

# **Indian Initiatives for Maritime Dominance: Pakistan's Options and Response**

Muhammad Abbas Hassan



# **THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN**

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**Muhammad Abbas Hassan \***

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## **Abstract**

*Air, Land and Sea power is a prerequisite for becoming a regional power. Maritime dominance allows a country to extend its muscles beyond the geographical borders. India is currently in pursuit of becoming a regional power and is trying to achieve maritime dominance. Unfortunately, its actions have not only threatened regional peace and stability, but have also brought international actors on the South Asian security canvas. Pakistan, an important littoral state, is directly affected by the Indian actions. To maintain regional balance and for its own national security, Pakistan has to not only explore options, but also enhance its maritime capabilities. This paper attempts to make an in-depth analysis of the complex situation in the Indian Ocean, and gives suggestions about the challenges and opportunities for Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Indian Ocean, India, Pakistan, China, Strategic Importance, Maritime Silk Road

## **Research Questions**

- Question 1: What are the Indian initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region?
- Question 2: What implications do they have for Pakistan?
- Question 3: How can Pakistan avoid getting compromised in this situation?

## **Introduction**

It is a scientifically proven fact that only 30 per cent of earth is land mass and the rest consists of water. Similarly, only 3 per cent of Earth's water is on land and the rest is in oceans.<sup>1</sup> This highlights the importance of oceans in our life. Indian Ocean, the third largest ocean, is known for its immense resources and the amount of trade

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<sup>1</sup> Area Of Earth's Land Surface – “*The Physics Fact book*” <https://hypertextbook.com/facts/2001/DanielChen.shtml>. Accessed on September 8, 2018

that is carried out in this huge body of water. Spanning from the eastern rim of Africa to the eastern rim of Asia, Indian Ocean connects three continents with its waters. Indian Ocean also has some of the busiest Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCS) that carry majority of the world energy trade.<sup>2</sup> Due to its geography, Indian Ocean is one of the most important oceans, both in the economic and strategic dimension.

It is no surprise therefore, that the ocean has attracted the attention of world powers. Controlling the Indian Ocean ensures command over the world energy trade. However, due to the size and magnitude of the ocean, no single power can accomplish this feat. Also, the rest of the world would not like the ocean to be under one power. As a result, a number of countries are taking their fair share of the pie. India, as the largest country in the Indian Ocean, has recently started to explore its potential and power beyond its geographical boundaries.

The Indian Navy now operates across the Indian Ocean with strategic bases and listening posts. These steps for maritime dominance reflect the Indian desires of becoming a regional power. As the second populous country with the world's fourth largest military and seventh largest economy, India is a step away from attaining the regional power status. At the same time, the United States of America has given a clear indication that they would also like India to play a vital role in their Asia-Pacific strategy.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Pakistan, an important littoral state of the Indian Ocean, has not taken enough actions that can place it as a player of high seas. This has given India an open space, and an upper hand over Pakistan.

The current security dynamics of Indian Ocean today involve multiple players. The China-India rivalry is pre-dominantly shaping

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<sup>2</sup> Kamlesh K. Agnihotri, "Protection of Trade and Energy Supplies in the Indian Ocean Region." *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 8, no. 1 (2012): 13-30.

<sup>3</sup> The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy, "Department of Defence", [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF). Accessed on September 11, 2018



the future scenarios, and willingly or unwillingly, Pakistan is becoming a part of it. This paper attempts to examine initiatives of India for dominance in the Indian Ocean. In the latter part, an attempt is made to analyze the implications and options for Pakistan.

## **Indian Initiatives for Maritime Dominance**

India, in recent past, has developed its naval capabilities at an unprecedented rate. This is largely due to its political stability and a powerful economy that keeps on expanding. Currently, India is the seventh largest economy in the world, and this allows it to seek a regional role.<sup>4</sup> Being the largest littoral of Indian Ocean with 13 major ports and 200 non-major sea ports and a total coastline of over 7500 kilometres, India is trying to establish itself as a dominating maritime power.<sup>5</sup> It is also pertinent to mention here that during the fiscal year 2016-2017, the major ports of India posted a record profit of 5000 crore Indian Rupees.<sup>6</sup> This amount roughly equals to \$ 700 million.

To follow its desire for maritime dominance, India has slowly started to invest in international locations to make its presence felt. An inherent advantage to India is that it has both an eastern and a western rim. As a result, it can operate in East Asia and in West Asia without any hindrance. This natural benefit is also a reason for India to expand its maritime capabilities. However, the security canvas of Indian Ocean is fragile in the sense that a number of actors like China and United States maintain presence in the region. In this scenario, it is certain that India would incline itself with the US to counter balance China. A spillover effect of this Indian move is that it hurts the Pakistani interests in the region. Although Pakistan has always maintained a peaceful posture and its naval capabilities are

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<sup>4</sup> The world's biggest economies in 2018, "*World Economic Forum*", <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/the-worlds-biggest-economies-in-2018/>. Accessed on November 11, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Sea Ports in India, "*Maps of India*" <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/sea-ports/>. Accessed on September 10 2018

<sup>6</sup> "12 major ports post record profit", *The Economic Times*, April 15, 2017. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping/-transport/12-major-ports-post-record-profit/articleshow/58187355.cms>. Accessed on September 21, 2018.

limited, it does feel threatened by the Indian initiatives for maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean.

To justify its maritime dominance in the region, India follows two well-defined strategies i.e. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the revised Indian Naval Doctrine published in 2015.<sup>7</sup> The SAGAR strategy revolves around India as the center piece of Indian Ocean. In the light of this policy, Indians believe that they need to maintain strong positions in key places of the Indian Ocean to play an assertive role. Moreover, the aim of this strategy is that India should also invest in smaller nations to uplift their existing infrastructures so as to facilitate the Indian presence. SAGAR also focuses on sustainable economic growth and discusses the Blue Economy in detail.

In 2017, while addressing the Indian Ocean Conference that was organized by the India Foundation, the Indian foreign minister stated that, “*The Indian Ocean is prone to non-traditional security threats like piracy, smuggling, maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, and trafficking of humans and narcotics. We realize that to effectively combat transnational security challenges across the Indian Ocean, including those posed by non-state actors, it is important to develop a security architecture that strengthens the culture of cooperation and collective action*”.<sup>8</sup> This statement also covers Indian actions for making investments all across the Indian Ocean in the name of cooperation and collective action. Whereas, in reality, India is slowly but effectively strengthening its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Within six months of releasing the SAGAR policy, Indian Navy proclaimed its maritime doctrine in October 2015. The doctrine is

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<sup>7</sup> G. Padmaja, “Revisiting ‘SAGAR’ – India’s Template for Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region”, *National Maritime Foundation*, April 26, 2018, <http://maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/636602941847320911.pdf>. Accessed on September 19, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Susma Suraj, “SAGAR – India’s Vision for the Indian Ocean Region” *India Foundation*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.indiafoundation.in/sagar-indias-vision-for-the-indian-ocean-region/>. Accessed on September 21 2018.

called “*Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*”.<sup>9</sup> The previous doctrine document that was released in 2007 was called “*Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy*”.<sup>10</sup> The current shift in the strategy is a clear indication that the Indian Navy is willing to take a bold stance in the Indian Ocean.

The doctrine has three silent features that are connecting the dots with the two strategies. The first feature is that on the official front, India has accepted the power game of Asia-Pacific and has showed interest in playing a role in it.<sup>11</sup> Second is that the Navy has shown an interest in playing a role beyond its reach.<sup>12</sup> This means that the Indian Navy would now like to assert itself in both the primary and secondary areas of the IOR. To remove any ambiguity, both secondary and primary areas are clearly demarcated in the document and this gives Indian Navy a cover to operate from the Eastern coast of Africa to the Western Coast of Australia. The third feature is of supreme importance because it is clearly mentioned in the Maritime Doctrine that India would now be the net security provider in the region. According to the Maritime doctrine, “*net security describes the state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing against the ability to monitor, contain, and counter all of these*”.<sup>13</sup> The doctrine leaves this point open to interpretation as the region in which the Navy wants to be the net security provider is not defined. This open-ended feature would justify any action of the Indian Navy in the name of security.

## **The Indian Navy**

The desires of India are far reaching and to pursue its goals it needs a strong navy that can operate in international waters without any difficulty. This requires a lot of investments and trainings of the personnel. However, India over the years has gradually built its

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<sup>9</sup> "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy", *Indian Navy Naval Strategic Publication* (2015).

<sup>10</sup> "Freedom to use the seas: India’s maritime military strategy", *Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy)* (2007).

<sup>11</sup> "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy, op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

naval capability to register itself as a power.<sup>14</sup> Also, being a nuclear power, India would like to ensure its second strike capability through its naval power that would give it an extra advantage when it comes to a nuclear conflict.

To increase its reach, India has heavily invested in submarines. The submarine platform allows India to mobilize its resources across the oceans without causing an alarm in the international community. Currently, the Indian Navy has two nuclear powered submarines; INS Chakra is on a ten-year lease from Russia that will expire in 2022.<sup>15</sup> A deal for another nuclear submarine on lease is in its last stages.<sup>16</sup> INS Arihant is an indigenous submarine that was commissioned in 2016. India is also testing a second indigenous nuclear submarine called INS Arighat since 2017, as INS Chakra is close to its return date. Also, India is building two more nuclear submarines that are close to completion. In 2018, India also announced that it plans to build six new nuclear submarines over the next 15 years.<sup>17</sup> This addition will register India as one of the strongest Asian navies. The nuclear submarines will also add to the capabilities of their aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya. In addition, India will start the sea trials of its second aircraft carrier INS Vikrant by 2020.<sup>18</sup> The nuclear subs would prove to be an asset to the newly

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<sup>14</sup> Ladwig III, Walter C. "Delhi's Pacific ambition: Naval power, 'Look East,' and India's emerging influence in the Asia-Pacific", *Asian Security*, 5, No. 2 (2009): 87-113. Accessed on October 17, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> "How India's submarine strength matches up to its neighbours China, Pakistan", *The Indian Express*, July 22, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indian-navy-submarine-china-pakistan-5270184/>. Accessed on October 3, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Sandeep Unnithan, "India close to sealing Rs 23,000 crore lease deal for Russian N-sub", *India Today*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-close-to-sealing-rs-23-000-crore-lease-deal-for-russian-n-sub-1401875-2018-12-04>. Accessed on December 23, 2018

<sup>17</sup> Manu Pubby, "With six new nuclear attack submarines, India officially opens up on its undersea aspirations", *The Economic Times*, July 14, 2018 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/with-six-new-nuclear-attack-submarines-india-officially-opens-up-on-its-undersea-aspirations/articleshow/48076623.cms>. Accessed on October 5, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, "India's First Homegrown Carrier to Be Ready By 2020" *The Diplomat*, January 24, 2018 <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/indias->

built aircraft carriers. With the induction of the INS Arihant, Indians have completed their nuclear triad. This also strengthens the second strike capability and brings up the level of nuclear deterrence.

Indian Navy also has a large fleet of about 15 conventional diesel electric submarines.<sup>19</sup> These platforms are of greater utility due to the strategic presence of India across the Indian Ocean. The total number of ships in service by the Indian Navy now stands at 295,<sup>20</sup> which are much larger than the number of ships in use by Pakistan Navy.

Apart from building a strong navy, India also regularly conducts or takes part in naval exercises across the globe. One such exercise is the Malabar exercise. In 2018, the exercise took place off the coast of Guam, and it was attended by the navies of Japan and United States of America.<sup>21</sup> The exercise, in its 26 year history, was hosted by the United States of America for the first time. This highlights the level of trust Americans have developed on the importance of the exercise and cooperation between the U.S, Japan and India.

## **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**

Given the fact that the Indian Ocean is the third largest body of water, an association of its littoral states can be game changer for the regulation of international water. For this purpose, The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) was founded on March 7, 1997 as an

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first-homegrown-carrier-to-be-ready-by-2020/. Accessed on September 5, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> "How India's submarine strength matches up to its neighbours China", Pakistan, *The Indian Express*, July 22, 2018 <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indian-navy-submarine-china-pakistan-5270184/> accessed on September 15 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Woody, "These are the 10 biggest navies in the world" *Business Insider*, April 12, 2018 <https://www.businessinsider.com/biggest-navies-in-the-world-2018-4>. Accessed on November 1, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> M.A. Hassan, N. Huda, "*Malabar Exercise 2018 – Implications for Pakistan*", Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), July 12, 2018, [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/IB\\_Abbas\\_July\\_12\\_2018.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/IB_Abbas_July_12_2018.pdf). Accessed on November 3 2018.

intergovernmental organization.<sup>22</sup> Today, the 22-member IORA is spearheaded by India. It needs to be highlighted here that powerful littoral states of the Indian Ocean like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are not part of IORA. Being a powerful member state, India can easily use the IORA to justify its actions through a legal cover. This also reflects how effectively Indians are using diplomatic ways to maintain their dominance in the region.

## **India in Middle East**

One of the most significant Indian initiatives is its development of the Chabahar Port in Iran. Islamic Republic of Iran is a neighbor of Pakistan and the port of Chabahar is of extreme geo-strategic importance. Located at the Strait of Hormuz, Chabahar allows India to not only monitor the SLOC, but also ensure that its energy trade remains unaffected in case tensions swell up in the region. Secondly, Chabahar allows India a direct access to the Central Asian Republics by bypassing a turbulent Afghanistan. At the same time, with Chabahar under its control, India can easily transport its goods into Afghanistan. Thirdly, the port of Chabahar is also in close proximity of the Parsi block which has the Farzad gas field. India is most likely to invest in the gas field to feed its growing economy. At present, India has invested about \$85 million in Chabahar, but it is estimated that the total Indian investment there would be more than \$500 million. India is also one of the countries that have been given an exemption on the sanctions imposed by US on Iran. In December 2018, the Indians effectively took over the operations of Chabahar Port.<sup>23</sup> This marks a paradigm shift in the dynamics of the region. India for the first time has constructed a foreign port and taken control of it. Its control of the Chabahar port will look after the loading and unloading, supplying equipment and marketing. The takeover is also giving way to the International North-South Transport Corridor<sup>24</sup> and has brought Russians into the security

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<sup>22</sup> "About IORA", *Indian Ocean Rim Association*, <http://www.iora.int/en/about/about-iora>. Accessed on October 23, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> "India Takes Over Iran's Strategic Chabahar Port", *Pakistan Today*, December 25, 2018 <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/12/25/india-takes-over-irans-strategic-chabahar-port/> accessed on December 27, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> International North South Transportation Corridor for better Indo-Russian connectivity inches towards reality, "*Economic Times*"

canvas of Persian Gulf. Pakistan believes that it shares cordial relations with the Russians, however, the latter have not mentioned Pakistan in their foreign policy document since 2014. Also, while Pakistan and Iran have agreed to promote bilateral trade, this has not been up to the desired level.

The second initiative in the West Asian region is the Indian presence in Duqm, a port in Oman.<sup>25</sup> The port of Duqm is perpendicular to the Indian western rim and the travel distance by sea between India and Oman is just 916 nautical miles. India has specifically taken this facility for maintenance, overhaul, and repair purposes. This strategic move strengthens Indian presence in the region and gives strategic depth to its operations in the Persian Gulf. With this facility, India would be in a position to stretch its outreach. India can also use Duqm as a staging post to monitor the international traffic and send reconnaissance information back home.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, it can also offer its services to its allies in the region.

In January 2013, it was reported by an independent French intelligence organization in their newsletter that India has developed a listening post in Oman.<sup>27</sup> It was also stated that this post has been active since 2009; one year after Oman and India signed a defence agreement.<sup>28</sup> The rumored post is just 400 nautical miles from Pakistan and allows India to conveniently monitor all the movements of Pakistan in the Arabian Sea, and also the international movement of ships in the Persian Gulf. The strategic location of this

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<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/international-north-south-transportation-corridor-for-better-indo-russian-connectivity-inches-towards-reality/articleshow/58099129.cms>. Accessed on October 26, 2018

<sup>25</sup> M.A. Hassan “*Indian Access to Chabahar and Duqm: Challenges for Pakistan*”, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, March 16, 2018 [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IB\\_Abbas\\_March\\_16\\_2018.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IB_Abbas_March_16_2018.pdf). Accessed on December 21 2018

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Ears across the Arabian Sea", *Intelligence Online*, January 16, 2013, <https://www.intelligenceonline.com/government-intelligence/2013/01/16/ears-across-the-arabian-sea,107940061-EVE>. Accessed on December 21, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

post also gives strength to the Indian operations in Chabahar and Duqm.

## India in Africa

In order to cement its dominance in the Indian Ocean, India has also been making inroads into Africa. Once dubbed as the hopeless continent by the Economist magazine, Africa now is the centre of global investments.<sup>29</sup> Major players like China and United States of America already have a strong foothold in Africa and India is now following in their footsteps.<sup>30</sup> India has an added advantage when it comes to Africa because it has a sizeable number of Indian communities that are settled in the eastern rim. They have been living there for decades, and as a result India would not have to do a lot of investment in building its image.<sup>31</sup> This is an advantage that the Chinese do not have, and as a result they are an easy target of American and Indian propaganda. However, India alone does not have the capability to tap into the resources of this great continent. As a result, it has taken its private sector on board to invest in the continent. It has also built a strategic alliance with Japan to tap into the eastern rim of Africa.<sup>32</sup>

To keep a check on the international trade trends and for strategic purposes, India developed its first listening post in

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<sup>29</sup> Sibusiso Sgwane, "Africa Is Not A Hopeless Continent", *Huffington Post*, February 5, 2017 [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sibusiso-sgwane-/africa-is-not-a-hopeless-\\_b\\_9166084.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sibusiso-sgwane-/africa-is-not-a-hopeless-_b_9166084.html). Accessed on November 5, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Zineb Boujrada, "This Tiny Country Has the Most Foreign Military Bases", *Culture Trip*, March 16, 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/africa/djibouti/articles/why-does-djibouti-have-the-most-foreign-military-bases/>. Accessed on November 5, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> "15 facts about the Indian diaspora in Africa", *World Economic Forum*, June 25, 2015, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/06/15-facts-about-the-indian-diaspora-in-africa/>. Accessed on November 27, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Malancha Chakrabarty, "Indian investments in Africa: Scale, trends, and policy recommendations", *Observer Research Foundation*, May 2017, [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ORF\\_OccasionalPaper\\_142\\_India\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ORF_OccasionalPaper_142_India_Africa.pdf). Accessed on November 24, 2018.



Madagascar in 2007.<sup>33</sup> For this purpose, the Indian government leased an atoll and placed its radars there for reconnaissance purposes. The post allows India to gather intelligence from the international waters and analyze shipping trends. The listening post is connected with Kotchi and Mumbai and this link is also used to monitor the movement of international navies operating in the region. The strategically located listening post in the south of Indian Ocean can be used to track down any incidents of piracy and ensure that the SLOCs are not interrupted. This is also an Indian attempt to send out a positive message to the world that India is a contributor to world peace.

Realizing the potential of the African continent, India with Japan announced a magnum opus project titled the Afro-Asian Growth Corridor (AAGC) in 2017 at the 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the African Development Bank held in Gujrat.<sup>34</sup> Initially, this project was called the Freedom Corridor when the Japanese and the Indian Prime Ministers discussed it in 2016 at a meeting held in Tokyo. However, there were certain areas that had to be addressed and the work was delegated to three think tanks: the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) in Jakarta, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) in India, and the Institute of Developing Economies–Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO).<sup>35</sup>

The three think tanks tied up the loose ends in the policy document of the Freedom Corridor and the project was renamed to AAGC. The estimated cost of the project for now is \$40 billion dollars with Japan spending 30 billion dollars with an Indian

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<sup>33</sup> Manu Pubby, “India activates first listening post on foreign soil: radars in Madagascar” *The Indian Express*, July 18, 2007, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/india-activates-first-listening-post-on-foreign-soil-radars-in-madagascar/205416/>. Accessed on October 30, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Jagannath P. Panda, “Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC): An India-Japan Arch in the Making?” The Institute for Security and Development Policy, August 2017, <http://isdpeu/publication/asia-africa-growth-corridor-aagc-india-japan/#>. Accessed on December 17, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

contribution of 10 billion dollars.<sup>36</sup> The main objective of this project is the integration of African continent with other regions of Indian and Japanese interests through strong strategic linkages. The policy document of AAGC identifies the other regions as Oceania, South East Asia, East Asia and South Asia. Some of the analysts have already started to term this project as an alternate to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Another dimension of this Indian initiative is that it would make it easy for India to whip votes at the General Assembly of United Nations. At present, the African continent has 54 votes in total and with India investing billions of dollars in the continent along with the soft image promoted by its Diaspora, the resolutions moved by India would be easier to pass.

Not all the initiatives of India for maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean Region have been a success or a walk in the park. One such initiative is the Assumption Island deal with Seychelles. Initially, India and Seychelles agreed upon building a naval base on the Assumption Island. The deal was initially signed in 2015 and the driving factor in this agreement was the threat from China.<sup>37</sup> However, at the start of 2018, shocking details of the agreement, which included terms and conditions that were not supposed to be in public domain, were leaked and this brought severe criticism from Seychelles. The criticism eventually saw the island nation pulling out of the agreement. However, through diplomacy, India has resolved this glitch. In the follow up, President Danny Faure visited India and was given a red carpet welcome by the authorities.<sup>38</sup> Now

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<sup>36</sup> "Countering OBOR: India, Japan to Launch Asia-Africa Growth Corridor this Week", *Sputnik News*, September 13, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/business/201709131057356145-india-japan-corridor-launch-africa/>. Accessed on November 11, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> "India's plan to build military base in Seychelles' Assumption Island stirs controversy", *Firstpost*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/indias-plan-to-build-military-base-in-seychelles-assumption-island-stirs-controversy-4374401.html>. Accessed on December 27, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> "India and Seychelles agree on naval base at Assumption Island", *The Economic Times*, July 13, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-and-seychelles-agree-on-naval-base-at-assumption-island/articleshow/64731817.cms>. Accessed on December 23, 2018

the deal has been revamped and further deals cannot be ruled out in near future.

## **QUAD and Beyond**

It is important to mention here that India is seen as a counter balance to China in the Indian Ocean and in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>39</sup> The Indo-Pacific region also has other regional and extra-regional powers that want to contain China in its tracks. Keeping China as the prime target, four countries namely United States, Australia, Japan and India held an informal meeting for the first time at the sidelines of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in 2007 that was called the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD).<sup>40</sup> This informal arrangement is now known as the QUAD. The agenda was clear, and that was to ensure a free and open Asia-Pacific region defined according to their interpretation. For starters, the QUAD held a massive naval exercise with Singapore on board. However, this informal arrangement fell apart due to a number of domestic and international issues like the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and a change of government in Australia.

After a hiatus of almost 10 years, the QUAD was reactivated in 2017.<sup>41</sup> Once again, the agenda was the same as first QSD and the Sino-US tensions were at an all time high. However, despite the growing US-China differences in the region, India has not been able to decide its course of action in the QUAD. It has denied the Australian request of joining the MALABAR exercise.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, it has been assigned a very important role by the

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<sup>39</sup> Anindya Batabyal, "Balancing China in Asia: A realist assessment of India's Look East strategy." *China Report* 42, no. 2 (2006): 179-197. p. 178.

<sup>40</sup> Lavina Lee. "Abe's Democratic Security Diamond and New Quadrilateral Initiative: An Australian Perspective." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2016) p. 03.

<sup>41</sup> Dinesh Yadav, "Revival of Quadrilateral: A shift in India's Policy towards China?." (2017): 92.

<sup>42</sup> Asha Sundaramurthy, "India Keeps Australia Out of the Malabar Exercise – Again", *The Diplomat*, May 8, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/india-keeps-australia-out-of-the-malabar-exercise-again/>. Accessed on December 17, 2018.

Americans in the South China Sea where they see it as an influencer.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to mention here that India is just 90 nautical miles from Indonesia, and this also results in an overlapping of their exclusive economic zone.<sup>44</sup> The close proximity and the Indonesian plan called the “Global Maritime Fulcrum” to balance out China’s BRI program have brought both nations together.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the two nations have entered into a strategic maritime alliance. Indonesia enjoys a geo-strategic location that overlooks the busy Strait of Malacca, and, in an agreement between the two countries signed in May 2018, India now controls the strategic Indonesian Sabang Port.<sup>46</sup> This port allows India to keep an eye on the Chinese shipments, and the port access also allows it to use the area for surveillance activities by its submarines. The Indonesian and Indian closeness is a result of their common animosity towards the Chinese BRI, and this was also mentioned by the Indonesian coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs General (Retd) Luhut Pandjaitan during his visit of India in May 2018.<sup>47</sup>

However, despite the involvement in QUAD and the agreement with Indonesia, India seems to be a little reluctant to lock horns with China. Both the countries also warmed up to each other after the Wuhan Summit on April 27-28, 2018 as they agreed to settle their differences in a peaceful manner.<sup>48</sup> It turn out that Indo-Pacific is

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<sup>43</sup> "The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy", US Department of Defence [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF). Accessed on December 17 2018

<sup>44</sup> S.P Jagota, "Maritime boundary", Vol. 9. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985. p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> Majid Mahmood, "Growing Indonesia-India Strategic Ties" Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, June 7, 2018, [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IB\\_Majid\\_June\\_7\\_2018.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IB_Majid_June_7_2018.pdf). Accessed on December 11, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "India-China Informal Summit at Wuhan", The Ministry of External Affairs, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29853/IndiaChina\\_Informal\\_Summit\\_at\\_Wuhan](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29853/IndiaChina_Informal_Summit_at_Wuhan). Accessed on October 12, 2018.

one region where the Indians are unclear, either because they don't want to be a part of a greater conflict or they don't have the resources for now to over-stretch themselves.

It is evident that India wants to maintain a dominating posture in the Indian Ocean. For that purpose, it is taking aggressive steps across the Ocean by acquiring ports and playing a lead role in IORA. Also, it is forming strategic alliances from Africa to Southeast Asia, to be a part of the world geo-political chessboard.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

Pakistan is an important littoral state of the Indian Ocean with a coastal belt of almost 1100 km.<sup>49</sup> Just like India, it is also strategically located in South Asia. However, the two neighboring countries have a history of a troublesome past. The reason for this tension is deeply rooted in the partition of India in 1947 by the colonial masters. As a result, the countries are still at arms over Kashmir. Being a nuclear power like India, the actions of both Pakistan and India greatly impact each other.

Pakistan has maintained a peaceful maritime posture and developed its navy to defend its waters from any aggression. The largest implication for Pakistan of Indian actions is that it has been isolated in the international arena following India's strategic alliances with US, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Oman, Iran, Seychelles, Madagascar and a number of African states. Consequently, it will be difficult for Pakistan to counter India with any of these states and who can help it in standing up to the Indian attempts at domination. At the same time, Pakistan does not have the resources for the uplift of its naval capabilities or establish operations beyond its borders. This puts Pakistan under severe pressure because now it has to counter balance a country that has bases all across the Indian Ocean, strategic alliances with great

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<sup>49</sup> Asaf Humayun, Naghmana Zafar, "Pakistan's 'Blue Economy': Potential and Prospects", *Policy Perspectives*, a Journal of the Institute of Policy Studies, 11, no. 1 (2014) pp. 57-76. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/polipers.11.1.0057?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_t ab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/polipers.11.1.0057?seq=1#page_scan_t ab_contents). Accessed on October 16, 2018.

powers, as well as military wherewithal including nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers.

The second implication for Pakistan is that since it is not part of IORA, it cannot exert itself on the international community. IORA is a powerful forum that now formulates policy across the globe. As Pakistan is not part of this association, it is unable to voice its concerns. This further deepens its isolation on the strategic front.

Pakistan, being a nuclear country, has to ensure its deterrence level through the second strike capability. Although the country has established a nuclear triad<sup>50</sup>, it still lacks nuclear submarines in its arsenal. As a result, prospects of second strike capability are very limited. The Indian development of nuclear submarines will give way to a new arms race in the region where Pakistan would take measures to build its own fleet of nuclear submarines. Currently, due to the financial crisis in the country, this would be a difficult prospect, but this is something that will keep on re-emerging in the minds of Pakistani strategic thinkers.

Pakistan is also in the process of establishing its deep sea port at Gwadar.<sup>51</sup> With Chabahar Port taking the early mover advantage, the Gwadar Port would have to offer competitive rates to become a lucrative trans-shipment hub. Also, one cannot rule out operations of Indian navy from Chabahar. Although the Iranians have made it clear that both ports will serve as sister ports as Gwadar has a much larger capacity for cargo handling, the presence of India at Chabahar remains a concern for both Pakistan and China.<sup>52</sup>

The Indian initiatives in the African continent have also pushed Pakistan on the back foot. As Pakistan remains busy with its internal issues, the opportunity posed by Africa has been grabbed by India.

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<sup>50</sup> Dr. Zafar Jaspal, "Babur-III tested; Pakistan becomes a Nuclear Triad" *Global Village Space*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/babur-iii-tested-pakistan-becomes-a-nuclear-triad/>. Accessed on October 13, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Hasan Yaser Malik, "Strategic Importance of Gwadar Port", *Journal of Political Studies*, 19, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>52</sup> Mir Sherbaz Khetran. "Gwadar and Chabahar: Competition or Cooperation." *Strategic Studies*, 38, no. 2 (2018).

Pakistani products will have a tough time competing with Indian products. This creates a challenge for Pakistani manufacturers who are already looking to tap into the African market.

## **Way Forward for Pakistan**

It is evident that the Indian actions are a double-edged sword for Pakistan and China. Mostly, on the face of it, India is taking initiatives for maritime dominance to off-set China, but at the same time, they are doing damage to Pakistan as well. Pakistan is already isolated in the international arena and the Indian initiatives have further pushed Pakistan towards isolation.

Pakistan, which has always promoted peace and prosperity in the region, has unfortunately suffered a lot from terrorism. Consequently, very little attention was paid to development of the country. As a result, Pakistan now lags behind India on both the financial and diplomatic front. This has limited the options for Pakistan to present its case to the international community. Fortunately, a stable system has finally started to take shape and the democratic system of the country has now entered into the eleventh year. This is the first time that elected governments are in power and the country has witnessed two smooth transitions of powers. This is slowly restoring the faith of international investors into Pakistan, but the process is slow and cumbersome.

An opportunity for Pakistan is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC connects Gwadar to Kashghar, giving China a much shorter and secure access to the Indian Ocean, and also nullifies the Malacca Straits dilemma. However, due to the negative propaganda against CPEC, and delays in the completion of various projects under the Corridor, CPEC has been moving at a slow pace.

Moreover, CPEC has not been branded in the right manner. The negative branding of CPEC across the globe and within Pakistan has casted a lot of doubts in the minds of policy makers. In partnership with Chinese, Pakistan needs to take serious measures to mitigate the damage done. This will not only send a positive message, but

would also attract foreign direct investment in the Special Economic Zones now being undertaken in Pakistan under the second phase. If this is achieved, maritime activity of Pakistan would substantially increase and would establish Pakistan as a significant contributor to the Blue Economy of Indian Ocean.

However, Pakistan must not put its eggs in one basket, and must start weighing in its various options and policies. One such effort has been the launch of official maritime doctrine in December 2018.<sup>53</sup> The 250-page document titled “*Preserving Freedom of Seas*” is an effort to send out a message to the world that Pakistani Navy does not believe in dominance and wants to ensure a free and fair use of sea.

In light of this new maritime doctrine, Pakistan needs to considerably increase the size of its fleet; both naval and commercial ships. At the moment, Pakistan Shipping Corporation only owns 4 tankers and 5 bulk carriers. As a result, bulk of our trade activity relies on foreign carriers. This also results in drainage of foreign currency. As Pakistani economy is not at par with India, it needs to increase its revenue sources and decrease foreign payments. A modest trade fleet can help ensure this. Also, such a fleet would be very useful when the Special Economic Zones in Pakistan start their operations. Pakistani ships will also send a soft image of Pakistan to the world.

Another major action that Pakistan can take is exploring new markets and cashing in on the existing infrastructure. Pakistan is in no position to make investments in other parts of the world, or acquire naval bases. However, it can send out its products to the world. Pakistan needs to establish itself as an exporting country. It should tap into Africa and Latin America. Traditionally, relations with Latin America have been poor due to the distance. If Pakistan can rent some warehouses on the western coast of Africa, it can easily develop trade relations with Latin America. This would not only boost its trade, but would also take it beyond the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>53</sup> "Alvi unveils Pakistan's first maritime doctrine", *Dawn*, December 21, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1452739/alvi-unveils-pakistans-first-maritime-doctrine>. Accessed on December 25, 2018.



Also, this will help Pakistan to capture the African market to some extent.

Last but not the least Pakistan needs to expand its maritime infrastructure. With a coastline of over 1100 kilometres, Pakistan has only three ports (Karachi, Port Qasim and Gwadar) out of these, one is not fully functional. Also, the concept of maritime tourism is alien to Pakistan due to 'sea blindness' both among policymakers and the masses. This needs to change and Pakistan needs to build small ports and tourist cities across its Makran coast to attract international tourist. These tourists will not only bring revenue, but would also send out a positive image of Pakistan to the world. Perception is greater than reality, and if Pakistan succeeds in changing its perception among the international community, not only will it generate money, but would also substantially increase its maritime presence in the international waters.

## **Conclusion**

As the growing power of Asia, India is determined to establish itself as a regional hegemonic player. For that, it requires a greater role in the Indian Ocean Region. This can only be achieved if it takes steps for maritime dominance. In this regard, India has not only made investments in key areas across the Indian Ocean, but is also making alliances in the Pacific region. It is also investing heavily on its navy in its aspirations to attain a blue water capability and regional hegemony. On the other hand, Pakistan maintains itself as a brown water navy which has a defensive outlook. The Indian actions are not only destabilizing the strategic stability of the region, but also pushing Pakistan to the corner. In this scenario Pakistan has to explore new options to maintain its presence in the Indian Ocean. The alliance with Chinese is one such step, but the scope needs to be broadened. Unless this is done, Pakistan would lose its relevance and the natural gift of geographical location will be of little use.



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