

## **MARITIME SECURITY AND GEO-POLITICS IN INDIAN OCEAN REGION: REPERCUSSIONS FOR PAKISTAN**

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### **Abstract**

*The world has witnessed a geopolitical power shift from Atlantic to Indo-Pacific, prompting the regional and extra-regional actors to scramble for power in Indian Ocean Region-IOR. China has unveiled Belt and Road Initiative to buttress its maritime foothold, while US, India, Japan, Australia, and UK are forging strategic partnerships and alliances such as Quad and AUKUS to counter China's prowess. The geopolitical convergence and divergence have made Indian Ocean a hub of geo-politics, horrendously undermining region's maritime security. As far as Pakistan's position is concerned, it is being enormously affected owing to its partnership with China in the form of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-CPEC. This research employs theoretical framework of geo-politics, maritime security complex, and Securitization. The methodology used is qualitative while the type of social research is exploratory. This insight concludes that various interlinked geopolitical developments are threatening the maritime security of IOR, which in turn has economic, security, and political ramifications for Pakistan. It also provides various recommendations for the formulation of Pakistan's maritime strategy based on elements of soft and hard power.*

### **Keywords:**

*Indian Ocean Region-IOR, geopolitics, maritime security, Belt and Road Initiative-BRI, Quad, AUKUS, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-CPEC*

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## 1. Introduction

Indian Ocean has become cardinal to progressively ocean-driven and ocean-centric regional-cum-global geopolitics. Being marked with baroque political, socio-economic, and cultural multiformity, Indian Ocean Region seems to be fulcrum of geopolitics. The geopolitical tectonic plates of the region have undergone major shifts, causing serious concern regarding maritime security. The labyrinthian maritime security's imperatives have brought about the colossal stakes of regional and non-regional actors in safeguarding the unceasing flow of maritime trade traversing through the SLOCs-Sea Lines of Communication in IOR.

At the heart of maritime geopolitics lies the various issues linked to the maritime security such as rise of China by virtue of Belt and Road Initiative, US-China competition, Sino-Indian rivalry, and strategic convergence of US, India, Quad and AUKUS states to curb the 'China's threat'. The strategic confluence of various actors in the wake of China's rise is increasingly causing the militarization and nuclearization of Indian Ocean. Besides the traditional security issues, some non-traditional security issues such as maritime terrorism, piracy, illicit trafficking, and environmental degradation are somehow linked to the geopolitical importance of Indian Ocean, thus posing multiple challenges to regional maritime security in general and Pakistan in particular. Pakistan is being immensely affected by aforementioned developments due to mammoth economic, security, and political stakes, chiefly after becoming part of China's BRI. The flagship project of BRI, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its maritime jewel 'Gwadar Port' have made Pakistan a significant actor with respect to region's geopolitics while simultaneously linking its security and economic development to success of CPEC.

In this backdrop, this research addresses the key questions: 1) How theoretical construct of Maritime Security Complex, geo-politics, and Securitization are inter-linked with respect to Indian Ocean?; 2) Why Indian Ocean is enormously significant making it hotspot of geopolitical competition?; 3) What are the key geopolitical developments that affect the maritime security of Indian Ocean? 4) How Pakistan is being implicated by the complex geopolitical dynamics in Indian Ocean, 5) What should be the response of Pakistan in order to deal with ever-enhancing challenges emanating from IOR?

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Maritime Security Complex

Maritime security signifies the sea-based multipronged security challenges. It serves as the key buzzword depicting the security in maritime domain a 'vogue' phenomenon while conjugating concatenation of interconnected issue areas as well as themes, essential for acknowledgement of unique features and diversity. Additionally, it acts as a comprehensive framework in order to analyze issues and take suitable actions with respect to maritime domain. Maritime security also can be comprehended through 'Maritime Security Complex' coined by Christian Beuger. It entails four key domains.

- a. **National Security:** The first key area refers to traditional security challenges concerning sea power such as naval competition, inter-state disputes, and arms proliferation. Scholars also include maritime terrorism in this domain.
- b. **Marine environment:** Environmental security in the seas comes under second domain. It primarily deals with marine resources' protection from pollution coupled with illegal fishing. Additionally, issues related to biodiversity and climate change also fall under second domain.
- c. **Economic development:** Economic security, blue economy, utilization and management of marine resources in sustainable manner, and global trade's protection are the areas of third domain
- d. **Human Security:** Individuals facing insecurities emanating from maritime environment, such as piracy, human trafficking, marine pollution, and illegal fishing are part of fourth domain.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.1 Geo-Politics-Maritime Security Nexus

The first domain of Maritime Security Complex chiefly pertains to the geopolitical dimension of Maritime Security. There are various theoretical approaches which describe geopolitics. As per Rudolph Kjellen, geopolitics equalizes state with a geographical organism; while as per Karl Huashofer, geopolitics means doctrine with respect to spatial determinism of processes in political domain, grounded on geography, notably political geography. Halford Mackinder is known for giving importance to geopolitics by introducing the concept of 'Pivot' in which he regarded Central Eurasia as Heartland of World, key region to dominate world politics. Contrarily, Alfred Thayer Mahan in his landmark work 'Influence of Sea Power upon History' changed the continental outlook in geopolitical frameworks and regarded sea as the most indispensable space in terms of geopolitics.<sup>2</sup>

Threats related to maritime security are discussed in geopolitical discourses to condone security's projection beyond external borders of state. Maritime security has a geopolitical dimension which implies how geography informs as well as constrains maritime regulations, operations, measures, policies, and consideration of geography while formulating maritime security strategies.<sup>3</sup> With respect to Indian Ocean, the various geopolitical developments such as rivalry between US and China, China and India, Belt and Road Initiative of China, naval modernization of China and India, convergence of interests of US and India as well as nuclearization of Indian Ocean horrendously affect the maritime security of Indian Ocean Region.

<sup>1</sup> Bueger, C., Edmunds, T., & Ryan, B. J. (2019). Maritime security: The uncharted politics of the global sea. *International Affairs*, 95(5), 971-978. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz145>

<sup>2</sup> Fernando, H. G. (2019). Geo-Politics and its impact on Maritime Security: Special Reference to Indian Ocean. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(4). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/35194357>

<sup>3</sup> Germond, B. (2015). The geopolitical dimension of maritime security. *Marine Policy*, 54 137-142, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.12.013>

Framework of Securitization espoused by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever is also very instrumental for the deconstruction of security threats in the Indian Ocean Region. Securitization theory emphasizes social construction of something as a threat. It underlies existential threat to referent object which in turn necessitates exceptional countermeasures and justifies rule-breaking behavior in this regard. The employment of this framework to apprehend maritime security brings about two possible tracks of exploration with reference to Indian Ocean Region. The first track signifies the 'Securitization' of maritime domain as a potent issue. It implies the understanding of seas and oceans as a theatre of threats and insecurity in contemporary era. A broad picture conjoins insecurity with 'maritime domain' and protection of referent object. Second track implies the Securitization of various issues in order to make them maritime security agenda. It requires issues' meticulous reconstruction to prioritize the protection of reference object threatened by maritime security threats.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Significance of Indian Ocean

Being the world's third-largest Ocean with an estimated 73, 556,00 square kilometers area bordering Australia, Africa, and Asia, Indian Ocean holds colossal significance. It also links the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean that in turn is marked by the global economic and political powerhouses. Indian Ocean is also home to world's 35% natural gas, 65% oil resources, raw material, and other important resources essential for manufacturing commodities.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it holds immense importance due to oil transportation through key chokepoints. About 80% of maritime oil trade of the world passes through the Indian Ocean.<sup>6</sup>

At the heart of maritime geopolitical competition in IOR is capability of states to keep up military presence adjacent to the strategically significant water's narrow stretches called chokepoints crucial for linking maritime trade routes. This capability enables the states to either disrupt or protect the key maritime channels termed as SLOC-Sea Lines of Communication. In naval terms, it is known as SLOC interdiction and SLOC protection during war and peace respectively. Out of total seven significant chokepoints indispensable for transportation of oil, three are present in Indian Ocean as enumerated below:

**Strait of Malacca:** Links Western Pacific and South East Asia to IOR, and is present between Malaysia, Singapore and Sumatra Island in Indonesia

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<sup>4</sup> Beuger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? *Marine Policy*, 53,159-164. <http://bueger.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Bueger-2014-What-is-Maritime-Security-final.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (2020, December 31). Maritime Security: Challenges and Prospects for Pakistan," <https://cpakgulf.org/2017/02/21/maritime-security-challenges-and-prospects-for-pakistan/>.

<sup>6</sup> Mercator Institute for China Studies. (2019, October 11). China's Expansion in the Indian Ocean Calls for European Engagement. <https://merics.org/en/analysis/chinas-expansion-indian-ocean-calls-european-engagement>.

**Strait of Hormuz:** Links Persian or Arabian Gulf to wider Indian Ocean, and is the only sea route for this linkage

**Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb:** Links Red Sea to Gulf of Aden in Indian Ocean. Moreover, Mozambique Channel between Mozambique and Madagascar is also significant for goods trade traversing Cape of Good Hope and destined for Middle East as well as Asia.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. **Geo-Political Trends Affecting Maritime Security in Indian Ocean**

##### 4.1 **China's rise in IOR**

China has forged staunch partnerships with the littoral and island countries, potent for its rise in IOR. The 21<sup>st</sup> century maritime Silk Road under China's BRI-Belt and Road Initiative is acting as valuable platform for economic and military collaboration. In conjunction with broad-spectrum maritime ambitions, the naval presence of China in Indian Ocean-IO is generating serious concerns for United States, India, Japan, Australia, and other states.

Two ocean approach of China central to its maritime security commensurate with its forward edge defence strategy, which foresees China developing a strategic zone of arc-shaped that encompasses northern Indian Ocean and western Pacific Ocean. The western perception regarding China's development of strategically significant ports and bases in IO's bordering states also termed as 'String of Pearls' strategy is illustrative of ever-enhancing geopolitical clout of China that can also serve the purpose of pulverizing its strategic containment by India and US. Andaman and Nicobar Command of India acts as an 'Iron Curtain' for China interdicting its entry into the region; therefore, an increase in sea power and development of strategic fulcrums in Indian Ocean is a viable way for China to guard its interests as per Chinese policymakers. Naval bases can be instrumental for provision of support as well as supply points serving the strategic aims in order to increase the maritime power of China. For example, Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Dar es Salam port in Tanzania, Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, Doraleh Multipurpose port in Djibouti, port in Seychelles, and Ream base in Cambodia signify the gradual penetration of China in region to diminish the American and Indian maritime hegemony.<sup>8</sup>

Among all these ports, the Gwadar port remains paramount in serving the geo-strategic interests of China, as the port would allow China to secure energy import supplies by circumventing Malacca Strait, thereupon overcoming its

<sup>7</sup> Baruah, D. (March 3, 2021). What Is Happening in the Indian Ocean?. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/03/what-is-happening-in-indian-ocean-pub-83948>.

<sup>8</sup> Colley, C. (April 2, 2021). A Future Chinese Indian Ocean Fleet?. *War on the Rocks*. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/a-future-chinese-indian-ocean-fleet/>.

'Malacca Dilemma'<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, energy resources shipment from strategically significant chokepoint Persian Gulf towards China through Gwadar port would substantially decrease distance from 30 days to 2 days. Given the geo-strategic location of Pakistan, it has furthered the augmenting interests of China in region and resultantly acquired military, economic, and technological assistance from China. Consequently, India has corresponded by forging alliances with like-minded regional and extra-regional states, developing sea-based nuclear deterrent, and enhancing its naval power. The lack of trust, coordination and institutional mechanism between China and Pakistan on one side and India on the other would undoubtedly expand the sea rivalry, thus setting off naval arms race.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.2 Indo-US strategic convergence: The China factor

US maintains its presence in Indian Ocean to protect its key strategic interests such as defence of chokepoints, sanitizing confliction with great powers, and safeguarding maritime trade highways. Given the relentless increase in China's presence, US has been pursuing a policy of containment to curb rise of China. For that purpose, India seems to be a credible partner due to its anti-China stance and placement in the IOR.

In 2007, India and US became partners in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue-Quad and their partnership gained momentum during Obama Administration when 2012 'Asia rebalancing' or 'Pivot to Asia' policy designated India status of 'net security provider' and 'regional anchor' Furthermore, Trump administration more explicit 'FOIO-Free and Open Indo-Pacific Policy' in 2017 signified a paradigm shift in strategic thinking from Asia-Pacific to broader Indo-Pacific. The Pivot to Asia primarily focused on United States coupled with its allies in East Asia; however, the Indo-Pacific strategy signifies the broader strategic interests. US considers that the rule-based liberal order and its hegemony are constrained by the military and economic actions of China in region. National Security Strategy of US and National Defense Strategy that came in 2017 and 2018 respectively laid a considerable focus on Indo-Pacific Region in order to contain China. This led to FOIP which primarily employs two ways to achieve US interests: first is multilateral engagements and second is bilateral partnerships across diplomatic, economic, political, and military domains.<sup>11</sup> The Indo-US strategic partnership in maritime domain signifies the utilization of second tool.

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<sup>9</sup> Grare, F. (July 31, 2018). Along the Road: Gwadar and China's Power Projection. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/07/31/along-road-gwadar-and-china-s-power-projection-pub-77217>.

<sup>10</sup> Ali, G. (2019). China–Pakistan Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean. *Issues & Studies*, 55(3). doi:10.1142/s1013251119400058.

<sup>11</sup> Munir, M. and Safdar, A. (2021). The US Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy: Implications for China (2017-present). *Polaris – Journal of Maritime Research*, 3(1). doi:10.53963/pjmr.2021.011.3.

Indo-US confluence of maritime interests is marked by the three rationales: the first rationale is shared vision that came after the '2015 Joint Strategic Vision for Asia-Pacific and IOR', regarding a unitary strategic continuum to Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific; the second rationale entails the maritime security cooperation between US and India with dualistic approach of countering the threat of China and enhancing the multilateral alignment in region. Third rationale is about the cooperation against the non-traditional security threats through boosting Maritime Domain Awareness.<sup>12</sup>

In 2016, both states signed LEMOA-Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement that allows India and US to use designated facilities for refuelling, supplies, services, and spare parts. Consequently, it provides India access to US bases and allows US to use the bases of India.<sup>13</sup> India has acquired the Strategic Trade Authorization Status (STA-1) from US which grants it a license for co-development and procurement of advanced military technology, therefore amplifying the military prowess of India. Concurrently, US and India have signed COMCASA-Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, a military-information sharing agreement, enabling the latter to access the surveillance and communication technologies of former. Moreover, it facilitates interoperability between both strategic partners to keep a check on mutual enemy China.<sup>14</sup> Another key agreement is BECA-Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement inked in 2020 will enable India and US to share critical information, classified satellite data, and sophisticated military technology; most importantly, this pact would provide India access to crucial geospatial information of US that in turn will buttress the precision of armed drones and missiles. Aid in targeting and navigation will also be provided through access to aeronautical and topographical data.<sup>15</sup>

The maritime partnership will assuredly increase the military capability of India vis-à-vis China as well as Pakistan, thus affecting the regional stability and in turn security. These defence pacts stipulate tensions with regard to naval dynamics and fifth-generation warfare. Moreover, such agreements may provoke Pakistan and China to change their naval fleet operational posture to respond to perceived threats.

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<sup>12</sup> Mishra, V. (2018). India-US maritime cooperation: Crossing the rubicon. *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 14(2), 15-25. doi:10.1080/09733159.2018.1562453

<sup>13</sup> Iqbal, A. (August 30, 2016). US-India Defence Pact to Impact Pakistan, China. *DAWN*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1280873>.

<sup>14</sup> Rehman, H. (June 23, 2019). US-INDIA Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) and COMCASA: A Strategic Assessment. *Strafasia*. <https://strafasia.com/us-india-strategic-trade-authorization-sta-1-and-comcasa-a-strategic-assessment/>.

<sup>15</sup> Hali, S.M. (November 2, 2020). BECA — a New Indo-US Bilateral Agreement. *The News*. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/737917-beca-a-new-indo-us-bilateral-agreement>.

### 4.3 Burgeoning maritime capabilities of India

India is incessantly enhancing its naval power either through indigenous capacity building or by acquiring cutting-edge naval assets from its allies. Presently, the naval force level of Indian Navy entails 150 ships coupled with submarines as well as aircrafts. A conceptual shift has been observed with respect to 'force-levels' perspective planning in Indian Navy, from 'platforms number' to enhanced 'capabilities under the MCPP-Maritime Capability Perspective Plan of Indian Navy. The projects in progress to increase naval capability include construction of submarines, 50 ships, and anti-submarine corvettes.<sup>16</sup>

Indian Navy is also pursuing 'Project 17A Programme' in order to buttress its combat capabilities. Being approved in 2015 with total cost of \$7 billion, the project entails the construction of seven Nilgiri-Class Stealth frigates also termed as the Project 17-A frigates. It will improve roll stabilization and stealth capabilities. Advanced sensors and indigenous weapons fitted on guided-missile frigates will lead to improved ship manoeuvrability, sea keeping and survivability.<sup>17</sup> Besides, 'Project 1135.6 'frigates' also augments the frigate program of India. As per the contract with Russia, signed in 2018, India will acquire two missile-guided frigates from Russia by 2024 and other two will be constructed at India's Goa shipyard. These frigates are expected to be armed with India's lethal supersonic cruise missile system known as 'Brahmos'.<sup>18</sup> With the 500km range, 2.8 Mach speed and ability to carry nuclear and conventional warheads, the Brahmos can be launched from various mediums such as sea, land, and air. In April 2022, Indian Navy alongside Tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command carried out successful test fires of Brahmos missile's anti-ship version. This cruise missile has pinpoint accuracy, works in all weather conditions and day as well as night; and works on principle of 'Fire and forgets' implying that after launch, missile requires no guidance.<sup>19</sup> Brahmos is regarded as one of the fastest and best precision-guided weapons in the world which has substantially amplified the credible deterrence of India. The missile lethality can be determined by the fact that even air-defence systems remain incapable of intercepting it, thus ensuring the offensive capabilities of the possessor state.

Another significant development is India's acquisition of Boeing 81-MPA (Maritime Patrol Aircraft), which India has dedicated to INAS-316 (Indian Navy Aviation Squadron) which is located at the heart of western seaboard of India.

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Defence, Government of India. (2024). FAQ | Department Of Defence. <https://www.mod.gov.in/dod/faq>.

<sup>17</sup> Naval Technology. (December 17, 2020). Nilgiri-Class (Project 17A) Frigates. <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/nilgiri-class-project-17a-frigates/>.

<sup>18</sup> Singh, A. J. (December 3, 2021). The Indian Navy- A Capability Based Blue Water force. *The Financial Express*. <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/the-indian-navy-a-capability-based-water-force/2381336/>.

<sup>19</sup> Drishtias (April 29, 2022). Anti-ship version of Brahmos Missile. <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/anti-ship-version-of-brahmos-missile>

Previously, P-81 fleet was dedicated to INAS 312, strategically present in India's southeastern seaboard with an eye on Gulf of Mannar and Bay of Bengal. With the acquisition of 6 more Poseidon (four pending and 12 inservice) in coming years, regional maritime information dominance of India will become unparalleled. Additionally, the agreements related to replenishment and logistic facilities in Oman's Duqm Port and Japan's Djibouti port in Ambouli have been renewed and signed respectively. Furthermore, the lacuna in Southwestern Indian Ocean will be filled after the completion of Agalega base in Mauritius. All these developments indicate that 'Reverse String of Pearls' strategy of India is underway in response to China's String of Pearls strategy in Indian Ocean.<sup>20</sup>

The maritime strategy of India based on procurement of behemoth naval capabilities, military technology from anti-China Quad alliance, nuclear triad, the perception of regional net security provider, pursuit of becoming great power and power projection in Asia-Pacific region coupled with the postural turn of India towards counter-force will have horrendous ramifications for regional stability, thus undermining the maritime security.

#### 4.4 Indian Ocean's Nuclearization

Although Indian Ocean is considered as a nuclear free zone, states' presence with sea-based nukes has generated grave maritime security concern. Divergence of interests and miscommunication among key regional players ie, Pakistan, India, and China has culminated into a security threat given the accruing nuclear activities. IOR is currently marked by a baleful wave of nuclearization currently being carried out by India. Amidst the deteriorating ties between China and India, the latter is manifesting seriousness about enriching its naval capabilities, notably through launch of third SSBN (nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine) in 2022. In 2009, INS Arihant or the first SSBN was launched and later commissioned in 2016, while the INS Arighat or second SSBN is slated to be commissioned in near future.<sup>21</sup> Under the 2015 maritime doctrine of India, it aspires to build nearly 5 SSBNs alongside 6 SSNs-Nuclear powered attack submarines armed with K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missiles, providing India colossal leverage over crisis stability and deterrence in IOR. The aim of building a staunch nuclear submarine force would require enhanced warhead production for SLCM-submarine launched cruise missiles and SLBM-submarine-launched ballistic missiles.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Khalid, Z. (June 13, 2022). Indian Navy's P-8Is Dominate the Indian Ocean. Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/indian-navys-p-8is-dominate-the-indian-ocean/>.

<sup>21</sup> Rajagopalan, R. P. (January 7, 2022). India launches third Arihant Submarine. Observer Research Foundation <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-launches-3rd-arihant-submarine/>

<sup>22</sup> Khan, S.A, (June 2, 2019). Nuclearization of Indian Ocean: Ramifications on Regional Security. Strafasia. <https://strafasia.com/nuclearization-of-indian-ocean-ramifications-on-regional-security/>.

The first SSBN has the ability to carry 12 SLBM named as K-15 Sagarika in India with range of 750km. India has also constructed long-range SLBM named as K-4 with range of 3500km for its forthcoming SSBN fleet and it intends to develop SLBM with even longer ranges such as K-5 and K-6. Furthermore, it has been producing Nirbhay cruise missile's sea-variant with 1000km range. The intention of India with respect to deployment of nuclear missiles afloat surface vessels is evident from the installation of Dhanush missiles.<sup>23</sup>

Burgeoning nuclearization of IOR signifies that growing sea-based nuclear arsenal of India transcends its defence capabilities against the arch rival Pakistan and thus can have detrimental regional as well as global implications. It will not merely initiate the regional arms race, but will catalyze the fresh wave of Indian Ocean's nuclearization with colossal risk to the already fragile strategic stability and deterrence in region. It has generated insecurity among various actors such as China and Pakistan, compelling them to enhance their capabilities. A test has also been conducted by Pakistan to mount its nuclear weapon on diesel-submarine for ensuring deterrence. Naval modernization drive of China is also underway to counter India's growing prowess. Resultantly, the regional balance of power would be disturbed, forcing various states to pursue bellicose force posture and arms race in order to shield their strategic interests.

#### 4.5 Strategic alliances: Quad and AUKUS

The first iteration of the Quad termed as Quad 1.0 dates back to 2007, but it failed given the reluctance of member states, particularly due to China's response. The revival of Quad under the term Quad 2.0 occurred in 2017 when United States, India, Australia, and Japan attended the ASEAN summits in Philippines. The statements given by the leaders signify the goal of alliance: rule-based order, free & Open Indo-Pacific, maritime security and observance of international law, and freedom of navigation as well as flight. The wording of statements obliquely pointed out militarization of Ocean and power projection by China.<sup>24</sup> The 2021 Quad Virtual Summit also gauged the traditional security threats coupled with non-traditional security threats; however Indo-Pacific's security remained a priority area. Quad has always been portrayed as an informal alliance with the key aim of freedom of navigation; however, amidst the surging China-US rivalry, the alteration of Quad into a military coalition cannot be precluded.<sup>25</sup> In May 2022, the Quad states also unveiled the IPDMA-Indo-Pacific Initiative for Maritime Domain Awareness that will

<sup>23</sup> Bhatti, B. A. (November 10, 2020). India's Nuclearization of the Indian Ocean and Strategic Stability in South Asia. Maritime Study Forum. <https://www.maritimestudyforum.org/indias-nuclearization-of-the-indian-ocean-and-strategic-stability-in-south-asia/#:~:text=India%20is%20fast%20developing%20the,navigated%20through%20Indian%20Ocean%20waters.>

<sup>24</sup> Haider, E. (2022). Navigating the Stormy Indo-Pacific-How Quad, AUKUS, US-China competition shape Pakistan's choices. *TABADLAB*. <https://tabadlab.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-03-07-Tabadlab-Working-Paper-11-Navigating-The-Stormy.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Bashir, R. (December 22, 2021). Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Challenges and Prospects for Pakistan. *Strafasia*. <https://strafasia.com/quadrilateral-security-dialoguechallenges-and-prospects-for-pakistan/>.

allow the Quad's partners in Indian Ocean, Pacific Islands, and Southeast Asia to acquire satellite data in case of illegal activity on ships and to keep a check on 'dark shipping' and territorial incursions. It will fulfil the strategic purpose of Quad states as they aim to utilize satellites in order to track movements of submarines and ships that in turn can cause region's militarization.<sup>26</sup>

Australia, UK, and US tripartite act-AUKUS is another key alliance to revamp the construct of Indian Ocean as well as Pacific Ocean. Being meticulously designed, AUKUS aims at anchoring Australia and Britain and synchronizing them with strategic pursuits of US. For Australia, it implies acquisition of nuclear submarines for its adjustment in region which is being challenged by footprint of China. Moreover, it will enhance Australia's force projection, aerospace and cyber capabilities, thus buttressing deterrence against key threats. For UK, it will complement the 'Global Britain' foreign policy vision thus rendering itself a maritime security partner in region. For United States, this deal signifies the re-shaping and re-establishment of prowess coupled with shift towards 'rescuing United States foreign policy' outlook of Biden administration. AUKUS will mushroom collaboration in multiple domains such as defence technologies, quantum and intelligence technology coupled with procurement of cruise missiles.<sup>27</sup> This pact is not devoid of deleterious ramifications for maritime security. Strategic nuclear competition has been improved with china given the US's pledge to mutually develop nuclear-propelled submarines with Australia. It accentuates arms race and increases the probability of conflict, thus eroding stability and peace in region.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Repercussions for Pakistan

### 5.1 Economic implications

The geopolitical contestation in IOR threatening its maritime security will pose detrimental economic challenges to Pakistan, given the massive economic activity of the country linked to sea. 97% of Pakistan's trade is sea-borne making regional maritime security indispensable for trade. Moreover, with the operationalization of CPEC, the economic stakes of Pakistan will become manifold. Gwadar port, considered as Maritime Jewel of CPEC lies at cusp of Strait of Hormuz with the potential to link Middle East, South Asia, and Central, which can make Pakistan a hub of regional transshipment. Regional connectivity will amass hydrocarbons, gas and oil resources, and minerals of CARs-Central Asian States

<sup>26</sup> Buddhavarapu, R. (June 8, 2022). The Quad's New Maritime Initiative Has Potential to Spur Militarization of the Indo-Pacific. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/09/quads-maritime-initiative-could-spur-militarization-of-indo-pacific.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Randev, R. (2022). Reshaping the Indo-Pacific construct through strategic geopolitical convergences: AUKUS as a harbinger of multipolar hegemony in region. *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2904531/reshaping-the-indo-pacific-construct-through-strategic-geopolitical-convergence/>

<sup>28</sup> Ali, S. (September 29, 2021). Deleterious Effect of AUKUS on the Asia-Pacific," Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/deleterious-effect-of-aukus-on-the-asia-pacific/>.

for purpose of trade. Additionally, the port will attract the FDI-Foreign Direct Investment in Pakistan. As per the estimates, CPEC will bring about US\$70 billion transit revenue on annual basis, fundamentally through Gwadar port; and the SEZ-Special Economic Zones in port will provide gargantuan employment opportunities. Resultantly, enhanced commerce and trade activities through the port would usher Pakistan's economic prosperity.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it will increase the strategic leverage of country by helping it monitor the vital SLOCs emanating from Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 21 million barrels of oil transit every day.<sup>30</sup> However, the Sino-Indian rivalry, the Sino-US competition, Indo-Pakistan rivalry coupled with various anti-China alliances in region will pose enormous challenges for Gwadar to become a success story.

It is important to highlight two key aspects to decipher the strong aversion of India and US towards the CPEC: firstly, it will stanchion China's influence in region, which is a major concern for both India and US; secondly, it will make Pakistan a key geo-economic actor, thus acting as a thorn in paw of India and challenging its regional hegemonic aspirations. The plans of India to disrupt the CPEC projects can be ascertained through RAW's special office created for this purpose and \$300 million allocation to it.<sup>31</sup> The incessant support to India by the US would strengthen its hegemonic position which India can use to interdict the Sea Lines of Communications-SLOC through misuse of US-backed international regimes such as PSI-Proliferation Security Initiative and CSI-Container Security Initiative. Maritime trade of Pakistan would be hindered in case of blockade by India or any other influential power. Moreover, the interdiction of sea routes would aggravate the relation between regional and extra-regional actors, causing military and economic instability in IO.<sup>32</sup>

## 5.2 Security Implications

US's maritime strategic partnership with India with leaping defence cooperation, such as LEMOA and COMCASA to strengthen India's military for countering China has been a source of security concerns for Pakistan. It has inevitably made Pakistan part of rival faction due to mounting tensions with US in general and India in particular. These development are causing security implications for Pakistan such as security dilemma, regional arms race. It is also intensifying rivalry between India and Pakistan with respect to Kashmir issue by

<sup>29</sup> Rafique, M. (November 30, 2020). Economic & Strategic Significance of Gwadar Port. *Daily Times*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/695547/economic-strategic-significance-of-gwadar-port/>.

<sup>30</sup> Alexandra Ma (January 13, 2020). How the Strait of Hormuz, a Narrow Stretch of Water Where Ships Carry \$1.2 Billion of Oil Every Day, is at the Heart of Spiraling Tensions with Iran. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/strait-of-hormuz-explainer-oil-us-iran-tensions-2019-7#:~:text=The%20narrow%20strait%20is%20the,through%20the%20strait%20every%20day.>

<sup>31</sup> Rashid, A. (2017). Pak-China Partnership: US and India's Response. *Margalla Papers* 21(1).

<sup>32</sup> Tahir, A. and Ejaz, K. (2020). India-United States strategic partnership in Indian Ocean region and its implications for Pakistan. *Journal of Indian studies* 6 (1), 7-30, <https://www.prdb.pk/article/india-united-states-strategic-partnership-in-indian-ocean-re-3007>

strengthening India's position vis-à-vis Pakistan.<sup>33</sup> The strategic convergence of US and India has led former to declare latter as 'Net Security Provider' of region. It will provide India a new stimulus to embrace a belligerent posture towards neighbouring states, notably Pakistan. The enmity between India and Pakistan since independence indicates that the maritime strategy of India will be directed towards Pakistan. Moreover, India can now import strategic weapons from United States because of Strategic Trade Authorization status which India can use for countering China and undermining security of Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> Some scholars view maritime engagement of India and US in IO as a mean to chip away the significance of CPEC. The expansion of Indo-US's naval muscle to reach Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf would also daunt energy flow from Middle East to China, which can undermine the Gwadar port's significance.

As far as the sea-based nuclear capabilities of India are concerned, the second-strike capability coupled with presumed shield from anti-ballistic missiles would allow India to adopt a more aggressive stance towards Pakistan, China, and other regional actors, compelling them to respond accordingly. The operationalization of India's naval nuclear force will undermine the delicate regional strategic balance. Nuclear triad of India has impelled Pakistan to pursue nuclear triad; moreover, it will perpetuate nuclear and conventional arms race. Underwater deterrent also brings command and control issues, ergo, enhancing the likelihood of unauthorized and accidental launch of nukes that in turn would destabilize the deterrence. Inadvertent use, misperception, and dangers of escalation are key probabilities associated with sea-based nuclear weapons, thereby, kicking off Pandora's box of dangers and issues which may not be tackled.<sup>35</sup>

Along with BECA, COMCASA, LEMOA, the proposed US-India Strategic Tech Alliance (based on aligning the Indo-Pacific strategy with respect to emerging technologies for security and defence goals around US partnership with India) will amplify collection and analysis of data. Furthermore, it will enhance access of India to satellite imagery, hypersonic missile capabilities, classified communication's advanced encryption, and target acquisition capability. It will further accentuate the ISR-Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance competence of India vis-à-vis Pakistan and China in Indo-Pacific and South Asia.<sup>36</sup> With the enhancement of military technological capabilities of India through COMCASA and other Initiatives, military and technology asymmetry between Pakistan and India will also increase, increasing vulnerability and threat perception of Pakistan that may cause failure of

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<sup>33</sup> Younas, K. (2020). Strategic Convergence and Competition in the Indo-Pacific Region: Policy Options for Pakistan. *Margalla Papers* 24(1), 81-96, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.24.1.39>

<sup>34</sup> Ahmed, A. (August 16, 2018). India STA-1 Status and Implications for Pakistan. *Daily Times*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/283962/india-sta-1-status-and-implications-for-pakistan/>.

<sup>35</sup> Jalil, G. Y. (2018). India's Development of Sea-based Nuclear Capabilities. *Strategic Studies* 38 (1), 34-47. [https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/3-SS\\_Ghazala\\_Yasmeen\\_Jalil\\_No-1\\_2018.pdf](https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/3-SS_Ghazala_Yasmeen_Jalil_No-1_2018.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, (January 12, 2022). *US-India Strategic Tech Alliance: Options for Pakistan*. [https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Report\\_IH\\_Jan\\_12\\_2021.pdf](https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Report_IH_Jan_12_2021.pdf)

deterrence.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, with India's acquisition of P-81, the defensive manoeuvres of Pakistan will remain vulnerable, causing substantial force disparity and in turn combat disadvantage.<sup>38</sup>

### 5.3 Political Implications

The geopolitics in Indian Ocean has grave political repercussions for Pakistan. Given the worsening of US-China rivalry, it will become a mammoth challenge for Pakistan to plump for either side. Due to economic and strategic ties with China, Pakistan cannot abandon its all-weather friend; simultaneously, Pakistan doesn't have the capacity to fully oppose the United States due to various structural challenges such as FATF, IMF alongside other monetary mechanisms.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, India's strategic partnership with US in maritime domain would provide former a huge advantage in terms of diplomatic relations with latter which can enhance India's political, economic, as well as strategic clout in the region.

## 6. Policy Options for Pakistan

There is no comprehensive maritime policy of Pakistan despite its huge stakes and dependence on Indian Ocean. Eroding maritime security chiefly due to geopolitical dynamics necessitates the formulation of a holistic-cum-pragmatic maritime policy including both soft and hard power elements.

### 6.1 Elements of Soft power in maritime strategy

**Naval diplomacy and maritime multi-alignment policy:** Pakistan can effectively employ the 'Naval diplomacy' in order to cultivate friendly relations with littoral states in IOR. This would lead to substantial decrease in trust deficit that will simultaneously enhance its strategic clout vis-à-vis India.

**Harnessing the Blue Potential:** The blue economy sector of Pakistan is nearly worth \$100 billion, but currently it only provides \$450 million revenue per annum. The blue economic potential of Pakistan needs to be fully utilized.<sup>40</sup> Offshore resources, seafood industry, and marine tourism need to be tapped which can contribute to sustainable development. Pakistan can forge 'Blue Partnership' with China under the CPEC to fully benefit from its blue economy sector.

<sup>37</sup> Rehman, H. (June 23, 2019). US-INDIA Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) and COMCASA: A Strategic Assessment. *Strafasia*. <https://strafasia.com/us-india-strategic-trade-authorization-sta-1-and-comcasa-a-strategic-assessment/>.

<sup>38</sup> Khalid, Z. (June 13, 2022). Indian Navy's P-81s Dominate the Indian Ocean. *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/indian-navys-p-81s-dominate-the-indian-ocean/>.

<sup>39</sup> Salamat, S. (February 28, 2022). Major Powers' Competition in Indian Ocean. *Times*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/892846/major-powers-competition-in-indian-ocean/>.

<sup>40</sup> Zafar, A. (June 9, 2022). The Untapped Blue Economy of Pakistan. *Paradigm Shift*. <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/blue-economy-of-pakistan/>

**CPEC and Gwadar port expeditious operationalization:** The economic prosperity of Pakistan is certainly dependent on the complete operationalization of CPEC as well as Gwadar port. This will not merely lead to economic stability of Pakistan but will enhance its geopolitical and strategic clout in region and beyond, due to location of Gwadar at the junction of various regions.

## 6.2 Elements of Hard Power in maritime strategy

### **Sea-based deterrence capabilities and strategic partnership with China**

The India's acquisition of sea-based nuclear weapons is the most lethal challenge for Pakistan, as it gives India second-strike capability. Pakistan should also acquire this capability through partnership with China. Additionally, China is developing Unmanned Underwater Vehicles-UUV which is an emerging technology to detect and autonomously attack submarines. Pakistan can collaborate with China in this regard which will provide Pakistan a technical edge to curb India's rising submarine capabilities, particularly in nuclear domain.

**Buttressing defence partnership with Turkey** Turkey's active involvement in Indian Ocean has provided Pakistan an opportunity to boost the maritime defence and security cooperation with it. Pakistan already has signed a pact with Turkey to procure the corvettes. This partnership can be extended to enhance Pakistan's defence capabilities

**Maritime Domain Awareness** Maritime activity has ramifications for economy, security, environment, and safety of country; and this activity's effective awareness is termed as MDA-Maritime Domain Awareness.<sup>41</sup> It is indispensable for Pakistan to enhance its MDA in order to counter traditional as well as non-traditional security challenges in IOR. Pakistan can forge relations with various littoral states, particularly those that are part of BRI, and shall also move towards joint maritime endeavours and ventures. Regional information collection structures, MDA training centres, and most importantly, the organization structure crucial for information coordination are important in this regard. Development of MDA regional centres would lead to improvement in development and research; moreover, it would improve threat response and enhance joint operations. Joint Maritime Information and Coordination centre in Pakistan can be replicated as a model for developing a regional MDA centre.

**Improvement of naval defence-cum-technological capabilities** Pakistan should make its defence formidable and upgrade its naval defence weapons and acquire more to ensure its defence. High end-Maritime Patrol Air Crafts shall be acquired in order to counter the technological superiority of India enhanced by P-81.

<sup>41</sup> Pole Star. (June 19, 2022). An Introduction to Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). <https://www.polestarglobal.com/resources/an-introduction-to-maritime-domain-awareness-mda>.

## **7. Conclusion**

Indian Ocean has become a pivotal hotspot in the geopolitical configurations of regional and extra-regional powers. Acting as a lifeline of global economy and trade due to presence of strategically significant chokepoints, Indian Ocean has become a hub of geopolitics. The complex-inter play of power characterized by strategic convergence, divergence, and containment involving key actors China, US, India, Australia, Japan, UK etc. signifies the power projection either through enhancing military capabilities and presence in region or by forging multinational alliances such as Quad as well as AUKUS. These geopolitical trends have weaponized, nuclearized and securitized the region with detrimental ramifications for maritime security. Geopolitical rivalry is augmenting nuclear and conventional maritime arms race, causing military asymmetry, enhancing probability of conflict, and eroding strategic stability, thus posing lethal threats to maritime security. The situation is further compounded by other challenges such as maritime terrorism, illicit trafficking, environmental degradation etc.

These developments have disastrous ramifications for Pakistan due to its strategic locations and potent interests in the IOR. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has made Pakistan a key factor in the region's geopolitics which in turn has brought about political, economic, and security implications. Resultantly, Pakistan requires a holistic maritime strategy entailing soft and hard power elements in order to deal with emanating challenges