

Can India Exploit Its Geostrategic Location To Control Indian Ocean?



Anurag Jaiswal

Associate Professor,
Dept. of Defence Studies,
Meerut College,
Meerut (U.P.), India



Sudhakar Tyagi

Research Scholar,
Dept. of Defence Studies,
Meerut College,
Meerut (U.P.), India

Abstract

No other country in the world dominates any ocean area as completely as does India particularly the northern Indian Ocean and its vital sea routes due to its geostrategic location. Over centuries, this has been only for trade, until the coming of the Europeans introduced the element of hostilities in otherwise tranquil seas. But the nature of the world has changed. India is now one country which it was not in the 15th century. It has the second largest population, great natural resources and growing economy and trade.

The Indian Ocean is usually seen as India's backyard and hence it is both natural and desirable for India to function as the leader in this region—the world's only region and ocean named after a single state. To this end, there needs to be broad agreement in the IOR that India's security perimeter—its "rightful domain"—extends from the Strait of Malacca to the Strait of Hormuz and the coast of Africa to the western shores of Australia. India will have to play a very large role in the region if the prospects for peace and cooperation are to grow. The age old precept, 'Prepare for War if you want Peace' may now be changed to read, 'Deter your adversary, if you want Peace'. It is only through acquiring and posing credible deterrence capabilities in the Indian Ocean that India can maintain tranquility with China and ensure a favourable balance of power. During present times, it is vital for architects and practitioners of Indian Foreign and Defense Policies to be accustomed with the nuances of the complexities of IOR.

Keywords: Maritime Security, Indian Ocean, Security, Piracy.

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is the third largest of the world's oceanic divisions, covering about 20% of the water on the Earth's surface. Its area is 73,556,000 square kilometers, including the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The world's earliest civilizations in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, and the Indian subcontinent which began along the valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates, Nile and Indus rivers respectively, had all developed around the Indian Ocean. The earliest known maritime trade between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley (2500 BC) was conducted along the Indian Ocean. During the first and second centuries intensive trade relations developed between Roman Egypt and the kingdoms of Southern India.

India needs to exploit its geo strategic location to control the Indian Ocean in order to achieve its rightful place in the comity of nations. This will demand enormous growth in all activities connected with the sea and will also increase its vulnerabilities, requiring the creation and maintenance of naval forces sufficient to protect its interests far from its own shores. West Asia and the Gulf region remain volatile, attracting the permanent presence of powerful navies. The rise of China, its expanding strategic linkages with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan and others have to be taken note of, even while working towards peaceful cooperation in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is to identify the geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean, China's ambitions and increasing influence in the Region and Indian proposed future strategy to limit Chinese presence to ensure better control of the Ocean.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that India can ensure a favourable strategic balance of power with China by having strong and effective control of the Indian Ocean.

Geo Strategic Importance of Indian Ocean Region Physical Characteristics

Indian Ocean connects four major land bodies – Africa, Asia, Australia and Antarctica. It is flanked by thirty-five littoral states in the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Australia. It includes six island territories of the Indian Ocean¹. There are also twelve hinterland countries (e.g. Nepal and Afghanistan) which are landlocked but whose access to the Indian Ocean lies through coastal states. The vital feature, which differentiates Indian Ocean from the other oceans, is the sub-continent of India, which juts about a thousand miles into the Indian Ocean. Existing disputes among states in the region are bilateral in nature, and lasting solutions to most of them can only be found through bilateral dialogue and efforts. The sub regions lack stability and mitigate political unity of IOR. This paves the way for external interference. The region also has a variegated economy with corresponding social conditions.

Growing Importance

The Indian Ocean has emerged as a critical maritime space in view of the strategic, security and economic significance of the region. The Indian Ocean and the states on its littoral are of significant and growing importance. The region contains 1/3 of the world's population, 25% of its landmass and 40% of the world's oil and gas reserves. It is the locus of important international sea lines of communication (SLOCs). The region is home to most of the world's Muslim population as well as India, one of the world's "rising powers." The Indian Ocean also is home to the world's two nuclear weapons states, India and Pakistan, as well as Iran, which most observers believe has a robust program to acquire nuclear weapons.²

Oil Rich Region

The Indian Ocean has seen intense maritime activity for the past 600 years, primarily for trade. While centuries ago, the motivation was for silk and spices, today it is for oil. Persian Gulf contains 65 percent of the world's proven reserves and accounts for more than half of the world's oil exports and almost all of Asia-Pacific's imports. Due to growth in global economy, the world wide demand for oil imports from the gulf is expected to grow and this fact is most critical while considering geo strategic significance of Indian Ocean. Despite efforts by nations to diversify sources, disruption of oil supplies is bound to impact severely on national economies leading to inflation and widespread unemployment. The US, Europe, China, Japan, India and most of Southeast Asian nations are heavily reliant on oil from the Gulf.³

Choke Points

Nearly all of world's trade passes through one or more of 116 straits and a handful of canals used for international navigation. Many of the straits do not carry enough commercial and naval shipping to be considered of global strategic importance. But there are at least eight busy straits and canals that are geographic "chokepoints"⁴.

The Strait of Hormuz (leading out of the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean) is the world's most important oil chokepoint due to its

daily oil flow of 16.5-17 million barrels, which is roughly 40 percent of all seaborne traded oil (or 20 percent of oil traded worldwide). At its narrowest point the Strait is 21 miles wide, and the shipping lanes consist of two-mile wide channels for inbound and outbound tanker traffic, as well as a two-mile wide buffer zone. The majority of oil exported through the Strait of Hormuz travels to Asia, the United States and Western Europe. Currently, three-quarters of all Japan's oil needs pass through this Strait. On average, 15 crude oil tankers pass through the Strait of Hormuz daily. Closure of the Strait of Hormuz would require the use of longer alternate routes at increased transportation costs.

The Strait of Malacca,⁵ located between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean. Malacca is the shortest sea route between Persian Gulf suppliers and the Asian markets –notably China, Japan, South Korea, and the Pacific Rim. Oil shipments through the Strait of Malacca supply China and Indonesia, two of the world's most populous nations. It is the key chokepoint in Asia with an estimated 15 million bbl/d flow. At its narrowest point in the Phillips Channel of the Singapore Strait, Malacca is only 1.7 miles wide creating a natural bottleneck, as well as potential for collisions, grounding, or oil spills. Recent reports by the International Chamber of Commerce show that piracy, including attempted theft and hijackings, are a constant threat to tankers in the Strait of Malacca. Over 50,000 vessels transit the Strait of Malacca per year. If the strait were blocked, nearly half of the world's fleet would be required to reroute around the Indonesian archipelago through Lombok Strait, located between the islands of Bali and Lombok, or the Sunda Strait, located between Java and Sumatra.

The Strait of Bab el-Mandab is located between Yemen, Djibouti, and Eritrea connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. It is approximately 29 Km wide at its narrowest point, making tanker traffic difficult and is limited to two 3.2 Km wide channels for inbound and outbound shipments. It is a chokepoint between the horn of Africa and the Middle East through which exports from the Persian Gulf transit before entering the Suez Canal. An estimated 3.5 million bbl/d pass through this waterway toward Europe, the United States, and Asia. The majority of traffic, around 2.1 million bbl/d, flows north towards the Suez complex. Closure of this Strait could keep tankers from the Persian Gulf from reaching the Suez Canal diverting them around the southern tip of Africa. This activity effectively engages spare tanker capacity and add to transit time and cost.

The Suez Canal, located in Egypt, connects the Red Sea and Gulf of Suez with the Mediterranean Sea. It is located on the west of the Sinai Peninsula and serves as a two way water transport route between Europe and Asia. It is 190 km long and 300 meters wide. The canal supports approximately 8% of the world's shipping traffic with almost 50 vessels traveling through the canal daily. Because of its narrow width, it can be easily blocked and led to a major disruption in oil transport. Closure of the Suez

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Canal and/or Sumed Pipeline would divert tankers around the southern tip of Africa (the Cape of Good Hope), adding greatly to transit time and tying up significant tanker capacity. The Suez Canal⁶ has been closed twice in the past, first in 1956 and again from 1967 to 1975.

International Security Paradigm for The Indian Ocean Region

SLOCs Protection

Most of the trade of the Indian Ocean littorals and the South Asian states is seaborne. SLOCs form the lifeline of these countries. The fact is that SLOCs arouse different response strategies amongst different people. To a military analyst, the SLOCs are related to the maritime instruments of power. To a politician, on the other hand, SLOCs signify the state of relations with countries located along the sea route traversed. Similarly, for some nations multilateral cooperation on SLOCs security may mean a perceived intrusion into aspects of sovereignty⁷.

Piracy

The strict definition of piracy implies that such acts can only take place on the high seas. In territorial waters, the same acts become armed robbery. Therefore, many violent crimes against seafarers escape inclusion in official piracy statistics. Piracy in the Indian Ocean Region is concentrated in – but not confined to – the waters of the Gulf of Aden, Southern Red Sea, much of the Arabian Sea and the Western Indian Ocean along the East African coast as far south as Madagascar and as far east as the Seychelles archipelago. Since 1994, there have been 3,541 pirate attacks worldwide, an increase of 168% from 1993 to 2005⁸.

Competition for Influence and Resources

Indian Ocean Region is characterized due to presence of some of the world's fastest growing populations and economies, such as India and Indonesia astride it. China although is not an Indian Ocean Region state, is dependent upon IOR and hence it seeks to influence the region. The current state in IOR has led to a situation where every state competes for access to increasingly scarce energy resources. Region's fisheries and fresh water resources have also come under very tough competition amongst IOR States for garnering as much share as possible. In addition, Other non IOR states will also compete for the region's resources in due course of time. In view of the fragilities involved, It is important to understand the shared objectives of the IOR states in the time to come for peace and tranquility in the region.

Maritime Terrorism

Maritime security has assumed a new dimension in the post 9/11 era. The fight against this issue has received a boost with the backing of the international community, particularly the United States. With a dramatic increase in large and small container transport by sea, the problem has grown. In this context the new CSI (Container Security Initiative) is a step toward overcoming this challenge. Maritime terrorism has been reported establishing bases in South East Asian countries such as Indonesia,

Remarking An Analisation

Philippines etc due to availability of functional space to organisations such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda etc.⁹

Oil-related Environmental Disasters

Oil-related disasters at sea are the bane of not only environmentalists but mariners and security specialists as well. They create havoc with the ecology in the maritime environment and have the potential to affect maritime security.¹⁰ Regional governments are deeply concerned with major oil spills or wrecks of oil tankers at narrow approaches to harbours and choke points, since such spills can seriously affect the flow of merchant shipping traffic and the flora and fauna.

Security against Mining

Mining of waters is one of the cheapest ways to conduct maritime warfare. Mines may be laid by seaborne or airborne vessels which can even be perpetrated by non-state actors to a limited extent. It is not even necessary to carry out actual mining operations. The mere threat or a well-calculated disinformation campaign about the laying of a minefield can deter any merchant ship from entering an "affected" channel or strait. Mining in a constricted area like the Malacca Straits has the potential to create havoc on international merchant shipping. Most of the regional navies have poor minesweeping abilities and are incapable of undertaking large or even medium-sized minesweeping efforts¹¹.

Unstable and Hostile States

The wide range of failing, unstable and hostile states also represents a series of security challenges in the IOR. Regime collapse in Pakistan and/or Myanmar, for instance, would risk destabilising regional security and economic development. The lack of any form of central governance and control in Somalia continues to fuel criminal activity (most noticeably piracy in the Gulf of Aden), and provides an opportunity for terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, to gain a firm foothold. Iran likewise continues to dominate issues of regional security. The combination of a nascent nuclear programme and Iran's fully developed missile capability present a pervasive menace to the whole Gulf littoral, in particular oil infrastructure, key energy SLOCs and the Strait of Hormuz.

Potential flashpoints

While it is difficult to predict future flashpoints with any degree of certainty, a number of potential flashpoints stand out in the Indian Ocean Region. The recent happenings in Arab countries, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Egypt, Pakistan and Israel make this region one of the most conflict ridden area in the world. The emergence of Muslim Brotherhood and other religious parties in the region may become triggers for clash between religions and civilizations¹².

China's Ambitions in the Indian Ocean

China's Growing Ambitions in the Indian Ocean

Although China is not strictly an IOR littoral, it is a rising power comparative to India with a growing military presence in the region. China's fast developing economy is reliant on the vast amount of trade and energy supplies that it receives from the Indian Ocean, which has led to concerted efforts to secure strategic energy concerns and establish

enduring relationships throughout the region. India has ample reason to be wary of China as its growing footprint in the Indian Ocean reduces India's room for manoeuvre and challenges its position of influence with other littoral states.

Designs for Superpower Status

China has asserted that it believes in peaceful development. However, most nations remain naturally suspicious of Chinese intent. In many cases, the beneficiary countries have been given soft loans and other incentives to ensure that the long term interests of China are protected. The constant impressive GDP growth and the phenomenal money being spent on military acquisitions and modernizations do not lend any hope about the intentions of China which has surpassed Japan as the second largest economy after USA.

Energy Security and SLOCs Vulnerability

The huge oil reserves in the IOR and main SLOCs passing through it does compel China to increase its presence in this region. This will be top requirement for China to maintain and improve the phenomenal double digit growth in terms of GDP. Even today nearly 80 percent of China's imports from around the world are through the sea routes and the SLOCs pass through the straits on either side of India. This would translate to hundreds of Chinese ships moving to China from different parts of the world on a daily basis and to endure security of the SLOCs, China needs to increase its maritime presence in the IOR.

India's Growth as a Pre Eminent Maritime Power

While China's focus and preoccupation is still with US, Taiwan, Japan and its maritime neighbours, it has always been wary of India's growth and is also suspicious of India's recent strategic alliance with US and engagement with its maritime neighbours including Japan and Vietnam. China is worried about a US led initiative and likely use of India's maritime forces to contain China. The geo strategic advantage enjoyed by India which provides excellent reconnaissance and intervention potential, a modern Regional Navy and its strategic outpost in Andaman and Nicobar close to Malacca Straits are sources of concern to China which is disadvantaged in terms of its maritime access to IOR through the Malacca Straits.

String of Pearls Policy

The String of Pearls has become one of the most widely commented subjects in contemporary strategic debate. China has called these its bases for economic activity and has shown no visible military presence in these locations. However, this does not mean that it has no future intention to do so. Chinese naval commanders have said as much, recently stating that China may also seek to obtain a base in the Gulf of Aden. The deep-sea water port of Gwadar, of which the first phase of construction has been completed, is projected to undergo militarization by the Pakistani Navy, which means that Chinese surface and sub-surface platforms could easily be stationed there. Most of the ports the PRC is helping to develop, be at Hambantota or Chittagong, can have a dual use, by hosting both merchant and military

vessel. It seems clear that China's string of pearls strategy is still very much in a nascent but still remains a cause of concern for the future of Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR¹⁴.

Fears of Maritime Piracy and Terrorism

The growing incidents of acts of maritime piracy particularly in the Gulf of Aden off the African coast has brought in maritime forces of various countries to the region to provide a protective shield to the large number of merchant ships that are plying the oceans crisscrossing the oceans. From the point of view of China, it has deployed its modern ships in rotation since end of 2008. On the return passage, the Chinese ships have also visited ports in India and other friendly countries. This has enabled its maritime forces to gain invaluable experience and familiarize with the areas of operation in Indian Ocean Region.

Aggressive China Stance

China has a history of conflict with most of its neighbours on issues of ownership of territories and on issues of demarcation of boundaries. These include Gulf of Tonkin, Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands. The extent of such disputes amply bring out that China has not allowed any resolution of conflicts in the area unless it meets its own national interests. Such a hard stance has to be viewed in the backdrop of their propensity to hold on to historical claims without any compromise. This long standing simmering discontent amongst maritime neighbours has the potential of flaring up in the South China Sea, Yellow Sea and the East China Sea depending on the aggressive intent of the involved countries.

Maritime Posturing

Traditionally, China believed in layered defence based on the concept of first and second Island line defence. While the first line of defence was linked to the inner line of Islands, the second line of defence extended outwards to include Japan. With the modernization of its maritime forces, it is obvious that China is trying to break free from the shackles of the self imposed twin lines of Island defence and move its area of operations/influence outwards beyond the South China Sea through Malacca Straits to the centre of Indian Ocean Region which is becoming the Centre of Gravity of maritime arena. There are simultaneous initiatives to wrest the advantage from the US Carrier Task Force by developing long range Anti Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBMs) that could target big war ships. The ASBM obviously provides China an answer to overcoming the restriction on its forces in the South China Sea.

Indian Strategy for Better Control of The Indian Ocean Region

Over the past few years, India has placed itself on a path to achieve, potentially, the regional influence in the Indian Ocean to which it has aspired. India has enhanced relations with most of the Non IOR countries in the world such as the United States, Japan, Israel, and France. India has improved its bilateral relations with most of the non IOR countries due to its growing economic clout and competent diplomacy. However, India will need to further strengthen its relations in coastal Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Concerted efforts would need

be undertaken to upgrade the distant relationships existing presently with Australia and Indonesia. At the same time, India will need to be more skillful than it has been in cultivating better relations with, and an environment more attuned to Indian interests in, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Further, much will depend on the performance of the Indian economy and on India's ability to avoid domestic communal discord.

India's Objectives in the Indian Ocean

In order to emerge as a dominant power and to contain China's designs in the Indian Ocean, India need to focus on the following issues:-

- (a) Enhancing influence across the IOR, through trade, investment, diplomacy and strategic partnerships.
- (b) Closer relationship with Africa, Middle East and Southeast Asian regions which have greater reserves of minerals and energy reserves.
- (c) Emergence as the dominant Indian Ocean power within next few years ahead.
- (d) Thwarting China in its attempts to gain significant and strategic foothold in the IOR.
- (e) Enhancing influence and control over choke points through security relationships with key littoral states astride IOR.

Indian Strategy

India, a Regional power in its own right, has made attempts to secure what can be legitimately considered its back yard. However, to achieve the objectives the Govt has to consider and execute all forms of international diplomacy, ensuring capability building for its Armed Forces, the Indian Navy in particular and form alliances with friendly littoral states. Some of the important facets of Indian Strategy have been enunciated in the succeeding paragraphs.

Cooperative Arrangements with Maritime Forces

Indian Defence Forces are reaching out to the maritime neighbours of China by engaging with their maritime forces at regular intervals. Such visits have galvanized the regional cooperative mechanisms particularly in the field of disaster relief. In addition, such interactions also enable the Navies in different parts of the world to work out Standard Operating Procedures, work out inter operability issues and keep templates ready for both war and peace.

Indian Initiatives in the Neighbourhood

While not exactly matching China event by event, India has also upped the ante in terms of engaging its maritime neighbours. The maritime neighbours would be quite happy with the sense of competition between the two Asian giants which pays them rich dividends in terms of economic investments and development. Therefore, one sees India also engaging in projects in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives. India has also nurtured excellent maritime relations with Seychelles and Mauritius¹⁵. While India does lag behind by over two decades in terms of its economic liberalization there are strengths that have attracted many players who prefer India to China for some interesting reasons.

Security Pact with Littoral States

Keeping the aggressive designs of China in perspective India needs to sign security agreements

with small neighbors in the Indian Ocean. The proximity of Maldives and the past record of India rushing to its aid when threatened by mercenaries have helped India to maintain cordial relations and engage its Arabian Sea neighbour both economically and in strategic terms. The frequent exchanges and the training being offered to the security forces have helped in cementing the relations. However, the act of the Maldives Govt to suspend the agreement for construction of Male Airport by the Indian company GMR seems to be on the behest of China. This kind of hostile coercion of small littoral states by China may pick up in near future. Hence, long term security arrangements must be made with these countries to ensure effective domination of the region.

Launch of INS Arihant –ATV

The induction of the nuclear capable submarine Arihant would provide the much needed second strike capability as part of the Triad. Though it would take some time before this component of the Triad becomes fully operational it is clear that India is charting the right course. India has a declared policy of 'no first use' of nuclear weapons however it reserves the right of massive retaliation¹⁵.

Modernisation of India's Maritime Assets

While the Indian Navy may be lagging behind in terms of sea based nuclear forces, in terms of its modern naval platforms centered around a Carrier, Indian Navy is a reckonable force which has demonstrated its potential both during peace and war. India is also adding to its infrastructure potential in the maritime sector by creating new ports and allowing private players to participate in building ships for the Navy and the Coast Guard. The mix of both indigenous and imported modern ships has given the Indian Navy a qualitative edge in the region. Indian Navy in addition enjoys a geographic location advantage. It also has a strategic maritime edge due to the location of its far flung island territory both on either flank in the Arabian Sea and in the Andaman Sea¹⁶.

Infrastructure Improvements

India has shed its past inhibitions about augmenting its defence preparedness in strategic areas of Arunachal Pradesh and has also been modernizing its Navy, Air Force and the Army. India is preparing itself for a two-front war simultaneously with Pakistan and China and accordingly the Govt has started giving due priority to the infrastructure projects along the Northern borders. Though China is showing concern on these issues but India is moving ahead to prepare its forces for any future misadventure by its biggest rival in the North.

Assertive India

With the increasing military might, economic clout and also against the public perception that India is too defensive, India in the recent past has displayed a degree of assertiveness much to the consternation of China¹⁷. The notable incidents that bring out this aspect of new assertiveness is related to holding firm ground on Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, Omission of the references to one China, post the visit of the Chinese Premier in December 2010 and even after that and the firm

handling of the stapled visas to Indian visitors from disputed areas. India's latest Quid pro quo action of printing its map with Aksai chin and Arunachal as its integral part is a strong sign to the International community and China in particular. With these strong assertions India is safeguarding its national interests.

Role of Navy in Kargil Conflict

Delays experienced in land battles during Operation Vijay in Kargil sector were offset due to positive and aggressive naval deployments against Pakistan. By deploying frigates, destroyers and submarines, Indian Navy was able to choke the Karachi harbor which accounts for receipt of nearly 90 percent of Pakistan's trade, including oil supplies. The Indian fleet's manoeuvres in the Arabian Sea resulted in Pakistan's fleet being shackled to its immediate coastline. Pakistan considered the Indian Navy about to enforce a quarantine or blockade of Karachi and prevent the supply of oil from the Persian Gulf. Islamabad was not keen to open another front for itself against the Indian military and so chose to withdraw from Kargil. Indian naval projection had been tangible and successful.

Indian Presence in South China Sea

To counter China's influence in the IOR, India has started joint oil exploration with Vietnam and trying to establish maritime relations with Philippines. Both these countries are in conflict with China over the Islands in the South China Sea. India's latest maritime exercise with Japan Navy is also a step in the right direction. As part of its future strategy India should form strong maritime ties with all the unhappy neighbours of China. India's greater presence in the South China Sea will act as a deterrent for China in the IOR.

Capability Building of Indian Armed Forces

Supplementing its diplomatic and political initiatives, India is shaping its growing military capability. These forces should be able, should the need arise, to: keep China's navy out of the Indian Ocean; enter the South China Sea and project military power directly against the Chinese homeland; project military power elsewhere in the Indian Ocean—at key choke points, on vital islands, around the littoral, and along key sea routes; and—in a presumably altered strategic environment—pose an important potential constraint on the ability of the U.S. Navy to operate in the Indian Ocean. At present, the overall thrust is to get weapons to project power, especially systems with greater lethality and reach. India's futuristic appreciation of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean in its rise as a regional power has given new momentum to the diplomacy and capacity building of its Armed Forces. With the correct and timely use of its massive soft power and efforts to build up the credible hard power will ensure a favorable power projection over China in the region¹⁸.

Conclusion

The Sino-Indian rivalry for better control of the IOR would surely play out in the coming years. China is concerned that India has a geostrategic advantage in the Indian Ocean and could try to compensate for continental power inadequacies in any border conflict by taking action against Chinese

interests in the Indian Ocean. Though the relations between these two Asian giants have improved since India's war with China in 1962 and the Indian Prime minister's 1998 letter to U.S. president justifying India's nuclear tests in terms of Chinese threat. However, and notwithstanding the probably episodic progress registered of late, China and India likely will remain long-term rivals, vying for the same strategic space in Asia. There is no sign of China giving up its 'contain India' strategy' which takes several forms: an unresolved territorial dispute; arms sales to and military alliances with 'India-way countries' (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma and now Nepal); nuclear and missile proliferation in India's neighborhood (Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia); and opposition to India's membership in global and regional organizations.

In order to ensure better and strategic control of the Indian Ocean and confront the wide ranging maritime security challenges, the efficacy of the Indian Navy and optimum utilisation of all resources of the State is essential. All efforts must be made to develop a mixed bag of capabilities to deal with the diversity of threats faced. Where the capabilities are lacking, regional cooperation should be maximised to overcome shortcomings to good effect. It is in India's interest to continue cooperating with other major powers in the region to secure common interests that include safeguarding the SLOCs, energy security and countering extremist and terrorist groups. Making India a dominant maritime power and limiting China's influence in the Indian Ocean region should be India's top defence and political agenda in the near future to ensure a favourable power projection with China.

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