. The Indian Ocean is seen by both countries as being essential to their economic and national security. Securing its marine trade routes and extending its geopolitical influence need China to create a strong presence in the Indian Ocean. India's strategic interests and ambitions to dominate the region depend on the balance of power remaining in the area.

Geostrategic Competition

The understanding of the Indian Ocean's significance as a center of great power struggle underscores its geostrategic relevance. The region's importance in international trade, energy supply lines, and military policy is acknowledged by poll respondents. The geostrategic rivalry is further complicated by the existence of extra-regional countries like the United States and their desire to preserve freedom of navigation. Global powers as well as regional countries like China and India are involved in this complex conflict, which makes the Indian Ocean a hub for alliances and strategic

manoeuvres. Control over important sea routes, access to resources, and influence over littoral governments are the main motivators for the competition.

Awareness of China's Regional Activities

The poll participants exhibit a significant level of knowledge of China's actions and their wider consequences for the surrounding area. This involves acknowledging the political and economic significance of the Maritime Silk Road initiative. The study demonstrates a comprehension that China's port and infrastructure improvements are components of a larger plan to strengthen its strategic footholds and increase its influence in the area. The possible hazards of China's growing influence are also mentioned by the respondents. These concerns include the potential for smaller countries to become more dependent on China and the effects on regional stability and sovereignty. This insight indicates a thorough understanding of the geopolitical possibilities of China's regional engagements and their strategic foundations.

Conclusion

The world's busiest waterway is the Indian Ocean. Between 2000 and 2017, the region's container traffic surged from 46 million TEU to 146 million TEU. Because of their superior technological capabilities and ability to project power to fend off threats from both state and non-state actors, littoral states in Asia, Australia, and Africa, as well as non-regional maritime powers like the United States, play a major role in maintaining the safety of the ocean for international trade. Combined efforts can address the main problems of piracy, people trafficking, disaster relief, and humanitarian aid by large nations whose interests rely on safe global commons.

Major powers have come together in cooperative and competitive agreements due to their reliance on marine trade. India, China, Japan, and Australia are the main regional powers; the United States and Europe are the main non-regional powers. To maintain the security of the SLOCs and safeguard their maritime interests, the countries must confront new difficulties and find new ways to work together as a result of IOR's growing competitiveness.

Beijing believes that the United States and its allies are trying to limit China and checkmate it in the Malacca Strait, which has led to a rise in military action in the Indo-Pacific region as a result of China's growth. Over the past 20 years, as the United States prepared to pivot to Asia or rebalance, the concern has intensified. By demonstrating strength and empowering them to resist China's pressure, the U.S. military helps nations that are impacted by China's power. China launched the Belt and Road Initiative to enlist the support of other nations by offering infrastructure and economic support. Nonetheless, the PLAN's footprints were followed by the maritime Silk Road, which promoted economic exchange. China claims that to protect the trade over the IOR, its military is necessary. On the other hand, it is incomprehensible why advanced military vessels, such as submarines, are stationed far out from Chinese land in the ocean and docked there. As part of China's blue water policy, these operational vessels are being used for ocean mapping and trial runs to evaluate the operating capabilities in distant seas.

China might turn the Indian Ocean into a Chinese lake if it has unfettered and unrestricted access to IOR. The maritime Silk Road may prove to be a conduit for PLAN's global expansion, encompassing half of the planet. Establishing a structural balance of impacted and like-minded governments who will cooperate to push back China and safeguard its maritime rights is the only option to stop China's aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region. To stop China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States, Australia, Japan, India, and nations like the Philippines and Vietnam are involved. Periodic cooperative military drills in the Indo-Pacific region (IOR) enhance naval communication between allies and partners while showcasing China's combined might. Semi-formal alliances like Quad, which include the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, have the potential to become important points of contact for containing China.

Beijing would try to demonstrate its strength by acting in an expansionist manner in the maritime sphere as China's military force grows and rises. The path forward for safeguarding global commons and preserving peace and tranquility in the region based on recognized international norms is

through cooperative arrangements and evolving mechanisms amongst important parties in the IOR. China has a long history of empires and is a continental power. Chinese adventure is best exemplified by the famous journeys made by Zeng He from China to the African coast during the Middle Ages. With the land-based and maritime Belt and Road program, modern China is emulating Zeng He's charitable endeavor. China has risen since the conclusion of the Cold War as a result of its quick industrialization, cheap labor, and economic connection with the rest of the globe. China requires an uninterrupted supply of hydrocarbons from the Persian Gulf to maintain its economic expansion. It is challenging for China to keep an eye on SLOCs from the mainland due to the IOR's enormous size.

The free and secure IOR is also necessary for the transit traffic to and from China. China came up with a cooperative plan to lessen this issue, identifying friendly marine nations throughout the IOR that would accept Chinese investment. China started building a network of port facilities, or "String of Pearls," using its economic clout to serve as a base of operations and supply logistical support for PLAN operations. These ports could aid China in countering any threat that might impede the unhindered passage of ships to and from the mainland.

Ports are also necessary because of the accidental risk that during the fight, China's adversaries could block the Malacca Strait. The maritime trade to and from China may cease if the blockade is maintained. What's more, the embargo would halt the hydrocarbon flow that is essential to Chinese industry. If a different transportation route could deliver China with the necessary hydrocarbons, this may be prevented. To facilitate the oil transition through the pipeline from the ships docked in the harbor, China has funded the deep-water ports at Kyaukpyu, Myanmar. The Gwadar port in Pakistan is connected to eastern China by the CPEC, another land-based infrastructure project. Over 12,000 km of separate marine traffic passes through the Malacca Strait on its way from the Persian Gulf to China. About 3000 kilometres separate Gwadar from Xinxiang in eastern China. The Malacca Dilemma may have an answer along these two paths.

China holds legal interests in Sri Lanka's Hambantota port, a strategically important location with a view of one of the busiest sea lanes in the world. Chinese warships and submarines have berthed in Sri Lankan ports. These port networks encircling India seem to be intended as a deterrent to India. There is also concern that China would militarise the recently acquired ports and utilize them for geopolitical gain, following the example of the South China Sea. These ports are just a few of the thirty-five ports China has funded worldwide. Six with a view of the Horn of Africa, PLAN has acquired its first military post abroad in Djibouti. The base's objectives include enhancing intelligence collection, fortifying its blue water, and carrying out anti-piracy operations.

Thus, it is relevant to inquire as to whether these ports were bought for military use and if India is the exclusive objective and containment strategy. Although there have been indications of PLAN's interactions with Indian ports, these are primarily intended to counter China's strategic and commercial interests in the region as well as India's maritime advantages in the Indian Ocean Rim. Currently, China is using this network of ports around the Indo-Pacific region to expand trade ties with the host nations and improve its commercial activity. China has shown in Sri Lanka that its investments can put small nations in a debt trap that it can later use to intimidate them into submission. Sri Lanka has leased 15,000 acres of land to China for commercial use, in addition to the port.

The main worry for India is the potential long-term security risks associated with the Chinese-funded ports. These ports are close to India's conventional and nuclear weapons systems; thus China would be discouraged from using them to attack India. On the other hand, these ports might be used to project power into the IOR and aid in securing the PLAN's SLOCs, thereby strengthening its blue sea naval capabilities. India's strategic decision to draw closer to the United States has been influenced by China's ascent and its assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific region. During the Cold War, India's connection with the Soviet Union

helped allay strategic worries about Pakistan and China. With the United States leading the charge, other nations like China surfaced to challenge American hegemony. The security conundrum brought on by China's ascent and quick military modernization has made both the United States and India perceive threats as more serious. As the United States implemented the rebalancing plan to counter China's military ascent in the Indo-Pacific region, India took steps to deter PLAN from invading its territorial seas.

China may attempt to trespass beyond India's disputed border, endangering the country's security. During the fight, China might persuade Pakistan to open India's Western front, leading to a two-front attack that would test India's retaliation. India's goal of having a blue-water navy is demonstrated by its naval modernization, which includes the introduction of aircraft carriers, the commissioning of nuclear-powered submarines, and the purchase of the P-8i Poseidon patrol aircraft, which is a technologically advanced aircraft. This might significantly reduce PLAN's ability to launch operations against India and give the Indian Navy the strength it needs to enter the South China Sea. China's formidable military might necessitate the use of an external balancer to rectify the imbalance in power between India and China.

China, according to the United States, will present a serious military threat to it in the coming decades. China's aggressiveness and goal maximization at any cost, especially when they conflict with established international conventions and norms of behavior, are demonstrated by Beijing's expansionist policies in the South China Sea, where Beijing has built an artificial island and militarised it. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command is responsible for keeping an eye on security in the Indo-Pacific area, which may pose a threat to American interests there. The United States is also concentrating on forging a network of like-minded nations that have suffered or may suffer as a result of China's ascent. Thus, nations like the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, and India are prepared to hold China accountable.

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