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STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN - OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR PAKISTAN



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ABSTRACT

The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean and hosts a huge volume of world trade especially oil and gas which remains important to the world economy. The Geo-Strategic importance of the Indian Ocean will not be undermined by the shift in US policy toward the Indo-Pacific Ocean. IOR waters have become a home for economic development as well as conflicts and competition for regional and major powers. The military bases in the Indian Ocean states have been growing in the past decade. Major powers such as China, the US, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, and India have established military bases in the Indian Ocean states. US and its allies want to restrict Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, China has also increased its military presence by patrolling/exercising with littoral countries in the Indian Ocean and establishing a naval base in Djibouti. US desires a role of India in the IOR and Pacific region to counter Chinese expansion, although India is reluctant to oppose China, especially in the South China Sea, being China's second largest trading partner. Pakistan is at a crossroads and trying to keep a balance in relations with China and US. The paper will cover the strategic importance of the foreign bases in the IOR, challenges, and opportunities for Pakistan.

Keywords:

IOR; Military Bases; Maritime Environment; Maritime Security; BRI; CPEC



1. INTRODUCTION

a. The Indian Ocean is the 3rd largest ocean after the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. It is landlocked from the north and most of it lies in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a hub of major sea routes connecting Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia with the US and Europe (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022). Global geopolitics and geo-economics are increasingly driven by the strategic interests of major powers. The prevailing geo-strategic environment in IOR reflects not only competition but also complex interdependence among various stakeholders due to enormous international trade flow and potential threats of disruption/blockade of chokepoints i.e., the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Bab ul Mandab, and Strait of Malacca. These chokepoints are exposed to blockade, international conflicts, political instability, and piracy. An estimated 40% of the world's offshore oil production and around 70% (Kaplan, 2009) of global petrol export come from the Indian Ocean (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022). Around 21 and 16 million barrels of oil pass through daily from the Strait of Hormoz & Strait of Malacca (Barden, 2019) respectively. Any disruption in the Indian Ocean particularly blocking chokepoints will cripple the world economy, especially China, Japan, India, and South Korea. Despite the US shift in policy of the Indo-Pacific Region, IOR will remain the focal point among the major powers. The main stakeholders including China, the US, Russia, the UK, France, and Japan have military bases in the IOR. Even littoral countries like India, UAE, and Saudi Arabia have also established naval bases in the Indian Ocean. India is also expanding its navy and establishing naval bases/use of ports/airfields of few countries in the IO.

b. Although there are indications that, when required these bases may be used to contain the growing role of China. The BRI & CPEC have emerged as a catalyst for strategic realignment in the IOR. In an era of globalization, economic cooperation for BRI and CPEC endeavours will bring peace and prosperity to the IOR. It will also strengthen relations between China endeavours and all countries that become part of the BRI/CPEC project. Pakistan is passing through a difficult era due to poor economic conditions, there are opportunities in terms of CPEC/BRI and challenges that how to maintain a balanced relationship between the USA and China. Pakistan needs to ensure Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) along with land & air route remain open in the event of tension or a war-like situation for itself and countries connected with CPEC.

c. Pakistan needs a comprehensive approach to meet security challenges by enhancing security measures for an uninterrupted and stable CPEC. Therefore, a strong navy equipped with modern ships, submarines, Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA), an effective coastal surveillance system, etc is needed to ensure SLOCs are not disrupted in peace and war times. There is a need to explore and exploit the untapped maritime potential of Pakistan like

Shipbuilding, shipping sector fishing, aquaculture, maritime tourism, and exploitation of the underwater resources of the Continental Shelf (CS) and EEZ. Recently released National Security Policy of Pakistan in 2022, the strategic shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics is a welcome initiative from the Govt of Pakistan (Zaidi, 2022). Pakistan also needs to beef up its merchant fleet to cope with the existing and futuristic trade. The regional cooperation and 'Look East' policy are to be addressed as no single country can meet the maritime challenges of the 21st century.

1.1 Countries in the Indian Ocean (37)

The countries of the Indian Ocean are mentioned in Table 1 and shown in Fig 2.1:

Table 2.1: Countries in IOR

S No	South Asia	Southeast Asia	Middle East	Africa	Australia
1.	India	Malaysia	Egypt	South Africa	Australia
2.	Pakistan	Indonesia	Israel	Madagascar	
3.	Bangladesh	Thailand	Jordan	Comoros	
4.	Maldives	Timor – Leste	Saudi Arabia	Tanzania	
5.	Sri Lanka	Singapore	Kuwait	Mauritius	
6.		Myanmar	UAE	Seychelles	
7.			Bahrain	Somalia	
8.			Oman	Kenya	
9.			Iran	Djibouti	
10.			Qatar	Mozambique	
11.			Iraq	Eritrea	
12.			Yemen	Sudan	
13.				South Sudan	



Figure 2.1: Indian Ocean Countries (World Atlas, 2021)

1.2 Landlocked Countries

Landlocked countries do not have access to the sea. As per international law, a nearby country with sea access must provide a port facility to that country, like Pakistan providing a port facility for Afghanistan trade.

Table 2.2: Landlocked countries

S No.	Asia	Africa
1.	Armenia	Burundi
2.	Azerbaijan	Chad
3.	Afghanistan	Ethiopia
4.	Laos	Lesotho
5.	Bhutan	Rwanda
6.	Kazakhstan	South Sudan
7.	Kyrgyzstan	Malawi
8.	Mongolia	Swaziland
9.	Nepal	Uganda
10.	Tajikistan	Zambia
11.	Turkmenistan	Zimbabwe
12.	Uzbekistan	

2. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

“Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas in the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters.” Adm Alfred Mahan.

a. There is a renewed recognition that Asia will determine the future landscape of the world economy. Every state requires safe and secure passage through the sea route which requires the state to build a strong navy. The major powers have established military bases or an agreement to use the port and airport facilities of the littoral countries in IOR to control the strategic location, power projection; attack any country, and defence-in-depth to their hinterlands.

b. IOR has the world's busiest trade routes with eight of the world's largest militaries with increasing military expenditures and nuclear-capable nations. There are 197 ports and harbours in the IOR with India having 13 major ports, Australia 10 ports, and Saudi Arabia 11 ports, according to the list of ports and harbours of the Indian Ocean. There are 37 littoral States of the Indian Ocean, comprising three Continents namely, Africa, Asia, and Australia. South Asia comprises 5 states, Southeast Asia 6 states, the Middle East 12 states, and Africa 13 states, Australia, and a few Islands under foreign control (Malik, 2017). Approx. 80% of the world's seaborne oil trade passes through the choke points of the Indian Ocean. On average, 100,000 ships pass through the Indian Ocean annually (Haider, 2021).

c. The Indian Ocean has the world's seven important choke points as shown in Figure 2.2, and any disruption in these straits especially the Strait of Hormuz and Malacca Strait could badly affect the global economy. These choke points include the Suez Canal; Bab-el-Mandeb; the Strait of Hormuz; Malacca Strait; Lombok Strait; Sunda Strait and the Mozambique Channel.

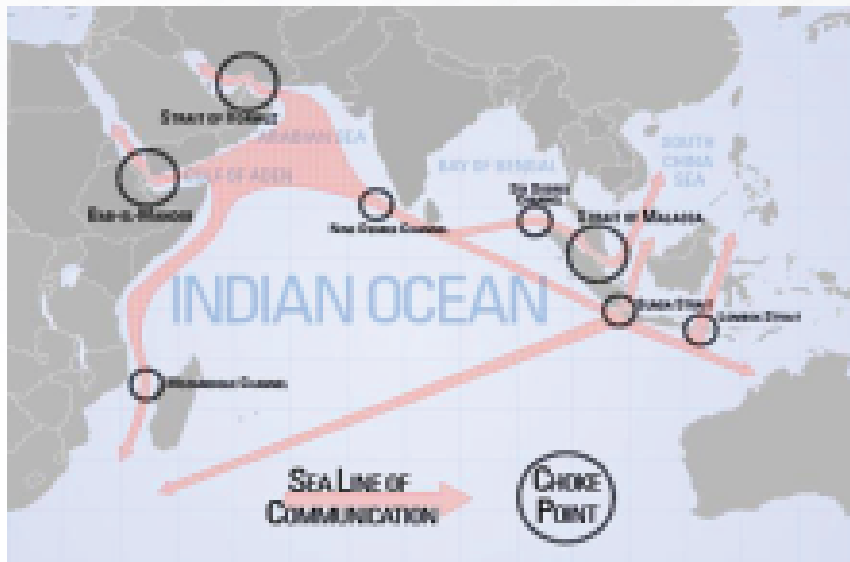


Figure 2.2: Straits in the Indian Ocean (Devlar, 2010)

d. Maritime security entails safeguarding national maritime interests; from conventional forces, non-state actors, maritime threats, and challenges in the maritime arena. Maritime security also considers safety from natural calamities and overcoming inherent shortcomings. This concept is not only vast but also multidimensional as well. It spans conventional maritime security issues; like state sovereignty and territorial disputes as well as non-traditional maritime security concerns, such as terrorism, piracy, narcotics, human & arms trafficking, security of energy resources, and physical security of ports & ships. It encompasses environmental issues, maritime boundaries, and disputes that exist within the IOR between nations in rightfully identifying their territory (Bhimrajka, 2020).

e. China emerged as an economical giant, enhancing its military power, aspiring to dominate in the South China Sea, and showing its presence in the Indian Ocean. The US desires to limit the Chinese role with the help of its allies. China has invested about US \$ 1 trillion in BRI/CPEC (OECD, 2018), to improve the infrastructure of these countries, bring prosperity and ensure that in case of a blockade of the Malacca Strait, Chinese trade can pass through CPEC though it will not be the entire trade of China as shown in Figure 2.3.

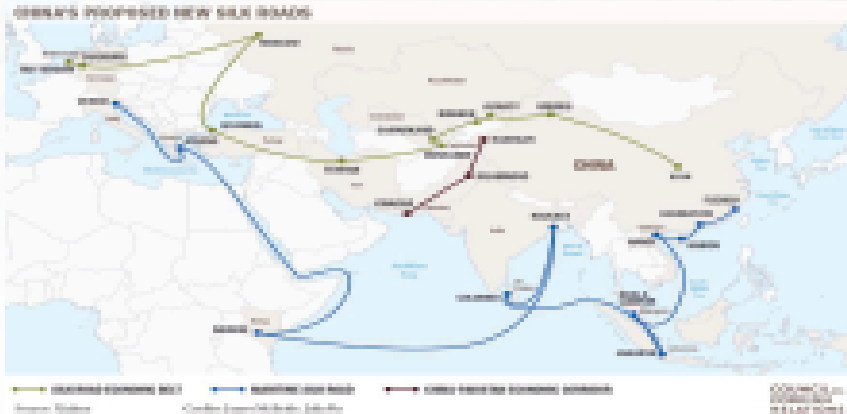


Figure 2.3: BRI and CPEC Route (Council on Foreign Relations, 2015)

f. “Security Dynamics” is playing a crucial role when analysing the strategic importance of IOR. The Gulf states are significant due to the vast reservoir of oil and gas that passes through the narrow channel of the Strait of Hormuz and the dependence of global economies upon it. The UAE and Oman have laid an oil pipeline in the Gulf of Oman. These pipelines connect from the land to port oil terminal, Oman (Nahdah, Ad Dakhiliyah governorate, to Ras Markaz Oil Storage Terminal) exports (GEM Wiki, 2022) 700,000 barrels per day which are about 78% of the oil export. The UAE exports (Hasban to Fujairah port) 1.5 million barrels per day which are about 40% of its total export (CEIC, 2022). In case of closure of the Strait of Hormuz, they can still provide oil. The oil tankers will cover less distance instead of sailing inside the Persian Gulf, they get the oil at the Gulf of Oman.

g. The littoral countries expanded their maritime forces and their capabilities to protect their SLOCs. IOR has contentious issues among countries, such as India- Pakistan, both nuclear powers, which have tense relations. India is directing all efforts to disrupt CPEC. In 2017, Pakistan arrested an Indian serving Naval Officer Kulbushan Yadav for disrupting law and order in Baluchistan. India’s Hindutva policy affected relations of India with neighbouring states. India and China have a land border dispute in Galwan area and China occupied a significant area of Galwan in 2020 (Landrin, 2022). Gulf states have issues with Iran, especially the three strategically located Islands of UAE in the Persian Gulf, Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb are controlled by Iran. As Iran considers these islands as an integral part of its territory and asserts its sovereignty over them. Iran argues that historical and legal evidence supports its claim to the islands, dating back to the time when they were under Persian rule. The containment of China in the Indian Ocean / South China Sea by the US and its allies can flare up at any time. The situation in Yemen and Afghanistan has improved but the IOR has all the ingredients to escalate tensions and disrupt peace.

2.1 Trade Corridors Politics

a. There are various trade corridors that can bring stability to the IOR as shown in Figure 2.4 and it depends upon relations between the countries of the IOR. If they put differences aside and keep economic prosperity to the fore, IOR has the potential to grow very fast as there are thickly populated countries with immense resources, if exploited.

- (1) CPEC/BRI when complete will bring prosperity to the entire region.
- (2) Maritime CPEC / BRI from Gwadar to Duqm Port (Oman) and Djibouti.
- (3) India – Pakistan – Afghanistan – CARs – Russia, if there is peace in Afghanistan, and India - Pakistan relations if improved, can bring stability to the region.
- (4) Pakistan – Iran – Turkey, rail-road trade routes exist but are not being used at full potential.

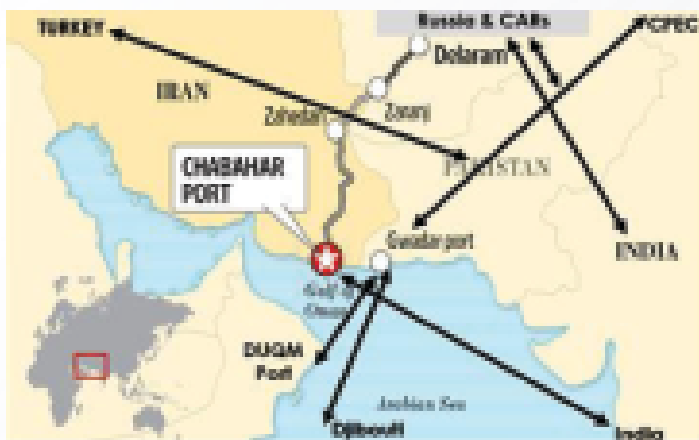


Figure 2.4: Trade Corridor

2.2 Area of Operations – Pakistan

a. Pakistan's Maritime Area of Interest flows from its vital SLOC emanating from the Southeast, Southwest, and West as shown in China's Military Bases as shown in Figure 2.5. The areas considered important from a geostrategic point of view are the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, The Gulf of Oman, and adjoining strategic chokepoints. The safety and security of SLOCs are a key national interest. Pakistan heavily depends on its imports/exports by sea. This demands a corresponding increase in its merchant marine and security apparatus.

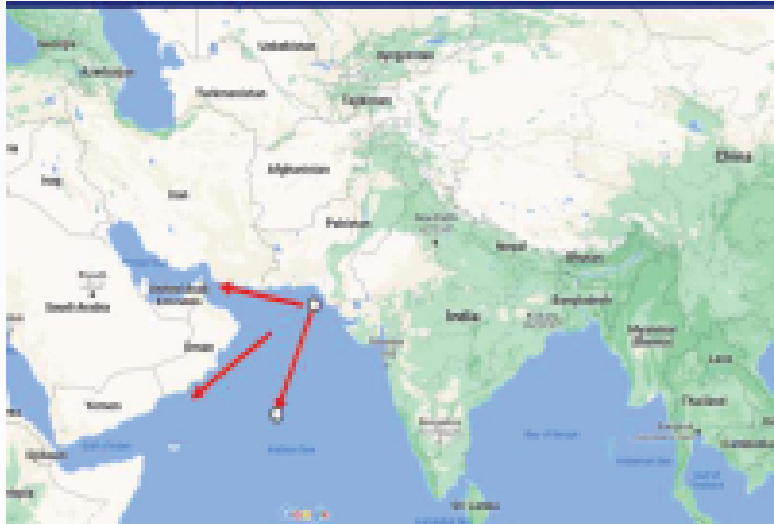


Figure 2.5: Area of Operations 1

b. Pakistan offers the shortest sea route to all the CARs, Afghanistan, and Western parts of China through Karachi and Gwadar Ports. The Gwadar Port has the potential to be used as a transit / trans-shipment port for Gulf states and can also be used to connect China to Africa and the Middle East and beyond as shown in Figure 2.6 The enemies of Pakistan are attempting to sabotage the Gwadar Port because if it is operational, it will alter the dynamics of the entire area.

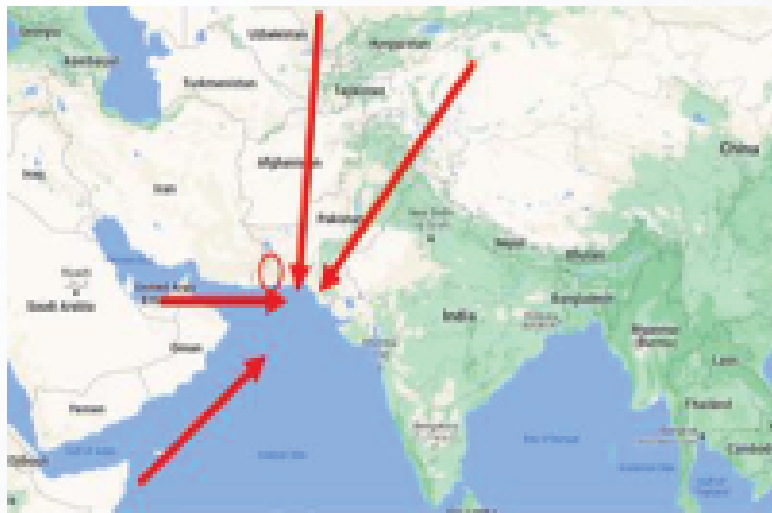


Figure 2.6: Area of Operations 2

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES

a. The phrase "coaling station" was used in the previous century when merchant ships had coal-powered engines. These ships could dock in any port to obtain coal and take a break. The same idea is now used in military bases where military ships and planes can enter a port to refuel and relax their crews. A foreign military base is located outside the territory of the country geographically and its armed forces are the sole occupants. These bases are established by an agreement between the host and another country to meet their strategic goals (Wikipedia, 2024). These military bases may either belong to the army, navy, air force, marines, or a combination of any or all, depending upon the maritime interest of stakeholders. A repair and maintenance facility are also available in the base for their ships, and aircraft so that they don't need to return to their country. At the time of tension or war, they can use these bases to attack/blockade any country within reach. These bases also induce deterrence as well as reassurance to littoral countries in the region. For instance, the presence of a US base in the Persian Gulf instills a sense of security in Gulf states and put pressure on Iran. Although it incurs a huge cost to maintain overseas bases, the US is spending a great deal in keeping these bases in comparison to trade in the Indian Ocean.

b. These bases create some economic activity in the host country like the rent of berths and land/air bases for its defense forces. Interestingly, Djibouti is home to 8 countries including the US, France, Germany Spain, Japan, Italy, China, and Saudi Arabia. This contributes US \$ 300 million to Djibouti's economy (Yimer, 2021).

c. Sometimes the natives of these countries show their resentment and hatred toward foreign countries as they think the sovereignty of the country has been compromised. Occasionally these countries interfere with the politics of the host countries and create an unfavourable situation. Nowadays citizens of Maldives are protesting, calling for an end to the Indian military presence because the Maldives perceived India interfering in their domestic affairs.

3.1 Foreign Military Bases in IOR

The Indian Ocean houses several foreign/littoral bases, that are discussed below:

a. United States of America

The US has established permanent base and made agreement with different littoral countries to use their ports, airfields, or army camp for its defence forces as shown in Table 2.3 and Figure 2.7.

Table 2.3: US Military Bases in Indian ocean states

S No	Country	Base/Facility to use Berth, Airfields, Army	Facilities For
i.	Diego Garcia (British)	Camp Thunder Cove	Air Force & Navy
ii.	Bahrain	HQ of USN 5 th Fleet	Navy
iii.	Iraq	Al Asad Air Base	Air Force
iv.	Oman	Seeb, Masirah & Thumrait Air Base, /Duqm/Salalah Port	Air Force/Navy
v.	Qatar	Al – Udeid Air Base	Air Force
vi.	Kuwait	Muhammad Al Ahmed Naval Base, Ali Al Saleem Air Base, ARMY - Camp Arifjan - Camp Buehring	Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine & Coast Guard
vii.	Saudi Arabia	Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB) or Eskan Village	Army & Air Force
viii.	UAE	Al Dhafra Air Base	Air Force
ix.	Djibouti	US Camp Lemonnier	USN Expeditionary Force (Marine)
x.	Kenya	Camp Simba	Navy
xi.	Seychelles	Seychelles International Airport Mahé island	Navy & Air Force (Drones)
xii.	Somalia	Beledogle Airfield	Army

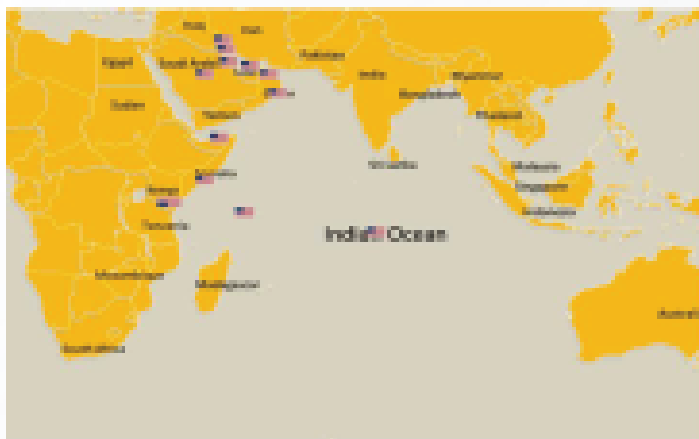


Figure 2.7: US Bases in Indian Ocean states

i. Diego Garcia

▪ Camp Thunder Cove - US Air Force & Navy

Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia (35 square km) is a British Ministry of defence facility leased to the US Navy (Camp Thunder Cove) after World War II, located on the atoll Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean (Wikipedia, 2024). Due to its

strategic location, it makes a significant link for the US in projecting power between East Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. It is the largest military and secretive base outside the US. It provides logistic, service, and installation assistance for US and Allied forces deployed in the Persian Gulf in the Indian Ocean.

Diego Garcia is home to 16 separate commands of the US. The US Air Force controls all airspace in the surrounding area, although it is technically operated by the US Navy. There are more than 4000 troops, two bomber runways, and a satellite spy station. Its deep port can berth aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, destroyers, cruisers, frigates, etc. The base accommodates 360 military personnel, 1,800 base operation services contractor (BOSC) staff, 300 mariners (MSC), 220 civilians, and 80 overseas government employees (Naval Technology, 2011). In 2001, The US air force conducted attacks in Afghanistan by using long-range B52 bombers aircraft.

ii. Bahrain

▪ HQ of USN 5th Fleet - US Naval Base

US naval base in Bahrain is home to US Naval Forces Central Command and station US Naval 5th Fleet used for marine and naval activities. The US naval ships patrol in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean regularly.

iii. Iraq

▪ Al Asad Air Base - US Air Force

Al-Asad Airbase is the second-largest US air force base located in Al Anbar in western Iraq. The base has served as a hub for the supply of fuel and military truck convoys during Operation Iraqi Freedom. It has two runways measuring 14,000ft and 13,000ft, along with multiple taxiways. The air facilities allow the movement of larger aircraft, such as the C-5 Galaxy and Boeing 747 (Airforce Technology, 2021)

iv. Oman

The US is utilizing the naval and air force facility of Oman, the ships & aircraft of the US Navy & Airforce regularly use Oman bases for rest, refuelling, and exercises.

- **Seeb International Airport - US Air Force**

The US is maintaining an air force base in Seeb International Airport, Oman which allows 500 aircraft overflights, and 600 landings(US Embassy, 2024). During the early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (in late 2001) (Votel, 2018), the US relied on Omani airbases.

- **Masirah Island Base - US Air Force**

It is a small facility that was used by the US air force Operation Desert Shield.

- **Seeb Airbase - US Air Force**

The US air force uses Seeb airbase for flight operations and storing military equipment. The base was part of the Facilities Access Agreement between the United States and Oman.

- **Thumrait Airbase - US Air Force**

Royal Air Force Oman (RAFO) Thumrait air base is a military airport which is located near Thumrait. The US signed an access agreement for use of this base with Oman in 1981(Wallin, 2022). US operates its military aircraft from Thumrait airbase occasionally.

- **Duqm & Salalah Port - US Navy**

In 2019, The US and Oman signed a treaty to permit the US. Navy access to Duqm port and Salalah port in Oman(Heller, 2019) . The US navy patrol in the Indian Ocean from these ports.

v. **Qatar**

▪ **Al Udeid Air Base - US Air Force**

Al Udeid is the biggest US airbase in the Gulf. Around 10,000 U.S. service personnel are stationed at Al Udeid Air Base. It is home to U.S. Combined Air Operations Center, U.S. Air Forces Central Command, CENTCOM Forward HQ, and U.S. Special Operations Command Central Forward (Wright, 2020).

vi. **Kuwait**

▪ **US Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine & Coast Guard**

After the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the US concluded a defence Cooperation Agreement with Kuwait (Christian, 2020).

▪ **Mohammed Al-Ahmad Kuwait Naval Base - US Army, Navy, and Coast Guard**

Mohammed Al-Ahmad Kuwait Naval Base is located on the eastern coast of Kuwait and is used by the US Army, Navy, and Coast Guard.

▪ **Ali Al Saleem Air Base - US Airforce**

US Air Force and its allies use Ali Al Saleem Air Base. It has two 9,805 ft runways. The HQ of the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing serves as the main airlift gateway for providing combat power to joint and coalition forces in the U.S. Central Command (U.S. Air Forces Central, 2021).

▪ **Camp Arifjan - US Army**

Camp Arifjan is used by the US defence forces (US Navy, US Air Force, US Marine Corps, and US Coast Guard). The camp provides facility-to-grounded support for helicopters and armoured vehicles (Military Bases, 2024).

▪ **Camp Buehring - US Army**

Camp Buehring is in the Kuwaiti desert used by US Army. It can accommodate around 14,000 transient soldiers (Military Bases, 2024)

vii. Saudi Arabia

▪ **Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB) or Eskan Village - US Army & Air Force**

Prince Sultan Air Base (Eskan base) at Eskan Village near Riyadh is home to the US 320th and 64th Air Expeditionary Group. US military troops the part of the US Military Training Mission (USMTM) (Military Bases, 2024).

viii. UAE

▪ **Al Dhafra Air Base – US Air Force**

The US maintains 5000 personnel approx. in UAE under a defense cooperation accord. Al Dhafra Air Base hosts the 38th Air Expeditionary Wing which includes aircraft such as the KC-10, E-3 Sentry, RQ-4 Global Hawk, F 22 Raptor and TR-1 reconnaissance flights modern version of (the legendary U-2 Dragon Lady) (East-USA, 2020).

▪ **Port of Jabel Ali – US Navy**

The US Navy has berthing rights to use the port of Jabel Ali, which is the largest man-made deep-water harbour and capable of berthing the US aircraft carriers.

ix. Djibouti

▪ **Camp Lemmonier - US Marine**

Camp Lemmonier base is used for Predator drones after Sep 11, 2001, attacks. The base is used to conduct missions over Somalia. It is the only US base in Africa. Camp Lemmonier is home to the marine-based Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) which is the joint task force of the US Africa Command (USAFRICOM) located to the South of the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport airfield and shares runways. The base conducts training and operations for the host states. The base was tasked with countering Somalia-based Al- Shabaab, conducting US military operations. It also provides support for the US operations in Yemen.

x. Kenya

▪ **Camp Simba - US Navy**

Camp Simba base at Manda Bay Kenya acts as a Forward Operating Location (FOL) for drone bases and is also used to train Kenyan naval special forces (Musyoka, 2019).

xi. Seychelles

▪ **Seychelles International Airport Mahé island - US Base - Navy and Air Force Drones**

The US has a drone base in Seychelles which is used by MQ-9 Reaper drones. Since 2009, air force and naval drones began operating to track pirates in the region's waters. It consists of three or four Reapers and about 100 US military personnel and contractors (Turse, 2011).

xii. Somalia

▪ **US Army Base**

The US government has announced the establishment of a base in Somalia in May 2022, which will house approx. 500 US troops to counter al-Shabab terror group.

b. UK Military Bases in the Indian Ocean

The details of UK Military bases are appended below and shown in Figure 2.8.

Table 2.4: UK Military bases

S No	Country	Base	Facilities Used for
i.	Bahrain	HMS Jufair Naval Base	Navy
ii.	Kenya	British Army Training Unit – Nanyuki	Army
iii.	Singapore	HMNB Singapore	Navy
iv.	Qatar	Al Udeid airbase (Jointly used with the US)	Air Force
v.	UAE	Al Minhad airbase	Air Force
vi.	Oman	Duqm Port	Navy



Figure 2.8: UK bases in Indian Ocean states

i. Bahrain

▪ **HMS (Her Majesty Ship) Jufair Naval Base - UK Navy Base**

United Kingdom established its first permanent military base HMS Jufair Naval Base in Bahrain to reinforce its Middle East presence (Gardner, 2015). There is about 500 UK defence personnel in the base (Harb, 2018).

ii. Kenya

▪ **British Army Training Unit – Nanyuki - UK Army Base**

The British Army established Training Unit BATUK based in Nanyuki, 200 km north of Nairobi, which provides military training in Kenya. This is an important facility where the British troops prepare for operations internationally. Now Britain has approximately 230 military soldiers in Kenya who are staying at BATUK. British Army and the Kenyan Defense Forces conduct regular joint training including 4500 British personnel and 600 Kenyan (Graham, 2021).

iii. **Singapore**

▪ **HMNB (Her Majesty Naval Base) Sembawang
Singapore - UK Navy**

In Singapore, the UK has a permanent naval facility, and it is the smallest military unit, comprising just 33 persons (Tossini, 2021). The UK has deployed two warships for a period of five years and will focus on furthering Britain's trade, diplomatic, humanitarian interests, and maritime security in Indo Pacific region (Kai, 2022).

iv. **Qatar**

▪ **Al Udeid Base - UK Air Force**

In Qatar, UK Royal Air Force (RAF) has No 83 Expeditionary Air Group, which offers command and control to the 4th Expeditionary Air Wings air force assisting Operation.

v. **UAE**

▪ **Al Minhad Base - UK Air Force**

The Royal Air Force operates Al Minhad airbase of UAE to carry out patrolling in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

vi. **Oman**

▪ **Duqm Port - UK Base Navy**

Oman Duqm port of Oman house has a new permanent Joint Logistics Support Base which can house Queen Elizabeth-Class aircraft carriers was established. It has a dry dock in addition to engineering facilities. It provides the UK with a permanent naval base outside Gulf which is very strategically important in the Indian Ocean. Royal Airforce can also use Al Musannah airbase of Oman and provide support to UK's naval operations in Gulf as well as in the north Arabian Sea.

c. **France Military Bases**

The details of France's Military bases are appended below and shown in Figure 2.9.

Table 2.5: France's Military bases

S No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Djibouti	Naval base of Héron	Navy
ii.	UAE	- Port Zayed in Abu Dhabi - Al Dhafra Air Base - Implantation Militaire Française aux Emirates Arabes Unis or IMFEAU	Navy, Air Force & Army

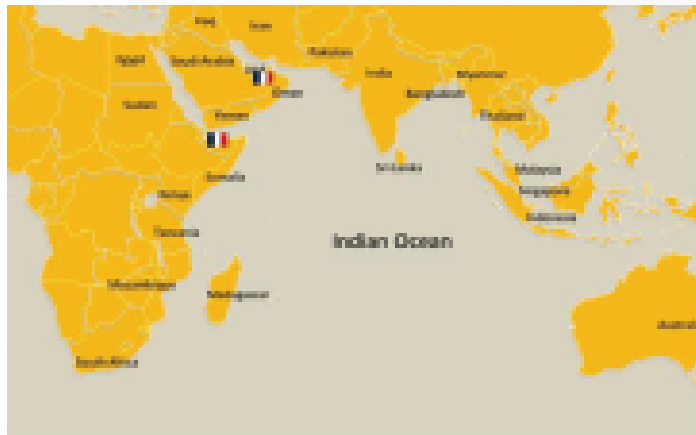


Figure 2.9: France Bases in Indian Ocean states

i. Djibouti

▪ Naval base of Héron - French Navy Base

French Forces in Djibouti (FFDJ) in the Naval Base of Héron constitutes its biggest military and sole strategic base on the continent at Djibouti comprising 1,500 troops, warplanes, and ships. France sees the country as an important base to maintain its international influence because of the need for the defence of the Red Sea (The Economic Times, 2021).

ii. UAE

France established its first permanent military base (army, navy, air force) in Abu Dhabi after 50 years to operate in the Persian Gulf.

▪ Port Zayed – French Naval Base

The naval base is established at Port Zayed Abu Dhabi where 72 naval persons are stationed, and the

French ships regularly use this port for patrolling in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.

- **Airbase Al Dhafra – French Air Force**

The French air force is using Al Dhafra airbase Abu Dhabi. At the base 3 Mirage 2000-5, jet fighters are stationed along with 57 military air force staff.

- **Implantation Militaire Française aux Émirats Arabes Unis or IMFEAU**

The French army established an army base 50 km in Abu Dhabi and in housed 93 soldiers for training /exercising with the UAE army (Wikipedia, 2023).

d. Italian Military Bases

Table 2.6: Italian Military Bases

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Djibouti	National Support Military Base	Navy

i. Djibouti

- **Militare Nazionale di Supportto - Naval Base**

Italy opened its first military base (naval air force and navy) in 2014 named Militare Nazionale di Supporto (National Support Military Base). It provides logistic and operation support to Italian forces which comprise 300 troops. The Italian Navy safeguarded the merchant ships transiting the Indian Ocean. The Italian military operations include the base fighting terrorism, close to Yemen, and Somalia, and conducting surveillance of mercantile traffic. The Italian army also conducted anti-terrorist operations against Shabaab Islamist or al-Qaeda operations, ransom, kidnap, and liberation of hostages (Faakto, 2019).

e. China's Military Bases

The details of Chinese Military bases are appended below and shown in Figure 2.10. China is establishing its military and naval bases in the Indian Ocean to safeguard its interest in the Indian Ocean. China is flexing its muscle and the Chinese Navy regularly patrols and exercises with the littoral countries of the IOR. Apart from Djibouti, Myanmar, and Tajikistan, China is also considering showing its military presence by establishing bases

in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Kenya, United Arab Emirates, Tanzania, Seychelles & Angola (Business Standard, 2020).

Table 2.7: China's Military Bases

<u>S. No</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Base</u>	<u>Facilities Used For</u>
i.	Djibouti	Naval Base Djibouti	Navy
ii.	Myanmar	Great Coco Island	Signal Intelligence
iv.	Tajikistan	Gorno-Badakhshan	Military Base

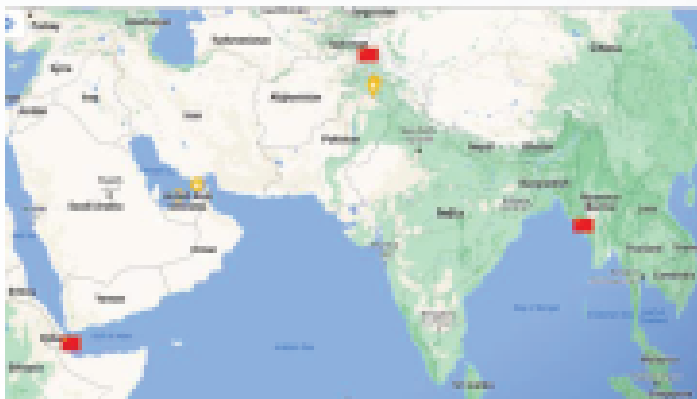


Figure 2.10: China Military Bases in the Indian Ocean states

i. Djibouti

▪ China Base - Navy

The first military base of China was established in Djibouti in July 2017 which includes a large helicopter base, naval port, and accommodation for 10,000 troops (Brewster, 2018). The base will be utilized by PLA Naval Ships for patrolling in the Indian Ocean and exercising with other navies. The West believes that the Chinese naval mission is not limited to Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW) or protecting SLOCs but included Intelligence collection and counterterrorism as well (Cabestan, 2020). This base enhances China's emerging global influence and shows its presence away from its shores, particularly in the Indian Ocean (TRT World, 2021).

ii. Myanmar

▪ Great Coco Island- China Naval Base

China has established a naval Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) facility on the Great Coco Island small group

of islands, which is situated at a strategic location in the north-eastern Bay of Bengal (Wikipedia, 2024).

iii. Tajikistan

▪ Gorno-Badakhshan- China Base

In 2021, Tajikistan has approved China's request for establishing an air base that is close to Afghanistan. This base will help to monitor the trade of China passing through Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Standish, 2021). The Chinese base is shown in Figure 2.11.



Figure 2.11: China Base-Tajikistan (Eurasia.org, 2019)

f. Russian Military Bases

Table 2.8: Russian Military Bases

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Russia	Proposed Military Base in Port Sudan	Navy

i. Sudan

▪ Port Sudan – Russian Naval Base

Russia is planning to open a military base at Port Sudan. This naval base would be defensive and aimed at maintaining stability and peace in the region. It would be used to carry out repairs, supplies, and a resting spot for Russian naval ships. This facility will strengthen its credibility as a defensive measure against maritime security threats in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean (Ramani, 2020).

g. Indian Military Bases

The details of Indian Military bases/right to use military facilities are appended below and shown in Figure 2.12.

Table 2.9: Indian Military Bases

S No	Country	Base	Facilities Used for
i.	Tajikistan	Farkhor Air Base	Air Force
ii.	Bhutan	Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) is located at Haa Dzong	Army
iii.	Madagascar	Madagascar Base	Navy
iv.	Mauritius	North Agalega Island	Navy and Naval Aviation
v.	Seychelles	Assumption Island	Navy and Naval Aviation
vi.	Oman	- Ras Ul had - Muscat Naval Base - Duqm Port - Duqm Airport	Navy & Air Force
vii.	Singapore	Changi Naval Base	Navy
viii.	Sri Lanka	Hambantota	Air Force
ix.	Maldives	Uthuru Thila Falhu Naval Base	Navy
x.	Nepal	Airstrip in Surkhet	Air Force
xi.	Vietnam	Nha Trang Port	Navy
xii.	Qatar	Doha Port	Navy

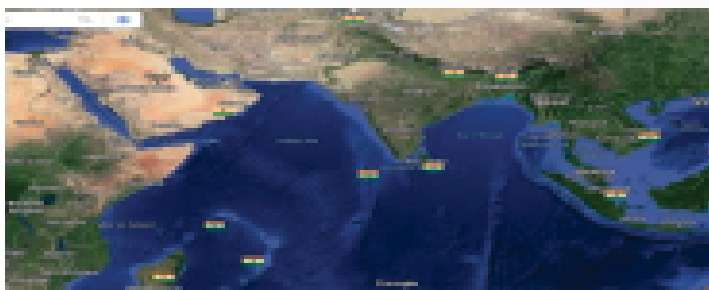


Figure 2.12: Indian Military Bases in Indian Ocean

i. Tajikistan

▪ Farkhor Air Base – Indian Air Force

Tajikistan and India share intense military cooperation. In this regard, India has established its first air force base in Farkhor in Tajikistan. It assists India in keeping an eye on the CPEC project of China and helps influence Central Asia and contain China. India operates some Russian made jets from Ayani airbase and uses Farkhor as a forward operating

base. This base is proving to be an asset to the Indian armed forces (Chugh, 2021).

ii. **Bhutan**

▪ **Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) Haa Dzong – Indian Army Base**

India has established Military Training Team (IMTRAT) for training the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and the Royal Bodyguard of Bhutan (RBG) troops in Western Bhutan Haa Dzong (Defence Direct Education, 2019).

iii. **Madagascar**

▪ **Indian Naval Base**

In 2007, India established a naval base in Madagascar equipped with radars and surveillance to follow shipping movements in the Indian Ocean which intercepts maritime communication. The base assists the naval forces of Madagascar to serve the coastal area of the country and gather information on other naval operations (Chugh, 2021).

iv **Mauritius**

▪ **North Agalega Island – Indian Navy & Naval Aviation Base**

The Navy & Naval Aviation base is established by North Agalega Island which includes a coastal surveillance radar system. India has been constructing a massive airstrip and two jetties on the 12km long island to improve its air and sea connectivity. However, the island is capable of catering to heavy-duty military aircraft (Shakeel, 2021). India is establishing large support facilities and when it is accomplished, the Indian Navy will permanently station some of its P-8I Neptune Submarine hunter aircraft to observe Chinese submarines' activities (Deb, 2021).

v. **Seychelles**

▪ **Assumption Island - Indian Navy and Naval Aviation Base**

India and Seychelles have signed a defence agreement for the construction of a naval facility on Assumption Island. Which is situated approx. 1,100 kilometres

southwest of Seychelles' main island of Mahé and six coastal radar stations will be established by India in Seychelles to monitor air and sea traffic. India is also planning to build an airstrip and naval berth on Assumption Island (Gurjar, 2020).

vi Oman

Due to the strategic location of Oman in the context of CPEC, India has strengthened its defence relations with Oman and established various levels of naval and air facilities.

- **Ras-al-Hadd – Intelligence Gathering – Indian Navy & Air Force**

An intelligence-gathering facility at Ras-al-Hadd to monitor ships' movement and collection of data.

- **Muscat – Indian Naval Base**

Indian Navy has a listening station & berthing rights at Muscat Naval Base.

- **Duqm Port – Indian Navy**

A pact signed in 2018 gives the Indian Navy access to facilities like the use of the dry-dock for maintenance at Duqm port in Oman (Javaid, 2021).

- **Duqm Airport – Indian Airforce**

The Indian air force has the right to use Duqm Airport.

Note: The presence of Indian forces close to Gwadar Port has the potential to disrupt CPEC and BRI and there is a dire need for Pakistan to counter it.

vii. Singapore

- **Changi Naval Base – Indian Navy**

In 2018, India and Singapore signed a bilateral accord for Naval cooperation which allows Indian Naval Ships logistical assistance that includes refuelling at Changi Naval Base. The US wants to give a role to India in the South China Sea in the Indian presence in Singapore is a significant effort to monitor Chinese ambitions in the Indian Ocean (Sharma, 2020).

viii Sri Lanka

- **Hambantota - Indian Base - Air Force**

India bought a Sri Lankan Airbase in Hambantota in 2018 to watch Chinese Naval activities (Javaid, 2021). Due to the recent economic turmoil, India would like to gain more from Sri Lanka by providing aid in exchange.

ix. Maldives

▪ **Uthuru Thila Falhu – Indian Naval Base**

India and Maldives have signed an agreement to “develop, support and maintain” the Coast Guard of Maldives. India is developing infrastructure, communications resources, radar services, and providing training to Maldivian personnel (Laskar, 2021).

x. Nepal

▪ **Surkhet - Indian Base -Air Force**

The Indian Air Force maintains an airstrip in Surkhet, Nepal that serves strategic interests for India (Jail, 2009).

xi. Vietnam

▪ **Nha Trang Port – Indian Naval Base**

India naval ships have access to use Vietnam Nha Trang Port. Vietnam has requested India to develop the naval facility. The location of Vietnam close to South China Sea will help India to monitor Chinese naval activities (EurAsian Times Desk, 2018).

xii. Qatar

▪ **Indian Navy**

India signed a defense cooperation and security and law enforcement agreement with Qatar in 2008. The agreement covered security concerns of Qatar and sought to safeguard India’s interest in the region, including maritime training, joint exercises, and sending troops in case Qatar is threatened (Devendra, 2021).

h. Japanese Military Bases

Table 2.10: Japanese Military Bases

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Japan	Djibouti	Navy

i. **Djibouti**

▪ **Japanese Military Bases – Navy**

Japan is realizing the importance of the Indian Ocean and established its first military base in Djibouti. The Japanese Self-defence Forces (JSDF) will patrol the Indian Ocean and conduct exercises with regional navies. Japan has invested US \$ 9 billion in Africa and a base in Djibouti is crucial for protecting its SLOCs (Gurjar, 2021). Japan is also a member of QUAD and took part in Malabar exercises with other QUAD countries, it is currently stepping up its presence in the IOR to ensure its SLOCs remain safeguarded and containment of China as well.

i. **Germany Military Base**

Table 2.11: Germany Military Base

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Germany	French Naval Airbase Djibouti	Airforce

i. **Djibouti – Airforce**

Germany has a presence at a French naval airbase in Djibouti, from which it patrols strategic sea lanes around the Horn of Africa (Santo, 2019).

j. **Spain Military Base**

Table 2.12: Spain Military Base

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Spain	French Naval Airbase Djibouti	Airforce

i. **Djibouti – Airforce**

Spanish P-3 aircraft is based in Djibouti, and the maintenance crews are stationed at the 11th Wing of the Spanish Air Force (Veronika, 2021).

k. **Saudi Arab Military Bases**

Table 2.13: Saudi Arabia Base – Navy

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For

i.	Saudi Arabia	Naval Base Djibouti	Navy
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i. Djibouti – Saudi Arabia Base – Navy

In April 2017, Saudi Arabia established its first naval base in Djibouti. It will ensure Saudi Arabia SLOCs are safeguarded and no arms supply to Yemen is ensured (Ng, 2022).

I. UAE Military Bases

i. Yemen (Socotra) – UAE Base – Navy

Table 2.14: UAE Base – Navy

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	UAE	UAE Naval Airbase Socotra	Navy

UAE established its first military base on the Yemeni island of Socotra. Due to its strategic location near major shipping routes, the UAE has built military bases on the island which it uses to collect intelligence on maritime traffic and monitor oil trading channels, in this regard, Israel is also cooperating (Faraan, 2021).

m. Greece Military Bases

Table 2.15: Greece Military Base

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Greece	Air Defense Battery	Army

i. Greece Base – Patriot Missile - Tanagra Air Base

Greece has established to PATRIOT long-range anti-aircraft system at Tanagra Air Base to protect Saudi Arabia from Yemeni Houthi forces in 2021 (Greek City Times, 2021).

n. Israel Military Bases

Table 2.16: Israel Military Base

S. No	Country	Base	Facilities Used For
i.	Israel	Israel's naval and	Navy

		intelligence base at Emba Soira	
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i. Eritrea Emba Soire – Israel Naval & Intelligence Base

Israel maintains an intelligence listening station at the peak of Emba Soira, a mountain reaching a height of 3,000 meters above sea level in Eritrea, and a naval base at the Dahlak Archipelago in the Red Sea. Israeli Naval Submarines and vessels also use this base, monitoring Iranian networks that Israel suspects of smuggling weapons to Hamas and Hezbollah. The alleged weapon shipments depart from Iran to Sudan on ships, and from there to Egypt, the Gaza Strip, or to Lebanon and Syria (Inbar, 2012).

o. Pakistan Military Bases

Pakistan has a military presence on deputation basis in Tabuk city of Saudi Arabia for the protection of the holy city of Mecca and Madina.

4. INDIAN INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

a. Indians realized the importance of IOR much earlier as the country sits astride many busy International Shipping Lanes that crisscross and gradually developed infrastructure of ports, harbours, and other maritime domains. India desires to dominate the Indian Ocean and has established naval bases in the IOR as discussed earlier and claims to be a Net Security Provider, which is refuted by Pakistan. India has adopted a multifaceted policy, on one hand, it is strengthening relations with the IOR countries by making different alliances, enhancing the capabilities and strength of Indian Naval units, and on the other hand improving relations with the US and other major powers. Indian Navy numerically is the strongest navy in IOR and operates in four commands namely, Western Naval Command, Southern Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command, and Andaman & Nicobar Command (Indian Navy, 2024).

b. Indian navy is rapidly building up and planning to be a 170-ship navy by 2027. Currently, there are 137 ships. This includes 3 carriers, 5 nuclear submarines, 20 conventional submarines, Destroyers & Frigates (10 DDGs, 16 FFGs,) (GKToday, 2016) and the latest maritime patrol aircraft and helicopters. Indian Navy is planning to acquire 57 carrier-based fighter aircraft and a new Arihant class of nuclear-powered attack submarines (Thakker, 2018). Pakistan has always supported the idea of making the Indian Ocean nuclear-free, but the acquisition of 5 nuclear submarines may lead to the nuclearization of the Indian ocean.

c. India's defence budget stood at \$72.4 bn; seven times larger than Pakistan (Laxman, 2023). The US perceives India as a major ally in the region and strongly supports its maritime expansion to counter Chinese expansion in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The US also declares India as a net security provider as per the US Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2022. In the past decade, India

and the US have defence cooperation strengthened by the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) and Logistic Support Agreement (LSA), an India-specific version of the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (COMCASA).

d. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India recognized the significance of the Indian Ocean and in 2014, while on a visit to Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles, he unveiled a new "SAGAR" policy (Security and Growth for All in the Region). Increased economic and political clout, connection, and reduced island susceptibility to security challenges, including climate change, were the goals. Additionally, it aims to strengthen regional unity to deter China's presence from growing further (Brewster, 2022).

e. India is also a member or co-founder of different forums in IOR, like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), in which Pakistan entry is banned, the Quadruple Treaty Organization (QUAD), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Pakistan is a member of IONS, South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), could not be flourished due to Indian intransigent attitude. All QUAD countries are now taking part in naval exercises 'Malabar Exercise' regularly since 2020. The exercises are taking place in the North Arabia Sea, Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, Philippine Sea, and Sea of Japan (Wikipedia, 2024). The Malabar Exercises take place on Chinese SLOCs; if necessary, they may be getting ready to block Chinese SLOCs in the future. This may be an indication that QUAD is turning a military alliance in the Indian and Pacific 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 (Wikipedia, 2024). Recently, a new alliance called I2U2 (India Israel UAE, and USA) was formed, and it is anticipated that it will follow the model of QUAD and conduct naval exercises in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. It may provide ingress to the Israeli navy in the Indian Ocean which is not in favour of Pakistan. In these forums, India utilizes all the means to project itself as the only major power of the Indian Ocean and to lessen the role of Pakistan.

5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR PAKISTAN

a. Due to continental thinking, Pakistan was unable to utilize the benefits of the sea. Recently, Pakistan has placed a high priority on the security and development of its maritime sector. It reflects Pakistan's aspirations to adopt contemporary technology and increase its naval presence in the Arabian Sea to guarantee the protection of SLOCs. The shift in politics in the post-cold war era, which places a strong emphasis on the economy rather than the prior model, which advised a key focus on just increasing conventional military capability, is the explanation being discussed. Therefore, the economy holds the actual power in the contemporary era, which means Pakistan would not only ensure the safe navigation of trade that China would attract, but also enhance its naval capabilities and technologies to maximize power through, the 'Blue Economy'.

b. Pakistan is passing through a crucial time. The new coalition government was formed in Pakistan in April 2022 which has caused political and economic instability. Pakistan's weak economy, the heavy burden of debt, which is US 117 \$ in 2021 and is 80.94% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), though govt plans to

bring it to 60% of the GDP, which if attained, will usher much needed economic stability (O'Neill, 2024).

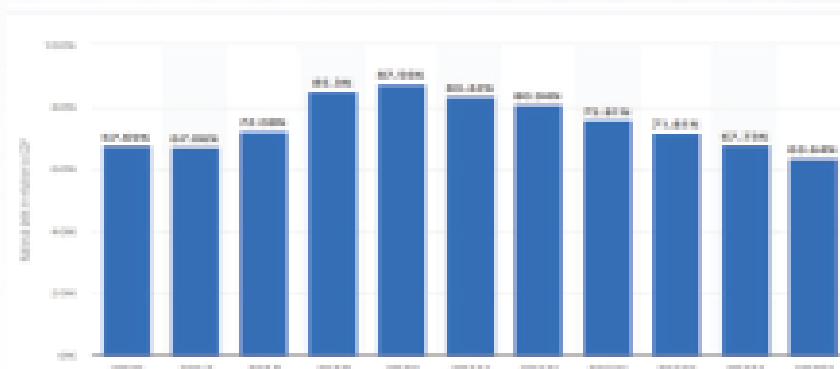


Figure 2.13: Pakistan National debt from 2016 to 2026 in relation to gross domestic product

c. Pakistan's export in 2021 were US\$ 25.304 Bn, and its imports were US\$ 56.380 Bn, causing a trade deficit of US\$ 31.076 Bn (O'Neill, 2024). Pakistan is fortunate that foreign remittances are increasing yearly in 2021 the remittances were US\$ 27 Bn (State Bank of Pakistan, 2019) and are expected to cross US\$ 32 Bn in 2022. It is imperative to grow its exports and reduce imports since a stage has been reached where Pakistan must take more loans for debt payments. Pakistan needs to develop an economic map in consultation with all stakeholders for the next 10 and 20 years and set economic goals that define how to pay loans through an export-oriented policy.

d. On 23rd March 2015, Pakistan's Maritime Zone was extended from 200 Nautical Miles (NM) to 350 NM, with an EEZ of 200 NM and a Continental Shelf up to 350 NM. It requires Pakistan Navy along with Pakistan Maritime Security Agency to protect the Pakistan sea boundary up to Continental Shelf. To do so, Pakistan has yet to acquire the required technologies and equipment, which it plans by the fiscal year 2030. With the progress of CPEC, the demand for maritime security has increased to address an array of threats such as piracy, illicit trafficking, terrorism, and potential conflict at sea. Furthermore, the exploration of natural resources in EEZ would require greater stability in the region to proceed with large-scale investments to build and renovate Pakistan's Blue Economy.

e. CPEC will be a game-changer for Pakistan, and it is a good omen that the entire nation and stakeholders are united in their resolve to make CPEC a success despite external pressures and terrorist activities targeting the vital project. In 2016, Pakistan's security forces arrested serving Indian Naval Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was involved in espionage sabotage, and terrorist activities for the Indian security agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

f. CPEC once operational would yield multiple benefits for Pakistan in dealing with unemployment issues, energy crises, poverty, economic

development, infrastructure, and inequalities in underdeveloped provinces. CPEC is estimated to generate 6 to 8 Bn Rs per annum just in taxes and tolls as well as create 2.3 million jobs between the years 2015-2030, leading to a more than 2.5% annual rise in GDP (Radio Pakistan, 2020). The first phase of CPEC is almost completed.

g. In CPEC phase 1 and phase 2, a total investment of US\$ 25 billion (Rafi Group, 2021) has been invested in the energy sector (3340 MW added to the national grid), transportation, and optical fibre projects. Gwadar airport and Gwadar Port are being developed to international standards. Ten projects related to socio-economic infrastructure and the development of Gwadar are underway. The second stage of CPEC emphasizes industrialization, agriculture, employment opportunities, information technology, modernization, and socio-economic growth (Zahid, 2022).

h. As discussed earlier, CPEC is crucial to the future of Pakistan. The volume of trade will increase manifold with the setting up of industrial zones opening under CPEC. Presently, PNSC has only 13 ships, and no matter how much money is spent on the infrastructure of CPEC, if we do not increase the number of ships in our fleet, we will remain at the mercy of foreign carriers. At the time of war/tension, there is no guarantee that foreign merchant ships will lift the cargo from Pakistani ports. Even if they do, freight charges will increase manifold. An estimated US\$ 5-6 bn foreign exchange was spent every year on sea freight charges only (Siddiqui, 2021), whereas a new medium size container ship/ oil tanker will cost US\$ 50 million (Made In China, 2024). We are losing a precious amount of foreign exchange and are dependent upon foreign carriers for our trade. There is a dire need of making plans to overcome the weakness of dependence on foreign flag carriers, otherwise, CPEC could become a vulnerability.

i. The presence of Indian naval forces at Duqm port, Oman is to disrupt Pakistan and SLOCs, especially saboteur economic activities targeting Gwadar port and disrupting CPEC. Although Pakistan Navy has increased its wherewithal to protect its SLOCs and Indian Navy operations from Duqm Port are being viewed by Pakistan Naval planners seriously, it would continue to pose a serious risk to our maritime trade during crises/conflicts.



Figure 2.14: Port of Duqm (Woody, 2020)

j. The Gwadar, CPEC, and BRI can act as a catalyst of regional connectivity between China, Africa, and the Middle East. India and the United States are opposing, propagating against CPEC, and endeavouring to contain China as it will be a game changer for the entire region (Malik, 2017).

k. Pakistan also needs to improve ties with East Asian countries, and a new strategy of 'Vision East Asia' may be aggressively adopted. Pakistan is more inclined toward BRI preferences. Additionally, Pakistan is one of these countries at the crossroads of terrorism in the region. It would not be apt to become a "frontline state" once again in the Indian Ocean promoting the interests of any foreign power.

l. It is high time for Pakistan to re-assert for economic globalization of regional countries in the Indian Ocean. Although Pakistan has gained a middle power status in the Indian Ocean, it is the second declared a nuclear-weapon state in the IOR, which is another strategic distinctive feature of Pakistan. Under the growing competition and rivalries, it is natural for Pakistan to enhance its maritime security through multilateral maritime security activities like AMAN exercises and part of the Combined Maritime Force. Pakistan is also not a member of the dynamic economic alliance, as SSARC is not a successful model due to Indian behaviour, Shanghai Cooperation Organization has yet to prove its efficacy. A new economic block comprising Pakistan, China, Iran, and Turkey may be a game changer for the region.

5.1 Pakistan's Maritime Interests & Limitations in IOR

a. Pakistan's maritime interests and limitations are discussed as under:

(1) Pakistan's total coastline is 1001 km, and it has only two major ports Port Qasim Authority (PQA) & Karachi Port Trust (KPT). The third Port at Gwadar is not fully operational yet. The vulnerability of KPT & PQA being well within enemy naval & air reach, vis-a-vis our heavy dependence on these two ports, demands a well-articulated and well-coordinated defensive plan.

(2) Pakistan is heavily dependent on imported energy including Oil, Coal, and LNG. PQA is the hub of energy, which is not the best strategy as its proximity to India, makes it highly vulnerable to Indian aggression. Pakistani ports handle over 91% of total cargo through the sea, on average, 2.5 ships disembark daily energy-related cargo at Pakistani ports, making it a critical vulnerability that can impact national security. Pakistan has very limited reserves, especially in the energy sector. Pakistan needs to address this vulnerability by increasing the storage capacity of oil, gas, coal, and other vital commodities.

(3) Efficient Pakistani ports can strengthen their maritime economy through regional and extra-regional trade (transit and trans-shipment trade).

(4) The maritime leg of CPEC starting from Gwadar connects the Arabian Peninsula and the continent of Africa (Djibouti). Such economic integration would reinforce the maritime economy and its linkages with Pakistan's national security.

(5) Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) has only 13 ships that can barely carry 10 % of the cargo. If more ships are not included, the handling capacity of cargo will reduce further leaving Pakistan at the mercy of foreign carriers for trade in times of war or tension. Also, PNSC fees in Pakistani Rupees are a great incentive for our traders and will ease the burden of freight expenses in US Dollars.

(6) The sea boundary between Pakistan and India is not demarcated. Both countries have conducted 12 rounds of talks from 1968 to 2012 without any progress. The creek and adjoining area in the EEZ hold immense economic potential for Pakistan and India. The area is expected to be rich in various resources e.g., fish, hydrocarbons, and minerals. These resources can be extracted for commercial exploitation. Demarcation or maritime boundary will help in policing by respective countries to manage fish/natural resources and border control etc.

(7) Pakistan has the third largest ship re-cycling facility at Gadani which handles more than 100 ships annually. It provides raw materials to many small and medium industries in Pakistan in addition to meeting over 33% of the country's steel requirement, employing approximately 25,000 – 30,000 people (Hameed, 2019). Being run as an informal set of industries without any policy, strategy, or governance mechanism, there is a threat of closure because of non-compliance with international regimes of Environmental protection (Hong Kong Convention, Basel Convention, and EU Regulations). It contributes more than Rs.10 billion to govt exchequer towards taxes annually. This sector requires govt attention to bring it at par with international standards.

(8) Marine Fishing sector can contribute significantly to the food security of Pakistan. It earned US\$ 496 million in FY 2022/23 from fisheries exports. Industry contribution to GDP is about 0.4%. The fishing sector employs around 390,000 people directly, and if we include other related jobs such as transporting, processing, and retailing, the number rises to between 900,000 and 1,800,000 jobs (Nusrat, 2021). There are 4 major fishing harbours (with 90 percent of the catch emanating from Karachi Fish Harbor, Karachi Fisheries, Korangi, Pasni, and Gwadar Fisheries). The fishermen use the old vintage wooden craft for fishing if provided fishing trawler with a good refrigeration system the Fish & Sea Food industry's actual potential may rise US\$ 1 billion. Pakistan is blessed with a mangrove forest of about 160,000 hectares that yields high production of fish. Pakistan has good potential for aquaculture farming, if govt provided incentives to local businessmen this area can flourish at much faster pace.

(9) Maritime and coastal tourism is a rapidly growing sector worldwide and one of the largest contributors to global GDP. With regards to tourism, Pakistan is overall ranked 125 out of 144 nations (Fatima, 2021). On the coastline of 1001 km, we have only one big city – Karachi, whereas Pakistan's sea frontage is full of pristine beaches. Our marine and coastal areas are rich and can be explored for building a "tourist belt", subject to Government support and facilitation, and investor-friendly policies.

(10) Pakistan's EEZ is 240000 sq. km, and its Continental Shelf is 50,000 sq km, which has tremendous potential for precious metals, oil & gas. At present, no exploitation of Sea-bed resources by Pakistan is being undertaken. Pakistan lacks the technology and resources to map and exploit this blessing of nature. A master plan is needed to harness Sea-bed resources available in Pakistani waters which can contribute significantly to Pakistan's economy.

(11) Pakistani coast is connected through Makran Coastal Highway. However, with the development of Gwadar Port, it is envisaged that traffic volume on this road will increase manifold. Dependence on a single artery for communication is also not advisable as any accident, natural calamity, or law & order situation may suspend traffic. It is the need of the hour to operate a sea transport/ferry service between Karachi and the Coastal cities of Pakistan. The same service can later extend to Iran and other GCC countries. It is pertinent to mention that maritime transport is the cheapest of all other modes of transport including road and rail.

(12) No single state can address the maritime challenges of the 21st century. It is thus imperative for Pakistan to continue its efforts for cooperation and collaboration with other friendly states to mitigate common challenges.

(13) Pakistan's national security is dependent upon its maritime security. Pakistan cannot afford an arms race with India but needs to safeguard its national interests in the EEZ and in the maritime boundary. Pakistan Navy gets the least share of the defence budget. Pakistan's Naval capabilities need to be enhanced to protect its SLOCs and Maritime Boundaries. Pakistan, therefore, must continue to equip its Navy, PMSA, Coast Guard, and other security organs of the state to keep the enemy at bay.

6. CONCLUSION

a. The Indian Ocean is the theatre of a new great game for global powers, and it will remain important for the world economy in this century. The growing number of overseas bases in the IOR by regional & extra-regional powers indicates its importance for ensuring SLOCs are always safeguarded. These military bases may belong to any or joint segment of the armed forces and require necessities like repair facilities, fuel, ammunition storage, etc., to be available. These bases can also be used as power projection and influence their own interests/policy in the region. These bases are located at the strategic

locations of the IOR, so that at the time of tension or war they can use to attack/blockade any country within reach. The host country gains some financial assistance from these bases and, the presence of these bases shows stability in the region e.g. the presence of the US forces in the Arabian Peninsula maintains stability in the region and prevents any aggression from Iran.

b. The emergence of China is viewed critically by the US and its allies and concerted efforts are being made to contain China. On the other hand, China is investing heavily in BRI/CPEC and bases to protect its own interests by establishing military bases and patrolling in the IOR. The Indo-US nexus is directed to contain China and keep a check on the growing China-Pakistan collaboration. India has established several military and economic agreements with the US and its allies to expand its influence in the IOR. India's aspirations of a Blue Water Navy are putting serious strains on regional maritime security, especially for Pakistan. The introduction of nukes in the Indian Ocean has raised new challenges and the specter of conflict. Despite Pakistan's overtures for Nuclear Free Zone, India has taken the first step to further complicate the strategic environment of South Asia. India is the first country to operate a nuclear submarine INS Chakra in the IOR.

c. CPEC can bring economic prosperity to Pakistan and the entire region., but it is being sabotaged by India and the USA. Pakistan needs to safeguard its maritime interests as national security is dependent on them by granting more incentives are given to the maritime industry e.g., increasing the merchant fleet, modern facilities for fishing, ship recycling, maritime tourism, efficient port operations, etc. Due to the poor economy of Pakistan, it is now imperative that all stakeholders put a joint effort into making economic plans for the next 20 years to address all economic issues and consistent growth through optimizing CPEC and implementing the Look East Policy. There is a need to realize the critical importance of the maritime sector in our national economy and its linkage with national security. It is imperative for Pakistan to invest in the maritime to derive benefits and subsequently secure its place in the comity of nations. Commensurate Naval capabilities are crucial to ensure SLOCs and Maritime Sea boundaries are safeguarded at all costs.

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