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MAJOR POWERS' INTERESTS IN IOR AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION



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ABSTRACT

Geo-economics and geopolitics are the indicators of competition between the supreme powers in the track of their deliberate goals. The US, China, and India together make up about half of the world's GDP and are vying for dominance in the Indian Ocean. In this perspective, while being smaller than Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, Indian Ocean Region continues to be crucial because of its enormous oil and gas reserves, choke points, nautical traffic, and the interests of foreign powers. The IMF predicted Global growth is now expected to fall from 3.4 percent in 2022 to 2.8 percent this year, The US and Europe are heading for recession, and the Asian economic situation is better, China and India will be major engine of growth this year. Therefore, Indian Ocean will remain the focus of attention for the world. New alliances are taking place in which US and India are the key players, the sole aim to contain China. On the other end, China's presence in Indian Ocean is increased in the last decade due to BRI/CPEC and military base in Djibouti. Chinese Navy is regularly patrolling and exercising with the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean. This paper endeavours to study major powers' interests in IOR and how developing a strategic alliance requires Pakistan to be vigilant and adopt a strategy to safeguard its interests.



1. INTRODUCTION

a. Indian Ocean differs from Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean; landlocked from the north and most of it lies in the Southern Hemisphere. It is point of contact between different great sea routes like the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia with the US and Europe with an estimated 120,000 ships passing annually. Indian Ocean handles approximately 30% of world trade, around half of the world's container traffic, and possesses some of the world's largest fishing grounds, which account for 15% of the world's fish catch, 55% of the known offshore world oil reserves, and 40% of the world's offshore natural gas reserves (Jayathilake, 2021).

b. The prevailing geo-strategic environment in IOR reflects not only competition but also complex interdependence among various stakeholders due to enormous international trade flows and potential threats of disruption/blockade of choke points i.e., Bab ul Mandab, Strait of Hormuz, and Strait of Malacca. These are exposed to the blockade, international conflicts, political instability, and piracy. Daily oil traffic from the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca is about 2(World Oil Transit Chokepoints, 2017) and 16 million barrels respectively (Paszak, 2021). The world's economy will suffer from any disruption in the Indian Ocean particularly, if they are blocked, especially those of Japan, China, South Korea, and India.

c. QUAD, AUKUS, I2U2, etc., with the US and India (which is not a member of AUKUS) as the key partners, were established with the aim of restricting China. Pakistan has expressed concerns over the US's Indo-Pacific strategy and its emphasis on India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region. Pakistan fears that this will undermine its own strategic importance in the region, especially given the historical tensions between Pakistan and India. The US and India are uneasy about China's development and the region's economic connectedness. Due to its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, the Chinese investment in the BRI/CPEC, particularly development of Gwadar port, is seen as a strategic threat to their interests in Indian Ocean, and they are trying to sabotage CPEC and discourage other countries to join it (Jaspal, 2021).

d. The Indian Ocean region has seen a significant increase in the establishment of foreign military bases in recent years. The presence of these military bases reflects the growing strategic importance of the region, which is home to important sea lanes of communication and natural resources. The United States has several military bases in the region, including Bahrain, Djibouti, and Diego Garcia. China has also established military bases in Djibouti. Other countries, such as the UK, France, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, also have military bases in the region. The presence of foreign military bases in the Indian Ocean region has raised concerns among some countries about the potential for increased militarization and competition in the

region. It is important for all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and work towards a more balanced and cooperative approach to regional security, which considers the interests and concerns of all countries in the region. Pakistan is a significant player in the Indian Ocean due to its strategic location, as CPEC offers the shortest access to China, the CARs, and Afghanistan, as well as being closer to Strait of Hormuz. Both internal and foreign pressures are present in Pakistan. Internally, there is political unrest, and a precarious economic situation and ties between the US and Pakistan are at an all-time low. The US and India are working together to oppose the CPEC. The completion of CPEC projects would alter the dynamics of entire areas, and numerous nations will invest in them.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper employed qualitative research methodology and has examined, through standard content analysis, relevant primary and secondary sources of data and information from various sources such as research papers, opinion articles, websites, online journals, and books / e-books. The research also consulted experts, pertinent national and international documents, and academics in peer-reviewed publications to gather a variety of pertinent prior assessments and viewpoints. The paper's analysis technique included an in-house session with experts to deduce findings and conclusions and to produce recommendations for practical actions, involving governance instruments proposed for Pakistan. Overall, this approach suggests that the research conducted in this paper is thorough and comprehensive, utilizing a range of sources and expert opinions to develop a nuanced understanding of the subject matter at hand.

3. US INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

a. The Indian Ocean is indeed an important region due to its strategic location, busy trade routes, and presence of several powerful countries. It is also a critical area for global security, as it has several nuclear-capable countries and is home to a significant number of military bases. The US has had a long-standing interest in the IOR, and despite any shifts in the policy of Indo-Pacific Region, it is likely to continue to prioritize the region's stability and security. This may involve partnerships and alliances with regional powers such as India, Japan, and Australia, as well as increased naval presence and military cooperation. However, it is also important to note that the dynamics in the region are constantly evolving, and any future developments could have significant implications for the US and its interests in Indian Ocean. The US has 12 permanent bases or use-of-base facilities in Indian Ocean (Hashmi, 2022) with Diego Garcia being the largest base outside the US, followed by the US Base at Djibouti and the 5th Fleet in Bahrain. The US made use of these bases to strike Afghanistan and Iraq, patrol the IOR, and goodwill visits to the littoral states.

b. Even though maintaining bases abroad is quite expensive, the US is spending a lot on sustaining these bases compared to its trade in Indian Ocean. These bases give the region's littoral nations comfort and deterrence as well. The US 5th Fleet in Persian Gulf, for instance, gives Gulf states a sense of security and increases pressure on Iran. The containment of China and other maritime operations like piracy, patrolling in the Indian Ocean, exercises with littoral countries, etc., are key to US strategic objectives in the Indian Ocean. Combined Maritime Force is a continuation of US policies in the Indian Ocean, which are detailed below.

3.1 Combined Maritime Forces

a. The US has established Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), under which four task forces manoeuvre to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean. The US forces regularly exercise with the littoral countries, visit ports, and patrol in the Indian Ocean.

(1) The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) involve multiple naval forces working together to uphold the Rules-Based International Order (RBIO). Their objective is to counter illegal non-state entities in international waters and foster stability, security, and prosperity across approximately 3.2 million square miles of vital global shipping routes.

(2) Primary areas of focus for the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) includes countering smuggling, narcotics, and piracy, fostering regional cooperation, collaborating with neighbouring nations and allies to bolster capabilities for enhancing overall stability and security, and advocating for a secure maritime environment devoid of illegal non-state actors. Additionally, CMF assets deployed at sea are ready to assist in responding to humanitarian and environmental incidents upon request (Forces, 2022). The area of responsibility of each CTFs is shown in Figure 1.1.

b. The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) consist of four distinct Combined Task Forces:

(1) CTF 150 (Conducting Maritime Security Operations beyond the Persian Gulf).

(2) CTF 151 (Focused on Counter-Piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden and along the eastern coast of Somalia).

(3) CTF 152 (Engaged in Maritime Security Operations within the Persian Gulf).

- (4) CTF 153 (Dedicated to Red Sea Maritime Security).
- (5) CTF 154 (Specialized in Maritime Security Training).

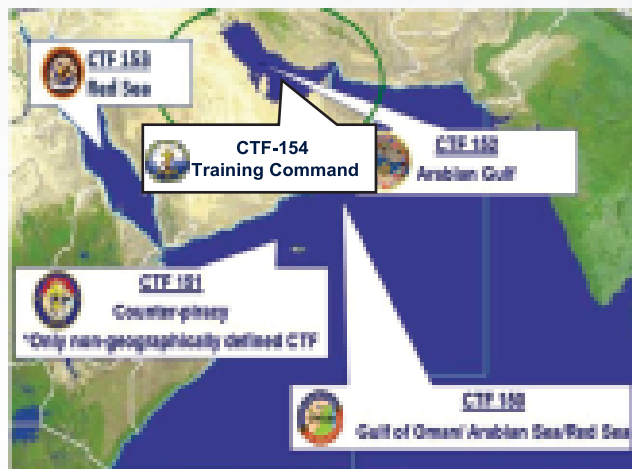


Figure 1.1: CTF's Area of Responsibility

3.2 Containment of China

a. The emergence of China as a significant global economic power and its display of military strength are seen as responses to the United States' strategy in the Indian Ocean. The presence of various task forces and foreign military bases in this region is potentially utilized to check China's influence. The US and its allies are actively contesting China's position as a major player in the Indian Ocean. China faces challenges due to its heavy dependence on oil and gas passing through the Strait of Malacca after departing from the Strait of Hormuz, leaving it vulnerable to disruptions.

b. China's future reliance on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a shorter route to receive essential resources is seen as a significant strategic move. Efforts are being made to impede or obstruct the development of CPEC. In 2021, Build Back Better World (B3W) project was inaugurated by the US and G7 countries in competition to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aimed to invest \$40 trillion in infrastructure needed by developing nations by 2035. However, it is not expected to yield the same impact as the BRI. Despite this, China has expressed openness to this initiative, extending invitations to the US to participate in the BRI (Faulconbridge, 2021). Additionally, US has made every effort to create and forge an accord with India to counter China in the Indian Ocean, but China is one of the India's neighbour and biggest trading partner while, India is reluctant to openly challenge China.

c. In the past ten years, US-Indian ties have strengthened on the economic and military fronts. Economically, the United States and India have been working towards strengthening trade relations. In 2019, the two countries signed a trade deal, which increased market access for certain goods and services and included intellectual property protections (Munir, 2019). In the field of defence, the US made special agreements with India, which were only done with its close allies like, Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). LEMOA is an agreement that is usually signed by the US with its allies for greater synergy between the armed forces. The US & India signed the LEMOA agreement in 2016. LEMOA solidifies and strengthens the Military ties between the US and India. It includes procedures for logistic supplies, support, and services. The agreement includes training, medical services, fuel, spare parts, transportation, food, water, repair & maintenance, clothing, and communication services (Kapoor, 2016).

d. The COMCASA was signed in 2018 which allows the US to transfer data equipment to India. Real-time data sharing over secure channels with the Indian military is also possible now (Smith, 2018). The BECA signed between the US and India in October 2020 significantly alters the balance of geostrategic stability in the region. The agreement allows for geospatial intelligence sharing with enhanced access to each other maps and satellite imagery. As a result, India now has the capability to access detailed information regarding military installation and troop placement to target attacks with more precision and accuracy. It will enhance the Indian military system and the accuracy of weapons such as ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, drones, etc (Rehman, 2021).

4. CHINESE INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

a. An emerging challenger superpower, China, poses a threat to the US and its allies, the US has described China as its strategic competitor (Daly, 2023). The Indian Ocean is given top priority in the Chinese strategy since China imports 54 % (254,747,432 tons) of oil from the Middle East to suit its energy demands (White, 2020). AUKUS, QUAD, and other military alliances were formed to impose restrictions on China in the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, trade routes, such as the CPEC/CMEC (China-Myanmar Economic Corridor) will allow the Chinese trade, particularly oil, to avoid the Strait of Malacca. The BRI which is estimated to be worth \$1 trillion USD, is changing the dynamics of these nations; if fully operational, CPEC would fundamentally alter the landscape of the entire area. The western provinces of China will benefit from this and be able to catch up with the eastern provinces in terms of

development. To ensure that its trade reaches its intended destinations in the future, China must rely on neighbouring Indian Ocean nations such as Pakistan (CPEC) and Myanmar (CMEC) for a quicker and safer path. China is dependent on other countries because it is not a natural part of the Indian Ocean Region, including Pakistan, Myanmar, etc. The Indian Ocean will remain the primary objective of the Chinese grand strategy (Rashid, 2014).

b. About 90% of oil imports to China pass through vulnerable choke points, as shown in Figure 1.2. The first one is the Strait of Hormuz, a far distance from China, and requires the blue water navy to safeguard its trade. The Indian Navy has a significant presence in the Indian Ocean, and its Western and Southern Naval Commands are located on India's west coast. These commands have the capacity to disrupt Chinese sea lines of communication (SLOCs) on their way to the Strait of Malacca, which could impact China's energy security.

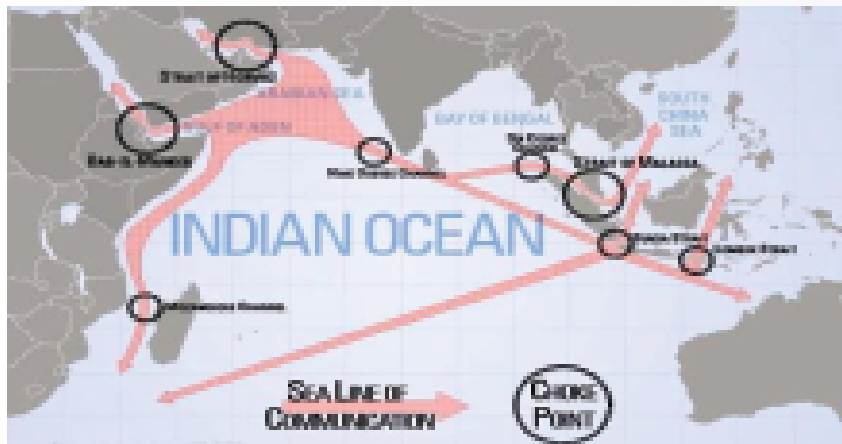


Figure 1.2: Choke Points in IOR (Journal Of India, 2021)

c. The US entitles that China has realized the "String of Pearl" (as shown in Figure 1.3) policy to pledge the continuance of its SLOCs, which are safeguarded by Chinese military and commercial installations that reaches from China to Port Sudan. The sea lines run through several major maritime choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Babul Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, and the Lombok Strait as well as other strategic maritime centres in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Somalia. The First Pearl is at Hainan Island in South China and second Pearl is the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, which will be used for a LNG refinery, aviation, and naval ships' fuel storage facility. The Third Pearl is at the Chittagong port in Bangladesh; the Fourth is the Woody Island situated 300 miles east of the Paracel Archipelago, Maldives, Ports of Sittwe in Myanmar, and 5th is Port of Gwadar in Pakistan (Dabas, 2017).



Figure 1.3: Pearl of String in IOR

d. China has planned economic and military development for the next 50 years, divided into three phases. The first Phase from 2000-2010 concentrated on economic activities, doubling GDP, and improving the capabilities of the Navy from Green Water to Blue Water. The second stage further doubled the GDP and development of 06 Aircraft Carrier groups from 2010-2020. As per the US Report of 2022 Chinese Naval units is expected to grow to 420 ships by 2025 and 460 ships by 2030 (O'Rourke, 2023). In the final stage of thirty years, spanning from 2020-2050 Chinese will be the largest economy and its navy powerful enough to project itself in all oceans, which is causing worries for US.

e. The two main pillars of the Chinese Strategy for an alternative route to its trade are CPEC and CMEC. While CPEC will provide the shortest route to the Chinese oil imports and export of goods from the western provinces of China. The CMEC is building road and rail transportation from Yunnan Province in China through Yangon port of Myanmar which will reduce considerable distance and days as well. Similarly, work is in progress to lay a pipeline from Kyaukpyu port of Myanmar to Kunming in China, which will meet all the requirements of the Chinese imported oil for its southern provinces and avoid the Strait of Malacca.

f. In expanding its defence capabilities, the first overseas base of China is established in Djibouti for the protection of its SLOCs from the Strait of Bab al Mandab. This base includes a large helicopter base, a naval port, and accommodation for 10,000 troops. The base will be utilized by PLA Naval Ships for patrolling and exercising with other navies in the Indian Ocean. The West believes that the Chinese naval mission is not limited to Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW) or protecting SLOCs but includes intelligence collection and counter-terrorism as well (YIMER, 2021); This base

enhances China's emerging global influence and shows its presence away from its shores, particularly in the Indian Ocean. China is supplying submarines to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand, and exports weaponry and systems to other Indian Ocean coastal nations. India is not pleased because these nations are its neighbors. The presence of China in the Indian Ocean is a balancing factor for the global politics.

g. The Indian Ocean is seeing a steady but significant increase in China's economic and military influence. The BRI/CPEC/CMEC (CMEC route is shown in Figure 1.4), military base, and ambition to be a global power reflect the Chinese strategy in the Indian Ocean. The US and its allies' task of containing China will be difficult, but they will be able to restrict its freedom of movement in the Indian Ocean.



Figure 1.4: China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)

5. INDIAN INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

a. India occupies a glaring place in the Indian Ocean and has a coastline of 7516.6 km of which 5422.6 km is mainland coastline and 2094 km coastline of island territories (Javaid, 2021). The US is supporting India in becoming a significant maritime force in the IOR against China. The US wants Indian naval ships to be deployed in the South China Sea, but India is hesitant to do so because of trade and being China's neighbour. All though India claims that China captured 640 sqkm of Indian territory along the Line of Actual Control (LoAC) that demarcates the China-Indo border neither the US nor India took any military or diplomatic action. By signing the agreements mentioned above, the US supports India to be a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, which is not in the interests of Pakistan and opposes it at all forums.

b. After Mr. Modi took over as the Indian Prime Minister in 2014, the relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated to their lowest ebb. The Hindutva policy of India has tarnished the image of a secular country. India is

also a member or co-founder of different forums in IOR, like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) (in which Pakistan's entry has been blocked), the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) including Pakistan, South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), could not flourish as compared to other alliances because of Indian unyielding attitude. The recent coalition of I2U2 is an indication of US plans. It illustrates India's effective and reliable diplomacy and Israel's plans to establish strong relations with the Gulf states. The presence of Israel is viewed with suspicions by Iran and Pakistan. It may allow Israeli Navy to operate in Indian Ocean and create hindrance for CPEC. Another initiative is India's SAGAR policy (Security and Growth for All in the Region) including Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Mauritius, and the South Asian region (Kaura, 2018). The aim is to increase India's political and economic influence and connectivity and minimize island vulnerabilities against security threats which include climate change and further expansion of China in the IOR. India positions itself as the sole major force in Indian Ocean, confronting China, and downplaying Pakistan's importance in these fora.

c. The Indian Ocean is of paramount importance in India's strategy as it handles 95% of its trade by volume and 68% by value. Nearly 80% of India's crude oil, about 3.28 million barrels per day, is imported through this region. Additionally, India is considered the fourth-greatest importer of LNG, with average rate of 45% arriving by sea. India ranks sixth globally in fish capture, harvesting 4.1 million tons, supporting a workforce of around 14 million in fishing and aquaculture industries (Jaishankar, 2016).

d. India has taken a diversified strategy, where in other hand, it is boosting relations with the US and other major powers while also fortifying relations with the IOR countries by forging various alliances and bolstering the capabilities and strength of the Indian Naval units. Indian Navy numerically is the strongest navy in IOR and operates in four commands namely, Southern Naval Command, Western Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command, and Andaman & Nicobar Command. Indian Navy is rapidly building up and planning to be a 170-ships navy by 2027 (Peri, 2021). Currently, there are 137 ships. This includes 3 carriers, 5 nuclear submarines, 20 conventional submarines, destroyers & frigates (10 DDGs, 16 FFGs), (O'Rourke, 2023) and the latest maritime patrol aircraft and helicopters. The Indian Navy is planning to acquire 57 carrier-based fighter aircraft and a new class of nuclear-powered attack submarines (Thakker, 2018). Pakistan has always supported the idea of making Indian Ocean nuclear-free, but acquisition of 5 nuclear submarines has led to nuclearization of Indian Ocean.

e. India's desire to become a mini-superpower and her reliance on Indian Ocean forced her to build military bases. India has established 11 military bases/agreements to use berths/airfields in different littoral countries of the Indian Ocean like Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, etc. (Javaid, 2021). The

purpose of these bases is to dominate the Indian Ocean and disrupt Chinese BRI. The berthing rights at Duqm port in Oman to check/sabotage CPEC is being viewed unfavorably by Pakistan.

f. India's plans to rule Indian Ocean are unpopular with the neighbors due to its unfriendly policies. Hindutva policies have increased neighbors' concerns even more. India is deepening its links with the US and the West, but it is unable to pursue a strategy antagonistic to China because it is the latter's main commercial partner. In 2021, China and India's bilateral commerce was worth US\$125 billion (Agarwal, 2022).

6. KEY PLAYERS IN INDIAN OCEAN - MILITARY BASES

a. In the past century when merchant ships used coal for their engines, a terminology was used as a coaling station, where these ships could enter any port to get coal and rest. The same concept is now used in military bases, where military ships and aircraft can enter the port/air base for taking fuel and rest for the crew. Geographically, a foreign military installation beyond the nation's borders is home only to that nation's armed forces. A deal between the host nation and another nation creates such bases to achieve their respective strategic objectives. Although maintaining these bases costs a lot of money, it is important to do so because of their strategic value.

b. Regardless of policy of US towards the Indo-Pacific, World would still consider Indian Ocean to be important due to choke points and its riches of oil and gas. Other key players and regional powers, in addition to the US and China, also have permanent bases or defence agreements to use ports, airfields, or maintain military presence. The list includes the UK, France, Italy, Russia, Israel, Japan, Greece, and regional countries India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. These bases create some economic activity in the host country, like rent of air bases. Interestingly, Djibouti is home to eight countries' armed forces including the US, France, Germany Spain, Japan, Italy, China, and Saudi Arabia. This contributes US \$ 300 million to Djibouti's economy (YIMER, 2021). The purpose of bases in Indian Ocean is to safeguard their SLOCs, power projection, maintain peace, intelligence gathering, and if required attack another country, as the US did from Diego Garcia for attacking Afghanistan and Iraq.

c. Sometimes the natives of these countries show their resentment and hatred for foreign countries as they think sovereignty of the country has been compromised. Occasionally these countries interfere with the politics of the host countries and create an unfavourable situation. Indian military presence in the Maldives has recently been the subject of protests from locals who want it to halt because they believe India is meddling in their internal matters.

d. A few islands in the Indian Ocean belong to the UK and France. The UK and France, who occupy the islands, own the resources located within two hundred nautical miles of those islands. They derive their income from these islands, which are also valuable strategically. The interests of the US, UK, France, India, and Japan in the Indian Ocean are furthered through military bases. They intend to obstruct the BRI, CPEC, and CMEC projects as well as the Chinese growth in the Indian Ocean.

7. ROLE OF QUAD/AUKUS/I2U2/ OTHER ALLIANCES

a. In the past decades, the US has formed a few alliances in the Indian and Pacific Regions like QUAD, AUKUS, I2U2, IPEF, etc. QUAD consists of the USA, India, Japan, & Australia. The intent of the Quad is to acquire a rules-based global direction, freedom of navigation, and a liberal exporting system. It will also provide debt financing to Indo-Pacific countries (Smith, 2021). But the basic role of QUAD is to contain strategic dominance of China across various regions like those of South China Sea, Eurasia, and the Indian Ocean. The littoral countries worry it may encourage China to step up its coercive diplomacy through heavy-handed use of economic power and military.

b. The US and other QUAD members have repeatedly characterized CPEC as the biggest geostrategic threat to their interests, increasing pressure on other states to distance themselves from the project at the expense of regional economic integration, trade, and livelihood development. Till now, the QUAD has not played an active defence-and-security role in counterbalancing China. All QUAD countries are taking part in Malabar Exercises since 2020. The exercise is held in Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and South China Sea in different years and in Chinese SLOC. It is possible that this is a sign that QUAD is forging a military alliance in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The purpose of QUAD was widely viewed as a response to increased Chinese economic and military power, and the Chinese government responded by calling it Asian NATO.

c. The volume of trade between China and the QUAD countries is astonishing. Australia's top trading partners are China, followed by the American, Japanese, and Indians. On the economic front, these countries are unable to cut their relations with China.

d. Australia pulled out of the French plan to buy 12 diesel-electric submarines for US\$66 billion and joined the US, and UK, in AUKUS to buy eight nuclear submarines for more than US\$100 billion (Hashmi, 2021). Australia is one of the peaceful states and have friendly terms with its neighbouring states, yet it is compelled to acquire nuclear submarines to one China under pressure.

e. The Indo-Pacific countries showed different reaction-like China has criticized it as “highly irresponsible” and according to them it can cause a race of nuclear among the state. Pakistan always wants the Indian Ocean free of the nuclear platform. North Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are concerned about AUKUS. Japan welcomed it, and South Korea and the Philippines appreciated it. South Korea considers that in the coming future it would be difficult to purchase nuclear submarines. India was denied acquiring nuclear submarines by the US in the past but now hopes to get US nuclear submarines.

f. I2U2 an alliance was made between the major powers of United States, India, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. The primary objective of I2U2 is to address global issues such as shortage of food, climate and environment issues, less production of oil, and the conflict of fostering collaboration in various spheres. Like the QUAD countries, I2U2 nations might arrange naval exercises in the Indian Ocean. This collaboration would allow Israel to move its marine forces. Indian Ocean is dominated by number of states, but Israel's existence is identified as an estimation against the projects of BRI/CPEC plans and keeps a check on China strategically.

g. IPEF for Prosperity is a recently established coalition comprising thirteen nations: the US, Australia, India, Japan, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and New Zealand. Collectively, these countries represent 40% of the global GDP. The primary aim of IPEF is to promote economic growth, resilience, and competitiveness among its member states. It serves as a comeback to the BRI and intends to reduce China's expanding influence in the region. However, as of now, IPEF has yet to demonstrate any substantial impact or effects.

h. Development of all these associations is due to the rise of China in the Indian as well as Pacific Oceans. The current Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi 's speech at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 11 July 2023 in Jakarta, ‘that countries should avoid being used as “chess pieces” by global powers in a region that he said was at risk of being reshaped by geopolitical factors(Hashmi, 2021). China and Pakistan are concerned about the mushrooming of new coalitions in Indian and Pacific Oceans, united against the BRI under the umbrella of the US and India.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION ESPECIALLY PAKISTAN

a. A new age of geopolitical rivalry is taking place in Indian Ocean. The regional nations are now in an awkward position due to strategic interests of major powers in Indian Ocean and new partnerships like QUAD, AUKUS, I2U2, etc. The infrastructure of these nations has improved, and their trade has increased because of China's significant investment in BRI, CPEC, and

CMEC. They all believe that these alliances are formed to restrict China. The AUKUS will start a race to acquire nuclear submarines in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. India already plans to build five, and Australia will purchase eight nuclear submarines. South Korea could be the next country to get a nuclear submarine. The presence of so many nuclear submarines will increase Indian Ocean's vulnerability to accidents, like under water explosions, nuclear reactor malfunctions, collision with another vessel etc. which would have devastating global consequences.

b. When it comes to investing a nation, there are differences between the US and Chinese approaches. China is glad to work with any nation, has no favourites, and has no demands. Their main goal is in improving the framework and focus more on trading. The US is more interested in enacting its global plan, overthrowing unlikely governments, selling it old, outdated military hardware, helping in trade on requests and satisfied dealing with people than with any nation's authority. When dealing with China, most nations feel at ease. Henry Kissinger said, "Being the US's enemy is dangerous, but being the US's ally is fatal" (Grey, 22 C.E.). After the second World War, the US has been involved in seventeen major wars in the world (Staff, 2020). The countries became more unstable after the war e.g., Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, and Lebanon. Therefore, the littoral states of Indian Ocean are cautious in maintaining relations with US.

c. As a result of various agreements, between the US and India relations in recent decades have strengthened. In addition, the US invited India to join the newly established QUAD, I2U2, and IPEF. The Indian Ocean Region's neighbouring nations, particularly Pakistan, are uncomfortable with India's increasing role. The US wants India to be the dominant nation in Indian Ocean as a counterbalance to China. The way India interacts with its neighbors and the Hindutva policies of discrimination inside the nation show that it lacks a leadership vision. Due to India's obstinate stance, SAARC was unable to thrive like other alliances. It plays a saboteur's role in CPEC, which is evident after the Indian serving Naval Officer Commander Kulbhushan Yadav was arrested by Pakistan in 2016. He engaged in subversive activities inside Pakistan. The attack on the Chinese in Pakistan is also linked to the involvement of RAW (Research and Analysis Wing of India). The Indian Navy's agreement to utilize Oman's Duqm port is part of a plan to sabotage CPEC. India engages in propaganda on social media and engages in cyber warfare. A European organization discovered the disinformation network that India built in 2005 to spread false information to harm Pakistan and other hostile nations in 2020. 265 fake locally recognized media channels were there in sixty-five states serving various interests of India and multiple dubious NGOs and think-tanks. In addition to organizing anti-Pakistan lobbying activities in Europe, this network was active in Geneva and Brussels and produced and amplified content intended largely to weaken Pakistan (Jahangir, 2020).

d. The National Security of Pakistan is dependent upon its Maritime Security. Pakistan has a two hundred Nautical Mile (NM) EEZ and a 150 NM Continental Shelf, both of which are underutilized. Approximately 91 percent of trade and 100% of oil imports come from the sea. Pakistan is dependent on imports and exports via the sea. The Strait of Hormuz is nearby, making Gwadar Port the fastest and safest marine route to landlocked Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, and the Western Province of China.

e. The goal of the US-India partnership and these alliances like I2U2, QUAD, is to reduce the influence of China in the IOR. The Chinese investment in BRI, CPEC, and CMEC will boost the local economy and open new trade avenues for China. Although the littoral and landlocked nations cannot challenge the US as the only superpower, they are all aware of the significance of Chinese investment for their economic future. Perhaps a new alliance comprising of China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan can be formed to reassure the nations in the region and possibly an act to counter US partnerships.

f. Pakistan's heavy reliance on imported oil and gas, the need for a loan to pay off its debt, and the nation's imports, which are more than twice as large as its exports, are all contributing to the country's current fiscal crisis.

g. Pakistan is currently experiencing a financial crisis because of its excessive reliance on imported oil and gas, the necessity to take a loan to pay off its debt, and imports, which are more than twice as high as its exports (Borger, 2021). The only option for Pakistan's economic recovery is the CPEC. For the entire region, the success of CPEC will be a game-changer; even the western nations would invest in its projects.

9. CONCLUSION

The vast reserves of oil and gas, susceptibility of choke points, and Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean will ensure that the region remains significant for the major powers. Pakistan's security is seriously threatened by the spread of nuclear submarines, foreign military bases, India's quest for great power status in the Indian Ocean. The coordination between the US and India in QUAD, I2U2, and its allies to impede BRI/CPEC and stop China's influence in IOR is unsettling the countries along the littoral. Even though it is difficult to restrain China, the US puts obstacles in its way to prevent it from dominating the Indian Ocean. The yearly military exercise of QUAD countries in Indian and Pacific Ocean needs to be evaluated. The CPEC/CMEC will open other commercial avenues to China. With India using cyberwarfare to promote propaganda against Pakistan and other countries, a new aspect of warfare has developed. Pakistan is to closely monitor all Indian propaganda and needs to be cautious in maintaining a delicate balance in its relations with the US, China, and other countries. Indian Ocean is significant for Pakistan because of sea trade and the CPEC. The economic challenges of the twenty-first century are too large for any one country to manage on its own. New coalitions of like-minded countries can be created to maintain regional peace and economic growth in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's sole chance to rebuild itself and alter the dynamics of the entire region is through CPEC.

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