

Indian Naval Modernization in IOR: Implications for China



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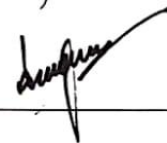
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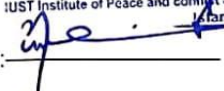

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

A2/AD	Anti-access and Area denial
ACSA	Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement
AIP	Air Independent Propulsion
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASSC	Assured Second-strike Capability
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
BoP	Balance of power
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CDRI	Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
CMEC	China Myanmar Economic Corridor
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreements
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
DoD	Department of Defense
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Energy Information Administration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFC-IOR	Information Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region
IN	Indian Navy
IO	Indian Ocean
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative
ISA	International Solar Alliance
IWSP	Integrated Weapon Storage Platform
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
LNG	Liquified Natural Gas
MBD	Mission-Based Deployment
MDA	Military Defense Agency
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MLSA	Mutual Logistics Support Agreement
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MPA	Maritime Patrol Aircraft
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication

ABSTRACT

This research explores Indian naval modernization in the Indian Ocean Region and its strategic implications for Sino-Indian relations. By assessing India's naval advancements and China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean, the study evaluates the shifts in regional power dynamics. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research involves a comparative analysis of oceanic strategies, naval capabilities, and geopolitical ambitions of India and China. This examination draws on primary and secondary sources, including government reports, scholarly articles, and maritime security analyses. The findings reveal that India's naval modernization is a strategic response to counter China's assertive influence in the IOR. The buildup of India's naval forces and partnerships aims to enhance its maritime security, deter Chinese expansion, and assert dominance in the region. Conversely, China's Belt and Road Initiative and military base establishment pose significant challenges to India's strategic autonomy. The research concludes that Indian naval modernization is pivotal in reshaping the security architecture of the IOR. However, this modernization drive also intensifies the Sino-Indian rivalry, making the IOR a central theater of power competition in Asia.

Keywords: Indian Ocean Region, Naval Modernization, Sino-India Strategic rivalry, Maritime Security, China's Influence in Indian Ocean, Geopolitical Competition

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Maritime security stands out as the most important aspect of security because earth surface comprises 71% of water that is directly involved in trade regulations which in turn is the fuel of life, with only 29% being land. Indian Ocean region (IOR) covers about 19.5 percent of the global oceans making it play a key role in global maritime affairs, including trade, maritime routes, and stability at sea. The significant Indian Ocean (IO) is bordered with 38 countries, connecting 3 continents, Australia to the east, Africa to the west, and Asia to the north. Such vast maritime connections make this region hold immense for international trade. All the countries along its shores rely heavily on the SLOC for their economic prosperity, making it a key component of global commerce i.e., India. The littoral states surrounding this ocean encompass some of the world's fast-growing economies, benefitting from abundant mineral resources and fishing.¹ Alfred T. Mahan, a renowned US maritime strategist, emphasizes the pivotal role of maritime power throughout history. He contends that disputes and economic rivalries at sea often escalate into military confrontations, highlighting the profound influence of naval prowess on the fortunes of nation-states.² The Indian Ocean has gained a pivotal position for numerous global authorities, with Mahan asserting that maritime dominance is crucial for projecting national power.³ It is significant to mention that the control over strategic trade routes serves as a manifestation of maritime supremacy.

Given the vast stretch of the Indian Ocean, no sole power can unilaterally assert authority over the region, prompting states to form military and economic alliances to vie for control. However, this naval competition can undermine governance and security among the major powers in the region, where India as a state having benefit of strategic position with the coastline border of 7515km with the Indian Ocean holds significant importance. Historically, India's strategic focus was land-centric, but recent developments have seen an emphasis on maritime strategy.⁴ Initiatives like

¹ Dinoj K. Upadhyay and Manoranjan Mishra, "Blue Economy: Emerging Global Trends and India's Multilateral Cooperation," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 30–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2020.1785087>.

² Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Warfare* (Courier Corporation, 2012).

³ Darshana M. Baruah, "Maritime Competition in the Indian Ocean," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 12, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/12/maritime-competition-in-indian-ocean-pub-87093>.

⁴ Darshana M. Baruah, "India's Evolving Maritime Strategy," *thediplomat.com*, December 3, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/indias-evolving-maritime-strategy/>.

SAGAR encapsulate India's vision for the IOR.⁵ However, the phenomenon of Beijing's expansionism strategies in the IOR cannot be overlooked from an Indian strategic perspective.

The US being a major power advocates for "Free and Open Indo-Pacific region" has been seeking a strategic partnership with India to counter Chinese presence in the region. New Delhi, in turn, has been attempting to transform her navy into a 'blue-water navy' skilled enough of safeguarding key national interests in the IOR.⁶ This includes acquiring advanced platforms to enable surveillance of wider nautical miles and engages in a wide array of naval maneuvers, along with the capability of Assured Second-strike Capability (ASSC). However, these modernization efforts may exacerbate existing asymmetries among regional navies, potentially tilting the balance of power (BoP) in New Delhi's favor thus attempt to mitigate Beijing's direct or indirect influence in the area. The aggressive operationalization of these capabilities could heighten the risk of naval skirmishes, leading to instability and escalating tensions among potentially rival states India and China in the IOR.

In today's world politics, IOR has become a key area of interest due to its intense power struggles, competition for resources, and the quest for energy security, making it increasingly important globally. The rise of environmental and economic concerns, along with the rising influence of major players like China and regional powers like India, highlights the significance of the IOR in world affairs. The sea routes in the Indian Ocean are vital for both global and regional trade, emphasizing their critical role.⁷ Security issues in the IOR mainly revolve around maritime matters, reflecting how geopolitical and economic interests are closely linked in the region. The ongoing instability presents significant challenges for foreign powers and regional countries with interests in the Indian Ocean. India, especially, has been assertive in pursuing its goals in the IOR. It's implementing a comprehensive naval strategy, investing heavily in naval expansion, promoting trade and investment, engaging in diplomacy, and forming strategic partnerships to extend its influence across the region. India's actions are assumed to be driven by concerns of Beijing's increasing presence in the region. To counter this, New Delhi is actively making alliances with energy-rich regions like Southeast Asia, Middle East, and Africa, to ensure her hold firm in

⁵ Soumyodeep Deb and Amlan Dutta, "India's Role in Capability Development Measures for Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean under SAGAR," *Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 10, no. 2 (August 2023): 47–59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/JTMS.10.2.47>.

⁶ Abhijit Singh et al., "The New India-US Partnership in the Indo-Pacific: Peace, Prosperity and Security," 2018.

⁷ Vijay Sakhujia, "Indian Ocean and the Safety of Sea Lines of Communication," ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu, August 2001.

the region.⁸ Strengthening security ties with vital coastal countries including Oman, Singapore, and Mauritius is also a priority for India. This approach aims to offset Chinese influence and safeguard India's interests in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, New Delhi is engaging in soft power efforts, particularly in collaboration with the US, to further augment its strategic position against perceived challenges from China in the area.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has founded the Indian Ocean division, signaling a shift towards a more wide-ranging approach to the region, particularly focusing on the island nations since 2016. Initially, Madagascar and Comoros were excluded from this division, but in 2019, the MEA revised its policy to incorporate these islands, demonstrating India's expanding and strengthening engagement in the Indian Ocean.⁹ New Delhi's continuous naval enhancements and growing strategic interests in the Indian Ocean have established it as a prominent maritime power,¹⁰ bolstered by its Indo-US partnership and commitment to securing regional interests.

The Indian Maritime Security Strategy document, 'Ensuring Secure Seas,' outlines New Delhi's broader objectives in exploring blue-water capabilities.¹¹ The convergence of Indian and US interests is poised to intensify competition in this strategic area, particularly in reaction to Beijing's increasing presence. China's motivations for expanding its presence revolve around enhancing connectivity, establishing alternative trade routes, and addressing concerns over the vulnerability of the Straits of Malacca.¹² This emphasis on naval power projection influenced India's strategic thinking and political leadership. Shortly after independence, the country's first naval chief proposed a comprehensive development plan aimed at elevating India's maritime capabilities to match those of Southeast Asian nations within a decade.¹³ New Delhi perceives itself as a regional hegemon, with the IOR holding strategic importance for its policymakers. As maritime trade volumes continue to rise, the Indian Navy (IN) has an increasingly significant part in state's national security. Consequently, India has initiated a comprehensive modernization program to enhance its naval combat capabilities. However, this modernization drive has raised concerns among other littoral nations in region regarding India's growing maritime assertiveness and

⁸ Darshana M. Baruah Greely Nitya Labh, Jessica, "Mapping the Indian Ocean Region," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 15, 2023.

⁹ Darshana M. Baruah, "Geopolitics of Indian Ocean Islands in 2019: Takeaways for Traditional Powers," South Asian Voices, January 9, 2020.

¹⁰ David Brewster, "An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?," Security Challenges 6, no. 3 (2010): 1–20.

¹¹ Megha Saravanan, "India's Maritime Security Strategy in the 'Century of Seas,'" Modern Diplomacy, June 20, 2022.

¹² Tanguy Struye de Swielande, "China and the South China Sea: A New Security Dilemma?," *Studia Diplomatica* 64, no. 3 (2011): 7–20.

¹³ *Ibid*, 3

potential security implications. In the last 20 to 25 years, India has been intensifying its presence in the Indian Ocean, strategically positioning its maritime forces.¹⁴ The IN has identified the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, stretching from the Andaman Sea near Malaysia to the eastern coast of Africa, as a critical area of focus. The Indo-US strategic partnership aims to bolster the former's military modernization efforts, bolstering New Delhi's influence in this strategically significant region. However, India currently lacks the military prowess and the resolve to effectively counter China, especially from the perspective of the US, due to its limited military capabilities and overall capacity. Despite this, there exists a sense of optimism in US strategic thinking that India could serve as a 'counter-weight' to China once it achieves some level of military parity. Many in Washington are actively supporting India's potential to fulfill this role, albeit recognizing that it's a gradual process. In the complex dynamics of the Pacific and IOs, India and China emerge as significant players. Despite their geographical proximity and shared characteristics such as vast territories, large economies, dense populations, industrial development, and technological advancements, they also harbor strategic ambitions, particularly concerning regional dominance.

As mentioned earlier, historically India's strategic focus has been predominantly land-centric, with limited attention given to naval capabilities. This orientation traces back to pre-colonial times when India's security concerns were primarily land-based, rooted in fears of invasions from the northwest. Despite its extensive coastline and historical influence in the IOR, India struggled to translate its maritime influence into concrete political or strategic advantages¹⁵. Following decolonization, maritime experts like Kavalam Panikkar and Keshav Vaidya advocated for a shift in India's strategic priorities, emphasizing the need for advanced naval capabilities. Panikkar emphasized the significance of the Indian Ocean for India's freedom, advocating for Indian control over this vital maritime expanse¹⁶. Vaidya similarly stressed the importance of India becoming a dominant naval power in the IOR, capable of defending both its coastline and distant maritime interests¹⁷. The history of land skirmishes and occasional border disputes of India and China contrasts with their robust and progressing trade dealings. It was seen even during Eastern Ladakh military standoff in 2021, their bilateral trade reached a record high of US\$125 billion, reflecting a phenomenon of complex interdependence. China's ambitious BRI project has raised concerns in

¹⁴ Darshana M. Baruah Greely, Nitya Labh, and Jessica, "Mapping the Indian Ocean Region," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 15, 2023.

¹⁵ Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad," *Survival* 60, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 181–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470773>.

¹⁶ Sufian Ullah, "Analysing India's Naval Development Strategy" (Islamabad : e Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2019).

¹⁷ K b Vaidya, *The Naval Defence of India*, by K.b. Vaidya (Bombay: Thacker and Co Ltd, 1949), 9.

New Delhi, particularly regarding its implications for Indian Ocean security. Beijing's sophistication of PLAN, coupled with her incidence in the IOR challenges India's claims of naval supremacy in the area.

Beijing's primary objectives in the Indian Ocean revolves around ensuring continual foreign trade and securing energy resources movement, which align with the strategic goals of their strategies of BRI and two ocean. India and the US perceive that these strategies of china will bring Beijing a long-term security advantage so, they must strategically contain China, particularly regarding its development of ports in countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, which they view as potential naval bases encircling India. While considerable academic discourse exists on various aspects of China's maritime strategy, there's a gap in analyzing the regional inferences of the hostile stature between China and India. This aspect warrants further scholarly attention to better understand the evolving power dynamics and tensions in the region.

This study aims to explore New Delhi's maritime sophistication efforts over the last couple decades while highlighting how Beijing's activities in the IOR have challenged India's naval dominance there. Despite China claiming its naval buildup is defensive, and aimed at protecting its economic interests, it has posed a significant challenge to India's regional naval superiority. This rivalry has increased regional instability, risking peaceful navigation and maritime security. The research has employed a content analysis approach, examining secondary data to compare and understand the situation better. By examining various factors, the study has aimed to explain why India is rapidly modernizing its navy in reaction to Beijing's expansionist strategy in oceans, aiming to preserve the power balance. Through this analysis, research seeks to shed light on the maritime competition dynamics in IOR due to India's maritime sophistication and analyze its associations with China.

1.1 Problem Statement

The Indian Ocean holds immense strategic importance, especially with the changing dynamics among major powers like India and China. While India's naval improvements can enhance its security, it's important to grasp how this affects the power balance with China. Even though China doesn't directly border the Indian Ocean, its expanding strategies like the 'two ocean strategy' and 'the string of pearls' could be linked to India's naval modernization. This rivalry between India and China shouldn't be underestimated, as it could disrupt peace at sea. India's ongoing naval sophistication may also impact China's expansionist plans. With increasing competition among major players, we need a deep understanding of how India's naval modernization influences power dynamics, security issues, and the development of a regional security framework.

1.2 Literature Review

The literature review is organized to underscore the crucial role of the IOR as a strategic hub connecting littoral states for trade and economic stability. It then delves into India's ongoing efforts to maintain its control in the IOR through naval modernization and explores how this modernization influences China's expansionist strategies in the region. This extensive research will help critically analyze the ongoing naval competition in IOR and will attempt to predict the future as the dissertation progresses.

India as the most populace state in the Indian Ocean understands the significance of its strategic presence in the region. Ensuring sustainable maritime operations is a key priority for India, reflecting its deep-rooted strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, be it economic or military. India's strategic location amid the Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Middle East and enhances its regional influence.¹⁸ Its extensive coastline and robust port infrastructure provide a strong foundation for maritime dominance in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, aligning national security objectives with broader national interests through control over crucial maritime trade routes. India's extensive coastline, spanning 7,516.6 kilometers, serves as a bulwark against potential commercial disruptions during natural disasters.¹⁹ In response to these advantageous factors, the Indian government has shown increasing fervor in enhancing the country's naval capabilities.

Research undertaken by William L. Dowdy and Russell B. Trood highlighted the significance of IOR as a pivotal geostrategic region in 1983, recognizing the critical role of maritime power projection; India is committed to bolstering its naval prowess to effectively safeguard its strategic interests and maritime trade routes in the IOR.²⁰

The research penned in 2020 by Maira Saeed and Umbreen Javaid highlighting the influence of Indian expansion in IOR and its impact on Pakistan highlighted that the Western Indian Ocean serves as a vital maritime conduit connecting Asia with Europe and North America, encompassing the littoral states of Africa. Such wide connecting points make India vital for regional stability in waters.²¹ Rich in rare-earth materials and energy resources, this region is strategically significant due to its vital chokepoints and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), making it an Exclusive Economic Zone of great importance. New Delhi's historical existence in the area dates back to the

¹⁸ Maira Saeed and Umbreen Javaid, "India's Naval Expansion and Strategic Partnership with the US in the Indian Ocean Region: Implications for Pakistan" (Margalla Papers-2020 (Issue-I), 2020).

¹⁹ Ibid, 18

²⁰ William L. Dowdy and Russell B. Trood, "The Indian Ocean: An Emerging Geostrategic Region," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 38, no. 3 (September 1983): 432–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070208303800304>.

²¹ Ibid, 18

medieval period, characterized by extensive trade along these sea routes with Arab and Persian traders.²² However, transitioning from recognizing common issues and aspirations to fostering effective cooperation poses substantial challenges, especially in the absence of region-wide security architectures, a cohesive regional identity, or a history of robust regional cooperation. The lack of accepted frameworks for regional leadership further complicates matters. Moreover, accommodating the interests of both regional and extra-regional states, referring to China and US, adds another level of intricacy to the dynamics of the Western Indian Ocean.²³ Balancing these diverse interests and fostering meaningful cooperation amidst geopolitical rivalries and differing strategic objectives presents significant hurdles in advancing naval safety and cooperation in region. Part of the Quad's agenda involves providing loans for infrastructure development to littoral states in Indo-Pacific. Beijing's ambitious strategy of BRI has successfully funded major infrastructure projects globally, including in Indo-Pacific. New Delhi perceives these investments as potentially encircling, referred to "String of Pearls," prompting India to counterbalance with its own investments.²⁴ Chinese investments in South Asia were sought due to India's perceived neglect of its neighbors and its perceived regional hegemony, which Chinese economic intervention could counter.

Christopher K. Colley's research delves into the notion that strategic rivalry best explains why China and India are enhancing their naval capabilities through sustained sophistication efforts. While other perspectives hold validity, they often intersect with strategic rivalries. Colley emphasizes the importance of sustained leadership efforts to develop formidable naval fleets, a process that typically spans decades.²⁵ Tuneer Mukherjee explains that in the Indian Ocean, varying strategic perspectives among stakeholders significantly increase the likelihood of strategic friction, complicating the achievement of geostrategic objectives for any competing power. China's integrated and consistent approach contrasts sharply with the perceived incoherent and inward-looking policies of the US and India. Beijing's comprehensive strategy encompasses trade, commerce, politics, and military ventures, extending from South China Sea (SCS) to the African section, thereby steadily enhancing its leverage in the region.²⁶ India has traditionally aimed to

²² Howard M Hensel and Amit Gupta, *Naval Powers in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific* (Routledge, 2018).

²³ *Ibid*, 22

²⁴ Ijaz Khalid, Shaukat, and Azka Gul, "INDIAN RESPONSE to CHINESE STRING of PEARLS DOCTRINE," *Global Political Review* 2, no. 1 (December 30, 2017): 27–35, [https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2017\(ii-i\).03](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2017(ii-i).03).

²⁵ Christopher K Colley, "Theory and My Argument," *Oxford University Press EBooks* 2 (March 30, 2023): 43-C2.P44.

²⁶ Tuneer Mukherjee, "China's Maritime Quest in the Indian Ocean: New Delhi's Options," *thediplomat.com*, April 24, 2018.

uphold strategic primacy in Indian Ocean but faces growing perils to its influence. The US is enhancing strategic competition with China in the Indo-Pacific, refining Indo-Pacific Command strategies, and strengthening its Major Defense Partnership with India and regional allies.²⁷

In a 2014 while explaining India's strategy in IOR David Brewster elaborated India's maritime power and its aspirations for regional leadership are scrutinized.²⁸ Brewster delves into India's strategic ambitions as it emerges as an economic and military powerhouse on the global stage, along with its evolving network of security associations in the IOR. Central to his analysis is the question of whether India possesses the necessary capabilities to assume a leading role in the Indian Ocean where New Delhi contends that she is not just a regional but a potential international force. Implicit in this vision is the belief in India's destiny to assert control over the Indian Ocean, a concept encapsulated in the notion of "India's Ocean."²⁹ This entails several key ideas: firstly, the notion that Indian dominance over the Indian Ocean is not simply an option to exercise her power but is a manifestation of her inherent destiny to rule; secondly, the imperative for India to institute a defense perimeter extending deep into the Indian Ocean to prevent external intervention in the subcontinent; and thirdly, the recognition that cultivating a scope of power in the IOR is a crucial footstep to India's ascent as a globally recognized power.³⁰

Brewster highlights the intricate dynamics between New Delhi and Beijing, noting that there is the firm opposition of latter's to former's ambitions in the IOR. He presents two strategic options for India in dealing with China: either to curb Beijing's influence in Indian Ocean or to engage China as an accountable investor thus collectively complimenting regional security where both are strategically significant for each other. However, Brewster doubts China's willingness to bank on India. Despite India's potential to dictate the Indian Ocean in the future, Brewster identifies several constraints, including the dominant military presence of the US in the area.³¹ Additionally, New Delhi's relationships with other powers like S-Africa, Indonesia, Australia, and KSA could hinder its quest for complete control. Furthermore, Brewster suggests that Beijing's expanding economic might and influence is bound to pose significant challenges to New Delhi's ability to foster security or trade liaisons in the region.³²

²⁷ CSA, "Great Power Competition and US Strategy in the Indian Ocean Region | Center for South Asia," southasia.stanford.edu, October 29, 2020, <https://southasia.stanford.edu/events/great-power-competition-and-us-strategy-indian-ocean-region>.

²⁸ David Brewster, "An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?," *Security Challenges* 6, no. 3 (2010): 1–20.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 28

³⁰ David Brewster, *India's Ocean: The Story of India's Bid for Regional Leadership* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), P. 12.

³¹ *Ibid*, 30

³² *Ibid*, 30

China demonstrates inclination of building strategic liaisons towards its neighboring territories and asserts its territorial interests vigorously. Sophie highlights in an article that recent developments such as the unification discussions regarding Taiwan and disputes in the SCS have underscored the necessity for China to bolster its naval capabilities.³³ Of paramount concern to China is ensuring energy security within the IOR, given her position of second largest petroleum consumer in the world. The majority of China's energy resources are transported via sea routes, and any disruption to this vital supply chain would severely hinder its economic progress, safeguarding maritime trade and securing SLOCs are critical objectives for Beijing.

It is highlighted in an article by maritime research experts in maritime policy review journal that since the early 1980s, China has pursued the growth of a 'Blue Water' Navy, striving to modernize and expand its naval prowess to emerge as an International authority adept to exert her command far across her borders from sea to land. Investments have been made in aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers, and submarines, and the development of A2/AD capabilities.³⁴ Despite significant investments, the PLAN still faces challenges in projecting power effectively in the Indian Ocean due to logistical constraints and difficulties in accessing strategically important naval chokepoints. While China possesses a formidable navy, its presence in the Indian Ocean has not been aggressive thus far.³⁵ The deployment of naval assets became more pronounced following piracy incidents in the Horn of Africa in 2008, prompting China to dispatch warships to counter the threat. Subsequent successful deployments have established Beijing as an important naval might in Asian region. Beijing adopted a practical approach, combining military strength with economic diplomacy to cultivate ties with Indian Ocean states. These measures serve to both mitigate potential Indian assertiveness and strengthen China's regional presence.³⁶

Huang explains in his research article published in China's economic review in 2016 that upon assuming office, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed visionary concept to rejuvenate the ancient Silk Route, once the pinnacle of global trade where China held a dominant position. The OBOR or BRI, an ambitious project comprising two primary constituents: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR).³⁷

Chang explains in his research on understanding the strategic prospects of CPEC for China that

³³ Sophie Wushuang Yi, "Understanding China's Efforts to Bridge the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait Disputes | Lowy Institute," www.lowyinstitute.org, March 13, 2024.

³⁴ Zeeshan Munir and Sheikh Imran Nasir, "China in the Indian Ocean Region: Challenges and Prospects," *Maritime Policy Review* 2, no. 1 (May 2021).

³⁵ *Ibid*, 34

³⁶ *Ibid*, 34

³⁷ Yiping Huang, "Understanding China's Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, Framework and Assessment," *China Economic Review* 40, no. 40 (September 2016): 314–21.

the IOR has since emerged as a focal point in the strategic considerations of both Chinese and Western analysts, owing to the passage of critical BRI components such as the CPEC and the MSR through this maritime expanse.³⁸ Central to China's aspirations of revitalizing its economic influence, the 21st Century MSR, focused primarily on Asia, Africa, and Europe, aims to enhance economic collaboration by establishing ports along historic maritime trade routes. This initiative resonates with China's String of Pearl Strategy, initially proposed by President Xi during a state visit to Indonesia in 2013.³⁹ Subsequently, China allocated USD \$40 billion towards realizing the BRI and 21st Century MSR vision. Extensive infrastructure and developmental projects have been undertaken, accompanied by lease agreements with regional nations such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Pakistan, and the Maldives. Substantial investments have been made in Africa to integrate the continent into BRI and MSR frameworks. Despite its potential to reshape regional socio-economic dynamics, the MSR faces multifaceted challenges.⁴⁰ Cheng explains that the disputes in the SCS have impeded progress, with contested routes provoking opposition from countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam to China.⁴¹ While these nations recognize the economic benefits, external pressures, particularly from the USA, have complicated matters. China has attempted to address concerns individually but faces skepticism and resistance.

The NBR researchers have highlighted in the report published in 2017 that the economic fragility in Asian and African countries earmarked for MSR participation poses another obstacle, albeit mitigated by Chinese investment efforts. However, the presence of extra-regional powers in the IOR, notably India, casts a shadow over MSR prospects.⁴² India perceives these initiatives with suspicion, viewing them as attempts to isolate and undermine its influence. Consequently, India has bolstered military capabilities and forged alliances, particularly with the USA, to counter China's rising incidence in the IOR and safeguard its interests.⁴³ China's maritime expansion in

³⁸ Y.-Y. Chang, "Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): An Initiative to Make China Great Again?," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2019): 7–35.

³⁹ Md Nazirul Islam Sarker et al., "One Belt One Road Initiative of China: Implication for Future of Global Development," *Modern Economy* 9, no. 4 (April 18, 2018).

⁴⁰ John Hurley, Scott Morris, and Gailyn Portelance, "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective," *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 3, no. 1 (June 28, 2019): 139–75.

⁴¹ Leonard K. Cheng, "Three Questions on China's 'Belt and Road Initiative,'" *China Economic Review* 40 (September 2016): 309–13.

⁴² Nadège Rolland and National Bureau of Asian Research, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer? | HKTDC Belt and Road Portal," beltandroad.hktdc.com, August 3, 2017, <https://beltandroad.hktdc.com/en/insights/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-underwhelming-or-game-changer>.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 42

the IOR is marked by extensive infrastructural initiatives. The overarching aim is to bolster Chinese maritime infrastructure in the IOR, including ports and pipelines, thus advancing China's maritime ambitions and interests. China's substantial investments in regional nations underscore its commitment to maritime objectives, with a readiness to pursue these goals with strategic discretion. Mohit Choudhry explains the strategic basis of collaborative defense agreements between Beijing and Kuala Lumpur has facilitated mutual understanding and granted China strategic access through the Malacca Strait.⁴⁴ Similar agreements with Myanmar entail the building of Special Economic Zones and deep-sea ports, potentially securing a stable energy supply route while circumventing the Strait of Malacca. Allegations of external interference in Myanmar's Rakhine State to thwart Chinese pipeline plans lack substantiated evidence. In Bangladesh, China's substantial investments in port and shipping infrastructure have prompted strategic countermeasures from India, including agreements for the use of Chittagong port.

Senior Pakistani analysts in the Pak Journal of International affairs view the development of Chittagong port as a component of China's String of Pearls Strategy, aimed at reducing dependence on Indo-US influence in the IOR.⁴⁵ China's extensive investments extend to Sri Lanka's maritime and industrial sectors, particularly in ports located along crucial shipping lanes. Chinese engagement with Colombo is anticipated to facilitate more transparent dealings, potentially enabling the deployment of information-gathering assets. Cabestan in his analysis of Beijing's military expansion in IOR mentions that China's naval base in Djibouti, coupled with prospective carrier battle group deployments, strengthens its naval presence in the area.⁴⁶ The potential deployment of Chinese nuclear attack submarines and SSBNs underscores China's strategic interests, as evidenced by recent sightings near the Horn of Africa.⁴⁷ India's enduring ambition to establish itself as a dominant force in the IOR is well-documented. With a history marked by colonization and British rule, India has invested substantially in the area to exert influence and maintain a leading role as a regional power. To achieve this, India has pursued assertive naval policies aimed at securing dominance in the Indian Ocean, driven by the belief in the region's inherent Indian-ness and a historical aversion to external powers.⁴⁸ While some

⁴⁴ Mohit Choudhary, "China's Malacca Bluff: Examining China's Indian Ocean Strategy and Future Security Archite," *Air University (AU)*, February 6, 2023.

⁴⁵ Dr. Fauzia Ghani and Dr. Muhammad Ali, "China's Strategy of 'String of Pearls' and South Asia," *Pak. Journal of Int'L Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2020).

⁴⁶ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "China's Djibouti Naval Base Increasing Its Power | East Asia Forum," *EastAsiaForum*, May 16, 2020.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 46

⁴⁸ Virain Mohan, "Reenergizing Indian Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Analyzing the Security Problem Th," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press*, August 1, 2022.

attribute India's assertiveness to insecurity rooted in its colonial past, others argue that it reflects broader ambitions for regional hegemony. This is evident in India's dismissive attitude towards smaller regional players like Pakistan and its strategic alignment with the US. However, this alignment has complicated India's relations with China, leading to coexistence, and competition. Dutta explains that despite growing trade between Beijing and New Delhi, both remain wary of each other's expanding influence among littoral states, fearing encirclement.⁴⁹ This rising tension has led to reshaping the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Indian Ocean.

Beijing's naval expansion in the IOR presents a significant security challenge for India, prompting closer collaboration with the US, Japan, and Australia, i.e., QUAD. Mutual perceptions of insecurity underlie tensions between China and India, with India viewing China as a threat to its strategic position in the IOR, while China sees India's presence as detrimental to its trade interests. New Delhi's strategic approach in the IOR can be influenced by ideologies like Hindutva, shaping aggressive responses to perceived threats. Analyzing India's concerns about China's rise and PM Modi's policies reveals the ongoing Sino-Indian rivalry on the naval front. China aims to secure its fossil fuel supplies and maritime routes in the IOR, prompting India to bolster its naval capabilities. China's project of 'String of Pearls Strategy' raises alarm in India, fueling rivalry and complicating regional dynamics.

1.2.1 Literature Gap

The extensive literature review suggests that India has been expanding its naval force since 1990, and has risen to the point where it is considered the strongest naval power in the SA region. However, it is observed that this naval expansion has been driven by Beijing's presence in IOR through a two-ocean strategy and the string of pearls strategy, even when Beijing does not share a direct maritime border with Indian Ocean. This suggests that there is a need for a nuanced explanation of the identification of reasons behind the Chinese increased presence triggering the need for power balance in the region. By undertaking a content analysis of the Sino-India maritime rivalry through a strategic lens this analytical gap can be covered.

1.3 Hypothesis

Indian Naval Modernization in IOR is likely to affect the strategic dynamics between India and China.

1.4 Research Questions

⁴⁹ Suyesha Dutta and Suvolaxmi Dutta Choudhury, "India's Competition with China for Dominance of the Indian Ocean," Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, April 24, 2024.

1. How does Indian Naval Modernization in IOR influence the Sino-India power balance?
2. How do China's strategic incidence strategies in IOR impact India's maritime security and regional influence?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Regional Complex Theory: A Critical Perspective

The RSCT, formulated by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, posits that regional security dynamics are shaped by distinct geographical and political boundaries that delineate them from other regions, where natural features like oceans or mountains often define the boundaries, create isolated security complexes wherein the interactions within these regional confines primarily influence the security concerns and policies of states.⁵⁰ This framework acknowledges that the security landscape of each region is unique, necessitating tailored security approaches that may also be impacted by the involvement of global powers, whose actions are modulated by these security dynamics.

The Copenhagen School, expanding on traditional military-focused security perspectives, categorizes security into five domains: military, political, societal, economic, and environmental. Each domain is interlinked, contributing collectively to a region's overall security posture, underscoring the necessity for states to address all five dimensions to ensure comprehensive security. Central to this approach is the concept of the referent object, which serves as an indicator of security concerns within each domain. For instance, in the military domain, the referent object might be state survival or the integrity of armed forces, whereas in the political realm, it might pertain to the preservation of legal frameworks or ideological continuity. Economic security could be gauged by the stability of supply chains and the prevention of economic crises, while societal security might focus on maintaining social hierarchies and cultural norms. Environmental security, on the other hand, emphasizes the preservation of ecological systems and natural resources.⁵¹

The process of securitization, a key element in RSCT, involves identifying when an issue transitions into a security concern, it is often marked by significant shifts in policies or military expenditures, indicating a heightened perception of threat. The scale and threshold for securitization can vary among observers, influenced by their strategic priorities and risk assessments. RSCT can be further enriched by integrating other theories, like the theory of Balance of Power, to examine regional power dynamics as I have tried to articulate in Chapter 2, and the effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral security arrangements. The concept of limited hard

⁵⁰ Dennis Senam Amable, "Theorizing the Emergence of Security Regions: An Adaptation for the Regional Security Complex Theory," *Global Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (October 2022).

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 48

balancing, which blends soft power strategies with selective military cooperation, offers a nuanced approach to managing regional security complexes. This theoretical framework will be employed to scrutinize how India navigates its regional security challenges through strategic partnerships and modernization initiatives in the IOR.

The particular theoretical lens highlights the interconnectedness of actors and interests within the IOR, where India's naval modernization efforts intersect with China's expansionist strategies, i.e., the pearl of strings, etc. Mutual perceptions of insecurity fuel tensions between India and China, as each seeks to safeguard its strategic interests in the region. India perceives China as a threat to its dominance in the IOR, while China views India's presence as a challenge to its trade and economic interests. Theory suggests that the ideological and geopolitical factors shape India's strategic calculus in the IOR and offer reasons for the rising competence between India and China in the region. Hindutva ideologies and historical legacies inform India's assertive responses to perceived threats, influencing its alignment with external powers like the US. This strategic alignment, exemplified by the QUAD partnership, complicates India-China relations and contributes to the naval competition in the IOR. China's strategic ambitions, as evidenced by initiatives like the BRI and the 21st Century MSR, has exacerbated the tensions in the region. China's naval expansion efforts, including the 'String of Pearls Strategy,' raise concerns in India and prompt it to bolster its naval capabilities in response.

The RCT framework elucidates the complex interplay of strategic interests, power dynamics, and ideological factors shaping the naval competition in the IOR. It underscores the importance of analyzing regional dynamics within a broader geopolitical context, taking into account the competing interests of various actors and the evolving nature of strategic rivalries. Theory offers a framework to understand the complex interactions and interdependencies among actors within a particular region, shedding light on how these dynamics shape the geopolitical landscape. India's aspiration to assert dominance in the IOR emerges as a central theme. Through naval modernization efforts, India seeks to consolidate its strategic position in the region. Meanwhile, China's expanding naval activities reflect its ambition to establish itself as a global maritime power. It encourages an analysis of power dynamics within the region, exploring how these aspirations intersect and potentially conflict. This analytical approach allows the researcher to formulate an analysis through the comparative lens and analyze whether this balance of power can cause stability or instability for the littoral states in the region. Mutual perceptions of insecurity drive the strategic calculations of both India and China. India views China's presence in the IOR as a threat to its strategic interests, while China perceives India's assertiveness as a challenge to its ambitions. Ideological considerations, such as Hindutva ideologies in India, and geopolitical

alignments, such as India's strategic partnership with the US, play a significant role in shaping regional dynamics. The literature review highlights the presence of strategic rivalries, particularly between India and China, amidst efforts to foster cooperation and maintain regional stability.

This theoretical perspective emphasizes the role of perceptions and insecurities in shaping regional dynamics, influencing the behavior of actors, and fueling tensions. The RCT encourages an examination of how these factors intersect with broader strategic interests, contributing to the complexity of the regional landscape. It emphasizes the need to analyze the interplay between competition and cooperation within the region, considering how these dynamics evolve and influence regional outcomes.

1.6 Research Objectives

1. Assess the impact of Indian Naval Modernization on the relative naval capabilities of India and China in the IOR to understand the power balance.
2. To analyze the impact of China's strategic incidence strategies in the IOR on India's maritime security and regional influence.

1.7 Purpose of Research

The overarching objective of this extensive research endeavour is to meticulously scrutinize the intricate process and far-reaching implications of Indian Naval Modernization within the IOR, elucidating its reverberations for China. By undertaking a rigorous analysis of India's naval advancements juxtaposed with China's strategic manoeuvres, this dissertation endeavours to unravel the multifaceted geopolitical dynamics engendered therein. At its core, this scholarly inquiry aims to furnish a comprehensive understanding of how the trajectory of naval modernization in the IOR intricately interlaces with regional power dynamics, nuances of security, and the overarching strategic calculus of China. Through a thorough exploration of pertinent factors and discernible trends, this research aspires to furnish invaluable insights indispensable for policymakers, erudite scholars, and seasoned practitioners alike, equipping them with the requisite acumen to navigate the complexities of maritime competition within the region and fortify endeavours aimed at fostering enduring stability and constructive cooperation in the expansive expanse of the Indian Ocean.

1.8 Research Methodology

This research aims to elucidate the rivalry between the coexisting regional powers, India and China in Asia, particularly as maritime forces, employing qualitative content analysis methods and secondary research approach. Discourse analysis and an extensive literature review serve as primary approaches to consolidate arguments and comprehend the theories surrounding naval rivalry and the power balance in the area.

The deductive approach guides this research endeavour. Research designs typically fall into two categories: inductive and deductive⁵². Inductive research seeks to generate new theories from existing data, whereas deductive research adopts a "Top Down" methodology⁵³, aiming to verify existing theories through data collection.⁵⁴ In this context, the objective is to verify the assumption that the continual enhancement of India's naval capabilities will prompt China to adopt more assertive strategies in the Indian IOR. A deductive approach is deemed more suitable for this research for several reasons.⁵⁵ Inductive research seeks to uncover new phenomena, whereas deductive reasoning aims to validate existing phenomena and theories.⁵⁶ Given that the research primarily revolves around verifying the causal relationship between India's persistent naval expansion in the IOR and China's corresponding maritime expansion, a deductive approach aligns more closely with the research objectives. Also, deductive reasoning can provide insights into the true potential of existing and forthcoming naval aspirations in the IOR. It offers a deeper understanding of the implications of naval expansion in the region and its prospects, thereby enhancing the overall comprehension of the subject matter.

The research incorporates a confirmatory hypothesis as it progresses to succeeding chapters, which is rooted in anticipated outcomes or predictions.⁵⁷ These predictions are formulated based on general observations, and the research seeks to validate or refute them. This study employs review-based techniques, which involve scrutinizing existing data and knowledge to enhance understanding of phenomena.⁵⁸ To achieve this, scholarly articles and books are reviewed to familiarize with the terminologies and concepts prevalent in maritime literature. Review-based techniques also facilitate insights into the evolving naval trends of rival states and their strategies for power projection. However, it's important to note that review-based techniques do not constitute primary data; rather, they serve to elucidate existing phenomena.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, given the quantitative nature of this research, this approach is deemed suitable for content analysis and

⁵² Deborah Gabriel, "Inductive and Deductive Approaches to Research," Deborahgabriel.com, March 17, 2013.

⁵³ S.M.Aqil Burney and Hussain Saleem, "Inductive and Deductive Research Approach," ResearchGate (www.researchgate.net, 2008).

⁵⁴ Ibid, 53

⁵⁵ Shrutika Sirisilla, "Inductive and Deductive Reasoning | Definitions, Limits & Stages," Enago Academy, January 19, 2023.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 55

⁵⁷ Mark Rubin and Chris Donkin, "Exploratory Hypothesis Tests Can Be More Compelling than Confirmatory Hypothesis Tests," *Philosophical Psychology*, 2022, 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2022.2113771>.

⁵⁸ Sonali K. Shah and Kevin G. Corley, "Building Better Theory by Bridging the Quantitative? Qualitative Divide," *Journal of Management Studies* 43, no. 8 (December 2006): 1821–35.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 58

deductive hypothesis confirmation.

Primary sources, such as newspapers and statistical data are leveraged to analyse the escalating naval developments in India and China. These sources enable the examination of the trajectory of contestation in the waters of the IOR between the two nations. In secondary sources, books and scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals are utilized to elucidate the analyses of naval strategy experts regarding the evolving balance of power in the IOR. By utilizing both primary and secondary sources, this research aims to identify emerging trends in naval technology and assess their efficacy on the waters, while also examining the implications for the RCT and the balance of power dynamics in the region. This comprehensive approach provides valuable insights into the future of naval rivalries in the IOR. To understand the research methodology of this research in an elucidated manner Saunder's research onion⁶⁰ is added as follows,

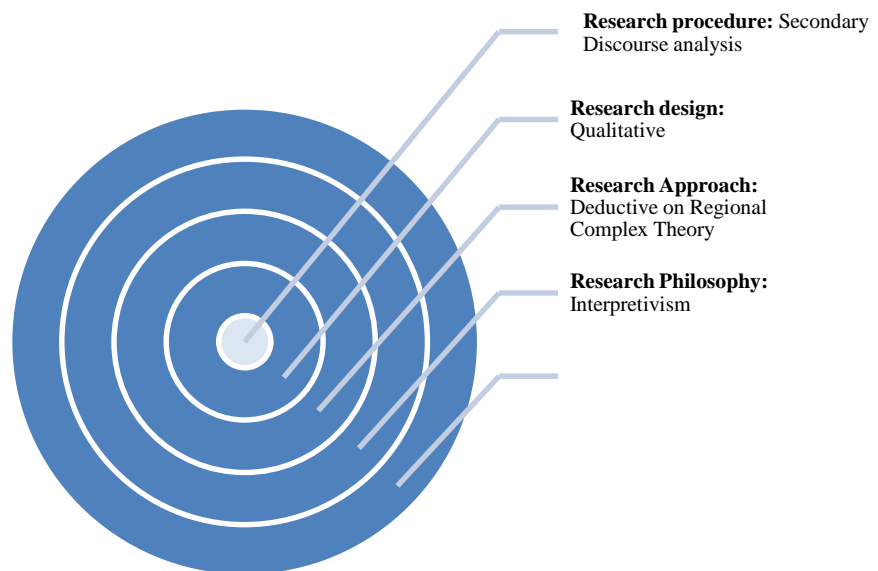


Figure 1: Saunders' Research Onion outlining the employed research methodology

1.9 Limitations of Study

While conducting the content analysis it is observed that certain white paper documents which are official national documents of India and China are unavailable for public use which can be a limitation in conducting the detailed and empirical analysis.

1.10 De-Limitations of Study

This research offers an extensive analysis of Indian maritime sophistication post-1990 till now. It provides a nuanced understanding of the rising focus on IN after the threat perception of

⁶⁰ E V A Dissanayake , “Research Onion: A Systematic Approach for Designing Research Methodology. Part One,” February 2023.

China in the region of Indian Ocean.

1.11 Organization of Study

This section delineates the fundamental framework of the dissertation. Its objective is to establish a foundational structure and direction for the inquiry. It furnishes insights into the rationale behind India's continual naval modernization efforts and examines their ramifications on China, a predominant maritime force in contemporary times. Furthermore, it presents various perspectives from scholars and thinkers pertinent to the subject matter. The subsequent elucidation of the methodology and research framework will guide readers in comprehending the trajectory of the research endeavor. Succeeding sections will delve into the correlation between the theoretical underpinnings of the RCT and its implications on the ongoing strategic competition between India and China in the IOR, through the conceptual lenses of balance of power and regional stability. This thesis is organized as following:

1. Introduction
2. Indian Naval Modernization and Sino-India balance of Power in IOR
3. China's Incidence in the Indian Ocean: Impact on India's Maritime Security
4. Revisiting the Hypothesis and Conclusion

Chapter 2

INDIAN NAVAL MODERNIZATION AND SINO-INDIA BALANCE OF POWER IN IOR

2.1 Introduction

The progression of naval modernization in Indian Navy (IN) and People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) highlights significant disparities, necessitating an examination of the evolution of maritime power in the region. This evolution can be understood as a transition from a Corbettian model, (focused on complete naval control on singular enemy waters), to a Mahanian approach, (emphasizing sea power and strategic dominance).⁶¹ Historical parallels can be drawn from the late 19th century, where Germany's development of a 'risk fleet' served both as a deterrent and a challenge to the British Royal Navy, aiming to break free from British naval supremacy.⁶² Initially, India and China's rivalry was primarily territorial, particularly along the northern Himalayan borders. However, the nature of their competition has shifted towards the maritime domain over time. Before the 1990s, naval rivalry between the two nations was minimal. The situation changed post-mid-1990s when China's economic boom enabled substantial investment in naval capabilities. Freed from the northern threat of the USSR, China focused on modernizing its navy. Similarly, India - facing increasing Chinese naval activity in the IOR, responded by bolstering her naval might, facilitated by the growing GDP.

The strategic competition between India and China has evolved from land-based conflicts to maritime rivalry. As the US-China maritime rivalry intensified, prompting the modernization of the PLAN, Chinese warships began frequenting the IOR regularly. This presence compelled India to modernize its navy in response. Consequently, the Indo-Pacific has become a new arena for Sino-Indian rivalry, with both nations expanding their maritime ambitions and capabilities.⁶³ Naval modernization in both countries aims to address their respective strategic vulnerabilities in the IOR.⁶⁴ Both India and China possess the financial resources to develop navies aligned with

⁶¹ Prof. Rohan Gunaratna and Dr. Punsara Amarasinghe, "From Mahan to Corbett: An Inquiry into the Development of Chinese Naval Strategy in the Indian Ocean Region," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, May 8, 2024.

⁶² Dirk Bönker, "Naval Race between Germany and Great Britain, 1898-1912," *International Encyclopedia of the First World War (WW1)*, January 11, 2015.

⁶³ Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah, *China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations* (Springer Nature, 2023).

⁶⁴ Sidra Khan, Zeeshan Ahmad, and Maghfoor Ullah, "China's Geostrategic Interest in the Indian Ocean Region," *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 4, no. 4 (December 30, 2023): 141–61, <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.917005034>.

Corbettian principles, focusing on sea control within their EEZs and beyond. China's strategic goals include keeping external powers away from East-Asian waters and protecting its global strategic ambitions. Conversely, India aims to prevent external naval powers from gaining a foothold in the IOR, aligning its naval capabilities with these strategic objectives.

Submarines play a crucial role in this modernization process of any Navy. The technological advancements in submarine design over the decades highlight the qualitative differences in naval capabilities. For instance, early diesel submarines were noisy and had limited operational range, while modern submarines were far more advanced than PLAN developed previously. Government reports, such as the Chinese MoD's White Papers and the IN's 'Indian Maritime Doctrine,' underscore the strategic imperative behind this naval modernization. The most effective way to measure naval modernization is through the examination of naval platforms and armaments. This research employs qualitative methods to assess the modernity and strategic fit of naval warships in both India and China. For China, the focus is on the percentage of naval warships deemed 'modern' by the American government, and how these platforms align with its naval strategy. Similarly, India's naval strategy and modern platforms are scrutinized to understand their role in potential military confrontations in the IOR.

The ongoing naval modernization in India and China is driven by their strategic rivalry, with each nation seeking to enhance its maritime capabilities to secure its interests in the IOR. This chapter delves into the implications of this modernization for the power balance in the region, providing insights into the evolving maritime competition between these two rising naval powers.

2.2 Indian Navy: Rising Naval Power in Indian Ocean Region

IN has transformed significantly from a predominantly green-water force in 1991 to one modernized power capable of substantial supremacy both within the IOR and increasingly beyond it, including areas like the SCS and northeast Asia. India leverages its extensive coastline and numerous ports to enhance its economic potential and strategic influence.⁶⁵ Nehru's vision likened the Indian Ocean to a regional Monroe Doctrine, aiming to limit extra-regional powers' access and mitigate conflicts through command and control.⁶⁶ This strategic mindset continues to shape India's maritime policies. In the early 1990s, the IN was often overlooked and underfunded in budget allocation, however, in over 30 years; it has made remarkable strides in enhancing the

⁶⁵ Tomasz Łukaszuk, "Indian and Australian Maritime Security Doctrines in the Indian Ocean Region in the 21st Century. Christian Bueger's Matrix of Maritime Security Approach," *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 49, no. 4 (December 31, 2020): 105–27.

⁶⁶ Muhammad Abbas Hassan, "Growing China-India Competition in the Indian Ocean: Implications for Pakistan," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2019): 77–89.

superiority and deadliness of its platforms.⁶⁷ To illustrate this transformation, consider that in 1991, the IN had only ten missile-equipped platforms with a total of 91 missile cells across the entire navy. By 2019, just one Kolkata-class destroyer had 49 guided missile cells, exemplifying the navy's significant advancement in capabilities.⁶⁸

India has always regarded the Indian Ocean as a significant and sacred domain, reflecting its traditional views, where it is geographically positioned to dominate the region, and its approach to maritime modernization is evident in its evolving doctrines and strategies. The Indian Maritime Doctrine, initially published in 2004 and revised in 2009 and 2015, underscores this evolution. Similarly, maritime strategies such as "Freedom to Use the Seas" (2007) and "Ensuring Secure Seas" (2015) reflect a shift from a passive to a more assertive stance, emphasizing regional engagement and security.⁶⁹ The 'Sagar Mala Project,' launched in 2015, epitomizes India's geo-economic strategy, focusing on port-led development to boost maritime infrastructure, smart cities, and coastal economic zones.⁷⁰ This ambitious initiative, though incomplete, highlights India's vision for maritime growth and its intent to bolster its regional influence however, despite significant regional engagement over the past twenty years, India remains wary of China's expanding maritime presence in the Indian Ocean.⁷¹ China's development of maritime infrastructure in neighboring littoral states has heightened strategic competition, perceived by India and the US as a challenge. This competitive dynamic has spurred the formation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), aimed at countering China's influence in waters. India and the US have strengthened their strategic partnership through agreements like LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA, enhancing their operational coordination and intelligence sharing.⁷² India's focus on anti-submarine warfare, exemplified by the adoption of technologies like the Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS), underscores its efforts to monitor Chinese naval movements.

Bilateral and multilateral naval exercises, such as Konkan Shakti, AUSINDEX, and Malabar, reinforce India's strategic posture and foster regional security cooperation. These exercises, often involving the US and its allies, serve dual purposes: enhancing strategic partnerships and

⁶⁷ Pritika Datta, "The Indian Navy: From a 'Cinderella Service' to a Saviour of the Seas," *Indian Defence Review*, October 19, 2017.

⁶⁸ Walter C. Ladwig, "Drivers of Indian Naval Expansion," 2012

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 65

⁷⁰ Suhasini Haidar, "After the Tsunami: How the 'Quad' Was Born," *The Hindu*, November 15, 2017, sec. Comment.

⁷¹ Rory Medcalf, "India Locks in the Quadrilateral Dialogue to Counter China," *Australian Financial Review*, January 24, 2018.

⁷² Milind Kulshreshtha, "Evolving Indo-US Naval Cooperation in Light of BECA, COMCASA and LEMOA Agreements," *Solute to Indian Soldier*, November 2, 2020.

containing China's influence in the Indian Ocean and broader Indo-Pacific. India's involvement in regional organizations like the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) further solidifies its strategic dominance. These platforms enable India to play a pivotal role in regional decision-making, bolstering its influence over other stakeholders in the Indian Ocean.

2.3 Primary Drivers of Naval Sophistication of India

A key aspect of this study is to identify the primary driver behind this naval sophistication, the evidence of which can only be found through understanding the roots of this spike in naval sophistication over the years. Historically, since its independence in 1947, India has been a military power, primarily focused on its territorial disputes with Pakistan and China. The contention with Islamabad is mainly at the northeast boundaries of India whereas the contention with Beijing has progressed into both a spatial and positional competition since the 1990s. This evolving strategic competition with Beijing is the critical factor driving India's maritime sophistication.

The core of this analysis focuses on the period from 1991 to the current day and highlights that although the Delhi-Beijing got into strategic contention after the 1962 Tibet war the naval confrontations intensified in the 1990s. The significant naval sophistication in India did not commence until after the turn of the century, particularly between 2005 and 2020. During this time, the rivalry saw a substantial escalation, marked by the presence of PLAN warships in the IOR and growing Indian discernments of strategic encirclement by Beijing. This period also coincides with India's enhanced financial capacity to modernize its navy, evidenced by rising naval budgets and briefings for sophisticated combat ships, many of which are yet to get tested by sea trials.

While India's naval budget is smaller compared to China's, the focus has been on enhancing quality rather than quantity. The IN has grown not only in size but also in technical erudition. New skills in the technical genre enable the IN to commence extended deployments. Indian war vessels now feature advanced sensors, long-range weapons, and interconnected platforms via data-link systems.⁷³ The introduction of new SSK submarines, equipped with advanced defense systems including anti-ship guided missiles and Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) structures, significantly enhances the navy's underwater endurance and combat capability.⁷⁴

⁷³ Abhijit Singh, "Future Technologies for the Indian Navy," orfonline.org, February 23, 2017, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/future-technologies-for-the-indian-navy>.

⁷⁴ NTI, "India Submarine Capabilities," The Nuclear Threat Initiative, October 11, 2022, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/india-submarine-capabilities/>.

As compared to Beijing’s expanding fleets of SSNs, SSBNs, and other warships, Delhi’s naval sophistication efforts might seem less impressive. However, as this chapter and subsequent ones will demonstrate, the IN, despite being potentially 10 years behind the PLAN in terms of warship sophistication, is steadily advancing to perfection. The actual or supposed threat posed by the Beijing remains the key catalyst for this progress. This modernization aims to contain Beijing’s growing impact amongst littoral states in the IOR and attempts to ensure that India can assert its maritime interests effectively in the region. The transformation of the IN reflects a strategic shift driven by the necessity to respond to China’s expanding naval capabilities. This chapter further explores the implications of these developments on the power balance in the IOR and evaluates Delhi’s strategic response to the evolving maritime security environment. To better articulate the naval strengths of the two powers the following graph is added.⁷⁵

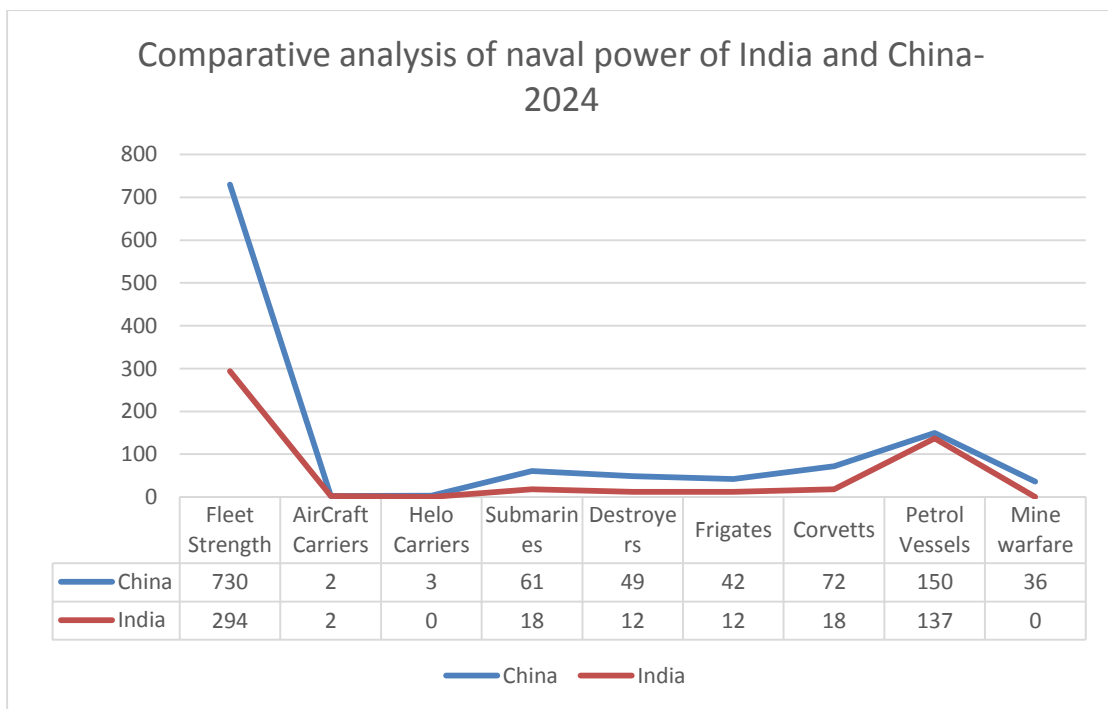


Figure 2: Comparative analysis of naval power of India and China- June 2024

2.3.1 Sino-India Strategic Rivalry

Upon taking the position of PM in 1991, P.V. Narasimha Rao perceived Beijing as a lasting threat to national security, a view shaped by the 1962 Tibet confrontation, China's 1964 nuclear test, and China's financial and nuclear assistance to Pakistan in the 1970s. The dissolution of the Soviet Union left India without a key ally, intensifying the India-China enmity during the early 1990s. Beijing's continued support for Islamabad, including significant arms sales, further strained

⁷⁵ GFP, “Comparison of China and India Naval Strengths (2024),” www.globalfirepower.com, 2024, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-comparison-detail.php?country1=china&country2=india>.

relations. Between 1993 and 1997, China supplied over half of Islamabad's missile imports, including fast attack boats equipped with a defense system of anti-ship-guided missiles, directly or indirectly challenging India's security.⁷⁶ When the US pressured China to sever ties with the nuclear program of Iran, the latter maintained its close relationship with Pakistan instead leading to closer ties of Delhi with the US. The China-Pakistan alliance was a significant concern for India, which had to navigate the complexities of the emerging global order. Indian policymakers began to see through what they termed "Woolly-headed Third Worldism," recognizing it as a cover for China's strategic maneuvers that compromised India's security in the region. Consequently, India adopted a more realist foreign policy approach, rejecting China's calls to jointly oppose Western hegemony and focusing instead on the Chinese threat.

The IN was underfunded and neglected at the beginning of the 1990s, known as the "Cinderella" service, it received a minimal portion of the defense budget. However, this began to change as Beijing pursued to recover relations with India, hoping to establish a non-Western-dominated world order to counter the US threat. However, India perceived it as a strategic move and focused on the sophistication of her maritime might. Despite limited budgets, the IN started receiving incremental budget increases. Up until 1996, the IN's budget allocation rise was about 13% compared to that of 1991, further increasing to 15 percent by 2006, and reaching 31% allocation in the defense budget was approved by 2023.⁷⁷ Although the enmity with Beijing was apparent long ago but India lacked the monetary resources to invest much in modern naval sophistication at that time. Meanwhile, China's military modernization was also in its nascent stages. The significant threat perceptions and animosity between the two escalations that would come to define the 21st century had not yet materialized. Nevertheless, the late 1990s marked the beginning of the IN's modernization efforts, coinciding with an intensifying rivalry with China. During this period, China also began making substantial reserves in marine hardware, partly in retort to the growing capabilities of the American Navy.⁷⁸

As the Sino-India animosity evolved, both nations recognized the importance of modernizing their naval forces. For India, this was a crucial step to counter Beijing's growing incidence in the Indian Ocean along with securing its maritime interests. The developments in the Indian naval capabilities during this period laid the groundwork for the more pronounced naval competition

⁷⁶ Sameer P. Lalwani, "SPECIAL REPORT: A Threshold Alliance: The China-Pakistan Military Relationship" (USIP.org, March 2023).

⁷⁷ John W. Garver, "Diverging Perceptions of China's Emergence as an Indian Ocean Power," *Asia Policy* 22, no. 1 (2016): 56–60, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2016.0033>.

⁷⁸ Young, "India's Defence Budget: The Navy and Its Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission," *orfonline.org*, July 16, 2022.

seen in the subsequent decades.

2.4 Rise of Bharatiya Janata Party and Evolution of Indian Naval Might

Indian strategic analysts started perceiving China's creeping encirclement strategy in the late 1990s and raised the issue of turning heads for naval sophistication to contain the perceived threat. In 1996, Beijing's collaboration with Washington to curb nuclear proliferation was seen by India as an attempt to undermine its security against a nuclear-armed neighbor.⁷⁹ The Gujral Doctrine, emerged during this period, prioritizing a sturdier Indian existence in its margins to counter China's growing influence. This era also marked the beginning of significant modernization efforts for the Indian IN.⁸⁰ At the beginning of 2000, the missile cell figure in the IN rose from 125 to 185, with the introduction of technologically advanced platforms like the Delhi-class destroyers and new kilo-class submarines.⁸¹

In 1998, the election of the BJP brought a more realist-oriented government to power, which regarded Beijing as a significant threat at territorial and naval fronts. Under PM Vajpayee, Delhi published "The Strategic Defense Review-The Maritime Dimension-A Naval Vision" in mid-1998. The document emphasized the need for the IN to protect India's maritime interests and deter challenges in the IOR, explicitly addressing concerns about Chinese influence. The late 1990s saw increased PLAN activities in the IOR, prompting Indian security officials to push for further naval modernization. The BJP government significantly boosted the IN's budget, with a notable 14 percent increase from 1999 to 2000.⁸² This period saw the IN transition from a primarily defensive force to one capable of exerting power and countering Beijing's presence in the IOR. The IN had ordered new warships and submarines, reflecting a strategic shift influenced by China's naval ambitions by the beginning of 2001. However, Delhi's nuclear trials in 1998 heightened tensions with China and the international community, where Beijing's efforts to isolate India by lobbying for sanctions further strained relations. During this period, China strengthened its military cooperation with Pakistan, supplying critical missile components and technology, which heightened India's security concerns.⁸³

With the traditional risk perception from Islamabad diminishing post-Kargil, India's MoD shifted its naval focus from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. The Eastern Command was bolstered to accommodate two aircraft carriers and new diesel-electric submarines (SSKs). Admiral Raman Suthan, then commander of the Eastern Fleet, highlighted the strategic rationale behind this shift,

⁷⁹ Ibid, 77

⁸⁰ Ibid, 74

⁸¹ Ibid, 73

⁸² Ibid, 73

⁸³ Ibid, 77

citing China's increasing interest in the region and activities around Coco Island as key concerns.⁸⁴ China's modernization of its naval forces in the early 2000s was more concerned with countering the threat perception from the American Navy in wide sea nautical, which saw many new Chinese warships venturing into the IOR, raising Delhi's threat perceptions of Chinese expansion strategies in the region. In response, India established its first joint command, the Andaman and Nicobar Command, in 2001. These moves underscored India's strategic shift towards containing the growing PLAN activity in the Indian Ocean, with the Andaman Sea serving as a critical entry point for Chinese naval forces.

India's evolving maritime strategy, shaped by the rise of the BJP and the perceived Chinese threat, led to substantial investments in naval modernization. The focus on the Andaman and Nicobar Command, along with the increased defense budget and new naval platforms, reflected India's commitment to maintaining a strategic edge in the IOR.⁸⁵ The Sino-Indian rivalry thus significantly influenced the trajectory of Indian naval development, positioning the IN as a formidable force in the region.

2.5 India's Strategic Considerations in Indian Ocean Region

Delhi's strategic considerations in the IOR are deeply rooted in its naval doctrine and broader geopolitical aims, with IN's self-identification as the region's primary responder underscoring its role in ensuring maritime security and stability. As articulated in the Maritime Security Strategy of 2015, one of the key objectives is to foster a conducive maritime environment to enhance net security across India's maritime areas of interest. However, the delineation of these interests is not solely within the Navy's purview; political leadership significantly shapes them. The IN considers the entire Indian Ocean as its core area of interest, stretching from the east coast of Africa to the Lombok Straits, covering critical waterways like the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, and to the Red Sea.⁸⁶ India's strategic vision for the IOR is encapsulated in the SAGAR initiative, which aims to assert India's influence and ensure regional stability, where recent policy actions highlight India's enhanced engagement in the region. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has restructured to better focus on Indian Ocean neighbors by establishing the Indian Ocean Division in 2016 and later creating an Indo-Pacific Division in 2020. These organizational changes signify the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean in the foreign

⁸⁴ David Scott, "Sino-Indian Security Predicaments for the Twenty-First Century," *Asian Security* 4, no. 3 (September 23, 2008): 244–70.

⁸⁵ Jeff M. Smith, "Andaman and Nicobar Islands: India's Strategic Outpost," *The Diplomat*, March 18, 2017.

⁸⁶ Indu Krothwal and Neha Kumar, "Theater of India-China Strategic Rivalry: The Indian Ocean," *Comparative Strategy* 42, no. 5 (August 24, 2023): 655–69.

policy of India.

PM Narendra Modi's visits to Sri Lanka, Seychelles, and Mauritius in 2015, and Maldives in 2019, illustrate high-level diplomatic efforts to reinforce ties with these littoral nations of Indian Ocean.⁸⁷ These visits mark significant milestones, given the long gaps since previous high-level interactions. The engagements, such as those through the Colombo Security Conclave, further solidify these relationships. The Conclave's member states have pinpointed key cooperation areas: maritime safety and security, counter-terrorism, countering radicalization, combating trafficking and transnational crime, cyber security, critical infrastructure protection, and disaster relief.⁸⁸

India's 'Neighborhood First' policy, which emphasizes close relations with its maritime neighbors like Sri Lanka and Maldives, further underscores its commitment to regional security.⁸⁹ Capacity-building efforts have included establishing coastal radar stations in collaboration with Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles, and extending similar support to Bangladesh and Myanmar to bolster their maritime domain awareness. India's proactive stance in addressing regional challenges is evident in its various initiatives. In response to natural disasters and security threats, India has partnered with Australia and France on initiatives like IPOI, ISA, and CDRI. The "Mission Sagar" initiative launched in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic is another testament to India's commitment, to providing extensive aid to neighboring countries.

The IN's role is pivotal in these engagements, showcasing its ability to respond swiftly to humanitarian crises. The Navy's significant involvement in disaster relief, notably since the 2004 tsunami, highlights its capability and readiness. Regular participation in humanitarian missions across South Asia, West Asia, and the South China Sea has solidified its reputation as a reliable first responder, thereby enhancing Delhi's diplomatic influence through soft power. The IN's efforts to bolster regional security are exemplified by initiatives like the IFC-IOR, aimed at addressing naval safety challenges.⁹⁰ The launch of the Mission-Based Deployment (MBD) in 2017 further demonstrates the IN's commitment to maintaining a strong and visible presence in the IOR, deploying assets strategically across the region to safeguard India's interests. Through these comprehensive measures, India not only reinforces its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean but also fosters regional cooperation, addressing shared security concerns, and attempts to stand out as the security provider in the region.

⁸⁷ S. Jeeva and D. Sivakumar, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi Visit to Sri Lanka and Its Impacts on Indo-Sri Lankan Relations," *Linguistics and Culture Review* 5, no. S2 (November 15, 2021).

⁸⁸ Antoine Levesques, "The State of Defence Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region," IISS, June 9, 2023.

⁸⁹ K. Yhome, "Subregional Security Cooperation: An Exploratory Study of India's Approach," orfonline.org, September 14, 2020.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 86

2.6 Challenges to New Delhi's Ambitions in Indian Ocean

India's strategic interest in the IOR is evident through its active role and ongoing efforts to enhance its capabilities in both traditional and nontraditional security paradigms. While India's geographic location and historical ties with the Indian Ocean littoral and island countries provide a strategic advantage, they also present significant challenges. The New Delhi defense budget for the fiscal year 2023-2024, amounting to \$72.6 billion, reflects a shift in defense perception of focusing on all security dimensions equally.⁹¹ The IN's budget saw a 20% increase, with a 10.6% rise in its modernization budget from the previous year. This shift highlights India's growing recognition of maritime threats. The budget includes approximately \$3 billion for maritime sophistication and \$7 billion for Air Force modernization, with the Coast Guard's budget seeing a significant 42.5% increase over the fiscal year 2020-21.⁹² According to the MoD, the IN's current force level comprises 132 ships and 15 submarines by the end of 2020.⁹³ The focus has shifted from merely increasing the number of assets to enhancing capabilities. New additions such as the stealth-guided missile destroyer INS Mormugao and the Scorpene-class submarine Vagir aim to bridge the capability gap.⁹⁴ The commissioning of India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, in September 2022, marks a significant milestone in enhancing the nation's maritime capabilities.⁹⁵ The vastness of the IOR, extending from the eastern coast of Africa to Australia's west coast, presents logistical challenges for the IN. While the Navy is visible between the Horn of Africa and the Malacca Strait, its presence near Australian waters is limited. The long distance from Indian shores to the western Indian Ocean is particularly challenging. In the absence of overseas military bases, agreements like Logistics Exchange Pacts are crucial. India has signed quite a few such agreements: the LEMOA with the US in 2016, the ACSA with Japan in 2020, the MLSA with Australia in 2020, and the RELOS with Russia in 2021.⁹⁶ These agreements help extend the Navy's operational reach and maintain a presence across the vast IOR.

Despite the increasing focus on maritime security, India faces challenges in matching the pace of the naval great game played by America and Beijing in the waters. This is partly due to the lack of sustained political discourse on the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless,

⁹¹ Reuters, "India Raises Defence Budget to \$72.6bn amid Tensions with China," DAWN.COM, February 1, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1734775>.

⁹² Ibid, 91

⁹³ Indian Naval Force, "Navy's Quest for Modernisation," www.spsnavalforces.com, 2021, <https://www.spsnavalforces.com/story/?id=652&h=Navyandrsquo>.

⁹⁴ Indian Navy, "Indigenous Stealth Guided-Missile Destroyer INS Mormugao, Second Warship of P15B Class, Commissioned by Raksha Mantri in Mumbai | Indian Navy," indiannavy.nic.in, December 19, 2022.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 94

⁹⁶ Ibid, 86

New Delhi has accomplished significant progress in the past ten years, recalibrating its policy approach to the IOR from power projection to security provider. Building partnerships with Indian Ocean littoral states remains crucial for maintaining regional security and stability, especially in the western Indian Ocean. The IN needs to enhance its capabilities through partnerships to address emerging challenges, including anti-submarine warfare and maritime domain awareness. As India continues to develop its maritime strategy, collaboration with regional and global partners will be essential to certify stability in the Indian Ocean.

2.7 China's Incidence in Indian Ocean and Power Balance

The IOR has become a battleground for strategic dominance, with India and China expanding their naval power to secure control over crucial SLOCs and boost international trade. Their modernization efforts aim to protect burgeoning economic activities and combat maritime threats like piracy and terrorism. Despite the focus on geo-economics, this naval build-up is perceived as a competitive arms race, potentially destabilizing the regional balance of power. Beijing's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean is driven by its strategic need to secure key trading routes, crucial for its energy supplies and economic stability. The US EIA 2021 report underscores the importance of these routes, noting that nine out of China's top ten crude oil suppliers require transit through the Indian Ocean. The transit of which increased to 11.5 million crude oil barrels per day in 2023.⁹⁷ Protecting these SLOCs has thus become a top importance for Beijing as it increases its regional influence and sustains its economic might.

Beijing's incidence in the Indian Ocean, once minimal, has grown significantly since 2008, primarily through anti-piracy missions in the western side. The PLAN has maintained a continuous presence, with multiple surface vessels deployed regularly. These operations have not only demonstrated Beijing's ability to put up with global maritime security but have also provided a rationale for a more permanent presence in the region. The establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017 marks a significant step in this direction.⁹⁸ Over the past two decades, China's naval capabilities have expanded dramatically. The commissioning of significant warships, such as the guided missile cruiser Hainan, the amphibious assault ship Dalian, and the ballistic missile submarine Changzheng, illustrates China's growing naval strength. China's diplomatic presence in the IOR is robust, with embassies in all six island nations, compared to the US, which has embassies in only three. Beijing's deepening engagement in the Indian Ocean through military, economic, and political means reflects its strategic ambitions. Engagement with

⁹⁷ Jimmy Troderman, "China Imported Record Volumes of Crude Oil in the First Half of 2023," www.eia.gov, September 18, 2023.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 97

Indian Ocean littorals is crucial for China to establish itself as a reliable security partner, particularly in light of its broader African engagements. As China seeks to protect its maritime weaknesses, its presence in the Indian Ocean is likely to grow stronger over the coming decade. China's potential development of another military facility, whether in the Pacific or the Indian Ocean, would further intensify maritime competition. A new naval base in the Indian Ocean would help mitigate China's geographic disadvantages and enhance its power projection capabilities. This increased presence would not only secure China's SLOCs but also complicate the strategic calculus for other regional players, including India.

From a geopolitical perspective, China has been welcomed by many Indian Ocean littoral and island nations as a new actor for trade, which has shifted the regional dynamics. Unlike the contentious SCS, China faces no territorial disputes in the Indian Ocean, positioning itself as a cooperative player. Through initiatives like the BRI, China has expanded its influence, providing an alternative platform for economic and security cooperation, catering to both traditional and nontraditional security aspects. This growing influence is a cause of concern for India, exacerbating existing tensions along their northern borders and intensifying competition in the Indian Ocean.

China's expanding footprint in the Indian Ocean signifies a shift in the regional power balance as illustrated in Chapter 1 through RCT. By increasing its military presence and forging stronger economic ties through the BRI, China aims to counterbalance the influence of other regional powers like India and traditional Western powers such as the US and France. This expansion is perceived as a strategic move to project power and secure critical maritime routes essential for China's energy imports and trade. India, on the other hand, is modernizing its navy and strengthening its strategic partnerships with Indian Ocean littorals and global powers to counterbalance China's growing influence. The increase in India's defense budget allocation for naval forces underscores this shift. India's strategic agreements with countries like the US, Japan, and Australia for logistics and mutual support reflect a concerted effort to enhance its operational reach and maintain a balance of power in the region.

The Indian Ocean littoral states, meanwhile, leverage their strategic importance by engaging with both China and India. By diversifying their partnerships, these nations seek to avoid dependency on any single power, thereby maintaining a regional balance. This multipolar engagement aligns with the Balance of Power theory, where smaller states navigate between larger powers to ensure their security and autonomy and illustrates how Indian Ocean emerges as a critical theater where regional stability hinges on the careful management of military and diplomatic engagements.

2.8 Conclusion

This section of the dissertation provides a comprehensive examination of the naval modernization efforts in India and China, illustrating how their strategic rivalry has shifted from territorial to maritime domains after 1990. India's transformation from a green-water to a blue-water navy is driven by its perceived encirclement by China and the latter's increasing presence in the IOR. This strategic shift aligns with historical theories of naval power, moving from limited naval engagements to seeking maritime dominance. The analysis highlights India's incremental but focused modernization efforts, emphasizing quality over quantity, to counter China's rapidly expanding and technologically sophisticated navy. The evolution of India's maritime strategy, particularly under the BJP, underscores a realist approach to regional security, enhancing its naval capabilities through budget increases, strategic partnerships, and infrastructural developments. Conversely, China's consistent enhancement of its naval power, driven by the need to secure key maritime routes for its energy supplies and economic interests, marks a significant shift in the regional power balance. Both nations' actions reflect broader geopolitical ambitions and the importance of maintaining strategic parity in the IOR.

Chapter 3

CHINA'S INCIDENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: IMPACT ON INDIA'S MARITIME SECURITY

3.1 Introduction

China's involvement in IOR has grown significantly since last decade, for her energy security needs, as around 80% of her imported crude oil transits the Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca (A strait connecting the SCS with the IO).⁹⁹ Despite diversifying its oil imports, China remains heavily dependent on supplies from countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman, and Angola. As a major trading partner, China leads imports for 24 IOR countries and exports for 13. Its BRI encompasses 39 African, 25 East Asian, 17 North African, and 6 South Asian nations, further solidifying its economic ties in the region.¹⁰⁰

China has also bolstered her diplomatic and economic relations with immediate littoral states including Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh, in IOR. Militarily, Beijing's incidence is marked by a base in Djibouti, joint exercises, anti-piracy missions, and arms supplies to various countries, underscoring its strategic positioning in the IOR. The BRI, particularly the MSR, exemplifies China's growing influence and its ambition to integrate its economy globally. Since the 1980s, PLAN has been a priority in China's military, resulting in significant advancements in naval capabilities, including the development of high tech wide range delivery systems, submarines, and anti-ship missiles. Beijing's expanding naval footprint in IOR has substantial implications for India. New Delhi, supported by US, seeks to contain Beijing's presence in the area. It is presumed that Beijing's rise has impelled New Delhi to reassess her maritime strategies, notably shifting from the prior 'Look East' policy of 1991, to a more assertive Indo-Pacific strategy aligned with US efforts to contain China.¹⁰¹ This strategic realignment has driven the enhancement of the IN. However, China's BRI, particularly the MSR, complicates India's aspirations. The development of infrastructure and ports under the BRI is perceived by Indian and Western observers as an effort to encircle India, referred to as the 'String of Pearls'.¹⁰²

China, while rejecting this interpretation, has invited India to join the BRI. Nevertheless, India, in collaboration with the US and its allies, remains wary and has formulated a counter-strategy known

⁹⁹ Ibid, 14

¹⁰⁰ James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, February 2, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Jyoti Sukhia, "India's Look East Policy: Its Evolution, Challenges and Prospects" (Kurukshetra University, February 28, 2024).

¹⁰² Zeba Maliha Khan, "Strategic Posturing of China in IOR," *Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (2022): 13–33.

as the 'Necklace of Diamonds,' focusing on strategic ports and bases of Changi in Singapore, Seychelles islands, Chabahar in Iran, Sabang in Indonesia, and Duqm in Oman.¹⁰³ India's strategic partnerships, such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor with Japan and agreements with Vietnam and Central Asian states, reflect its broader regional ambitions.¹⁰⁴ China's declared objectives in the IOR include safeguarding socioeconomic security, investments, industrial growth, and national interests through its naval sophistication. Since the BRI's inception, Beijing has accelerated its naval development to protect its global interests, maintaining vigilance to ensure its maritime security worldwide, but has created a security dilemma for Indian Naval Forces.

3.2 China's two Ocean Strategy

During the Mao Era (1949-1976), the PLAN was secondary to the Army, focusing mainly on coastal defense due to the nature of the threats facing China. However, under Deng Xiaoping's leadership and the nation's reform and opening-up, the navy also underwent significant changes.¹⁰⁵ Despite the "Four Modernizations" prioritizing national defense last, Liu Huaqing, who became the PLAN commander in 1982, played a pivotal role in its transformation. Influenced by Alfred Thayer Mahan's theories, 'Liu' adapted ideas for China's naval strategy.¹⁰⁶ Liu (Modern-day China's Mahan) emphasized the importance of controlling the seas for both economic and military advantages while highlighting the significance of SLOCs for trade and military supply routes, which are crucial in today's globalized world.¹⁰⁷ Liu's strategic reforms, rooted in Mahan's principles, aimed to enhance China's naval capabilities to protect its trade routes and extend its power and wealth through maritime dominance. However, following Liu's strategies the emergence of the Malacca dilemma has been under discussion to ensure security at both economic and military fronts.¹⁰⁸

The swift and decisive victory of the US in the First Gulf War in 1991 profoundly impacted China's military community, highlighting the vast gap in capabilities between China and the US.¹⁰⁹ This event accelerated China's military reform, particularly for the PLAN, which is now in the second

¹⁰³ Arfa Javaid, "What Is Necklace of Diamonds Strategy?," Jagranjosh.com, July 21, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Jagannath P Panda, *Scaling India-Japan Cooperation in Indo-Pacific and beyond 2025: Corridors, Connectivity and Contours* (New Delhi: Kw Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2020).

¹⁰⁵ Richard Evans, *Deng Xiaoping and the Making of Modern China* (Penguin Mass Market, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ Jack McCaffrie, "Book Review: Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21st Century: The Turn to Mahan," *International Journal of Maritime History* 20, no. 1 (June 2008): 453–55.

¹⁰⁷ I.C. Little, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783," *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies* 14, no. 1 (February 28, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ Pawel Paszak, "China and the 'Malacca Dilemma,'" Warsaw Institute, February 28, 2021, <https://warsawinstitute.org/china-malacca-dilemma/>.

¹⁰⁹ Tom Guorui, Sun, and Asia Programme, "CHINA'S TWO OCEAN STRATEGY: Controlling Waterways and the New Silk Road ASIA FOCUS #31 L'IRIS," 2017.

phase of modernization as per Liu Huaqing's strategy.¹¹⁰ Liu advocated for the PLAN to operate independently rather than as an adjunct to the Army, emphasizing the need for the navy to command the seas. Liu's modernization plan for PLAN involves three distinct phases. The initial phase emphasizes personnel training and ship upgrades to bolster regional deterrence. The second phase focuses on enhancing near-sea combat capabilities through the building of light aircraft carriers and additional warships, establishing the PLAN as a dominant regional force in the Western Pacific.¹¹¹ The final phase aspires to elevate the PLAN into a blue-water navy, capable of securing SLOCs, projecting power globally, and deterring intercontinental dangers. Liu's Mahanian influence is evident in his broader vision of the navy's role in China's national strategy. He argued that maritime goals should be integrated within China's overall national strategy, linking the PLAN's modernization to the country's economic and geopolitical future. Liu's blueprint for the PLAN thus reflects a comprehensive understanding that China's survival and growth are increasingly tied to its economic and geopolitical strategies, making naval power a crucial element of China's global ambitions.

Beijing's two-ocean strategy can be analyzed from both broad and narrow perspectives. Broadly, the strategy aligns with the capabilities of the PLAN, forming its macro-structure. Currently, the near-seas encompass the East and SCSs and the Yellow Sea, while the far-seas include waters beyond these regions.¹¹² This classification can evolve as the PLAN advances in its modernization efforts. Narrowly, the strategy focuses on the Pacific and IOs due to their strategic importance. Militarily, the Pacific Ocean is of paramount concern to China due to regional tensions involving Taiwan, and the US involvement in strategic decision making of S. Korea, Japan. The SCS serves as a maritime buffer and potential blockade point in conflicts, necessitating the PLAN's operational effectiveness in this region.¹¹³ Conversely, the Indian Ocean represents a critical area for PLAN training and the next phase of Beijing's sea power projection. China's military base in Djibouti and economic interests in Pakistan and Sri Lanka further underscore the significance of this region.¹¹⁴

Economically, the Pacific and Indian Ocean are vital for China's SLOCs, facilitating commerce and energy supply. As mentioned earlier and emphasizing now again that 80% of China's oil

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 106

¹¹¹ Ibid, 109

¹¹² Thai PBS World, "Xi Jinping's Myanmar Trip Part of China's '2-Ocean' Strategy," www.thaipbsworld.com, January 16, 2020.

¹¹³ Chung-in Moon and Chang-hee Nam, "Changing US-Japan-China Relations and the Future Challenges to the ROK-US Alliance," *Pacific Focus* 16, no. 2 (October 2, 2008): 5–23.

¹¹⁴ Michaël Tanchum, "China's New Military Base in Africa: What It Means for Europe and America – European Council on Foreign Relations," European Council on Foreign Relations, December 14, 2021.

imports transit these waters, with Malacca strait being particularly crucial.¹¹⁵ The Malacca Dilemma highlights concerns over potential embargoes or blockades, and several critical analysts emphasize that without a powerful navy, Beijing remains vulnerable to disruptions in its supply lines, affecting economic security. Piracy in the Indian Ocean poses a significant threat to China's commercial fleet, leading to economic losses and higher insurance premiums. This necessitates expansion of PLAN's operational reach into the far seas to safeguard Beijing's commercial interests. The sheer volume of global trade passing through these regions requires robust protection against piracy, with China expected to play a more prominent role in maintaining secure SLOCs. The dual objectives of ensuring economic security and modernizing the PLAN underscore the strategic significance of Pacific and Indian Oceans in China's two-ocean strategy.

3.3 Malacca Dilemma and China in Indian Ocean

President Hu Jintao introduced the term "Malacca Dilemma" to highlight the strategic vulnerabilities of China's reliance on the Malacca Strait for energy imports.¹¹⁶ Political scientist You Ji emphasized that securing SLOCs presents both conventional and unconventional challenges, including military threats. Hu pointed out that certain powers aim to control navigation through this critical chokepoint, which is essential for 80% of China's energy imports.¹¹⁷ To support its economic expansion, China focuses on maritime supremacy, viewing secure SLOCs as crucial for achieving economic and maritime goals. Consequently, China seeks to strengthen military alliances, enhance its maritime presence, and deepen cooperation with neighboring Indian Ocean nations. This strategy is particularly concerning for regional rival India, as both countries strive to maintain their influence over these strategic routes. The Indian Ocean's SLOCs are vital for global trade and energy transfer, leading China and India to modernize their navies, potentially increasing regional security tensions. The USA also plays a significant role, aiming to counter Beijing's influence to guard its interests.

To grasp China's "Malacca Dilemma," one must consider the strait's geography. As Hu Jintao noted, the vulnerability of the Malacca Strait, a key passage for East-West trade routes between China and oil-rich nations, is primarily geographical. This narrow chokepoint, spanning 1,100 km and narrowing to just 2.8 km at the Phillips Channel, is vital for China's economy and security.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ ICS, "The Malacca Dilemma: No Panacea but Multiple Possibilities," ICS Research Blog, May 22, 2020, <https://icsin.org/blogs/2020/05/22/the-malacca-dilemma-no-panacea-but-multiple-possibilities/>.

¹¹⁶ Navya Mudunuri, "The Malacca Dilemma and Chinese Ambitions: Two Sides of a Coin," Diplomatist, July 7, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 115

¹¹⁸ Luc Parrot, "Dire Straits: China's Energy Import Insecurities and the 'Malacca Dilemma,'" London Politica, March 22, 2023.

The future power dynamics between China and India is likely to hinge on Malacca strait, a critical chokepoint connecting northern Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific. India is bolstering its presence at the strait’s western entrance to contain Beijing’s maritime expansion, highlighting the strategic importance of these routes that facilitate global trade for over 4/5th of countries. Malacca strait, connecting the SCS to the Bay of Bengal, is a crucial commercial artery, with approximately 3/5th of global maritime trade passing through it daily, supplying major Asian economies like China and Japan. The strait’s strategic significance underscores the necessity for regional powers, i.e., China and US, to ensure their protection to uphold trade flows and prevent potential blockades. While a blockade of Chinese supplies via the Strait of Malacca is unlikely without a major armed conflict—potentially instigated by the US Navy, China remains vigilant, developing military capabilities to safeguard its interests in the SCS and secure essential resource routes.



Figure 3: Map representation of significant straits for China to enter IOR¹¹⁹

Beijing's response to this dilemma is twofold. Firstly, for the security purposes where securing this passage can ensure safe transit of Beijing’s trade vessels with PLAN playing a crucial role. Beijing argues that this defensive measure enhances regional security and supports free navigation. Secondly, China seeks alternative routes to bypass the Malacca Strait through a couple of key projects include the CPEC (Gwadar Port to Xinjiang), the Myanmar Oil Pipeline to Kunming, and a proposed project of Kra Canal in Thailand.¹²⁰ While these strategies appear logical for ensuring security and economic prosperity, they have significant regional implications that require scrutiny to understand Beijing's broader ambitions.

¹¹⁹ EIA, “The Strait of Malacca, a Key Oil Trade Chokepoint, Links the Indian and Pacific Oceans - Today in Energy - US Energy Information Administration (EIA),” www.eia.gov, August 11, 2017.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 44

A thorough analysis of China's Malacca dilemma uncovers several strategic ambiguities – geographical, security, and behavioral, where the geographical uncertainty requires a broader perspective beyond the Malacca Strait as it is one of several routes out of the IOR, alongside the Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar Straits. Contrary to Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) narrative, diverting through these alternatives is not prohibitively expensive. If a chokepoint were to be identified, the Strait of Hormuz poses a greater vulnerability due to its strategic significance and stronger foothold of US and IN forces, in areas where PLAN has limited influence.¹²¹ Beijing amplifies its security concerns in the Malacca for three main reasons. First and foremost, the strait is bordered by three neutral countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—who resist external intervention, including from the US, to preserve their regional coordination. Secondly, there is no consensus on the primary threat to the strait: while the US and Singapore emphasizes terrorism and piracy, Malaysia and Indonesia suspect these threats are exaggerated to justify strategic control. This disparity mitigates the likelihood of a targeted blockade by any single actor. Beijing shares concerns about piracy and terrorism, which are global issues rather than threats specific to any one nation. Effective local patrols have drastically reduced piracy, from 38 incidents in 2004 to just four in 2008.¹²² Thirdly, should the US attempt to blockade Malacca and surrounding straits, an expensive and complex endeavor, China could retaliate by blockading US allies like Japan, S-Korea, and Taiwan in the East and SCSs.

Behavioral ambiguity is evident in President Hu Jintao's 2003 declaration at a party conference, labeling the Malacca Strait as China's Achilles' heel. Party conferences typically emphasize the CCP's achievements and future plans, not strategic vulnerabilities. This unusual focus may be a deliberate strategy to justify China's increased presence in the IOR and signal its broader ambitions to the international community. In essence, China's intent to dominate these straits and use them as a springboard for its naval expansion in IOR is clear. Overall, these factors elucidate the complexities of China's Malacca dilemma and highlight the strategic motivations behind its actions in the IOR.

3.4 China's Strategies to Contain the Malacca Dilemma

Beijing has emerged as a global power, presenting a strategic challenge to the US and its allies, positioning itself as a significant competitor. The Indian Ocean features prominently in China's geopolitical calculus due to its critical role in China's energy security, with over half of its oil imports traversing from the Middle East. Initiatives like AUKUS and QUAD reflect efforts to

¹²¹ Ibid, 44

¹²² Ibid, 44

counter China's influence, particularly in the Pacific Ocean. In response, China is developing alternative trade routes such as the CPEC and CMEC, aiming to bypass vulnerabilities like the Strait of Malacca thus curtailing the dilemma.¹²³

The BRI, a colossal investment exceeding \$1 trillion, is reshaping regional dynamics, particularly through projects like CPEC that promise transformative impacts on China's western provinces.¹²⁴ To secure these routes, China relies on partnerships with Indian Ocean states like Pakistan and Myanmar. Despite its distance from the IOR, China's strategic focus remains steadfast on securing vital sea lanes, i.e., about 9/10 parts of Beijing's oil imports cross through significant choke points of the IOR, specifically the strait of Hormuz shown in the following graph. The IN's significant regional presence, especially through western and southern Maritime Commands, underscores potential disruptions to China's Malacca Strait SLOCs.

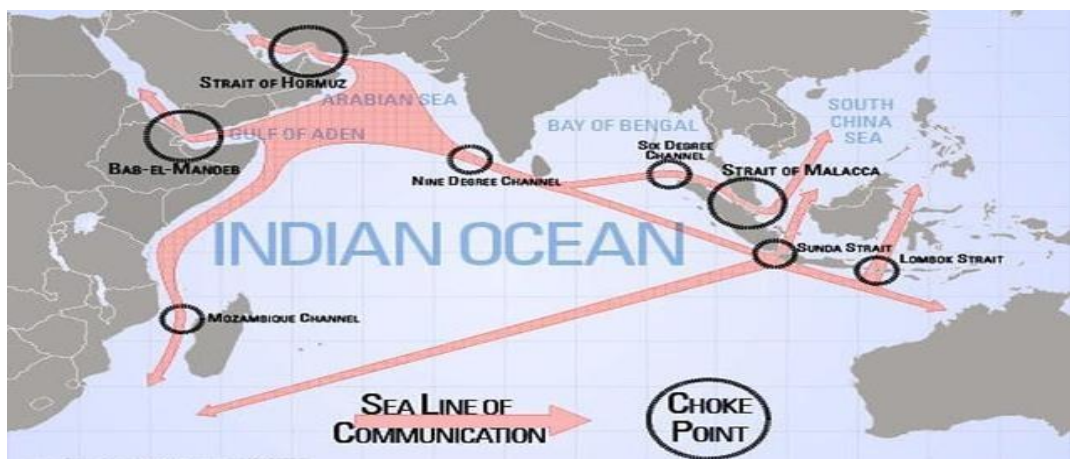


Figure 4: Map representing how China can counter the Malacca Dilemma¹²⁵

The US perceives Beijing's implementation of the "String of Pearls" strategy as pivotal for securing its SLOCs. China's strategic framework includes installations from Chinese territory to Port Sudan, covering key choke points and strategic ports in South Asia. Key installations include Hainan Island, Sri Lanka's Hambantota port focusing on LNG refining and naval logistics, Chittagong port in Bangladesh, Woody Island in the SCS near the Paracel Archipelago, Sittwe port - Myanmar, and Gwadar port - Pakistan. China's long-term strategy, spanning three phases over 50 years (2000-2050), aims to elevate its economy and navy to global prominence, with

¹²³ Lucas Myers, "The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and China's Determination to See It through | Wilson Center," www.wilsoncenter.org (Asia Dispatches, May 26, 2020).

¹²⁴ China Power, "How Will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China's Interests?," ChinaPower Project, September 11, 2017.

¹²⁵ Syed Kamran Hamid Hashmi et al., "Major Powers' Interests in IOR and Implications for the Region," Paradigm Shift, April 6, 2024.

projections indicating significant naval expansion to over 460 ships by 2030.¹²⁶

Central to China's alternative trade routes strategy are the CPEC and CMEC, where CPEC provides a direct route for Chinese imports and exports from its western provinces, dropping the reliance on the vulnerable Malacca strait. CMEC includes road and rail projects linking Yunnan province to Myanmar's Yangon port and a proposed oil pipeline to Kunming, enhancing logistical efficiency. China's overseas military base in Djibouti underscores its expanding defense capabilities and strategic intent in the Indian Ocean. This base supports naval operations, including patrols and exercises, and extends China's influence beyond its shores, contributing to the global power dynamic.¹²⁷ China's military engagements in the region, including submarine sales and defense exports to regional states, pose challenges to Delhi's regional influence, prompting concerns among Indian policymakers. The Indian Ocean is witnessing a significant rise in China's commercial and martial presence driven by initiatives like BRI, CPEC, and CMEC, reflecting Beijing's ambitions to assert itself as a global maritime power. Despite efforts by the US and its allies to constrain China's activities in the region, China's strategic initiatives and expanding naval capabilities continue to reshape dynamics in the Indian Ocean, posing complex challenges for regional and global security.

3.5 China's Entry Points in Indian Ocean

With over six years of Chinese anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the deployment of submarines to the Indian Ocean, considerations for PLAN support facilities in the IOR are no longer speculative. The US Department of Defense (DOD) predicts that Beijing will establish one or more logistical support facilities within the next decade. China and the US are increasingly focused on the IOR, as evidenced by the US Maritime Strategy's reference to the "Indo-Asia-Pacific" and the US Pacific Command's broad area of operations.¹²⁸ Determining the locations of Beijing's naval logistics points is crucial due to the region's growing strategic significance. Amongst the power struggle of the US and China in the IOR the implications on IN cannot be neglected as explained in Chapter 2. Securing multiple access points in the IOR requires long-term political stability, strong logistical infrastructure, and deep-water ports in host territories. These fundamentals help predict China's future naval movements in the Indian Ocean, highlighting specific patterns and potential future ports under development that receive Beijing's investment. In the following graph, different ports that China has visited are highlighted and the

¹²⁶ Ralph Jennings, "Analysts: Chinese Navy to Grow through 2050, with Emphasis on Hardware," VOA, April 5, 2022.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 114

¹²⁸ Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel Collins, "Dragon Tracks: Emerging Chinese Access Points in the Indian Ocean Region," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 18, 2015.

estimated number of visits is pointed out with different colors.

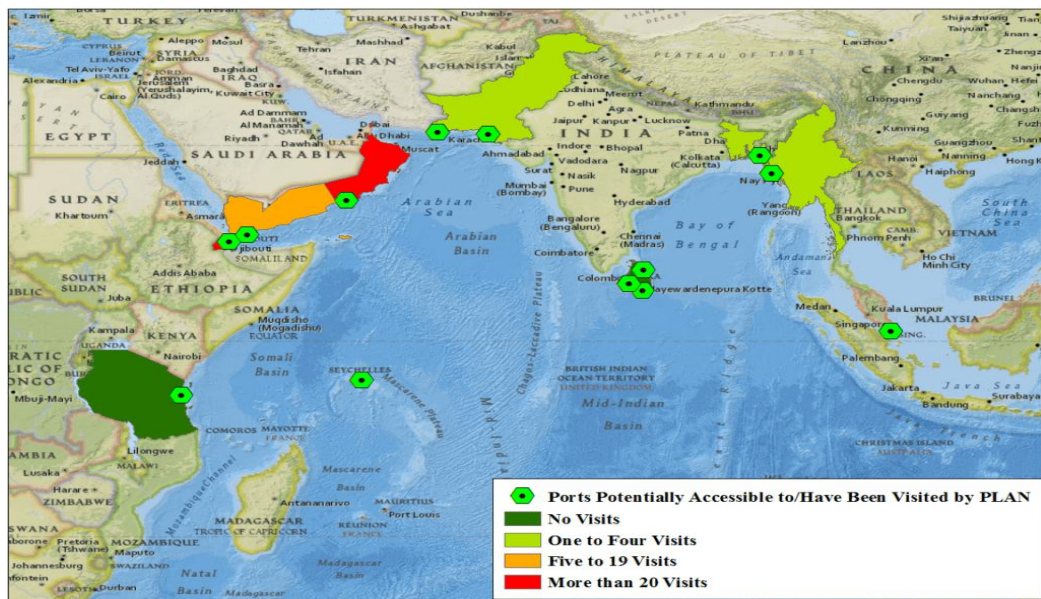


Figure 5: Map representing the entry points of China in IOR¹²⁹

Two ports stand out with significant PLAN activity: Port Salalah, Oman, and Djibouti, with over 20 PLAN port calls each (marked with red color in the map). Aden, Yemen, falls in the next tier with 10-20 port calls (marked with orange color in the graph). Oman and Djibouti, despite being resource-limited, provide stable political environments and infrastructure conducive to strategic relations with various global powers. This stability makes them ideal for hosting Chinese naval facilities. While there are no official discussions about a formal Chinese base in Oman, Port Salalah functions as a de facto facility, hosting nearly all PLAN anti-piracy task forces, whereas the significance of Djibouti is equally significant. Yemen, on the other hand, has been less stable, a fact likely influencing Chinese planners to prioritize Salalah and Djibouti. In terms of infrastructure, both Salalah and Djibouti offer limited ship repair capabilities and essential supplies like diesel fuel, water, food, and provisions. Djibouti's infrastructure is particularly promising, already hosting bases for the US, France, and Japan. Aden, now indefinitely suspended, previously offered more basic services. Another notable port is Karachi, Pakistan's main commercial and naval hub, with superior repair facilities compared to most in the region. Despite being a strong ally to China, concerns about security and the perception of close military ties with Pakistan, a matter of significant concern for India, might limit Karachi's role. While Oman and Djibouti are prime options for Chinese naval logistics due to their stability and infrastructure, Karachi offers potential but is constrained by geopolitical sensitivities. Yemen's instability has relegated Aden to a lower priority despite its strategic location. China's strategic

¹²⁹ Ibid, 128

choices in the IOR reflect a balance between practical logistics needs and broader geopolitical considerations. The modernization of the Chinese military and its navy aligns with former President Hu Jintao's vision for naval advancements. In his speech at the Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007, Hu emphasized the need for technologically equipped forces capable of hybrid warfare.¹³⁰ This vision includes accelerating the development of mechanization and computerization, and modernizing logistics. Beyond protecting economic interests, China's strategic posturing in Indian Ocean is driven by her intent to expand control and authority in oceanic spaces, similar to the US. China's concept of "informatization" is central to PLAN modernization, enabling it to compete globally by gaining information superiority in maritime and naval operations.¹³¹ This involves using advanced hyperspectral imaging satellites for command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR), supporting precision-strike capabilities.

To counter the US SOSUS-Fish Hook technology in the Pacific and IOR, Beijing is developing its "Underwater Great Wall" project, advancing its underwater warfare capabilities. This includes using indigenous technology and unmanned systems with comprehensive surveillance, strike, and suppression capabilities.¹³² As part of its military modernization, China has invested heavily in research on unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) and unmanned surface vehicles (USVs), with significant funding from the government and PLA. Although these naval sophistications are as countermeasures to contain US influence in Indian Ocean it has created a power imbalance and security dilemma for India. China's domestically developed JARI-USV demonstrates its advancement in unmanned warfare systems, with a modular design for adaptable combat roles including anti-submarine, air-to-air, and sea-to-sea operations which are complemented by tactical and strategic UAVs like the ASN-209 and BZK-005, as well as UCAVs. Beijing has employed UMVs for oceanographic data collection, pollution monitoring, disaster prevention, and tactical surveillance.¹³³ China's defense exercises, such as Joint Sea 2021 and Blue Commando 2019, along with port investments under the BRI, enhance security cooperation and safeguard Beijing's maritime trade interests in the IOR.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Does China Really Know How to Wage Cyber War?" (The Diplomat, February 20, 2015).

¹³¹ Bruce A. Elleman, *A History of the Modern Chinese Navy, 1840-2020* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

¹³² Michael S. Chase et al., "Emerging Trends in China's Development of Unmanned Systems" (RAND, March 12, 2015).

¹³³ Ian F. Akyildiz, Dario Pompili, and Tommaso Melodia, "Underwater Acoustic Sensor Networks: Research Challenges," *Ad Hoc Networks* 3, no. 3 (May 2005): 257–79.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102

Through these developments, China aims to enhance its naval presence and influence in IOR, directly or indirectly challenging India's strategic interests in the area. This expansion strategy reflects China's broader goals of ensuring economic security and asserting its role as a major maritime power.

3.6 String of Pearls vs. Necklace of Diamonds

To address the 'Malacca Dilemma,' President Hu in 2004 initiated a "new historic mission" for deploying Chinese naval forces in offshore waters, underscoring Beijing's intent to establish a naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Since then, China has expanded its naval footprint by fostering a network of ports and diplomatic ties with littoral states under the MSR Initiative. This expansion has impacted New Delhi's strategic interests, heightening fears of encirclement.

China has cultivated a strategic network among Asian littoral states through port constructions, investments, and diplomatic relations, a strategy 'String of Pearls.' This has extended Beijing's naval presence into South Asia's offshore waters, especially the Indian Ocean. The term, coined by Booz Allen in the 2005 report "Energy Futures in Asia," predicted China's naval expansion through infrastructure and investments. This network enhances China's economic, political, and diplomatic influence in IOR, reinforcing its maritime dominance and strategic reach. In this strategy each pearl of the string represents the viable power domain that China intends to procure in the Indian Ocean. Some significant ports include the Chittagong, Sittwe, Gwader, and Hambantota.



Figure 6: Map representing Chinese string of pearls strategy¹³⁵

Beijing's strategic expansion in the Indian Ocean, marked by ports in Gwadar and Hambantota, is poised to gain further access through Myanmar's ports. The CMEC facilitates this ambition,

¹³⁵ Narinjara News, "China Seeks to Dominate Bay of Bengal through Myanmar Ports," [www.narinjara.com](https://www.narinjara.com/news/detail/628c703b21f2d423422dc72b), May 24, 2022, <https://www.narinjara.com/news/detail/628c703b21f2d423422dc72b>.

linking Yunnan Province to the Indian Ocean and bolstering the BRI. CMEC, a priority for both nations, enables China's navy to monitor India and bypass the Strait of Malacca. It is expected that by 2030, China's navy aims to control the Indian Ocean, challenging US naval supremacy by 2049.¹³⁶

India's 'Necklace of Diamonds' is a counter-strategy to China's 'String of Pearls,' first articulated by former foreign secretary Nirupama Rao in 2011. This initiative seeks to counteract Beijing's growing attendance and infrastructural developments in IOR, which India perceives as encirclement.¹³⁷ Over the years, India has modernized its naval and maritime strategy to counterbalance China's naval presence. Under Prime Minister Modi, India has actively pursued its Look East Policy, strengthening relations and strategic partnerships with key littoral states such as Iran, Singapore, Indonesia, the US, and Japan.

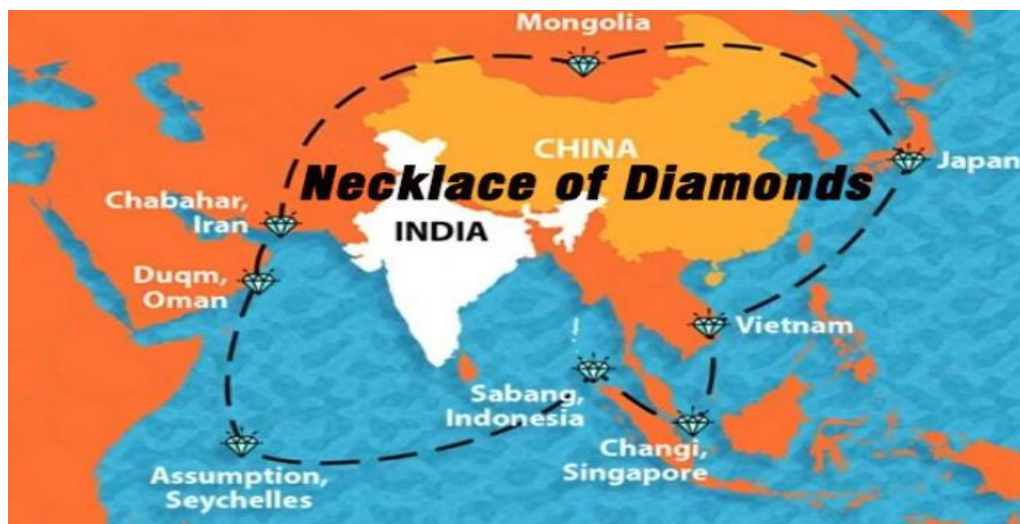


Figure 7: Map showing the Necklace of Diamond strategy of India¹³⁸

Chabahar, Iran: Iran holds strategic significance for India for her energy resources and as a potential commercial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, essential for countering China and Pakistan. Under Modi, India has strengthened ties with Iran, investing \$500 million in the Chabahar Port to counter Beijing's influence in the Indian Ocean, exemplified by CPEC and Gwadar Port.¹³⁹

Trincomalee, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka, close to India, has aligned with China, joining the MSR and hosting Chinese investments in ports like Hambantota along with a lease of 99 years.¹⁴⁰ In

¹³⁶ Ibid, 135

¹³⁷ Ibid, 103

¹³⁸ Ibid, 103

¹³⁹ Soroush Aliasgary and Marin Ekstrom, "Chabahar Port and Iran's Strategic Balancing with China and India," *The Diplomat*, October 19, 2021.

¹⁴⁰ Maria Adele Carrai, "China's Malleable Sovereignty along the Belt and Road Initiative: The Case of the 99 Years Chinese Lease of Hambantota Port," July 29, 2019.

response, India, under Modi, has fostered stronger bilateral relations, investing in the Trincomalee Port and signing an oil tank deal to counter Chinese influence.

Sittwe and Dawei Ports, Myanmar: Myanmar, located near the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, is vital for New Delhi to counter Beijing's 'String of Pearls.' India has developed the Sittwe Port and shown interest in the Dawei Port, strengthening strategic ties with Myanmar to mitigate China's regional influence.

Duqm, Oman: Under Modi, India has expanded its strategic reach in Indian Ocean, securing access to Oman's Duqm Port for military purposes. This port, near Chabahar, enhances India's presence in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, countering Beijing's maritime strategy.

Assumption Islands, Seychelles: Seychelles, a close strategic partner, has signed defense pacts with India, granting access to the Assumption Islands. India is developing naval bases here, leveraging the islands' strategic position to augment its authority in the Indian Ocean.

Sabang, Indonesia: Following Modi's 2018 visit to Indonesia, India strengthened ties, gaining access to the Sabang Port near Malacca strait.¹⁴¹ This move boosts India's strategic footprint in this strategic area to counter China.

Changi, Singapore: In 2018, Modi signed a naval cooperation agreement with Singapore, allowing India's navy logistical and refueling support at Changi Port.¹⁴² Strategically located near the SCS and Malacca strait, this port is crucial for India's 'Necklace of Diamonds' strategy.

The evolving dynamics in the Indian Ocean reflect significant shifts catalyzed by China's continuous maneuvers, presenting India with dual challenges. Firstly, China's deployment of submarines under the guise of anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden signals its aspirations for future naval dominance, raising concerns in New Delhi about Beijing's strategic intentions in the region.¹⁴³ Secondly, the establishment of Beijing's naval bases in Djibouti in 2017 underscores its utilization of port investments in littoral states for potential logistical and military networks, further unsettling regional stability. In response, India has leveraged its strategic geography and centrality within the Indian Ocean to foster alliances with littoral states. Indian maritime strategists emphasize their role in safeguarding the region from external threats and securing vital sea lanes and critical chokepoints. With China's proactive maritime policies as a backdrop, India has intensified efforts to enhance bilateral relations and bolster its MDA. This strategic approach

¹⁴¹ Shashank Mattoo, "India, Indonesia Complete Joint Report on Sabang Port Feasibility," *mint*, May 29, 2023.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 141

¹⁴³ Azim Zahir, "India–China Rivalry in the Indian Ocean: Emergence of a New Indo-Maldives Strategic Dynamic," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 17, no. 1 (March 15, 2021): 78–95.

includes deepening naval cooperation with nations wary of Chinese naval expansion, reflecting a concerted effort to counterbalance Beijing's rising influence.

The competitive dynamics between Beijing and New Delhi in Indian Ocean have spurred a technological and strategic arms race, heightening concerns about potential future confrontations in the maritime domain. As both nations strengthen their naval capabilities and expand their geopolitical footprint, the Indian Ocean arises as a key theater where their rivalry and ambitions intersect, shaping the region's future security landscape.

3.7 Militarization of Indian Ocean Region

In the IOR, military bases serve as contemporary equivalents of historical coaling stations, providing refueling and respite for ships and aircraft. These installations, established through bilateral agreements between host nations and foreign powers, serve as exclusive domains for the latter's armed forces. Despite the considerable costs involved in their maintenance, these bases are crucial due to their strategic significance. Beyond the US and China, other global and regional powers such as the UK, France, Italy, Russia, Israel, Japan, Greece, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE maintain permanent bases or have defense agreements granting access to ports and airfields. These installations contribute economically to host nations through rent and ancillary services.

Djibouti exemplifies this multi-national military presence, accommodating forces from eight countries including the US, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, China, and Saudi Arabia, injecting approximately \$300 million annually into Djibouti's economy.¹⁴⁴ The primary objectives of these bases include safeguarding SLOCs, projecting power, maintaining regional stability, conducting intelligence operations, and potentially launching military campaigns, as seen in US operations from Diego Garcia during conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, tensions often arise as local populations view these bases as compromising national sovereignty and sometimes accuse foreign powers of meddling in domestic politics. Recent protests in the Maldives against India's military presence highlight such concerns. The islands in the Indian Ocean under UK and French control provide strategic advantages, with these nations benefiting economically from resources within their territorial waters. The collective interests of major powers in the region, including obstructing Chinese initiatives like the BRI, CPEC, and CMEC, underscore the geopolitical stakes involved in maintaining military bases in the Indian Ocean.

3.8 Regional Alliances in Indian Ocean Region

The US has established several alliances across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including QUAD,

¹⁴⁴ Théo du Couëdic, "Djibouti at the Crossroads," African Business, May 14, 2024, <https://african.business/2024/05/economy/djibouti-at-the-crossroads>.

AUKUS, I2U2, and IPEF in last few decades. The QUAD alliance, comprising the USA, India, Japan, and Australia, aims to uphold a rules-based global order, ensure freedom of navigation, and promote liberal trade practices. Despite its stated goals, QUAD's primary strategic objective is perceived as containing China's growing influence in areas such as the South China Sea, Eurasia, and the Indian Ocean. Concerns among littoral nations suggest that QUAD's activities could potentially embolden China to employ coercive diplomatic tactics, leveraging its economic and military might. While QUAD has participated in joint Malabar Exercises since 2020 across the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and SCS, suggesting a burgeoning military alignment, it has yet to assume an active defensive or security role against China. The alliance's formation has been widely interpreted as a response to China's expanding economic and military capabilities, prompting China to label QUAD as an "Asian NATO."

Economically, China maintains significant trade volumes with QUAD countries, being the top trading partner for Australia and holding substantial trade relationships with the US, Japan, and India. Australia's decision to withdraw from a French submarine deal worth US\$66 billion and join AUKUS, alongside the US and UK, in acquiring nuclear submarines exceeding US\$100 billion, underscores regional tensions and strategic recalibrations driven by perceived threats from China.¹⁴⁵

Reactions to AUKUS have varied among Indo-Pacific nations: China has condemned it as reckless, raising concerns about nuclear proliferation. Japan has welcomed the initiative, while South Korea and the Philippines have shown appreciation despite apprehensions about future access to nuclear submarines. India, previously denied nuclear submarine technology by the US, now anticipates procurement under AUKUS. The formation of I2U2, involving the US, India, Israel, and the UAE, aims to address global challenges such as food shortages, environmental issues, and energy insecurity, fostering collaboration across multiple domains. Like QUAD, I2U2 nations may engage in naval exercises in the Indian Ocean, enhancing Israel's maritime capabilities and contributing to strategic checks on Beijing's regional ambitions. Similarly, the IPEF, encompassing thirteen nations representing 40% of global GDP, seeks to bolster economic resilience and competitiveness in response to China's BRI. However, IPEF's impact remains nascent and has yet to demonstrate substantive outcomes.

These coalition formations reflect mounting concerns over China's expanding influence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's remarks at the ASEAN meeting

¹⁴⁵ Muhammad Subhan Saleem Rana, "Militarization of the Indian Ocean: Prospects of Global Politics and Economy," *Strathea*, September 11, 2023.

in Jakarta underscored apprehensions about regional geopolitics being manipulated by external powers, cautioning against nations becoming pawns in broader strategic maneuvers. China and Pakistan view these alliances as attempts to counterbalance BRI initiatives, orchestrated primarily by the US and India, further complicating regional dynamics.

3.9 Conclusion

China's more active expansion in IOR through BRI and String of Pearls Stratagem is an indication of assertive economic and military power projection in this critical region. Beijing's military base in Djibouti and other engagement in naval activities as well as a rapidly emerging capable navy yielding substantial influence in regional stability and global maritime politics leads to the 99 years long lease of Hambantota to Beijing. This has led to responses from regional players like India that challenges China's growing power through partnerships, military build-up and regional approaches such as the "Necklace of Diamonds". The increased China's economic and maritime presence in the IOR has heightened conflicts and security risks among the regional and international players including the US in alliance with India. The Beijing–New Delhi competition in the IOR, aggravated by divergent views of the desired regional order and security, will probably remain an important factor shaping world maritime politics and alignments. New Delhi and Beijing, are heavily dependent on Indian Ocean trade routes and forced to protect their SLOCs and are thus have turned increasingly assertive in the region. Global competition for a great power status has therefore led to geostrategic competition in the area. Beijing's 'String of Pearls' which entails building strategic partner ports in the littoral states of Indian Ocean serves two functions. It helps meet China's security needs to diversify the sources and routes of its seaborne imports and exports and to reduce the 'Malacca Dilemma'. In the meantime, it also serves the Beijing's geo-political agenda and increases its political force and geographical dominance in the IOR. These forwarding diplomatic choices of China show her inclination to shape the Indian Ocean's strategic dynamics. India on the other hand remains sensitive to this development of China and has come up with counter measures which include Act East Policy, and the Necklace of Diamonds. Although some of these strategies have not been fully achieved India seeks to counterbalance China's power within the region and assert its hegemonic claim within the Indian Ocean. This research posits that the simultaneous naval build-up by both the countries provides a strategic direction for geo-political competition in the Indian Ocean that may alter the international politics and structure of world politics as they heighten security risks for international players.

This shift makes the IOR likely to remain 'a theatre of strategic contests' not just for navy but for economic diplomacy and political influence that will massively influence the geopolitics of the area in future. The IOR can be a very contentious region for the naval forces provided the

challenges of nuclear submarines proliferation, foreign military bases and fast emerging India's regional hegemonic tendencies. Collaborative efforts such as QUAD and I2U2 between the US, India, and their allies aim to counteract Beijing's BRI and CPEC, unsettling regional stakeholders. Despite formidable challenges, the US persists in obstructing China's dominance in the Indian Ocean which has led to IN sophistication over the years. The annual military maneuvers conducted by QUAD nations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans necessitate careful scrutiny. Meanwhile, CPEC and CMEC promise to open new commercial corridors for China. In navigating the economic complexities of the twenty-first century, collaborative coalitions offer a pathway to regional stability and prosperity, presenting Pakistan and other littoral states with opportunities to reshape its strategic position.

Chapter 4

REVISITING THE HYPOTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Analysis of Key Findings

The IOR has become an area of strategic contention between India and China where Beijing even though not directly connected with Indian Ocean has been intruding the area for her trade interests and considered as a threat by India. The hypothesis that is tested in this thesis is that Indian naval sophistication is likely to affect the strategic relations between India and China especially within IOR, an area where both these powers are interested in sustaining their dominance. In this study, a comparative approach of the naval policies of India and China has been deployed and this is underpinned by the analysis of military doctrines, technologies and strategies of the navy. In an attempt to undertake this research and to make it both easily understandable and defensible, the theoretical background is based on the RCT proposed by Buzan and weaver and geopolitical theories of power projection and of power balance. Learning in the context of the current topic is subsidiarity derived from the general field of RCT especially understanding the interdependence of the two powerful states and how the might of one can have impact on that of the other, which in some way explains how states try to prevent adversaries from undertaking undesirable actions at sea. This theory is taken forward by the concept of Copenhagen school of thought connecting it with the balance of power theory. Theoretical analysis makes it possible to look at how the great power politics is in play between India and China. Even though there is a plethora of works can be found on IOR's strategic dynamics but very little work exists that systematically examines the role and the effect of India's naval modernization for Sino-Indian strategic relations in IOR. This research has attempted to bridge this gap by examining the various aspects of India's growing naval might and its effect on its strategic orientation towards China, while highlighting the primary drivers to this strategic rivalry. Data is collected and analyzed qualitatively because a broad and more detailed understanding of modernization of naval forces and its influence on India china strategy is significant.

Modernization of the IN is undertaking in response to the security imperatives as well as to secure dominant presence in the IOR. As the strategic SLOCs, the Indian Ocean has a strategic significance to the Indian economy, more importantly in energy security and sea borne trade. This is not to suggest that Indian states' external and internal security is not threatened from the seas; on contrary, they have been invaded by colonial powers via the sea in the past. The changes in the Indian Navy, therefore, are about modernization to improve its capabilities for deterrence, for maintaining MDAs, and for projecting power around the IOR to protect its interests. Growing

Chinese engagement in the IOR is viewed as a strategic concern for India even though it is expected to bring more trade avenues for revenue generation. The Chinese 'String of Pearls' and deployment of access points in the littoral states of Indian Ocean are anticipated as imminent threat to India. Together with the China's BRI, this network has rather important implications in terms of sovereignty and role of India in the region. There are several indicators that point towards this threat perception for India such as Beijing's military base in Djibouti as well as its increasing strategic footprint in neighboring states growing security dilemma for India in the region.

As for the Chinese active maritime presence, India raised the pace of naval sophistication to counterbalance China's expansion. The present day IN with the outline of its future growth contained in the Indian Maritime Doctrine is aspiring towards the formation of a blue water navy. This consists in procuring new systems, such as aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, stealthy frigates, and maritime patrol aircraft, as well as in creating network centric warfare architecture. Apart from that the SAGAR mission of India is a step towards collective growth for all the littoral countries marking the position of regional security provider – which can be seen as a diplomatic soft power usage to sustain position of regional major power. India's strategic response also has involved strengthening its maritime relationships. These partnerships are geared towards the realization of cooperation in tactical as well as in intelligence, sharing of common interests in maritime operations with a view of containing China's regional dominance. For India, the strategic challenge is twofold: to contain Chinese increased presence in the IOR but at the same time, and not provoke a confrontation that could turn the conflict into a larger scale one. Regional membership in multilateral organization including IORA and IONS clearly signify India's diplomatic thrust towards multilateralism and security cooperation in the south-Asian region.

The "Malacca Dilemma" is central to Beijing's strategic concerns in IOR, for it is a critical chokepoint. As China's dependence on this route grows, it becomes increasingly vulnerable to disruptions, particularly from India, who's Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide a strategic vantage point near the Strait. India's ability to control or monitor Chinese naval activity in this region poses a significant threat to Beijing's energy security. Therefore, New Delhi's strategy in the Malacca Strait is not just a defensive measure but a critical lever to counterbalance Chinese expansion in the IOR. If India fails to assert dominance in the Malacca Strait, it risks enabling further Chinese incursions into the IOR, potentially altering the regional power balance. For all littoral states, including Pakistan, this could mean a greater Chinese naval presence in their maritime zones, bringing with it strategic vulnerabilities and economic dependencies. Pakistan, despite being a close ally of China, may find its own maritime interests overshadowed by Beijing's strategic objectives, particularly as China's influence in the region expands. India's maritime

approach of Look East and Act East policies has been formulated on the backdrop of China's emergence. While these policies were primarily of economic nature mainly concerning the ASEAN states and big behemoth of East Asia, they have evolved apparatus of security over the time and have gotten more enmeshed into the US strategy targeting containment of China's rise. China's BRI, specifically its MSR component, has already involved substantial investments in ports and infrastructure in littoral states, creating a foothold that could easily translate into military presence. This extended reach could threaten not only India's strategic autonomy but also the sovereignty of smaller states, turning the Indian Ocean into a contested space dominated by Chinese influence. Therefore, India's failure to contain China at the Malacca chokepoint would not only compromise its security but also destabilize the broader regional order, making it imperative for India to strengthen its naval capabilities and assert its influence in this vital maritime corridor.

From the research it is clear that to counter the strategic growth of China, India while requires sustained support and cooperation, which it enjoys from the US. The US has incrementally considered India as a strategic power in the Indo-Pacific region and thus offered military assistance and improved defense cooperation in order to build up India's capability in the region. This partnership is viewed in the context of China's rising stakes and both these nations have an apprehension of China's strategic ambition in the IOR. But as much as India has sought to strengthen itself and assert its interests in the maritime domain and the Indo-Pacific, the document identifies the problem constituted by China's BRI. The development of ports and infrastructure under the BRI is viewed by Indian security analysts as a String of Pearls, or an encirclement strategy that makes Chinese strategic space in the IOR deeper, thereby complicating India's bid to pre-emptively acquire command of the seas. The Indian strategy, known as the 'necklace of diamond,' envisages locking China into diplomatic alliances and undertaking counter-assets investments to counter China's penetration. But these initiatives remain problematic, especially where the focus is quantity and continuity of economic and military spending.

This content analysis also raises questions about securitization of relations in general, and Beijing's emergence as the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region in particular. The growing military dimension of the IOR, due to China's naval presence and the resultant unwelcome compartment from both India and the US, has consequent implications for conflict. What one sees in the Gulf and the Middle East is not just an economic race to capture SLOCs or control oil resources; it is a power struggle over one of the world's most important strategic landscapes. This paper anchored on the Discourse Analysis observations that India's newly emerging maritime strategy is slowly shifting into the overall direction of the liberal structured Indo-Pacific

framework advanced by US and its allies. Regarding the six-fold framework of strategic effects, the dissertation postulates that Indian naval sophistication has important consequences in terms of the Sino-Indian competition in IOR. New Delhi's growing naval power combined with the relations that New Delhi has forged with the US and other powers makes her a force that counters Beijing's regional expansion. The change in this power balance in the IOR has significant consequences on regional security that may trigger competition and open rivalry between the two states.

4.2 Options for India amid China's Presence in Indian Ocean

The primary take from this extensive research sums up that In response to China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi needs not to turn 'China out of the Indian Ocean' policy rather should avoid adopting measures aimed at keeping China out of the region. Although India has fewer resources compared to China, it benefits from a strategic geographical position in the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, the IN continues to be the most powerful instrument to protect the Indian interests in this context. Trading off the increasing dominance of China, India has sought to enhance its naval capabilities in recent years within IOR.¹⁴⁶ Most current estimates suggest that the Indian navy currently has strength of about 160 ships, which should be adequate in regard to the near future threats posed by the Chinese navy.¹⁴⁷ Still, it is crucial not in the quantity of ships, but in the quality of the Indian fleet, such as the application of new technologies, increasing the fleet's combat effectiveness. It is pertinent to mention that precision-guided munitions and smart weaponry are need of the hours for enhancing the naval power of India. Further, India should ensure strategic partnership with the US and other like-minded country for the building of formidable ASW capability especially Air-ASW. This would serve a credible signal to prevent Chinese submarine from venturing into the IOR. Even with the development of nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers India is not likely to match this numerical strength of the PLAN. Therefore an effective monitoring and scouting system needs to be incorporated as a part of India's strategic planning to counter China. Establishing of a MDA network, especially in areas surrounding the IWSP choke points in the Indian Ocean needs to be done. Long-range anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare as well as ISR provisions have been added to Indian navy capabilities through procurement of MPA called P-8I has served to expand Indian navy.¹⁴⁸ However, Owing to little number of P-8Is plus the lack of well-developed military infrastructure

¹⁴⁶ Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization* (CreateSpace, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 146

¹⁴⁸ Darshana M. Baruah, "Expanding India's Maritime Domain Awareness in the Indian Ocean," Carnegieendowment.org, July 21, 2016.

in Andaman and Nicobar Islands it becomes difficult to undertake the continuous surveillance of IOR. Formation of Indian Naval Ship Baaz in Nicobar Islands is a good augury to improve surveillance in vicinity of major choke points. Also India should look at having stationary offence fending underwater pinging systems in India's strategic zones for example the bay of Bengal to discourage any Chinese submarine intrusion into the Indian Ocean.¹⁴⁹ Involving Japan to develop underwater detection systems and possibly chart out future cooperation with the US in the of maritime domain information sharing would go a long way toward building more strategic awareness of China in the IOR.¹⁵⁰ In doing so, India has ensured if it increases its naval dominance and keeps a watch on China's activities; it can remain proactive, providing it a stronger strategic outlook.¹⁵¹

That is why the reaction of India to China's presence in the IORA could and should be different from an openly hostile one to pursue the goal of China's exclusion from the body. The Andaman and Nicobar Command which is located near the main strategic straits in the IOR should be accorded top priority by off laying more of naval ships and Surveillance aircraft's to these islands. This would enable India to take advantage of a strategic spot of China the 'Malacca strait' and keep track of any movement made by the Chinese. Besides, establishing the maritime infrastructure necessary for constant naval presence and modernizing the minor naval outposts in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for the same would enhance awareness regarding Chinese developments.

India has to inject more efforts into strategic regional cooperation and naval power diplomacy to secure its favorable influence among IOR littoral states. All the above, coupled with the need not to allow a security vacuum to be filled by China make it important to strengthen security cooperation with different littoral states. Unlike China, which could offer these nations a lot of financial assistance, India could stay relevant though constant security interactions, could position the IN as a key security actor.¹⁵² While doing so, however, India needs to refrain from becoming a regional navy police and must focus on important tasks which include presence and power response, construction of capabilities, awareness of maritime space and humanitarian aid mission. India's SAGA concept, and its strategic naval focus, emphasize that India will seek to be a net security guardian and force without seeking to divide the region in the ongoing US-China contest.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 148

¹⁵⁰ Raisina Debates, "India-Japan Collaborations: Andaman and Nicobar Islands in Focus," *ORF*, April 14, 2022.

¹⁵¹ Pooja Bhatt, "From the Mountains to the Seas: India-China Competition in the Wake of Galwan – South Asian Voices," *South Asian Voices*, June 17, 2024.

¹⁵² Ibid, 151

Therefore, it remains crucial for India to tiptoe in their relations with other rising regional players including US, Japan, France, Australia, Singapore and Indonesia. Multinational exercises must be given less emphasis as compared to bi-lateral exercises so that the power balance remains upshifted further in the IOR. At the same time, active interaction with China cannot be regarded as a side issue, as the consequences of its PRC policy are extremely serious. Given this background of China being superior in naval power to India, it would be in the interest of the latter to continue the bilateral track –II dialogue on maritime security wherein it may be easier to search for convergent interest.¹⁵³ They could facilitate the setting up of rules on how various mishaps at sea especially those involving submarines could be avoided and try to address the Chinese felt insecurity in the IOR.¹⁵⁴ Also, they might involve more social and friendly calls and replenishments of the Chinese vessels carrying out anti-piracy or other constabulary roles in the region, so that the relations in the area became less adversarial.

4.3 Revisiting Hypothesis

For the proposed hypothesis, ‘Indian Naval Modernization in the IOR to likely to impact the strategic relations between India and China’ one must identify and determine whether or not the research supports the hypothesis. In this hypothesis, dependent variable is the strategic interactions which depict the relationships between India and China which encompasses various angles of power balance. This includes how they mobilize their force, wage diplomacy, engage in trade relations and project power within the IOR. The strategic dynamics are not a fixed construct; they change based on what is happening both internally and externally thus they are maneuverable to the changes in the independent variables.

The Indian attempts to transform the naval forces as a powerful entity through procurement of modern equipment and technology; acquisition of state of the art platforms and building up of maritime facilities signify a strategic shift in the nature of its military capacity. These measures are assumed to strengthen India’s capabilities to advance influence, safeguard its sea interests and meet emerging aggression from outside notably China. It seems quite clear that the process of modernization of the IN is not being aimed solely at defense needs; it is being also used as an opportunity to reinforce control over the IOR that is of crucial interest for both countries. As New Delhi beefs up its naval power, it affects the power balance in the region and thus is a vital factor in China’s strategic considerations. Based on Beijing’s perception of New Delhi’s naval power, it could develop various actions such as strengthening of its naval force, forming strategic

¹⁵³ Joaquin Matamis, “From the Mountains to the Seas: India-China Competition in the Wake of Galwan, Stimson Center,” Stimson Center, June 16, 2024.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 151

partnerships or seeking diplomacy to counter the purported threat. In addition, the roles of the IOR add to it a layer of strategic interaction which binds the independent and dependent variables together. The IOR is an important region for the international business, oil, and the military SLOCs. When this naval modernization continues, India's capacity to contain and perhaps dictate the condition in this region improves and this has direct implications for China. Beijing's attendance in Indian Ocean including the BRI project and opening of the military bases can be viewed as pro-active measures arising from India's improving naval strength and shift power balance.

The cooperation of India and the US in the area of maritime security brings another element of perspective to the picture. Apart from enhancing the effectiveness of India's naval development on the China question, this relationship provides reassurance against any Chinese misadventure in the region. Even the economic resources and the political commitments in India have their role in determining the extent and the speed of their naval modernization. These internal factors can either facilitate or retard the process, for instance, strong economy translates into more resources for Indian naval programs which in effect forms a stronger deterrence against Chinese might as well.

4.4 Future Avenues of Research

While undertaking this extensive research different areas that were found necessary to be explored in detail but are not primarily under scope of this research are compiled as following.

The next area for research can be extended to the comparison of Sino-Indian military strengths to the trans-regional security threats that China encounters in her two ocean strategy. Even today, all comparisons tend to single out the Indian and Chinese naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean exclusively. Future research needs to explore the ways in which China's engagements in the SCS, Taiwan and the Asia-Pacific region shapes its strategic outlook and resource distribution in the Indian Ocean. Knowledge of these wider perspectives will offer a better evaluation of balance of power between India and China.

One more area that can be considered for the further research is an interaction between India's strategic cooperation with the USA, Japan and France and its maritime security. All told, these alliances provide a certain clout to India in the Indian Ocean but require a closer look in terms of how durable and how they might evolve in response to China's rise. More extensive future research should be conducted to examine how these relationships affect India's naval plan and security dynamics of the area and prospect future obstacles that might be encountered as these ties deepen.

One of the other significant fields to pay more attention in the future is the development of China's naval strategy in the Indian Ocean. At this moment this region has been becoming more and more

significant for the China, and the process of expanding naval powers is gradually being initiated in the IOR. Subsequent study should also focus on exploring how this strategic adversary might develop to overcome its present limitations as in supporting naval operations and obtaining adequate airspace for its planes. However, it is equally useful to consider what kind of circumstances might make the Indian Ocean more important to China and how this will shape the future of the region's security architecture.

Last but not the least; understanding the dynamics of this power balance between India and China through critical lens can be an important area to explore for Pakistan to strategically understand the dynamics of future endeavors with either of the two states in future. Although China has been an ally to Pakistan yet the diplomatic need of strife free relations with India are equally significant. With India striving for blue water navy Pakistani strategist need to analyze the dynamics in more critical way thus to avoid any future surprises amid India becoming the competent regional naval power to China in Indian Ocean. In this way, the presented areas will constitute a focus for further research that will enable to obtain the detailed picture of cooperation and competition the two in strategic play in IOR.

4.5 Final Words

This research undertakes a careful analysis of India's evolving naval capabilities, while highlighting that her modernization efforts are not merely defensive but also proactive, aimed at asserting its authority in IOR. The strategic competition between New Delhi and Beijing in this vital maritime domain underscores implications of power shifts in Asia Pacific. China's increased incidence in IOR, coupled with New Delhi's modernization drive, introduces a complex security dilemma that goes beyond traditional regional rivalries. By focusing on the interplay of maritime strategies, geopolitical ambitions, and security policies, this research offers an analysis of the evolving power balance in the region.

Ultimately, Indian naval modernization serves as a crucial element to reshape the Indo-Pacific security architecture, where India is continuously attempting to counterbalance Beijing's growing maritime influence across oceans. The findings of this research contribute to the broader discourse on strategic deterrence and regional security, offering insights into how naval power and geopolitical strategy will continue to influence the future of Sino-Indian relations in Indian Ocean.

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Thesis Submission by Rabia Riaz, Supervised by Dr. Ansar.docx

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