

Strategic Interests, Power Dynamics and Emerging Alliances in IOR

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Abstract

The Indian Ocean Region has emerged as a theatre of competition between the competing powers which are pursuing strategies to maximize their relative share of power. This region gained tremendous political, economic and strategic importance. The U.S. has embarked upon the Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy in its pursuit to encircle China with the help of India. This leads to realignment of strategic relations in the Indian Ocean Region, whereby India has emerged as a Major U.S. Defence Partner. This study explores how these changing relations might implicate the strategic landscape of the region. The theoretical foundation of this study would mainly revolve around the realist school of thought and a modern variant of Hans Morgenthau's realism often called as neo realism or structured realism. By using the qualitative research methodology, the study attempts to develop a balanced perspective regarding different policy objectives and foreign policy approaches of several states involved in this region including Pakistan. The Indian Ocean Region has emerged as a theatre of competition between the competing powers which are pursuing strategies to maximize their relative share of power. This region gained tremendous political, economic and strategic importance. The U.S. has embarked upon the Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy in its pursuit to encircle China with the help of India. This leads to realignment of strategic relations in the Indian Ocean Region, whereby India has emerged as a Major U.S. Defence Partner. This study explores how these changing relations might implicate the strategic landscape of the region. The theoretical foundation of this study would mainly revolve around the realist school of thought and a modern variant of Hans Morgenthau's realism often called as neo realism or structured realism. By using the qualitative research methodology, the study attempts to develop a balanced perspective regarding different policy objectives and foreign policy approaches of several states involved in this region including Pakistan.

Key Words: Indian Ocean Region; Structured Realism; Emerging Alliances; Asia Pacific Rebalancing; Major International Powers.

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1. Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) entails the coastal states as well as islands that meet the Indian Ocean. It occupies an estimated-fifth of the total area of world's Oceans. It is expanding from east coast of Africa to the Gulf States. The Indian subcontinent is in the centre whereas it extends to the archipelago of Asia from the southeast to Australia in the east which was discussed in detail in chapter Nations have traditionally relied on the maritime trade routes to carry out trade in distant regions. The security of these trade routes remains paramount for economic security and freedom of navigation. The crucial choke points are particularly vulnerable to cause disruption in flow of ships because of closer proximity to land and hence may interrupt the supply of energy and other commodities. This requires any seafaring nation to ensure a favourable security order, or at least freedom to navigate, through troubling waters. This also explains why the Western colonial powers have historically taken and maintained the control of these chokepoints and seaports, including the Bab al-Mandab Strait which pivots the entrance from Mediterranean to Arabian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Strait of Malacca which inlets from East Asia to the Bay of while Bengal.

As the global economic and political focus also shift towards East, the Indian Ocean becomes a key emerging region in the geopolitical domain. Its unique strategic location makes it a key shipping hub. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of states in the IOR and multilateral trade between them have grown faster than other economies in the world. According to an estimate, fifty percent of transport containers and, seventy percent of worlds' oil related products i.e. petroleum pass through this region. Energy Information Agency (EIA) of the US Department of Energy (USDOE), also highlights that about 30% of crude oil and related products transport through Strait of Hormuz and 27% transport through the Strait of Malacca.

When United Kingdom pulled itself from "East of Suez" in 1968; United States assumed the sole leadership of maintaining the order in Indian Ocean. Due to its massive power capacity, US established its hegemony along the Indian Ocean region. This also allowed the US to check the emergence of other threats to the Indian Ocean region which is also a "global common". However, American naval power and its ability to exert influence in distant regions has significantly declined in recent years. In the meanwhile, China's sea power has significantly upgraded in terms of both quantity and quality. Though China has not used its massive power projecting potential in the Indian Ocean, like it asserts its claims in East and South China Seas, it is likely to eventually strive to attain greater control over the Indian Ocean region.

With the passage of time, the entities focusing on the Indian Ocean are increasing, because of it being the transport route for energy and commodities, and keeping in view the imbalance of power between the United States and China. On this situation, some questions arise over how the order will be maintained in the IOR in future. While contemplating the answers, it merits reiteration of the fact that Indian Ocean is a theatre of conflict between the regional players (emerging China, rising economy of India, ASEAN and littoral states, and extra-regional powers like the United States of America).

China is vulnerable to having a so-called "Malacca dilemma" and is trying to seek full access to the region to solve this problem. However, China's engagements has also irritated India, and India is trying to assume a

central role in the politics of IOR. From that viewpoint, this chapter considers the strategic interests and power dynamics of main players in the Indian Ocean. It also analyses the policy approaches of regional and global powers in the region. The chapter also sheds light on the comparative stakes and interests of regional and extra-regional powers that are engaged within this region. Additionally, it also investigates how unique provincial states have adjusted themselves to the extra-territorial and worldwide forces, for example the U.S., and examines various coalitions and alliances involved with the key strategic issues in the region. By a similar token, this chapter also examines the dangers presented to regional stability and additionally recognizes the nature and extent of regional cooperation among concerned states.

2. Strategic Interests and Concerns in IOR

When we talk about vital interests of the states in the IOR, it is so evident to express that, the region is at the heart of geo-political, financial, and strategic exercises. Strategically Indian Ocean acquires critical importance due to the presence of major nuclear countries in its region, i.e., China, India and Pakistan. Due to its unparalleled importance, United States also takes interest in order to maintain its hegemonic power, which further enhances its significance. During last few years, major players of IOR continuously deploy fleets and nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNS) equipped with nuclear capable submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMS). On one side of the coin, it safeguards their strategic, military, economic and political interests, while on flipping the coin, it makes Indian Ocean a constant place of possible confrontations and conflicts from the choke point of Bab El-Mandeb to the Straits of Hormuz, along the coastline of South Asia to the Straits of Malacca.

As major powers take extraordinary interest in IOR, especially after the Cold War and with the increasingly interdependence owing to globalization. As mentioned earlier, the prime reason of their interest is Indian Oceans' "in-between" position, which is the busiest transit route not only for hosting international trade but also with regards to access to Middle Eastern oil terminals and European markets. Howsoever, it provides vital link between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Put another way, it ensures uninterrupted carbon-energy supplies to China, India, US and UK [3]. As the strategic, military, economic and political interests are inter mingled, it becomes difficult to point each state's interests with certainty. These are tightly-knit issues and this chapter will accordingly focus to shed light on all these aspects.

Strategic interest is an expansive term which usually includes a connection between two parties that is commonly useful to them. The benefits might entail increased security and safety, enhanced trade and economies, better access to financial markets, and cooperation about all the issues. However, when strategic interests in IOR are considered, the discussion remains incomplete without taking an eye on the strategic interests of China, India, United States, ASEAN, Gulf countries, Europe, and Africa. The strategic interests of one state are interlinked with the other, and vice versa. However, this chapter endeavours to break down the key interest of all the regional and extra-regional players. As there are many countries lying along the horn of Africa, like Kenya, Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia, where helpless people are living their lives in suffocating environment because of endless civil wars and other conflicts. In the Gulf region, continuously rising conflicts are far from being settled-from Arab spring to Israel-Palestine strife. When we talk about South Asia, Indo-Pak

animosity and the underlying unresolved political disputes seem far from being resolved even in decades. Likewise, Iran also seems interested in acquiring capabilities to project its power in Indian Ocean. In addition, occupation of Afghanistan, two gulf wars, along with war on terror also add fuel to the fire, and lead to continuous discord, conflict and unrest in the IOR.

This region (IOR) is still undergoing geopolitical turmoil - with assertive North Korea, Sino-Japanese apprehensions over Diaoyu and Senkaku's islands, and regional conflicts in South China Sea. This change in attitude has put the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the pivot of major states' power rivalry and weakened central perceptions and unity of ASEAN [1]. Additionally, in recent years, the IOR has gained increasing importance as a potential area of geopolitical competition. This growth will influence the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), since five of its ten-member states are littoral states of the Indian Ocean, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar and Thailand [1]. There are strong historical linkages between Southeast Asia and the IOR. So, the ASEAN is also glued its lenses on the security dilemma of maritime lanes of IOR, which are promising signs of trade and economic connectivity. These shipping lanes act as a bridge which leads to Europe, the Middle-east, Central Asia and Africa. However, the ASEAN countries (especially littoral states among them) must strengthen their participation in regional agreements, and promote institution building in IOR to promote interconnectedness and mutual prosperity [1]. beyond the borders of their actual sub region; therefore, they attain international dimensions, and create a loophole for extra regional forces (like the United States) to exploit [1].

3. US Interests

While discussing the strategic interest of United States, it is important to consider former US Presidents George Bush's words, which are directly relevant to the topic under discussion. He said, "Our action in the Gulf is about fighting aggression and preserving the sovereignty of nations. It is about keeping our word, our solemn word of honour, and standing by old friends. It is about our own national security interests and ensuring the peace and stability of the entire world." So far, the same strategy is being implemented by the succeeding governments in the White House.

4. Strategic Interests

The US had established one of the naval facilities at Diego Garcia, long time ago, which carries out its various activities in the IOR. While standing in Diego Garcia, US safeguards its critical interests in similar fashion. Coupled with this, US has also established several other naval bases in the Indian Ocean which help it to ensure its power projection and hegemony in these waters and also take care of its vital strategic, economic, military and political interests.

The key US strategic interests in the region include the following:

- Maintaining a dominant role in South Asia, Southwest Asia, and in the Middle East.

- Preventing the expansion of so-called "Islamic fundamentalism" in the region.

Ensuring security and protection of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) in. Ensuring the presence of US military, in the front area, in order to upgrade its IOR react rapidly in the event of military interventions. Containment of Iran's nuclear aspirations; and capacity. Containment of China's growing influence.

5. Economic Interests

United States also has myriad economic quests in the Indian Ocean. The prime economic interest of United State is to focus on the key resources in the Ocean in addition to international trade transit route which neither starts nor ends in the United States. Besides carbon energy supplies, the US is also dependent on IOR for other 18 critical materials. Not to mention, Indian Ocean also provides huge market for finished products to United States. Along with it, Indian Ocean is pivot for natural Uranium resources. Furthermore, an estimated 77% of natural rubber is exported from the same region. In a similar fashion, this region also provides a potential market for arms.

If seen through consumer market lens, then according to estimation, more than 4.2 billion people reside in Asia's 46 sovereign states. According to one of the forecasts of World Bank, China may be the largest economy between 2020 and 2030, while India might compete as 2nd largest economy of the world between 2030 and 2035. Thus, the scale and scope of Asia as a potential market and economy attracts US towards Indian Ocean.

6. Military Interests

Eventually, military interests of the United States are also interlinked with its economic and political interests. The document, "US National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement highlights that the prime objective of US military interest is to maximize its security, by maintaining a strong defence capability and strengthening cooperative security measures . During post-cold war period, the doctrine of US Naval forces has undergone complete transformation. From the prior focus of open war, it has shifted to "power-projection through strengthening Naval bases in the region, so that employment of naval forces from the Indian Ocean can directly influence the events in littoral states and others in Indian Ocean region .

In addition, from the "Navy Operational Concept" of US naval forces, the importance and need for an advanced presence of American forces is so obvious in the Indian Ocean. This is also apparent by the creation and activity of autonomous US maritime fleets in Indian sea. Besides, the lasting nearness of US military, just as, maritime bases in the western Indian sea also provide the US with a competitive edge. US has further fortified its capacity by floating financial help, just as it uses politico-military pressures as a coercive tool [2].

7. Political Interests

Political doctrine of US in Indian Ocean prefers a status quo in political engagements, to ensure its global pre-eminence in line with its power projection objectives. It also seeks to influence the littoral states of Indian Ocean. From the viewpoint of American policy makers, any form of government is acceptable in coastal

countries, as long as, the political interests of the ruling institutions in these countries are consistent with the goals of American policy. To achieve this very objective, military and economic support is always offered to the regimes in littoral states.

8. Chinese Interests

China, being the rapidly emerging state in the Indian Ocean has its own vision of political, military, economic and strategic arrangement. Chinese interests in Indian Ocean region are historical and deep-rooted. Taking into consideration its historical attachment, Indian Ocean is central to Chinese view of the region because of its critical maritime trade routes into the region.

9. Strategic Interests

In the contemporary unipolar world, China wants to carve out major role in creating a new type of world order. This objective cannot be attained without considering its neighbourhood i.e. Indian Ocean, its access, and creating an influence within. Likewise, China also keeps her eye on the Indian hegemonic designs to control the Indian Ocean and has expressed an antagonist view over such attempts. Furthermore, Malacca strait, which is considered a major choke point of Asia, also holds strategic importance from Chinese perspective (as mentioned in previous head) as it's the prime transit route for oil imports of China coming from Middle East.

10. Economic Interests

Being the fastest growing economy, and highly industrialized state, China becomes the second largest carbon-energy consumer after United States, and the largest coal consumer after United States and the largest coal consumers. By keeping in account, the Chinese engagement and policies in the region, its range of authority in IOR is quite evident, China is also aware of its geo-strategic location. Thus, its engagements reflect not only its diplomatic but also its economic and military involvement in the Indian Ocean region. Like the long-term Chinese commitment (One Belt One Road) to build the massive infrastructure which connects three continents (Europe, Asia, Africa), shows her deep economic as well as political insight. China's help to Pakistan to build the Gwadar port through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and also manifested its long-term intentions of maintaining its footprints in Indian Ocean [1]. Currently, China's major assistance to several littoral states can be observed easily. Thus, by using policy of liberal aid, China is building its long-term relations in Indian Ocean region.

11. Military Interests

Being the fastest growing and emerging power, China has a formidable military and is an established nuclear weapon state. Within this framework, China views the Indian Ocean region as her huge market ahead, especially southwest Indian Ocean. However, China also faces the menace of regional rivalries with India, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Contrariwise, owing to China's growing military and naval strength, her geographic location, and growing influence over the Indian Ocean region, it is quite imminent that China is the foremost and important player in Indian Ocean region. Interests of other players) Though many other nation states maintain their

presence in Indian Ocean to safeguard their respective interest. Significant of these states include Russia, Japan, European Union, Australia etc. However, none of them has yet shown specific strategic interests in Indian Ocean region. Hence, all these sovereign states except Russia bandwagon with USA, and seek collective security within the framework of United Nations. Suffice it to say that these states' direct chances of a conflict with each other are less likely.

12. Interests of Regional Powers

While discussing regional powers, there are two sovereign states, who play significant role in IOR. These are India and Iran. So, their interests in the Indian Ocean region are discussed ahead.

13. Indian Interests

India is an emerging power in the region. It has huge economic potential and developing massive military power to pursue its political aspirations of achieving hegemony in the Indian Ocean. Despite Indo-Pak security-insecurity oxymoron, India's interests seem to go beyond just South Asia. Thus, India's strategic interests are discussed through its lens. India's strategic interests move around securing maritime lanes in Indian Ocean, for instance offshore oil platforms along with SLOCs (sea lanes of communication). Apart from this, India also cares about its uninterrupted fluidity of trade. India's naval concerns involve many factors as it aims to protect its coastline, island territories as well as other trade and commerce resources.

14. INDO-Pacific

Geared towards China's containment in South China Sea as well as in the Indian Ocean, the term "Indo-Pacific" has gained significance. Initially, Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe used the term "Indo-Pacific" in 2007. He is of the point that there is a connection between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Notwithstanding, the President of the United States reactivated the term Indo-Pacific this region. This might be reflected in multilateral military activities, for example, at the EAS culmination, held in 2017. The term Indo-Pacific is utilized instead of "Asia-Pacific". This shows the significance of India in the U.S. approach towards the Malabar. It is trilateral maritime activities between India, Japan, and the United States. India also hosted a military exercise of ASEAN Plus held in 2018 [3].

15. Power Competition and the End Game (Analysis)

IOR attracts the focus of the world because of its major strategic location and key chokepoints. In addition to this, all crucial maritime trade routes pass through Indian Oceans, which make this place a can of worms and makes different states sceptical about their security. The above discussion also suggests that IOR has become a hub of great power politics where different states compete for relative gains and share in power structure. China is gradually emerging as a major player in the Indian Ocean, and it actively pursues its vested interests in the region that also engages other regional states. China's huge naval expansion is seen by India and the U.S. as destabilizing, and they believe that Beijing's growing military influence also gives rise to many repercussions for other nation states in the Indian Ocean. The ongoing South China Sea conflict and turbulent relationship

with Japan are quoted as examples of this trend. To counter this looming threat at the geological level, USA, the previous hegemon of the world, has built relationships with India, to keep an eye in the Indian Ocean. In the same manner, it keeps a close watch on other relatively smaller regional powers and attempts hare them into it fold in the effort to counter Beijing. To what extent will U.S. be able to contain China's rapidly increasing influence remains to be seen. Beyond any question, it is also evident that there are certain factors which are influencing China's strategic moves [4].

16. Factors Influencing China's Strategic Culture

China's economy is for the most part dependent on global maritime exchange and carbon-vitality imports, for example, oil, which represents almost 70% of all out energy flexibly. Moreover, 2013 obverse China as largest oil importer of oil than United States. Due to this, China's reliance on Strait of Malacca increases manifolds than before. Traditional as well as an conventional security extortions to Beijing are of great concern. According to EIA's port, almost 80% of China's oil imports pass through the Strait of Malacca, which is already vulnerable choke point, and adds Malacca dilemma. This term is primarily emphasized by President Hu Jintao in 2003 to manifest China's vulnerability for nomic strangulation at the hands of possible American interruption of Chinese ships passing through this strait [5].

17. Geopolitics and the BRI

The second summit of the China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was held in Beijing from 26 to 27, April 2019 and brought together world leaders from more than 150 countries Premiers of 40 countries as well as international organizations attended this summit. It was considered as an opportunity to present the Chinese megaproject aimed at to promote global growth and prosperity. China used this opportunity to develop a favourable clout in the international community that could welcome Beijing's vision of economic interconnectedness for shared destiny and mutual prosperity.

18. USA criticism

But critics from the United States took the opportunity to represent the Belt and Road initiative as a substantiation of China's geopolitical emulation that would push developing countries into the blind spot of debt trap. U.S. projects China as a revisionist state that only seeks to alter the existing world order on the lines of communist ideology that opposes the liberal values of the free world. By putting it concisely, the debate is all about whether the RS is complaisant Chinese initiative aimed at promoting greater international connection for common conch development or a mirage for controlling the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This issue is of the utmost importance for Pakistan as CPEC is the B's flagship project and an example for other developing countries to follow.

As being the flag bearer of China's foreign policy and new approach towards the external world, BRI seeks to revitalize primitive silk routes linking China to Eurasia In order to realize this manoeuvre, China has created financial institutions, as well as, develops planning mechanisms to stepping up the progress and construction of infrastructure in adjoining nation states, linked with economic belt of silk road and maritime routes.

The China Development Bank alone has allocated nearly \$1 trillion by 2015 to more than 900 transportations, infrastructure, and energy projects. The Export-Import Bank of China has committed to finance more than 1,000 projects in 49 countries under the Belt and Road initiative. Total Chinese financial spending is anticipated at \$ 3 trillion. Currently, more than 80 countries have become a direct part of this initiative, while kinds of other states, including many members of the European Union, are also participating. These nation states are scattered all over the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is interesting to note that the countries from European Union have even defied American expectations and decided to economically engage with China. This trend may not represent the changing structure of alliances, but it manifests how states now give preference to their own interests as compared to those of the allies. Secretary of State Trump Pompeo announced the strengthening of USA's regional role in 'Indo-Pacific'. Further adds that, it will be realized as the mightiest economy engine for the entire world, moreover, also announced 113 million dollars for that, as compared to China's 1 trillion dollars. Tersely, emphasizes that declining USA under uncertain umbrella of Trump administration does not float the same impression as rising China does. Because of its ability to compete in the global market, the United States has used increasing pressure against China. This trend is also exhibited in the form of ongoing trade war between Beijing and Washington. Beyond a shadow of doubt, in any project of BRI, there will be gaps that President Xi recognized at the last summit, calling for transparency and zero tolerance for corruption. But to say that the BRI is a geopolitical takeover by China to challenge the United States hinders its true objective. Moreover, it reveals United States' own weakness in a changing world order [6].

19. China's investment in India's neighbourhood

Although India has restored its relations with nations around the world, its political aptitudes are regularly required when managing its neighbours. India's conciliatory deficiencies can be found in the South Asia district as; numerous little South Asian states pick nearer connections to China as opposed to India. For instance, Nepal as of late pulled back from the primary joint military activities of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sector Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in India and picked to take an interest with China in joint military activities 12 days. The quickly changing political conditions numerous South Asian nations and the because of individual discretion among political pioneers in the locale keep on privily affecting the solidness of India's relations with its neighbours. In this setting. be most overwhelming test looked by India, is the expansion of China-led infrastructure projects. to fix this, India must restore associations with its local accomplices. Although India can't bear to offer and reproduce what China offers in its neighbourhood, because of its greater economic might and trade potential. This situation pels India to utilize compelling strategies and shrewd political skills to contain China's growing influence [7].

Power Struggle between India and China ideally, India must refrain from interrupting the strategic autonomy of its small s Egbers To all appearances, India is facing the growing influence of China in its nk of the woods. However, whenever India is perceived to overlook its neighbours, the consequences of foreign policy are counterproductive for India's interests China's economic ability has empowered it to actualize its perceived initiatives and extend it to nations including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and particularly Pakistan. It kewpies reinforces the proof incorporates the build out of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, economic help and coordinated effort to Nepal, and advancing tourist in Bhutan. As stream of its bellwether program BRI, Beijing has

additionally introduced a new framework and correspondence extends in the region, closing the advancement of Chittagong Port and the Bangladesh Industrial Park in Dhaka. By a similar token, it additionally consents to facilitate commerce arrangement with the Maldives, which encourages Maldives to open its approach to make the most of its fish market to worldwide level. Additionally, marking of an hindered commerce concurrence with the Maldives which will open its fisheries to the worldwide market is considered another venture inside the more extensive system of the BRI is the CPEC, which takes India's breath away as it crosses through Pakistani administrated Kashmir.

India needs to comprehend that it can't offer what China can as far as be emptying cash in the economies of South Asia. Despite the fact that India's regional contribution is little as compared to China, however the quickly evolving geostrategic factors in South Asia vary with the developing impact of China. More into the deal, this suggests conversation starter on India's role in its neighbourhood [8].

Some experts are of view that "Indian East "strategy and the "One Belt One Road" complement each other On flipping the side, China does not have any intention to restrict its activities in Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Nevertheless, China will not refrain from using all its might to pressure India when its interests are viewed as threatened.

20. Conclusion

The alliance around the Indian Ocean has very important consequences for all the states whose strategic interests are involved with the Indian Ocean region. The adoption of competing strategies, like the String of pearls, India's Act East or U.S. Pivot of Asia, by different states refer to evolving strategic competition in Indian Ocean region. The Indian Ocean holds quickly expanding, key and economic imperativeness. It is at the junction of worldwide economy powerhouses and significant force posing While promising indications of more noteworthy exchange and financial network loom note far off, they are joined by wellsprings of strain and uncertainty, both new and existing. On the other side, these difficulties are not constrained to the security front, as challenging dreams of territorial request advanced by significant forces have components of monetary rivalry and interlaced key competition. Such pressures are destined to happen adrift, making the Indian Ocean a space with a squeezing requirement for compelling preventive discretion and compromise components. India's efforts to establish influence in the Asia-Pacific region have become musingly evident in recent years. Act East policy reflects the rapidly evolving geopolitical predicament of the Asia-Pacific region, which are lucidly outlined by the of China and India, and further augmented by the gained momentum by the convergence of India and United States. India is considering more aspiring and determined role for itself in the Asia-Pacific region. It is widely believed that India's role in the region will continue to grow India has been trying to play significant role of net security provider (term given by USA), while keeping in view the China's assertiveness in the South China Sea as, India is not directly involved in sovereignty conflicts of South China Sea. India pushed this streak during bilateral security talks with countries like the United States, Japan and Vietnam. Therefore, India under the Modi's regime has ambitions not only to "look into the South China Sea" but also "Act into South China Sca". So, under the shadow of Act East policy, India seeks to help Vietnam to strengthen its naval abilities. Irrefutably, China likes it or not, but India h become one of the main players in the Asia-Pacific strategic

landscape. Incontrovertibly, India is also well acquainted with the fact that any confrontation and hard ties with China cause serious repercussions for India, especially in terms of economic domain. Consequently, New Delhi will not be directly involved in the conflicts India will adopt a more cautious policy toward the South China Sea to pressure China while circumventing provocations. Despite all this, India has already stained some success points. United States, as well as its allies in the region, support India's bid for growing influence in the IOR. In lieu of emerging power, India will seek to expand its influence in the South China Sea. [9]

It is well recognized that India's growing engagement in the South China Sea is balancing China. It is not surprising that Beijing remains alert to the dangers posed by India's legislative policy in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and encourages an adequate response. The future direction of the Sino-Indian relationship depends on their ability to cope with all these teething troubles without getting caught into any strategic rivalry.

India will continue to oppose any Chinese occurrence in the Indian Ocean, while it is likely to view US military existence in the area with some leniency, considering that it will fade over time. Nevertheless, India's failure to accommodate China's emerging activities in the region or to cooperate with other powers in the Indian Ocean may prevent India from fully attaining its ambitions to become the power in the region.

India and the U.S. are very suspicious of China's magnificent plans in economic advancements and perceive Beijing's rise as the greatest threat. India also belittled the pioneering BRI project and CPEC because India believes it crosses through the disputed territories of Kashmir. On the flip side, both United States and India saw BRI with a doubted eye and assumed it as "debt trap" for participating countries. However, it should be noted that BRI will seriously hamper India's efforts to increase its share in world trade, if India prefers to stay out of this multilateral project of interconnectedness and economic cooperation.

In addition to what has been said, the United States suspect China as the utmost challenge to its interests not only in the Pacific but also in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, United States adopts the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy to reevaluate its military deployments and forge new alliances with regional states that could join in its effort to contain the rise of China. Currently, the U.S. strategic focus relies on containing China's influence and maintain its key position in the IOR [10].

On the flip side, there seems a general consensus in Beijing that United States is actively pursuing the policy of China's containment. Henceforth, the United States military and naval presence poses a major threat to China's national security and fundamental interest. Beyond any question, irrefutably China is apprehensive about safeguarding its SLOCs. From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the states are currently competing in the IOR to pursue their divergent interests that lead to adopting competing strategies against each other. In addition, United States and India continue to project China's strategic behavior as offensive in nature. As, according to some strategists and experts, there is a sentiment that both the countries (India and United States) should join hands with China for the bigger picture and set aside all the differences which, however, seems improbable.

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