

## **Maritime Security and Geopolitics in Indian Ocean Region (IOR): Evolution of India's Maritime Strategy – Implications for Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*The security matrix of Indian Ocean is in a flux. With the pronouncement of US backed Indo-Pacific enterprise, and the advent of the 'Asian Century,' the maritime renaissance is already underway which has rejuvenated the essence of India's maritime strategic vision. Indian Ocean is at the centre of India's strategic priorities in its pursuit of reclaiming preponderance and giving an impetus to its blue economy. India's national prestige for the dominance on land and sea, entwined with geo-economic needs and geostrategic threats perceived, determine its geopolitical imperatives. India's maritime adventurism, as envisaged in its maritime strategic vision, embodied in maritime doctrines, exhibited in assertive Indian Navy's posture, and enshrined in military modernization, articulates the agenda for securing SLOCs and deterring nuclear neighbors. Pakistan reciprocally perceives similar security threats from India at its eastern borders and in western waters. India's maritime strategy, in its holistic version, potentially threatens CPEC and Pakistan's economic and strategic interests in Indian Ocean. Within the thematic lines of Regional Security Complex Theory, this study highlights how mutual security threats shape naval postures of competing states. Moreover, 'sea power' as the conceptual narration of maritime security will help assess how Indian maritime strategy has evolved through recent decades and how it has shaped Pakistan's policy actions and responses.*

**Key Words:** *Pakistan, Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific, CPEC, Maritime Security, India's Maritime Doctrine*

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*“After nearly a millennium of inward and landward focus, we are once again turning our gaze outward and seaward, which is the natural direction of view for a nation seeking to re-establish itself, not simply as a continental power, but even more so as a maritime power, and consequently as one that is of significance on the world stage.”*

*Pranab Mukherjee-India’s External Affairs Minister (2004)<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

The once ‘neglected’ Indian Ocean is regaining eminence due to revived strategic relevance and commercial significance. As a strategic juncture to the Indo-Pacific, the trade corridors of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) link the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast and Northeast Asia. For this intertwined confluence, the turns and trends in the neighboring waters in the past have substantially affected the maritime environment of the Indian Ocean.<sup>2</sup> While the notion of merged ‘Indo-Pacific’ may be recent, Indian Ocean by virtue of its geography, has served as a strategic realm of dominance for various powers throughout the colonial period, with the eroding influence of few while the growing indulgence of the others. After a long respite, the contours of the 21<sup>st</sup> century power politics are being reoriented to Indian Ocean due to its unprecedented role in the global trade and commerce and energy security.

The current geopolitical dynamics of Indian Ocean, however, are not exclusively attributed to the exogenously driven power politics of the extra-regional actors. The naval engagements of the rising and aspiring regional powers, like India and China, are also engendering security entanglements for the medium and smaller maritime nations like Pakistan. The surging economic needs since the past decades have turned both India and China towards Persian Gulf for energy supplies. China being relatively new in the maritime

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<sup>1</sup> Chinmoyee Das, “Changing contours of India’s Ocean strategy, 2004–2015,” *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs*, (2018): 3, DOI: 10.1080/18366503.2018.1465253.

<sup>2</sup> Sarabjeet Singh Parmar, “Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean: An Indian Perspective,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (January–March 2014): 50.

[https://idsa.in/system/files/8\\_1\\_2014\\_MaritimeSecurityintheIndianOcean.pdf](https://idsa.in/system/files/8_1_2014_MaritimeSecurityintheIndianOcean.pdf).

politics, started off in the mid-1990s by extending its vision and mission of seaward expansion. On the contrary, for India, Indian Ocean has historically had relevance due to its geographical contiguity for trade and expansive energy needs.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, India's quest for recognition as a major land and maritime power (exhibited primarily in economic development, military modernization and nuclearisation) has shaped its maritime security agenda within large geographical swaths of Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, India's maritime military strategy *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy 2007* enunciates the "freedom to use the seas for national purposes, under all circumstance" and "vitality of good order in Indian Ocean."<sup>5</sup> Not only on doctrinal level, but also the role of Indian Navy and its modernization, as encapsulated in maritime doctrine, exhibits India's assertive aspirations cloaked as normative obligation to become a regional power.

Strategic dynamics in maritime domain hold equal threats, challenges, and opportunities, for the medium and smaller maritime powers. All the coastal states, regardless of their size, share some interest and claims and exert some influence in pursuance of those interests. Pakistan being a significant maritime nation in the vicinity of Arabian Ocean—extending to broader Western Indian Ocean, has its coast adjacent to the strategically vital Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs). Gwadar, one of Pakistan's three deep seaports, connects South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the maritime sector

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<sup>3</sup> Frédéric Grare and Jean-Loup Samaan, *The Indian Ocean as a New Political and Security Region* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Lee Cordner, "Rethinking Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 6, No. 1 (June 2010): 67-85, DOI: 10.1080/19480881.2010.489671.

<sup>5</sup> Directorate of Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, Integrated Headquarters Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy*, (New Delhi: Indian Navy, 2007) <http://aldeilis.net/mumbai/1686.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Portia B. Conrad, "China's Access to Gwadar Port: Strategic Implications and Options for India," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 13(1) (2017): 55-62, DOI: 10.1080/09733159.2017.131712.

contributes to 95% of country's trade and 80% of energy resource (crude oil and refined products) which is estimated to rise further with unimpeded operationalization of the CPEC.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the Eastern Indian Ocean, where the extra-regional powers like the US, with its regional allies including Australia and Japan, have casted their strategic clout, the Western Indian Ocean is an arena of aspiring regional maritime powers like China and India, particularly. India in the pursuance of its 'Manifest Destiny,' to 'Look and Act East,' as well as to have assertive control of its acclaimed 'India's Ocean/Indian Lake,' is aspiring for regional hegemony, which in turn endangers China's security needs to safeguard its 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's Gwadar Port, as the 'Crown Jewel' of CPEC, is one of the significant dots in the Western Indian Ocean, connecting 'String of Pearls' that certainly becomes vulnerable due to India's expansionist ambitions.

US as the "sea-based balancer lurking just over the horizon,"<sup>8</sup> in its aggressive containment/encirclement of China, may potentially become the active agitator in the Indian Ocean. This may further disrupt the regional security matrix in the region. To condense the much larger theme of 'Maritime Security and Geopolitics in Indian Ocean Region,' this paper aims to highlight the evolution of Indian maritime strategy and its implications for Pakistan. In this regard, geopolitics of Western Indian Ocean would be the area of focus, with the 'Sea power' as the main component of 'maritime security' for this study. The basic assertions of Regional Security Complex Theory would illustrate how regional maritime security complex in Indian Ocean is shaped by the mutual security threats of both India and Pakistan, and what policy options are there for Pakistan.

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<sup>7</sup> Pakistan Navy, *Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan (MDP): Preserving Freedom of Seas* (Naval Headquarters Islamabad, 2018): 163.

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Center Stage for the Twenty-first Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 2 (March/April 2009): 18, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699491>.

## Indian Ocean Environment and Maritime Geopolitics

Strategic pre-eminence of Indian Ocean has not been non-existent in the past decades. It, however, has remained unnoticed in the global geopolitical discourse, and been often treated as what Cordner refers to as, the “‘strategic backwater’ - a thoroughfare for maritime trade in transit elsewhere - primarily East Asia or Europe.”<sup>9</sup> Maritime environment of Asian became susceptible to the global geopolitics with the advent of ‘Asian Century.’ It has not only gained prominence due to growing competition between regional powers, but has also become the theatrical convergence for the interests of extra-regional actors. These dynamics have thus affected the security environment of the IOR.<sup>10</sup> It was the inter-war rivalry of world navies that made Great Britain cognizant of the significance regional navies hold. In order to retain British supremacy in the Indian Ocean, Royal Indian Navy was established for the coastal security and enactment of naval traditions.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the strategic significance, the geo-economic importance of Indian Ocean, since ancient times, has been highlighted by Panikkar. The ‘highways’ of Indian Ocean were used by Indian merchandise ships traveling far to India and China in the east, and west to Arabia, Africa and Europe. As cited by Panikkar, over 90% of Indian trade via Indian Ocean helped immensely in the industrial development, necessitating some adequate sea power to ensure and secure India’s commercial standing in world market. Accordingly, Panikkar inferred that the “power that has the control of Indian Ocean has thus a stranglehold of Indian commerce.”<sup>12</sup>

Geographically, the Indian Ocean lies at the core conduit of China’s transcontinental mega investment project, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which not only enhances the

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<sup>9</sup> Lee Cordner, *Maritime Security Risks, Vulnerabilities and Cooperation: Uncertainty in the Indian Ocean*, 1, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Parmar, “Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean,” 50.

<sup>11</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (Birkenhead: Wilmer Brothers, 1945): 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> K. M. Panikkar, “The Strategic Problem of the Indian Ocean,” *The Indian Institute of International Affairs* 6, (January 1, 1944): 5.

economic significance of the Indian Ocean, but also places China in the geopolitics of IOR as one of the key players. The two components of BRI, China's Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), connect China through land and coast to the Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, Africa and Europe.<sup>13</sup> The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a flagship project of BRI, connects the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt, expanding China's access to Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Pakistan's Gwadar port adjacent to Indian Ocean waters, constitutes an important feature in China's 'String of Pearls.' This geographical proximity significantly entangles the roles and interests of China and Pakistan within the IOR. The large part of China's oil and gas imports from the Middle East and Africa are carried through Indian Ocean's (SLOCs). Thus, any military blockade by China's adversary, including the US or India, would potentially affect China's economy to the point of collapse, with the same prospective economic impact for Pakistan.<sup>14</sup>

## **Maritime Security and Security Complex of the Indian Ocean**

'Security' is largely taken in terms of 'derivative of power' i.e., powerful will attain security, or as a 'consequence of peace' i.e., security assured because of peace. Buzan, however, aptly widens the scope of national and international security by including "foreign, military and economic policies of states, the intersection of these policies in areas of change or dispute and the general structure of relations which they create."<sup>15</sup> In the context of regional dynamics of security relations among states, asserts Buzan, the middle level states play a vital role as a mediating factor, both in comprehending the patterns of relations among the local

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<sup>13</sup> R. W. Hu, "China's 'One Belt One Road' Strategy: Opportunity or Challenge for India?" *China Report* 53 (2), 2017, doi:10.1177/0009445517696619.

<sup>14</sup> Samir Tata, "Deconstructing China's Energy Security Strategy," *The Diplomat*, January 14, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/deconstructing-chinas-energysecurity-strategy/>.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (UK: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983): 3.

states as well as their relations with the great powers. By pronouncing security as a relational phenomenon, he argues, states' capabilities, desires and fears shouldn't be assessed individually, but in interdependent terms with other interacting states.<sup>16</sup> This is because within the regional security sub-systems, the local sets of states are bound by geographical proximity; therefore, their national security problems cannot be outlined in dissonance. Thus, the patterns of enmity/amity among them are shaped and linked by their major security perceptions and mutual concerns. Buzan calls such an intense interdependence based regional subsystem as a 'security complex'. Unlike the other regional subsystems that are defined by the distribution of power, Buzan's security complex is defined in terms of 'security' and 'intense interdependence,' wherein interdependence of rivalry, rather than the interdependence of shared interests, shapes and differentiates different regional subsystems. The principal factor defining a 'complex' usually remains to be a high level of mutual threat among two or more major neighboring states.<sup>17</sup>

The security complex theory can also be applied to maritime domain where the main regional actors in the Indian Ocean, including Pakistan, India and China, are interlocked in a web of security complexes. Due to territorial congruity, the conflict of maritime security interests resulting in security threats shape strategic visions of the states. Thus, states' maritime policies and doctrines are formulated on the basis of these visions and perceptions and threats which then interdependently shape states' naval postures.

Besides, 'Maritime security' has become an important discourse in the international security studies over the past decades, due to the emerging traditional and non-traditional threats in terms of inter-state maritime disputes, maritime terrorism and piracy, narcotics, illicit goods and human trafficking, arms proliferation, illegal fishing and environmental concerns. As a hypernym, maritime security includes certain rooted and new concepts

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Buzan, "A Framework for Regional Security Analysis," In Buzan, B., et al., *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 5-8.

including; *sea power, marine safety, blue economy, and resilience of coastal populations*.<sup>18</sup> ‘Security at sea’, being antecedent to ‘maritime security,’ primarily covered the traditional domains of national security concerns in naval warfare and maritime power projection. The role of naval forces, as the key concept of ‘Sea power,’ is vital both for the formulation of wartime strategies and peacetime protection of SLOCs. These strategies are aimed at securing trade, ensuring deterrence, procuring surveillance and interdiction. ‘Marine safety’ concerns the safety of ships, maritime installations, maritime professionals and the marine environment. ‘Blue economy’ and ‘blue growth’ - terms introduced at the 2012 Rio+20 World Summit, focus on various interlinked dimensions of economic development in the oceanic realm. The fourth concept covered by ‘maritime security’ in terms of ‘human resilience’ includes food security and human security concerns of the coastal population and seafarers.<sup>19</sup> In this study, maritime security is, however, primarily defined in terms of its ‘Sea power’ component with regards to the role and aspirations of Pakistan and Indian navies, which plays a significant role in determining the security complex of IOR.

## **India’s Maritime Outlook and the Seaward Expansion**

India’s maritime outlook has been in tandem with the evolving strategic environment of IOR. While the Indian maritime vision finds its roots in the works expounded by K.M Panikkar during 1940’s, the Indian maritime history dates back to colonial era, and is categorized into five distinct periods. The Hindu period extended to 15th century A.D and the Portuguese period from late 15th century to the closing of 16th century. Then followed two British periods (1612-1830 and 1830-1947), and the Indian period since August 15, 1947. The

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<sup>18</sup> Christian Bueger, “What is Maritime Security?,” *Marine Policy* 53 (March 2015): 160-161, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.12.005>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 161.

reason for two British periods is significant due to a new turn in 1830 when East India Company's Navy in India was reorganized as a combatant fleet and renamed as Indian Navy.<sup>20</sup>

The role of Indian Navy, nevertheless, remained marginal for some period in the post-British India, for it almost took India about two decades to redirect its geopolitical interest from land to sea. As Mukherjee and Mohan remark, the primacy of new land borders after partition, and the Tibet question became the key security concerns for India within the Asian continent, thus, relegating the role of the Navy. It was India's military modernization program by Rajiv Gandhi that also included expansion of the Navy and later the interventions in Sri Lanka and Maldives.<sup>21</sup> Contrarily, Maan links the shift of India's maritime strategic thinking to 1970's, following the 1971 war with Pakistan.

This shift further spurred in the 1990's due to the demand and enhanced role of a blue-water navy for globalizing Indian economy. During the Cold War, India's Indian Ocean prospect was primarily to pronounce and protect its territorial claims over the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for resources, and to secure its island territories. Such an assertion of expanded Indian economy finds expression in the account of Indian Shipping Ministry that by 2021, India's Maritime Transport has contributed to 95% of the trade by volume and 68% by value.<sup>22</sup> The elaborations of India's seaward expansion can further be deduced from its maritime doctrine, its evolution and even more the role of Indian Navy that reflect the materialization of the spirit of India's maritime strategic vision.

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<sup>20</sup> Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh, *Under Two Ensigns: The Indian Navy 1945-1950* (New Delhi: India, 1986): 18, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Under-Two-Ensigns-06Apr16.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Anit Mukerjee and C. Raja Mohan, *India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India, <https://shipmin.gov.in/division/shipping>.

## Indian Maritime Doctrine: Embodiment of Indian Maritime Strategy and Vision

*“Though to other nations, Indian Ocean is important, to India it is vital. Not only is she bound by it on three sides, but from the point of view of both security and commerce the control of Indian Ocean is a matter of life and death for her.”*

K. M. Panikkar<sup>23</sup>

The ‘vitality’ of Indian Ocean suggested by Panikkar, has been enshrined implicitly as ‘exclusivity’ in the existing maritime doctrine *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* 2015.<sup>24</sup> In consonance with the evolving geostrategic environment of Indian Ocean, the *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2004) (revised in 2009) has also evolved from *Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy* (2007) to *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (2015). The evolution of the doctrine, however, is not characterized by total shift of focus or objective, rather the broadening of sphere of prowess and functioning of Indian Navy.

The very first document, *Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy* (2007), highlights the quintessential motive for the resurgence and consolidation of India’s posture as the ‘maritime power,’ with the centrality of Navy and its role for the security and stability in the IOR. As noted by Alatas, the 2007 Doctrine, as an extension of the 2004 Doctrine, was released after the technical (weaponry system and hardware) and professional (trained human resources) upgradation of Indian Navy.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> K. M. Panikkar, “The Strategic Problem of the Indian Ocean,” *The Indian Institute of International Affairs* 6 (January 1, 1944): 8.

<sup>24</sup> Gurpreet S Khurana, “Net Security Provider’ Defined: An Analysis of India’s New Maritime Strategy-2015,” *National Maritime Foundation*, November 23, 2015, <https://cimsec.org/net-security-provider-defined-analysis-indias-new-maritime-strategy-2015/>.

<sup>25</sup> Sharifah M. Alatas, “India’s Maritime Strategy In The Indian Ocean Region: Issues Of Strategic Culture”, *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 3 (03) (2015): 400, <https://esciencepress.net/journals/index.php/JSAS/article/view/1324>.

Along with the primacy of Indian Navy, the significance of IOR, in pertinence to the volatile geopolitics has also been highlighted in the 2007 Naval Doctrine. The oceanic realm is said to have been mired by permanent “violent peace”<sup>26</sup> characterized by the localized conflicts due to nuclearisation and terrorism. It called for the strategic and military role of the Indian Navy to counter threats, across the full spectrum of conflict.<sup>27</sup> Being one of the proactive foreign policy instruments, on operational terms, the navy’s role covers the overall coastal and offshore maritime security, deterrence, conventional military threats, as well as non-traditional threats originating ‘at’ and ‘from’ the sea. The existing document also underlines the expanded sphere of India’s maritime interests on geographical terms. The *Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2004*, gave primacy to the Indo-Pacific region with northern IOR as the ‘primary area’ of interest. The 2015 Doctrine sketches and stretches the geographical sphere of concern southwards and westwards by enclosing South-West Indian Ocean and Red Sea into ‘primary area.’ The ‘secondary area’ of interest has also been categorized by encompassing western Coast of Africa and the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>28</sup>

### **Role of the Indian Navy (IN)**

As much India is relentlessly pursuing its ambition for becoming the undefeated regional power on land, its maritime strategic vision entails deterring the rise of any other power in the adjacent waters. Such strategic vision can be accomplished through ‘sea-control’ that overlaps with the conception of ‘sea power’ under ‘maritime security’. The vision for the role of an undefeatable IN, as proposed by Indian naval thinker Keshav Vaidya a

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<sup>26</sup> Directorate of Strategy, *Concepts and Transformation, Integrated Headquarters Ministry of Defence (Navy), Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy* (New Delhi: Indian Navy, 2007): 10, <http://aldeilis.net/mumbai/1686.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Khurana, “Net Security Provider”, 2.

contemporary of K. M. Panikkar, is “to outspread its defensive agenda, beyond its coast, to the oceanic frontiers that “are stretched far and wide in all directions.”<sup>29</sup>

The established role of IN in the 2007 doctrine is attached to a broader economic vision as well as military missions, including freedom of trade and navigation, energy security and protection of the EEZ. With the prospective outcomes, particularly with regards to Pakistan and the Indian Ocean, as calculated from *Operation Vijay* and *Operation Parakaram*, the three goals of Indian Navy highlighted in the *Freedom to Use the Seas 2007* are: ensuring security of India’s maritime interests, to deter Pakistan, and to win the war convincingly at sea.<sup>30</sup> In a hindsight, the scope for mobilization of all military assets for the prevention of escalation has widened, with the aim to conduct conventional maritime operations (below the nuclear threshold), in order to influence the land battle.

This may primarily be due in part to the lessons learnt during the wars of 1965 and 1971, while facing a comparatively smaller but equally proficient Pakistan Navy (PN). The daunting bombardment of Indian coastal town Dwarka during the 1965 war by PN surface-based forces on merely light cruise and six destroyers and operation by PN submarine Ghazi is a glaring example. IN, despite having aircraft carrier, couldn’t deter the ascendancy of the PN in the North Arabian Sea. Similarly, during the 1971 war, PN submarine Hangor restored the balance by torpedoing IN submarine Kukri on 9 December, 1971, and later the INS Kirpan. Despite being on the offensive initially, an efficient retaliation by PN led the IN to go on defensive. The 1971 war not only highlighted the importance of submarines and surface launched anti-ship missiles (AShM), but also the deterring potency of PN.<sup>31</sup> India’s maritime-

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<sup>29</sup> Keshav Vaidya, *The Naval Defense of India* (Bombay: Thacker, 1949): 9, quoted in, David Scott “India’s Drive for a Blue Water Navy”, *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10, No. 2, (Winter 2007–2008): 4, <https://jmss.org/article/view/57675/43345>.

<sup>30</sup> Directorate of Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, *Freedom to Use the Seas*, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Operational Plans Division Naval Headquarters, Pakistan Navy, *Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan*, 32.

military doctrine, in the words of Khurana, substantially extrapolates its core essence from western concept of “command of the sea” that lies on “sea-control.”<sup>32</sup>

The first unofficial document on maritime strategy, *A Maritime Military Strategy for India 1989-2014*, had highlighted the ‘conflict role’ of Naval Forces that includes: coastal sea control, selective and distant sea control, and distant credible sea denial. The role of Indian Navy in land operations was, however, taken as subsidiary preference.<sup>33</sup> In *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015)*, the role of Indian Navy has expanded to include: prosecution of conjoined offensive and defensive missions for reinforcing “operational actions” including force projection, coastal defense, sea control, sea denial, SLOC protection, information warfare, and escalation management.<sup>34</sup>

For such war and peacetime “operational actions,” technology backed by financial resourcing and intelligence sharing has vital roles to play. In the backdrop of China challenge, and for the assertive posture in the littorals of the Indian Ocean, the technological naval modernization of Indian Navy has been incorporated in the financial allocation. The navy’s share of capital in modernisation funds of defence budget (2022-23) has increased as well up to 43%: the Indian Coast Guard earned 39%, whereas army merely attained 9.48% hike as compared to 2022.<sup>35</sup>

As of the role of intelligence sharing for countering maritime terrorism, since 2009, Indian Navy has been assigned with the authority to look over all maritime security matters, including coastal as well as offshore security. By 2018, as part of maritime diplomacy, 21 agreements of information-exchange pacts had been signed, with France, the UK, the US

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<sup>32</sup> Gurpreet S. Khurana, “The Essentials of India’s Naval Strategy,” *Études Marines* 17 (2020): 61, [https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cesm/EM17\\_-EN\\_NUM.pdf](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cesm/EM17_-EN_NUM.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Directorate of Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, *Freedom to Use the Seas*, 101.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Abhijit Singh, “Defence Budget 2022-23: A Mixed Bag,” *Observer Research Foundation*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/defence-budget-2022-23-a-mixed-bag/>.

along with the western Pacific littorals like Singapore, Japan and Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, India has also signed bilateral agreement on the sharing of intelligence and real-time imagery with the US under Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).<sup>37</sup>

In terms of maritime assets, Indian Navy is already equipped with; supersonic missiles frigates with Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs), Corvettes and Aircraft carriers for acquiring sea-control. Fleet of carriers can play significant role both in strategic and operational terms, as it would help in sea control, protection of SLOCs, and power projection in distant waters.<sup>38</sup> The unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) is another dimension in which India has been working to provide for the ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) operations.<sup>39</sup>

Precision sea-based missile is another variant and a newer version of missile-boat strikes (previously used by Indian Navy against Karachi port December 1971) that has been introduced for 'force projection.' The newer technology can transcend deep into the enemy littoral, thus, reinforcing India's "active" deterrence against Pakistan.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, surgical and precision strikes, used already as Special Forces (2016) and ground-attack aircraft (2019) to induce "compellence."<sup>41</sup> The potential use of newer technology by India,

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<sup>36</sup> "India Starts Centre to Share Maritime Traffic Updates," *The New Indian Express*, December 23, 2018, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2018/dec/23/india-starts-centre-to-sharemaritime-traffic-updates-1915429.html>.

<sup>37</sup> A. Sigdel, *India in the Era of China's Belt and Road Initiative: How Modi Responds to Xi* (New York: Lexington Books, 2020), 4-10.

<sup>38</sup> Sufian Ullah, Analysing India's Naval Development Strategy, *Islamabad Policy Research Institute* XIX (1): 86-110 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.31945/iprij.190104>.

<sup>39</sup> G.N. Roberts and R. Sutton, eds., *Advances in Unmanned Marine Vehicles* (London: Institution of Engineering and Technology, 2006), <http://dlib.scu.ac.ir/bitstream/Ebook/58032/2/0863414508.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Gurpeet Khurana, "The Essentials of India's Naval Strategy," *Études Marines* 17 (2020): 62, [https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cesm/EM17\\_-EN\\_NUM.pdf](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cesm/EM17_-EN_NUM.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> "Comparison Between 2016 Surgical Striker And Balakot Air Strike", *The Hindu*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/comparison-between-2016-surgical-strike-and-balakotair-strike/article26379492.ece>.

based merely on India's miscalculated assumptions has serious implications for Pakistan's security.

The nuclear dimension of Indian maritime military has induced another transformative pattern in terms of nuclearisation of IOR. While India's first nuclear-powered ballistic missile-carrying submarine (SSBN) completed its deterrent patrol (armed with nuclear missiles) in November 2018, its nuclear submarine program is not nascent. India initiated its nuclear submarine program in 1970s by gaining vessels from Russia on lease. India's SSBN program has met a new developmental turn when the INS Arihant was indigenously commissioned in 2016, followed by the launch of second INS Arighat in November 2017. India's indigenization program for the next 15 years includes further built-up of SSBNs.<sup>42</sup> From modernization to indigenization, the role of Indian Navy has transformed from a 'buyer's navy' to a 'builder's navy'<sup>43</sup> which certainly may have implications for the power matrix in IOR, as well as for Pakistan's maritime security.

## Implications for Pakistan

For Pakistan, maritime security, more than any other aspect of security, can fundamentally be defined in terms of national security concerns intertwined with economic security. The major maritime threat faced by Pakistan from its western waters is from the nuclear neighbor India that is ambitiously pursuing continental and maritime hegemony. The *National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022-2026*, the first ever security policy launched by the National Security Division on January 14, 2022, disapproves the 'self-professed role' of one country as a 'net-security provider' in the Indian Ocean, as it would have negative security and economic implications for the region. The policy document stipulates for the

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<sup>42</sup> Aqeel Akhtar, "Nuclear Submarines Shift Strategic Balance of Indian Ocean," *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, January 29, 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/01/nuclear-submarines-indian-ocean>.

<sup>43</sup> Lt Cdr Shahzad Bashir Qasim Hussain et al., "Dynamics of Evolving Threats From Sea – Perception Inversion," (Paper presented at the Command & Staff College Quetta by a panel of Course Members from 45th Pakistan Navy Staff Course, <https://pnwc.paknavy.gov.pk/pnwclibrary/crs/45th/5.pdf>).

renewed focus regarding the critical challenges of cyber intrusion and surveillance of Pakistan's SLOCs along the Indian Ocean, protection of EEZ, ensuring freedom of navigation and protection against piracy.<sup>44</sup>

As of doctrinal level, *Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan (MDP): Preserving Freedom of Seas (2018)* is the pioneering document which gives a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's maritime sector, and highlights the importance of maritime power in corroboration with Pakistan's Foreign Policy and National Security. The military role of Pakistan's naval forces is underlined as two-pronged: protection of SLOCs; and maintenance of effective deterrence against aggression or conflict affecting Pakistan's maritime interests. In a collaborative and inter-operative manner, the role of Navy has been broadened to address the disruptive elements within the nautical swaths of 'Northern and Western quadrants' of the Indian Ocean. The broader agendas of human security interests overlapping with this brand of 'maritime security' include maritime terrorism, piracy, gun running, and drug trafficking and human smuggling. A much expansive domain of maritime activity is also deemed favourable for the operationalization of CPEC and the Gwadar port.<sup>45</sup>

India's unceasing military modernization has advanced from stealth capabilities well beyond to nuclear level. Washington-Delhi growing strategic concord in anti-China pursuit has endowed India with a "naval moment"<sup>46</sup> allowing for the modernization of naval fleet with a strategic nuclear component. India's sea-based nuclear deployments have higher tendency of crises escalation from conventional to nuclear level and hence bears the potential repercussions for deterrence stability, arms race stability and crisis stability in South Asia.<sup>47</sup> With much nominal effect of India's SSBN on naval and nuclear policies of China, India's

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<sup>44</sup> National Security Division, Government of Pakistan, "National Security Policy of Pakistan: 2022-2026," January 14, 2022: 25, [www.nsd.gov.pk](http://www.nsd.gov.pk).

<sup>45</sup> Pakistan Navy, *Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan (MDP): Preserving Freedom of Sea* (Naval Headquarters Islamabad, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> Anit Mukherjee, and C. Raja Mohan, "India's Naval Moment" in *India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security*, ed. Anit. Mukherjee, and C. R. Mohan (New York: Routledge, 2016), 237–246.

<sup>47</sup> Aqeel Akhtar and Sufian Ullah, "India's Sea-Based Nuclear Forces and Strategic Stability in South Asia," *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18366503.2021.1961352>.

strategic aims backed by nuclear indigenization may have serious implications for Pakistan in terms of acquisition of conventional and nuclear naval capabilities.

Despite limited areas of interest in the North Arabian Sea, Pakistan's strategic inspiration is aptly "dictated by the evolving contemporary strategic needs."<sup>48</sup> Strategic and nuclear ambiguity may serve well Pakistan's nuclear standing and posture in case of prospective ambitions and acquisitions. For wartime strategy, as proposed by Hussain et al., Pakistan needs "Double D strategy" that is Deterrence and Denial: capability + appropriate posture projection by the Pakistan Navy to deny freedom of maneuver by the adversary.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, peacetime strategy and technology required by PN are:

- **Maritime Domain Awareness:** Through surveillance satellite, coastal radars, patrolling platform, and aviation assets. Pakistan lacks technologies in this domain.
- **Network Centric Operations:** Surface and aerospace surveillance (satellite-based surveillance), aircraft, UAVs, ship-borne and shore-based surveillance systems. Also, development of secure and reliable communication.
- **Power Projection and Limited Sea Control:** Modern multi-mission ships, naval aviation capability, sea and shore-based aviation assets, UAVs, for surveillance and strike missions in all dimensions.
- **Anti-Access:** Nuclear-powered submarines with equipping surface, air and sub-surface platforms, long-range precision strike missiles, land-based long-range Anti-Ship Missiles, counter amphibious operations.<sup>50</sup>

On diplomatic level, Pakistan actively retains its cooperative engagements with the regional maritime organizations. International Maritime Conference (IMC) 2007 was

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<sup>48</sup> Pakistan Navy, "Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan," 57.

<sup>49</sup> Lt Cdr Shahzad Bashir Qasim Hussain et al., "Dynamics of Evolving Threats from Sea," 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 4-6.

initiated by Pakistan Navy to reinforce maritime security and promote multinational exercise AMAN. Also, Pakistan joined Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2014 and hosted 'IONS Preparatory Workshop and IONS Working Group in 2015 and 2017.'<sup>51</sup> In 2004 PN joined Combined Task Force 150; counter maritime terrorism coalition 2009 counter piracy coalition CTF 151.<sup>52</sup> These platforms would substantially help Pakistan in image building and narrative building against human security threats.

Pakistan is part of the Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Cooperation (IOMAC) established for Ocean governance and management. The cooperation consists 9 members with exception to Australia, India and South Africa. Pakistan with collaboration of China can use diplomatic efforts to seek membership of South Africa, as both China and Pakistan have already extended their economic outreach to African region. Pakistan's 2017 "Look Africa Plan" and 2019 Engage Africa Policy envisioned increasing trade between Pakistan and Africa. As part of Overseas Deployment (OSD) and Human Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions to African countries, since 2019, Pakistan Navy Ships Aslat, Moawin and Nasr carried OSD missions and engaged in disaster relief and goodwill visits to various African countries, including Djibouti, Kenya, Niger, and Sudan.<sup>53</sup> These economic and diplomatic efforts can help in peacetime strategy for distributing naval forces into distant theatres of Western Indian Ocean with the future strategic prospects.

The naval or maritime strategy frames the role of naval forces both during peace and war. Depending upon the strength of maritime nation, the strategy can either be offensive/defensive or a combination of both. As a general trend, offensive maritime strategy is adopted by the stronger side whereas the weaker side strategically opts for defensive. The defensive/offensive posture is further determined by political/military strategic objectives. Unlike the war at land, contestation in waters is more fluid with the unpredictable turns,

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<sup>51</sup> Pakistan Navy, "Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan," 38.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 37-38.

<sup>53</sup> Munib Salman, "Exploring the Western Indian Ocean for Pakistan," *Maritime Study Forum*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.maritimestudyforum.org/exploring-the-western-indian-ocean-for-pakistan/>.

dynamics, and ends. A weaker power would rarely resort to hostility unless war becomes inevitable and geographical position serves strategically advantageous.<sup>54</sup> Pakistan, being a significant maritime nation in the Indian Ocean Region, militarily needs to retain a balance in its offence-defence posture, pertinently tending to its security threats and needs. For geographically smaller maritime state, as Stenzel proposes: A strategic defensive at sea should include elements of the offensive. Disputing or contesting sea control encompasses not only offensive actions aimed at attiring the enemy's fleet but also actions aimed at lifting the enemy's blockade of one's coast; defence and protection of one's coastal installations/facilities, naval bases, and ports; and defence against the enemy's landings. It also includes defence of a strait/narrows and important positions on the coast.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Due to broadening of security agenda endowed by globalization, and reinforced human security concerns evoked by securitization, there has been a verifying convergence of traditional and non-traditional security threats in the Indian Ocean Region. Such a confluence has also affected the geopolitical domain where geostrategic concerns, in a symbiotic manner, impinge upon the geo-economic considerations. In such an evolving scenario, Pakistan's maritime challenges tend to be multi-pronged; to keep up pace with the emerging security challenges like ocean resource management, economic concerns, piracy, maritime terrorism, climate change and environmental security; and secondly to address India's expansionist ambitions. India's maritime expansionism serves two-pronged maritime agenda for a blue-water navy. First, to contain threats posed by China and Pakistan, and secondly to exploit its strategic location, role, and maritime capabilities for the protection of its extensive EEZ. The implications of such a posture by India bear significance, not only for

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<sup>54</sup> Vego, "Maritime Strategy and Sea Denial," 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred Stenzel, *Kriegführung zur See: Lehre vom Seekriege* (Hannover/Leipzig:Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1913): 69, quoted in Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Denial: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2019): 59.

Pakistan, but for the whole Indian Ocean Region. Pakistan being a medium maritime power, can play the role of a balancer by working in collaboration with the larger maritime ally China on diplomatic, politico-military, and economic fronts. On discrete terms, preserving adaptability to the evolving strategic environment, particularly in nuclear and cyber domains, and synchronization of the material and nonmaterial maritime assets (strategy, vision, doctrine, posture, technology, intelligence and communication and naval force), can substantially help attain maritime security objectives for Pakistan.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.