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CONTENTS

INDIA AND CHINA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: A COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF GEOPOLITICS

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> As the competition between India and China suggests, the Indian Ocean is where global struggles will play out in the twenty-first century. Like a microcosm of the world at large, the greater Indian Ocean is developing into an area of ferociously guarded sovereignty... The Indians and the Chinese will enter into a dynamic great-power rivalry in these waters with their shared economic interests as major trading partners locking them in to an uncomfortable embrace.[(1)]
>
> **— Robert D. Kaplan**

Introduction

Today the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has become one of the pivots of the global geostrategic agenda. Power and resource struggles and a quest for energy security, emerging environmental and economic issues, increased interests of powers like China, and the surfacing of regional powers like India have accentuated the significance of this region. In tandem, global and regional commerce is largely dependent on Indian Ocean sea lines of communication. Interrelated security issues principally congregate in the maritime domain. The volatility of the region is going to remain a great challenge in the next few

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decades for both the foreign powers with great interests in the Indian Ocean and the regional states.

India has progressively soaring aspirations in the Indian Ocean. Its naval strategy attempts to spread its influence across the entire IOR, through high spending on its naval expansion, augmented trade and investments, diplomacy and strategic ventures. It is bolstering relations with the energy-rich Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia regions to ensure its economic steadiness and great-power ambitions. India is most alarmed at China's rising interest in the IOR. Thus, to counterbalance the Chinese influence, it is spiralling influence and control over the Indian Ocean choke points through security relationships with key littoral states like Singapore, Mauritius and Oman, to name a few. Through such strategy, and soft balancing with the United States, India hopes to secure its own position against a perceived growing Chinese challenge in the Indian Ocean.

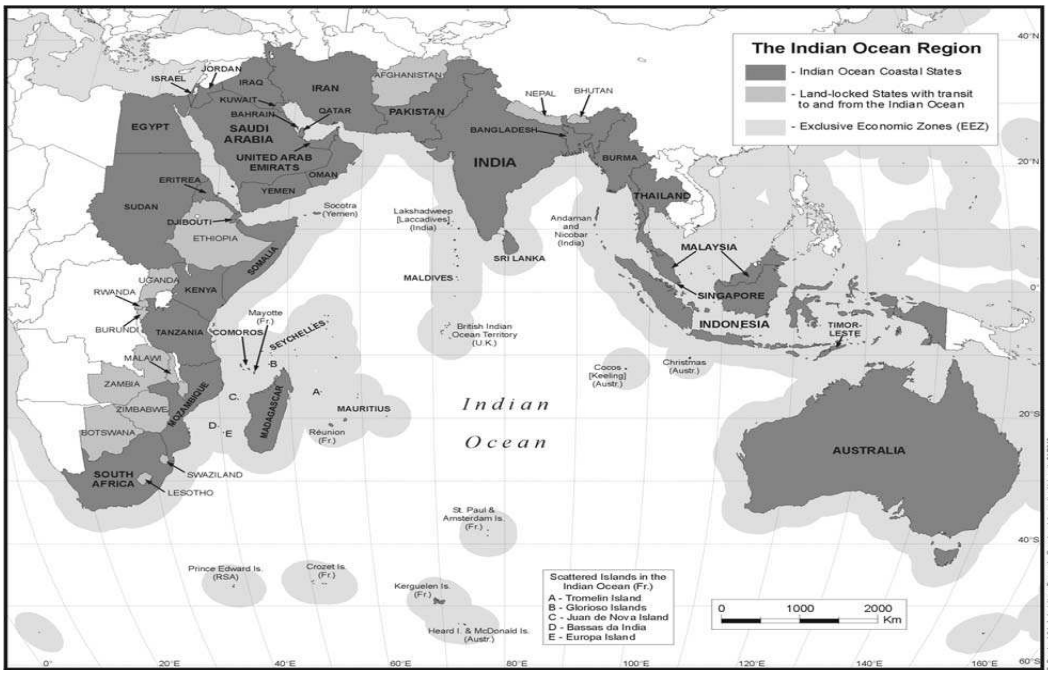
Fuelled by a booming economy, China's naval power is on the rise again. China's pursuit to enhance their maritime control in the IOR has materialized in the form of both military engagements and active participation in the economic realm. However, China seems to continue with its doctrine of soft power diplomacy in the IOR. The "blue book" (2013) outlines Chinese naval strategy and makes a case for China to deepen its economic engagements with the IOR littoral states. It stresses that Beijing's interests will be driven by commercial rather than military objectives. Nevertheless, China is apprehensive of the growing Indo-US strategic partnership to counter its influence in the IOR region and elsewhere.

The paper is sectioned into four parts. The first one provides an overview of the geostrategic significance of the Indian Ocean. The second discusses the changing dynamics of India's maritime strategy in the IOR. The third part sheds light on China's increased sway in the IOR and the US attendance in the IOR vis-

à-vis Indo-China power struggle. The last chapter suggests possible areas of cooperation between India and China in the IOR, followed by a conclusion.

Fig 1.1

Geostrategic Significance of the Indian Ocean(2)



The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world, after the Pacific and the Atlantic. Regarded as a large-scale ocean basin-centric region, the Indian Ocean Region is composed of the Indian Ocean itself, “with all of its tributary water bodies (such as the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Andaman Sea and the Malacca Strait), 38 coastal states,” along with 13 landlocked states which are dependent on the Indian Ocean for transit to and from the sea. On the whole, this region covers “an area close to 102,000,000 sq km (2/3 of sea and 1/3 of land),” thereby representing “20% of the entire globe’s surface, is inhabited by 2.65 billion people, representing 39.1% of the world’s population in 2009, and has a gross domestic product in purchasing power parity (GDP-PPP) of $10,813 (US)

billion, representing 15.4% of the world's GDP-PPP in 2008."[3] The Indian Ocean region endowed with a huge portion of world's oil and natural gas reserves and substantial amounts of other mineral and biological resources. There are serious disparities in terms of economic development and internal political stability between the 36 key and 19 peripheral countries in this region. Along with trouble-free countries such as Australia, Singapore and Saudi Arabia, there are poor and unstable nations like Somalia, Mozambique, Madagascar and Eritrea. The IOR represents a unique blend of diversity and disparities in terms of politics, population, culture, economy and environment, as well as a multifarious geopolitical framework where external powers and local states' interests deeply converge.[4]

Regardless of its geographical significance, the position of the Indian Ocean in global geopolitics and geostrategy has long been sidelined. However, since the end of the 1960s, this situation has dramatically shifted. Today, the Indian Ocean Region has conclusively become an area of crucial geostrategic importance, and will remain so at least for many ensuing decades. This is chiefly owing to the growing impact in world affairs of Persian Gulf oil and the Indian Ocean's sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and choke points, as well as the fickle regional socio-political environment (militarisation, power politics, social and economic challenges), American's heavy military involvement, China's advent on the regional chessboard and India's ascent as a real Indian Ocean great power.[5]

While playing as a region of prime interest for so many far-off states in the world (such as the USA, the European industrial states, Japan and China), IOR is also an area where regional states and non-state actors have a growing voice and therefore have to be taken into account. Moreover, the region also represents the most troubled and dangerous area of the world. "In 2009, a total of 170 political conflicts were recorded in the Indian Ocean Region, representing 46.6% of the

365 conflicts worldwide, with 50% of all the crises and severe crises in the world, 19 of the 31 high-intensity conflicts (61.3%), as well as all of the seven wars." For many observers of the region, this unstable situation is compounded by foreign military interventionism and interference in local politics; and is also related to various local factors engendering social and political tensions such as cultural intolerance, radicalism and terrorism, poverty, environmental degradation and conflicts over resources, lack of democracy and weak state facility.[6]

Holistically, the Indian Ocean can be seen as a rich and diverse physical environment, a great medium for transportation, an important theatre of military activities, a vast area of leisure, as well as an area under limited legislation and even less policing. Taking account of these distinctive features of the Indian Ocean, Bouchard and Crumplin[7] observe:

1. "As a physical environment, it provides many resources, living and non-living, on the littoral, at the surface or in the water column, on the bottom of the sea or beneath it; it is subject to numerous physicochemical processes such as the thermohaline circulation, corrosion, dissolution and precipitation; it is susceptible to pollution (from land and sea activities), degradation and destruction of its ecosystems and biodiversity; it is coupled to the atmosphere in the weather and climate patterns, which also influence the mean sea level;"[8]
2. As transportation medium, it provides a unique and shortest maritime trade route to the region and the world. In comparison to other oceans, navigation circumstances in the Indian Ocean are simple, with the exemption of the roaring forties and the furious fifties of the Southern Indian Ocean;
3. From military perspective, it provides great opportunity for the deployment of "naval ships and submarines to show the flag, as

well as for mining and demining activities, intelligence operations, naval blockades, rescue operations, humanitarian operations, ship inspections, ship escorts, naval patrol and surveillance, anti-terrorism and anti-piracy operations, naval warfare and projection of power from sea to land;”**(9)**

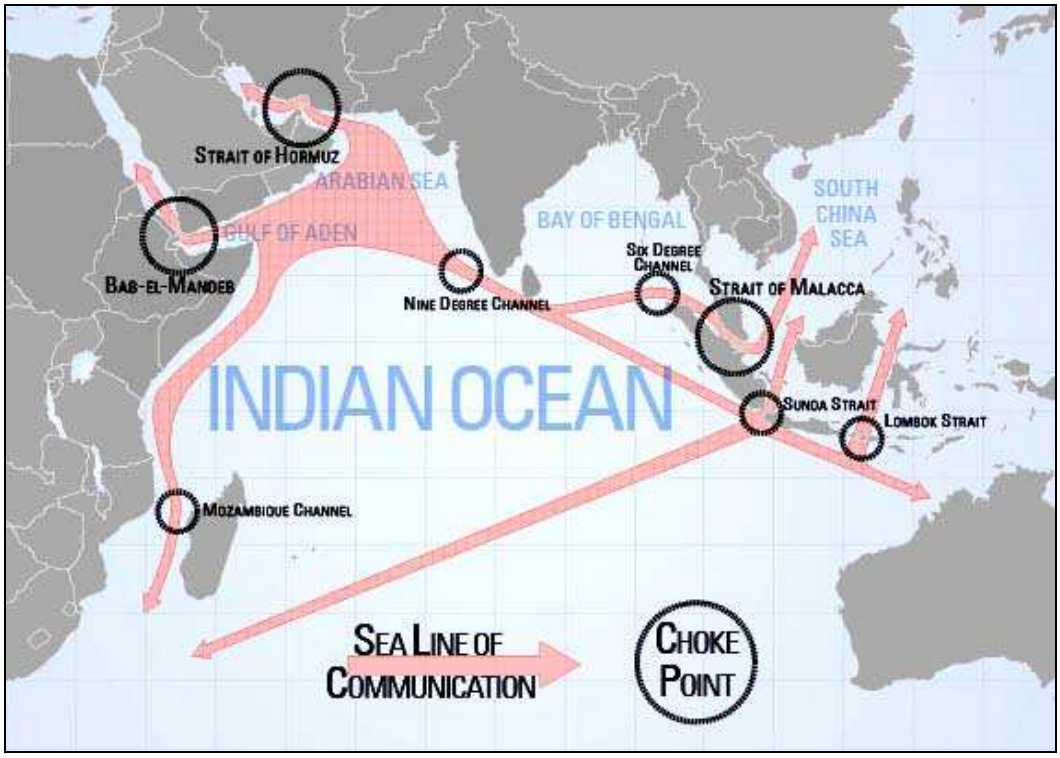
4. As an area of recreation , it boasts as a centre for coastal tourism, water sports, sailing and cruising, as well as fishing, all of which add up to significant external revenue for coastal communities; and,

5. Finally, “as an area under limited legislation and even less policing, at least beyond the territorial sea (extending to a maximum distance of 12nm from the coastal state’s baseline), the Indian Ocean can also be considered as a kind of a ‘maritime frontier’ where many enjoy not only the freedom of the sea but also unsecured state control enabling the conduct of a large array of illegal or grey zone activities (smuggling, poaching, piracy, and so on). This is certainly not specific to the Indian Ocean, but it seems to be a problem of greater and growing importance in this particular ocean where low socio-economic conditions on land and poor policing capability by the coastal states coincide.”**(10)**

Geostrategically, and in contrast with the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Indian Ocean is unique in the sense that it is closed to the north by the Eurasian continent and that maritime communication to the outside world is mostly constrained by a small number of choke points.

Fig 1.2

Choke Points in the Indian Ocean([11])



All marine traffic is funnelled through these very narrow passages as they are time-and cost-saving over other routes. Most of the foreign navies are based in these choke point areas to monitor the traffic and intervene whenever perceived necessary. The American navy and its allies hold permanent bases in the Strait of Malacca area, the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz area, and the Gulf of Aden to the Suez Canal area, securing vital shipping routes against miscellaneous threats such as terrorism, piracy, robbery and hijacking. Nevertheless, other forces, such as the Indian and the Chinese navies, are increasingly becoming prominent in the IOR.

Indian Ocean: An energy corridor

The Indian Ocean emerges as the bastion of world economy in the 21st century. Its maritime routes will fuel the economic engines of rising Asian powers like China and India, as well as that of the industrialised world. With the continuous economic development and political stability in Africa, the continent will offer further strategic impetus to Indian Ocean trading networks.

Shielding energy networks in the maritime domain will, however, require a formidable naval presence vital for sea control. The Indian Ocean is of crucial strategic value due to its own oil reserves and those in the Persian Gulf. It not only serves as the world's most important energy and international trade maritime route but also a central theatre of naval manoeuvring for rival powers to augment their naval strength and forge alliances to offset the opposing side.

The Indian Ocean harbours an array of non-energy, renewable and non-renewable resources. According to estimates, between now and 2025, the world's leading economies would continue to depend on traditional energy reserves. "Oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) are the two with inherent naval significance, as they must be transported by sea." Being cheaper than any overland substitutes, maritime transport stands as the ideal choice to transport energy goods. The Indian Ocean has the world's largest concentration of littorals rich in oil and gas reserves. "The region boasts 80 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves and 17 per cent of natural gas. 40 per cent of global seaborne commerce moves across the ocean, one-fifth of which comprises oil and gas. Each day, over 25 million barrels of oil transits through the Strait of Hormuz to key importers like the US, China, France, India and Japan."**(12)** The growing unrest in South and Central Asia has left the security of overland pipelines extremely uncertain thereby increasing the dependence on sea transportation.

The shifting power dynamics in the Indian Ocean: Rise of India and China

In the post-Cold War era, both India and China have emerged as two strong Asian economies. In order to continue on an ambitious path to modernization, both countries are trying to translate their strengthening economies into political weight and supra-regional influence. Supremacy over maritime Asia and in particular over the waters between the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the South China Sea (SCS) has surfaced as a primary component of both Beijing and New Delhi's strategic rationale. The IOR and the SCS are not only the world's key energy and bulk cargo transit routes, but also the littoral states and these waters themselves are rich in crucial hydrocarbon resources.

As China's national security is increasingly dependent on the safety and protection of these sea routes to sustain its economic development and growing power, the People's Republic has in the past two decades increasingly built up its regional presence and naval power in both the IOR and SCS. India, too, in recent years, has begun to expand the scope of its IOR-centred oil and gas policy — particularly focused on the politically challenging Persian Gulf region — towards Southeast Asia, most notably the SCS. In doing so, New Delhi not only seeks to gradually diversify its import sources, increase its naval presence, foster relations with the littoral states in this region, but also counteract Chinese presence in the IOR by getting economically and strategically involved in Beijing's maritime backyard.[13] The resulting overlapping interests and the increasing meddling in each other's maritime backyards have increased the danger of military conflict in the already tense Sino-Indian relationship.

India's maritime strategy

Unlike China's maritime aspirations, India's ambition to become a great maritime power has received far less attention. The "Indian factor" could be

decisive to the future of world politics, security and stability in the Asia-Pacific Region. During the last two decades, succeeding Indian leaders across the political divide have pressed for an enlarged focus on the Indian Ocean. In 2007, outlining a clear shift in India's maritime strategy, Pranab Mukherjee, India's then foreign minister, said:

> After nearly a millennia of inward and landward focus, we are once again turning our gaze outwards and seawards, which is the natural direction of view for a nation seeking to re-establish itself, not simply as a continental power, but even more so as a maritime power, and consequently as one that is of significance on the world stage.[14]

Today, India is pursuing an expansive maritime strategy. Indian expectations are underscored by geopolitical considerations in which one recurring contextual feature in Indian discourse among naval and government figures is to stress the territorial benefits enjoyed by India in the Indian Ocean Region. Although any hegemonic ambitions are frequently disavowed by the government, yet strong connotations are evident from the key government officials' statements. In 2009, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stressed that "there can thus be no doubt that the Indian Navy must be the most important maritime power in this region."[15] The following year, the then foreign secretary, Nirupama Rao, in her speech to the National Maritime Foundation, argued that "as the main resident power in the Indian Ocean region... India is well poised to play a leadership role" with regard to maritime security in the region.[16] Moreover, the then defence minister, A.K. Antony, told the 2012 Naval Chiefs Conference that "India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and the professional capability of our Navy bestows upon us a natural ability to play a leading role in ensuring peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region."[17]

Indian Naval strategy began to take tangible shape over the last decade in the form of Maritime Military Strategy for India 1989–2014 (1998), Indian Maritime Doctrine (2004), Navy's Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (2005) and India's Maritime Military Strategy (2007).[18]

Limited in its dimension, the 1998 Maritime Military Strategy for India 1989–2014 focused on a framework of defensive limited coastal 'sea-denial.' However, the 2004 Indian Maritime Doctrine encouraged a more forceful competitive strategy for projecting power deeper into and across the Indian Ocean. Ambitious in its approach, the Indian Maritime Doctrine talked of India's "maritime destiny" and a vision in which a proactive policing role was envisaged for the Indian Navy, enabling it to counter distant emerging threats, and defend SLOCs through and from the Indian Ocean. It was also lucid about 'attempts by China to strategically encircle India.'[19]

The 2007 Maritime Military Strategy encompasses the period 2007–22. It specifies India's current naval strategy, and was described by its authors as "an insight and the rationale for the resurgence of India's maritime military power" that "the professed strategy clearly is premised on deterrence with offensive undertones."[20] The Maritime Military Strategy seeks to exploit the geographical advantages accessible to India by espousing an oceanic approach to its strategy, rather than a coastal one.

Motivated by great-power aspirations and strategic competition with China, India is beefing up its naval capabilities and security relationships throughout the Indian Ocean region. It has paid significant attention to developing relationships at the key points of entry or "choke points" into the Indian Ocean — the Malacca Strait, Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, the India Ocean island states, the Persian Gulf, the principal International Shipping Lanes (ISLs) across the Indian Ocean, and the choke points leading to and from the Indian Ocean.[21]

India's standing as the most populous country in the Indian Ocean region and its central position in the northern Indian Ocean have long contributed to beliefs about India's destiny to control its eponymous ocean. David Scott, a renowned strategist, in one of his articles "India's Grand strategy for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions,"[22] writes that there is now a well-established tradition among the Indian strategic community that the Indian Ocean is, or should be, "India's Ocean". India sees its future as a principal maritime security provider in a region extending from the Red Sea to Singapore and having a considerable security role in areas beyond. Indian dream of "Mahabharat" (greater India) stretches as far as Australia.

Unlike the 2004 maritime strategy, spanning 25 years, the new one covers the next 15 years to come, which its authors believe will secure a balance between long- and short-term objectives. If effectively implemented, the strategy will facilitate India in effectively protecting its national interests in the oceans and turn it into a great maritime power by 2022.[23]

India and the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean

Since the 1990s, India has embarked on a major programme to develop a "Blue Water" navy involving significant increases in naval expenditure. Compared with the Chinese naval strategy, the Indian version is more of a post-Mahan concept, and a postmodernist one. The main objective of the Indian Navy is to ensure the country's free access to the oceans and secure its dominant position in the Indian Ocean. This is largely due to India's significant net energy imports. India, the world's third-largest energy consumer since 2009, imports 26% of the energy it consumes. Conversely, China imports less than 10% of the energy consumed, according to World Bank data. Geopolitically, with 7,500 kilometres of coastline and about 1.63 million square kilometres of its exclusive economic zone, India is the only major power with direct access to the Indian

Ocean.[24] India has to take into account four precise security issues concerning piracy, disruption, jihadist infiltration, Pakistani competition,[25] and the influence of a rising China.

In February 2012, taking note of heightened Indian alarm and its counter efforts vis-à-vis China's military rise, James Clapper, the US director of national intelligence, told a Senate committee:

> Despite public statements intended to downplay tensions between India and China, we judge that India is increasingly concerned about China's posture along their disputed border and Beijing's perceived aggressive posture in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific region.[26]

An overt sense of 'encirclement' by China through the appearance of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean is emerging in India. It is greatly concerned by the facilities being set up for China in the Indian Ocean via allies like Pakistan, sympathetic states like Myanmar, and susceptible island states like the Seychelles. China is not readily submitting to any Indian sphere of influence in the IOR.

Countering threats to Indian naval expansion in the IOR

To offset emerging threats to its expansion in the IOR, India has worked out a six-fold strategy. The first principle focuses on "increasing its naval spending. Second, strengthening its infrastructure presence. Third, increasing its naval capabilities. Fourth, active maritime diplomacy, including increased deployments of these naval assets around the Indian Ocean. Fifth, exercising in the Indian Ocean; unilaterally or bilaterally, trilaterally and multilaterally with other actors. Sixth, keeping open the choke points in and out of the Indian Ocean; in part through its own unilateral deployments, and in part through cooperation with other relevant choke point countries."[27]

a) Augmenting India's naval spending

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India's military spending has escalated by 66 per cent over the last decade. India's Defence Budget 2012-13 amounted to "US$ 40.44 billion", showing a "17.63 percent" increase when compared to last year's outlays. A keen look at the growth of Indian defence budget 2012-13 shows that the focus is essentially on naval build-up. The allocation of $7.8 billion has given the Navy an all-time high of 19 per cent share of the defence budget.**(28)** Moreover, in local terms India's military spending now being channelled into naval purposes is considerably greater than naval expenditures by all other Indian Ocean states put together. A key positive aspect for India in the Indian Ocean is that it enjoys close local geographic advantages, concentration of forces and prioritization that amplify the impact of increased financial expenses. In immediate strategic terms, increased spending shares for the Indian Navy are facilitating further infrastructure construction and asset manufacture-purchase.

b) Infrastructural development for naval expansion

India's geographic edge in the Indian Ocean has given impetus to the construction of large naval stations across the IOR. This advantage to India is being incorporated into its naval infrastructure programmes on the "mainland (its Western, Eastern and Southern Commands), the Lakshadweep Islands, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Western Command, based at Mumbai, focuses on the Arabian Sea." India is actively pursuing the construction of 'Project Seabird', a specially-dedicated naval base (Indian Naval Ship) INS Kadamba, near Karwar in Karnataka. Upon its completion, the Indian Navy will be "able to base 27 major warships there against 11 at present."**(29)** INS Kadamba's more southerly location facilitates prompt deployments into the south-western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Naval requests in July 2012 for

facilities in Gujarat, at Gandhinagar, were seen as attempts aimed at enabling it a closer look at on the Strait of Hormuz choke point to and from the Gulf.[30]

The Eastern Naval Command**,** based at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, concentrates on the Bay of Bengal and is under construction. It has seen continuous addition of surface ships, aircraft, and submarines**.** In 2005, the Eastern Command had 30 warships under its wing; by 2011 it had reached 50 and still growing.[31]

In April 2012, the Indian Navy commissioned a new base, INS Dweeprakshak, on the Lakshadweep Islands for a more robust presence. Once fully operational, INS Dweeprakshak will have new aircraft, warships and helicopters operating from there.[33]

The Andaman and Nicobar islands that comprise an archipelago of 572 islands at the junction of Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, is a Union Territory of India. “The North to South spread of the islands facilitates domination of the Bay of Bengal, the Six and Ten Degree Channels and also parts of the Indian Ocean.” In addition to their location, these Islands also have an “Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 300,000 sq. km. Thus, any country controlling these islands would be able to control the Bay of Bengal. Due to their proximity to South-East Asian countries, these islands can serve as a bridgehead for any country seeking to either attack mainland India or carry out subversive activities.[33] They also provide the entrance to the Malacca Strait chokepoint by only 160 km. Official figures and statements reiterate how the islands give India ‘geopolitical advantage’ and ‘vantage position’ in the Eastern Indian Ocean. Former Indian chief of naval staff Nirmal Kumar Verma noted how the islands offer a “vital geostrategic advantage” and a “commanding presence.”[34]

India’s naval position and use of the archipelago chain has been fortified in recent years. In June 2011, plans were unveiled for further expansion and strengthening for both the naval and air force units established on the islands. The

islands would soon convert into major “amphibious warfare hub” through the outset of full-fledged training facilities and the founding of an “integrated sea-and-land fighting unit for operations in the Indian Ocean and its littoral. At Campbell Bay, on the southerly tip of the archipelago and 300 km closer to the Malacca Strait than the Car Nicobar base, INS Baaz was opened for naval air arm operations in August 2012, with immediate plans for a 10,000- foot-long runway that would allow fighter operations.”[35]

c) Naval capability accretion

As the latest Maritime Strategy has enunciated, Indian Navy has made very significant advancement towards capability accretion over the past three years. Along with a robust pace of purchasing and construction, the Indian government approved in “April 2012 of the five-year Defence Plan for 2012–17 and the Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) for 2012–27. Under these plans, the Indian Navy is aiming to induct more than 90 fighting platforms in another ten years.” The arrival of such purchases and indigenously-produced surface and air platforms is plumping up the capability and reach of the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean.[36]

In December 2011, *Foreign Policy* magazine noted that India is planning to spend “almost $45 billion over the next 20 years on 103 new warships, including destroyers and nuclear submarines. In contrast, China's investment over the same period is projected to be around “$25 billion for 135 vessels.”[37]

In September 2012, the procurement of INS Chakra, a nuclear-powered submarine leased from Russia, placed India into an elite group of countries operating underwater nuclear-powered vessels.[38] The INS Arihant, India’s “indigenously designed and developed nuclear-armed submarine, is expected to become fully operational by late 2014. In addition, 46 warships for the Navy are in different stages of construction at several shipyards in the country. India has

also begun to induct Russian Nerpa-class submarines, which will give the navy a much needed fillip to the submarine fleet and considerably enhance sea-denial capabilities. Three stealth frigates — in 2010 (INS Shivalik), August 2011 (INS Satpura) and July 2012 (INS Sahyadri) — have been added to the fleet." In order to augment naval surveillance outreach in the IOR, the Indian Navy is engaged in establishing "operational turnaround bases, forward-operating bases, and naval air enclaves" therein.[39]

An organized and efficient increase in India's Indian Ocean-centred amphibious capacity has taken place over the decade. The arrival in 2007 of "INS Jalashwa, the ex-USS Trenton purchased from the United States for $48.44 million, added powerful amphibious landing capacity to the Indian Navy." Commissioning of three landing ships — "INS Shardul (2007), INS Kesari (2008) and INS Airavat (2009) — also forms part of the naval build-up. These are 125-metre-long ships that can carry 10 main battle tanks, 11 combat trucks and 500 soldiers." In September 2011 the Cabinet Committee on Security ordered "eight amphibious assault vessels, to be built in Kolkata for delivery by 2014, probably to be based at the Andaman and Nicobar Command." Incresed number of swift and advanced warships are entering into service with the Indian Navy that are fitting for Indian Ocean maritime diplomacy as well as potential conflict.[40]

India's naval air arm is not just expanding its fighter component, it is already expanding its surveillance capacities, specifically and primarily with the Indian Ocean in mind. The setting up in April 2012 of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) squadron at the INS Parundu naval station on the Tamil Nadu coastline, extends India's surveillance capacity in the Bay of Bengal and northern Indian Ocean.[41]

Something of a race is emerging with China's own future aircraft-carrier building programme, but such Chinese aircraft -carrier assets are likely to be deployed into the West Pacific and South China Sea rather than the Indian Ocean.

In contrast, India's aircraft-carrier capability is bespoke for concentration, and local superiority, in the Indian Ocean.

d) Use of naval diplomacy

Besides beefing up hard naval power, India has successfully used its diplomatic influence to expand its presence in the IOR. As former Indian chief of naval staff explained in summer 2012: "the Indian Navy has been at the forefront of bilateral and multilateral cooperative engagements and diplomacy is a critical component of our maritime strategy. Given our geographical position our natural paradigm is to architect the stability of our region."**(42)**

India's naval diplomacy comprises wide-ranging approaches involving personnel and assets. The personnel level involves India's training of naval officers of other countries, sending its own naval officers (from Chief of Naval Staff downwards) on routine trips to these countries, and standard interactions at the officers' level. Under agreements with Oman (1973), United Arab Emirates (2003) and Qatar (2008), successful naval training is given to these particular Gulf choke point states.**(43)**

Cooperation at assets level includes varied cooperative examples such as transport of military apparatus to Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius, operation of military installations (Maldives), "the hydrological explorations held on behalf of Indian Ocean micro-island states, patrolling of sensitive straits with local agreement (Mozambique)," perambulation of EEZs (Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius) and humanitarian aid provided by the Indian Navy.**(44)** Finally, India has efficiently employed maritime diplomacy in its broad naval deployments. These deployments have become conventional means of presenting the flag throughout the whole region. Such deployments are recognised in India as a highly discernible way of bolstering its position in the Indian Ocean.**(45)**

e) Naval exercises

India has employed a range of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral military drills that hold magnitude either characteristically, politically, tactically or operationally. It has entered into emblematic exercises with local minor states. Into this category come "the 'Ind-Indo Corpat' exercises between the Indian and Indonesian navies which have been held since 1994, the India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol ('Ind-Thai Corpat') exercise in the Andaman Sea set up in 2006, and the joint naval exercises carried out with the Malaysian Navy in 2008 and 2010." More substantive and strategically significant exercises have been conducted with other countries. In the east, "joint 'Simbex' exercises, of growing strength and substance with important strategic implications for presence and choke point control, have been held between India and Singapore since 1993, with Singapore providing friendly berthing facilities for the Indian Navy" for entrance and exit purposes from the Indian Ocean.**(46)**

In view of its heightened concerns about Sri Lanka being overwhelmed by Chinese influence, India carried out joint naval exercises with the Sri Lanka Navy, codenamed 'Slinex-II' in 2005, 2009 and 2011. Bilateral India- Maldives 'Dosti' symbolic exercises have been organized since 1991, and became trilateral with the participation of Sri Lanka in 2012.**(47)**

f) Choke points

Indian Maritime Doctrine states:

> By virtue of our geography, we are... in a position to greatly influence the movement/security of shipping along the SLOCs in the IOR provided we have the maritime power to do so. Control of the choke points could be useful as a bargaining chip in the international power game, where the currency of military power remains a stark reality.**(48)**

Fig 2

Chinese and Indian presence in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea[49]

The strategic pivot of India's Maritime Military Strategy specifically includes "the choke points leading to and from the Indian Ocean — principally the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the Cape of Good Hope."[50]

As for the Strait of Malacca, India's hold over Nicobar and Andaman islands gives it direct entrée and potential choke point control of the northern approaches to the Strait. The Indo-US convergence eased by the agreement in 2002 for the Indian Navy to conduct American shipping through the Strait enabled US patrol vessels to be redeployed for Indian Ocean-based operations over Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, India's befriending of the local Strait states Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, including joint exercises and friendly deployments in the Strait area with them, holds significance. Since 2000, India has been upbeat in deployments into the South China Sea.[51]

India is also active in the Strait of Hormuz wherein it has established close military relations with Oman, which provides direct access to the Strait. Since

2003, India has been concluding defence pacts with Oman dealing with training, maritime security cooperation and joint exercises. The Thumrait airbase has been employed by Indian Air Force for shipment purposes and Oman has offered the Indian Navy berthing facilities in support of anti-piracy patrols. In 2008, India also entered into a security agreement with Qatar, just inside the Gulf, that included maritime security, intelligence sharing, and Indian commitment to asserting Qatar's place in any prospective situation.[52]

The Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb is a standard part of Indian Navy's strategic outreach up into the Red Sea and beyond. India is very watchful of this strategic choke point. "Indian naval visits to Djibouti have been maintained; in 2002 (twice), 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2009. Joint exercises with other nations like France (2005, 2007) and Russia (2009) in the Gulf of Aden" has also led the Indian Navy out into these choke point waters. The dispatch of the aircraft-carrier INS Viraat to the Gulf of Aden in August-September 2009 was aimed at 'power projection.'[53]

Finally, as regards the Cape of Good Hope, India has fostered military collaboration with South Africa. The Defence Cooperation Agreement of 2000 is one such example. Activities by Indian Navy around all the main choke points have not institutionalized its unilateral authority; however, they have helped fostering an ability and willingness to keep them open. As for the Malacca Strait, it also gives India the ability to block (China's so-called 'Malacca Dilemma') trouble-free Chinese admission into the Indian Ocean.[54]

Indian advancements in the South China Sea

In 2012, suggesting that with the security of the nation's economic assets at stake in South China Sea, the Indian Navy chief, Admiral D.K. Joshi, said:

> "We [the Indian Navy] will be required to be there and we are prepared for that."[55]

Apart from the estimated massive hydrocarbon reserves of the SCS, India's involvement in the SCS is for security of maritime supply lanes through the Strait of Malacca through which six per cent of India's hydrocarbon imports are shipped. Through SCS, India seeks strategic entrance to the Pacific Ocean and a 'tit-for-tat encirclement' of China in partnership with close diplomatic allies in the region, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines. In view of the recent Sino-Philippines tensions, India in recent years has increasingly strengthened bilateral relations with Philippines, involving a certain degree of regular Indian naval presence in the Southeast Asian archipelago country.

India and Vietnam have enjoyed friendly relations since the Cold War. Both countries attribute much strategic value to their ties over their common concern about rising China. Apart from its economic attractiveness as an oil- and gas-rich country, Vietnam's strategic location bordering the northern to the southern part of the contested SCS and Hanoi's defiance of China are also in political terms important factors in India's developing strategy in the SCS.[56] In October 2011, India and Vietnam proclaimed their strategic partnership, which was followed by an announcement of joint India–Vietnamese hydrocarbon exploration drilling in the South China Sea, drawing criticism and warnings from the PRC. Apart from their energy cooperation, both countries have strengthened military cooperation as Hanoi invited the presence of Indian Navy vessels in its claimed waters in the SCS.[57]

Indo-US alliance in the IOR

China is not the biggest Great Power challenge in the Indian Ocean for India. Instead, given its military presence in Bahrein, Diego Garcia, and Western Australia, the United States is the power that can still 'shape' Indian Ocean events. However, in view of a tangible Chinese presence in the IOR, the US has

been tolerant of a rising Indian position in the Indian Ocean. As one Pentagon-commissioned report explained in 2012:

> There is broad consensus within Washington and Delhi that each depends on the other to sustain a favourable strategic equilibrium as Chinese power rises... increased Indian capabilities... particularly with respect to the Indian Navy's capacity to provide security in the Indian Ocean, are in US interests.[58]

Rise of China as a naval power in the IOR

The talk about Chinese push towards the seas has become a burning issue for many western scholars and policymakers. During the last decade, China has taken up an active naval strategy directed towards establishing trade, bases, and ships and building up of a powerful navy with dispatch. However, China seems to continue with 'soft power' diplomacy in regions adjoining vital SLOCs. They have reached out to countries throughout Southeast and South Asia, and their efforts have yielded a fair measure of success.

While its interests may prompt China to attempt to amass hard naval power in these regions, it is worth pointing out that (a) capabilities will not match Chinese intentions any time soon; (b) Chinese naval aspirations in the Indian Ocean region will run afoul of those of India; and (c) China must address matters in East Asia before it can apply its energies to building up naval forces able to vie for supremacy in the Indian Ocean region.[59]

Energy — China's paramount strategic interest in IOR

Energy security is the supreme concern animating Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean. The nation's energy use has more than doubled over the past two decades, exacerbating its dependency on energy imports. According to US Energy Information Administration, China is the world's second-largest consumer of oil behind the United States, and the second-largest net importer of oil as of 2009.[60]

In a report, RAND Corporation estimated that oil demand in China is projected to grow at an "average annual rate of 3.8 percent during the period 1996–2020, increasing consumption from 3.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) to 8.8 mb/d."[61]

This demand for energy resources has brought tremendous domestic political pressure on China to ensure an uninterrupted flow of energy. Chinese officials have sought out supplies of oil and gas as far away as the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa. The security of the waterways stretching from China's coastlines to the Indian Ocean has taken on special policy importance for Beijing.

Complex geopolitics is also at work. While Sino-Indian relations have seen steady improvement since the late 1990s, geopolitical calculations have long furnished a backdrop to bilateral ties. India is the dominant power in the Indian Ocean region, and given its great-power potential, it could very well rise to become a peer competitor of China over the long term. Given these dynamics, any Chinese attempt to control events in India's geographic vicinity would doubtless meet with Indian countermeasures. The Chinese recognize that India's energy needs, which resemble China's own, could prod it into zero-sum competition at sea.[62]

Chinese thinkers, moreover, voice special concerns about India's geopolitical ambitions beyond the Indian Ocean. According to the Chinese scholar Hou Songlin, India's 'Look East Policy' toward the Association of Southeastern Nations (ASEAN) carries maritime implications. While New Delhi is focusing on economic cooperation for now, the second stage of its eastern-oriented strategy will expand into the political and security realms. Indeed, he prophesises that Indo-ASEAN cooperation on counterterrorism, maritime security, and transnational crime fighting represents part of an Indian "grand strategy to control the Indian Ocean, particularly the Malacca Strait."[63]

Another Chinese observer, Zhu Fenggang, postulates that Indian maritime strategy envisions aggressively extending naval missions from coastal regions to

blue-water expanses. For Zhu, New Delhi's objectives include: (1) homeland defence, coastal defence, and control over maritime economic zones; (2) control of the waters adjacent to neighbouring littoral states; (3) unfettered control of the seas stretching from the Hormuz Strait to the Malacca Strait in peacetime, and the capacity to blockade these chokepoints effectively in wartime; and (4) the construction of a balanced oceangoing fleet able to project power into the Atlantic Ocean by way of the Cape of Good Hope and into the Pacific by way of the South China Sea.[(64)]

Confronting the US: China's security dilemma in IOR

In October 2011, US President Obama announced that America would rebalance its global strategy and "pivot to Asia."[(65)] Soon after that, the then defence secretary, Leon Panetta, indicated that the bulk of the US Navy would redeploy from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

> By 2020, the navy will reposture its forces from today's roughly 50-50% split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60-40 split between those oceans… That will include six aircraft-carriers in this region, a majority of our cruisers, destroyers, combat ships and submarines.[(66)]

These moves are widely seen to be designed to counter China's growing power and influence as well as marked assertiveness in its maritime neighbourhood.

The Chinese have also devoted substantial attention to the security dilemma posed by the US Navy's dominance of the high seas stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. With an increase in naval conflicts and America's naval upsurge, China's apprehensions over access to the straits have heightened. In an emergency, Chinese military experts contemplate the US and its regional allies could close the straits to shipping,

depriving China of crucial resources, particularly the Malacca Strait, the maritime portal for virtually all of China's Persian Gulf oil,[67] and that eventuality preoccupies Chinese thinking. Proclaims Shi Hongtao:

> From the perspective of international strategy, the Straits of Malacca is without question a crucial sea route that will enable the United States to seize geopolitical superiority, restrict the rise of major powers, and control the flow of the world's energy... It is no exaggeration to say that whoever controls the Strait of Malacca will also have a stranglehold on the energy route of China. Excessive reliance on this strait has brought an important potential threat to China's energy security.[68]

Some Chinese strategists consider the Indian Ocean an arena in which the US will strive to contain China's broader aspirations. They appraise Washington's military realignment in the Asia-Pacific region in stark geopolitical terms. Applying the "defense perimeter of the Pacific" logic elaborated by the then US secretary of state Dean Acheson in the early Cold War years, they see their nation enclosed by concentric, layered island chains. The United States and its allies can encircle or block China from island strongholds where powerful naval expeditionary forces are based. Analysts who take such a view conceive of the island chains in various ways. For example, many observers see Guam and Diego Garcia as an interactive island basing dyad that enables the US to shift forces deftly from northeast Asia to theatres as remote as Africa and back.[69]

Despite the presence of all these challenges, China is well aware that for now, these dilemmas remain largely in the realm of abstract speculation. First, the Chinese recognize that a steady flow of energy resources is an international public good and that everyone would suffer should this public good be interrupted. Only in extreme circumstances such as a shooting war over Taiwan would the US resort to a naval blockade even assuming it could make good on a blockade.

Second, China is superior to India across most indices of national power, allowing it to exert pressure to counter India's nautical ambitions.[70] The recent Sino-Indian rapprochement, furthermore, promises to temper competitive forces between the two resurgent powers.

Is Chinese 'soft power' policy response enough?

China's actual and rhetorical responses to its energy vulnerabilities and to its great-power relations with India and the US in the Indian Ocean suggest that it is crafting a sophisticated, long-term strategy aimed in part at securing its maritime position.

Through a well-calculated policy, it adheres to its claim that it is pursuing a "peaceful rise" to great-power status. This helps assuage fears in Asian capitals of China's naval buildup, which in short order has produced a leap in combat power. Beijing has fashioned a maritime diplomacy that bestows legitimacy on its naval aspirations in Southeast and South Asia, reassuring littoral nations skeptical of Chinese proclamations; undercuts America's claim to rule the waves in the region; and appeases Chinese nationalism, helping it maintain its rule. This represents an impressive use of soft power.[71]

However, a rising number of Chinese maritime experts like Yan Xuetong[72] and Zhang Wenmu believe that trade has always been inseparable from naval dominance, furnishing the basis for great-power ascendancy. These experts believe that China must foster its naval modernization programme that will allow the PLA Navy to rival the navies of the major powers.

In order to assert control over the SLOCs traversing South and Southeast Asia, the PLA Navy needs to add certain platforms to its order of battle, beyond those needed to mount a contested zone in the East Asian littoral. At present, the PLA Navy possesses only enough surface combatants and conventional submarines to serve as the nucleus for a modest cruise-missile navy consisting of

at most three to four combined strike groups. Chinese maritime experts believe that the PLA Navy stock needs increased number of modern frigates and destroyers. Despite its impressive progress, the PLA Navy still has fewer than 20 modern surface combatants, the most useful assets for patrolling the seas. Serial production of cruisers and destroyers would signal confidence in PLA Navy hardware, encouraging Chinese leaders to deploy navy units farther offshore.(73)

China needs more “Organic Naval Air Power.” Its navy suffers from three interrelated weaknesses that could be best reversed by robust naval aviation. First, ‘maritime domain awareness’, the US Navy’s term for art of oceanic surveillance, is the key to effective SLOC defence. Over the horizon surveillance and targeting remains a weak spot for the PLA Navy, even in home waters where it enjoys the luxury of nearby land- based sensors and aircraft. Second, despite the navy’s recent advances in anti-air and anti-submarine warfare, PLA Navy surface combatants remain highly vulnerable to attacks from modern submarines and aircraft. Third, the most glaring gap in the inventory is the absence of sustainable, long-range combat power. A concerted effort to develop or acquire plentiful long-range aircraft and ship-based helicopters for maritime surveillance, patrol, and anti-submarine warfare missions will be necessary before China can hope to assert control over SLOCs beyond the waters adjacent to its mainland.(74)

Besides, more combat logistics platforms are required. At-sea sustainment, i.e. the ability to refuel, rearm, and take on stores underway is a recurrent deficiency of the PLA Navy. A fleet of “forward-deployed oilers, ammunition ships, and refrigeration ships” will be one of the decisive elements if China seeks to position itself as a leading power in the Indian Ocean basin.(75)

However, for now, as it expands its interests in the Indian Ocean, waging vigorous soft-power diplomacy and backing maritime aims with material power, China will lack the capacity for overt naval competition in the region for some

time to come, and the pace and scope of its activities in that ocean will be limited by priorities far closer to home.

"String of pearls" strategy: an exaggerated Chinese factor in the IOR

In the mid-1980s, China began implementing plans to build a blue-water navy. Although focused on protecting its interests in the western Pacific Ocean, in particular the Taiwan Strait, this development also has long-term implications for India. China's naval capabilities now exceed India's by a considerable margin in both quantitative and qualitative terms. However, its ability to project power into the Indian Ocean is severely limited by the distance from ports in southern China and lack of logistical support in the Indian Ocean, as well as China's need to deploy to the Indian Ocean through choke points, principally the Strait of Malacca. China's perceived attempts to overcome these strategic limitations in the Indian Ocean region have been called its "String of Pearls"[(76)] strategy. This term, widely used in American and Indian diplomatic and official circles, refers to bases and seaports scattered along the sea routes linking the Middle East with coastal China, amplified by diplomatic connections with key states in these regions.

China has been developing political relationships and commercial interests in the Indian Ocean region for some years with favourable littoral states, including its *de facto* alliance with Pakistan and good political and economic relations with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. According to Indian claims, the "string of pearls" strategy includes the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, electronic intelligence gathering facilities on islands in the Bay of Bengal, funding construction of a canal across the Kra Isthmus in Thailand, a military agreement with Cambodia and building up of forces in the South China Sea. These "pearls" are to help build strategic ties with several countries along the sea lanes from the

Middle East to the South China Sea[77] in order to protect China's energy interests and security objectives.

However, many analysts are sceptical of Indian claims about China's intentions in the northern Indian Ocean, particularly assertions of a Chinese naval presence in Myanmar and the Andaman Sea. Many claims about Chinese "ports" or "bases" appear to be exaggerated or groundless. The Chinese navy has no historical tradition of projecting power beyond coastal waters. It has built no aircraft-carriers and has no intercontinental bombers. It has only a very small fleet of in-flight refuelling and airborne command and control aircraft and has only a relatively small number of blue-water naval combatant vessels.[78] While China may well desire to have the capability to project military power into the Indian Ocean region, it seems that it will be a long while before such capabilities come to fruition.

Despite these questions about China's intentions and capabilities, the "string of pearls" theory is widely followed in New Delhi. China's relationships in the Indian Ocean region are often not perceived in the Indian security community as being a legitimate reflection of Chinese commercial interests in the region or its strategic interests in protecting its SLOCs across the Indian Ocean. Instead, many perceive China's regional relationships as a plan of maritime "encirclement" of India or otherwise intended to keep India strategically preoccupied in South Asia.

Indian response to Chinese supposed 'encirclement'

India has responded to China's perceived Indian Ocean strategy in several ways. First, as noted above, it is expanding its own power projection capabilities.

Second, it has sought to pre-empt the development by China of security relationships in the Indian Ocean through the development of India's own relationships in the region. For example, in February 2012, India hosted naval

exercises with 14 Indian Ocean countries on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Pakistan and China were not part of it. India is also spending $2 billion to set up a military command on Andaman Islands.[79]

In the southwestern Indian Ocean region, it has friendly terms with Mauritius, is developing security ties with Madagascar and Mozambique, is bolstering maritime security relations with France and South Africa and has a growing presence in Antarctica. Despite America's predominance in the northwestern region, India is developing security relations there, particularly with Qatar (which sits inside the Persian Gulf), and Oman (which sits on the Strait of Hormuz at the head of the Persian Gulf). India has defence agreements with both these countries and since 2008 has enjoyed berthing rights in Oman.[80]

The two island chains that dominate the central Indian Ocean are the British-administered Indian Ocean Territory (which hosts the US air and naval base on Diego Garcia) and the Maldives. In the Maldives, since 2009 the old British airbase on Gan island has been accessible for use by Indian reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft.[81]

Third, the Strait of Malacca, which represents a key choke point between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, forms a focus of India's maritime security plan in the northeast Indian Ocean. The Malacca Strait is one of the world's busiest waterways and constitutes a crucial trade route between East Asia, Europe and Middle East. The Strait is largely within the territorial waters of Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. India's security relationships in the region are anchored by Singapore which sees India as having an important security role in the region, acting as a balance to other extra-regional powers, including China, the United States and Japan.[82] The Indo-US nuclear deal and regular joint naval exercises are also aimed at containing China's rise in the region.

In the wake of 9/11 terrorist attacks (September 2001), at the invitation of the United States, India took a security role inside the Strait through the provision

of naval escorts for high-value commercial traffic, as part of the US-led "Operation Enduring Freedom." Since then, India has been careful to position itself as a benign security provider in the Strait. However, India's official justification for its interest in the Strait — that is, 'securing the Strait from threats of piracy and terrorism'—holds little water.[83] It is evident that India's interest in the Strait is primarily motivated by a desire to enhance its role as the leading maritime security provider in the Indian Ocean and potentially control access to the Indian Ocean. However, the littoral states — and in particular, Malaysia — have resisted giving India a formal security role in the Strait.

IOR and the way ahead

Devising a way ahead for IOR maritime security, while addressing the challenges of the 'Asian century' in an atmosphere of competition and distrust, is not going to be easy. The lack of maritime domain surveillance, intelligence and enforcement capabilities and capacity among IOR states is a major problem. Regional cooperative mechanisms are at best fragmented and incomplete. In some quarters, there is suspicion towards, and a related lack of willingness to engage with external powers. Emerging human and environmental security concerns combined with common interests in maritime trade and the need for ocean-based resources suggest that the maritime domain offers the most likely prospect for progress to be made.[84]

While much of the Indian Ocean has been encompassed within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), territorial seas or the archipelagic areas of regional states, much of the ocean remains part of the global square; and states maintain the right of freedom to transit most areas under national jurisdiction. However, many regional states lack capacity and resources; they are unable to effectively manage and protect their maritime zones and have little capacity to contribute to broader common security. Many external powers have significant

and legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean, and they have the capacity to assist in providing maritime security to protect their own and others' interests. Consequently, there is a need to involve external powers in IOR security arrangements. A classic dilemma of regionalism versus globalism is presented here.[85] The seeds for IOR maritime security cooperation and collaboration lie, in part, in dealing with this dilemma. The challenge is to construct regional security arrangements that will provide enduring and flexible mechanisms to facilitate principally maritime security cooperation in order to protect expanding and major common interests.

China's prolonged material weakness along the sea trade routes could allow Washington and New Delhi to forge a near-term maritime partnership with Beijing. Cooperation in areas such as disaster relief, maritime domain awareness, and counterterrorism could lay the groundwork for a more durable partnership in maritime Affairs.

In his book, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*,[86] Indian analyst Raja Mohan explores the dynamics of Sino-Indian maritime competition in the expanded theatre of the Indo-Pacific and argues that the Indian Ocean would be heavily influenced by the role of the United States, which continues to be the dominant power in the region. Raja Mohan ascribes a critical role to the US in determining the eventual outcome of the Sino-Indian maritime rivalry. In this triangular relationship, he explores the possibility of China and the US finding a modus vivendi which may leave India isolated. On the other hand, China could well turn the game by resolving the long-standing border dispute with India and thus enabling a more cooperative rather than competitive maritime relationship. Cooperation in areas such as disaster relief, maritime domain awareness, and counterterrorism could lay the groundwork for a more durable partnership in maritime affairs.

Concluding reflections

Driven by the rising power projection goals in Maritime Asia, both China and India have largely been expanding their naval build-up to secure economic and strategic interests in the waters of maritime Asia between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. This has resulted in an increasing overlap between Sino-Indian interests. Distrustful about each other's objectives, the uneasy relationship between the two emerging giants and the intersecting economic and strategic interests have been leading to a gradual increase in the naval presences of both countries within the IOR.

Although, still conceived for solely economic purposes, the location and nature of China's and India's engagement in these waters and sensitive naval standoffs not only point to an increasing militarization of their maritime engagement, but also to their potential military naval clashes sometime in the future. China and India will try to limit the escalation and scale of those conflicts in order not to risk any damage to their emerging economies. Both Beijing and New Delhi have contingent energy, economic and security interests in their claimed maritime backyards and beyond which the two countries are not likely to back off from. Moreover, the American factor is crucial in determining the Sino-Indian competition in the IOR. The US, China and India have all declared, through strategy, an intent to remain diplomatically, economically and militarily engaged in the region, making it a point of strategic juncture. The extent to which they are in coalition, coexistence or clash in the region could set the agenda for global security in what many nations have dubbed the 'Asian Century.'

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