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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**Strategic Reflection of Indian Ocean
Power Duel between China and
India around the Bay of Bengal**

중국과 인도의 인도양 해양패권 경쟁: 벥골만을
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Strategic Reflection of Indian Ocean Power Duel between China and India around the Bay of Bengal

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Abstract

Having neglected the Indian Ocean for decades, the geopolitical importances of the Indian Ocean is once again highlighting. Stretching from from the Persian Gulf to far south-western Australia and the southern tip of Africa to the Malacca Strait, it is a hub for world trade in goods and ship-bound energy pass, accounting for 12% of world GDP. China's rise including naval military presence and infrastructure-led Belt and Road Initiative in the region works as a serious challenge especially for India as they have long been considered as their *mare nostrum*. Under these circumstances, China and India are seeking to establish strategic partnerships with Indian Ocean coastal countries to pursue their respective strategies of deterring China and deterring India. One of the distinctive approaches of China is its active economic cooperation with Indian Ocean coastal countries, while one of India's strategies to deter China is the Indo-Pacific strategy with the United States, Japan and Australia known as the Quad.

This study attempts to demonstrate that the Indian Ocean policies of China and India have diversified to grab the regional power in the area and it will compare and analyze the policies of both countries in securing their national interests. It argues that under the Maritime Superpower Initiative, China is striving to grab hegemony in IOR, as a stepping stone to become a global power. Second, China's effort on the IOR proves the influence of the Global South. Lastly, India's approach to counter China weighs on heavy security cooperation including QUAD. Therefore, the Indian Ocean power duel around the Bay of Bengal has emerged as one of the most strategically

important arenas in the 21st century beyond China and India, intensifying the global tensions.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, Maritime Power, Hegemonic Competition, Multilateralism, Naval Strength, National Security

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of Study

Tensions between China and India have been historic. The Indian government allowed Tibet's provisional government to be based in Dharamsala, the northern part of India. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has long been an issue for China since Beijing considers New Delhi as a strategic rivalry in the area. With the long-lasting border disputes and the 1962 Sino-India war, the emergence of the nuclear power of India, the power demonstration by China in the IOR was still not clear. From the mid-1980s, China has shown its operations in the IOR: the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) started to project a series of port calls on the IOR neighboring countries including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.¹

Mentioning safeguarding world peace and strengthening China's national interests, President Hu Jintao put maritime power at core in the Central Military Commission's speech in 2004. Since then, its strategic approach aimed at enhancing China's maritime capabilities, security-oriented issues for energy and international transportation routes. The 2008 defense white paper mentioned the country's interest to become a key player in the global competition for resources and the PLAN's play in distant waters apart from China's territory. To counter piracy, the PLAN has been deployed in the Gulf of Aden for the first time which has successfully continued to this day. Such projects were expected to develop further for its blue-water logistics and more importantly military presence out of China. Maritime interests have once

¹Christopher D. Yung & Ross Rustici. (2010). "China's Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles, and Potential Solutions," Washington, DC: *National Defense University Press*

again resumed by Xi Jinping under the Maritime Superpower rhetoric. As economic and security challenges are expected to be contested in the area, tensions in IOR are likely to increase. Both countries are increasing their naval presence in the region: China prioritizes the protection of its maritime trade, while India seeks to establish itself as the powerful security provider in the area. The role of the US in the Indian Ocean region drives geopolitics of the area, thus its actions are crucial between China and India.

1.1. Geographic Importance of Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Indian Ocean is the only major water that does not extend from pole to pole, at the same time it is large enough to extend from the Indian peninsula to Antarctica. The world's oldest and most densely populated countries are located on the Northern rim of the Indian Ocean. Different from the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the IOR is geographically unique as it is closed from the North by the Asia continents but open in the South. However, this is the vulnerable place from which many invasions have occurred. The European colonizer came from the sea to reach its shores. The Indian Ocean is symmetrical to a 'North-South axis,' running down the length of the archipelago of Maldives. In contemporary times, the sea has transformed to be the critical lifeline for safety, security, economics, environment, and maritime geopolitics. There are contested and often intersecting interests that characterizes the complex environment represented by competition, interdependence, rivalry, susceptibility in the strategic maritime picture.

Alfred Thayer Mahan, a notable defense strategist, famously stated that the Indian Ocean holds a pivotal role in Asia's leadership. Given that the Indian Ocean serves as the gateway to the world's seven seas, it determines the fate of global power.

This quote has been frequently referenced by both Indian and Chinese scholars to highlight the growing importance of the Indian Ocean. Many scholars concur in opinion that the security dynamics revolves around the IOR, and rising powers' strategic approaches may resemble that of 19th century Europe. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has now become a venue for the competition between superpowers, particularly China, India, and the US. Consequently, it has emerged as a crucial spot to grasp the actual implications of a balance of power framework in Asia and beyond, considering the geographical significance of the Indian Ocean.

Considering the gravity of the Indian Ocean, especially around the Bay of Bengal, it demonstrates a distinct role for China from the South China Sea and East China Sea. While the IOR may not be directly aligned with China's core interests, it holds substantial importance for China given its strategic and economic considerations. When it comes to energy security, trade, maritime routes, and resources, the Indian Ocean serves as a critical pathway for China's energy imports. Over 80 percent of China's total energy supplies, comprising oil and natural gas, are transported from the Middle East and Africa via the Indian Ocean. Safeguarding the security of these sea lanes is crucial for ensuring China's energy security. Moreover, the Ocean serves as a vital conduit for maritime trade, connecting China with African, the Middle East, and European markets and an integral component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to strengthen connectivity and trade along both land and maritime routes. Given the fact that Chinese goods and resources are predominantly transported through the Indian Ocean, its importance for China's trade and economic interests cannot be understated. Furthermore, it is abundant in natural resources, including oil, minerals, gas and fisheries, which are essential for supporting China's growing economy and sustaining its industrial and economic development.

Consequently, securing access to resource-rich areas within the Indian Ocean region holds strategic significance for China.

The IOR's geographic status acts as a portal to significant geopolitical areas for China. It grants entry to vital regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, where China aims to assert its influence and establish diplomatic connections. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean holds considerable military importance, enabling China to showcase its ability to project power and maintain a naval presence, thereby advancing its defense objectives. Additionally, it allows China to counteract the influence of other major powers in the region. Safeguarding maritime security in the Indian Ocean is imperative for China's naval capabilities and the preservation of its sea communication lines. With diverse challenges, including piracy, terrorism, and territorial disputes ahead of IOR, China actively engages in global initiatives aimed at upholding stability and security in the Indian Ocean for protecting its own interests and contributing to regional peace and stability.

One of the primary concerns driving Chinese IOR interests stems from the issue of energy security.² Over the last twenty years, China's energy consumption has doubled, which has led to concerns about energy security and high energy dependence from overseas. China surpassed Japan in petroleum consumption and foreign supplies now account for over 30% of China's total oil consumption, which has led to fears in Beijing that any disruption in energy transportation could negatively impact China's economic development in 2003. There have been warnings in the media that such disruptions could lead to grave oil shortages and power outages in the future, potentially hindering China's economic transition.

²Energy in China: Transportation, Electric Power and Fuel Markets. (2004). *Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre*, Institute of Energy Economics

China's energy demand is predicted to double over the next two decades, leading to concerns about energy security. This has compelled Beijing to look for oil and gas supplies apart from China including the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf. As a result, the sea lines security communication has become crucial for the Chinese government. The fear is that any disruption to energy transportation could hinder the nationwide economic development, leading to immense power outages and gas shortages. China's strategic plans come from the nationwide energy-imports dependence and shipments, demonstrating its insatiable appetite for energy security for an uninterrupted power resource. Energy security is a forefront of China's strategic concern. Economic stringency caused by the pandemic in 2020, the oil demand in China decreased by 3 percent or 390,000 barrels a day which was the first drop since 1990.³

Chinese analysts have expressed concerns over increasing geopolitical ambitions by India beyond the IOR, particularly ASEAN and East Asia. India's strategic ties with countries including Japan, Vietnam, and the United States, have been viewed with suspicion by some Chinese scholars who perceived it as a containment strategy against China. However, India's repeated stress was that its foreign policy is not aimed at containing any specific country and is based on promoting regional stability, peace, and economic growth. The strategic competition between two countries around the Bay of Bengal is likely to continue for many years given the importance of the region for both countries' economic and security interests.

1.2. Regional Hegemonic Competition

³Clifford Krauss. (2023). China's Oil and Gas Use Fell in 2022 for First Time in Decades, *The New York Times* (January 27)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/27/business/energy-environment/china-energy.html>

China's ascension as a global superpower has been an emerging issue for many Western countries, especially for the US in recent decades. This apprehension is reflected not only in policy-making circles but also in academic discourse. According to John Mearsheimer, a prominent scholar in International Relations, China's growing influence poses an imminent threat to the existing world order and existing hegemony. Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism anticipates intense competition among major powers, including China, and the possibility of military conflict as a result of this competition. As Beijing continues to prop up its economic and military presence, the theory suggests that it will inevitably become a rival to Washington. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate these claims and their implications for global and regional security.

India's economy has undergone a monumental transformation that is reminiscent of America in the 19th century. The creation of a vast national market has allowed firms to grow through economies of scale, while internal migration has shifted millions of people and created a new consumer class. In the past seven years, India's economy has grown by 40%, making it the world's fifth-largest economy by 2027, according to the IMF. With a projected GDP of \$5tn, it is predicted to be just behind the US, China, and Japan. Furthermore, India's stock market has already become the fourth largest globally, and it has about 100 unicorns, the third-largest country after the US and China. Meanwhile, India's G20 presidency in 2023 with focus on inclusive growth, climate finance, multilateral institutions, and sustainable development goals, is expected to lay a crucial ground for the nation. It will be intriguing to observe how China and India navigate these challenges and work towards achieving their respective objectives or tackling threats.

Indeed, the two nation's incredible economic growth over the past few

decades has been unprecedented. Despite facing different challenges and adopting different economic models, both countries have managed to achieve significant poverty reduction and improvements in living standards for their citizens. The sheer size of their populations and their rapidly growing middle classes make China and India increasingly important players in the global economy.

Both countries, however, still face many challenges ahead of them such as income inequality, high unemployment rates and domestic unequal development issues. There are significant infrastructure disparities between urban and rural areas as well. Environmental challenges related to their rapid industrialization and urbanization pose threats to people and the ongoing geopolitical tensions between China and India, and between China and other major powers, create uncertainty and potential risks for the global economy. While the fast development of China and India has been signaling positive signs in many respects, it is important to acknowledge potential risks and geopolitical perils associated with the IOR in the foreseeable future.

1.3. Methodology

This study is basically a comparative study, investigating specific policies or initiatives of the governments and remarks of the political figures at formal events or meetings via literature review. If there are no official documents issued by the government, the paper will refer to the articles and documents of major diplomats, former bureaucrats, and government officials.

2. China

China's diplomatic trajectory can be delineated into distinct periods: the pre-People's Republic of China (PRC) era, the revolutionary phase encompassing Mao Zedong's rule from 1946 to 1976, the strategic triangular period in the early 1970s, and the era of openness during the 1980s under the governance of Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao, and the current period under Xi Jinping. The foreign policy of the People's Republic of China is found on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which constitute the bedrock of China's diplomatic approach: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in domestic affairs, equality and mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence.

Xi Jinping's foreign policy has undergone a notable shift, displaying greater proactivity across various aspects compared to previous approaches. Xi's Grand Strategy encompasses three primary pillars: instilling confidence in other nations regarding China's peaceful intentions as a rising power, transitioning from mere rhetoric to concrete actions in promoting reforms within the international order to support China's ascent, and demonstrating unwavering determination in safeguarding core interests of the Communist Party of China (CCP). Notably, Xi's foreign policy agenda places significant emphasis on the ambitious maritime superpower initiative known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was proposed in 2013. The policy provides monetary assistance to developing countries that had been left behind by globalization. Moreover, the BRI did not harm the existing world order, but to wield China's economic, military and political clout over other regions. Welcome cooperations with other countries and establishments such as AIIB, BRIC New Development Bank, WB, IMF, Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation. China's

active approach continues to develop with new challenges of Xi's Rejuvenation plan.

The annual National People's Congress, a crucial component of China's "Two Sessions," concluded in March, with Premier Li Keqiang's government work report for 2023 ("GWR") to policymakers, outlining the country's economic direction for the upcoming year. The GWR covered all critical areas of the economy and trade, including foreign investment, financial stimulus, and technological innovation. The Greater Bay Area, seen as China's southern economic powerhouse, has been further expanded to support Hong Kong's economy and enterprises in recent years. The GWR confirmed that the central government will ensure that Hong Kong and Macau maintain a high degree of autonomy and that the government will continue to support two regions' development and stability. The CCP's Taiwan strategy for the next five years should be primarily peaceful, but Xi hopes to enter into substantive negotiations. Under this premise, the CCP will seek to expand exchanges with Taiwan. With challenges from the United States and the anti-China sentiment of the Taiwanese, China's measures and means may not be effective in the short term. Moreover, following the COVID-19 epidemic, cross-Straits exchanges were suspended for a time, and the CCP is actively seeking their resumption. This year could present a window of opportunity for the expansion of cross-Straits exchanges.

The CCP continues to employ a two-pronged approach to Taiwan and strengthens the connection between its Taiwan policy and China's national development. "Overall Strategy for Solving the Taiwan Issue in the New Era" and the "Taiwan Issue and China's Unification in the New Era" white papers by the CCP published in August 2022 reveal China's political ambitions and efforts toward Taiwan.

Strengthening the Communist Party's diplomatic efforts and exerting greater control over military diplomacy, President Xi has enhanced the diplomatic controls. Traditionally, China practiced political party diplomacy through the Central Liaison Department (CLD), Central Propaganda Department (CPD), and United Front Work Department (UFWD). In the early days of the PRC, these departments operated covertly and had limited scope. However, under Xi's leadership, their responsibilities have been broadened, their visibility increased, and substantial support has been provided to project a positive image of China globally. The Central Liaison Department has assumed a leading role in party diplomacy, primarily by managing connections with communist and socialist parties in foreign countries, including the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The new era after the Cold War drove the agency to establish relationships with foreign political parties of various ideologies willing to collaborate with China.⁴

Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, the Communist Party's diplomatic endeavors have been strengthened, resulting in heightened influence and command over military diplomacy for Chinese diplomats. China's involvement in political party diplomacy has traditionally been conducted through the Central Liaison Department (CLD), Central Propaganda Department (CPD), and United Front Work Department (UFWD). During the initial phases of the PRC, these departments operated discreetly and within defined limits. However, under Xi's guidance, their roles have been expanded, visibility augmented, and extensive assistance provided to foster a favorable global perception of China. Assumedly leading the way in party diplomacy, the Central Liaison Department has taken charge of managing cooperative relations

⁴David Shambaugh. (2017). 'China's Quiet Diplomacy: The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party,' *China An International Journal*, 5(1): 26–54

with communist and socialist parties abroad, including the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Following the end of the Cold War, responsibilities of the apparatus were expanded to establish connections with political parties worldwide, regardless of their ideological orientations, as long as they exhibited a willingness to cooperate with China.

The idea of the "China dream" had started to gain traction, by Hu Jintao to legitimize the party's rule by emphasizing historical continuity and achievements. Xi Jinping is credited with introducing several new foreign policy concepts, such as the "new type of Great Power relations" that characterizes Sino-American relations since his meeting with Obama. Another important issue is China's relations with neighboring states. However, the most significant initiative is the BRI which has long-term plans. A new Silk Road initiative was proposed by Hu Jintao, however, it was not resumed by Xi Jinping later.

In president Xi's speech in Washington, D.C. in 2012, the idea of "a novel form of interaction between influential nations in the 21st century," referred to as "xinxing daguo guanxi" in Chinese was introduced. This notion emphasized the importance of establishing a relationship based on "reciprocal comprehension and strategic confidence," "acknowledging each other's fundamental interests," "collaborating for mutual gains," and "strengthening cooperation and coordination in global affairs." Hu Jintao and Dai Bingguo, the state councilor, further expounded on this concept during the fourth U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue held in May 2012. During his visit to Washington, then Liang Guanglie, China's defense minister and state councilor also advocated for the joint cultivation of a fresh kind of rapport between nations with economic strength and political power .

The fourth meeting between the US and China further elucidated this concept

by Hu Jintao and Dai Bingguo, the state councilor. In his visit to Washington, Liang Guanglie, the former state councilor and defense minister, also advocated for fostering a novel type of rapport among major nations. At the G20 summit in Mexico in June 2012, President Hu Jintao and the U.S. President Barack Obama convened, wherein Hu proposed enhancing dialogues, pursuing cooperation for mutual benefit, effectively managing disagreements, and jointly assuming responsibility for global peace and prosperity. This proposal was subsequently mentioned by Cui Tiankai, China's ambassador to the United States, in documents published on the Chinese Foreign Ministry's website and the China International Strategy Review. Under the leadership of President Xi and Premier Li Keqiang, China continues to champion the concept of a new paradigm in relationships among major countries. Addressing a question during a press conference at the National People's Congress on March 17, 2013, Premier Li expressed his belief that conflicts between major powers are not inevitable and that common interests often outweigh their differences. He affirmed China's willingness to cooperate with the U.S. government in establishing a fresh model of relations between superpowers. This concept remains a central tenet of current foreign policy in China.

2.1. China's Strategic Approach Under the Xi Jinping Administration

2.1.1. Economic Expansion: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

President Xi projected the concept of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" as an innovative regional diplomatic model at the State Visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. He has also supported the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the advancement of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" in his State Visit to Indonesia. These endeavors were subsequently amalgamated with the

projection of "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The official endorsement of the BRI by the Party leadership in November 2013 underscored its importance as a policy priority, and in March 2015, the State Council sanctioned detailed plans for the initiative collaboratively devised by numerous government departments.

The BRI functions as a pivotal strategy in order to pursue China's economic growth through the exploration of innovative modes of economic cooperation with emerging nations. Over the course of three decades, China's economic reforms have yielded remarkable success, notably through significant growth in exports and foreign direct investment from developed countries. Nevertheless, China's economic progress has recently encountered challenges, resulting in a somewhat stagnant development landscape. China's strengthened diplomacy through the BRI offers promising prospects for the country, bringing forth new economic opportunities.

In addition to promoting economic growth, the proposed economic agenda also serves as a vehicle for China to expand its clout on the global stage and shape the international economic system. China is eager to take on greater responsibilities in global economic governance as a rising superpower, however, the frustration came from the slow pace of reform within existing international institutions, including the IMF and World Bank. These organizations have traditionally championed the "Washington Consensus" approach to economic development, which has not always delivered successful outcomes. China's emphasis on infrastructure development, as evidenced by the BRI, offers an alternative model that may prove valuable to other developing countries. By creating new institutions including the AIIB and by promoting the BRI, China seeks a more proactive role in creating the global economic system and promoting its own interests. The ultimate goal is to establish a new international economic architecture that better reflects the interests and priorities of

emerging economies such as China. Third, the Belt Road Initiative encompasses more than just infrastructure-focused development, with policy talks and summits, linking infrastructure connection, trade independence, monetary assistance, and people-to-people exchange also playing crucial roles. Infrastructure development will be essential in order to reinforce regional cooperation and collaboration, particularly in the early stages of the Initiative, by providing China's economic success experience. Multiple projects are currently being conducted to link a copious amount of subregions, such as high-speed railroads, highways, energy pipelines, and telecom and electricity connections. Finance assistance has been circulating from various sources, such as Chinese institutions like the Silk Road Fund and the China Development Bank, China-made international organizations including the AIIB, the BRICS New Development Bank, as well as many Chinese companies. Finally, the economic initiative presents potential opportunities preparing a new economic foundation and new policy attempts for breakthrough of the economy. However, uncertainties and risks come along the project including geopolitical tensions, international policy situation, and financial viability of cross-border infrastructure projects. It remains to be seen whether this new initiative by China will have a transformative impact on the world, given its novelty for both China and the international community. Nonetheless, China's attempt to support building infrastructure in underdeveloped states regions should be acknowledged. Prudence is necessary, both financially and politically, for this initiative to be fruitful.

The main target of the BRI is to support economic progress in the developing countries through mutually beneficial cooperation, promoting trust and communication. The initiative is guided by four principles, which include openness and cooperation, market-based operation, harmonious inclusiveness, and mutual

benefit for all countries. Unlike other international economic cooperation mechanisms such as the WTO and G20, the BRI is inclusive and does not exclude any interested parties, including countries like Japan and Korea. Additionally, implementation of the Initiative must make commercial sense, adhering to market-based rules, rather than being treated as foreign aid provided by the Chinese government.

Comprising three primary routes, the BRI establishes a comprehensive connection with China. The initial route commences in China, traverses Central Asia and Russia, and ultimately reaches the Baltic Sea in Europe. The second pathway extends through Central Asia and West Asia, linking to the Persian Gulf and spanning across the Mediterranean region. The final route stretches from China, winds via Southeast Asia and South Asia, and culminates in the Indian Ocean. China's ambitious maritime silk road plan emerges from its coastal harbors, spans across the South China Sea, and encompasses regions including the Indian Ocean, Europe, Africa, as well as Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor are intricately interwoven with the broader BRI initiative.

With over 60 nations' participation, the BRI covers a substantial portion of the world population and economy, accounting for two-thirds of the global population and one-third of GDP amounting to \$21 trillion. Stretching across three continents and bridging the East Asian and European markets, this underdeveloped region presents a significant opportunity for China's future economic growth. By linking key cities along the planned route and designating them as hubs and economic and trade zones, China aims to establish a new Eurasian land bridge and strengthen cooperation corridors with economic benefits spanning China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, and the Indo-China Peninsula. Emphasizing the importance of

efficient and secure transportation, the presence of major ports plays a crucial role in facilitating trade and connectivity.

The conspicuous characteristic that sets the 'BRI' apart from other international cooperation mechanisms is the crucial role in the infrastructure build-up. Constructing infrastructures has been a core of China's economic growth of its reform period and is therefore an important element of this initiative. Most countries along the "Belt and Road" route have significant infrastructure gaps, which could be due to financial constraints, lack of planning and coordination, or other reasons.

The BRI addresses a significant deficiency in the current international economic framework, which is the lack of infrastructure projects for both developed and developing nations. The IMF previously called for increased investment in infrastructure projects to support economic growth, but insufficient funding prevented action. The BRI has the potential to attract finance from public and private institutions for infrastructure development. Numerous projects have been proposed, particularly in high-speed roads and railways, energy transport pipelines, electricity connections and construction of telecommunications. However, the BRI is more extensive than infrastructure construction. Since the promulgation of the bold transnational project in 2013, the total amount of engagement has reached USD 962 billion. Out of this, approximately USD 573 billion can be attributed to construction contracts, while non-financial investments account for USD 389 billion.⁵

2.1.2. Diplomatic Approach: Maritime Superpower, String of Pearls Strategy

2.1.2.1. Maritime Superpower

⁵Sukjoon Yoon. (2015). Implications of Xi Jinping's "True Maritime Power": Its Context, Significance, and Impact on the Region, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 68 2015, No. 3, Art. 4

China's former President Hu Jintao was the first to introduce China's maritime strategy by proposing China as "maritime power".. This idea was emphasized at the eighteenth Communist Party Congress and twelfth National People's Congress' the first plenary session of the in 2013. This concept had been mentioned previously by Hu Jintao's predecessor, who wanted to increase the power of the PLAN to align with the new century's mission. However, the idea of true maritime power now includes every Chinese citizen, and it is being utilized to promote the nations' political, ideological, and economic fundamentals and philosophy. The vision is to build up China's national strength in the area of military, economic and security developments. In Chinese history, overemphasis on land power, such as the Great Wall, has always weakened the might and prosperity of the country. Therefore, a strategic balance between land and sea power is crucial for China's success.

The China's Communist Party (CCP) Politburo conducted the Eighth Group Study Session in 2013, focusing on the topic of "building a strong maritime nation." During this session, Xi Jinping, as the presiding leader, systematically outlined the roadmap and approach to transform China into a maritime powerhouse. He emphasized the importance of overall development based on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the need for adopting a coordinated approach to both the domestic and international environment. The strategy involved a focus on land-sea coordination, utilizing the seas to enrich and strengthen the country, promoting harmony between people and the seas, and pursuing win-win cooperation. Xi Jinping highlighted the peaceful, cooperative, and mutually beneficial methods to solidly advance the construction of a maritime superpower. He emphasized the significance of increasing attention, understanding, and planned management of the seas, aiming to continuously achieve progress in building a maritime superpower. In his report regarding the 19th

CCP National Congress, president Xi Jinping highlighted the importance of land-sea coordination and the accelerated construction of a maritime superpower. Building a strong maritime nation is a crucial aspect of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the noble era.⁶

Maritime domain was considered as a colonialist sphere by many China's strategists during Mao Zedong's era and anyone advocating for alternative strategies was considered an foe in their communist ideology. Despite China has never explicitly framed exclusively a "maritime" or "continental" national strategy due to its vast land area and the historical dominance of cultural interactions via the Silk Road, it has generally been viewed as a continental power. However, "Maritime Silk Road" has shown the historical cases of Chinese dynasties including Song, Ming, and Yuan pursuing maritime expansion. Therefore it is incorrect to say that China completely neglects its maritime interests. Neutral stances have been taken by China's national strategies with emphasis shifting between land and sea to maintain stability and security. Chinese history has been proving that the balancing of disparities between coastal and inland areas is a political challenge.

Liaoning in 2012 was China's first aircraft carrier deployment. China's heavy dependence on the transportation of goods by sea, including oil, natural gas, energy, soybeans, and raw materials imports such as the Middle East, South America, and Africa Continent. With domestic circumstances, China's merchant fleet plays a crucial role in facilitating these imports and Chinese products exports to foreign countries. However, China's relentless pursuit for maritime superpower and naval presence

⁶Xi Jinping, (2021). Comrade Xi Jinping's Remarks to the Eighth Collective Study Session of the CCP Politburo [习近平同志在中共中央政治局第八次集体学习时的讲话]. Interpret: China, CSIS (JUL 30)

stems from the fragility of these transportation links, often referred to as the "Malacca Dilemma," playing as a significant factor necessary to address this concern.⁷ The Department of Defense's 2021 Report provides a comparison of naval combat assets between China and India.⁸

	Aircraft Carriers	Large surface combatants	Small surface combatants	Transport & landing	Patrol craft	Submarines
China	3	36	105	52	67	58
India	2	10	32	17	55	16

Sources: Department of Defense 2021, Report to Congress, www.Indiannavyic.in

2.1.2.1.1. Indian Ocean and Maritime Superpower

The Chinese have a fond recollection of a historical period when Zheng He led peaceful voyages exploring the Indian Ocean and the Africa's eastern coast⁹, and there are even speculative accounts suggesting these expeditions reached as far as North America and Europe. PLAN's first deployment with its naval task force in 2008, consisted of a Luyang II-class destroyer, Jiangkai II frigates, and a Fuji-class auxiliary ship to the IOR for projecting anti-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden. This deployment, along with other implications that China has begun making towards broader maritime cooperation, should be seen as indicative of their

⁷Ian Storey. (2006). "China's Malacca Dilemma," China Brief Volume: 6, Issue: 8, *Jamestown Foundation* (April 12)

<https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-malacca-dilemma/>

⁸Toby Mann. (2022). Why India wants a bigger navy and to build the ships on home soil, *ABC News* (September 11)

⁹Vijay Sakhuja. (2011). Asian Maritime Power in the 21st Century: Strategic Transactions; China, India and Southeast Asia, Singapore: *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*

non-confrontational intentions and their aspiration to be recognized as a responsible maritime power. Given that the Indian Ocean possesses one-third of global trade transportation, it is noteworthy that Chinese naval units have engaged in bilateral anti-piracy naval exercises with the U.S. Navy in the Indian Ocean since 2008 and the second exercises in 2013.

2.1.2.2. String of Pearls Strategy

"String of Pearls" strategy targets at addressing its shortages of logistic support facilities and the military bases in IOR. This propulsion involves access to establishments or development of military bases across the Indian Ocean's northern parts, providing practical assistance for the PLA Navy. In recent years, ports such as Gwadar in Pakistan, Sri Lanka's Hambantota, and Kyaukpyu in Myanmar have been financially assisted by Chinese firms to construct commercial port facilities. With the financial assistance, the Chinese military has been strengthening its power to have undisclosed rights for the PLAN to establish a long-lasting presence at their will.

Amidst debates about China's intentions regarding its involvement in port construction in the IOR, Beijing maintains that such projects are solely commercial in nature. Despite the presence of the PLA Navy in the Arabian Sea for anti piracy operations since 2008, China has avoided overt military activity in the IOR and has categorically denied plans to establish any military bases there. Instead, since 2013, "Maritime Silk Route" (MSR) initiative has emerged more actively with the String of Pearls strategy. It consists of proposing China-centered ports systems, developmental projects, and creating Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean countries' special economic zones with the policy focusing on the physical infrastructure aspect of the initiative, the new production development and industrial chains for distribution to secure

transshipment. This initiative would likely bind countries located in the northern Indian Ocean for China's new economic opportunity and diplomatic relations.

2.1.3. Military

China has made significant efforts to modernize its navy, with a goal of becoming a "maritime superpower" capable of protecting its national interests. This ambition was first expressed by Hu Jintao, the former president of China, at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 and was later reiterated by Xi Jinping 2018. The need for building a powerful and modernized naval force capable of conducting missions out of China's territorial waters has been emphasized in the defense white paper published in 2019. These modernization efforts have resulted in an increase in the size and a reform of the PLAN. According to research by RAND, though China consisted of 57 destroyers and frigates in their surface fleet in 1996, short-range surface-to-air missiles were featured only in three of them, leaving them vulnerable to modern anti-ship cruise missiles. The majority of China's attack submarines were also outdated Soviet Romeo-class vessels from the 1950s.

China's navy has expanded rapidly in recent decades, and by around 2020, it has surpassed the size of the US Navy.¹⁰ The PLAN's growth had been significant by 2020, with estimates from the US Congressional Research Service and the US Department of Defense putting the number of Chinese ships and submarines at around 348 and 355 respectively in 2021. The US Navy's deployable battle force was made up of 296 vessels in the same year. The British Royal Navy possesses approximately 76 ships and a fleet of 44 ships was owned by the Royal Australian Navy, ranking behind China with comparatively less numbers.

¹⁰China v America: how Xi Jinping plans to narrow the military gap, *The Economist*, (May 8th 2023)

China's Shipbuilding industry has been growing rapidly in recent years. The ship construction in China numbered more than Japan, Australia, India, France, and the United Kingdom combined from 2017 to 2019. A German vice admiral pointed in 2021 that naval expansion of China is equivalent to adding the entire French navy to its fleet every four years. In the same year, China launched 28 new ships while only seven ships were commissioned by the U.S. Navy. If China maintains its current pace of shipbuilding, it could have a total of 425 battle force ships by 2030.

China's military diplomacy has experienced significant growth with Xi's power despite China's relatively less military presence worldwide. This expansion includes a range of communication and crisis management mechanisms with foreign militaries, which are critical components of China's national defense strategy. Moreover, military diplomacy has allowed China to establish a network of potential military bases beyond its borders, such as the support facility in Djibouti, which has around 2,000 military personnel and naval equipment facilities. To protect China's defense interests and economic security, this facility, located near the US, France and Japan's military outposts, demonstrated Chinese Indian Ocean interests including Africa, the Middle East to build maritime silk road. China's two major establishments which are military support by financing \$100 million to the countries in Africa Continent in 2015 and the establishment of the China-Africa Defense and Security Forum in 2018 demonstrate China's gradual expansion of its military role.

2.1.3.1. Military Reform

The China's Communist Party (CPC) holds command over China's armed forces. The Central Military Committee (CMC) of the PRC, whose chairman is elected by the National People's Congress (NPC), has authority to declare a state of war. The

State Council oversees the development of national defense, including the creation of national defense development programs, and is responsible for the Ministry of National Defense (MND). The CMC is the highest military command in China and is directly linked to the CCP Central Committee, making the armed forces subject to party control. The commander-in-chief of all Chinese forces is the chairman of the state CMC, who is also the leader of China.

The operation command of the Chinese military comes as follows. The Chinese armed forces are the country's security forces for defending China against foreign security threats. It comes with five main organizations: the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Armed Police (PAP), militia units, the Ministry for State Security and the Ministry for Public Security. The PLA ground forces, the PLA navy (PLAN), PLA air force (PLAAF) and the PLA Second Artillery Corps are four branches of the PLA. Entering into the era of president Xi Jinping, military reforms proceeded with the downsizing of the number of professional soldiers, establishing new departments and strong emphasis on maritime power. Xi's reform contained three purposes: strengthening PLA's ability to plan and conduct joint operations, revitalizing Party's control and discipline within the PLA and the need for improvements in the area of "civil-military integration (CMI)". The innovation mainly focuses on organizational logic behind the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from centered on a small CMC staff system to much larger CMC staff incorporating many of the former general departments' roles and functions. However, these motives were not new but taken together to shape an agenda that Xi acted on to create a "world-class" force by mid-century in 2049.

2.1.3.2. China's Naval Strength

As part of its efforts to modernize the military, significant investments of PLAN have been commenced, resulting in the development of fleet size and abilities. In the mid-1990s, only 57 destroyers and frigates were existing in China's surface fleet, but only a few of these vessels were equipped with short-range surface-to-air missiles, leaving them critically vulnerable to modern anti-ship cruise missiles. Similarly, most of the attack submarines in the Chinese fleet affiliated to the Soviet Romeo-class, which was first introduced in the 1950s.

However, in recent years, the PLAN has made significant strides in its modernization efforts, and as of 2020, it has surpassed the US Navy in fleet size. The Pentagon's 2022 China Military Power Report estimated China currently has around 340 warships, and this number is expected to grow to 400 ships by 2025. This growth in fleet size and capabilities has raised concerns among some analysts about China's intentions and the potential conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region. However, Chinese officials have emphasized the modernization of the PLAN in order to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and for promoting regional stability and peace as well.

2.1.3.3. Military Exercise in Indian Ocean

China has conducted military exercises in the Indian Ocean over years, which have raised concerns in India about Beijing's growing military activity in the Bay of Bengal. In December 2020, China's navy held a series of exercises in the eastern Indian Ocean, including live-fire drills and antisubmarine warfare operations. The exercises involved the Chinese warships deployment, submarines, and aircraft, and were reportedly aimed at improving the PLAN's combat readiness and ability to operate in distant waters.¹¹ Several joint military exercises were conducted by China

¹¹ Kristin Huang. (2020). "China's naval drills in 4 regions show ability to counter US,

with other countries' defense forces in the Indian Ocean, such as Iran, Russia and Pakistan. In 2020, China and Pakistan government reported that a joint naval exercise in the northern Arabian Sea was conducted¹² while a joint naval drill of China and Russia has been placed in the Indian Ocean in January 2021.

2.3. Regional Hegemony Partners

2.3.1. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a tropical island located off the southern tip of India peninsula, which has been a popular tourist destination for centuries due to its natural beauty. However, there was a long civil war that emerged from ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority in the north and east. In 2009, the bitter and 26 years of conflict finally came to an end with the government's seizing of Tamil Tiger rebels. Despite the bitter surroundings, there are ongoing accusations and counter-accusations regarding abuses committed by both sides. Sri Lanka was under the influence of the Portuguese and Dutch in the 16th century, and after almost 150 years of British colonial rule, the nation eventually gained independence in 1948.

Sri Lanka established its diplomatic relations with China in 1957, and the country has been a significant partner in the China String of Pearls Strategy. Under the Rajapaksa government, Sri Lanka's willingness to allow China to access military-purposed facilities has been expressed. In 2014, China gained a permit of

observers say, *South China Morning Post*, (August 24)
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3098671/chinas-navy-drills-4-regions-show-ability-counter-us-observers>

¹²Ayaz Gul. (2020). China's Warships Hold Joint Naval Drill With Pakistan, *Voices of Asia* (January 08)
https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_chinas-warships-hold-joint-naval-drill-pakistan/6182310.html

Hambantota port management, which included berths exclusively for the use of China. Additionally, a proposal of China's assistance to the Sri Lankan Air Force in the Chinese-run facility located in the northern part of the nation has been made by the previous administration. Even though there were rising concerns stemming from the visits of Chinese submarines to a Colombo port in 2014, the new government allowed for China with a more balanced relationship, which may lead to a reversal of some of these developments. Although Sri Lanka may benefit from a partnership with China, it is unlikely to challenge India's dominant position in Sri Lanka's geostrategic landscape.

2.3.1.1. Sri Lanka and BRI

Sri Lanka is a key nation for Chinese-funded projects such as the Colombo Port City and Hambantota port which possessed the geographical importance along the Maritime Silk Route. During Mahinda Rajapaksa's tenure as president from 2005 to 2015, Colombo supported Beijing's MSR initiative because he faced isolation from the West with the charge of human rights abuses. However, accusations of corruption involving Chinese firms and Rajapaksa's close ties with China led to public opposition, which contributed to his failure to secure reelection. Nonetheless, China continued to provide Sri Lanka with unconditional annual military credits of US\$1 billion since 2009. When Maithripala Sirisena assumed the presidency, he ordered a review of the projects to ensure their fairness. Despite the review, both projects are still being carried out as originally planned. The initial plan of the Colombo Port City started as a joint venture between China Merchants Holdings (International) and the Sri Lankan companies, it expanded to nations' largest foreign investment project, with an US \$500 million investment to construct the Colombo International Container Terminals. The project encompasses residential areas, a marina, and even a Formula

One racetrack. Xi Jinping's State Visit to Sri Lanka made a ground to commence the operation in 2014.

China was considered as the primary monetary provider of foreign direct investment, leading to discussions regarding the potential free trade agreement (FTAs) establishment. Having over 4.5 million TEUs and targeting to expand by 7.2 million TEUs in three stages, the Colombo Port becomes among the world's top 20 container ports. The Port's expansion project was initially halted in 2015 by President Sirisena but later resumed. In 2008, China Harbor Engineering Company, Chinese state-owned enterprises, and Sinohydro Corporation were built in the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, which benefits from a natural harbor and a strategic location near international shipping routes and the hometown of then-president Rajapaksa. During his presidency, a deal that a China's joint venture China Harbor Engineering Co. and China Merchants Port Holdings to permit Hambantota port's container terminal operations for 40 years was struck. China's Exim Bank provided over \$1.2 billion in credit for port construction and \$1.35 billion for a power plant. Subsequently, Sirisena agreed to further facilitate the Hambantota port and construct a large economic zone in partnership with Beijing.

China Merchants Port Holdings has gained authority by the Sri Lankan government for a duration of 99 years, at a price of \$1.12 billion. Furthermore, despite facing strong protests from the local population, the government also granted permission to the same Chinese company to utilize 15,000 acres of land surrounding the port modernizing for the industrial zone development. Domestic circumstances with substantial debt burden was a factor for president Sirisena reluctantly agreed to the agreement. Sri Lanka's \$ 64 billion debt accounted for 76% of its gross domestic product, and its debt was among the highest having over \$8 billion debt by China

additionally.

Despite China's promises of past and future investments, some Sri Lankans have opposed Chinese investments, and their discontent turned violent during the Hambantota industrial zone inauguration ceremony in January 2017, resulting in clashes between protesters and the police. Locals were concerned that they would be displaced from their homes. The former Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, is leading the campaign against the deal, arguing that the 99-year lease on Hambantota harbor violates the country's sovereignty. He also questioned why China was granted 15,000 acres of land, which he claimed was over three times the size of all other economic zones in the country combined. The Sri Lankan finance ministry reported losses of around \$230 million at the port between 2011 and 2016, with trade revenues totaling only approximately \$1.3 million, indicating that the Hambantota project is facing difficulties.

The Hambantota port has limited involvement in global trade with the presence of vessels from Japan, India, and South Korea. There have been rising concerns over China's potential intentions to utilize the port as a naval base, allowing its naval vessels patrolling the Indian Ocean to refuel and dock. This move aims to safeguard China's oil and gas imports from the Africa Middle East region. Granting China access to Sri Lankan ports could enable its warships to make stopovers while en route to or from Pakistan or engaged in battling armed piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Colombo plays a crucial role as a transshipment hub for container traffic from India, where large vessels unload containers in Colombo, which are then transported by smaller feeder boats to smaller and often outdated ports in India. Notably, in 2014, several Chinese submarines visited Colombo, raising suspicions and concerns.

2.3.2. Maldives

The Maldives, positioned southwest of the Indian subcontinent, comprises a series of almost 1,200 islands, most of which remain unpopulated. Tourism serves as the central pillar of its economy, with several islands developed to cater to affluent visitors. According to the Maldives Ministry of Tourism, China accounted for 21.9% of all tourist arrivals in 2019. The increasing influence of China in the country has raised concerns, particularly in terms of its potential implications for military and security cooperation.

Maldives established its diplomatic relation with China in 1972, and since then there have been notable cases of high-level official talks between the two nations. A significant visit took place in 2014, when President Xi Jinping embarked on his inaugural State Visit to the Maldives, highlighting the mutual cooperation with the Maldives, particularly in the context of the BRI. China has emerged as the second-largest exporter to the Maldives in 2018, accounting for 16.5% of total imports, with a value of US\$ 488 million. Considering the strategic value of the Maldives in relation to military bases and geopolitical factors, both China and India have intensified their efforts in the region. This is exemplified by the presence of the US military base, Diego Garcia, located approximately 1,170 km to the south of the Maldives.

2.3.2.1. Maldives and BRI

President Xi in his State Visit to Maldives in 2014, pledged to build a "Friendship Bridge" linking Male to Hulhule Island, which would cost \$210 million. In addition, China agreed to construct a port in Laamu Atoll and the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport. China secured the contract to develop the airport and benefited from the change in the Maldives government which resulted in an Indian company's winning bid being canceled in 2013. The Maldives is a small country consisting of

more than thousands archipelagos, with tourism contributing more than 25% of its \$2.3 billion economy. During Xi's visit, China and the Maldives signed nine agreements, including those related to the aforementioned projects. Beijing is currently undertaking an \$800 million expansion project at the airport, funded by an initial loan of \$373 million from China's Exim Bank in December 2016.

2.3.3. Bangladesh

Bangladesh, with its river delta emptying into the Bay of Bengal, is one of the most densely populated nations in the world. The country has made recent strides in reducing population growth and improving health and education with incredible economic stability by the apparel industry. After a bitter war with Pakistan, Bangladesh emerged as a separate country in 1971. Military rule lasted for 15 years, and although democracy was restored in 1990, political instability remains a challenge. Bangladesh is vulnerable to natural disasters such as flooding and cyclones. Islamist extremism has also been on the rise in this traditionally tolerant nation. Diplomatic ties between China and Bangladesh were established in 1976.

2.3.3.1. Bangladesh and BRI

While China serves as the main provider of weaponry and training to Bangladesh's armed forces, there is no concrete evidence indicating a significant defense alliance between the two nations. There is a lack of coordination between the Bangladeshi and Chinese military, no notable joint military exercises, and Bangladesh shows no inclination to host Chinese military presence. In a recent move, Bangladesh decided to replace its older two Chinese Ming class submarines with Russian submarines, indicating its preference for the best equipment deal available. Additionally, Bangladesh has expressed its desire for Sonadia ports or other locations

to be developed by an international consortium not dominated by China.

The Kunming Initiative initially proposed an economic project linking China, India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar in 1999, however, the initiative gained momentum after rebranding it as the "Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Initiative". Traversing underdeveloped regions in northeast part of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and southwestern China, the corridor connects economically disadvantaged areas with its potential market size of 2.8 billion population. With Bangladesh serving as its central hub, the development of an effective 2,800-kilometer transportation construction linking the BCIM countries is expected to bolster economic partnership in the region, along with China's high-speed rail project between Kunming and Kolkata.

The proposed railway, starting in Kolkata and passing through Benapole, Dhaka, and Bangladesh's Sylhet, is being considered as the financing project by the big institutions including AIIB and the Silk Road Fund's. Myanmar's Tamu-Kalewa road and link to Kunming can be further projected after reentering India at Silchar and Imphal railway construction. Possible roadmap that the railway might also include the Bangladesh port of Chittagong. In addition, the 10th BCIM forum in Kolkata in 2012 hinted at a plan for the Kolkata-to-Kunming (K2K) highway. China and Bangladesh are also in discussions about a highway project that would link Chittagong and Kunming through Myanmar. If realized, this would provide Bangladesh with access to the Mekong subregion, encompassing southwestern China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and would facilitate increased trade. Bangladesh could also generate tolls or transit fees from vehicles using the highway, potentially boosting its revenue.

Both China and India have interest in accessing Bangladesh's Chittagong port to secure their sea routes, particularly for transporting oil and gas from Africa and the Middle East. The proposed highway connecting Chittagong-Kunming, along with the port construction surrounding Sonadia-Matabari islands to Chittagong, would enhance the role of Bangladesh in the Maritime Silk Road. China, Bangladesh's largest trading partner, amounted to US\$12 billion bilateral trade in 2014. Bangladesh's imports from China grew by around 20% between 2011 and 2016, while exports experienced an average growth rate of 40%. Moreover, Bangladesh has granted China exploration rights to develop its Barakpuria natural gas fields. President Xi Jinping's State Visit to Dhaka in 2016 proposed an investment deal worth US\$24.5 billion, including 15 agreements, MOUs, and 12 loan documents, indicating the rapid growth of bilateral relations.

Under the OBOR initiative, China and Bangladesh have signed a Cooperation Agreement that provides US\$21.5 billion in concessional Chinese co-subsidizing for 28 development projects. These projects span various economic sectors, such as maritime cooperation, counterterrorism collaboration, power and energy development, and addressing climate change. These agreements have the potential to help Bangladesh attract low-cost and labor-intensive industries to bridge its manufacturing gap. However, it is important for Bangladesh to exercise caution regarding the debt aspect, as a significant portion of the aid from China comes in the form of debt. Although Bangladesh's debt-GDP ratio was only 21.8% in Fiscal Year 2020-2021, the country should be mindful of taking on excessive debt.

2.3.4. Pakistan

Pakistan, a Muslim-majority nation, was formed in 1947 as a result of the

separation of the Indian sub-continent, in order to build Muslim nation for their own homeland. It was originally composed of two wings, but the Bengali-speaking eastern wing seceded in 1971 with the aid of India, forming the independent nation of Bangladesh. Pakistan has been hindered by economic stagnation and Islamist violence, and its relationship with neighboring countries India and Afghanistan is often tense. Pakistan and China's diplomatic establishment was signed on May 21, 1951.

2.3.4.1. Pakistan and BRI-CPEC

China and Pakistan have established a robust partnership and are considered regional allies, with China providing substantial military aid and strategic support to Pakistan in its conflicts with India. This enduring friendship is China's closest equivalent to a long-term alliance. China's support for Pakistan has also limited India's strategic options, as concerns arise over perceived threats along the Sino-Indian border and nuclear weapons proliferation. The relationship between Pakistan and China is well-established and characterized by a strong bond. Pakistan has consistently supported China's initiative known as the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) has established China as a significant economic and strategic partner among South Asian countries. Over the past 15 years, there has been a significant upswing in bilateral trade between Pakistan and China, encompassing contracts ranging from \$1.8 billion to \$150.8 billion. The construction of infrastructure in China's western region has conferred great importance upon the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) Initiative, both of which have been instrumental in advancing China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The primary object of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is to establish a link that stretches from Kashgar in Xinjiang to the port of Pakistan's Gwadar in Balochistan Province, providing access to global markets for China's landlocked western provinces.

The CPEC is a proposed trade route in Pakistan, encompassing roads, rail links, and oil and gas pipelines, with some sections already completed. Premier Li Keqiang introduced the concept during his visit to Pakistan in May 2013, coinciding with Nawaz Sharif becoming Prime Minister. The CPEC is anticipated to attract \$45.6 billion in Chinese investment, with \$33.8 billion allocated to electricity and \$11.8 billion to transport infrastructure. During Li and Nawaz meeting, 53 agreements and MOUs were signed, 31 of which pertained to the private energy sector, enabling the admission of Pakistani energy firms to power generation projects and Chinese commercial banks' debt financing. The overall amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into Islamabad since 1970 accounts almost the same to that of China's CPEC investment.

Recognizing Gwadar's strategic significance as a crucial entry point to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and its advantageous proximity to vital shipping routes in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, China made a substantial investment of \$198 million to complete the initial phase of the port in 2006, in response to Pakistan's request. In a demonstration of its commitment to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan granted operation rights for Gwadar port until 2059 to a state-owned enterprise, China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) effectively replacing the Singapore Port Authority in 2015. Future plans include expanding Gwadar into a specialized economic zone spanning 152 hectares and implementing infrastructure improvements to accommodate large vessels with a deadweight capacity of up to 70,000 tons.

The envisioned oil transportation involves importing oil from the Middle East, refining it, and storing it in Gwadar's refineries, followed by transportation to China through pipelines, railways, or roads. China's desire to diversify its oil transportation

routes, reducing dependence on the United States Navy-secured Strait of Malacca, is a significant driver behind these efforts. Although China has constructed some roads in Pakistan, the CPEC and Gwadar's commercial viability still require the creation of pipelines for oil and gas, and high-speed railway, covering vast distances.

Funding for the initial stage of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was secured from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), primarily targeting the construction of a 64 km stretch of the M4 highway that connects Shorkot to Khanewal in Punjab province. Pakistan, grappling with a peak power demand of 18,000 MW while having a current generation capacity of only 12,000 MW, presents significant collaborative opportunities for China in the power sector. The Karot hydropower plant, valued at US\$1.4 billion, serves as the inaugural investment by the Silk Road Fund in Pakistan. This project was materialized through a joint venture involving the People's Bank of China, the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank, China Three Gorges South Asia Investment, and Pakistan's Private Power and Infrastructure Committee. The primary financial support for this endeavor was extended by the China Exim Bank and the China Development Bank.

The Gwadar Port development holds benefits for both countries. Pakistan, facing limitations in ports, industrial facilities and maritime security, sees Gwadar's deep harbor as an alternative to the blockaded Karachi port. Additionally, Gwadar's strategic location near the Straits of Hormuz provides opportunities for Pakistan to strengthen its maritime capabilities. For China, Gwadar could serve as a naval listening post to monitor sea lines of communication, observe the US maritime activities in the Persian Gulf, and examine naval bases of India. Given its proximity to the critical Straits of Hormuz, which facilitate the transport of 17 million barrels of oil per day, Gwadar's development is crucial for China's oil supply. Approximately 60%

of China's oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz, making it a vital route for China's energy security.

Pakistan's former President Pervez Musharraf has warned India that in the future occurrence of the disputes and conflicts with Pakistan, India might confront the PLAN stationed in their port. Islamabad got a promising support of eight advanced diesel-electric submarines to modernize Pakistan's navy by Beijing. As of 2022, China's assistance to Pakistan has exceeded \$65 billion, under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China operates four economic zones. However, security challenges are expected in Balochistan, where militant groups target power infrastructure and gas pipelines, while local tribesmen lead uprisings. To ensure the safety of Chinese workers, a security force of 12,000 Pakistan personnel is tasked with protecting them, given security concerns and antagonism of the Chinese workers presence in Pakistan. Air defense system, military base, and airport is facilitated in Gwadar with China's demand.

The American Enterprise Institute reported that approximately 25% of Chinese investment, totaling \$246 billion, undertaken between 2005 and 2014, have faced setbacks or cancellations due to various reasons. Additionally, Pakistan has concerns about its ability to repay Chinese loans and the number of employment opportunities generated for its workforce through the CPEC initiatives. Both Pakistan and China need to address several challenges and tackle common issues for the success of the CPEC.

3. India

The rise of Narendra Modi as the Indian prime minister sparked high hopes regarding India's position in the global political arena. During the late 1990s, India's new arena for economic performance and its nuclear tests in 1998 seemed to indicate that India was on the cusp of becoming a significant global player. Despite its refusal to become a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), India successfully negotiated the India-US nuclear deal, which enabled India to navigate the increasingly stringent regulations governing nuclear trade. This agreement was seen as symbolic of the shifting global power dynamics, as the US and India joined forces to counter China's rising influence. With Modi assuming the role of prime minister in 2014, there was a widespread perception that India's foreign policy would enter a more determined phase, especially considering his proactive approach through a series of state visits to both major and minor countries worldwide.

Modi's leadership exuded charisma and authority, evident through carefully orchestrated events and adept utilization of social media. His personal imprint was visible in the Bharatiya Janata Party's 2014 election manifesto, which expressed a firm commitment to "fundamentally reboot and reorient" India's foreign policy, aiming to situate the country's global strategic engagement within a new paradigm.¹³

With Hindutva, or the essence of Hindu identity, at its core, Modi incorporated this ideology and political stance as the fundamentals of India's diplomacy. This approach is seen by some as embodying a resolute and more powerful India, essential for safeguarding national security and earning international recognition of India's preeminent position globally. This stands in stark contrast to the vulnerabilities and compromises that characterized the rule of the Congress party. However, for those

¹³Rajesh Basrur. (2017). Modi's foreign policy fundamentals: a trajectory unchanged, *International Affairs*, Volume 93, Issue 1, Pages 7–26 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iw006>

who oppose Hindutva and Modi, it represents the assertive aspect of Hindu nationalism, as evidenced by its manifestation in domestic politics during the Gujarat riots of 2002 under Modi's leadership as chief minister. Taking a broader perspective, India's relationships with key counterparts such as the US, China, Russia, and Pakistan have maintained a relatively stable trajectory over time. India's endeavor for military modernization has been constrained by the personnel and pensions costs which accounts 53 percent of the total spending though it is the country with the third largest defense budget after the United States and China. '*Agnipath scheme*' which means fire path in Hindi was unveiled by the government in 2022 to recruit younger soldiers for tackling the challenge of domestic job creation and reduce pension burden to make better defense procurement and R&D.¹⁴

3.1. India's Strategic Approach Under the Narendra Modi Government

3.1.1. Economic Expansion: BIMSTEC

Comprising seven nations, namely Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, Nepal, and India, BIMSTEC is a regional organization placed in the neighboring regions of the Bay of Bengal. The genesis of BIMSTEC can be attributed to the 'Look East Policy' (LEP) of India and Thailand's 'Look West Policy' (LWP), both of which aimed to foster connectivity between South Asian and ASEAN countries. India's LEP aimed to strengthen ties and enhance connectivity with nations in Southeast Asia, a vision that gained further momentum with the upgrade to the Act East Policy (AEP) in 2014. BIMSTEC, in turn, provided Thailand with an avenue to

¹⁴Agnipath Scheme for Enrolment in Indian Armed Forces (2022), DETAILED BRIEF: AGNIPATH SCHEME FOR ENROLMENT IN INDIAN ARMED FORCES, Government of India (June 15)

<https://indianairforce.nic.in/agniveer/>

realize the objectives of the LWP while also serving as a platform for nations such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal to establish linkages with economically dynamic Southeast Asian countries that are recognized as key global hubs for major economic activities.

Addressing concerns about larger countries dominating smaller neighbors, BIMSTEC has witnessed the convergence of key regional players including India and Thailand. The institution was initially established in 1997 as the Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BISTEC), comprising member states of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Myanmar's inclusion occurred in December, 1997, by a Special Ministerial Meeting held in Bangkok. The Sixth Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok on February 8, 2004 brought Nepal and Bhutan's inclusion to the organization. This expansion resulted in the organization being renamed as 'BIMSTEC,' giving rise to a new regional community. With a population of approximately 1.5 billion people, accounting for 22 percent of the global population, and a collective GDP of \$2.7 trillion, BIMSTEC holds significant demographic and economic significance.

BIMSTEC strives to foster a conducive atmosphere that promotes rapid economic progress, social advancement, and comprehensive multilateral collaboration. Within the organization, there are 14 identified spheres of cooperation, with each member country assuming leadership in specific sectors. For instance, initiatives in transport and communication, tourism, environmental preservation, disaster risk management, as well as counterterrorism and combating transnational crime are spearheaded by India. Bangladesh takes charge of trade and investment, while Myanmar oversees energy and agriculture. Sri Lanka focuses on technological advancements, human interchange, and medical care, while Thailand leads efforts in fisheries. Nepal is responsible for eradication of poverty, while Bhutan spearheads

endeavors in cultural heritage preservation.

BIMSTEC has a comprehensive agenda focused on promoting multilateral cooperation in the economic sector within the Bay of Bengal region, enhancing the ability of member countries to address a copious amount of strategic and security vulnerabilities. In May 2017, the leaders of BIMSTEC countries took part in India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration ceremony for his second consecutive term. It hinted at the reinforced influence of BIMSTEC by exerting India's efforts as a regional leader in the IOR. BIMSTEC represents a combined GDP of US\$2.7 trillion, with significant potential for boosting trade and economic growth in the region.¹⁵

	Sri Lanka	Maldives	Bangladesh	Pakistan
BiMSTEC	o	X	o	X
SAARC	o	o	o	o

3.1.2. Diplomatic Approach: Neighborhood First Policy, Act East Policy, SAGAR

India's foreign policy underwent three stages since its independence in 1947. First phase of India's foreign policy lasted until the Sino-India border war in 1962 and Jawaharlal Nehru's, India's first prime minister, a policy of 'non-alignment was the core principle'. Nehru's faith was that India was weak enough to have a critical impact in the world with the Cold War. Thus, the country should have kept equal distance from major powers, advocating for disarmament and decolonisation, and using persuasion rather than coercion to support for the 'One World' a reality by internationalist ideal. Non-alignment involved adhering to the United Nations principles, avoiding military alliances, and avoiding significant integration into the

¹⁵ Bhattacharjee, Joyeeta. 2018. "SAARC vs BIMSTEC: The search for the ideal platform for regional cooperation". Issue Briefs and Special Reports. *ORF(Observer Research Foundation)*

American-led global market, as it was at that time. Additionally, India was actively engaged in important normative debates regarding international and intrastate conflict management.

The next stage of Indian foreign policy spanned from the early 1960s to the end of the Cold War. A more radical agenda in order to secure the developing world had been taken by Nehru's leadership. India rearmed its military in response to perceived threats from China and Pakistan and a more assertive position towards its neighbors and the West was placed in this period. India's nuclear test was conducted in 1974 and slowly developed a deterrent capability. The ceaseless stance of economic self-reliance was taking place and the nation stayed away from the global market economy contact for its dependence on the global powers or other emerging economic clouds. While India remained interested in normative issues, its priorities shifted from disarmament to developing world's economic justice. These moves aimed to increase "strategic independence or autonomy of the nation," allowing the country to act for its interests with minimal disturbance by other major powers. India's pact with the Soviet Union since 1971, marked by the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, compromised this bid for autonomy in the eyes of Western observers.

The last stage from 1991 to the mid-2000s saw the nation implementing a series of new measures for addressing its crippling economic and political positions. The country opened up its economy in 1991 with partial reform to adopt more foreign trade and investment and the 'Look East' policy in 1994 has commenced to find partners for financing, expertise, and trade, conducting nuclear tests in 1998 and building a complete deterrent for security in the face of China's rapid economic rise, and pursuing a rapprochement with the US, the new power player following the end of the Cold War.

3.1.2.1. Neighborhood First Policy

Since independence in 1947, India has adopted a regional policy centered around the belief that the Indian Subcontinent falls within its exclusive sphere of influence. The core principle of this policy is to prevent the intervention of major powers in regional affairs. Indira Gandhi, in particular, emphasized that India would refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other states in the region, unless explicitly requested to do so. Furthermore, India would not tolerate external interference from any foreign power. In the event of an internal crisis requiring external support, states in the region are encouraged to seek assistance from within the region before turning to external sources.

India's regional policy has undergone significant changes from the Rao government to Manmohan Singh's tenure, encompassing four key shifts. Firstly, as India integrated its economy with the global economy, it became impractical to maintain an exclusionary regional policy. India no longer openly opposed the involvement of extra-regional powers in regional affairs. Secondly, military and non-military intervention remained a crucial aspect of India's regional policy. For instance, the pro-China stance adopted by the Mahinda Rajapaksa government in Sri Lanka was believed to be influenced by India's delayed response to sensitive Tamil issues, which was a result of pressure from coalition partners during the previous Manmohan Singh government in New Delhi. The third factor is the Gujral Doctrine, which aims to foster better relations and goodwill with smaller neighboring countries through non-reciprocity. Lastly, there has been an increased influence of Indian states on foreign policy formulation. India acknowledged that the interactions with other countries shapes India's relations with them. The Modi government, like its predecessors, places significant emphasis on prioritizing its neighborhood. The

constructive approach of the West Bengal government in resolving the territorial disputes with Bangladesh has further bolstered this outlook. At the same time, the relation between India and Pakistan have deteriorated over time, with incidents such as cross-border terrorism and the rise of Pakistan religious fundamentalism posing threats to national security and stability of India. Conversely, India's alleged involvement in the tribal areas of Balochistan is viewed as a threat to Pakistan's security.

The situation surrounding India's relationships with its neighbors has been further complicated by the surgical strike carried out by India. The issue of intervention continues to play a significant role in these relationships. An Indian scholar Happymon Jacob has noted that India's increasing interference in the in-land politics of its neighboring countries, voicing security implications or the need to counteract unfriendly strategic choices, has led to growing unpopularity in regional capitals. For example, India's perceived blockade of Nepal led to a widespread perception in Nepal of Indian interference. Similarly, India's promotion of the coalition led by Maithripala Sirisena against Sri Lanka's Rajapaksa was seen as interference by the Sri Lankan government. Despite overwhelming support for the Constitution in the Terai region of Nepal, India asked Nepal to delay its promulgation so that the demands of the Madheshi parties could be incorporated, which Nepal saw as a distraction in terms of state affairs.

Similarly, issues in India over the President Mohamed Nasheed expulsion in the Maldives led to the cancellation of Prime Minister Modi's planned state visit. Maldives saw this as an infringement on its sovereignty and issued a statement that it will not tolerate foreign interference. Such actions have pushed Maldives closer to Beijing.

Following the resounding win of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Narendra Modi took power as Prime Minister of India in 2014. Under his leadership, India's National Foreign Policy (NFP) has experienced various fluctuations. Modi challenged traditional norms by sending the invitations to member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for his swearing-in event. The underlying principle behind India's neighborhood policy is the recognition that the country's ability to exert influence beyond South Asia hinges on effectively managing its relations with neighboring countries. Given the asymmetrical nature of India's relationships with surrounding countries in terms of population, military strength, geography, and economy, the Modi government reintroduced the NFP to address these dynamics.¹⁶ Additionally, from the "Act East Policy", Modi revamped "Look East Policy" signifying the nation's proactive stance in its East Asian engagements, which is crucial for securing its northern states. Simultaneously, Modi's NFP strengthens India-led regional forums such as SAARC and fosters amicable relations with neighboring nations. By his inauguration on May 26, 2014 with inviting all SAARC leaders, and having a State Visit to Bhutan, Modi demonstrated his sheer commitment to buffer up India's neighborhood connections before focusing on global affairs.

Given the evolving circumstances, the political dynamics in South Asia are transitioning from the traditional dominance of India to China with economic benefits.¹⁷ In response to this changing landscape, a strategy of "Competition and Cooperation" towards its neighboring countries has taken hold in India's policy making process. The cooperative aspect of this approach primarily emphasizes the

¹⁶Saroj Kumar Aryal & Simant Shankar Bharti. (2023). Evolution of 'India's Neighbourhood First Policy' Since Independence, *Society* 60, 224-232

¹⁷ Rahul Roy-Chaudhury. (2018). India's perspective towards China in their shared South Asian neighborhood: Cooperation versus competition. *Contemporary Politics* 24(1): 98–112

growth of trade relations, inter-regional economic initiatives, linking economic projects, and engagement in regional institutions and multilateral apparatus. These efforts aim to enhance bilateral relations within the shared neighborhood and promote mutual cooperation.

3.1.2.2. Act East Policy

"Act East" policy, India's proactive diplomatic initiative, aims to bolster economic, diplomatic, and strategic relations within the Asia-Pacific region. As the IOR plays a crucial role in its contemporary International Relations, India began its eastward shift in 1992. The Look East Policy embodies core principles of the "Act East" policy, and the two are not distinct entities; rather, they represent different phases of India's policy evolution focusing on the Asia-Pacific region. When India initiated the Look East policy in 1991, the country's economic status, global reputation, and external environment were not as they are today. India was striving to transition from regulated economic policies to autonomous and liberalized regulations, a process that took several decades to reach the current stage of its economic development.

As Modi launched the Act East Policy in 2014, India's economic, strategic, and diplomatic bondages with the Asia-Pacific region emphasized at its core. The creation of the strategic agenda coincided with India's relatively robust economy and higher global status compared to the preceding decades. The policy sought to forge stronger ties with neighboring countries with shared interests to deter China's emerging economic and military prowess and its impact on regional dynamics. The end of the Cold War in 1991 necessitated a significant shift in economic and strategic policy across Asia. India responded to this change by making three notable policy changes. India's 1990s economic reform was a significant departure from its earlier

development strategy.

India's new political implementation came with the fall of the Soviet Union adopting a multi-dimensional foreign policy that fostered vivacious economic and strategic cooperation with the new global power, the United States. The global phenomenon drove India to have a significant civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2008. Despite having long standing historical ties with Southeast Asian countries, India had not previously leveraged this relationship to its fullest potential. However, closer relations with these countries have been cultivated with the post-Cold War period providing a strong rationale for India. India's economy was hit hard by the Gulf War in 1990, suffering from a sudden increase in oil and gas prices, compounded by the Soviet collapse, on which India heavily depended on. Therefore, India had to seek alternative regions to sustain its economy.

The South Asian region unfortunately did not offer many business and investment opportunities due to political disagreements, lack of trust, and economic underdevelopment. India was compelled to search for new prospects in Southeast and East Asia. China became the front player in the Indo-Pacific region with its modernization program, and the formation of ASEAN by Japan, the major economy in the world, was created by providing support for manufacturing bases. India's launch of its Look East Policy with economic objectives and strategic dimensions was adopted by the fact that ASEAN and East Asia had tremendous growth potential. There are three key actors in terms of India's partnerships with several countries in the region: detailed institutional arrangements, economic interests such as modernization of infrastructure and regional connectivity, and mutual strategic benefits.

3.1.2.3. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)

With Andaman and Nicobar Islands located just 175 kilometers from Indonesia's Aceh province, India has 7,500 kilometers of its vast coastline and numerous island chains that stretch far into the Indian Ocean. The country enjoys a great geographical merit of sea-lines of communication to get into the global economy. As the almost 90% of India's oil imports transported by sea, primarily from the Gulf, and export based economy looming large with a increasing proportion of its economy and transshipment, it is understandable that the report published by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) 2017-2018 put a great emphasis on the geographical importance of the Indian Ocean region as part of India's diplomatic engagements. According to the report, a "qualitative transformation" has been placed in nations' engagement process with the littoral countries following the Prime Minister's bolster vision articulated in 2015. India has made significant progress in maritime security through signing agreements for bilateral relations with key littoral states, as well as its growing contributions to humanitarian assistance and disaster-reduction efforts, as evidenced by the progress made in the Indian Ocean Association, the region's premier organization.

In order to determine the veracity of these assertions and to ascertain whether a new scope for becoming regional leader is indeed in effect, careful scrutiny is needed with the stated objectives of Security and Growth for All in the Region(SAGAR). Regional visits to Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka in 2015, PM Modi served as guest in chief at the offshore patrol vessel commissioning ceremony. the MCGS Barracuda, which India gifted to Mauritius. Further developed for the SAGAR, the event employed five fundamental propositions. Necessities to secure both the mainland and islands and to defend the each nations' national interests while simultaneously seeking to generate shared benefits emerged; the expansion of

economic and security collaboration as well as the provision of assistance to develop the maritime security capabilities of neighboring nations and island states; the encouragement of collective action and cooperation via existing institutions such as IONS and maritime cooperation with other regional mechanisms; the advancement of collaboration aimed at sustainable development; and finally, working in conjunction with extra-regional actors who possess great benefits and stakes in the area.

In addition to the points mentioned earlier, it is crucial to consider another influential set of principles in Indian foreign policy referred to as Panchasheela. These principles held significant importance during their inception and were incorporated by then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1954 treaty between India and China as a framework for foreign policy. Panchasheela encompassed five fundamental principles that both countries were expected to adhere to. These principles encompassed the concepts of respecting territorial integrity and sovereignty, refraining from aggression and interference in the domestic affairs, promoting equality and mutual benefits, and striving for peaceful coexistence. Panchasheela, in accordance with its era, aimed to tackle the challenges of a time when aggression was commonly seen as the prevailing approach in global politics, offering an alternative approach to handling interstate relations. However, it is important to recognize that considerable transformations have taken place since then. Over the course of time, these principles have adapted to prioritize national interests while recognizing that cooperation can yield benefits for all parties involved, rather than adhering to a zero-sum paradigm.

Objectives of the SAGAR mainly focuses for the country to recognize as a champion to cooperate and build partnerships in the neighboring countries in Indian Ocean and therefore accomplishing a role of multilateral initiatives promoters, while also playing a crucial role as the region's primary responder to natural disasters and

political crises, and a net security provider. This represents a significant shift compared to previous discussions about the passive Indian hegemonic aspirations in the world order and the keeping out of global powers. However, critics have pointed out the government's attempts to showcase a "qualitative transformation" in India's maritime diplomacy made India lagging behind in effectively adopting resources and effective strategic agendas benefiting them. Therefore, George Tanham's infamous 1996 RAND publication article claiming that the country troubled with a lack of strategic thinking keeps looming large.¹⁸

The perspectives on Indian foreign policy have been diverse, with some perceiving it as unplanned and reactive. The election of a BJP-majority government and the proactive role of the Prime Minister in diplomacy have sparked renewed discussions on the determinants and effectiveness of India's foreign policy. While some argue that the BJP's ideology, particularly its emphasis on Hindutva, significantly shapes foreign policy decisions, others contend that Indian foreign policy has become more transactional rather than ideological. In response to its expanding maritime interests and capacity, India has undertaken efforts to enhance its transshipment cargo via ports and harbor-related infrastructure through the Sagar Mala initiative. Externally, India's increased involvement in maritime affairs has been driven by geopolitical developments, necessitating a more active participation in shaping maritime security arrangements. However, there are still capacity and implementation challenges to address. Nonetheless, the SAGAR initiative signifies a shift in both thinking and action, exemplified by India's engagement in three maritime projects in Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Iran, which highlight India's strategic choices and objectives behind these endeavors. Recent progress in these projects underscores the

¹⁸Bhattacharjee, Joyeeta. (2018). "SAARC vs BIMSTEC: The search for the ideal platform for regional cooperation". Issue Briefs and Special Reports. *ORF (Observer Research Foundation)*

significance of India's maritime initiatives.

3.1.3. Defense Approach and Security Strategy: QUAD

The congruence of interests between the Quad and India, in terms of maritime concerns and strategic outlook, corresponds with the viewpoints of the other participating nations within the Quad alliance. Instead of solely focusing on the Indo-Pacific, this alignment centers around a vision that less stresses Indian Ocean's geographic imperatives. The term 'Quad' was initially coined by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, but it was subsequently revitalized by Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia during senior diplomats talks among the four countries in the middle of the ASEAN summit in Philippines in 2017. This revitalization led to parallel commitments among Quad members to uphold a free and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific region. The fundamental impetus behind this value-driven framework primarily stems from China's presence and conduct within the region.

Apprehensions arising from China's tactical employment of infrastructure projects and investments in the area to achieve geopolitical leverage have led to the emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept. It has widely acknowledged that China's adherence to international norms, particularly in the maritime sphere, is dubious at most. This acknowledgment of China's conduct has significantly influenced the development of the Indo-Pacific framework, which seeks to comprehensively tackle and counter China's growing impact in the IOR.

The Indian Ocean is emerging as a new arena for the power duel between global power mainly with the US and China, beyond the Indo-Pacific. IOR is now gaining attention due to its economic dynamism and strategic significance as a hub for trade in goods and energy. China is making inroads into the Indian Ocean, and other navies are also vying for influence in the region. In April 2023, Japanese Prime

Minister Kishida Fumio pledged \$75 billion of investment in the Indo-Pacific region with his State Visit to India.¹⁹ His pledge has led to a new era of great-power rivalry in the IOR, with smaller countries in the region seeking to benefit from it rather than becoming its victims.

3.1.3.1. Concept of Indo-Pacific

Initially coined by a German geographer Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), the "Indo-Pacific" terminology has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the United States, Australia, India, and Japan. The concept refers to a geopolitical region that stretches from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific, encompassing the traditional Asia-Pacific region as well as the IOR. Rather than Asia Pacific, the term "Indo-Pacific" reflects a growing recognition of the interconnectivity between the two regions and the significance of the Indian Ocean in global affairs. The "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) concept emphasizes the importance of maintaining international law and order, promoting economic growth and development, and enhancing security cooperation among the regional countries with shared identity, democracy. The adoption of the Indo-Pacific concept highlights the growing strategic significance of this region and the need for greater cooperation and engagement among the countries involved.²⁰

China does not officially use the term "Indo-Pacific" in its official documents, instead referring to the region as the "Asia-Pacific." However, the nation's economic

¹⁹Rivalry between America and China has spread to the Indian Ocean, *The Economist* (10th April 2023)

²⁰Kai He & Mingjiang Li. (2020). Understanding the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US–China strategic competition, regional actors, and beyond, *International Affairs*, Volume 96, Issue 1, Pages 1–7

interests and strategic advantage revolve around the Pacific and Indian Oceans, especially through schemes such as the BRI. China's decision to refrain from adopting the "Indo-Pacific" terminology likely stems from the belief that the Indo-Pacific strategy led by the US aims to restrict China's influence.

Under the Obama administration, the US disclaimed any intention to confine China, while the Trump administration openly confronted China. In the 2017 US National Security Strategy, China was categorized as a state that seeks to revise the existing order and a strategic competitor that threatens American power, influence, and interests. Later, China was reiterated as a revisionist power to reshape the region for their benefit in the 2019 Indo-Pacific strategy report. These assessments demonstrate a shift in the US's perception of China, which was previously seen as a cooperative partner during the Obama era. Among Chinese policymakers, the Indo-Pacific strategy is assumed as an attempt to counteract China intensifying the trade war in early 2018.

As the terminology shifts from 'Asia-Pacific' to 'Indo-Pacific,' it signifies an escalating strategic rivalry between the US and China. There is a concern that this competition may lead the two countries to fall into what Graham Allison describes as the 'Thucydides trap.' To mitigate the risk of military conflict, the Biden administration has published a report outlining its Indo-Pacific strategy, encompassing five key objectives. These objectives include promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific, fostering connectivity, regional peace and prosperity, strengthening defense act in the Indo-Pacific region, and enhancing regional resilience against transnational threats.

3.1.3.2. Defense Status

The Indian Navy forces currently consist of approximately 150 ships and

submarines. The navy has shifted its focus from the "bean-counting" approach of simply counting the number of platforms to one that emphasizes capabilities. The Navy's force accretions are now based on the Maritime Capability Perspective Plan, and over 50 ships and submarines are currently being constructed. The Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) has already brought three amphibious ships and ten Fast Attack Craft. Presently constructing advanced Anti-submarine Corvettes, the GRSE has also secured a contract for building LCUs.

Leading its way in ship construction is the Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), situated in the southern region, spearheading the audacious project for building the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier. In parallel, in Mumbai, Mazagon Docks Ltd is actively involved in the fabrication of destroyers of the Kolkata Class, P-15B, as well as a stealth frigate belonging to the Shivalik Class. The construction of Scorpene Class submarines is also currently in progress. Furthermore, Goa Shipyard Limited has played a pivotal role in the manufacturing of Offshore Patrol Vessels for both the Navy and Coast Guard, and is presently dedicated to the production of advanced versions of these vessels. Recognizing the necessity to broaden the domain of warship construction, additional shipyards, including private enterprises, in this specialized sector were expected to foster by the Indian Navy. As part of its efforts to facilitate the participation of additional shipyards, including private enterprises, in warship construction, the Indian Navy has received favorable responses. The offers were given to M/s Pipavav Shipyard Ltd for the production of a few NOPVs, and ABG Shipyard for the construction of Cadet Training Ships. The indigenous construction of warships by the Navy has witnessed significant advancements since the commissioning of INS Nilgiri on June 3, 1972. India stands out among the select few nations with the capacity to manufacture a diverse range of warships from Fast Attack Craft to Aircraft Carriers. To bridge the capability gap outlined in the Navy's Master Plan, however,

India has also acquired ships from abroad, including the Vikramaditya carrier and Russia's Talwar Class subsequent vessels. Furthermore, the Navy is actively engaged in the Mid-Life Upgrades (MLUs) of its ships, which will enhance the combat potential of Rajput Class and Brahmaputra Class vessels, ensuring their operational longevity well into the 21st century.

Over half of the defense budget is utilized for its personnel and pensions, the government proposed the Agnipath scheme in June 2022 to recruit younger soldiers from 17.5 to 21 replacing the minimum tenure of 17 years with a service duration of four years. After the first four years, only 25 percent of the *Agniveers* will be given the right to serve as regular personnel with benefits and those who do not meet the requirement, will be discharged with a tax-free severance package, but not eligible for pensions or medical benefits.²¹

For many years, the Indian Ocean has been a significant strategic region, and the United States Navy has recently increased its "freedom of navigation exercises" there. In an effort to reduce China's growing influence beyond the IOR and Indo-Pacific, countries that share values such as democracy, including India, Australia, Japan, and the United States, are conducting military exercises in the region. In November 2020, the annual "Malabar" exercises continued with the second phase taking place off the west coast of India, where the American supercarrier, USS Nimitz, joined the Indian Navy's flagship, INS Vikramaditya. Japan, which joined Malabar in 2015, also participated with their warships, while Australia was invited to join after a

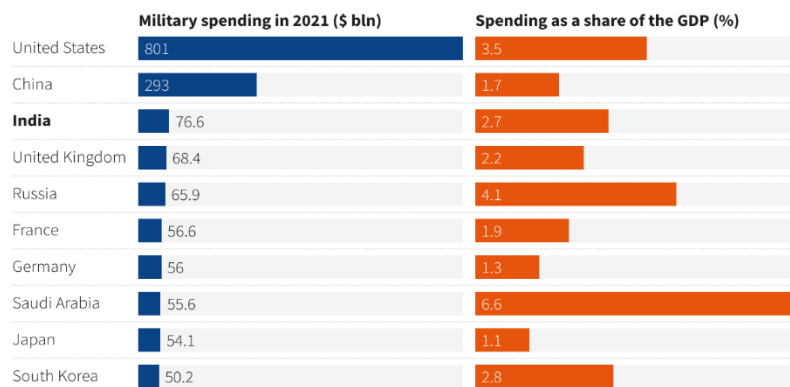
²¹Govt announces 'Agnipath' recruitment scheme for armed forces, *Times of india* (14 June 2022)

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/govt-announces-agnipath-recruitment-scheme-for-army-forces/articleshow/92198113.cms>

13-year absence. The quartet had previously conducted the first round of Malabar in November 2020 at the Bay of Bengal off India's east coast. The US Navy plans to reestablish its First Fleet, which was disbanded half a century ago, and station it in the Indian Ocean. As the navy has overstretched with more than operational effectiveness, the reforms need to take place. The conventional submarine force demonstrates well with Indian's negative naval status with its India submarines in total which has no follow-on acquisition programme in place.

Global comparison of military spending

India's defence budget at \$76.6 billion in 2021, which was 2.7% of GDP that year, was lower compared to neighbouring China.



Note: China and Russia spending numbers are SIPRI estimates.

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute | Reuters, Feb. 1, 2023 | By Sumanta Sen

Struggling to be a leader in the IOR, both countries are building better relationships with coastal countries of the area, promoting economic and diplomatic benefits. The global military spending comparison by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute shows that India is the third largest country with \$76.6 billion spending after China in 2021, however, the size of the expenditure is well behind

China with \$293 billion.²² India took part in the Vostok military exercises by Russia in September 2022 and the thirteen countries have joined the drills including China.

3.2. Regional Hegemony Partners

3.2.1. Sri Lanka

New Delhi holds a profound interest in Sri Lanka due to its close geographical proximity and the presence of strong cultural, ethnic, and religious connections between the two nations. China's economic and strategic interest in Sri Lanka intensified when the former Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa was charged with human rights violation related allegations during the civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As a result, Colombo was able to strengthen its political ties with China, which led to a decrease in Indian and Western influence in the country. In response, India was resolute in its commitment to enhancing its relationship with Sri Lanka. The new President Sirisena embarked on a visit to India in 2015, which was reciprocated by Narendra Modi's State visit to Colombo in March 2015. Notably, this visit marked a significant milestone in 28 years. Modi delivered a speech at the parliament of Sri Lanka and also made a visit to Jaffna, the northern province in the process of recovering from the long-lasting impact of years of conflict.

Sri Lanka declined China's request for submarine docking rights in Colombo before the BRI summit in 2017. Despite the prior approval by the former government for a Chinese submarine to dock, Sri Lanka pursued a delicate balancing act. The official meeting brought Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe concurrently to secure

²²Nan Tian, Diego Lopes da Silva, Xiao Liang, Lorenzo Scarazzato, Lucie Béraud-Sudreau and Ana Assis, Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2022, SIPRI, Stockholm: (April, 2023) <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2023/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2022>

approximately \$24 billion additional loans. Notably, Chinese state-owned enterprises have made investments for the Colombo Port City construction and Hambantota port operation. However, these investments have faced criticism from opposition parties and trade unions, who view them as jeopardizing national property and assets to China. To address India's concerns regarding potential military utilization of the port, several measures by Colombo have been taken for countering China with its involvement in industrial operations while maintaining strict oversight of security activities.

As with the country's efforts to deter China's engagement in the Hambantota port to commercial operations, India maintains vigilance concerning the potential utilization of Sri Lankan ports as naval bases by China. Former Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman expressed doubt regarding China's commitment to confining its activities solely to port-related endeavors in Hambantota. To reinforce the longstanding bonds between the two nations, Modi embarked on a second trip in May 2017. He inaugurated a specialized hospital funded by India and engaged with the Tamil community from Indian native. Additionally, India is considering investments in Hambantota with infrastructure construction including the Mattala airport.

India's endeavors to strengthen its presence at the airport can contribute to monitoring of China's military clout over the country. India's allocation of Varuna, an offshore patrol vessel, to Sri Lanka in 2017 further bolsters the collaboration between the two coast guards. Although the relationship between the two countries has improved significantly, unresolved issues such as ethnic tensions, geopolitical disputes, and conflicts over fisheries persist. The kinship between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Tamil population in Tamil Nadu has frequently led to the overflow of internal

conflicts from Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu. Additionally, disagreements regarding fisheries remain a contentious issue, with the Sri Lankan navy previously implementing fishing restrictions on the Sri Lankan side with the internal war and intermittently subjecting Tamil fishermen to mistreatment. Despite the conclusion of the conflict, disputes concerning the livelihoods of Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen continue to arise.

The coastal distance between the two nations in the Palk Bay region ranges from 16 km to 45 km. Unless effective mechanisms are established to tackle and resolve conflicts, the Indian fishermen entering waters of Sri Lanka without authorization will persist as contentious matters. Sri Lanka heavily relies on India as its primary trading partner, and the two countries have an existing Free Trade Agreement (FTA). To gain a substantial edge in accessing the Sri Lankan market, it is imperative for India to actively advocate for the timely approval of the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA). The devastating Easter bombings in 2019 at the nation's capital put counter-terrorism cooperation important in the bilateral relationship. Colombo has sought New Delhi's aid in counter-terrorism training and the enhancement of security measures.

3.2.2. Maldives

India established diplomatic relations with Maldives in 1965, recognizing the strategic importance of the Maldives due to its location in the IOR. However, India has expressed concerns about the internal political situation in the Maldives. Prime Minister Modi had planned to visit Maldives as part of his tour of three neighboring nations in March 2015, but the visit was canceled due to political instability in the country at that time. In April 2016, former Maldivian President Abdullah Yameen's State Visit to India resulted in the signing of agreements across various fields,

including defense, taxation, tourism, religious place conservation, and aerospace industrial cooperation. Beijing's growing presence in Male has had a distant relationship with India. Xi Jinping's State Visit to Maldives in 2014 strengthened its cooperation in various fields including defense, diplomatic, and economic ties between two countries.

The Maldives has attracted substantial Chinese investment by participating in the BRI project. China has undertaken various significant projects in the country, including the leasing of an uninhabited island to a Chinese company for a 50-year period. The Maldivian parliament swiftly approved a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China, a move that drew criticism due to the manner in which it was rushed through during a late-night session. Former Maldivian President Yameen, while discussing the FTA, openly advocated China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) within the context of the BRI, causing India to voice concerns. Without prior consent, the Maldivian government took action against three local councilor meetings along with the Indian ambassador, exacerbating India's apprehensions. When the Male declared a state of emergency in February 2018, India strongly criticized this decision.

Following the expiration of the Letter of Exchange (LoE) in May 2018, India's defense ties with the Maldives experienced a decline as the Maldivian government requested the removal of the gifted naval helicopter, ALH Dhruv. In June 2018, the imprisonment of Supreme Court judges and former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was seen as a consolidation of power by Yameen, leading to deep dismay from India. While some experts cautioned against adopting a confrontational approach towards the Yameen government, the September 2018 general elections resulted in the defeat of Yameen government and the victory of opposition leader Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. Since then, there has been a significant improvement in relations between India

and the Maldives, with Indian Prime Minister Modi being invited to Solih's inauguration event in November 2018.

Modi prioritized the diplomatic relations between India and its neighboring countries, embarking on a tour to Maldives in early June 2019, which marked initial overseas visit subsequent to his re-election. Throughout the Yameen era, India refrained from directly intervening to safeguard its interests in the Maldives, given the lack of financial resources to counter China's geo-economic influence and concerns about further aligning Yameen with China's sphere of influence. Nonetheless, India's geographical proximity and its status as the foremost transit country in the region provide it with an advantage in promoting regional connectivity. In 2020, the Maldives announced its endorsement of the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy, and the government solidified a defense pact with the US via the US Secretary Mike Pompeo's visit to Male in October. The Maldives' actions reflect the geopolitical dynamics within the Indian Ocean.

3.2.3. Bangladesh

The Bay of Bengal was the place where the first torpedoes attack was made on Dec. 8, 1971, when Pakistan Navy submarine Hangor, which means shark, exploded and sank the Indian frigate Khukri. The Pakistan's attack was historically successful, sinking the ship in two minutes with 194 Indian casualties, however, it consequently led to Bangladesh's(East Pakistan) independence from Pakistan. Recognized by India as a separate nation from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh has enjoyed diplomatic relations with its neighboring country for several decades. Over the years, the relationship between India and Bangladesh has grown stronger, with Dhaka now being considered as one of prominent partners in the neighboring countries. An important

milestone in their partnership was reached in July 2014 when both nations agreed to abide by the decision of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, effectively resolving a longstanding dispute over maritime borders. Another remarkable progress has been shown by Modi's State visit to Bangladesh in June 2015, where the ratification documentation exchange for the land boundary accord has been concluded. Under this agreement, transferring 111 enclaves to Bangladesh, while Dhaka reciprocated by returning 51 enclaves to New Delhi was cordial cooperation provided by India.

Deviating from previous accusations of India's "big brother" stance, former external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj emphasized the term "elder brother" to convey endorsement and support. This perspective shift became apparent in the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's State Visit to India in April 2017, when India proposed a significant credit line of \$4.5 billion. Additionally, an extra \$500 million was allocated for the country's military procurements, further strengthening their bilateral ties. Emerging as a crucial partner in India's counterterrorism efforts, Bangladesh has been an entrance for India's sub-regional initiatives, including the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

A mutual agreement on coastal shipping was established in June 2015, enhancing Indo-Bangladesh maritime connectivity. This accord helped foster maritime linkages between the two nations, aiming to facilitate mutually beneficial maritime activities. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) centered on Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the IOR was added into further consolidating their shared commitment to maritime collaboration. Showcasing proactive engagement in regional maritime deliberations, the Bangladesh Navy

actively joined the Goa Maritime Symposium in 2018 with Myanmar, Mauritius, Singapore, and Thailand. Furthermore, the Bangladesh Naval Ship Somudra Joy's Visit to Visakhapatnam, India in September 2018 played a pivotal role in strengthening naval cooperation between the two countries, deepening interactions in professional levels, cross-deck visits, and people-to-people exchanges of both Indian Navy and Bangladesh Navy.

3.2.4. Pakistan

Pakistan has consistently wielded a substantial influence over India's internal politics and foreign policy goals since its independence in 1947. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 put Karachi, the Headquarter of the Pakistan Navy and hub of the nation's maritime trade, at risk. The Indian Fleet stationed itself 400 km away from the Karachi Port and took advantage of the absence of night vision capabilities in the Pakistan Air Force to stealthily approach closer during the night. The Indian Navy launched Operation 'Trident' on December 4, 1971, specifically targeting the Karachi Port. The minesweeper PNS Muhafiz, the destroyer PNS Khaibar, and the MV Venus Challenger, which, as per Indian sources, was carrying ammunition from the US for Pakistan were sunk by Indian missile ships and the destroyer PNS Shah Jahan suffered irreparable damage. The missile ships also conducted airstrikes on Karachi's Kemari oil storage tanks, resulting in their burning and destruction, causing significant losses of the port. The success of Operation Trident came with no damages to the Indian forces, returning safely to their base. Consequently, December 4 is celebrated as 'Navy Day' in India. The Indian Navy's triumphant Trident operation projected a subsequent military action named 'Operation Python' on the midnight of December 8-9, 1971. The Indian Navy fired four missiles at Karachi, leading to the destruction of more than half of the region's fuel reserves. These audacious naval operations allowed the Indian

Navy to gain full control over oil routes from the Persian Gulf to Pakistani ports, exerting significant influence over Pakistan's maritime activities. In a short span of time, the Indian Navy had successfully taken over Pakistan's maritime region.²³

Prime Minister Modi, however, showcased his willingness to engage in diplomatic negotiations with Pakistan by extending an invitation to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to attend his first inauguration ceremony in 2014. Nevertheless, India postponed the planned talks between the secretaries of foreign affairs which was scheduled in Pakistan's Islamabad in three months after Modi's celebration in 2014. The Pakistani High Commissioner refused to have meetings with Kashmiri separatist leaders associated with the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). Diplomatic dialogue between two nations resumed in March 2015 when their respective foreign secretaries engaged in discussions in Islamabad. This progress paved the way for a roadmap of talks formulated during Modi and Sharif's meeting in Ufa, Russia, in July 2015, eventually leading to a gathering of secretaries of foreign affairs and national security advisors from both countries in Bangkok in early December.

Despite previously avoiding discussions on terrorism in relation to Jammu and Kashmir, India agreed to include it as a topic of discussion. However, Islamabad's insistence on meeting with the leaders of the APHC made it impossible to hold the talks in a third country. In an unexpected move, Modi made an official visit to Pakistan in 2015, holding a meeting in Lahore. While this generated initial enthusiasm, it ultimately had limited impact on improving the overall relationship. Following the Pathankot terror attack in January 2016, bilateral relations reached a

²³Shariq Majeed. (2021). 1971 WAR: When Indian Navy blocked Karachi, its men became masters of Arabian Sea, *Times of India* (October 18)
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/when-indian-navy-blocked-karachi-its-men-became-masters-of-arabian-sea/articleshow/87102536.cms>

stalemate. India's political approach to Pakistan naturally put Pakistan to have active engagement with China yielding ambivalent results as Islamabad sought engagement with China, Russia and Iran to counter increasing pressure from the United States on terrorism-related issues.

The Indian army's surgical strikes in Kashmir, which targeted areas under Pakistan's control, highlighted the limited options India has in dealing with Pakistani aggression. The cancellation of foreign minister talks by India in September 2018, shortly after they were announced, demonstrated the challenges of engaging with Pakistan. More than 40 CRPF personnel were killed in the Pulwama terror attack by a Jaish-e-Mohammad suicide bomber in February 2019 and further exacerbated its strained relations. In response, India conducted airstrikes in Balakot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the largest JeM terror camp within two weeks.

Throughout history, Pakistan has utilized its nuclear weapons as a means of protecting itself while also promoting terrorism against India. This has also served as a deterrent against any potential retaliation by India. However, India's air strike in Balakot has signified a shift in this dynamic, as it demonstrates India's willingness to confront Pakistan's nuclear coercion and may set a precedent for future punitive actions. PM Modi used the Balakot attack for his election campaign to highlight his government's willingness to tackle with terrorism funded by Pakistan. While focusing on Pakistan may yield short-term electoral gains, it is risky in the long run as it distracts from the larger challenge posed by China.

India's approach towards Pakistan has been a mix of engagement and hardline tactics. Talks have been initiated at some times while at others, India has canceled them, citing Pakistan's lack of commitment to ending cross-border terrorism.

4. Conclusion

IOR is a strategic theater for both China and India. Both countries' economic, diplomatic and military engagements with regional countries including Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh and Pakistan are a crucial factor in the IOR. Despite India's position in the Indian Ocean helps enjoy great strategic location, China has strengthened its cooperative ties in the region with economic benefits greatly. China and India are well aware of the fact that "maritime security" takes a huge toll on the growth and the development of their national security in the 21st century. The Indian Ocean Region plays a pivotal role for maritime security, emerging as a new concept in international security in the 1990s, and international organizations and nations place a greater emphasis on maritime security as a key priority on their security agendas. Both countries' approaches to the region take three major dimensions: economic expansion, diplomatic approach and military & security approach.

	Economic Approach	Diplomatic Approach	Military&Security Approach
China	Belt & Road Initiative	-Maritime Superpower -String of Pearls Strategy	Military Modernization
India	BIMSTEC	-Neighborhood First Policy -Act East Policy -SAGAR	QUAD

China's strategic approach to Indian Ocean countries is primarily distinguished by the economic advantages it brings. The execution of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has resulted in significant infrastructure construction of bridges, airports, and highways in countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, and

Pakistan. The economic strategy initiated in 2013, reflects Xi Jinping's China Dream to become a global power, aiming to uplift countries that have been marginalized by globalization and have limited development within the existing arrangements. The BRI seeks to improve and enhance the current global order, rather than directly challenging it, thus augmenting China's economic, military, and political influence across different regions. It emphasizes collaboration with other nations and apparatus that are already part of the existing order, including the AIIB, BRIC New Development Bank, World Bank, IMF, and Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation.

The BRI has the objective of encouraging regional economic development by fostering collaborative and mutually advantageous partnerships, while promoting mutual trust and communication among countries in the area. The Initiative is governed by four guiding principles, which emphasize open and cooperative relationships, market-driven operations, inclusive and harmonious interactions, and benefits for all participating countries.

India's foreign policy stands out due to its longstanding principle of non-alignment, which allows India to pursue its national interests and engage in security cooperation to counter China alongside the US, Japan, and Australia as part of the QUAD. These nations share a common bond of democracy. As India undergoes rapid development, its focus is shifting from a "continental" to a "maritime" perspective. India's aspirations for maritime hegemony in the IOR region are exemplified by its acquisition of the INS Vikramaditya, a Kiev-class aircraft carrier from Russia in 2013, as well as four Arihant-class nuclear submarines and two Vikrant-class aircraft carriers' development and construction. This shift is articulated in the strategic document titled "Freedom to use the seas: India's maritime military

strategy" published in 2007 written by the Indian Navy, which clearly outlines India's ardent passion to safeguard its Indian Ocean interests and establish itself as a regional security provider. Admiral Sureesh Mehta emphasizes in the document's foreword that India's top priority is to establish safe and stable conditions that fosters sustained economic growth and improvement of the living standards for its people in the region. As India strives to attain its rightful place among nations and fulfill its manifest destiny in the IOR, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), with its 23 member states since 1997, serves as a testament to India's efforts. The Republic of Korea joined IORA as a Dialogue Partner in 2018, recognizing the growing significance of the Indian Ocean region. India still faces limitations in military modernization due to the significant allocation, accounting for 53 percent of total spending, towards personnel and pensions. To address this challenge and optimize defense procurement and research and development, the government introduced the "Agnipath scheme" in 2022. This initiative, meaning "fire path" in Hindi, aims to recruit younger soldiers, thereby mitigating the burden of pensions and facilitating domestic job creation.

In order to ensure dependable locations for supply in the Indian Ocean, the Chinese navy presently depends on business models for most of the ports in the area. Nonetheless, forthcoming discussions with pertinent nations will be essential for China to establish dependable supply bases. As projected by the U.S. Defense Department, China might pursue the expansion of its power and logistics networks in the IOR in the coming decade, potentially by establishing entry points or supply bases. This endeavor may encompass the signing of agreements with regional nations to furnish the Chinese navy with fuel, provisions, personnel services, and fundamental maintenance assistance.

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국문초록

인도양의 지정학적 중요성이 부각되고 있다. 아프리카 남단에서 말라카 해협까지, 페르시아만에서 멀리 호주 남서부까지 뻗어 있는 이곳은 세계 상품 무역과 선박 에너지 수송의 중심지로서 세계 GDP의 12%를 차지하고 있다. 후진타오 주석의 ‘해양강국 건설’ 천명을 시작으로 시진핑이 집권한 이후에도 해양패권 확보를 위해 힘쓰고 있는 중국은 인도양에서의 해군 군사 훈련과 일대일로 사업을 활발히 펼치고 있다. 중국의 부상은 오랫동안 인도양을 전통적 내해로 인식하고 있던 인도에게 심각한 도전이 되었다. 따라서 중국과 인도는 인도양 연안 국가의 전략적 협력관계를 구축해 서로에게 대중국 견제전략 및 대인도 견제전략을 추진하고 있다. 중국은 해양강국건설을 중심으로 인도양 연안국들과의 적극적 경제, 외교, 군사적 협력을 통해 대인도 견제전략을 진행하고 있으며, 인도의 경우 미국·일본·호주와의 '쿼드(Quad)' 안보 협력을 통해 적극적인 대중국 견제정책을 펼치고 있다.

본 연구는 중국과 인도의 인도양 정책이 다각화되어 역내 패권을 장악하고 있음을 밝히고 국익 확보를 위한 양국의 정책을 비교 분석하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 중국은 해양대국 구상 하에서 중국이 세계 강국이 되기 위한 디딤돌로서 인도양 패권을 잡기위해 노력하고 있으며, 인도는 인도양 해양패권을 위해 글로벌사우스와 환인도양연합 등 다자주의를 기반으로 영향력을 확대하고 있다. 인도의 대중국전략은 QUAD를 포함한 안보협력에 집중되어 있는데 결론적으로 인도양은 뱅골만을 중심으로 중국과 인도 뿐만 아니라 21세기에 세계 질서를 움직이는 중요한 해역으로 부상하여 글로벌 긴장이 고조되고 있다는 것을 논증한다.

핵심용어: 인도양, 해양패권, 패권경쟁, 다자주의, 해군력, 국가안보

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