

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology  
of Egypt / Egyptology

**INDO-CHINA GEO STRATEGIC RIVALRY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN  
AND ITS IMPACT ON PAKISTAN**

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**Omer Shabbir , Amna Malik , Irum Arshad , Indo-China Geo Strategic Rivalry In The Indian Ocean And Its Impact On Pakistan , Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(8). ISSN 1567-214x.**

**Keywords: Indo-China, Rivalry, Indian Ocean, Pakistan.**

**Abstract:**

Indian Ocean is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest ocean on the planet Earth. In the contemporary world, trade is one of the prime medium that is used to boost the economy and frame out the basic ingredients to become the regional or global hegemon. It is a known fact that the India and China are competing in the Indian ocean to secure their sea lines communication. India is utilizing its pivotal geo strategic location, however China is using its string of pearls strategy to counter each other's influence. Both the giants proactively involved their troops in land border clashes but now the maritime security has surfaced as a bone of contention between the two countries. The aim of this paper is to unfold the interest of both the countries in IOR. This paper intends to unfold the regional paradigm through a lens of realist approach and unwind the ground realities by using a spectrum of qualitative research methodology.

**Introduction:**

A very unique feature of Indian Ocean that distinguishes it with the rest of the two water bodies i.e. Atlantic and Pacific Ocean is its semi enclosed feature. IOR is an ocean that has the largest choking points, moreover it is embedded with rich mineral resources. The IOR contains 65% of the world's strategic rich minerals and 31% natural gas. A general assumption that is pinnacle point among its feature is the trade of crude oil by Japan, European countries & USA through IOR. (Friedrich A. Schoot, 2009)

The sea lines communication serves as the arteries that manage the International trade. The hub of oil production that is Middle East shares borders with IOR that further glorify its significance and importance. Another catchy feature that elevates the IOR is Indo China affairs that can be explicitly defined as "the rise of India and Rise of China". The most anticipating fear that hovers around India is its encirclement in IOR. (Fernando, 2015)

It is famous quote that we can change our friends but we can never change our neighbors. Therefore under the aforementioned quote the prime responsibility of any state is to secure its borders. Being a nuclear power, both the countries are utilizing their all financial and military resources to subjugate the right of each other. China being an island is abutting by natural barriers that are difficult to pass or areas that essentially are wastelands with minimum population. In its East, it has the Pacific Ocean, in its North are the Siberian and Mongolian regions, sparsely populated and difficult to move through. In its south there are hills and mountains that separates China from Southeast Asia. Only in the Northeast along with Russian Maritime Provinces and Yalu river that separates China from Korea are the traversable point of contacts. But the balance of military power is heavily in China's favor at these points.

Strategically China has two problems, both pivoting around the question of defending coastline. First, China must be vigilant about the attacks from sea. The same thing happened in 1930's when Japan invaded Manchuria in the Northeast and then sailed into south in the 'heart of China'. Second, the 2<sup>nd</sup> threat that could debilitates the China's internal security comes from powers seep in under populated portion of the West. The same incident happened during the Mongol invasion from the Northwest. But that invasion was fulfilled by the unprecedented Chinese fragmentation, as were the European and Japanese's invasions (Fatima,2015)

### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of the current study is to examine the mounting hostility between the two nuclear powers that is China and India and its implication on Pakistan. The study intends to unveil the overall impact of this hostility on the South Asian politics in general and the internal politics of these three stakeholders in particular.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The research article has been carved out under the theoretical framework of realist paradigm. The theory of realism talks about the lust of power between states and that the states only follow their national interest. The proponents of Realism like Machevelli, Morgenthau further elaborate that realists don't think about moralities and use every mean that could eventually protect their national interest.

### **China's concerns over Indian Ocean:**

Indian former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once said that India is a super-regional power, its strategic footprints covers the region bounded by the horn of Africa, West Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and beyond to the far reaches of the Indian Ocean. China is conspicuously aware of New Delhi's intentions of projecting its ambitions of power into and beyond IOR. India's aspiring geopolitical expansion strategy could possibly turn the two giants into a never ending competition over this unique water body (Joseph R. Morgan, 2016)

**Indo-China concerns over Indian Ocean:**

Indian Ocean is a gateway to the arena of International trade and energy resources, moreover it serves as a platform for India to compete with rising China and setting up a stage for extending security cooperation with USA. Both the competing giants are well aware of the Geo-strategic location of IOR and will never lose any opportunity to utilize the choking points that are passing through the Persian Gulf, Africa and Europe. The appetite of resources put these Asian giants into tug of war. China's military presence in Hainan Island is a testimony of complementing "string of pearls" strategy. A state of the art airstrip on Woody Island in the East of Vietnam is a reflection of "strings of pearls" strategy. (Mukherjee, 2010)

**Chinese Infrastructural Interests:**

The extension of strings of pearls strategy is the launching of BRI and 21<sup>st</sup> century maritime silk route is the extension of strings of pearl strategy (Tiezzi, 2020). Furthermore the Chinese government has started different projects in the adjacent littoral states of Indian Ocean under the banner of BRI. The states that are being the developmental partner of China are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka, Nepal and Myanmar.

**Bangladesh:**

Bangladesh owns a significant role in the Chinese Indian Ocean policy. Since Bangladesh is located at the Bay of Bengal, China envisages to capitalize its geostrategic location by mobilizing the precious resources of gas and oil through Myanmar pipelines. The Chinese President visited China in 2016, where he signed 27 projects that further provided a base of cooperation in different spheres (Siddique, 2019). China and Bangladesh strengthened their hands in the field of information technology, construction, disaster management and people to people contact. Moreover the China and Bangladesh agreed to establish a road link between Kunming and Chittagong through Myanmar and established an air link to enhance the connectivity (Ramachandan, 2019).

The port of Chittagong possesses a vital role in Chinese shipping lines network. In 2010, the Chinese government invested \$9M for the up gradation of port. The port runs along through China to Southeast Asia, the Eastern coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean and from Mediterranean to Greece. For **vigilance purpose**, the Chinese ministry of defense gave submarine to Bangladesh to ensure the safety of Bay of Bengal.

**Srilanka:**

Srilanka is the strategic partner of China in One Belt one road initiative as well as in Indian ocean. Over a period of time the bilateral relations between China and Srilanka got stronger as China is the major exporter of arms to Srilanka. China sold the fourth generation jet fighters to Srilanka which were Jian 7 jets and JY-113D state of art radars. Moreover China sponsored the construction of Hambantota airport that served a strategic connection for the economic integration. Various defense analysts are of the view that Hambantota would serve as the port as well as the naval base that raised serious concerns for India. However china asserts that it would only utilize it as a dockyard and refueling base (Habib, 2018).

**Nepal:**

The China and Nepal have always faced concerns in their relations because of the Indian factor. Nepal mostly depends on India as far as the agricultural items are concerned. China in order to establish a connection with Tibet, establishing a rail connection between Golnand and Qinghai province, another rail track was built between China and Lhasa. China and Nepal became a strategic partner by signing memorandum of understanding in OBOR.

**Myanmar:**

Myanmar possesses a vital position that serves an overland transportation link between China and Indian Ocean. The BRI will provide an opportunity to China to directly transport its goods because of its close proximity with Strait of Malacca. Myanmar dominates Coco-Islands that would enable China to fulfill its dream of top notch blue water navy by 2050. Coco-islands is located adjacent to the Indian Territory and only 30km away from the Indian controlled Andaman Islands that would provide an opportunity for the Chinese Navy to keep an eye on Indian activities.

**Pakistan:**

China and Pakistan are the time tested allies. Both are envisaging a defining role in Indian Ocean. China has invested billions of dollars in CPEC project that would serve as a route for Chinese products to various parts of the world. The project includes oil gas pipelines rail and road link in Pakistan that would make a connection between Gwadar and Kashgarchina is determined to connect Arabian Sea and western Xinjiang province of China through Pakistan. China is establishing Gwadar port to access Indian Ocean directly instead of the Middle East belt.

**China suspicion over India Vietnam agreements:**

The rivalry between the two countries further mounted over the dispute of South China Sea. Indian trade ties with Vietnam raised suspicion among the Chinese policy makers for oil and gas resources. The contemporary Chinese foreign policy sticks around the concept of “string of pearls” strategy. It is basically a concept of a necklace which has several beads and each bead is a country which would come into an alliance with China. The China is envisaging to play a proactive role to have a workable relationship with all the South Asian countries that will eventually encircle India. The CPEC project is a clear manifestation of China’s ambition of debilitate India’s role in the region that it could incapacitated China’s grip over the South China Sea.(Scott, 2017)

**India’s concern over the Indian Ocean:**

India’s connived “Look east policy” in 1991 aimed to get closer to south East Asian countries for extracting its own desired results. India assumed itself as a continental power that would eventually materialized a central position in IOR, a fact that will exercise an increasingly profound influence on the region.

**India China concerns over Malacca strait:**

The Strait of Malacca remarkably carries a profound importance, because it joins the Indian Ocean with Pacific Ocean that ultimately serves as a merger of string economics such as China,

Japan, South Korea and India. The Strait of Malacca again pose an acute threat to the Indian economy because it is the gateway of the Chinese manufactured goods into the European and African continents. In lieu of the importance of Strait of Malacca, India has increased the presence of its navy by building the base of Andaman and Nicobar islands in the heart of “Bay of Bengal”. India considered these islands as the doors of East which is a “throat channel” for their strategic partners in South East Asia and Far East. (Ma, 2018)

### **Pakistan factor in the Indo-China relations:**

During the indo China war of 1962, Pakistan took a principle stand of supporting China, which consequently posed a rivalry between Pakistan and India. Later on in 1971 when Pakistan and India lifted their eyebrows, China extended military support by lending several F-7 fighter jets which played a role in countering Indian aggression. Pakistan and China are the time tested friends. China strengthened the arms of Pakistan by giving them the military technology in order to neutralize India within South Asia. China has used Pakistan to prevent India from exerting its leadership role even within South Asia.

Despite the swinging sword of Nuclear Supplier groups (NSG) and its strict obligations, it has openly announced to build two additional nuclear power plants in Pakistan. The Chinese strategy of strengthening India’s western neighbor by building the roads and power plants further raised suspicion and hostility in Indians, moreover India’s fear of Pakistan’s support of militant wings that create an acute crisis of internal security within India that always brought the two nuclear powers on the verge of clash.

China and Pakistan share the common geopolitical concerns that make them the natural partners, their common border dispute with India, a history of hostility and confrontation with Delhi; and a powerful mutual interest in maneuvering to balance or contain India’s power and influence. China and Pakistan have gone extra mile and recently labelled their friendship as “All weather-friendship”, which will certainly create doubts in Delhi (Mohan, 2016)

### **Conclusion:**

The importance of Indian Ocean can further be deciphered by exploring its natural resources, as currently it is producing 2/3 of oil resources, 41% of gold and 97% of diamond. As per the recent report of UN, 87% of world’s offshore resources are embedded in the 200 miles of Ivory Exclusive Economic zone. Defense industries of the western countries import unique minerals through Indian Ocean and export 55% of unique raw materials to other states.

Both the countries have realized that strong economies could protect their national interest. China has assumed the potential role of India in South Asia. However China has increased its influence by establishing ports in Srilanka, Myanmar, Pakistan which has raised suspicion in the minds of Indian policy makers. The border issue between China and India has not been resolved but it has not affected the trade partnership between the two countries.

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