



MODI'S MARITIME AMBITIONS – IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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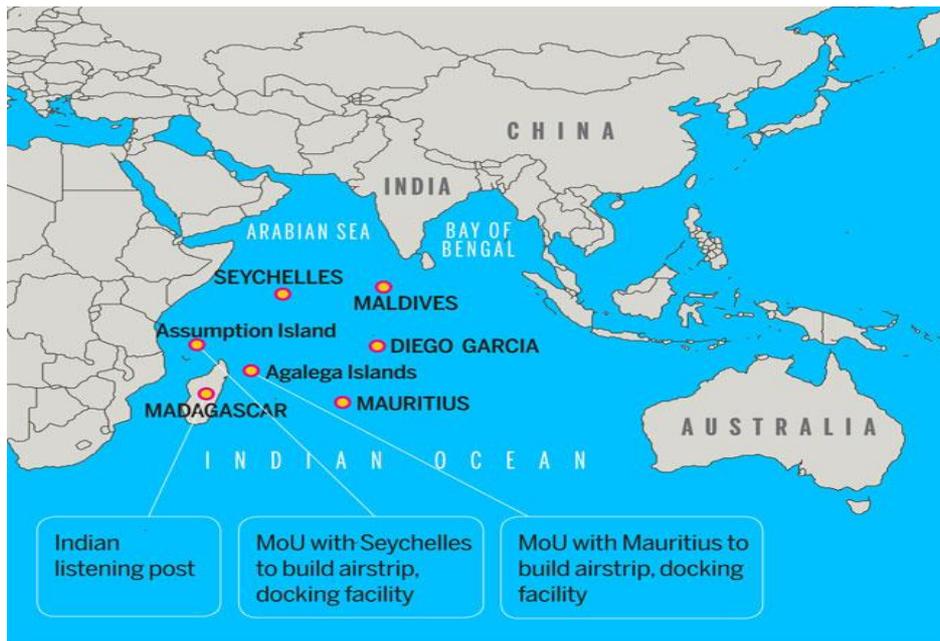


Traditionally, India has maintained itself as a land focused country and concentrated on developing its land capabilities. However, in the background of the emerging dynamics of international diplomacy and security, India has recently begun to focus its attention towards managing the oceans, especially the Indian Ocean, more seriously under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It seems clear that India has decided to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean, and for that reason it has taken some major steps. In March 2015, Modi travelled to the Indian Ocean islands states — Mauritius and Seychelles — to outline India's first ever policy for the Indian Ocean. The policy is called SAGAR — Security and Growth for All in the Region. In Sanskrit, "Sagar" also means the sea. India also acquired infrastructure development rights to develop two islands 'Agalega' from Mauritius, and 'Assumption' from Seychelles during the same visit.¹ However, in March 2018, in an unprecedented security breach, the classified agreement signed by India to develop military facilities and station Indian military personnel at Seychelles's Assumption Island has been leaked online, raising questions about whether the project's details will need to be reworked.²

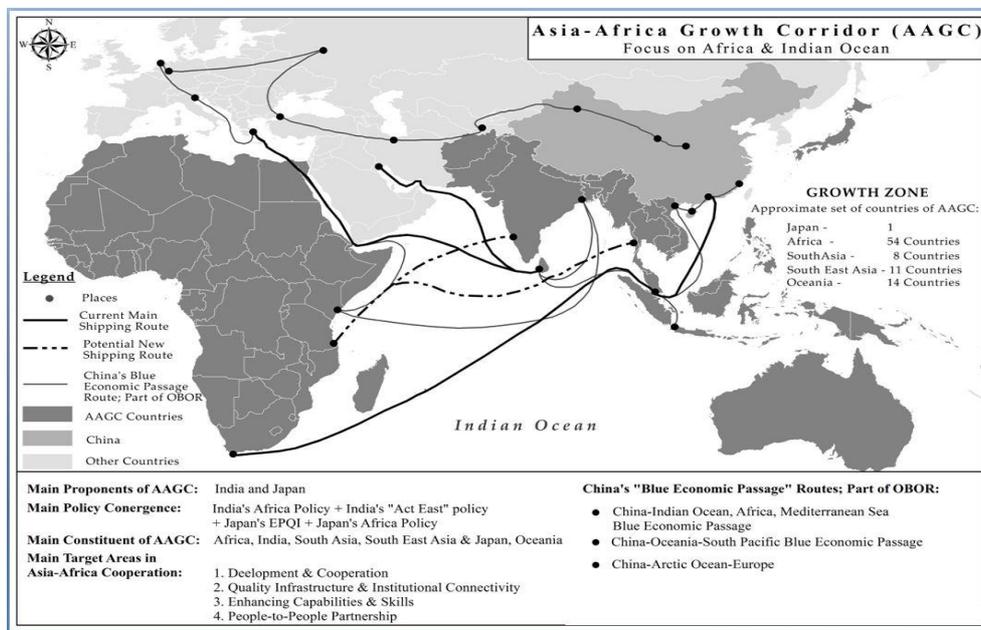
¹ Two islands: Indian Ocean to soon be 'India's Ocean', "*Dawn*", March 12, 2015 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1169104>

² Exclusive: Details of Top Secret India-Seychelles Military Agreement Leaked Online. "*The Wire*", March 8, 2018 <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/in-embarrassing-leak-details-of-top-secret-india-seychelles-military-agreement-made-public>



Source: India Today

In partnership with Japan, India is also building the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) at an estimated cost of \$40 billion contributed by both India and Japan. The project was announced at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank (AfDB) summit in Gandhinagar, India, on May 22-26, 2017. One of the core purposes of this project is to improve presence at the eastern rim of Africa and counter the Chinese presence in the region.³



Source: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia: ERIA

³ Thinking Africa: India, Japan, and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, "The Diplomat" 3 June 2017 <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/thinking-africa-india-japan-and-the-asia-africa-growth-corridor/>

At its narrowest point, the Strait of Hormuz is 21 miles wide, but the width of the shipping lane in either direction is only two miles wide, separated by a two-mile buffer zone. It is deep enough and wide enough to handle the world's largest crude oil tankers, with about two-thirds of oil shipments carried by tankers in excess of 150,000 deadweight tons.⁴ In February 2018, during a series of visits to the Middle Eastern countries, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi managed to strike strategic deals that will have a long lasting impact on the region. One of these deals includes the Indian control of Iranian Shahid Beheshti port — phase one of Chabahar Port which sits right on top of Hormuz. The second deal came as a result of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Oman. New Delhi and Muscat finalized an agreement that will see India gain access to the strategically located port of Duqm on Oman's southern coast. The port sits on the northwestern edge of the Indian Ocean and also provides easy access onward into the Red Sea through the Gulf of Aden⁵.



Source: Google Maps

The Malacca Strait is considered one of six choke points, or narrow channels, along widely used global sea routes. They are critical for global energy security because of the high volume of oil transported through the narrow straits. At least 15 million bpd of oil flows through the Malacca Strait from West Asia and West Africa.⁶ In May 2018, Indonesia agreed to give India economic and military access to the strategic island of Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra and close to the

⁴ Hormuz and Malacca Remain Top Oil Chokepoints, "Maritime Executive" 4 August 2017 <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/hormuz-and-malacca-remain-top-oil-chokepoints#gs.plQyE>

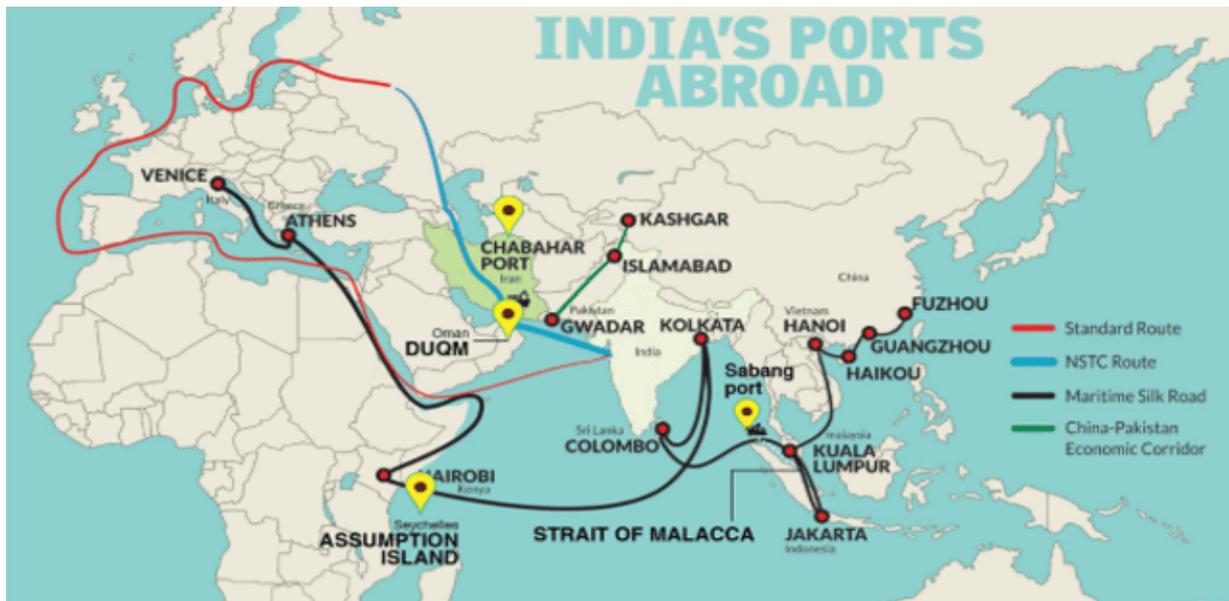
⁵ Indian Access To Chabahar And Duqm: Challenges For Pakistan, "Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad" 16 March 2018 http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IB_Abbas_March_16_2018.pdf

⁶ Hormuz and Malacca Remain Top Oil Chokepoints, "Maritime Executive" 4 August 2017 <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/hormuz-and-malacca-remain-top-oil-chokepoints#gs.plQyE>

Malacca Strait. Sabang, also known as Weh island, is located 710 km southeast of the Andaman Islands and less than 500 km from the entrance of the Malacca Strait, through which almost 40% of India's trade passes. According to Indonesia's coordinating minister for maritime affairs Luhut Pandjaitan, the port's 40-metre depth is good for all types of vessels, "including submarines".⁷ The Indonesians are calling this as part of their "global maritime fulcrum" strategy that is targeted to balance out China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This development will also indicate that no major breakthrough has been achieved at the much hyped Modi-Xi summit in Wuhan during April 2018.



Source: Google Maps



Source: Times of India

⁷ Indonesia gives India access to strategic port of Sabang, "Hindustan Times" 17 May 2018 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indonesia-gives-india-access-to-strategic-port-of-sabang/story-KPXWky7PGAHFUj0jCL26yJ.html>

Following all these developments, India now has access to four strategic ports abroad and this strengthens its position as a regional power player and a counter weight to China. Being a part of the Chinese Maritime Silk Route, Pakistan can also utilize the Chinese facilities to safeguard its interest.

However, for Pakistan this is a wakeup call to start developing its own maritime capabilities. Pakistan now faces serious challenges in the Indian Ocean due to the Indian buildup. To counter this, Pakistan must not only align itself with multiple players, but must also formulate a strong maritime policy based on current realities. Pakistan must also offer concessions to Merchant ships to attract maritime traffic to its ports. The Gwadar Port would be a huge asset in this regard. All of this would require dedicated efforts at both diplomatic and domestic front.