



## China's Role in the Indo-US Strategic Interest in the Indian Ocean Region



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**Abstract:** *The strategic position and economic resources of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) make it a point of contention for both big and regional governments. The United States and India maintain friendly diplomatic and security ties and are regarded as trustworthy strategic partners. Both countries maintained diplomatic ties throughout the Cold War, although India was the USSR's reliable strategic ally at the time. India changed its course and started bolstering its bilateral relations with the US after the Cold War ended. Both states participate in several economic and geopolitical accords. Although the United States and India both have interests in the Indian Ocean area, their interests coincide to counteract China's rise to prominence as an economic force in this region.*

**Key Words:** Geo-Strategic, Indian Ocean, Indo-US, Pacific Region

### Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is an important arena where the strategic objectives of global powers interact in the ever-changing field of international relations. China is one of these powers that has gained attention from both India and the US due to its growing influence. This article explores the complex dynamics of China's influence on the US and India's strategic goals in the Indo-Pacific region. Washington and New Delhi are taking notice of China's strong maritime presence, which is typified by its bold Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and navy growth. India interprets China's actions through the prism of regional security

and sovereignty because of its longstanding maritime relations and growing naval might (Saha, 2020). At the same time, the United States, which is eager to hold onto its position as the world's leading power, views China's actions as a calculated threat to its sway in the IOR. An analysis of China's regional naval deployments, economic investments, and strategic manoeuvres offers important insights into its goals and possible consequences for the Indo-US relationship. In order to shed light on the shifting geopolitical dynamics influencing the future of the region, this article seeks to analyze the complex aspects of China's

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position in the Indo-US strategic calculation in the Indian Ocean (Davis, n.d.).

### **Geo-Strategic Importance of IOR**

The Indian Ocean has become an important platform for regional and international nations to accomplish their own national goals, especially with regard to the vital energy commerce Sea Lines of Communication. The Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Australian Bight, the Mozambique Channel, the Gulf of Aden, the Java Sea, the Savu Sea, the Red Sea, the Sea of Zanj, the Andaman Sea, the Flora Sea, and the Timor Sea are just a few of the many tributaries that make up the Indian Ocean. All involved parties have as their main goal ensuring the safety and stability of their Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), as any disruption to maritime trade would have disastrous effects on both local and global organizations (Ali, 2018).

Furthermore, choke points—areas where the interests of many stakeholders with conflicting nationalities intersect—are extremely vulnerable in the Indian Ocean. The Mozambique Channel, the Sunda and Lombok Straits, Bab el Mandeb, the Six and Ten Degree Channels, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Strait of Malacca are among the designated vital sites. The Strait of Hormuz is an important waterway that connects the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea, as well as demarcating the territory of Iran and Oman. About 85% of Asia's crude oil supply is transported via the Strait of Hormuz on a daily basis, making it a vital centre for this industry. As such, it plays a crucial role in enabling the exchange of crude oil. Each and every day, an astounding number of 17 million barrels is transported through the Strait. (Izuyama & Kurita, 2017).

Since the 17th century, maritime commerce routes have been subject to significant limitations in terms of the specific routes and choke spots that ships must inevitably navigate. Furthermore, in order to ensure the safety of navigation, as well as the effective functioning of supply and evacuation operations, it is imperative to provide security measures for transshipment sites, as well as the

entry and departure points of chokepoints. Throughout history, Western colonial countries have engaged in disputes over the dominance of strategic locations, including chokepoints and ports.

Notable examples include the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which is a crucial waterway between the Arabian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Comparably, the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, which connect East Asia with the Bay of Bengal, are notable as important transit routes (Tehseen, n.d.).

IOR has become an important trade route and a crucial factor in determining global economic patterns as a result of the migration of economic expansion from the West to the East. Approximately 70% of the world's crude oil and petroleum products, as well as 50% of all container shipping, pass through the Indian Ocean. According to estimates from the US Department of Energy's (USDOE) Energy Information Agency (EIA), over 30% of the world's crude oil and petroleum products are processed via the Strait of Hormuz, with another twenty-seven percent moving through the Strait of Malacca (Davis, n.d.).

The British withdrew from the East of Suez in 1968, and the United States took over responsibility for maintaining law and order in the region. U.S. has enhanced liberal order and an open economic system by eschewing foreign hegemonic control, forming varied challenges to IOR as a global commons, and utilizing its imposing strategic reach potential. Nonetheless, it is clearly apparent that in comparison to other countries, American marine supremacy is waning. Over this time, China's marine capabilities have significantly increased both in terms of quantity and quality. It's important to acknowledge the prospect that China may attempt to achieve unilateral dominance over the IO area in IOR, even if it hasn't used these capabilities as often as it has in the East and South China Seas (Saha, 2020).

Concerns have been expressed about the preservation and possible change of the current order in the region due to the increasing reliance of different entities on the IOR as a vital route for the transit of

commodities and energy, as well as the shifting power dynamics between the United States and China. When examining possible solutions to these problems, it is insufficient to see the IOR as a point of dispute between the United States, the established dominating power, and China, which is rising. (Ghosh, 2020). The Malacca Dilemma, a concept used to illustrate Beijing's dependency on the Strait of Malacca for maritime trade, has left China vulnerable. China is attempting to handle this difficulty by gaining access to the region in response. However, India, a country that holds a prominent role in the region, has expressed dissatisfaction with China's efforts. From this specific vantage point, the competition for entrance, which includes port usage and military installation defence, is considered the primary factor influencing security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. The next section assesses the conflict between Beijing and Delhi and then examines the patterns seen in the recipient parties that Beijing or Delhi engages in, with a specific emphasis on the Indian subcontinent (Snyder, 2002).

The significance of the Strait of Malacca as a crucial choke point in the Indian Ocean stems from its involvement in a contentious conflict involving India, the U.S., and China. This region under consideration is guided by a connecting point between IO, the South China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. The Strait of Malacca acts as the most expeditious passage for the transportation of oil imports from East Asian, Australian, and Chinese regions, facilitating their transit across the Persian Gulf (Anwar, 2015). Beijing holds significant interests in this region as it serves as a crucial hub for China's oil imports. The potential closure of this hub, for any given cause, would have immediate and severe repercussions for Chinese oil imports and the overall economy (Saha, 2020).

### **India's Strategic Interest in IOR**

With a 7,500-kilometer coastline, India has the longest seaport in the Indian Ocean, with 12 major and 200 smaller seaports. This vast maritime infrastructure has been developed as a result of New Delhi's current and future

maritime goals. India's marine economy includes energy security, shipping, fishing, seaborne trade, and a sizable Indian diaspora and investment. By 2024, it wants to generate \$250 billion from the marine industry. India has made the Indo-Pacific region a strategic priority as a result of these goals. In India, the word "sea" has a slightly distinct meaning. The phrase "the sea is the world is one family" in Sanskrit suggests that the oceans and the world are intertwined in terms of resources, trade, and marine security. (Baruah, 2020). This demonstrates the geographical significance of the ocean to India's economic development and sense of security. Given these Indian aspirations and hegemonic schemes, New Delhi is considering becoming even more involved in IOR. When the Indian Ministry of Defense released its Annual Report 2014-15, which provided a summary of the security environment, it was the first time that India was referred to as a "Maritime Nation historically," with IO being crucial for Indian growth and security. It released its Maritime Doctrine in 2004 and then developed a new one in 2009 (which was amended in 2015).

Furthermore, the organization formulated a Maritime Military Strategy in the year 2007, followed by the expansion of a Maritime Security Strategy in 2015. This Maritime Doctrine of the Indian Navy can be characterized as a set of established notions and tenets pertaining to the utilization of conventional power. On the other hand, the Naval Strategy of the Indian Navy can be described as a comprehensive strategy aimed at transitioning from present circumstances to a preferred objective within a specific circumstance. The papers cited above demonstrate that India's sphere of influence is primarily centred on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with particular emphasis on the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. Furthermore, India shows a special interest in strategically important places like the Cape of Good Hope, the Hormuz Strait, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Strait of Malacca. These places are vital routes to and from these areas. (Asma Sana and Shaheen Akhtar, 2020).

Indian maritime interests, goals, and objectives are elaborated in the Indian maritime security strategy and navy doctrine, which outline contemporary Indian naval strategic thought. The most significant feature of these documents is the expansion of Indian interests from IO to East Asia, Far East, and Oceania, spanning nearly the entire Asia-Pacific region. Second, India's Asia-Pacific policy is heavily influenced by America's Indo-Pacific strategy and defines its role and tasks in accordance with the U.S. obligation as a net security provider in IOR. The Indo-Pacific Strategy of New Delhi is reflected in its accelerated naval modernization and policy of an expanded neighbourhood (Snyder, 2002).

The idea of 'Indo-Pacific' has validated the Indian Navy's vision of the IOR as its core sphere of influence and East Asia and the South China Sea as subsidiary areas of interest, both of which are crucial for protecting its Blue Water Navy. To expand its reach as a provider of internet security, India is diligently buying and modernizing its naval capabilities (Latif & Zia, 2021). The Indian Maritime Military Strategy 2015 and Indian Naval Doctrine 2015 show India's naval goals in the Asia-Pacific region and provide a framework for the Navy to emerge as a well-equipped, modern, and strong naval force with power projection capabilities in the extended regions. Recent naval development and Modi's policy of Extended Neighborhood can be used to analyze the evolving features of India's Indo-Pacific strategy (Saeed, 2017).

India's 2007 Maritime Military Strategy shows a notable increase in its understanding of China's activities. Indian Defense Ministry in its Annual Report 2006-07 observed the growing defense relations between Beijing and several neighbouring countries of India, which have been consistently watched. According to the 2007 Maritime Military Strategy, it is posited that the strategic goals of most navies from outside the region align closely with India's own strategic interests. These interests primarily encompass combating extremism and terrorism, as well as safeguarding Sea Lines of Communication. On the contrary,

there is a cautious attitude towards the PLAN's ambitious modernization plan and China's endeavours to create a strategic presence in IOR (Rath, n.d.).

One of the diplomatic roles of which Navy involves the prevention of incursions by nations that pose a threat to Indian national interest. This is achieved through active engagement with countries located in IOR littoral, with the provision of timely and high-quality assistance in areas that are of significance to these nations. Due to our historical lethargy in this sector, some nations are now able to exert influence in our maritime neighbourhood, which necessitates a policy shift declaring "There is a pressing necessity to disengage the littoral states in our immediate vicinity from regimes that exhibit hostility towards Indian interests" (Nizamani, 2014).

With the formulation of its new Maritime Security Strategy in 2015, India's growing strategic orientation to bolster its capacity as a provider of net security became obvious. It placed net security at the centre of the strategic plan for establishing an advantageous and productive maritime habitat. Net security can be defined as the security of the state inside a certain area, which is evaluated by carefully considering the prevailing dangers, intrinsic risks, and growing competition in a nautical atmosphere, and then assessing ability to effectively scrutinize, control, and counteract these threats. Indian Navy has been recognized for its role in ensuring internet security, effectively leveraging its military, constabulary, diplomatic, and philanthropic responsibilities. The essential components of maritime security encompass the establishment of a strong presence and prompt response, active engagement in maritime affairs, fostering the development of capabilities and capacities, enhancing regional Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and conducting operations to ensure maritime security (Lai, 2013).

The last item covers a wide range of activities, including patrols and surveillance within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), joint patrols, counterpiracy operations, disaster

relief and humanitarian assistance, noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO), maritime embargoes, peace support operations, and maritime search and rescue. But as the National Maritime Foundation's Captain Khorana notes, Delhi makes a distinction in the Indian Ocean between serving as a net security provider and taking on the role of a net provider. United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) chief Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., pushed for a cooperative patrol in March 2016 to protect the idea of unfettered maritime transit. Manohar Parrikar, the Indian Defense Minister, responded as follows: (C. (Dr) G. S. Khurana, 2018).

India has taken a holistic strategy to achieve its goals of dominating the aforementioned field. This strategy has a number of components, including sophisticated naval patrols in international waterways, trade, diplomacy, investments, and strategic alliances. India understands that it needs a sea-based second-strike capability in order to carry out this plan. The acquisition of the previously indicated capacity to conduct a second attack by New Delhi has resulted in the start of a nuclear arms race in both the Indian Ocean and the South Asian region. The gap between China and the US and their bilateral power struggle has helped New Delhi advance, even as India's hegemonic ambitions have created some serious technology and command and control obstacles. The Indian Foreign Secretary, J. Shankar, says that New Delhi wants to be a significant power, not only keep things in balance. Because of its strong hegemonic ambitions and status as the most important Indian Ocean littoral state, India is one of the most important actors in the maritime power dynamics of the Indian Ocean Region. According to Indian diplomat K. M. Pannikar, India's sovereignty and lifeblood are dependent on the Indian Ocean. He claims that if India's coasts are undeveloped, then no political or economic arrangement would be successful there, and neither will scientific or commercial growth (Mishra, 2017a).

## **US Strategic Interest in IOR**

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The United States places the utmost importance on its interests in South Asia and IOR, considering them to be of the highest priority, while regarding other regions as just noteworthy. The rising impact of Beijing in the region has an impact on both groups. The United States of America holds significant strategic concerns on the prevention of potential skirmishes among India and Pakistan, as well as Delhi and Beijing, which possess the potential to enhance the deployment of nuclear weaponry. Another crucial aim is to guarantee the security of these weapons and prevent their continued dissemination (Jia, 2017).

The protection of freedom of navigation in IO is regarded by US officials as an integral aspect of safeguarding the accessibility of the global commons. (Munir & Safdar, 2021). Furthermore, it is imperative for American officials to prioritise the mitigation of violent extremist groups that may constitute a significant risk to the United States, irrespective of the geographical location of their safe havens, be it Afghanistan, Pakistan, or any other region within the vicinity. American officials have also articulated their intention to cultivate a "free and open Indo-Pacific" framework, which entails establishing a regional political, security, and economic structure that is not under the hegemony of any particular nation, including China (Hediuk, 2020).

Furthermore, the U.S. possesses a wide range of lesser nevertheless noteworthy interests in the region of South Asia. These encompass the provision of assistance to local peace and stability initiatives, particularly with regard to the protracted conflict in Afghanistan, and additionally the advocacy for peaceful resolutions to territorial disputes. Washington also aims to foster sustainable economic growth through market-based approaches, enhance trade relations, facilitate human development, promote human rights, and provide assistance to regional states in their pursuit of energy security, while simultaneously mitigating and minimizing the impacts of climate change. Considering the

importance of democratic governance in relation to various regional goals, it is imperative for the U.S. to prioritise the assistance for democratic governance and the fortification against external interference as a crucial priority. Transparent and accountable governance can potentially contribute to the mitigation of harmful Chinese influence and reduce nations' vulnerability to manipulation by Beijing. (Nasir & Munir, n.d.).

The state of Washington is now experiencing notable shifts within its strategic environment. In recent years, there has been a notable decline in bilateral ties between the U.S. and China. This shift may be attributed to the United States' strategic adjustments in reaction to China's increasing assertiveness over its long-term objectives in both the Asian region and on a global scale. The emergence of bilateral conflicts between Beijing and Washington would pose hurdles to their collaborative efforts for addressing regional concerns, hence necessitating increased attention from US policymakers towards Beijing's leverage and power in South Asia. There is growing apprehension in Washington regarding China's purported intention to establish a sphere of influence consisting of compliant nations. This objective exemplifies China's strategic approach towards East and Southeast Asia under the tenure of Xi Jinping. China's objectives and capabilities cast a substantial influence on the strategic aspirations of the United States for the area, a trend that has persisted consistently under various administrations. (Paskal, 2020).

In various domains encompassing strategic stability, preventing terrorism, and regional economic development in South Asia, the United States and China exhibit a competing orientation rather than a cooperative approach, despite purported alignment of interests. This dispute arises, at least in part, from divergent interpretations of the matters at hand. China perceives Pakistan as a vital component of its BRI, serving as a counterbalance to India's ascendance. The notion that Pakistan should face consequences for its support of extremist groups that

contribute to regional instability is dismissed by both the U.S. and India (Jia, 2017).

Beijing's government emphasizes the comparative susceptibility of Pakistan to India as a means to justify the actions taken by Islamabad, whilst Chinese authorities express apprehension regarding the potential activities of certain groups that could pose a threat to China. The U.S. expresses qualms about China's involvement with smaller states in South Asia. These concerns stem from apprehensions about the sustainability of loan practices and suspicions of Beijing's covert attempts to secure geopolitical access, primarily military access, to IOR territories in northeast India (Hediuk, 2020).

Furthermore, in certain South Asian countries, the unchallenged economic dominance of Beijing, coupled with its occasional role as a leading force in multilateral organizations, poses challenges for the U.S in promoting its longstanding foreign policy objectives pertaining to the rule of law, human rights, good governance, and anti-corruption measures (Bush, 2022).

The significance of South Asia and the Indian Ocean region extends beyond matters that are limited to the local and regional context. The region is poised to become a significant focal point in global politics, exerting substantial influence on the broader US-China competition, particularly in the context of emerging nations and within the Asian continent. The region of South Asia accommodates around 24% of the world's population and approximately forty percent of the population in Asia. The region comprises vibrant emerging economies characterized by robust development rates and the potential to serve as an alternative to East Asia in terms of low-cost manufacturing, notwithstanding the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Manyin, 2012).

South Asian states are also important technological marketplaces whose decisions will influence technological ecosystems across the board, including supply chains and hardware, legal and technical standards, and privacy and data protection norms. The Indian

Ocean transports 80 percent of world seaborne trade and 40% of oil shipments. IOR extends from Africa to the Middle East to South Asia Southeast Asia and Australia and has critical maritime choke points at its eastern and western ends. The command of the global commons, particularly the high seas, is central to U.S. grand strategy (Cossa et al., 2009).

The South Asian states hold significant importance as technological marketplaces, exerting impact on many technological ecosystems such as supply chains, hardware, legal and technical standards, as well as privacy and data protection rules. Forty percent of oil exports and eighty percent of all marine trade worldwide are transported across the Indian Ocean. The huge territory that includes Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Australia is known as the Indian Ocean region. The eastern and western edges of the region are home to strategically important marine choke areas. The US grand strategy gives controlling the world's commons, especially the high seas, a great deal of weight. Due to the interrelated geopolitical and economic problems of the Indo-Pacific area, a strategic geographic construct has been formed. The Indo-Pacific region has grown significantly in significance both strategically and economically in recent years, becoming a major theatre for regional and global powers including the United States (Ford, 2020).

United States today has a position of significant dominance in the Indo-Pacific area, mostly attributed to its substantial military capabilities encompassing air and naval installations, alongside communication outposts. The Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS) signifies a growing focus on IOR, which is emerging as a central hub for geopolitical interactions as the importance of maritime affairs is heightened in strategic discussions. Furthermore, this observation highlights the growing interconnectedness of geopolitics, geostrategics, geo-economics, and environmental sustainability. The relevance of IPR has been emphasized through many statements made by President Trump, senior administration officials, and the

implementation of policies such as the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and IPS report. (Geraghty, 2012). The strategic significance of IO influencing global politics is considerable, albeit secondary to the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans in terms of American national security, which directly adjoin US land (Manyin, 2012).

### **Emergence of China in IOR**

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China is primarily concerned about the security of its energy supplies when it comes to IO. Given its status as the region's biggest energy user and its highly dependent economy on outside supplies, China emphasizes how crucial it is to keep the Sea Lines of Communication open. In order to achieve this goal, Beijing must make a significant military presence in the IO. China's Blue Book documents concerns about vulnerabilities in this marine region and emphasizes the need to reduce dangers from other countries as soon as possible. China must improve its strategy in the Indian Ocean given the growing commercial connections it has with nations in Africa and the Middle East. Beijing has thus increased its naval activity, particularly in the vicinity of the strategically important chokepoints in the region. (Wirth & Jenne, 2022).

The Malacca Strait is a very important commerce route that must be crossed by a large percentage of global trade and shipping—roughly one-third—and global oil transport—roughly forty percent. Because of this, the Malacca Strait is now one of the busiest and most widely used commerce routes in the world. The Strait of Malacca is more important to China than it is to other governments that have competing interests. Approximately two-thirds of China's energy sources pass across the Malacca Strait on their way to other countries. The former Chinese President Hu Jintao is credited with coining the phrase "Malacca Dilemma". China Youth Daily then noted that whoever controls the Strait of Malacca would unavoidably have the capacity to affect SLOC's internal surroundings. There have been some analysts in the United States

who have proposed that Beijing could suffer more serious negative consequences from a disruption of its energy supply via the Sea Lines of Communication than from a conventional attack on its territory (Clif, 2020).

Taiwan and the nearby China Sea served as the focal points of China's prior conventional naval strategy. Beijing has, however, shifted its attention to the defence of the far-off South China Sea and larger Chinese regions as a result of its growing power and global interests. China's current approach shows a clear expansion in its strength and maritime interests, in contrast to previous decades when its maritime ambitions were limited to the South China Sea. China's maritime interests are currently expanding significantly outside of its nearby waters and surrounding areas. This growth is explained by the nation's continuous rise to power. Premier Li Keqiang of China provides the rationale behind China's superior military and naval capabilities (Dolven, 2020).

The person put out the theory that this phenomenon might be linked to the profound changes taking place inside China's security environment. Antipiracy operations were the main goal of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)'s early deployments in IO (Yoshihara, 2012). Beijing's goals in the IOR have grown as it has developed, and it now places special emphasis on defending the sea lanes that connect its territorial waters to the Persian Gulf. China hopes to become a major regional and international force by undermining US dominance in the Indo-Pacific area by increasing its naval presence from seven to fourteen vessels.

China's economic and geopolitical influence inside IOR has grown dramatically. Since the late 1990s, Beijing has significantly increased the amount of aid it provides to other countries, mostly to protect its energy resources. China has consistently worked in IOR to lessen its reliance on the Strait of Malacca in addition to resource extraction. The business started talks with Myanmar in 2004 to build a pipeline for natural gas. It also started building an oil pipeline at the same time to make it easier to import crude oil via Myanmar

from the Middle East and Africa. While the oil pipeline started operating in 2015, the natural gas pipeline started operating in 2013 (Clif, 2020).

Additionally, China is in charge of building Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which opened for business in 2004. This port facilitates communication with China's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region by acting as a transport and energy gateway. India's fears were heightened when China proposed to construct the Chittagong Port in Bangladesh and the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, both of which were agreed upon at a 2007 meeting and aligned with China's "String of Pearls" policy. (Brewster, 2014). The amount of commerce between China and Bangladesh exceeded that of India and Bangladesh in 2002. Even though China declined Bangladesh's government's offer to build the Sonadia Port in February 2016, China may still try to get access to Bangladesh's Kutubdia Base, which is said to be big enough to house a Ming-class Type O35B diesel-electric submarine (Dolven, 2020).

During the 2013 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, which took place in Indonesia, the "Maritime Silk Road" project was unveiled. China's confidence has been greatly enhanced by its noteworthy achievements in the field of infrastructure spending. China responded by holding the Dialogue on Strengthening Connectivity Partnership in November 2014 in conjunction with the APEC Beijing Summit. China obtained support for its OBOR proposal during this summit from seven non-APEC countries, including Bangladesh and Myanmar. This program includes the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road and the "Silk Road Economic Belt".

Yoshinobu Yamamoto asserts that the One Belt One Road (OBOR) program has benefits, including enhanced land and marine infrastructure and the supply of international general commodities. But it also gives China the power to use this infrastructure network strategically, maybe to the exclusion of other countries. It is critical to evaluate how Beijing's national interests—which include securing energy supplies, resolving the Malacca



Dilemma, and selecting investment capital destinations—combine with the idea of enhancing the "connectivity" of IOR. Determining the possible effects of creating a regional system that benefits China on the current order is also essential. (Vaughn, 2018).

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) expanded its reach in 2009 when it actively engaged in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. 2010 saw the People's Republic of China send a hospital ship overseas, which arrived in Djibouti and ended up in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The ship's main goal was to deliver medical assistance to the host nations. Although the aforementioned actions may not immediately constitute a military threat, they have raised China's profile as a major player in international affairs. Opportunities for China to participate in cooperative drills with foreign naval forces have significantly increased.

Notably, the US Navy and other parties have collaborated on three separate occasions to undertake antipiracy manoeuvres in the Gulf of Aden. Beijing's engagement in anti-piracy efforts, however, suggests a shift in the direction of defending the freedom of passage on the high seas. It is anticipated that China's ability to deploy ships in open waters will gradually improve over time as a result of its ongoing participation in anti-piracy operations. China and Djibouti signed a strategic cooperation agreement in 2014. Near the end of 2015, the agreement to improve China's logistics infrastructure in Djibouti in order to facilitate PLAN operations was made public. (White, 2020).

### **INDO-US Strategic Alignment in IOR**

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Given Beijing's rapid military and economic rise, the United States views India as a critical regional ally and actively supports efforts to increase its maritime capabilities. Delhi and Washington have similar interests in IOR. Because of its strategic location, both countries have a thorough awareness of the importance of IOR strategically. With roughly 66% of the world's oil traffic and 50% of the 90,000 commercial vessels that use the world's sea routes, IOR is a major player in international

commerce and business. Home to around one-fourth of the world's population, the area includes some of the fastest-growing economies on the planet. Though it faces a wide range of security issues, such as international criminal activity, human and drug trafficking, and terrorism, the area shows great promise. To address these issues, the US works to strengthen and expand its relationships with Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. (S. Singh, 2019).

The United States' engagement in the Indian Ocean Region can be seen as indicative of its strategic objective to counterbalance China's influence. This is achieved through the provision of scientific, military, and economic assistance to India within the region. India and the United States share a diverse array of mutual interests in the Indian Ocean, prompting the need for the establishment of deeper bilateral relations. Although the US and China primarily prioritise transnational issues like piracy and extremism, it is evident that the China factor holds the most influence in fostering increased bilateral collaboration. The United States unequivocally endorses India's military ascendance in the Indian Ocean, perceiving India as a viable contender to China. Both states have entered into several military agreements, particularly in the marine domain, in order to expand their influence in the Asia-Pacific region, with a specific focus on the Indian Ocean. This strategic collaboration is aimed at countering China's growing aspirations for regional dominance (Sobia Hanif and Muhammad Khan, [2018](#)).

### **Conclusion**

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To sum up, China's involvement in the Indian Ocean region has significantly impacted the strategic calculations and alliance dynamics of both India and the US. China is posing challenges to the regional order as it increases its naval capabilities and spreads its influence through programs like the Belt and Road Initiative. Given that China's efforts directly jeopardize India's maritime security and regional clout, the country is cooperating more

closely with like-minded allies, such as the US. In the meantime, the United States sees China's ascent as a strategic threat to its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, which has prompted increased cooperation with India and other regional players to offset Beijing's expanding sway. The changing dynamics in the Indian Ocean region highlight how complicated contemporary geopolitics is and how important it is for major players to work together strategically. Although China, India, and the US continue to compete, there are also chances for communication, coordination, and

steps to foster confidence in order to reduce tensions and advance stability. Furthermore, negotiating the complex geopolitical terrain of the Indian Ocean necessitates a sophisticated comprehension of the goals, motivations, and capacities of every player. Stakeholders can ensure that the Indian Ocean remains a zone of peace and collaboration rather than confrontation by promoting constructive conversation and cooperation as a means of working towards a more stable and prosperous future for the area.

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