



GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN: CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES FOR REGIONAL POWERS

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Abstract

Highlighting the geopolitical and geostrategic significance of the Indian Ocean, which emerged as strategic heartland of the contemporary politics, is the prime objective of the research. The growth of the Indian Ocean Region has contributed to the emergence of Western-centric multipolar world. This region has been declared a great pivot as to be rich in energy reserves. Despite its importance, IOR is prone to a number of threats. The research has adopted the descriptive method of research. It has explained the topic deductively in reference to the theory of securitization. The IOR has been quite unpredictable in the terms of the regional security models that keep shifting from state-centric traditional security threats to those created by non-state bodies. These issues are divided into two categories: traditional and non-traditional security (NTS). The freedom of navigation is more important for the smooth flow of the marine trade in the Indian Ocean; challenges like competition among the great powers, unconventional security threats, and degradation of climate change are also present.

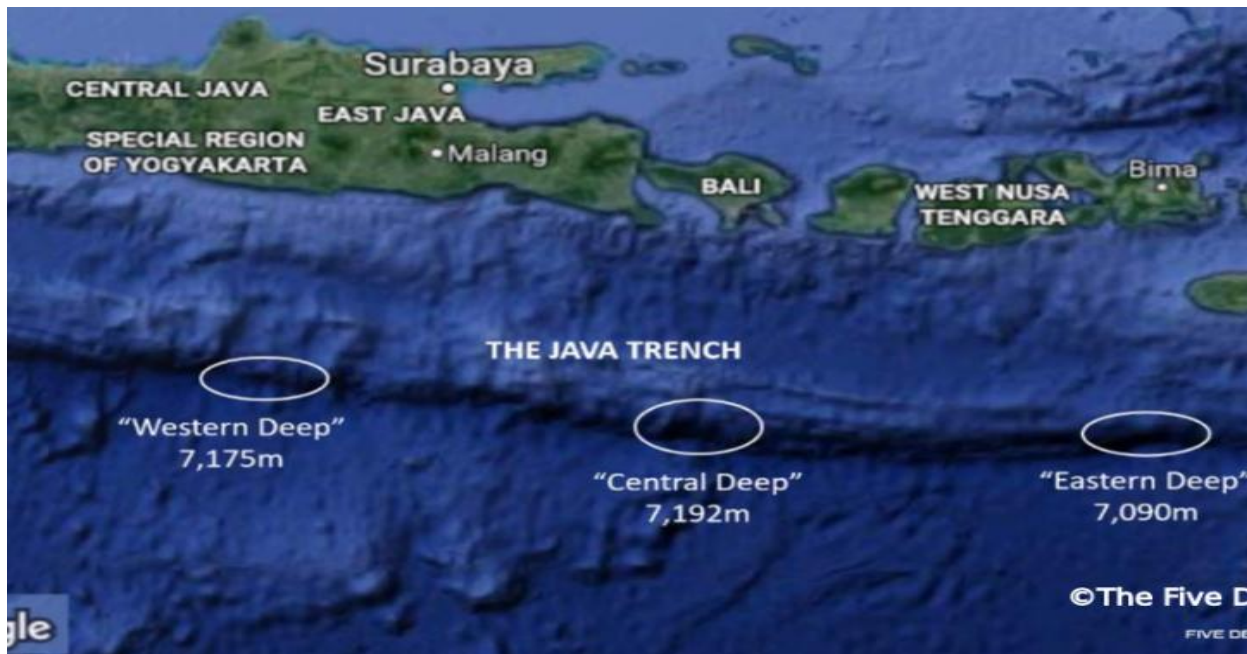
Key Words: Strategic heartland, Geo political, Marine Trade, Unconventional security, Indian Ocean, Environmental degradation

Introduction:

The Indian Ocean Region has emerged as the heartland of the 21st century political milieu, shifting attention of the modern world to IOR, displacing US, Europe and North-East Asia. It is worth mentioning that major powers focused on the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific because of economic and strategic interests that can be gained in this region. Obama's administration had sought the Asia Pivot strategy to strengthen bilateral relations with Asia and regional powers; US desires to boost trade-investment with regional states (Turner & Parmar, 2020). China and India are building up their naval presence in the Indian Ocean to increase their deterrence and show the strength of their military might. As China's hold up in the region is increasing, to cater for the protection and security of its maritime trade, challenging India's desires of regional domination and influence will ultimately lead to a rise in security issues. United States needs to establish a key role in the Indian Ocean (IO) to maintain the balance of interests; else it may create a vacuum for conflict between Indian and Chinese interests (Hornat, 2016). In particular, the Asia pivot (rebalance) policy to Asia was formally declared in late 2011. The Pivot policy was planned as a grand strategic shift of US interest and assets from the post 9/11 severe threats of Afghanistan and Iraq to a region considered of foremost long-term importance. Generally, it has been described by the observers as a reaction to the physical rise of China (Turner & Parmar, 2020).

The Indian Ocean water has to make a home for economic developments, conflicts, disputes and competition among the regional and extra-regional powers. The Indian Ocean region's growth contributed to the emergence of a world that is less Western-centric and more multipolar. China and India's neighbourly relations have mostly occurred across their territorial borders so far. Both are, however, gradually expanding their strategic frontiers seawards as rising big powers with expanding interests. Consequently, the countries' maritime confrontation will increase (Berlin, November 2018).

Saul Bernard Cohen defined geostrategic region as “the expression of the interrelationship of a large part of the world in terms of location, movement, trade orientation, and cultural or ideological bonds. Furthermore, ‘the geostrategic region must be large enough to possess certain globe- influencing characteristics” (Cohen, 2011). Saline water covers one-fifth of the world's oceans in the Indian Ocean. It is the most physically complex of the three big seas. From the southernmost point of Africa to Australia, the Indian Ocean covers 28,360,000 square miles (excluding marginal seas), (73,440,000 square km). The Indian Ocean's average depth is 12,990 feet (3,960 metres), although the Sunda deep in Java Trench off the southern coast of Java, Indonesia, is 24,442 feet. (7,450 meters) (Filivophic, 2020).

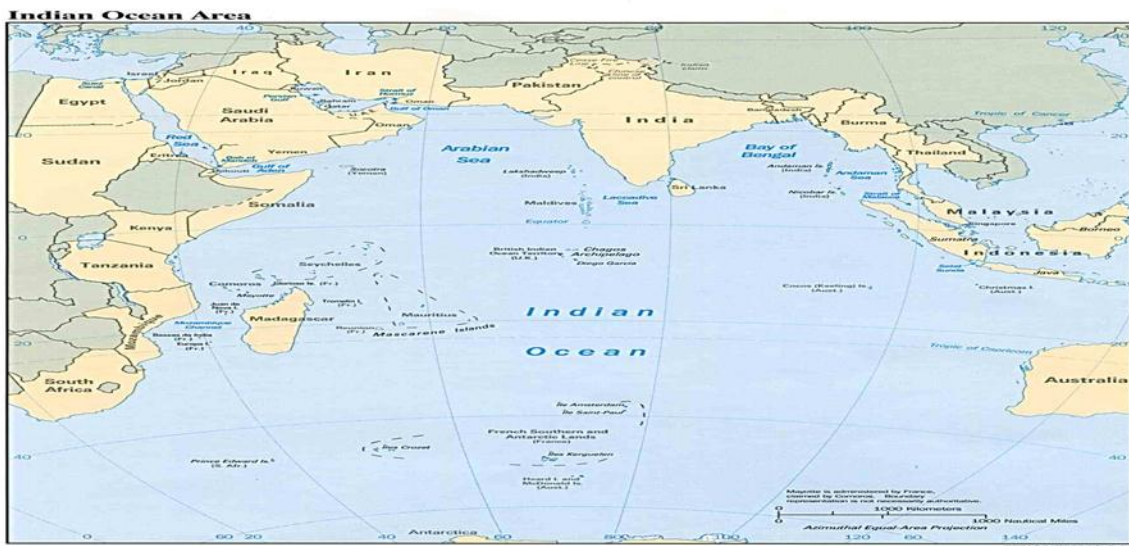


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Over the years, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has been a global hub for several reasons. World trade routes go through this area. The Strait of Hormuz and Malacca, which carry 32.2 million barrels of oil and petroleum per day, more than half of the world's maritime oil trading, are in the Indian Ocean region, which must be rich in energy resources. The Indian Ocean contains 40% of the world's offshore petroleum, coastal beach sands and offshore waters are rich in minerals, and

fisheries are becoming more important for exports and home consumption (Alberta, 19 May 2016).

The Indian Ocean approximately covers 75 million square kilometers, almost 27% of the Maritime space of the globe and 14 % of the total world. It is fringed to the west by the African coast and Arabia, to the east by the Thai–Malay Peninsula, the Indonesian coasts, and – further south – Western Australia (The Indian Ocean Region: Security, Stability and Sustainability in the 21st Century, 2013). The Indian Ocean Region is bounded by 36 states, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Djibouti, East Timor, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Malaysia, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand and United Arab Emirates(UAE),and Yemen. Because of their own islands territories, the United Kingdom and France are also considered IO littoral states. Australia, Indonesia, India, Madagascar, Malaysia, Thailand, Somalia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa own over 40 percent of the world's coastline (The Indian Ocean Region: Security, Stability and Sustainability in the 21st Century, 2013).



(<https://maps.lib.utexas.edu>)

The Indian Ocean is largely used to carry oil from the Persian Gulf to a variety of terminus across the globe. Oil heading for the West Coast of the Australia, China, Japan and United States, and on the other side south East Asian countries must flow the Malacca Strait, which is a crucial choke point (Ahmed, 2020). Major Powers, particularly the United States, retain a visible and credible existence in the region because oil is important for countries. This Ocean was the earliest centre of oceanic activity in man's early history, serving as a thoroughfare for prosperous commerce, ideas, and culture. In the second century, trade winds brought India closer to Europe than in the 17th or 18th centuries. Because the world's reliance the future, oil exports

from the central Asian states by the sea routes have to travel through this region's ports, the Indian Ocean is predicted to observe clashes of economic interests and a tumultuous security climate. This place has been labelled as one of the most deadly by certain analysts (Owens, 1999).

Geo-Strategic Imperatives

These islands are strategically important due to their location, proximity to commercial routes, and well-developed harbours. Holding these islands allowed Western maritime power to control the Indian Ocean and littoral countries in the past, as history has demonstrated (Baruah, 2021).

The Indian Ocean (IO) provides important maritime routes linked with the Africa, Middle East with Europe and the Americas. It transports a significant volume of fossil fuels and petroleum goods from oilfields in the Indonesia and Persian Gulf. Large hydrocarbon reserves are being utilized in Saudi Arabia's nautical areas. Iran, India and Western Australia are the three world's most populous nations (Ahmed, 2020).

India's crude oil imports extend 4.4 million barrels per day in 2019. Recently, Iraq is the largest supplier of India's crude oil, whereas India's crude oil imports is 22%. Almost 59% oil is imported through the Persian Gulf, mostly from Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Country Analysis Executive Summary:India, 2020).

India has for long observed IOR as its backyard, and most of the littoral states have remained under the influence of Indian Domain, 90 percent of India's trades through this Ocean. The extensive coastline surrounding the Indian Ocean, as well as the countries' limited resources make cooperation even more essential (Baruah, 2021).

Maritime trade and sea ports have made major contributions to socioeconomic growth, strengthening economic linkages between states from various regions. Because of its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar port emerges as an attractive port in the region. Their distinctive location attracts to trade from Afghanistan, Central Asia, west China, and many other States. The Arabian Sea, the Gulf Of Oman and the Persian Gulf, are connected by these major shipping routes (Kalim & Syed, 2020). This region holds significance as in 2018, 21 million b/d of oil passed through this strait, or approximately 21% of global oil consumption (Barden, 2019).

Fewer than 4000 hulls are responsible for nearly 20 million shipping containers travelling throughout the world (Berlin, November 2018). The world's second busiest maritime channel, The Straits of Malacca, takes on new significance in this context. It transports 80 percent of Japan's and China's oil supplies. Each year, oil worth \$70 billion travels through the straits. (Barden, 2019)

The Andaman and Nicobar islands are where most shipments enter the straits under the 10-degree canals. As a result, India controls a key sea corridor. The A&N Command in Port Blair, Andaman Islands, is India's first tri-service command. The goal is to transform Port Blair into a key international trading center and to establish an oil terminal and transshipment port in Campbell Bay, located in the Nicobar Islands, with strategic significance (Time to Leverage the Strategic Potential of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, 2020). The Himalayas form its northern boundary, geographically isolating the region. The countries of the region are also separated from one another because there is no one railroad or land route that connects them all. There is no inland navigation, with a few exceptions. Despite their cultural and economic ties to the region, the Indonesian islands, Indo-China republics, and Thailand appear to have their "backs" to the Indian Ocean. They are equally interested in the Pacific, if not more so (Country Analysis Executive Summary: India, 2020).

Theoretical Framework:

International Relations' theories provide the conceptual grounds to comprehend the events and circumstances of international system. This research takes the concept of security to explain the point of discussion. The dynamism of the international arena makes the concepts dynamic in the study. For instance, the end of cold war brought various changes in the international political arena. Among those changes, the transition in the basic conception of security is one case. The concept of security was rephrased from traditional to the non-traditional security. Richard Ullman was the first to advocate the extension in the concept of security. The definition of security has extended from state-centered, military security to the non-state (human), global security. Benjamin Miller has restated the concept of security by initially defining the concept itself. To him, two conditions fulfill the state of security. Firstly, when there is no threat or danger and secondly, when a threatened entity is capable enough to defend itself. The expansion in the traditional security provides the explanation for the non-traditional security. According to which, the origin, nature, responses, responsibility and the core values are transfigured from opponent states to the transnational non-state actors, from military capabilities to non-military (economic, political) and from state-centric approach to global level (Miller, 2017).

This study highlights the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean, which attracts the attention of various regional, global, and non-state actors. The research examines both traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Indian Ocean, where the security situation is threatened due to competition among different actors. Traditional security challenges in the region include potential conflicts between regional states like India-Pakistan and global powers like the US-China, which results in a security dilemma between them. Naval spending and military expansion in the region traditionally exacerbate tensions between the actors, as they seek to counter each other's influence. Additionally, the Indian Ocean region is also vulnerable to non-traditional security threats such as human trafficking, piracy, terrorism, and environmental degradation caused by overfishing and oil spills. The economic security of Indian Ocean also comes under the domain of non-traditional security as major chokepoints, Strait of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz, and important SLOCs pass through the region. The global trends have been shifted to economic integration with increased interdependence of the states. The global trade

flows through the region and thus it also needs to be securitized. The amalgamation of traditional and non-traditional concepts of security is the core debate in the Indian Ocean region keeping in view its geopolitical and geostrategic importance.

Research Methodology:

The research has adopted the descriptive method of research. It has explained the topic deductively in reference to the theory of securitization. This research solely relies on the secondary sources of data i.e., articles, books and online sources. The research has analyzed the data under subjective approach using the qualitative method of research.

Economic Importance of Indian Ocean:

1.1 Rich Energy Resources Base

The Indian Ocean is based to 16.8% of oil reserves and 27.9% of natural gas reserves world. In the year of 2017, the Indian Ocean economies were produced 35.5% of the world's iron and worldwide gold based on 17.8% (Wignaraja, 2018). The region was also responsible for global fishing trade. A number of countries have resulted in a successful foundation for export industries, like India and Indonesia accounted for roughly 4.5% of the worldwide frozen fish exports just in 2017 (Wignaraja, 2018).

2.2 Maritime Trade

More than half of the world's sea-borne oil Maritime trade through these routes. In 2019, Japan depends on external resources for 88% of its natural resources, and the Middle East provided 90% of Japan's oil imports. Japan's container transport with Europe passes through the Indian Ocean as well (YOSHIMATSU, 2021). Currently there are over 20 seaport terminals in the world that can control and receive boats larger than 19,000 TEU, with Asia accounting for more than half of these ports. Only Singapore port, Jebel Ali in Abu Dubai, Tanjung Pelepas in Malaysia, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka are located in the IOR, with the majority of ports in China and South Korea. India, the Indian Ocean's largest country, currently lacks a deep-water terminal capable of berthing ULCVs greater than 18,000 TEU (IYER, 2019).

China's world top ordered oil importer through Indian Ocean, 542 million tons of crude oil in 2020. In 2019 China imported 53% of crude oil came from the Middle East passed through the Indian Ocean (Bah, 2021). With the launch of 100 24,000 TEU vessels expected by 2020, the most vulnerable countries will need to develop policies that include the stresses and expenses on the public sector. This study analyses India's potential role in policy making, arguing that grasping this opportunity has a number of benefits. The article also highlights the issues posed by the introduction of ULCVs in the IOR, as well as practical solutions for fostering more littoral cooperation (Mikheev, Iqba, Irina, & Butt, 2021).

The projected increase in oil production in Iraq and the emergence of Basra as a major hub for exporting petroleum in the region will be examined in the upper-level sector, as will the significant upward revisions of 'Proven Reserves' of both Iraq and Iran. Furthermore, there are exploration and production activities in the Timor Sea and the Chinese and Indian influence over the Myanmar offshore gas field. Ongoing security concerns regarding the transportation and provision of petroleum in this area will be evaluated, and the midstream industry will analyze the current state and importance of the primary export terminals in the Persian Gulf (Kannagara, 2018).

The strategic implications of the crude oil pipelines running from Habshan to Fujairah via the United Arab Emirates, which would provide an alternative route to tanker shipments through the Strait of Hormuz will be examined. In the downstream sector, the focus will be on the potential regional significance of Singapore as a gateway for petroleum, as well as the projected expansion of the Thai Canal (Kra Isthmus Canal), which would effectively create a "Malacca bypass" for petroleum trade from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. Additionally, the economic output of the region, with a particular emphasis on developing countries will also be examined (David Michel, JULY 2012).

Strategic Importance of IOR for Extra Regional Forces:

Continuing US and UE Anchor:

According to regional countries, the United States will continue to serve as the Indian Ocean's strategic anchor and security provider, with their efforts being appreciated in addressing security imbalances, challenging the dominance of any powerful state, and maintaining regional stability. Meanwhile, India has echoed the concept of the Indian "Zone of Peace" and the withdrawal of both regional and extra-regional naval forces from the Indian Ocean in response to the United Kingdom's plans to station power projection units permanently in the Persian Gulf (Sakhuja, 2015). The US naval presence in the region has ensured the freedom of navigation for crucial crude exports, carried out military operations during the Persian Gulf wars, monitored Iranian military deployments and deterred aggression, and undertaken maritime security operations (MSOs), including counter-terrorism, counter-trafficking, and counter-piracy missions (JSON, 2018).

Diego Garcia, a British Indian Ocean colony located south of India, provides logistical support rather than naval support to the US forces. Meanwhile, Bahrain provides naval support to the US and allied forces in the Central Command CENTCOM IOR (Green & Shearer, 2012). The US Pacific Commands (PACOM) navigate much of the Indian Ocean region, and the US also maintains a rotational presence of up to 2500 Marines and aircraft near Darwin on Australia's northern side as part of its alliance relationship with the region (Heather Nauert, 2017).

There has been an argument that the interest of emerging economies in the Indian Ocean region is an attempt to challenge the dominance of developed countries over institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Due to their strategic geographic location, the

adjacent states have significant economic power, with vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and extensive coastlines that include important ports. These states have invested heavily in marine base infrastructure and are eager to support global projects such as China's Maritime Silk Route and Russia's Northern Sea Route (NSR) via the Arctic. The BRICS countries are highly dependent on the seas and are connected to each other through the Atlantic, Arctic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans, which transport over 90% of world trade (Sakhuja, 2015).

The European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) covers all of Europe's sea basins, including the Mediterranean, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, North Sea, Arctic seas, and Atlantic Ocean, as well as Asia, Africa, and the Americas. It has both internal and external dimensions, and its objective is to address a range of asymmetric threats and issues that affect freedom of navigation at sea, both domestically and globally. These include piracy and armed robbery, maritime terrorism, transnational organized crime such as drug trafficking, gun smuggling, and human trafficking, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, maritime infrastructure security, cyber warfare, and environmental hazards (Defence, 2020).

Collaborative efforts in maritime security are a crucial element of the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS). The strategy acknowledges that contemporary marine challenges and issues are diverse and may require an "international response," necessitating cooperation with partners and involvement with regional and extra-regional powers. To this end, the EU Naval Forces work in conjunction with the US Combined Maritime Task Force 150 and 151, both of which operate under the US 5th Fleet (U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Combined Maritime Forces - U.S. 5th Fleet, 2022). Various naval task forces, including NATO and several Asian navies, have taken part in Operation Atlanta in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia to combat piracy in the Indian Ocean (Michel & Sticklor, 2012).

The French navy has established forward stations in Mayotte, Le Reunion, Djibouti, and Abu Dhabi, which serve as an extra-regional force in the Indian Ocean. In the Arabian Sea, Iran has a significant regional military presence and has recently expanded its operations deep into the Indian Ocean. Additionally, Pakistan's navy has developed formidable air, surface, and subsurface capabilities. The US maintains a dominant military presence in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) and has established agreements with numerous countries, including Australia, Bahrain, India, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, the UAE, Yemen, and others. The US Navy has consistently projected military force throughout the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2021).

India is a major player in the Indian Ocean region with new submarines, air defense systems, fighter jets, and long-range maritime aircraft in development. The Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) was established to promote collaboration for maritime safety and security, highlighting the region's significance for global trade and security. The IFC-IOR is hosted by the Indian Navy and was established by the Government of India in 2018 (Thakkar, 2021).



China's naval task force (CTF 525) has deployed 25 warships in the Indian Ocean since 2008, while Japan has deployed its naval and air troops in the region, operating out of military bases in Djibouti. Russia is also interested in the Indian Ocean's security dynamics, and its navy has displayed its "flag" and "presence" in the region to participate in naval operations. Similarly, NATO has monitored the security dynamics in the Indian Ocean (Sakhuja, 2015).

China's regional vision includes the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, which aims to restore land-based commerce through the Silk Road Economic Belt and a Maritime Silk Road. The initiative involves an investment of \$40 billion in global infrastructure development. China has strengthened regional ties through its development projects in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its focus on the region increased after 2009's anti-piracy operations. (Rolland, 2019).

“China has improved its military and especially its naval capabilities, to secure persons, property and investment with others countries. Expert also suggests that Beijing's advances into what is sometimes referred to as India's neighborhood are motivated by China's surplus capacity challenges, which encourage Chinese enterprises to take part in and develop new markets outside of the country. China has already spent \$200 billion on such initiatives. China's spending on the BRI, according to Morgan Stanley, might reach \$1.2–1.3 trillion by 2027, while estimates on total investments differ” (Chatzky & McBride, 2020).

According to some analysts, India has an endeavour significant states that the BRI is a plot to power in Asia, threatening of a ‘String of Pearls’ the Chinese geo-economics strategy generates unsustainable pressures for its Indian ocean adjoining states in order to settle of regional chokes points. Always India has been disturbed by china's Pakistan relations. On the other side India support to Japan and its neighbour states Afghanistan, where it has been put around 3 billion dollars on its highways and building projects (Sinha, 2021).

The defence of the Indian Ocean is a common issue among the countries in the region. The first challenge is to replace the void left by the Europeans who have left. Another, more difficult task will be to keep the ocean free of any additional external elements. It is in the best interests of the nation's surrounding this ocean to keep it out of the cold war. All of this necessitates a high level of cooperation and good neighbor lines from those countries. At best, the security of this region can be assured by a Commonwealth undertaking - express or implicit - involving countries such as Thailand, Burma, and Indonesia. India, which is surrounded on three sides by the ocean, cannot avoid taking the lead and must therefore establish a world-class Navy. With its grasp over this Ocean, a hostile force can put the region's countries' freedom in jeopardy (Green & Shearer, 2012).

The defence systems in South Asian nations were relatively primitive, and the sea was entirely ignored. India built land-based defences to stave off assaults from the northwest and, on rare instances, Central Asia. This facilitated the conquest of Asia by the maritime powers of Europe. Up until her recent difficulties with China, the free India had not shown evidence of altering her narrow perspective. In the huge ocean that washes her shores, she still has no outpost. She will

need to develop a first-rate naval station in the Andaman's to confront a future danger from the Pacific. India must take the lead in developing a proper defense policy for the Indian Ocean, working with other nations that are already working to overcome their suffocating backwardness (Green & Shearer, 2012).

In terms of economics and geopolitical importance, the northern Indian region is crucial. The focus of Indian Foreign policy on its eastern neighbours has piqued interest and drawn attention to the region. India's booming economy, which is on track to become one of the world's third fastest-growing economies, necessitates the development of existing import and export markets. Being seafaring neighbouring island countries has increased the requirement for safe inter-lying sea channels. The world's busiest choke point, the Malacca Straits, is located here, adding to the strategic factor's complexity (Varma, 1967).

Indian Ocean vulnerabilities and Effects:

Emerging Threats

The successful operation of marine trade in the Indian Ocean depends on freedom of navigation, but there are also difficulties including rivalry between superpowers, unusual security concerns, and environmental deterioration. Despite the increased competition, multilateral cooperation on issues such as piracy, disaster aid, and drug smuggling has place between China, India, and other countries. The following areas indicate promise for increased collaboration:

Put a stop to Piracy: Piracy has lost ocean-going traders a lot of money, yet global and regional remedies have been successful (Khurana, 2012). Piracy and drug trafficking are becoming increasingly popular in the region. In 2012, 200 kilograms of heroin were transported using maritime trafficking routes in the Indian Ocean. Between May 2015 and May 2016, the amount of heroin smuggled surged to over 4500 kg. In 2017, 84 (46.7 percent) of world pirate events occurred in this region, putting at jeopardizing the security and safety of maritime trade and connected operations (David Michel, JULY 2012).

China and India each operate their anti-piracy operations, dispatching the naval escort commerce ships, providing security, rescue operations, and grab smuggling. China sent its nineteenth naval escort task group to the Gulf of Aden on April 23rd 2008. Meanwhile, India has foiled forty piracy attempts and created an online registration system for businesses seeking Indian naval escorts. The Malaysian Airlines Flight 370, which was vanished in a way from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing in March 2014, was another recent example of cooperation. Twenty-six countries, including China and India participated in the operation at its peak. In July 2015, wreckage thought to be from the flight was located (Passarelli, 2014). Major Powers control sea route resources due to a lack of regional maritime security. Most geopolitical conflicts are in the South China Sea, which trade threatens and energy-dependent countries like Sri Lanka (L, 2010)..

Natural disaster relief:

Humanitarian aid and disaster relief teamwork can improve. Australia, India, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the UK, and the US helped with relief and recovery after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. China has given \$62.2 million in aid, delivered supplies, and dispatched medical and rescue personnel. The Indian Ocean vulnerability to natural disaster and the resulting repercussions of climate change, more than a decade later, may give fuel for more widespread collaboration (Lavigne, 2013).

The world's largest container shipments entered the Suez Canal through the Mediterranean Sea. Accordingly, "to Evergreen Marine, a Taiwanese transport company that operates the ship, 'Suspected of being hit by a sudden strong wind, causing the hull to deviate. And accidentally hit the bottom and run aground'" (Summr Said, 2021). On the other side chairman of the SCA, Osama Rabie said that, the wind that a not a major cause of the traffic jam, and that Technical or human error.

Fisheries:

The degradation of the environment also poses a challenge to the region's growth. Fish supplies and other minerals might swiftly run out if marine resources are not used sustainably. This could have a detrimental effect on the region's economic development because some large economies depend on these resources to promote commerce and economic progress (BARUAH, 2021).

The Indo-Pacific region heavily relies on fishing as a major source of animal protein, and it is a significant export commodity for the region. However, overfishing and environmental degradation pose severe threats to the long-term economic development and food security of the area. Despite recognizing the need for sustainable fisheries, the implementation of such procedures has been ineffective. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) primarily operates at a sub-regional level and focuses on certain species, as pointed out by David Michel from the Stimson Center (Passarelli, 2014).

In the same way as the human body needs health to be active and fertile, the environment requires health in order to support living creatures and life on this planet. Ocean pollution research has been undertaken based on the following factors: an extreme threat to living resources, harmful for human health, resource depletion, and interference with other sea users. Increased human activities have had a significant impact on Marine life living in the Earth's ocean in recent years (Guo, 2017).

The basic purpose of AUKUS, particular the commitment to export nuclear-powered submarines (SSN), has created different reactions between America's allies in East Asia, these responses are largely affected by two competing for imminent, reinforcing military and naval supremacy despite rising China, on the other hand they were trying to avoid the notorious "Thucydides Trap" (Julienne, 2021).

"Thucydides Trap" approach fear that AUKUS may invigorate a (nuclear) arms race which may eventually exacerbate tensions in East Asia. Although it has not taken any clear position yet,



along with China's close partners, Laos and Cambodia, regions like Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, Thailand, are likely to be included here. Further, New Zealand's moves will impact and influence Australia (Julienne, 2021).

The LEMOA is quite similar to the Logistic support Agreement between the armed forces of India and the United States, United States has signed agreements with more than 80 states and most of these states are non-military U.S alliances (Rajagopalan, R.P.,2016).

The main purpose of this agreement is to provide basic logistics supplies like water, lubricants and oil, food and support, and on a mutual basis they were supplies of clothing to the militaries of the two countries. These services are concerned, the maintenance of the spare parts, port and workers, medical provisions and basic communication facilities. There are opportunities to ensure India's U.S strategic partnership is more powerful and relevant to the coming times specifically for the United States 'rebalance to Asia' strategy (Sakhuja D. V., 2016).

Negotiating the interests of major powers while pursuing their own goals can be a challenging task for countries in the IOR. While being courted by major powers can sometimes work in favor of less-resourced countries, being trapped in a proxy battle among big nations for status, influence, and power is not in their best interest. Ideally, competition would be healthy and beneficial to all parties involved; however, this is not always the case. Therefore, peace and stability in the Indian Ocean are critical for Asia's future economic development.

The IOR has a lot of potential because it is currently one of the least integrated regions with many undeveloped resources. However, terrorism, piracy, and inter/intra-state strife (both religious and ethnic) are common in the region. For instance, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant / Syria (ISIL/ ISIS) preaches an Islamist doctrine that has some supporters in Southeast Asia, which has the potential to jeopardize ASEAN member states' security. Therefore, the IOR poses both challenges and opportunities for ASEAN. However, ASEAN has minimal influence on the decisions made in the Indian Ocean by the great powers such as the United States, India, and China. To address this, ASEAN can strengthen ties with regional and sub-regional organizations like the Bay of Bengal initiative for Multi Sectorial Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Increased networks and regular involvement between all major powers will hopefully lessen competitive components over time and lead to a cooperative partnership. This will be in ASEAN's and the IOR's best interests (Rolland, 2019).

Conclusion

The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean has grown due to China's global influence and India's rapid economic growth, while the US's shift towards an Asia-focused foreign policy has raised concerns about Indian Ocean security. One concern is the potential for India and China to vie for "naval supremacy" in the region. India has responded cautiously to China's growing presence in the region, as it is constrained by its land borders and relies on China for support in pursuing its global ambitions.

The Indian Ocean region faces several challenges, including the spread of piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking, and internal strife, which have made the region volatile. External powers are eager to expand their influence in the region through actual presence, rather than just mediating and reducing volatility. To ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean, key players such as the United States, China, India, and their partners should work together to address emerging threats and challenges. The Indian Ocean also has untapped potential as one of the least integrated regions with abundant resources, offering opportunities for collaboration and economic development.

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