

Indian Ocean and Indo-China Rivalry: Challenges for Pakistan

Muhammad Owais

University of Management & Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

Indian Ocean is the third largest Ocean of the world providing sea route for almost half of the global trade. It has also become a reason of conflict for regional powers such as China and India, as well as for external powers. Both countries are trying to secure their interests at every cost challenging the peace and security. This paper gives an analytical review on the interest of world powers specially the interests and ambitions of China and India. Based on their interest and geo-political rivalry, this paper aimed at discussing the challenges associated for Pakistan. This paper concluded that the role played by the rival and regional powers is endangering the existence of many states including Pakistan in this region.

Key Words: **Words: Indian Ocean, China, India, Pakistan**

Introduction

In the contemporary era, the interdependence of states has increased on each other. It enabled the international actors to realize the significance of maritime security and Sea Lines of Communication (Kalim, 2018). The Indian Ocean is the third largest Ocean in the world and covers 19.8% of water content of the world. The Indian Ocean is bound on the North by Asia including India, on the West by Africa, on the East by Indonesia and Australia. This region consists of 38 littoral states. The trading of world oil through the Indian Ocean has increased its significance in the eyes of larger states. This trading opportunity provided by the Indian Ocean was not paid much heed during the cold war era. But in the post-cold war era it gained importance due to the changing nature of world politics. The Indian Ocean is famous for its oil trade routes like Strait of Hormuz and Strait of Malacca. USA is trying to dominate the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with the help of its regional allies. It intended to contain the growing power of China especially with the help of India. Both China and India wants a stronghold in the region and also wants to create their hegemony. This paper analyzes the role played by China and India in the Indian Ocean with emphasis on security challenges for Pakistan.

Strategic importance of IOR

IOR is the hub for trading and migration for a longer period of time. This has created greater importance in global politics due to its geographical location. It

Muhammad Owais

extends from the rim of Africa to the shores of Australia. The majority of states use maritime routes in extending their markets for trade purposes. This route is enormously used by China to reach the majority of the global market after passing through the Strait of Malacca. The large amount of oil passes through these routes to meet the requirements and needs of world second largest economy, China (Hassan M. A., 2019).

With India is destined to be the sixth largest economy of the world, it is trying to become a regional hegemon. These ambitions raises the concerns of Pakistan as challenges associated with the strong presence of Indian military in the Indian Ocean as well as for China who is largely dependent on it for trade. US intended to control the progression of China by supporting endeavours of India. This competition among the regional powers and great powers is responsible for creating instability in the region.

China's geo-political interest

China is geographically connected to the two energy rich regions of the world such as, Indian Ocean Region and Caspian Region. Due to its history and unique foreign policy, China doesn't interfere in the internal matters and as well as foreign affairs of other countries. China owns most important economic and military corridor, Wakhan Corridor which connects Caspian region with Indian Ocean Region. To secure its interest in the region, China wanted to control the land trade routes passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan by establishing its naval base in Gwadar Port situated at the main point of Strait of Hurmoz in Indian Ocean Region. Every actor in international politics sought stability in Afghanistan and the Central Asian States but all of them wanted to ensure protection of their interests (Malik H. Y., 2014).

China's policies are focused on the growth of economy by non-interfering in the internal affairs of other states. It believes in the stability of the political governments of all countries but US pursues the policies of regime change to comprehend its interests. Pakistan government gave operational rights of Gwadar port to China and signed a deal of 753 km long gas pipeline with Iran. The new trio of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan emerged in the continent of implementing peace in the region free from the US domination. India has strong apprehensions on the presence of China in its sphere of influence in the west. For its opportunities, at present Iran seems to be its only hope. India also not much like the trade access of Afghanistan through Pakistan. To protect its regional and international interests, India aligned its interest with the interest of USA and Iran (Malik H. Y., 2014).

To protect its interest in the region and mass shipments in the trade routes of IOR region, China built its first ever naval base in Djibouti, East Africa. Djibouti is located at Horn of Africa that is also another very important trading route which connects Europe with rest of the world. The presence of China in the Africa challenges the interests of US and also directly challenges the Indian interests in

Indian Ocean and Indo-China Rivalry: Challenges for Pakistan

the Africa. Despite building a naval base in Africa, China invested US \$ 60 billion in Africa to explore new markets, main land resources and maintain its presence in the region. This will help in the economic growth of Africa and reduce poverty and will be beneficial for global prosperity.

Gwadar Port was developed by China to ensure implementation of its long term goal of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). After the completion of this port, it will become the world largest deep sea water port and directly link with China through land route of Pakistan. This will not only cut the time but also provide the access to significant geo-strategic location in Arabian Sea.

US interests

The Central Asian region has got its importance because of the large reserves of hydrocarbons and other energy resources. US imports 19.5 million barrels of oil daily from this region. Approximately, fifty percent of its oil requirements are contended from Central Asia. According to the estimations, US will import sixty four percent of its oil needs to fulfill its requirements within few years. USA has an eye on Indian Ocean Region with provision of long term benefits. USA is facing a number of threats to its security in the Indian Ocean Region. The major strategies of USA towards Indian Ocean are:

- USA wants to create its hegemony in the region and it does not want any state or country to dominate the Asian region.
- USA has developed a strategic partnership with majority of the states in this region.
- USA wants to promote a rule that would support and strengthen the territorial position and stability.
- It wants to use IOR as a source of getting energy resources and to expand trade between Indo-Pacific region.
- US wants to prevent the region to be used as a base for terrorism and to protect this region from any kind of terrorist attacks.
- It wants to maintain peace in the region and to prevent and stop any regional conflict between countries such as India and Pakistan.
- USA wants to promote its economic interests and stability in the region.
- It wants to work with India, China and other regional countries to make them aware of the climatic changes occurring in the region.
- It wants to work with partners in promoting democracy, rule of law, human rights and religious freedom (Vaughn, 2018).

Role of India in Indian Ocean

India is having a largest offshore in IOR with the coastline of 7500 kilometers. For expansion of its maritime ambitions, India built 12 major ports and 200 minor ports. India is actively playing its role domestically as well as internationally to ensure its strategic position in the region. India is also developing close relations

Muhammad Owais

with Iran for implementation of its long-term goals in the region and countering influence of China. India is one of the eight countries exempted from US sanctions on trade activities with Iran. India is working on long-term strategic corridor linking Central Asian states with Arabian Sea through Afghanistan and Iran.

Indian sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean region

India is increasing its power and supremacy in Indian Ocean region by spreading naval forces in all around the Indian Ocean and also establishing cordial relations with those countries situated in the IOR. These also include many states that are continuously threatened by their neighbouring states. So, Indian strategists perceive that India is having a great geographical position in Indian Ocean as a peninsula.

An American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan stated that, “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. In the 21st century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters” (Brewster, 2010). India started a program “Blue Water”. For this they increased their annual budget from 11% in 1992/93 to 18% in 2008/09. The purpose for this program is to increase its dominance in Indian Ocean. They increase their naval ambitions, influence by making good security relations in Indian Ocean region. Littoral states are invited. The aim is to lead its power in Indian Ocean region. There are also commented critics on their naval desires and having long misunderstanding between their naval forces and foreign ministry over the anti-piracy operation decision in Somalia.

As China becoming stronger economically in Asian region, the Bush administration never wanted this, therefore, they cheer up India’s naval strategists and stated that they are giving aid and giving full support to influence power in Indian Ocean.

India’s relations with southwest countries in Indian Ocean

Mauritius is located in the southeast of Indian Ocean region. Both the countries have developed close security relations with each other having an island territory spread towards 900 km in the east of Madagascar. The Mauritian President Anerood Jugnauth described the connection in terms of “blood relations” India and Mauritius (Brewster, 2010). In 1974 they have a defense agreement through which India gave them patrol boats and helicopters and also trained their naval officers.

Indian naval buildup and capability for sea control

As compared to western blue water navy, Indian battle order is less account in different ways. Under smart superintendence, the Indian naval arrangement concentrates on the making of a strong maritime walkout credentials. Initially their forces are aimed to control over maritime section, permitting India to defend the shipping and swap also energy supplies. They received P-81 aircraft from US in

December 2012 for this purpose. These aircrafts have magnetic spotting kit and radars, which can easily detect the submarines and other armored (Cordesman, Toukan, Wang, & Jones, 2016).

India's growing naval expansion

Currently there is a tough naval competition between India and China in Indian Ocean. As China is building up rapidly, modernizing maritime and increasing and elaborating their customary naval credentials. Meanwhile, India is competing itself with China. The United States and India have signed a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) on 29th August 2016. The purpose of this agreement was to increase their naval credentials in Indian Ocean to suppress China (Malik A. R., 2017).

China-India strategic rivalry in IOR

Indian Ocean region connects the Middle East countries enriched with energy resources with the whole of Asia and that is a major reason for the rivalry between China and India. According to some perceptions, China is trying to increase its influence in Indian Ocean Region which is challenging the Western countries, particularly India in the Indo-Pacific region. One purpose of doing this is China's strong geo-economic grip that is gained through its BRI and the trade and investment gained from this initiative. China-India strategic rivalry in IOR has certain reasons which are followed.

- The increased partnership of China with Pakistan, traditional rival for India. The China Pakistan Economic Cooperation (CPEC) between China and Pakistan is a major project in China's initiative of BRI.
- China's diplomatic relations, trade and investment with Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal.
- The increased presence of China's military and naval bases in IOR.
- India did not agree to join China's BRI and it disagreed over CPEC project in Kashmir because of the security and sovereignty concerns.
- Border disputes among both countries.
- China's opposition on India becoming the permanent member of the United Nations. Also China does not agree on India joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- India is giving shelter to around 100,000 deported Tibetans.
- India's policy of developing relations with Vietnam.
- The completely different and opposite political systems of both countries. India is the world's biggest democratic country whereas China is not a democratic state (Kaya & Kiliç, 2017).

Emerging implications of China-India rivalry in IOR

China-India rivalry is expanding in the Indian Ocean region and that can be the reason of developments of naval bases from both countries i.e. China and India. This could become a problem for US naval bases and its territorial position. Due to the increased strategic competition between the two countries in IOR, the links between the East Asia and South Asia and Indian Ocean region is increasing, which is a developing link in the Indo-Pacific region. Both countries want to expand the vision of their positions in the world.

The increased competition for energy and other resources across IOR are faced by both countries which could have some effects on the global markets. India is developing relations with countries like Australia, USA, Japan and others due to the increased competition with China. The increased presence of India and China's naval and military bases in IOR might affect the territorial position of USA in the IOR.

Geo-strategic prospects of Gwadar Port

The changing political scenario of the world like, Iran-US tensions, instability in Afghanistan, Indo-Pak conflict, China's unprecedented economic growth and the US strategic tactics have been changing the political scenario of the world. This global shift from geo-politics to geo-economics and the realization of maritime security, the usage of Sea lines for global trade and energy transportation have made importance of ports and seas more dynamic and complicated. The issue of competitiveness has been an important issue these days.

Gwadar as a deep-sea port situated in the Baluchistan Province was first noted in 1954. The Government of Pakistan first thought to transform Gwadar in 1964. A study was conducted in 1993 which highlighted the importance of economic and geographical significance of this port. In 2007, it was inaugurated by President General Pervez Musharraf (Malik H. Y., 2012).

Significance of Gwadar

This port is present in deep sea and located close to international SLOC and is suitable for trans-shipment facilities. It offers trade with Afghanistan and Caspian region. Being a gateway to Persian Gulf, it offers harbor services, shipment, transshipment and manufacturing conveniences for extra regional key players like United Arab Emirates (UAE) and European nations (Khetran, 2014).

The location of Gwadar plays a significant role in the region as it surrounded by energy rich Central Asian Republic, and it alone connects five regions namely Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Persian Gulf, and Caspian region. All trade related activities of Central Asian States could take place through Gwadar port route for cost effectiveness reason thus strengthening Pakistan's economy.

Indian Ocean and Indo-China Rivalry: Challenges for Pakistan

The new phenomena of maritime power and its role in economic developments are directly linked with the military intervention for the security measures of sea and safe transportation of trade. Gwadar port provides depth to Pakistan Navy to play a powerful role in the region and to combat the enemy.

Importance of Gwadar port for China

China has largest population and to fulfill its energy needs, China imports oil from the Middle East. While Chinese vessels have to travel a long distance in order to get oil and passing through sea lines of vital rivalries, Gwadar on the other hand is surrounded by countries having two third oil reserves. So, Gwadar can act as the shortest trade route to China. The Chinese industries are also facing trouble to compete the global market due to high transportation charges. In 2015, under an agreement on economic collaboration between China and Pakistan, the city and port would be further developed with the assistance of China and in 2016, it became operational. The Gwadar port drew the attention of China as it provides shortest route for its trade. Moreover, it gives China an opportunity to counter balance India-America alliance in the region.

Gwadar port has been taken over by China as a hub port and to concentrate on economic potentials of Gwadar port that can enhance the economy of Pakistan as well. It evaluated the prospects of trade and industrial developments opportunities and economic benefits through Gwadar port (AiMin Deng, 2018). Chinese commitment towards development of the Gwadar port, huge investment and technical support will enhance the Pakistan's economic interest with the provision of its economic prosperity in the changing geo-political position. Pakistan is ready for playing an important role in the new world political order.

Growing triadic nexus and challenges for Pakistan

Considering the serious challenges and to protect and tackle the situation arising due to the growing Indo-US-Israel strategic and military relations, China and Pakistan are fully aware of its consequences not only upon them but also considered it as a serious threat for the durable peace of the world. Keeping in view the whole scenario, Pakistan and China realized that the need of similar strategic, security and military alliance between them to maintain the balance in the region. India and China being large countries of the region in terms of population, area and economies can gain access to different resource rich areas and enhance economic power. To counter India, China has invested an amount of US \$ 248 million in Gwadar port (Bukhari, 2011).

Through this huge investment of almost 80% of total expenditure in Gwadar port, China has taken the authority to transit all its good from Gulf to Indian Ocean. Drop off at Gwadar and back to Shanghai by using the ancient trade route (silk route) between China and Pakistan. India considered this Pak- Sino economic collaboration in Gwadar a great threat for itself. To confront this alliance, India is

Muhammad Owais

taking interest in Central Asian States through Chabahar port. The race of gaining control of Indian Ocean between India and China has been confronted by China's Defense Minister by saying that Indian Ocean is not India's ocean. Both China and Pakistan have fear of deleterious effects of growing Indo-US nexus in South Asia as a great threat for their national interest (Khondoker, 2015).

Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan always intended peace in the region and has promoted it. Pakistan has friendly relations with the countries in the region although it was not a part of IOR. As Pakistan is situated along IOR, it is its responsibility to ensure peace in the region and not to get involved in any kind of political conflicts in the region. It is the right of Pakistan to safeguard its interests in the region. Pakistan has very good relationships with China from the beginning and both countries are working too hard to increase their regional connections. Both of them are cooperating and working on different projects like the BRI and CPEC. Moreover both countries always come to each other's support in the times of need.

Since 1947, Pakistan and India exist as rival states and still there was no improvement in relations of both countries. They have certained conflicts among them such as conflict on the princely state, Jammu and Kashmir. There had been numerous full scale and limited wars between the two countries. The violation of Indus Water Treaty of 1960 by India, the arrest of Indian spy Kalbhushan Jadev in Pakistan, the presence of Indian agents in Pakistan sent from the Afghanistan border have made the situation and the relations between both countries worse.

Another implication for Pakistan is that India is trying to isolate Pakistan on global level. India has also made some strong relations with UAE and Saudi Arabia which have helped Pakistan in the past and have good relations with Pakistan as well. Some collaborative projects started by Pakistan and one of the examples of these projects are the US \$ 20 billion project in Pakistan. India is strengthening itself in Africa and this step should be taken by Pakistan as well as it would be a beneficial step for the country.

Competition for Pakistan in Indian Ocean

1. CPEC

In Indian Ocean region Pakistan faces a major challenge that is CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor). Due to Pakistan's current economic crisis, this project has a great importance for Pakistan's economy. This project is also too much beneficial for China, because this is a shortest route for China to access in Indian Ocean. Central Asian countries also get access to Arabian Sea through this route. But India did not want that this project should be completed because it highly affects the interests of India's in the IOR so with the help of USA it always opposed this project.

2. India's 'Look East' policy and challenges for Pakistan

India always wanted to sustain its role in IOR, they started sharing and caring policy towards Middle East, West Asia and Central Asia. They have two airbases in Tajikistan to secure its hold in Afghanistan and Central Asia, which is an alarming situation for Pakistan. As India has always great ties with Arab states, now they want to get access towards Central Asian countries. Pakistan must have not only to secure their ports also to build good relations with their neighboring countries. Pakistan must have to change their naval base from Karachi to Gwadar (Nawaz, 2004).

3. Pakistan's maritime security

Pakistan has not that much equal bankroll naval forces as compared to India, but gradually they are updating naval forces. Currently, they have the largest contingent after buying eight Chinese Type 39B Yuan Class SSKs. China is helping Pakistan to modernize their naval forces for the upcoming Indo-US-Israel nexus. For Pakistan it is quite difficult to protect their coastline from their enemy with having '10' frigates and '8' submarines. Pakistan should have to use unsymmetrical warfare approach to beat India's prevalent firepower.

4. Pakistan's economic interests in IOR

Latter on Pakistan have to secure her interests in IOR. Recently Pakistan has successfully launched submarine cruise missile (SLCM) "Babur" which was portrayed negatively by international media. A report by Vox News on April 4th, 2018 says that "The acquirement of nuclear-armed submarines by Pakistan and India has increased the chances of a destructive war between the two countries." (Hafeez, 2018). Actually the purpose of SLCM test is to protect their economic interests. The threat which was coming from India now with this test is tried to secure Pakistan's naval security, modernization and economic interest. 97% of Pakistan trade took place through Port Qasim, Karachi, Gadani and Pasni.

Port Qasim is playing a key role because of industrial estate, meanwhile there is some specific issues like trafficking, human smuggling and labor union issues. Gwadar is becoming economic hub in future, but absence of railway tracks are becoming issue for cargo transportation.

Conclusion

This paper emphasizes on the geo-political competition between China, India and US in IOR. Due to strategic importance of this ocean, all the actors are involved in conflicting interests. USA and India are cooperating to stop the dominance of China in the region because it is challenging the Indian hegemony in the region. US also supports India to counteract China in Indian Ocean and other important regions of the world. Pakistan is the neighbor of both China and India, and is located very close to the land lock Central Asian States, Caspian region and Strait of Hormuz. Due to its geo strategic location it creates a lot of implication for Pakistan who are working to get maximum opportunities while using these Sea Lanes of Communications because sometime its interest clash with the interest of other powers. This paper suggests that policies implemented in the region should be based upon stability and to maintain the peace, and secure economic and diplomatic interests of smaller regional states such as Pakistan.

References

- AiMin Deng, A. Y. (2018). A Study on Gwadar Port International Competitiveness using Porter's Diamond Model. *World Journal of Innovative Resreach* , 4 (1), 1-7.
- Brewster, D. (2010). An Indian Sphere of Influence in Indian Ocean? *Security Challenges* , 6 (3), 1-20.
- Bukhari, S. S. (2011). India-United States Strategic Partnership: Implications for Pakistan. *Berkeley Journal of Social Sciences* , 1 (1), 1-27.
- Cordesman, A. H., Toukan, A., Wang, M., & Jones, E. P. (2016). *The Indian Ocean Region: South Asia Subregion*. Washington D. C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- Hafeez, Q. t. (2018, April 13). *Indian Ocean Politics and Pakistan's Economic Interests*. Retrieved December 21, 2019, from Modern Diplomacy: <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/04/13/indian-ocean-politics-and-pakistans-economic-interests/>
- Hassan, M. A. (2019). Growing China-India Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Implications for Pakistan. *Strategic Studies* , 39 (1), 77-89.
- Kalim, I. (2018). Geo-Strategic Prospects of Gwadar Port: An Analysis of Protecting Sea Lanes of Indian Ocean. *Journal of Political Studies* , Special, 111-120.
- Kaya, T. Ö., & Kiliç, F. (2017). Sino-Indian Strategic Rivalry in The Indian Ocean Region. *The Journal of Humanity and Society* , 155-172.
- Khetran, M. S. (2014). The Potential Prospects of Gwadar Port. *Strategic Studies* , 34 (4), 57-69.
- Khondoker, M. R. (2015, March 24). *Gwadar VS Chabahar Port: A Race for Dominance*. Retrieved December 20, 2019, from FAIR: <http://fairbd.net/gwadar-vs-chahbahar-port-a-race-for-dominance/>
- Malik*, H. Y. (2014). THE EMERGING STRATEGIC RIVALRIES IN INDIAN OCEAN REGION: AN ANALYSIS OF INDO-AMERICAN AMBITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA.
- Malik, A. R. (2017). The Indian Ocean Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan. *Journal of Security and Strategic Affairs* , III (1), 25-44.
- Malik, H. Y. (2012). Strategic Importance of Gwadar Port. *Journal of Political Studies* , 19 (2), 57-69.
- Malik, H. Y. (2014). The Emerging Strategic Rivalries in Indian Ocean Region: An Analysis of Indo-American Ambitions and Implications for China. *Journal of Contemporary Studies* , III (2), 68-85.
- Nawaz, R. R. (2004). *Maritime Strategy in Pakistan*. Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School.
- Vaughn, B. (2018). *China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress*. Washington D. C.: Congressional Resreach Service.

Biographical Note

Muhammad Owais is an Assistant Professor at Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Management & Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.