

# **The Strategic Maritime Environment of the Indian Ocean: An Analysis of the Challenges and Prospects for Pakistan**

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## ***Abstract***

*Strategic maritime environment of the Indian Ocean (IO) is rigorously changing in the course of last two decades. Regional focus has sharply shifted from territorial to maritime borders, largely impacting transnational ties in wake of defense and security measures. This insight covers background of strategic maritime environment of the Indian Ocean along with shifting trends after the launch of China's "Belt Road Initiative". The discourse also covers impact of COVID crisis on maritime environment of IO and recent tactical reorientation of global powers in the region. Furthermore, Strategic analysis of maritime power in the Indian Ocean is done in calibration of the various political narrative. USA, China, India, Australia, and Pakistan are taken under keen sight of policy analysis. Opportunities and challenges for Pakistan in lieu of this discussion is penned down categorically. Development of Maritime Security Strategy of Pakistan (MSSP) with commensurate needs is brought focus under as a result of the deliberate policy and maritime environment study of IOR. Cogent recommendations are offered to Pakistan Navy and the Government to fill the lapse on way to emerging naval power of the Western Indian Ocean. It is a qualitative research, employing descriptive chronological discussion, based on targeted theme in the larger perspective.*

***Keywords: BRI, Defense and Security, Indian Ocean, Maritime Environment, Policy Analysis***

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## 1. Background of Strategic Maritime Environment in the Indian Ocean (IO)

In the recent course of years, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) emerged as a strategic hub of navies of many countries. It has exacerbated the clashes among the riparian and other Asian states for ascending influence. Clash of hegemons in IO is taking surge as USA and China appears to be strategic rivals. One very reason for active military presence of the USA in IO is to balance the power equation in the region due to the rising shadows of Chinese control<sup>1</sup>. Long-going US-Iran rivalry and Middle East concerns are also reasons behind US interest in the Indian Ocean. Strategic overlooking exposit that India aims its emergence as a regional power with no better option available than the prospect alliance with the US for accomplished economic and military intentions<sup>2</sup>. While maritime security strategies and development of modern Australian navy may give a balancing effect to the rising power expression in IOR<sup>3</sup>.

Above all connectivity is the major concern in the Indian Ocean which raises clashes, competitions, and progressive ways. Today the alliance maneuvering in IOR is an anarchic shift in the structural reorganization of a hegemon. According to Alexander Wendt coalitions are aiming for power balance and ultimate superiority<sup>4</sup>. Within BRI, three major corridors i.e. CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor), CICPEC (China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor), BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor) routes outspreading in IO are changing prospect strategic environment and security trends. Extended travel time and distance

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<sup>1</sup> M. K. Bhadrakumar, "US-India Military Alliance Comes into View," *Asia Times*, October 26, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/10/us-india-military-alliance-comes-into-view/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Serge DeSilva Ranasinghe, "Future of Navy Modernisation: An Interview with Rear Admiral Mark Campbell," *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, July 30, 2014, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/future-of-navy-modernisation-the-royal-australian-navy-looks-to-the-future/>.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): P., 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858?seq=1>.

will be circumvented with the initiation of these routes and one country supremacy as an economic giant<sup>5</sup>.

On the other side, Chinese dependency on the Strait of Malacca seems implausible to end as currently 80% of Chinese oil trade is done through the route<sup>6</sup>. While in comparison, fully functional CPEC needs a decade to meet the responsibilities of the Chinese rising economy. For the purpose, China made a strategic security plan for the Indian Ocean region by increasing naval bases i.e., Sittwe, Chittagong, Hambantota, Djibouti, and prospect trade base in Gwadar-about 500km away from world's most strategic chokepoint of Hormuz<sup>7</sup>. More than US\$1 trillion Chinese investment in BRI has raised a competitive environment and security needs in the Indian Ocean region within the last decade.

Strategically foreseeing, China's envisioned planning may contain India in the first place from northern borders to open edges with the Indian Ocean. Further due to US-Iran rivalry and increasing Indo-US alliance under LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) has kicked out India from Iran's Chabahar port investment plans<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the USA could be contained by choking at Gwadar deep-sea strategic port in a trade movement

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<sup>5</sup> Francois De Soyres et al., "How the Belt and Road Initiative Could Reduce Trade Costs | VOX, CEPR Policy Portal," Voxeu.org, 2018, <https://voxeu.org/article/how-belt-and-road-initiative-could-reduce-trade-costs>.

<sup>6</sup> Alisha Dalvi, "The Malacca Dilemma: A Hindrance to Chinese Ambitions in the 21st Century—Berkeley Political Review," Berkeley.edu, August 26, 2019, <https://bpr.berkeley.edu/2019/08/26/the-malacca-dilemma-a-hindrance-to-chinese-ambitions-in-the-21st-century/>.

<sup>7</sup> Jayanna Krupakr, "China's Naval Base(S) in the Indian Ocean—Signs of a Maritime Grand Strategy?," *Taylor & Francis Online* 14, no. 3 (March 16, 2017), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700161.2017.1296622?journalCode=rsan20>.

<sup>8</sup> Saad Rasool, "India's Chabahar Debacle," *The Nation*, July 18, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/19-Jul-2020/india-s-chabahar-debacle>.

towards the Persian Gulf and via active military presence at Djibouti<sup>9</sup> anchorage.

BRI is China's magnificent effort for increasing influence which Delhi tried to counter by the establishment of Information Fusion Center (IFC)<sup>10</sup> to gather information via linking coastal radar chains in the Indian Ocean and IORA allied countries. Modi's up and down traveling within coastal states of the Indian Ocean for enhanced economic cooperation, connectivity and joint security measures is a practical shift of "Look East" to "Act East"<sup>11</sup> policy. The entry of SSBN and Arihant-class SLBM's may add to security threats in the sensitive politico-military zone of IO<sup>12</sup>. Alliances in IOR among independent deployer states is paving way for freedom of navigation for secured trade beside great power competition in the region.

The United States of America sees an assortment of potential dangers to its security in the Indian Ocean Region, wavering between pressures from a regional power to non-state players. There are steady security stresses, swaying from SLOCs security to increment in nonconventional weapons<sup>13</sup>. The danger of Islamic expansion is an irritating point significantly. Increasing China's Stealth technology i.e.

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<sup>9</sup> Max Bearak, "In Strategic Djibouti, a Microcosm of China's Growing Foothold in Africa," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-strategic-djibouti-a-microcosm-of-chinas-growing-foothold-in-africa/2019/12/29/a6e664ea-beab-11e9-a8b0-7ed8a0d5dc5d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-strategic-djibouti-a-microcosm-of-chinas-growing-foothold-in-africa/2019/12/29/a6e664ea-beab-11e9-a8b0-7ed8a0d5dc5d_story.html).

<sup>10</sup> "Ports and Partnerships: Delhi Invests in Indian Ocean Leadership," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, December 5, 2019, <https://amti.csis.org/ports-and-partnerships-delhi-invests-in-indian-ocean-leadership/>.

<sup>11</sup> K V Kesavan, "India's 'Act East' Policy and Regional Cooperation," *ORF (Observational Research Foundation*, February 14, 2020), <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-act-east-policy-and-regional-cooperation-61375/>.

<sup>12</sup> Prakhar Gupta, "India's Nuclear Submarine Programme Has Reached a New Milestone. Here's All about It," *Swarajyamag*, February 28, 2020, <https://swarajyamag.com/defence/indias-nuclear-submarine-programme-has-reached-a-new-milestone-heres-all-about-it>.

<sup>13</sup> Swadesh Rana, "A Permanent U.S. Presence in the Indian Ocean," *Taylor & Francis* 3, no. 2 (August 19, 2009), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700167909421487?src=recsys>.

high frequency radars, J-20 and Jian-10 aircrafts<sup>14</sup> may choke down and cause heavy loss to US warfighting line. An increase in the devoted US Indo-pacific command's defense capitals and the absence of British and French interests may cause a power imbalance in IOR<sup>15</sup>. The vacuum is probably going to create a ripple in the US safeguard resources from the North to South Pacific by moving 60 percent of its maritime armada to Hawaii.

Considerable power imbalance may be filled by US partners like Australia, India, and possibly Indonesia, who can accept more prominent obligations for IO security in the US absence<sup>16</sup>. Maximum utilization of the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and continuous power show in warm waters of IO might initiate global competition and influencing regional affairs. The conduction of revenge policies and military operations in terrains of Afghanistan after the 9/11 incident may pose serious security threats to the military powers present in IO particularly for the USA. Reorientation of power block after recognizing Israel by UAE and Saudi Arabia creates strategic ripple in power show<sup>17</sup>.

Maritime security concerns i.e., SLOCs protection, maritime chokepoints' security measures, Pak-India conflicts, Sino-India rivalry are threatening the stability of the region which may decide prospect domination of IOR. The Indian Ocean is connecting seven seas i.e., the Mediterranean and Red Seas, Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, China Sea,

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<sup>14</sup> "Does China's J-20 Rival Other Stealth Fighters?," ChinaPower Project, February 15, 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-chengdu-j-20/>.

<sup>15</sup> David Michel and Russell Sticklor, "Indian Ocean Rising: Maritime Security and Policy Challenges," July 2012, [https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Book\\_IOR\\_2\\_1.pdf](https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Book_IOR_2_1.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Special Reports, "China's Vast Fleet Is Tipping the Balance against U.S. In the Pacific," Reuters, April 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-navy/>.

<sup>17</sup> Al Jazeera, "How the World Reacted to UAE, Israel Normalising Diplomatic Ties," Aljazeera.com (Al Jazeera, August 15, 2020), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/15/how-the-world-reacted-to-uae-israel-normalising-diplomatic-ties>.

and the West and East African Seas<sup>18</sup>. It increased the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of these waters as future deciding factor for international politics and trade economy ensuring the 21st century as a century of Asian states.

This research is qualitative in nature employing descriptive chronological discussion targeting theme in the larger perspective. It opinions policy options for various stakeholders of IO for prospect regional security dimensions. As right after AUKUS IO environment is likely to take new strategic power shifts, a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, announced on 15 September 2021 for the Indo-Pacific region.

## 2. Shifting trends in IO Maritime Environment after BRI

Under the shadow of the Gramscian principle of hegemony, China is emerging as the Capitalist state of the Indian Ocean Region with the launch of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Wherein dealing with the extra-regional powers by strategic military force while on the other hand driving civil society by consent with socio-economic driving factors<sup>19</sup>. Shifting of the epicenter of politics from Euro-Atlantic to Indo-Pacific region has been embraced with global geostrategic and politico-economic significance<sup>20</sup>. US efforts for power prevalence and Chinese economic and military upswing in the region may threaten the unilateral navigation of Washington on the international hegemony theater.

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<sup>18</sup> Science Reference Section Library of Congress, "What Are the Seven Seas?," Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, November 19, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/everyday-mysteries/item/what-are-the-seven-seas/>.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, "Hegemony and the Operation of Consensus and Coercion," In R. Howson & K. M. Smith (Eds.), *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion Ch., 1*, January 1, 2008, 1–15, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/era/538/>.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Shafiq, "Chapter 3 Emerging Geo -Political Realities in Asia Pacific Region," *Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) Journal XIV* (2014): 81–110, [http://www.dsdw2016.dsdw.go.th/doc\\_pr/ndc\\_2560-2561/PDF/8611st/5.%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%203.pdf](http://www.dsdw2016.dsdw.go.th/doc_pr/ndc_2560-2561/PDF/8611st/5.%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%203.pdf).

Development of Gwadar port city, under the BRI flagship Project CPEC, may change the role of Pakistan Navy and dynamic presence of the Chinese Navy at the Head of WIO. Due to its strategic location at the steering point towards the Middle East and Hormuz strait focus on regional maneuvering is increased. Decrease in Indian influence at Chahbahar port increase opportunities for Pak-Iran-China (PIC) confluence. This business cum military maneuvering to secure regional SLOCs will bring India and Pakistan face to face in the race of becoming “regional Anchor” (according to US defense policy-2012)<sup>21</sup> for the broader IO to “Conjoint Security Head” in WIO.

Looking at the other side of the coin, China-India bilateral ties are fraught due to historical disputes with a rising threat to Indian intentions of being NSP in WIO. Friction stems from the 2400-mile border in India’s Arunachal Pradesh and China’s Tibet and the legacy of the 1962 Sino-Indian War along the Himalayan border<sup>22</sup>. To no surprise, hegemonic thirst may lead to strong retaliation ending into a full-scale conflict in the militarized WIO depending on trade alliances and military cooperation scenarios.

Australian investment in “The South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity” (SARIC) initiative worth more than \$25 million is shifting trend in the strategic maneuvering of IO<sup>23</sup>. It equates the Chinese rising trust graph in the IOR states via metastatic signaling with US-backed cooperation blocs and military alliances. Furthermore, China

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<sup>21</sup> Department of Defense United States Of America, “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense.” (Washington: The White House, January 3, 2012), [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/defense\\_guidance201201.pdf](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/defense_guidance201201.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> PK Chakravorty, “Sino-Indian War of 1962,” *Indian Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (December 2017): 285–312, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0376983617726649>.

<sup>23</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “Australia Announces Regional Connectivity Initiative in S Asia with India as Pivot,” *The Economic Times*, January 9, 2019, <https://economic.times.indiatimes.com/news/defence/australia-announces-regional-connectivity-initiative-in-s-asia-with-india-as-pivot/articleshow/67459073.cms?from=mdr>.

released a \$3.2 million loan for Kenya<sup>24</sup> to develop an infrastructural connection between the port city and Nairobi. It is a strategic as well as an investment dynamic to contain Indian IFC's (connecting through radar signals) and US-backed economic cum military maneuvering in the heart of Indian Ocean<sup>25</sup>. In 2017, Australian white paper stated to increase cooperation with the IOR coastal states in the sector of WIO maritime security and the enactment of laws. Australian Minderoo foundation's "Ocean flourishing Initiative"<sup>26</sup> is a creating sense of collective environmental protection retaliation- towards prospect intense nuclearization of Indian ocean which may affect climatic changes and oceanic health in the wider sense<sup>27</sup>. Rather than appearing as a military rival, Australia is trying to manage a healthy cooperative environment with joint collaborative and infrastructural investments that may need security measures.

#### a. Shifting strategic trade routes and control of Chokepoints

Inclining economic strength of Beijing is steering Asia with the launch of BRI and bolstering relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) possibly for new economic world order. Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement (FTA) proposal by ASEAN members<sup>28</sup> created room for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2012 with the membership of five regional economic giants i.e. China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New

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<sup>24</sup> Antony Kamakia et al., "Financing for Development and Socio-Ecological Transitions: A Review of Chinese Investments in Kenya," *Environmental Management and Sustainable Development* 7, no. 2 (March 8, 2018): 34, <https://doi.org/10.5296/emsd.v7i2.12561>.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, Ladwig C. Walter, and Justin D. Mikolay, "Diego Garcia and the United States' Emerging Indian Ocean Strategy," *Asian Security* 6, no. 3 (September 30, 2010): 214–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2010.507408>.

<sup>26</sup> "Our Invitation to You from Flourishing Oceans Photo by Reinhard Dirscherl Ullstein Bild via Getty Images," accessed November 8, 2020, [https://cdn.minderoo.org/content/uploads/2019/02/06090200/Flourishing-Oceans-Invite\\_190206-digital-p.pdf](https://cdn.minderoo.org/content/uploads/2019/02/06090200/Flourishing-Oceans-Invite_190206-digital-p.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Beenesh Ansari, "Indian Ocean: A Great Game for Strategic and Nuclear Supremacy – SASSI University," South Asian Strategic Stability Institute SAASI University, November 25, 2019, <http://sassi.org.pk/indian-ocean-a-great-game-for-strategic-and-nuclear-supremacy/>.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Devonshire Ellis, "Understanding ASEAN's Free Trade Agreements," ASEAN Business News (ASEAN briefing, February 13, 2014), <https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/understanding-aseans-free-trade-agreements/>.

Zealand. The categoric rise of half of the global GDP holders reduced Transpacific Partnership (TPP), (which was later withdrawn by Washington), further adds an approach for the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) focusing infrastructural development in Asia. China aims to establish Naval ports across the Indian Ocean under BRI's flagship projects which may be an impending threat to extra-regional powers and US-allies in IOR<sup>29</sup>. Region-centered policies to manage and dominate SLOCs in the last two decades has increased the economic uplift of the Asian countries. These policies replaced USA with China and increased trade share of as primary partner. For instance, India-US trade statistics is 1/8th of the total to Sino-Indian trade volume<sup>30</sup>, while another comparison states that Indonesian trade statistics is 12.5% with China and 7% with the USA<sup>31</sup>. Even currently, the USA itself is trading with China far more than its trade-sum with Canada. Washington has changed its approach towards china after Trump stepped into the office. Policy shift was observed from "Asia Pivot" to the revised "Indo-Pacific Quad"<sup>32</sup> and "free and open Indo Pacific" (FOIP) Policy to deal with trade war and revitalization of regional stakeholders in recent times of COVID-19 health emergency too.

Further analysis of US strategic moves shows that Washington's military commitments in the region of Afghanistan and the Middle East along with modifying Asian polices have become the reason for

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<sup>29</sup> Jayanna Krupakr, "China's Naval Base(S) in the Indian Ocean—Signs of a Maritime Grand Strategy?," *Taylor & Francis Online* 14, no. 3 (March 16, 2017), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700161.2017.1296622?journalCode=rsan20>.

<sup>30</sup> Wei Tian, "China and India: Trends in Trade over the Last Decade," *THE JOURNAL of CHINA and GLOBAL ECONOMICS* 1, no. 1 (2012): 27–38, <https://mjyu.ccer.pku.edu.cn/docs/26.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Mari Pangestu, "China–US Trade War: An Indonesian Perspective," *China Economic Journal* 12, no. 2 (May 4, 2019): 208–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538963.2019.1611084>.

<sup>32</sup> Premesha Saha, "From 'Pivot to Asia' to Trump's ARIA: What Drives the US' Current Asia Policy?," ORF (Observational Research Foundation, February 19, 2020), <https://www.orfonline.org/research/from-pivot-to-asia-to-trumps-aria-what-drives-the-us-current-asia-policy-61556/>.

losing control of IOR chokepoints. Rapid fluctuation in the polices also impacts the area of preference and operationalization in comparison to the regional rising giant-China. Shifting of Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific command at Pentagon in 2018<sup>33</sup> with hybrid-warfare tactics depicts the importance of IOR for the USA to retain its hegemony. Recent US efforts for withdrawal from Afghanistan, nuclear-deal with Iran, and peace-agreement with the Taliban are conduits towards winning hegemony race in IOR. As focusing on IO politics and maneuvering will be easy for US leadership after free from these distractions. While the US adherence to FOIP with US\$300 million aid<sup>34</sup> and Revival of QUAD is the impetus for the USA to ensure China of its unshakeable presence in Asia. Geostrategic and geo-economics maneuvering of China to entail the Chinese hold on weak and small regional states<sup>35</sup> with higher monetary benefits and infrastructural support under BRI may not let the USA rise again (despite new block formation i.e. post Israel acceptance confluence of the USA, KSA and UAE).

The shifting of Obama's 'Asia Pivot' to Trumps' "ARIA" Policy offers Washington a chance to cooperate with Southeast Asian states and allies who are intending to increase their stake in the region<sup>36</sup>. It is going to be a test of flexibility and freeness for Indo-Pacific theories such as Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," Australia's "Foreign Policy White Paper," India's "Act East Policy", and Taiwan's "New Southbound Policy." Washington is putting energies to assure

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<sup>33</sup> Caroline Houck, "Pentagon Rebrands PACOM as 'Indo-Pacific Command,'" *Defense One*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2018/05/pentagon-rebrands-pacom-indo-pacific-command/148612/>.

<sup>34</sup> Reuters Staff, "U.S. Pledges Nearly \$300 Million Security Funding for Indo-Pacific Region," *Reuters*, August 4, 2018, sec. APAC, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-singapore-usa-security-idUSKBN1KP022>.

<sup>35</sup> Nilanthi Samaranayake, "China's Engagement with Smaller South Asian Countries," *United States Institute of Peace*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/04/chinas-engagement-smaller-south-asian-countries>.

<sup>36</sup> Premesha Saha, "From 'Pivot to Asia' to Trump's ARIA: What Drives the US' Current Asia Policy?," *ORF (Observational Research Foundation)*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/from-pivot-to-asia-to-trumps-aria-what-drives-the-us-current-asia-policy-61556/>.

its regional cohorts to stabilize their duties in promoting regional strength. As in this scenario, India seems to be a conundrum of security and economic arena while fighting internal retaliations due to CAB Bill, Kashmir lockdown since the last eleven months, and ongoing Ladakh crisis<sup>37</sup>.

Eyeing IO centered policies shows how the region is making a beeline for enthralled security conditions where two blocs (strategic power alliances in IO) may revive cooperation. If not focused on cooperation options, it may result in planting seeds of other extended clash. Despite positive Chinese intentions as per state narrative, realism implications drive the State's tendency to retain economic expansion with all probable entraps. Beijing is endeavoring to keep disrupted issues aside and increment the financial commitment with India<sup>38</sup> and Japan through exchange under its model of relationship. The ASEAN states and other Asian countries are additionally not prepared to encounter the results of any future power-clash due to its present financial torments. The eventual fate of Indo Pacific lies with the fundamental territorial partners and the small states that how much they are at ease with China's share-based investments which is in certain states alleged as a debt trap system<sup>39</sup>.

#### **b. COVID-19 and Oil economies' economic depression**

Ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is radically decreasing worldwide activity leading to economic recession. It is the biggest oil-devouring division particularly in the transportation segment. Henceforth, it is difficult to understand that to what range oil costs will go lower as an

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<sup>37</sup> Pravin Sawhney, "With India's Options in Ladakh Crisis Narrowing, the Way Forward Is High-Level Dialogue," *The Wire*, July 6, 2020, <https://thewire.in/security/with-indias-options-in-the-ladakh-crisis-narrowing-high-level-talks-are-the-way-forward>.

<sup>38</sup> Saheli Roy Choudhury, "Three Reasons India Can't Quickly Distance Itself from China despite the Border Clash," *CNBC*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/07/why-india-cannot-disengage-from-china-despite-geopolitical-tensions.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Shahar Hameiri, "Debunking the Myth of China's 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy,'" *www.lowyinstitute.org*, September 9, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/debunking-myth-china-s-debt-trap-diplomacy>.

advantage to buyers. While an increase in oil demand is forecasted fact as the coronavirus aftermath.

On 5 March 2020, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) proposed a 1.5 mbd production cut for Q2 2020, of which 1 mbd would be by OPEC countries and 0.5 mbd from non-OPEC but aligned producers (most prominently, the Russian Federation)<sup>40</sup>. The following day, the Russian Federation rejected the proposal, and Saudi Arabia also announced unprecedented discounts of almost 20% in key markets. The result was a more than 30% plunge in prices to as low as \$31.1 (WTI crude) per barrel on 9 March, and the crisis in the oil industry has continued to worsen. An intensifying recession due to COVID-19 crisis drove global oil prices even further down to \$11.57 per barrel (WTI crude) on 21 April<sup>41</sup>.

Lowest oil-shipping rate squeezed trade movements and shifting of focus point from military maneuvering to saving lives in the COVID pandemic. Circuitous impact of economic recession on net oil exporters in post-COVID prism has changed preferences of IO countries and oil economies too. Foreseeably, oil-economies may look for new cooperation to balance their loss via strategic reshaping of alliances in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) having a deep impact on the power equation and balancing of the region.

### **c. Shifting regional political focus from Euro-Atlantic to Asia-Pacific zone and nuclearization of IO**

Hegelian dialect makes it unacceptable for a hegemon to see declining military might, economic dominance, diplomatic influence, and reducing respect. Failing hegemon keeps trying for the compensation of his loss of respect and influence on the rising hegemon which in turn drags, yet not fully risen hegemon it into a

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<sup>40</sup> Farhad Taghizadeh-Hesary, "Economic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Oil Price Collapse," *Asia Pathways*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.asiapathways-adbi.org/2020/05/economic-impacts-covid-19-pandemic-and-oil-price-collapse/>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

premature confrontation<sup>42</sup>. Shifting of Politico-economic focus from Euro-Atlantic to Asia-Pacific zone has emerged new military alliances, strategic maneuvering in the Indian Ocean<sup>43</sup>. Increased usage of Nuclear weapons i.e. nuclear submarines, missile stations, and paralyzing armadas has added armed sight to IO politics. Recalibration of US policies towards the Asia-pacific and Indian Ocean zone may yet not balance the race of declining and rising powers<sup>44</sup>. For instance, Consider the China-US condition in the challenged seas of Asia–Pacific. In the preceding years, Beijing has embraced an extraordinarily increasingly forceful stance opposite regional and oceanic debates with Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. While US interest does not incite undeniable showdown over generally minor happenings and challenges. US security policies in the IOR is continuously facing reliability check as Washington cannot challenge Beijing on each incitement. Yet every agitation that goes unchallenged improves China's influence over its neighbors and debilitates America's standing in the region. Chinese deploying navy's combat units for anti-piracy patrols<sup>45</sup>, M-11 missile technology transfer<sup>46</sup> to Pakistan along with aggressive SCS patrolling. Chinese calculated moves and technology support to Pakistan for increasing submarine squad<sup>47</sup> has refuted increasing US-India alliance and

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<sup>42</sup> Richard McKeon, "Dialectic and Political Thought and Action," *Ethics* 65, no. 1 (1954): 1–33, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2378780>.

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Shafiq, "Emerging Trends in Geo-Politics of Asia Pacific Region," *Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) Journal* XIV. 81-101 (April 2014), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289317217\\_Emerging\\_Trends\\_in\\_Geo-politics\\_of\\_Asia\\_Pacific\\_Region](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289317217_Emerging_Trends_in_Geo-politics_of_Asia_Pacific_Region).

<sup>44</sup> Mercy A. Kuo, "US-China Economic Relations: Impact on the Asia-Pacific Region," *thediplomat.com*, June 7, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/us-china-economic-relations-impact-on-the-asia-pacific-region/>.

<sup>45</sup> "China's Piracy Patrols – Maritime Security Review," *Maritime Security Review*, January 2, 2019, <http://www.marsecreview.com/2019/01/chinas-piracy-patrols/>.

<sup>46</sup> Monica Chansoria, "Role of China as Pakistan's Nuclear and Missile Patron," *Indian Defence Review*, November 15, 2010, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/role-of-china-as-pakistans-nuclear-and-missile-patron/3/>.

<sup>47</sup> H. I. Sutton, "Chinese Navy Submarines Could Become a Reality in Indian Ocean," *Forbes*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/06/26/chinese-navy-submarines-could-become-a-reality-in-indian-ocean/?sh=7deb5c0754a6>.

cooperative talks for opening military bases to US navy- for bridging the gap towards China and exchange of weapon technology including anti-submarine warfare (ASW). On the other hand, Chinese submarine patrol to Persian Gulf mentions its resolute presence in IO.

### 3. Strategic Analysis of Power States Maritime Policies in IO

**a. Strategic Analysis of US Maritime Policy in IO:** The Indo-pacific region is facing serious security disputes regarding humanitarian, governance, and trade matters. US presence in Indian ocean dates to century but in 1972 Asia-pacific region was given under US Pacific Command's 'area of responsibility'<sup>48</sup> preceded increased interest after the Arab-Israeli War. The USA has focused in three major areas while developing its Indian Ocean Maritime policy, firstly, continuing Sino-Indian contest, secondly, Due to rising Chinese influence in south china sea and at Malacca strait, chokepoints regulation became a far more immediate concern as US-Iran tussle is going on near Hormuz Strait, thirdly secure international maritime trade routes<sup>49</sup>.

Long-distance from naval bases and continuous efforts to dominate IO would create further difficulties for US. China's attaining anti-access and area denial (A2AD) capabilities will have deep impact on US maritime policy- addressing possible battlefields for the USA and Chinese trade routes. US absence in SCS would open playgrounds as Chinese up the ante by declaring new administrative areas despite Vietnam and the Philippines's criticism<sup>50</sup>, compels the USA to ensure its presence in Southern China. While at the same time managing influential presence and

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<sup>48</sup> "U.S. Indo-Pacific Command > about USINDOPACOM > USPACOM Area of Responsibility," Pacom.mil, November 11, 2020, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>.

<sup>49</sup> Dr. Satoru Nagao, "Review of 'Defining U.S. Indian Ocean Strategy' | Intelligence Analysis," 笹川平和財団 | 海洋情報 FROM THE OCEANS, accessed November 9, 2020, [https://www.spf.org/oceans/analysis\\_en/c1204-1.html](https://www.spf.org/oceans/analysis_en/c1204-1.html).

<sup>50</sup> Drake Long, "China Ups Ante in South China Sea with New Place Names, Districts," Benar News, April 20, 2020, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/philippines-china-04202020182553.html>.

defense in depth at Hormoz strait in case of US-Iran full-scale conflict, is stretching the USA in two dimensions. So, in the case, increasing defense resources to the US Pacific Command is the major focus of Pentagon standing along with its largest defense ally SCS-Japan. On the other side, USA responded very inclusively by extending its presence in three dimensions i.e. at Australian HMAS Stirling providing a deep-water port for military maneuvering, secondly, current US investment for up-gradation Cocos Island runway nearest to Sri Lanka and thirdly, investment in security installations in Bay of Bengal to operate aircraft in the region in case of any emergency<sup>51</sup>.

US-QUAD policy as a counter-alignment strategy of USA in comparison to BRI's consortium of commerce cum military investment around the Indian Ocean may give tough time to Chinese rise. US covert diplomatic strategies i.e. supporting Indian leadership for acceding LEMOA and COMCASA with India on one hand and increasing investments in Japan ports and Australia on other hand, is a diversified try to 'one size fits all' strategy. Moving close to Chinese terrains, US undercover support to Taiwan's independence may create hurdles for the presence even in South China Sea<sup>52</sup>. So, Pentagon backing the rise of democratic Taiwan as key official guarantor and sending peace envoys to Taiwan in November 2019 is an undeniable move to win the US's peaceful presence in IOR. Preserving radiant alliance in IOR is major US focus as currently there is not any hard crisis going on in IO.

Right from 2012, decreasing US presence in IO is continuously increasing Indian naval grip on IOR along with increasing US-India alliance after Indian training to Vietnam and Iran's submarine

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<sup>51</sup> Phillip Coorey, "US Military Eyes Cocos Islands as a Future Indian Ocean Spy Base," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 27, 2012, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/us-military-eyes-cocos-islands-as-a-future-indian-ocean-spy-base-20120327-1vwo0.html>.

<sup>52</sup> "US Steps up Support for Taiwan to Counter Rising China Pressure," *www.aljazeera.com*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/1/us-steps-up-support-for-taiwan-to-counter-rising-china-pressure>.

forces and Thailand's aircraft carrier crews<sup>53</sup>. So, Indian rise as emerging naval power of Blue waters is driving US maritime policy to an effective edge by increasing defense ties, getting US support in NSG, and the US relying on India as a front-line force against china in the region. Pentagon's future move may claw down the Indian economy and Naval power in IO to get a larger range of impact countering Chinese influence in the IOR defending the freedom of navigation at important chokepoints and by offering collective surveillance system based on US satellites.

**b. Strategic Analysis of Chinese Maritime Policy in IO:**

The consortium of the "Two-Ocean Navy" strategy and "One Belt One Road" OBOR initiative is taking momentum to make china military and economic tycoon of IO. Major Chinese concerns are the risk of war due to the Malacca dilemma, commercial supply lines, increasing US presence in Japan, and South Korea. While on top, threats to freedom of navigation and piracy against Chinese massive commercial fleets in two oceans may spur a serious contention<sup>54</sup>. Contemporary naval hegemon of US in IO has driven Chinese maritime policy to preferentially modernize People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). Right after US withdrawal from Trans-pacific Partnership regional countries including Australia has begun to increase ties with China<sup>55</sup>. Chinese ports in Siri Lanka, Pakistan, and Djibouti are giving hard economic expansion and safe commercial supply lines to China. While for further safety and protection china has a valid reason to launch its military fleets in the IO field<sup>56</sup>. OBOR progression to the Middle East is also

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<sup>53</sup> Jan Joel Andersson, "THE RACE to the BOTTOM: Submarine Proliferation and International Security," *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 1 (2015): 12–29, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26397814?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26397814?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>54</sup> T. Sun and Alex Payette, "CHINA'S TWO OCEAN STRATEGY: Controlling Waterways and the New Silk Road" BY Tom (GUORUI) SUN," [www.semanticscholar.org](http://www.semanticscholar.org), 2017, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/CHINA-%E2%80%99-S-TWO-OCEAN-STRATEGY-%3A-Controlling-and-the-Sun-Payette/1840af9a04093bdcda462873436089578a187bbc>.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel C. K. Chow, Ian Sheldon, and William McGuire, "How the United States Withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Benefits China," [papers.ssrn.com](http://papers.ssrn.com) (Rochester, NY, August 7, 2018), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3228007](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3228007).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

expanding its opportunities for balancing US centralization in IO along with Sub-marine force.

Chinese private protection units for sea-based trades in comparison to the hard military is a strategy to keep the Chinese image soft while in practical Private and public sectors are not far off in China<sup>57</sup>. On the other edge, Chinese military presence under the auspices of the UN-peacekeeping mission and nuclear-driven submarine fleet for protection of SLOCs is schematic plotting in IO<sup>58</sup>. Controlling Hormoz strait by the imminent naval presence at Gwadar after functionalizing CPEC in full swing and subsuming Malacca dilemma by the presence at Hambantota port is part of Chinese maritime strategy to a one-fits-to-all strategy under OBOR. In the way, PLAN has expanded its zone of operation from SCS, yellow sea to WIO in the Persian Gulf. PLAN's Subservience to the Chinese economic rise is transforming its capabilities of self-protection of its SLOCs to the Bluewater navy<sup>59</sup>. US strong presence in East Asian and west pacific countries is a worry for Chinese power projection and intimidation which may get even worse in the case of Taiwan's reunification. While Chinese efforts for free trade zone may pave ways for de-escalation in the region under Maritime Silk Road (MSR) which is currently clawing under-operationalized QUAD policy.

Currently, deployment of 60 Chinese warships, naval support port of Doraleh near Bab-el-Mandeb strait, 093A-Chinese Submarine at Feydhoofinolhu island<sup>60</sup> is sure to power show

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<sup>57</sup> VEERLE NOUWENS, "Who Guards the 'Maritime Silk Road'?", War on the Rocks, June 24, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/who-guards-the-maritime-silk-road/>.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Gowan, "China's Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping," Brookings, September 14, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

<sup>59</sup> Priyanshi Chauhan, "Cooperation against Competition: India and China in the Energy Sector," South Asian Voices, July 16, 2019, <https://southasianvoices.org/cooperation-against-competition-india-china-energy-sector/>.

<sup>60</sup> "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress," accessed July 19, 2020, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>.

beside economic rise in IO. US concerns regarding slipping of Chinese submarines in wartimes via Lombok and Sunda Straits may even strangle US presence in SCS despite ongoing verbal clashes due to territorial claims in east Asian countries<sup>61</sup>. China is intensifying its maritime diplomacy as in 2012 formation of Maritime Leading Group (MLG), centralizing coast guard's command under PLA by adding military functions to them and efforts for unified maritime law to manage domestic seas. But to no surprise, China is using the traditional path of rising hegemony by ensuring its considerable presence in IO neither pure military nor pure economic.

**c. Strategic Analysis of Indian Maritime Policy in IO:** Analysis of "Indian Maritime Doctrine" (IMD)-2004 and transforming "Indian Maritime Security Strategy" IMSS-2007 to IMSS-2015 mentions major areas of focus viz; primary and secondary i.e. being "Net Security Provider" rather than regional maritime policeman, Red Sea-Inlet to IO near strait of Babl-e-Mandab, Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden and expanding area of operation by recognizing new chokepoints- the Mozambique Channel and Ombai-Wetar Straits<sup>62</sup>, countering Chinese rising influence by establishing US-alliance and containing conventional rival-Pakistan in all maritime means particularly after 26/11 incident. Modi's announcement of SAGAR vision and shifting from 'look East' to 'Act East' policy by increasing ties with East Asian countries is regional strategic maneuvering under economic progression aegis<sup>63</sup>. Joining QUAD, QUAD 2.0, US-Indian cooperation under LEMOA and recent entry to the Australia-India Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (AIMLSA)

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<sup>61</sup> H. I. Sutton, "Chinese Navy Submarines Could Become a Reality in Indian Ocean," *Forbes*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/06/26/chinese-navy-submarines-could-become-a-reality-in-indian-ocean/?sh=7deb5c0754a6>.

<sup>62</sup> Gurpreet Singh Khurana, "'Net Security Provider' Defined: An Analysis of India's New Maritime Strategy-2015 | Center for International Maritime Security," *CIMSEC*, December 4, 2015, <https://cimsec.org/net-security-provider-defined-analysis-indias-new-maritime-strategy-2015/>.

<sup>63</sup> "SAGAR Vision," *Drishiti IAS*, April 23, 2020, <https://www.drishitiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/sagar-vision>.

and the Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement (DSTIA) on June 5, 2020<sup>64</sup> in a virtual conference depicts Indian inclining focus towards military expansion in IO to contain China. Even rising tensions at SCS and Ladakh zone on Sino-Indian borders could not affect Indian policy for affirmative peaceful change.

Being a resurgent maritime state, India has a myriad of interests in IO ranging from economic security, oceanic resources, SLOCs security, and hub of maritime security architecture. Despite the establishment of extra-territorial radar stations and connecting them with the Information Fusion Center (IFC)<sup>65</sup> at Delhi may not be an enough move to confine Chinese naval presence in IO. As docking of two nuclear Chinese submarine at Colombo port in 2015 strategically keep an eye on Indian feathers<sup>66</sup>. Indian power balancing effort in IOR is failing because Iran struck off India from Chabahar after LEMOA<sup>67</sup>. But rising imbalance can be countered further with the Indo-Russian agreement for upgrading its Kilo-class Submarine and leasing of Nuclear attacking submarine to improve its naval flotilla<sup>68</sup>. In 2017, India signature and agreement to buy High-tech Guardian Drones-Predator B for increasing its grip

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<sup>64</sup> Brad Lendon CNN, "India and Australia Strengthen Military Ties as Tensions Simmer in South China Sea," CNN, June 5, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/04/asia/india-australia-military-agreements-intl-hnk/index.html>.

<sup>65</sup> "Ports and Partnerships: Delhi Invests in Indian Ocean Leadership," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, December 5, 2019, <https://amti.csis.org/ports-and-partnerships-delhi-invests-in-indian-ocean-leadership/>.

<sup>66</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, "Chinese Submarines in Sri Lanka Unnerve India: Next Stop Pakistan?," Indian Strategic Studies, May 29, 2015, <https://www.strategicstudyindia.com/2015/06/chinese-submarines-in-sri-lanka-unnerve.html?m=1>.

<sup>67</sup> Saad Rasool, "India's Chabahar Debacle," The Nation, July 18, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/19-Jul-2020/india-s-chabahar-debacle>.

<sup>68</sup> Manu Pubby, "Upgrading Kilo Class Submarines: L&T Set to Partner Russia for Rs 5,000-Crore Defence Deal," *The Economic Times*, June 14, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/upgrading-kilo-class-submarines-lt-set-to-partner-russia-for-rs-5000-crore-defence-deal/articleshow/50491411.cms?from=mdr>.

on maritime surveillance in IOR<sup>69</sup>. But these moves are merely hyperbolic rhetoric and bereft of concrete maritime policy to fulfill its aim of being “Net Security Provider” of IO. Nerve center of Indian maritime trade routes in IO may get strangulated in case of increasing Sino-US Conflict in SCS. While QUAD 2.0 is yet not enough to contain China at home ground particularly when India has adjacent borders with China and Chinese naval ports in its backyard. Resultantly rather than containing, china must be engaged in trade and joint security projects while India’s dominant-dependent psyche may cost herself high in the rift of global giants i.e. US and China, to dominate IOR.

#### **d. Strategic Analysis of Australian Maritime Policy in IO:**

Australian maritime policy revolves around mature grand strategy including denial, engagement, and reform which aims to address the “air-sea gap” and “continental Imagination”<sup>70</sup>. Canberra Government doesn’t aim to contain China or the USA in any way in fact following “mare incognitum” in the military sense while cooperation and coordination are considered major moves to ensure maritime commons’ and resources security<sup>71</sup>. Asia-Pacific Economic and military juxtaposition drags Australia to participate in IO geopolitics. In “Asian century White paper-2012” and “Defense White Paper-2016” has one thing in common that Australia started to consider covert military maneuvering to save its identity neither in offense mode<sup>72</sup>. Shifting trends of securing SLOCs, Chokepoints’ domination, naval bases in the heart of IO,

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<sup>69</sup> Shishir Gupta, “India Eyes Acquisition of Predator-B Drones from US,” Hindustan Times, July 5, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-eyes-acquisition-of-predator-drones-from-us/story-nVOOMnUWNh7KokbqE9uVYM.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Abhijit Singh, “An Indian Perspective on Australian Maritime Strategy,” [www.lowyinstitute.org](http://www.lowyinstitute.org), November 12, 2013, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indian-perspective-australian-maritime-strategy>.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Evans, “Maritime Strategy and Australia’s Future in an Asia-Pacific Century,” in *A Joint Institute and Naval Warfare Professional Development*, 2016, <https://www.rusinsw.org.au/Papers/20161103.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Carr, “No LoNger a MiddLe Power Australia’s Strategy in the 21 St Century Études de L’Ifri,” 2019, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/carr\\_australia\\_middle\\_power\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/carr_australia_middle_power_2019.pdf).

and MSRs has attracted Australia to re-orient itself from physical isolation to powerful symbiotic friendships. 38 percent of Australian exports take place with Beijing<sup>73</sup>, but at the same time, defense and military base offer to the US, AIMSIA and DSTIA with India is making Australia as an important consideration for military reorientation in IO.

The Australian navy has confused the political economy with strategic complexities in sea-power theory by merely focusing on contemporary trade routes and military alliances. AUSINDEX-military exercises and intending participation in Malabar naval exercises (involving 30 friendly countries) under the Indian flag is a sharply increasing potential of Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in the post-COVID-19 edict<sup>74</sup>. This appears to be QUAD's naval alliance in IO against China.

However, Australian presence in the USA led Blue-Dot Network may balance China's BRI by the synergizing blue economy of IORA states<sup>75</sup>. Revisionist policies with strategic threat assessment along with enhancement in a maritime role in IO may strengthen Australia's diplomatic position as a maritime facilitator.

**e. Strategic Analysis of Pakistan's Maritime Policy in IO:** Analysis of maritime policy approved in 2002 and later diplomatic developments depicts Pakistan's core maritime interests i.e. conservation for the maritime environment, protection and promotion of maritime interests, infrastructural development of coastal zones, and extending naval activeness in WIO<sup>76</sup>. Beside

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<sup>73</sup> Matthew Cranston, "Australia's Export Share to China Hits Record High 38pc," Australian Financial Review, September 30, 2019, <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/australia-s-export-share-to-china-hits-record-high-38pc-20190930-p52w9y>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>75</sup> Mercy A. Kuo, "Blue Dot Network: The Belt and Road Alternative," thediplomat.com, April 7, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/blue-dot-network-the-belt-and-road-alternative/>.

<sup>76</sup> "Understanding Pakistan's Maritime Interests," Quwa, July 13, 2016, <https://quwa.org/2016/07/13/understanding-pakistans-maritime-interests/>.

two ports working in Karachi and Bin Qassim has to bear all the economic and military maneuvering load of the state. Moreover, these two ports were prone to any attack in conflict or war times i.e. operation trident in 1971. For the purpose, Pakistan had to find coastal strategic depth in its territory. After the launch of the BRI flagship project-CPEC in Pakistani terrains, Gwadar appeared as “région la plus sûre” for developing the largest deep seaport and military base along. A journey from ‘sea-blindness’ to ‘sea-awareness’ ended with the launch of the “Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan in 2018 under the banner of MARSEW held at Pakistan Navy War College (PNWC)<sup>77</sup>. “Preserving freedom of Seas” slogan highlights the importance of sea tied economic and maritime security.

In the course of the last twenty years, the Pakistan Navy has developed an edge over the superior Indian Navy by adopting offensive sea denial strategy by increasing primacy of submarines and highly equipped-missile based maritime aircraft<sup>78</sup>. Pakistan adopting No-First-Use policy<sup>79</sup> in conflict raises its worth as a mature sea guardian despite accurate target maneuvering with the maximum probability of success i.e. locating worth billion Indian submarines and expatriating from its sea borders. Testing of Babur-3, Ra’ad-II, French-built Exocets, and Hatf-VIII is challenging Indian naval sea-based deterrence and balance of power at seas<sup>80</sup>. Looking into a larger frame, LEMOA offered Indian naval bases to the US navy paving way for Chinese trade cum military bases at Hambantota and prospectively at Gwadar<sup>81</sup>. Indian Deterrent

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<sup>77</sup> Cdr (Retd) Azam Khan, “Pakistan Launches First Formal Maritime Doctrine,” Global Village Space, February 21, 2019, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/pakistan-launches-first-formal-maritime-doctrine/>.

<sup>78</sup> Vijay Sakhuja (2002) Pakistan's Naval strategy: Past and future, Strategic Analysis, 26:4, 493-507, DOI: 10.1080/09700160208450064

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Khatoon, N. (2020, March 24). The Maiden Test of Pakistan’s Ra’ad II Cruise Missile: An Overview. Retrieved from <http://capsindia.org/files/documents/882329cf-997a-48ca-a86f-c9a3db5f74e0.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> M. K. Bhadrakumar, “US-India Military Alliance Comes into View,” Asia Times, October 26, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/10/us-india-military-alliance-comes-into-view/>.

patrol by INS Arihant further evolved strategic maneuvering at seas and responded by Pakistan with Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP)<sup>82</sup>. Rather than following the bottom line of security-survival<sup>83</sup> shifted its focus to region centric-model of maritime security. Pakistan is not prospecting to balance the presence of Indian and other navies at IO but ensuring its safe and articulated presence around the WIO. Shifting of security trends post 9/11 to post COVID-19 demands a multilateral approach to tackle maritime complexity i.e. securing SLOCs, countering proactive doctrines, oceanic nuclearization. Emergence of new Anti-Iran Block and Indian expulsion from Chabahar after LEMOA<sup>84</sup> creates strategic opportunities and responsibilities for Pakistan.

#### 4. Potential Challenges for Pakistan

Global power politics has complexed economic development and military presence opportunities for Pakistan and China in the Indian Ocean. Indo-pacific is recognized as an integrated entity by Quad group but Pakistan and China keep Pacific and IO matters separate. Following categoric discussion explains:

**a. Security Challenges:** Pakistan has strategic interests that emanate from coastline to Exclusive economic zone. Location of two major ports i.e. Karachi and Bin Qasim ports are near eastern borders which lessens their strategic importance in case of war and crisis. Security of SLOCs, operationalization of Gwadar port, radicalization in the Middle East and South Asia may pose threats to maritime developments. Weapon, drugs and human trafficking through Pakistani waters may question mark national interests and security. Indian intentions to subvert CPEC and Gwadar port by

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<sup>82</sup> Sohail Azmie, "Regional Maritime Security Patrols (RMSP) | Pakistan Today," Pakistan Today, June 3, 2019, <https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/06/03/regional-maritime-security-patrols-rmsp/>.

<sup>83</sup> Barry Buzan, 2003. *Regions and Powers*.

<sup>84</sup> Saad Rasool, "India's Chabahar Debacle," The Nation, July 18, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/19-Jul-2020/india-s-chabahar-debacle>.

indirect militancy and backing separatist Baluch is rising concern for Pakistan. Increasing trilateral partnerships-Pak-Iran-China (PIC) may assist in active WIO presence.

**b. Blue Economy Challenges:** Securing sea resources and the fifth water province of Pakistan is becoming essential due to increased dependency on sea-based trade. Extension of EEZ has opened opportunities for Pakistan but at the same time marine pollution, oil spilling, lacking a supply of good quality fish along with sharp climatic changes are present-day challenges.

**c. Tourism Development:** Unattended maritime zones in Pakistan needs to be developed under proper planning to utilize it to maximum potential. Security and elevated aids are a major challenge towards coastal and marine tourism expansion in Pakistan.

**d. Strategic Alliances:** Pakistan could not afford to stand against strategic military maritime alliances in IO despite increasing cooperation from the Chinese government in infrastructural projects. Developing trade, surveillance, and security alliance with QUAD and IOR countries may pose a high cost to maintain its presence in WIO.

**e. Task Force Participation:** Participation in CTF-150, CTF-151, and later self-called RMSP has improved Pakistan's international maritime image. Being the part of UN-based peacekeeping, anti-piracy operations, refugee rehabilitation in WIO zones may increase the role of Pakistan as a front-line allied security state.

**f. Debt Trap Diplomacy:** CPEC served as a regional game-changer in a larger perspective along with an increased level of challenges for Pakistan. Increased security parameters, the task force for protecting such a huge project, converging Baluch dissenter's interest to make the project successful. Debt trap diplomacy under shadow of CPEC is an undeniable challenge for Pakistan to secure its independent future beside governed colony.

## 5. Estimated Opportunities for Pakistan

Increasing influence range and maritime awareness has extended opportunities for Pakistan in a larger frame.

**a. Development of perennial coastal resorts:** Pakistan has a 1000 km long coastline with extensively mesmerizing natural sights and beaches. Under a project of coastal development-perennial resorts i.e. one resort within every 100 km will increase tourism, employment, and soft-image.

**b. Agreements on International Ship and Port facility:** Signing of agreements for International ships, crew employment and availability port facility in the friendly countries and trade alliances may serve purpose of secure trading and peaceful international presence for Pakistan.

**c. Artificial Island development:** Large investments such as CPEC and Gwadar port development may design the bright economic future of Pakistan. Development of artificial islands in contiguous and EEZ may increase marine tourism, security extension opportunities, and within-sea radar and military stations.

**d. Provision of shortest trade routes for China, CARs, and Afghanistan:** Pakistan provides shortest trade routes to landlock states i.e. Afghanistan, CARs, and western Chinese provinces. It may be utilized with flexible trade policies to attract countries to depend on Pakistan for sea-based trade increasing revenue generation opportunities. CPEC has converged interests of states in Pakistan with linkage to Europe via highways and railroads.

**e. Development of IFCs:** Assisted information fusion centers with allied maritime countries and military bases around the country may help to manage information and response. Furthermore, a parallel IFC for human capital may be created to get skilled minds and force for interpreting better future dreams to reality.

**f. Security development and assistance in western IO:**

Development of TF-88 for securing Gwadar port and advanced security trends under regional security complex may raise Pakistan's status for security provision. Pakistan may launch new taskforces for regional security projects promoting skilled employment and revenue generation. Inclusion of Chinese JH-7, J-20, Jain-10 and Pakistani JF-17 into maritime air combat squad may effectively reduce Indian threats.

**6. Proposed Maritime Security Strategy of Pakistan (MSSP)**

Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan (MDP)-2018 has given vast insight over the navy's role in nuclearized IO, the perspective of national security relationship with Pakistan Navy, and its war fighting philosophy. Comprehensive and strategic analysis of the IO environment and policy analysis of active states extracts important dimensions to be followed for developing MSSP.

- i. Pakistan must issue a duly revised National Maritime Policy (NMP) and National Maritime Strategy (NMS) commensurate with contemporary needs focusing to complete and mature its sea-based deterrence potential.
- ii. US-India collaboration in IO should be balanced by increasing collaboration with China under CPEC to advance cause of blue economy along with investment in security of Gwadar port and maritime related projects of CPEC
- iii. China is biggest investor in Pakistan under CPEC so expansion of scope and periodicity of PN-PLAN joint exercises along with regular port visits by PN/PLAN to each other ports may increase mutual reliance.
- iv. Indo-pacific merging seems implausible for Pakistan, so it may increase the security of its SLOCs, international container ports, and comprehensive sea protocol for law enforcement agencies which ensure national economic interests and geostrategic converging in the North Arabian Sea.

- v. Discarding neighbour's idea of "Net security Provider", Pakistan may increase its cooperation under the banner of RMSP by further developing a conjoint patrol force serving the needs of all regional stakeholders.
- vi. Extending submarine squad with SSBNs and SSGNs with assured second-strike capability may raise PN status in the IO navies.
- vii. Increased budget allocation for indigenous maritime excellence centers for research and policy development will further enhance the importance of tri-service force.
- viii. Development and integration of advanced technologies i.e. internet protocol surveillance system, CO2 and metal detectors, x-ray and infra-red detectors for non-intrusive check along with underwater and aerial security systems.
- xi. "Science and technology" transfer, "security surveillance" and technical information sharing centers should be developed for cohesiveness and more shrewd naval moves in IO under AMAN exercise banner.
- x. Reorienting focus of foreign policy and military security to oceans for marine production and improving oceanic health which may serve the purpose of MDGs and the Growth of Pakistan's Blue Economy.

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