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## Contemporary Geo-Politics of Indian Ocean: India, China and Other Powers

**Arunoday Bajpai**

### Introduction

The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean on the earth covering 20 per cent of the total oceanic water. It spans over 10,000 kilometers from the southern tip of Africa to the western coast of Australia. In the southwest, it joins the Atlantic Ocean and to the east it joins the Pacific Ocean. Its major choke points are: Babel Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, Lombok Strait, Palk Strait and Malacca Strait. Its main seas are: Gulf of Aden, Andaman Sea, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Great Australian Bight, Gulf of Mannar, Mozambique Channel, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf, Red Sea and other water bodies. It joins the Mediterranean Sea via Gulf of Aden, Bab el Mandeb, Red Sea, Suez Canal and to the Pacific Ocean through Malacca Strait. Spanning 28 million sq km, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is host to a third of the world's population. A significant share of international trade passes through the sea lanes of the IOR. Indian Ocean is the major trade route linking Europe and America with Middle East, Africa and East Asia. It is the major trade route for petroleum products of Persian Gulf and Indonesia. Robert Kaplan (2011: 07) accounts that the Indian Ocean rim land from the Middle East to the Pacific accounts for 50 per cent of the container traffic and 70 per cent of the traffic of petroleum products for the entire world. He says that India is as poised to become the world's third largest oil importer, after China and the US, with over 90 per cent of its oil transiting the Indian Ocean. China is in the same company because over 85 per cent of its imported oil already passes through the Indian Ocean. Besides, the Ocean is rich source of petroleum products, marine products and minerals. Nearly 40 per cent production of the total

offshore petroleum products comes from Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean Region has been always been useful area for trade, security, marine resources to the littoral states as well as dominant world powers of the time. During colonial times, it served as a strategic resource for the establishment and maintenance of colonialism by European powers in South Asia and South East Asia. It was 19th century American Navy Officer and geo-strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, who for the first time elaborated the maritime dimension of security and dominance. In his seminal work, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1763*, published in 1890 (Little Brown and Co.), he enunciated the concept of 'sea power' which postulates that the countries with greater naval power will have greater worldwide impact and ability to exercise control over seas and territories. The book gives an account of the role of sea power during the 17th and 18th centuries and identifies the steps needed to achieve and support sea power with emphasis on having the most powerful fleet. His contention was that any country with command over sea, based on strategic naval operation in support of land forces, would have decisive advantage over others. This work has influenced the naval strategy of many countries in modern times (Harding: 2006). Since the maritime journey of Vasco Da Gama to the Indian shores in 1498 till the end of World War II, it was the British Royal Navy, which was influential operator in the Indian Ocean, with minor challenge from other colonial powers. After the War, British naval presence in the Indian Ocean diminished considerably and after the Suez Crisis (1956), the British relinquished his naval responsibilities to the

east of Suez. This created a power vacuum which was filled by the US navy with its bases in Diego Garcia in Indian Ocean supported by the fifth fleet in Bahrain and sixth fleet in the east located in Japan. Thus, the US navy has emerged as the sole dominant sea power in the Indian Ocean as well as the Pacific Ocean after the World War II. During the cold war era, the US used her sea power in the Indian Ocean to advance her strategic interests in the region. The US mobilized her naval forces in 1961 in Indian Ocean in support of India during the Indo-China war 1962 and again in 1971 in support of Pakistan during Indo-Pak war of 1971. The US, because of her naval presence, also denied equal influence to the Soviet Union in the IOR and Pacific Ocean. The US still wants to maintain her position as the status-quoist power in the IOR.

### **Changing Strategic Dynamics in Indian Ocean Region**

In the Post-cold war period, the strategic dynamics of Indian Ocean has changed considerably because of persistent efforts by new players-China and India to gain strategic influence in the I O R. These efforts are the result of their perceived or real strategic interests or fears in the IOR. While the US is still a predominant position in Indo-Pacific, the new strategic developments may prompt her to redesign her strategy and moves to maintain her pre-eminence in the region. Whatever the shape the redesign of such strategy may take, its underlying assumption would be to ensure that the emerging powers also develop a stake in the maintenance of existing global economic and political order in the region. Thus, the IOR or Indo-Pacific and its changing strategic dynamics hold crucial importance for its three key players: China, India and the US. American scholar Robert Kaplan (2011) predicted that the Greater Indian Ocean stretching from Horn of Africa to Indonesian archipelago will be the centre of the global conflicts because most of the international business supply will be conducted through this route. He further argues that it is here that 21st century power dynamics will be revealed as the interests and influence of region's three key players China, India and United States are beginning to overlap and intersect.

### **Chinese Maritime Interests and Strategy**

China has opened her economy in 1978 and achieved nearly 10 per cent economic growth for three

decades. Globalization has propelled her economy in big way. She has lifted 300 million people out of poverty. Consequently, China has emerged as the second largest economy of the world after the US. Japan has been pushed to the third position. With the growing economy, the Chinese interests have also assumed global dimensions. With this economic growth, China's global influence is also on rise. In spite of a huge domestic market, Chinese economic push was largely propelled by her burgeoning external trade and investment and continuous supply of energy resources from external sources like Middle East and Africa. If China wants to maintain its position as a rising global power, it has to maintain the momentum of her economic growth and for that it has to ensure the continuous and uninterrupted supply for material and energy resources from external sources, which lie in her west and south. Thus, it logically prompts China's involvement in the IOR as well as Pacific Ocean. China has following strategic interests in the IOR:

1. To ensure the safety of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) to maintain the uninterrupted supply of her trade and energy resources. According to Kaplan (2014), 'As for now, Beijing's principal interest seems to lie in the need to protecting the SLOC along the Indian Ocean, vital for the country's energy import'. In fact, China surpassed the US in 2013 to become the world's largest oil importer (Samaranayake: 2014).
2. To ensure the security of choke points of Indian Ocean mainly Malacca Strait and Lombok Strait in the East and Bab el Mandeb and Hormuz strait in the west.
3. Conversely to deny other powers mainly India and the US to gain undue influence in the Indo-Pacific region, detrimental to China's strategic interests in the region.

### **Chinese Maritime Strategy**

Though China is yet to lay down a comprehensive Indian Ocean strategy, the Chinese think tank (Blue Book: 2013) have made a case for a more proactive role for China in the IOR. It says, 'If (China) cannot have positive impact on these regional powers and Indian Ocean littoral states, the future situation would be even more severe and will affect China's development and peace negatively'. It also warns that New Delhi is preparing for a 'two-front war' with China and Pakistan and notes the developing strength of India's blue water navy (Tharoor:2013).

However, in view of emerging needs of rising China, her global interests have also expanded, which is visible in her maritime behavior and unfolding strategy in the IOR. Kaplan (2014) remarks that, as a corollary, the PRC's naval objectives have undergone a shift – from that of conducting coastal defense activities to offshore defense and ultimately to far sea defense. The latest Chinese Defense White Paper, released in 2013, calls for protecting national maritime rights and interests and armed forces providing reliable support to China's interests overseas. Accordingly the unfolding Chinese maritime strategy has three dimensions:

*Strategic and Cooperative Partnership with Littoral States of IOR*

China understands that India and the US both are better placed in the IOR, because of different reasons. In order to bolster her presence in the IOR, China has initiated a policy of seeking naval facilities and strategic partnership with the littoral states surrounding India. Since China has maritime disputes with all his neighbors in Pacific Ocean, the strategic maritime collaboration is being cultivated in with the littoral states of Indian Ocean. Under this strategy, China has availed naval facilities at Gwader in Pakistan, electronic gathering facilities on islands in Bay of Bengal, port facilities in Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Chittagong in Bangladesh, naval bases in Myanmar, funding of the construction of canal across the Kra Isthmus, signing the military agreement with Cambodia and so on. Pakistan is a strategic ally and all weather friend of China, who is building road and rail link from Gwader to mainland China through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), an area which is also claimed by India. In spite of many Chinese claims the commercial motive of these facilities is not explicit. Anand Kumar (2012) remarks, 'But most of these ports are not economically viable, unless they serve non-economic purposes. The deep sea ports at Gwader and Hambantota will allow the Chinese to monitor Indian and US naval activity in the region. If we take into account this aspect of Chinese ventures, this also means containment of India and challenge to US military power.'

This strategy is also known as 'string of pearls' a term which originated in a 2004 study of Booz Allen Consultants, submitted to Pentagon and subsequently popularized by Washington Post reporter Bill Gertz. In America, it is seen as China's attempt to gain strategic foothold in Indian Ocean and for many Indian scholars, it is now an article of faith that China is encircling India from sea (Holms:2010).

The 'string of pearls' strategy of China has generated much heat in strategic circles in India. In order to overcome its military aspect, China has come out with its benign version in 2013, which is known as 'Maritime Silk Route' (MSR) proposal, which focuses on developing port and other facilities across littoral states of Indian Ocean but ostensibly for trade purposes. According to Abhijit Singh (2014) the MSR project is surrogate for giant Chinese SLOC running from all the way from the East African coast to the Southern coast of China-created, maintained and controlled by Beijing. In its ultimate form, therefore, the MSR would end upsetting up Chinese logistical hubs in Indian Ocean, linking up already 'existing string of pearls'.

*Rapid Modernization of Naval Forces*

In order to match the strength of her naval forces to her growing economic and strategic needs, China has moved on rapid modernization of her navy in last two decades. Bedford (2000) argues that there are two main reasons for the rapid modernization of People Liberation Army navy (PLAN): necessity and opportunity. Necessity emerged rising overseas economic interests. The opportunity came with the disintegration of Soviet Union as China was freed from land dispute worries and concentrated on her maritime disputes over the status of Taiwan, the Spratly and Parcel Islands, and the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. During 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the US deployed two aircraft carriers against China, which exposed weakness of Chinese naval forces and prompted China for naval modernization. Since the 1990s, the PLAN has strengthened its forces around four core elements: frigates and destroyers; submarines; naval fighters; and anti-ship missiles. It is unsurprising that these are precisely the systems required to fight a sea battle against an aircraft carrier and its battle group. At present, the Chinese Navy is the second largest navy in the world after the US Navy.

*Increasing Strategic Deployment of Naval Forces in IOR*

This is the new emerging elements of Chinese maritime strategy. The increasing incidents of piracy across Gulf of Aden provided an opportunity to China in 2008, when it deployed her naval forces in this region to fight piracy. China deployed two destroyers and the supply ship in the region. A team of sixteen Special Forces Members, armed with attack helicopters were also deployed. Later, China has maintained a three-ship flotilla of two warships and one supply ship in the Gulf of Aden. India and China came face to face in Ocean for the first time in 2011,

when India signed a contract with Vietnam for oil exploration in the South China Sea, but it was opposed by China. With the increasing deployment of Chinese forces in the region, India decided not to go for exploration, citing economic non-viability of oil fields. China has already bolstered her naval presence in East China Sea by declaring Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). In 2014, in the wake of missing Malaysian Airliner, India politely refused a Chinese request to launch search operation off the coast of Indian Islands territory Andaman and Nicobar (The Hindu:2014). In 2014, a Chinese nuclear powered attack submarine (SSN) made its first declared operational patrol for two months (Dec.2013 to Feb. 2014) in Indian Ocean. The Chinese submarine, armed with land attack and anti-ship cruise missiles and torpedoes reached Gulf of Aden via Ombai Water Straits near Indonesia (Unnithan: 2014).

### Indian Maritime Strategy and Interests

India too has adopted economic liberalization policy in 1991 to integrate her economy with global economy. However, India is at least one decade behind China in opening her economy. India's liberalized economy has also scored an impressive growth rate of 7-8 percent in last 20 years or so. It has led to the expansion of her global interests. India has become the third largest global economy in terms of PPP after the US and China. It is now counted as one to the emerging economies. She also cannot maintain the momentum of her economic growth without protecting her overseas trade, investment and energy flows. This has added new dimension to her strategic interests in IOR, besides her conventional concerns for her coastal security. Briefly India has the following strategic interests in the IOR:

1. To ensure a credible naval security of mainland and her islands territories (Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep and Minicoy Islands) from conventional as well as non-conventional security threats. Indian peninsula surrounded from three sides by Indian Ocean has 7516kms long maritime boundary to defend. This geo-strategic location of India is both a sense of positional strength as well as source of potential security threat. Neither the US nor the China has this type of existential security threat emanating from Indian Ocean.
2. To ensure the safety and security of SLOC in Indian Ocean and its Choke points for her trade and supply of energy resources.
3. To ensure the exploration and sustainable

harnessing of marine resources in the IOR.

4. To restrict undue influence of external powers in the IOR; which is likely to prove detrimental to India's strategic interests. India considers IOR as her backyard crucial to her security and other strategic interests.

### Indian Maritime Strategy

In view of her economic interests and increasing Chinese presence and assertion in Indo-Pacific, India has also reoriented her maritime strategy to protect her strategic interests in the region. Among others, the three factors are: India's Look East Policy leading to India's close engagements with Chinese neighbors in South East Asia, Chinese increasing forays in Indian Ocean, and Indo-US closeness – have deep impact on India's evolving Indian Maritime Strategy, which became more proactive since the middle of last decade. The three dimensions of India's maritime strategy are:

#### *Enhanced Capability and Role of Navy*

India unfolded a new Maritime Doctrine (Indian Navy: 2004) in 2004 which calls for enhanced capabilities and role of Indian naval forces in view of her expanding economic and strategic interests. According to current naval modernization plan India will increase its fleet size to 160 by the year 2020. The Maritime Doctrine calls for control of maritime choke points, islands and trade routes in the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal and further expanded to include the arc from Persian Gulf [2] to Strait of Malacca within the legitimate maritime interests by 2025. Thus, it involves forward movement of Indian Naval forces in both Western and Eastern ends of IOR. In the West, Indian ships are deployed around Gulf of Aden to check the incidence of piracy. In the East, India has developed close strategic maritime partnership with Vietnam and Singapore.

#### *Regional Maritime Collaboration*

India considers Indian Ocean as her backyard and any security threats to regional littoral states may also pose security threat to India. Accordingly India has focused evolving a regional cooperative mechanism for maritime security in IOR. India was instrumental in formation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technological and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Both these

regional groups were formed in 1997. The IOR-ARC is an association of 18 littoral states of Indian Ocean with vital stake in the maritime security. In its 13th Ministerial Conference held in Nov. 2013 in Perth, Australia it assigned important place to maritime security as an area of common interest to all members. Another multilateral regional initiative is Trilateral Cooperation in Maritime Security launched in 2011 by three countries-India Sri Lanka and Maldives. It focuses on strengthening cooperative approaches using modern technologies for capacity building of regional states to counter threats to maritime security in the region (Ghosh: 2014). The DOSTI (Friendship) and MILAN (engagement) joint naval regional exercises are part of this initiative. Yet another collaborative initiative of India, started in 2006 and known as 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS: 2014), is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues. In the process, it endeavors to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly cooperative solutions on the way ahead.

#### *Bilateral and Multilateral Maritime Cooperation with Other Powers*

India has also followed the policy of forging maritime collaboration with other major powers like US, Japan, Australia and some other smaller countries having stake in the Indian Ocean. In this respect Indo-US partnership is more important because of latter's influence and stakes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Besides regular Malabar joint Indo-US naval exercises, both navies have forged closer link for inter-operational cooperation. Indian navy has provided naval protection for US shipping in Malacca Strait in 2002, both forged close cooperation in responding to 2004 tsunami disaster, US warships have visited India and both have started a dialogue on missile defense and air born warning and control system (Singh:2013). In spite of Chinese opposition, India has invited Japan to join Malabar exercises in 2014 and Australia may join in future.

#### **The United States: Interests and Strategy in Indo-Pacific**

The United States is one of the three preeminent actors having significant naval presence and interests

in the IOR. The presence of US in the Indian has been a part of her global naval presence and predominance. She has been and continues to be a 'Resident Power' in the Pacific Ocean with naval bases and bilateral security arrangement with regional actors mainly Japan, South Korea and Australia. The US has considerable naval presence in Diego Garcia in the form of Naval Support Facility, established in 1977, including a large naval ship and submarine support base, military air base, communication and space-tracking facility and an anchorage for pre-positioned military supplies for regional operations. Diego Garcia is part of the British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT), which was given to the US in 1966 for fifty years lease, with provision of further optional extension for 20 years. The US commissioned Naval Air Facility in 1981. With the completion of a new port facility in 1985, the first US aircraft carrier was also commissioned in Diego Garcia. The Strategic Air Command also deployed B-52 Bombers in 1987. The strategic potential of US naval base in Diego Garcia is further bolstered due to its close coordination with 5th Fleet positioned in Bahrain in the west and 6th Fleet positioned in the in Japan in the east. The US effectively utilized Ariel bombing facilities of Diego Garcia during Gulf War 1991, invasion in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraqi invasion 2003. The US is a Status-quoist power, as it still wants to maintain her naval dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. Accordingly, she has following strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region (Future Directions: 2011):

1. Ensuring that US objectives are not jeopardized by states such as China and Iran.
2. Preventing new or established extremist groups from harming the interests of the US or allied Indian Ocean littoral states.
3. Ensuring that the US policy is supported by a network of diplomatic relations with view to secure trade relations, military cooperation and influence.
4. Ensuring continued access to markets, energy supplies and raw materials.
5. Ensuring the security of maritime choke points and Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs).

Kaplan (2014) notes that US interest in the IOR centers around three imperatives: securing Indian Ocean for international commerce; avoiding regional conflict on issues of strategic choke points-strait of Hormuz and Malacca Strait; and dealing with Sino-Indian competition in IOR. As per the US Defense Department's document, 'Strategic Choices and management Review' (July 2013), US strategy on Indian Ocean revolves around building a coalition with regional allies like Japan, Australia, and the

Philippines and the partners like India and Vietnam. The US has also promoted the concept of Indo-Pacific to adopt an integrated approach to the entire region. Its 'pivot' or 'rebalancing' strategy also seeks to cement strategic partnerships with other countries in this region to balance the rising military and economic power of China. India and Australia have positively reacted to Indo-Pacific concept, but China is suspicious of the concept as it may be used by the US to contain China. In spite of this concept, the fact cannot be denied that the US has been and continues to be a 'Resident Power' in the Pacific region, with close security ties with her regional allies. Thus, the US will have to continue to bear the primary responsibility to maintain peace and stability in the region till some new regional security architecture is not evolved.

### Indian and China: Strategic Moves and Rivalry and US

Both India and China are the emerging powers of Asia. The much discussed notion of 'Rise of Asia' revolves around the position and influence of these two largest nations in the global economic and

political affairs. Both are members of the G-20, a group of 20 largest economies in the world, with the mandate for management and regulation of global economy. Both are the founder members of BRICS, a group of five emerging economies, which are predicted to replace the US and European economies as the largest economies within a span of three decades or so. This global profile of the two has contradictory overtones: sometimes it seems aligned against the predominance of the US and her European allies, but at the same time directed against each other. While their joint demands for a multilateral global economic and political order, reform of international financial architecture, demands for concession in climate change or trade negotiation fall in the first category, their moves and countermoves in Indo-Pacific come under the second category. Many scholars like Kaplan (2011), Mohan Malik (2012), C. Raja Mohan (2013) and others have predicted the intensification of ongoing maritime rivalry between India and China in IOR/ Pacific Ocean due to their overlapping interests and conflicting ambitions. Malik argues, 'And both remain suspicious of each other's long-term agenda and intentions. Each perceives the other as pursuing hegemony and entertaining imperial ambitions. Both are non-status quo powers: China in terms of *territory*, power, and influence; India in

**Table 1:** Comparative Strength of Naval Forces of US, China and India [1]

Naval Force Component	United States	China	India
<i>Total personnel strength</i>	323000 (excluding 109000 reserves)	255000	58350
<i>Aircraft carriers</i>	13	01	02
<i>Submarines</i>	53	63	15
<i>Frigates</i>	24	47	15
<i>Destroyers</i>	62	25	08

terms of *status*, power, and influence. Both seek to expand their power and influence in and beyond their regions at each other's expense. China's "Malacca paranoia" is matched by India's "Hormuz dilemma". If China's navy is going south to the Indian Ocean, India's navy is going east to the Pacific Ocean'. C. Raja Mohan, using the ancient Indian mythological narrative of 'Samudramanthan' (Churning of Ocean by demons and gods and subsequent fight between them over the distribution of booty, in which gods were helped by the Super God Vishnu), he argues that there is inherent clash of interest between India (gods) and China (demons) and the US (Vishnu) will help India. The weakness of this narrative lies in the fact that it precludes the possibility of maritime collaboration between US and China on the one hand and India and China on the other (The Hindu: 2014). Again, he buys the prevailing American notion of

'Indo-Pacific', which ignores the fact that the Indian interests in the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean are not the same as Chinese interests and vice versa.

It is true that both India and China as rising economies want the security of SLOC for their trade and energy supply but, in addition, Indian Ocean has crucial significance for India's security as Pacific Ocean is for China's security. The notion of 'rivalry' needs deeper analysis. Both India and Japan are equally dependent on Indian Ocean for energy supply and trade but why there is no talk of rivalry between the two? There are deeper reasons for this rivalry. First, like the nuclear technology, the notion of maritime security and associated moves, also have 'double use'-both for promotion of valid economic interests as well increasing the power and influence. That is how many nations are not convinced with

China's 'Peaceful Rise' thesis or innocuous looking maritime silk route proposal. Second, the historical background of mistrust, war (1962) and boundary disputes between them gives credence to rivalry hypothesis. Added factors are China's authoritarian political system, prevailing secrecy in defense and foreign policies and its aggressive pursuits of national interest in engaging with external countries, regardless of the nature of their political regime (North Korea and Myanmar). Third, the predominance presence external power like the US in the Indo-Pacific and its evolving continuous maritime partnership with India, raises security concerns in China also. Whatever we may term we may give, there is a sense of distrust between India and China in pursuing their respective maritime interests.

What are the options available for the US, which is still a pre-eminent naval power in Indo-Pacific region? Kaplan predicts the increasing rivalry between India and China amidst 'elegant decline' of American naval power, which will forge greater collaborative mechanisms with other powers in the region. The Obama administration's 'Pivot' or 'Rebalancing' (2011) is designed to that end. America is going to stay for long in the Indo-Pacific. American-Indian strategic maritime collaboration may not be entertained by India to the extent that it is anti-China. India would like to maintain her strategic autonomy till her core interests are not threatened by China. Moreover, India is still a hesitant emerging maritime power, with focus on her core interests in the IOR. In spite of much talk of rivalry between India and China in IOR, the potential flash points of maritime conflicts are still located in the Pacific Ocean— South China Sea; East China Sea; and Taiwan Strait. China would first like to assert its naval supremacy in these spots, where it is likely to come in direct conflict with her smaller neighbors. It is at this point that the US strategy will be on test. Given the naval superiority of US and its effective presence in the region, China may not like to move ahead beyond a certain point in near future. India is not likely to get directly involved against China in any such conflict in the Pacific Ocean. India-China naval show off in 2011 in South China Sea on oil exploration issue is a case in point. However, if it comes to Indian Ocean, India may not back off as it is directly linked with her security and other vital interests. Moreover, China's adventure in the Indian Ocean will prove advantageous to India because of latter's geographical position. The fact of China's economic and military resurgent cannot be denied. But it cannot also be denied that the strategic configurations in Indo-Pacific are highly unfavorable to China as majority of regional and international

actors are apprehensive of her intentions. Therefore, the US is encouraging the evolution of a collaborative security mechanism in the Indo-pacific region; consisting of Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, Philippines and others to ensure peace and stability in the region. How far India is likely go with the US in this strategy, appears uncertain due to a number of factors.

The US wants India to play larger role in South-East Asia and to encourage strategic partnership with India to counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Yet this partnership may not be smooth because of some perceptual and strategic differences between the two nations. Ashley J Tellis (2012) observes that the U S considers Indian Ocean as a 'Global Common' or As Alfred Mahan terms as 'great highway – a wide common, whereas India considers it as a' coherent sub-region or 'Indian Ocean Society' with distinct cultural and historical linkages and commonness among the littoral states. Some scholars like C Udai Bhaskar and Geoffrey Kemp (2011) find that due to different perception between India and the US on the position of Pakistan and Iran, strategic partnership faces hurdles. However, these writers comment that both countries have certain common interests like control of piracy and defining the rules of road for the use of global commons, which provide opportunity for maritime partnership and cooperation. The fundamental problem is that the US has larger global issues which affect the prospects of Indo-US maritime partnership, whereas Indian stakes are largely regional in nature.

Also there are certain other factors of compulsive nature which restrict the scope of rivalry between India and China. The rivalry between India and China may not take hot form as both have learned to live under suspicion for long time and both have stake in the existing global order as their rise is the product of this order. Stuenkel (2013) argues that given the internal problems and the bilateral economic engagement between the two, they will not go for another war. Rasgotra (2014) also concludes that their shared objectives should underpin greater cooperation rather than competition between India and China. In this interdependent world, the most likely scenario is that China's valid strategic interests will be accommodated in the Indo-Pacific region with some friction. The predominance maritime position of the US will have stabilizing effect and it is likely to play a balancing maritime game in the region. The US navy is still far superior to China's. Again, as Nagao (2012) argues that Chinese navy will have disadvantage in far distant operations. The prevailing strategic equations and China's needs as emerging

economy will deter her from any maritime adventure in the Indian Ocean in the near future.

### Notes

1. The figures of naval strength of the US, China and India are derived from two sources: (a) Greenfield, Daniel (2012). Is the US Navy Big Enough to Take on China and Iran? Available At: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2012/dgreenfield/is-the-us-navy-big-enough-to-take-on-china-and-iran/> and (b) Indian Navy (2014). Available At: <http://indiannavy.nic.in/naval-fleet/ship>.
2. India has built a road from Afghanistan to the Gulf of Oman. The Zaranj - Delaram road, built by India, is part of a larger Indo-Iranian project that will connect Kandahar and Herat to Iran's Chahbahar Port on the Persian Gulf, a new Indian-financed port in Iran. A railway line is also planned along with Zaranj-Delaram road in Afghanistan. This project will provide India with new sea access point to Central Asia through Persian Gulf.

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