

Pakistan's Vulnerability To Great Power Competition In The Indian Ocean

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Abstract

The strategic maritime environment in the Indian Ocean (IO) has seen tremendous transformation during the last 20 years. Defense and security measures have caused the regional focus to abruptly shift from territorial to maritime borders, having a substantial impact on international relations. The historical context of the strategic maritime environment of the Indian Ocean is discussed in this paper, along with the changing patterns of the US, China, and Indian presence as the three primary rivals. By strengthening its ties with India in the Indian Ocean, the US is implementing its counterbalancing strategy against China. China has a "Common Future, Common Growth" plan that it wants to achieve through its Belt and Road Initiative and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The US Indo-Pacific Strategy takes the place of the Asia-Pacific Rebalancing. Iran's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean are related to its strategic necessity to employ oil diplomacy to end its "geopolitical isolation" as a result of US rivalry. The political and strategic developments in the Indian Ocean are being watched from the side by the European Union. Given China's BRI and its focal point, the CPEC, and its location at the gateway to energy highways, Pakistan has a significant geostrategic advantage. In this paper, the struggle for hegemony in the Indian Ocean is examined, and Pakistani policy suggestions are provided.

Keywords: US, China, Maritime Power, Pakistan, Europe, Africa

Introduction:

Whoever controls the Indian Ocean governs Asia, according to Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, a US naval strategist. The future of the globe will be decided in these waterways, which in the twenty-first century are the key to the seven seas. More than 30% of the water SLOCs in the globe is found in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), a geographical area that runs from the western coast of Australia through the northern Strait of Malacca and the western Mozambique Channel. The southern Indian Ocean, which includes the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, is an essential maritime route between Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The Strait of Malacca's function as a naval choke point also directly affects China's

naval might, and interest in the sea lanes as a potential venue for conflict and cooperation has increased. IOR, which supports maritime trade, ships more than half of the world's oil by sea, and has 23 of the top 100 container ports in the world, is a particularly safe area of Great Power competition. Three key choke points on the International Ocean Route (IOR), an important maritime route, are the Straits of Hormuz, the Malacca Strait, and Bab el-Mandeb. These choke points are of ultimate strategic significance in both the geographic and economic spheres because of the massive amounts of commerce that pass through them. IOR has long been considered the backbone of great power rivalry and international geopolitics because of its

natural geographic significance. For obvious reasons, its dominance was inevitable given its geographic significance as well as its commercial and economic impact. The Middle East's energy-rich nations are linked to Asia's booming economies via the important geostrategic region known as IOR. Previously referred to as a "neglected ocean," the Indian Ocean Region is now the focal point of political, geopolitical, and economic operations because to the presence of conventional and nuclear ships from the major powers and nuclear-armed nations like Pakistan, China, and India. In order to maintain the balance of power in the region and provide second-strike capabilities, fleet missile submarine deployment and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) are essential. The US erected a naval station at Diego Garcia in the IOR to protect its significant regional interests. There are significant consequences to the US's new "Asia Pivot" policy. Pakistan and China are understandably concerned about the IOR's strategic balance as a result of Indo-US cooperation in the area. Along with that, the competition between China has intensified due to the pacts of QUAD, LEMOA, and COMCASA. This rivalry has important geopolitical repercussions for the United States, China, and most definitely for India and Pakistan.

IOR and China's Development:

Traditional IOR strategic powers view the expansion of Chinese maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean as a threat. Numerous researchers think Beijing aims to dominate the IOR. To that end, the notion that China has strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region as a maritime power is supported by China's Military Strategy, a 2015 military white paper. It claims that for the first time, its responsibilities have begun to shift from "offshore waters' defence" to "open seas protection." Rival states in the IOR view this as evidence that China has interests that extend far beyond the South China Sea. It involves

Commercial channels and access to the Middle Eastern and African natural resources, on which China heavily depends (Khan, 2022). When China began carrying out its intentions to build a blue-water fleet in the late 1980s, it made its first foray into the Indian Ocean. Even though China is primarily interested with defending its interests in the Western Pacific Ocean, particularly the Taiwan Strait, this development has long-term implications for IOR. China overcame the strategic limitations in the IOR by employing the "String of Pearls" strategy (Vujakovic, 2020). China has been cultivating political links and commercial interests in the IOR since a few years ago. These include friendly relations with Pakistan and solid political and economic ties with Burma, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

Chinese naval forces have been expanding their presence in the Indian Ocean since 2008, initially with the deployment of nuclear and conventional submarines and later through anti-piracy operations. Regional dynamics have been considerably altered by China's full-fledged entrance into the Indian Ocean region in 2015, which includes multibillion dollar investments, political clout, and a military presence along the maritime Silk Road. As part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, China has also made a large contribution toward the construction of the Gwadar deep-water port on Pakistan's Baluchistan coast (CPEC). The fact that Moscow doesn't appear very concerned with China's expanded production of intercontinental missiles, strategic anti-missile defense, or improved naval capabilities is significant. As a result, by working with China in these areas, Russia gains much economically while losing little in terms of security, making things tough for the United States, and improving its relationship with a key ally. Obviously, this represents a significant paradigm shift in IOR politics. (De Silva, 2020).

Rebalancing Asia: A goal of the United States:

Any significant modifications to the Asia-Pacific region's security architecture are thought to pose a threat to the United States. The Obama administration declared in 2011 that Asia is becoming the region where American foreign policy, national security, and economic interests are most strongly aligned. As a result, the United States will be more present and active in the Asia-Pacific area. In response to growing Chinese influence in the shipping lanes, the United States made this announcement. As a result of this step, the United States would later "pivot" or "rebalance" toward Asia. It seeks to impose limits on China's escalating dominance. The defense collaboration between the United States and India may enable India to acquire long-range patrol aircraft, drones, maritime helicopters, aircraft carrier technology, and anti-submarine gear. The Chinese outposts that have been built in Djibouti, Pakistan, and Myanmar, in India's opinion, must be fought (Legrenzi & Lawson, 2017).

Russian Interest in South Asia and the region's resurgence:

As part of its "Return to South Asia," Russia is cultivating ties with Pakistan and India. Russia and Pakistan have recently improved their bilateral relations in a number of ways. Recently, their business relationships and military cooperation have improved. Defense is the main topic of discussion between Pakistan and Russia. On the other hand, the third order relates to relations between Russia and India, where both parties have resolved to increase their cooperation. Russian exports of air and naval defense equipment help India's military capability. India can now reach Central Asia thanks to Russia. India gives greater weight to the proposed 1,410-kilometer energy corridor that would connect Russia to Central Asia. The Iranian port of Chabahar, which is governed by

India, connects the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Caspian Sea to Russia and northern Europe (Azim et al., 2016). With regard to significant regional concerns, both India and Russia wish to depend less on the US and China. Russia's existing strategic ties with China are not safe in the long run, despite the fact that the United States urges India to strengthen their military alliance through programs like the Quad. The third layer is not motivated by hostility toward any particular nation. It reflects the multipolar, rule-based, win-win geopolitical reality of the area. The final story, which both Russia and India are using as frames, describes how Russia has responded to the lingering repercussions of Sino-US competition. The strategic need for Indo-Russian collaboration vs the U.S. pull would determine if such an order would still be applicable in the future.

Similar to this, Pakistan's geostrategic location and crucial role in the regional strategic environment are directly related to the strategic interest Russia has begun to show in Pakistan. Russia now most likely acknowledges Pakistan's legitimate need for defense in order to maintain the balance of power during this. India was first seen as the best source of hegemonic stability in South Asia, according to the Russian perspective. This pragmatic change was probably brought about by the realisation that Pakistan, which possesses nuclear weapons, would adamantly oppose Indian hegemony and that China would continue to ensure Pakistan's security by maintaining a sufficient conventional and nuclear deterrent to balance India. Russia doesn't want to get left behind in the arms race that Pakistan and India are allegedly engaging in. Pakistan, however, is keen to purchase modern military equipment from Russia at a fair price (Shah & Anwar, 2022). As a further step toward regional connection, Putin suggested the "Greater Eurasia Partnership" in 2016, which would include the EAEU members, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and

the Commonwealth nations. Since 2015, Moscow and Beijing have signed agreements signalling cooperation and regional integration because the BRI and the EAEU share the same objective of uniting Eurasia through overland trade and infrastructure. In order to realise the Russian geo-economic goal of a "Greater Eurasia," researcher Andrew Korybko claims that Pakistan is the "zipper of Pan Eurasian Integration," encompassing South, Central, and West Asia. Russia has agreed to provide Pakistan with oil at a lower price in response to the country's growing household and industrial energy needs. By improving relations with Russia to meet its energy needs, Pakistan has chosen a prudent strategy in this regard. Although establishing greater bilateral ties with Russia has historically been challenging for Pakistan, this age of strategic and economic cooperation and complicated interconnections means that Pakistan cannot avoid improving relations with Russia.

The strategic situation of Pakistan:

With a 990 km long coastline that borders the Arabian Sea, Pakistan is one of the major littoral states of IOR. The vast majority of its maritime economic resources are located in its Exclusive Economic Zone. Due to its Western coast's close proximity to the Gulf, Pakistan is strategically crucial for providing the quickest, most dependable, and secures sea access to Afghanistan, the Western Province of China, East Asia, and other landlocked countries in Europe and the Pacific via Gwadar Port. Due to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC, Pakistan has a significantly greater interest in the Indian Ocean. The oil and gas pipelines that connect Central Asia to warm waters via the Karakoram Highway and Afghanistan also have a hub at the Gwadar Port, which is convenient. Pakistan is positioned to become a key maritime power and a regional economic hub if the CPEC projects are successful. Additionally, IOR is

Crucial to Pakistan's marine trade, which depends on it for about 95% of the time. The Arabian Sea is its sole source of petroleum, oil, and lubricants. The water is getting increasing attention because there aren't many land-based communication links in the eastern hemisphere. On the link to the Indian Ocean, Pakistan is anticipated to have a big impact. Pakistan's twin role as a bridge and a facilitator of China's participation in the seas is crucial for both governments (Nurmuhammedov,2017).

Pakistan's strategic presence in the Indian Ocean:

Pakistan's strategic presence in its various forms Interior of the Indian Ocean Pakistan, which is located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, is an important coastal nation since more than 95% of its trade is carried out by the sea through its ports of Karachi, Qasim, and Gwadar. In addition, Pakistan conducts nautical research, excavation, and inspection within its 290,000 sq km Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf. More than 15 million barrels of crude oil from the Gulf States are transported daily across the Persian Gulf via the coastlines of Pakistan. The quickest and most direct path to China, Central Asian countries, and Afghanistan is via Pakistan. The significance of Pakistan's marine economy potential, as well as its military and regional strategy, are amply demonstrated by this. Pakistan recently renamed the Ministry of Ports and Shipping to the Ministry of Marine Affairs after appreciating the value of maritime activities and their contribution to national security. The Pakistani government adopted the Maritimes Zones Act (MZA) in 1976 after realizing Pakistan's potential for prosperity by extending its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from 100 to 200 nautical miles from the starting point. Pakistan increased its continental shelf to 350 nautical miles in 2015, and the UNCLCS (UN Commission for Limits of the Continental Shelf) was given jurisdiction over that expansion.

However, as time goes on, the significance of MZA is dwindling because the government was unable to make irregular changes to the statute. Even though the 1982 United Nations Law of Sea Convention (UNLOSC) was approved, our regional legislation did not incorporate it until 1997, which resulted in a significant loss of a number of global advantages, including the advantage of sharing and marketable privileges, which severely harmed the Pakistani marine economy. The absence of facilities for conducting marine searches, a paucity of oceanographers and "blue jobs," and other factors have made it difficult for Pakistan to realize its full maritime potential. To enable MZA to extend its sphere of influence at sea, the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency Act 1994 should be incorporated into one comprehensive statute and reviewed and changed in conformity with international law (Shahid, 2021).

**Pakistan's geostrategic significance:
Possibility of becoming into a transit
economy:**

The dynamics of international politics were dramatically changed by the Cold War and the years that followed. But because all aspects of global politics and affairs Centre on the state, a state continues to be the main actor in the international system. A state uses economic endeavors and military hardware to increase influence and control over its neighbors and territory in order to ensure its survival and security. These actions and policies are currently leading to a very difficult scenario. The introduction of new trends in economic activity, commerce between nations, and access to resources like coal, oil, and gas as well as the management of geo-economic tools (Garlick, 2018). Routes are topographical and tactical ideas that allude to the actual entrance into a given area or state. Routes or places of security and development are affected by domestic growth. Routes are also a crucial tool for illuminating the

qualitative connections between the states and opening avenues to increased economic efficiency, safety, rural growth, and access to urban or international markets. The most crucial of all these advantages is having simple access to the market since without it, a state cannot maintain its economic and commercial activities.

Pakistan's borders, in particular the province of Baluchistan, have historically been essential for consolidating power, pursuing development, and drawing attention from around the world. In the modern world, regional and international powers that are interested in the South, West, and Asia from a geopolitical and economic perspective find Gawadar's position to be quite alluring. Gawadar is situated north of the Chinese region of Xinjiang and south of the Persian Gulf's entrance. Its harbor's proximity to the Hormuz Strait, a conduit for almost 17 million barrels of oil per day, giving it the ideal location between three significant regions: South Asia, the Persian Gulf (rich in oil), and Central Asia (resource-rich in oil and gas), which further strengthens its strategic worth (Aswani et al., 2022). Additionally, because to the region's strategic and terrestrial importance, major nations like China, the United States, Russia, and the rest of the regional actors are prepared to expand their economic supremacy there. Beyond the choke point and shallow waters of the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar stands out on the global maritime scene as an alternative to Dubai due to its proximity to significant SLOCs and its significance as a part of the so-called String of Pearls in the new great game. China is Pakistan's primary trading, investment, and military ally. China is actively pursuing CPEC, the main project of its wider Belt and Road Initiative, as it presses forward with other economic initiatives in the region. Gwadar provides China with a substitute for the Strait of Malacca, demonstrating how all of the participating countries may strategically gain from exploiting the coastlines of Makran and

Gwadar due to the access to the coastline that can support economic and strategic interests in the region. It can improve China's access to the northern Indian Ocean and the Hormuz Strait, opening up access to maritime waterways. Additionally, Pakistan offers the CARs the quickest land access (2600 km via Afghanistan) to the Arabian Sea for trade when compared to Iran (4500 km) and Turkey (5000 km). The CPEC route has also been in operation since 2004. There is a quadrilateral trade agreement between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in this area. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are also included in its reach. A project called TKPI (Termez, Kabul, Peshawar, Islamabad) has been suggested as a potential replacement for TAPI. This project is approximately half as long as the TAPI project, which is 1700 km, and it takes 750 kilometers to get to Islamabad. The majority of Afghan trade, which involves both essential foods and daily commodities, goes through Pakistan. Pakistan would unavoidably require assistance throughout Afghanistan's reconstruction and rehabilitation phase following the US and NATO withdrawal. Despite Indian investment or desire for alternatives like the Chahbahar Port of Iran, Pakistan practically remains the most practicable option for regional connectivity with Afghanistan. (Akhtar, 2021). Additionally, Pakistan serves as a point of convergence for the major nations' geopolitical objectives. There are four states, two Muslim and two non-Muslim, on either side of a large body of water. It has nuclear weapons of its own and is surrounded by three nuclear-armed states. Due to its geostrategic and geopolitical importance, it has been and still is the Centre of the major powers' aspirations. Academics claim that Asia as a whole is benefiting from the economic advancement of the twenty-first century. This development may increase the wealth and reach of power on the Asian continent. However, some researchers contend that slogans supporting economic

progress also encourage political unrest and intra-personal conflicts. Economic expansion causes political upheaval because it alters local and global power dynamics.

Conclusion

The IOR navies were made up of the fleets of many countries, including Pakistan, Australia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, South Africa, Iran, and Singapore. Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India. There were additional naval bases from France and the United States. The warships of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman collaborated during the "Aman Exercises" to battle the threat of both domestic and foreign terrorism as well as piracy. Investigations against several alleged pirates, middlemen, insurance companies, financiers, brokers, and security organizations were necessary. In 2010, Somali pirates received almost US\$238 million in ransom payments, of which US\$95 million (or 40%) went to recipients outside of Somalia. Without regional support, piracy could not be eradicated.

It is impossible to disregard any advances in this area given the Indian Ocean's important impact on the growth and prosperity of Pakistan. Pakistan, which is more focused on continental than maritime issues, must therefore pay particular attention to the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's Navy is becoming increasingly important, so it's time to draw attention to maritime issues. Think tank meetings must take Pakistan's security and economic interests in the Indian Ocean into account in order to achieve this. Even while many influential regional and international countries view China's support in constructing Gwadar as part of a plan to build "strings of pearls," it gives China considerable economic benefits. China will be able to save 22 days of marine travel time and a significant amount of freight expenditures by running the trade to the Western areas of China via the Dubai-Gwadar-Urumqi route, which is roughly 3500

kilometers long, as opposed to the 14,500-kilometer Dubai-Shanghai-Urumqi course. Pakistan is largely worried about keeping the North Arabian Sea safe and stable, which is a problem for its neighbor. However, Pakistan has constantly taken an active position in Counter-Piracy Task Force-151 Combined Task Force-150 because it is aware of the risks that lurk beyond international borders. These kind of international collaborations have been quite significant in this field. Pakistan, the world's sixth most populous country, may soon need to turn to the oceans to provide food security for its growing economy and people. Understanding the "Century of Oceans" is crucial. People must be aware of the delicate nature of the situation, the need to establish standards, build technical expertise, and support local businesses.

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