

Ambitions of Great Powers in Indian Ocean Region: Impacts on Regional Maritime Stability

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Abstract

The Indian Ocean Region has emerged as the central locus of geopolitical contestation and strategic aspirations of global and regional powers due to its centrality in international trade, energy transit, and security concerns. This article looks at the ambitions of key great powers—primarily the United States, China, and India, though Pakistan and other regional powers such as Australia, Japan, and Middle Eastern states also contribute to shaping the IOR's evolving strategic environment. PRC, of late, has increased its footprint in the Indian Ocean Region under the auspices of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. This rising Chinese presence in the region is a cause of concern for India, which sees this as an effort to strategically encircle her. This has grave implications for its so-called role as a net security provider in the region and its national security. To counterbalance the Chinese moves in the IOR, India has undertaken a number of actions, which in turn raises the geopolitical anxieties of China, thus prompting her to take counter-reactions. The rationale behind China's strategy to move from near-seas to the far-seas is discussed in this paper. Increasing Chinese presence has made India realize its goal of becoming a major maritime power more aggressively, often taking actions perceived as offensive by China, hence leading to countermeasures. This has ensued a chain of actions, reactions, and counter-actions among these competing states having far-reaching consequences for the region and the world. This research argues that the Chinese footprint is driven mostly by its economic ambitions and finds military aspects associated with the BRI to be perceived threats, given that in reality, China faces many vulnerabilities in the IOR. Thus, it is unlikely that it will build bases with an offensive intention. Instead, the growing Chinese presence in the region could be explained by developing Chinese apprehensions about the security of its SLOCs. Besides, possible areas of cooperation between both India and China and the future of their rivalry are also predicted while suggesting some measures for both of them.

Keywords: Malacca Dilemma, Maritime, Indian Ocean, BRI, Indo-China competition, SLOCs,

Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region is a huge, strategically important area covering the waters of the Indian Ocean, enclosed on three sides by the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Australia. It constitutes the third-largest ocean in the world, covering approximately 20 percent of the Earth's water

surface. The IOR, rich in natural resources, plays the role of an important pivot in international trade and transportation of energy; therefore, it has been a prime focus in terms of international politics, security, and economics. This region comprises over 38 coastal states and a plethora of island nations, including leading actors such as India, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and South Africa, plus key strategic chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and Bab-el-Mandeb. The IOR has conventionally been a hub of cultural exchange, trade, and maritime exploration. Nowadays, it has been turned into a hotbed of geopolitics, finding itself right in the middle of global shipping lanes and a site of increased competition for the use of maritime resources. In addition to this is the growing involvement of major world powers that seek to exploit influence in the area. The IOR is equidistant to critical energy-producing regions, especially in the Middle East and Africa, hence the reason it plays a very important role in global energy security in the transportation of oil and natural gas. Its strategic importance in global geopolitics is enormous, as in all overviews, the region has evolved to become an arena of cooperation and competition among the great powers. It sits at the crossroads of a number of major global trade routes, facilitation of a substantial portion of the world's seaborne trade. Key maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, for example, have nearly 20% of global oil supplies transported across it, and the Strait of Malacca is one of the most crowded sea lanes in the world, underpinning the IOR's role in moving goods, energy, and raw materials. Strategic Importance of Indian Ocean Region (IOR).¹ The IOR has been a vital factor in contemporary geopolitics, emerging as a pivot in the quest for international trade, energy security, and military strategy. Located amidst the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Australia, its unique position empowers it as an indispensable space for the flow of goods, energy, and strategic influence. IOR gets its strategic importance not only from geopolitical and economic value but also from the critical maritime routes through which a large portion of global trade and energy transport takes place. Geopolitical and Economic Importance The IOR holds a central place in global geopolitics due to its location at the crossroads of key regions such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The IOR gains geopolitical significance due to proximity with major regional and global powers like India, China, the United States, Australia, and the Middle East. It thus naturally positions regional powers and smaller regional states with interests in the region that variously vie for influence over the area for reasons of economic gain, security, or military advantage.

Key Maritime Chokepoints

The IOR has a number of critical maritime chokepoints that control access to the vital sea routes for global trade. These include:

The Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20% of the world's oil passes from the Persian Gulf to global markets, including Europe, the United States, and Asia. It is a narrow waterway through which oil exports from the Middle East are supposed to flow into the rest of the world.

The Strait of Malacca is a narrow waterway between Malaysia and Indonesia, through which around a quarter of the world's trade passes, including oil, LNG, and containerized cargo.

Bab-el-Mandeb Strait: This connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and gives an easy and direct route to the Suez Canal, considered one of the most crucial trade routes on the globe since it connects Europe to Asia and Africa. The separate chokepoints serve as sea commerce highways for the international commerce supply chain. Any disruption of flow within any such route has far-reaching consequences on world trade, energy markets, and security.

¹ Manuel, A & Gates, R. (2016). India And China, The New Superpowers. <https://iis.berkeley.edu/india-and-chinanew-superpowers>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

Global Economic Hub

The Indian Ocean has become an economic lifeline for most of the world's major and emerging economies. Nearly 60 percent of the world's oil shipment, as well as very large quantities of natural gas, coal, and other critical commodities, pass through the IOR. It links the oil-rich states of the Middle East to the global economy, thereby acting like an important artery for global energy commerce. The IOR also facilitates trade between rapidly growing economies in Asia, Africa, and Australia, with port cities such as Singapore, Dubai, Mumbai, Durban, and Perth acting as critical hubs for commerce and trade. Thus, this includes the global relevance of the IOR regarding energy resources but also transportation of manufactured goods, raw materials, and agricultural products. It also has undersea resources, such as fish stocks, oil, and natural gas, which remain largely unexploited but are receiving increasing attention from regional and other great powers intent on ensuring access to resources. As global demand for energy and natural resources continues to grow, the economic importance of the IOR will only increase.

Maritime Routes and Energy Security

The oceanic routes across the Indian Ocean are some of the busiest and most strategic routes anywhere in the world, carrying not only vital goods but also forming part of the energy security of many countries. This is so because much of the world's energy resources, especially oil and gas, are produced in the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Southeast Asia, and thus the region's maritime routes are critical to transporting these resources to global markets.

1. Energy Transportation

The IOR serves as a link connecting the chain of supply for oil and natural gas at an international level. Along the Persian Gulf—one of the most critical oil-producing regions in the world—the Strait of Hormuz is commonly used for all its crude exports. For the oil-exporting countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, among others, the IOR is indispensable as a conduit for their supplies of energy. Disrupting shipping in this region—be it from piracy, military conflict, or natural disasters—can give rise to extraordinary increases in global energy, and thus oil prices.² Besides oil, the IOR has an additional crucial aspect: LNG cargoes, especially from the Persian Gulf to the main consumers in the world market, such as India, China, and Japan. Amid countries seeking uptakes of greener energy resources, natural gas is increasingly looked upon as a "bridge" fuel, so the importance of the region in the energy markets of the globe increases.

2. Vulnerability of Chokepoints

Given the fact that the IOR ships a huge volume of oil and natural gas around the world, the security of the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Hormuz as maritime chokepoints draws great interest in terms of global energy security. Narrow waterways of economic importance are especially susceptible to blockades, piracy, or military conflict. A disruption in these areas can have cascading impacts on the world energy markets, which might further lead to volatile prices, supply shortages, and geopolitical tensions. For example, a military strike against Iran in the Strait of Hormuz would badly impair oil supplies to the largest global consumers like China, India, and Europe. Territorial disputes regarding South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca are bound to imply a range of risks related to the secure transportation of goods and energy to thus impact on the supply of vital resources.

3. The Competition for Energy Resources is Strategic

The energy competition is indeed increasing in the IOR. The increased energy competition has indeed boosted the strategic importance of the IOR. China and India, as two of the world's largest

² Malik, M.J. (1995). Sino—Indian Rivalry in Myanmar: Implications for Regional Security. Contemporary Southeast

energy consumers, have increasingly sought to secure access to the region's energy resources. The BRI from China, with investments in key infrastructures and port facilities not only in countries like Pakistan but including Sri Lanka and Somalia, epitomizes how China uses its economic and military powers to secure its energy requirements. However, for India, the IOR is a question of national security and economic development, given its role in protecting energy supply routes and maintaining regional waters within its purview. India has considerably ramped up its naval presence in the IOR through joint naval exercises with the United States, Australia, and Japan as part of the Quad format, in addition to deep engagement in multilateral security formats such as IORA.

Ambitions of Global Powers in the IOR

The Indian Ocean Region is fast turning into a theatre of hectic geopolitical rivalry. Major global powers such as the United States, China, and India are competing with one another against their ambitions in this region. The United States, who until now enjoyed the pre-eminence of being the greatest naval power in the IOR, is increasingly being supplanted from its position as the traditional security guarantor of the region. Indeed, while the U.S. Navy is an overwhelming force, regional influence is relative, brought forth by the rise of other regional powers and China's expanding presence. The dynamic rise of economic and military power in China has only recently thrown the attention of the United States onto countering that power, pivoting to Indo-Pacific. But already there is growing regional resistance to maritime dominance, relying more on multilateral alliances like Quad and AUKUS. First, China's IOR ambitions stem from its need to secure access to vital maritime trade routes and energy supplies crucial for its growing economy.

However, China invested in port infrastructure across the region—from Gwadar in Pakistan through its BRI to Hambantota in Sri Lanka with the express aim of expanding its strategic footprint. This is in keeping with China's broader strategy of challenging the United States while securing its trade routes and consolidating political and economic influence over smaller states in the region.³ Meanwhile, this growth also props up China's strategic long-term goal of becoming the most important maritime power in the Indo-Pacific. The Indian Ocean has a special subject for strategic relevance with respect to geographical positioning at the center in the region. India has an articulated ambition to attain regional hegemony and simultaneously deny any other foreign power—most significantly, China—standably, any meaningful platform in what India perceives as its backyard. The spiraling presence of China in the Indian Ocean challenges India's perceived traditional sphere of influence and hence jacks up its regional insecurity. Such a resolve to secure its strategic interests is well evidenced in India's moves to strengthen its naval capabilities, develop its defense relationships with like-minded states through the Quad, and even declare its rights by initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium - IONS. The need to balance regional security imperatives with an aspiration for good economic relations with the IOR states, which include China, further complicates its role in the region. The regional insecurity, along with the economic ambition, brings into light the logical approach behind India's expanding naval presence and strategic policies regarding the balance of power for containing regional influence of China. Regional Alliances and Security in the IOR This strategic importance is manifested in a number of regional and multilateral alliances aimed at tackling common security challenges, promoting economic cooperation, and safeguarding maritime trade routes. While global powers, in different ways, are striving for influence in this pivotal region, the balance often tends to come at the cost

³ Shehzad, I., Haris, M., Jamal, F., & ul Hamid, M. (2025). Impact of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on dynamics of the Kashmir Conflict between India and Pakistan. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(1), 1884-1889.

of smaller states' choice either to align with such powers or seek neutrality from growing geopolitical tensions. Against this backdrop, alliances such as Quad and AUKUS are shaping up as a significant tool of regional security and power projection in IOR. Quad: Deepening Security Cooperation in Indo-Pacific.⁴ The Quad is a multilateral framework comprising India, Australia, Japan, and the United States aimed at foiling the increasing influence of China in both the Indo-Pacific and IOR. Although the concept of the Quad was born in the post-World War II security structures, it received a fresh fillip over the last couple of years based on concerns interlinked with China's undeclared fiat over the South China Sea and its growing economic-military footprint in the IOR.⁵ Quad is a tool to check China's expansionism for India at least more significantly in the maritime and economic domains. Security cooperation, without doubt, we have certainly taken a big leap forward: joint naval exercises, Malabar; strategic dialogues; and everything else from maritime security to cyber defense. These range from the protection of freedom of navigation through vital sea lanes, counterpiracy, right down to issues relating to non-traditional security threats such as terrorism and natural disasters. On that point alone, Quad members all have an interest in seeing an open, rules-based order in the region where no single power, mainly China, is able to dominate the maritime space. The role of the Quad does not end with security-related issues, as member states work on regional economic cooperation, building of infrastructure, and humanitarian assistance. The Quad's emphasis on connectivity like the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative and the investment in infrastructures gives the regional states an option to look at China's BRI and, therefore, more options for economic partnerships.⁶ But while the Quad is gaining in importance, there are differences in national interests and approaches that work against cohesion. For instance, Japan and Australia, though sharing Indian concerns about China's maritime ambitions, have very healthy economic relations with China, which makes the task of the Quad acting as a counterbalancing unity to Chinese influence in the region quite complex.

AUKUS: Strengthening Military Alliances in the IOR

More recently, the AUKUS security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States has further altered the Indo-Pacific security landscape and that of IOR. Fundamentally, AUKUS is meant to build advanced military cooperation with an emphasis on nuclear-powered submarines, cyber defense, and artificial intelligence. A trilateral partnership is seen as directly aimed at responses to growing Chinese military presence combined with its increasing military assertiveness in the region, especially against its noted ambitions over the South China Sea and investments in naval capabilities.⁷ The AUKUS pact, therefore, flags a significant boosting of the defense ties by the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies. Part of the Southern Leg of the IOR; Australia is considered to occupy a pivotal position in the security architecture. The nuclear-powered submarines AUKUS reportedly intend to give to Australia will mark a remarkable build-up in the naval capability of Australia for power projection and strategic presence across IOR, especially when tensions are growing due to China's military footprint, which is developing in the region. China views AUKUS with suspicion and sees it as a ploy on the part of the powers to

⁴ https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ER.FSH.PROD.MT?end=2016&start=2013&view=chart&year_high_desc=true. "Total Value of CPEC Is \$50 Billion Not \$62 Billion". Obortunity, Last modified January 31, 2020.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ https://web.archive.org/web/20090521113622/http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090518_10. "Total Fisheries Production (Metric Tons)". data.worldbank.org, Last modified 2020.

⁷ Shehzad, I., Haris, M., Jamal, F., & ul Hamid, M. (2025). Impact of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on dynamics of the Kashmir Conflict between India and Pakistan. Social Science Review Archives, 3(1), 1884-1889.

encircle and contain its rise in the Indo-Pacific. China's strong opposition to the pact, therefore, underlines both the brewing Cold War rivalry in the region, as also the strategic significance of the IOR to the global leading powers for gaining control of strategic maritime chokepoints and energy routes. Pakistan's Strategic Role in the IOR In a similar vein, Pakistan also wields an extremely important role in the IOR, although this is oftentimes tailored according to its strategic partnership with China and its security concerns vis-à-vis India. Its particular geostrategic position at the confluence of the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and Central Asia provides its own unique view of this region.⁸ This has turned Pakistan-an actor in regional security-into a strategic position to use for furtherance of its national interests, particularly relating to its relations with India and the influence of such external powers as China and the United States. The most salient plank of this would be the relationship with China through the CPEC. In this context, Gwadar Port Development under the CPEC makes Pakistan an important node on the BRI and adds to its growth as an important maritime entry in the IOR. For China, it gives direct access to the Arabian Sea, bypassing the Strait of Malacca, and enhances the strategic leverages of Pakistan in the region. In the meantime, Pakistan's military strategy is directed at sustaining striking naval potential in order to safeguard sea borders, especially in view of the growing Indian influence in the region. Needless to say, on its part, the Pakistan Navy came to play an increasingly important role in strengthening its capabilities in the IOR and simultaneously in cooperating with China and other regional powers on issues related to maritime security. Joint exercises and security partnerships between Pakistan and China underpin naval engagements along the China-Pakistan axis as a feature of the regional security architecture. Meanwhile, these are being complemented with Pakistan's initiatives taken in the regional security frameworks of IORA and IONS, opening avenues of cooperation with the regional states while balancing its strategic rivalry with India. The role of Pakistan in the SCO and its security linkage with both China and Russia further complicates regional dynamics and makes Pakistan a partner of paramount importance toward shaping the future architecture of security in the IOR. Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region.⁹ Besides being a hotbed for international trade and transportation of energy, the Indian Ocean Region presents a number of security challenges which threaten stability within the region. Security challenges emanating from interstate conflict to non-traditional threats of piracy, terrorism, and environmental degradation are multi-faceted by nature. Meanwhile, regional security dynamics have become increasingly complicated, and from states to non-state actors, all of them shape up the security landscape as the region keeps on growing in geopolitical significance. Each of the regions that compose the IOR-from East Africa into the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia-possesses a very distinct set of security issues that take on both local and global importance.¹⁰ With its presence of vital sea routes, regional states and great powers jostle in their influence and security control amidst a struggle to address natural resource competition and transnational security threats. As trade and energy flows navigate the chokepoints of the Indian Ocean, regional vulnerabilities in a range of insecurity manifestations become more visible. The threats to maritime security Issues of maritime security remain the most critical in the Indian Ocean because this region contains some of the world's busiest sea lanes. A very important point here is that chokepoints are concerned with the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Bab-el-Mandeb, part of this region, and their decisive role in controlling global trade and energy flow. Considering the strategic relevance of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://obortunity.org/2020/01/31/total-value-of-cpec-is-50-billion-not-62-billion/>. Abi-Habib, Maria. "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up A Port". The New York Times, June 25, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>. Ali, Ghulam.

"China's

¹⁰ Ibid.

the region, this may further imply that disruption to the flow of the maritime traffic across this region could have implication and impacts on the global economy at large or that of the concerned countries themselves.

1. Naval Militarization and Rivalries

As fleet build-ups by China, India, the United States, and Australia continue in the IOR, a growing number of analysts have voiced their concerns regarding regional militarization and prospects for conflict over the control of key maritime routes. Strategic competition also comes with the growing Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean through infrastructure projects on foreign territory, particularly those in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, which the Indians view as a direct challenge to their dominance at sea. While the regional presence of the U.S. Navy is created to defend interests and keep pathways free; an emergent rivalry between it and China makes regional security dynamics more complex.¹¹ It is not just the major powers; even the regional navies are modernizing their fleets to contribute to mounting tensions over the maritime territorial disputes, particularly relating to regions such as the South China Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Clashes on the sea are highly likely to take place amidst rising tensions which may affect the crucial sea lanes and trade routes through which the global economy sustains.

2. Ecological and Natural Calamities

It is also confronted with a lot of natural disasters or hazards like cyclones, tsunamis, and oil spills that further imperil the security of navigation. Climate change--in the form of rising sea levels and severe weather conditions--increases the risk factor for countries comprising land that is very low above sea level. Coastal infrastructure could be damaged, thereby affecting trade and regional stability.

Piracy, Terrorism, and Regional Stability

The IOR has been a flash point for a number of non-traditional security threats, such as piracy and terrorism and has not only had destabilizing impacts in the region but also have impacted world trade and security as well.

1. Piracy

Piracy has emerged as a constant threat in different regions of the IOR mainly off the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia, the Strait of Malacca, and the Gulf of Aden. Piracy through these waters threatens not only the maritime trade but also the safety of sailors, protection of vital energy, and shipping lanes. Whereas the Somali piracy crisis peaked in the early 2000s and underpinned much-improved international cooperation and anti-piracy measures, it still remains huge. Piracy in the Strait of Malacca, while being brought down considerably in the last couple of years, is still a threat due to its strategic importance in this vital shipping route. The lack of effective governance and political instability provided countries like Somalia just the right mix of piracy with the militant groups and organized crime syndicates. Pirates prefer attacking cargo ships, oil tankers, and other small vessels for the opportunity to hold these vessels for ransom or bring away high-value cargo.¹² To contain piracy, there is international involvement in anti-piracy operation roles, even though as was initially spearheaded by the United States and other naval forces of China,

¹¹ Mohan, C. Raja. "The Indian Ocean and the Emerging Strategic Landscape." *International Studies Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2019.

¹² ul Hamid, M., Karim, A., Shams, Z., & Inayat, K. (2025). The Rise of China and Its Impact on Global Governance: Emergence of A New World Order. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(3), 2213-2221.

India and the European Union; even so, there are challenges to fulfilling the maritime security of the Indian Ocean breadth.¹³

2. Terrorism and Fundamentalism the IOR is also a terrorism-prone region;

it serves as a hotbed for the emergence of fundamentalist organizations, most especially in countries like Somalia, Tanzania Afghanistan, and the Maldives. In some areas of the region, extremist ideologies have combined with political instability to give birth to radicalization. Organizations such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Taliban have taken advantage of porous borders and weak governance in many IOR states to function with comparative impunity. Whereas the Arabian Peninsula, especially Yemen and Saudi Arabia, faced the development of terrorism against the background of the civil war in Yemen, the generally complex relation between India and Pakistan on the issue of Sir Creek in IOR.¹⁴ This makes the terrorist groups operating across the IOR a direct threat to regional stability and international shipping which could even destabilize key trading nations and disrupt economic flow.

3. Cross-border tensions and proxy conflicts One of the most persistent security challenges in the IOR has been political tensions among the regional states, especially between India and Pakistan. The two nuclear-armed neighbors have continuing disputes over Kashmir and other border issues that spill over into militancy and terrorism. Proxy conflicts, such as those between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan, make security even more complex in the region by mixing geopolitical rivalry with non-state violence. On top of these, there is the protracted conflict in Yemen and Syria, adding tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, entailing a further undermining of regional stability. These conflicts have indirect implications for the security of both the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz, two key maritime chokepoints, even though they may be unrelated to direct maritime operations.

Impacts on Regional Maritime Stability

This is in turn combined to create an overall impact on the stability in the IOR due to piracy, terrorism, and regional rivalries. The presence of competing national interests, political instability, and asymmetry in military capabilities makes the job of sustaining cooperative security structures hard for the nations in this region. Although some multilateral efforts have been undertaken towards the resolution of a few of these challenges, regional consensus on one hand and a variety of external powers elbowing their way for influence makes the efforts at securing the region quite complex. The arc of dissimilar threats in the maritime security environment in IOR makes for very important implications for global trade, energy security, and international relations.¹⁵ Ongoing piracy, the persistence of terrorism, and elaborate geopolitical rivalries undermine efforts at entrenching stability and safety in this crucial part of the world. Most likely, with new economic corridors being developed and as the maritime traffic in the region increases, these security challenges will remain well into the future, posing an even greater demand for greater international cooperation and regional collaboration to mitigate their impact.

Conclusion and Opinion The IOR, of its immense strategic significance, has remained a focal point of attention among global powers and regional players interested in competing influences and controls.¹⁶ No amount of words can overemphasize the role it has played so far in global trade, energy transport, and geopolitical relevance. Still, there are some serious security challenges relating to IOR, which include

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Malik, M.J. (1995). Sino—Indian Rivalry in Myanmar: Implications for Regional Security. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 16(2), 137-156. [https:// www.jstor.org /stable/25798241](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798241)

¹⁶ Ibid.

militarization of sea space, maritime disputes, piracy, terrorism, and regional rivalries. In a sense, with heightened tensions, an appreciation will emerge that a way will have to be found to square these various challenges with the central role of this region in global commerce and security. While the IOR militarization in the wake of global powers like China, India, and the United States, along with the developing reach of multilateral alliances such as Quad and AUKUS, does suggest elements of a shifting regional landscape, the security architecture remains complex and fragile. As new players and regional states like Pakistan, Australia, and Japan, along with many others, move on with their influence, their policies and partnerships would definitely shape the future of the region in times to come. This challenge has also entailed the realization that the Indian Ocean is as much a geopolitical playground as it is a global common.¹⁷ The sea has long served as a platform for peaceful trade, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation. It must not become a place of conflict but a space where nations can share and collaborate in mutual interest. We respect inevitable political change and an adjusted balance of power in the region, but let us be reminded: the ocean belongs to humanity. In a world now so connected, we can opt for economic prosperity, maritime security, and sustainable development-or for conflict. While indeed a lot of places exist where men may fight, the sea is not to be included among such places. With its critical maritime routes and chokepoints, IOR has to remain a platform for trade and cooperation and not conflict. The peaceful, open, and secure waters of the Indian Ocean are a collective interest of all nations in and out of the IOR for facilitating global trade and human development. There is a need for regional cooperation, and there has to be an international collaboration to address conventional and non-conventional security threats.¹⁸ As the future of IOR gets shaped, the accent has to fall on building trust and fostering peaceful coexistence in these shared waters. The Indian Ocean should be less a zone of contention than a common good, where nations can seek to unite with collective strength for a vision of a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous future toward which all can be headed.

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¹⁷ Manuel, A & Gates, R. (2016). India And China, The New Superpowers.

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¹⁸ Mehrotra, L. (2012). India's Look East Policy: Its Origin and Development. Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 7(1), 75-<https://www.jstor.org/stable/45341805>

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