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## **CHINA STRATEGY AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIA'S SECURITY**

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### **Introduction**

China's growing naval presence in and around the Indian Ocean region, beginning in areas such as China's Hainan Island in the South China Sea, should be troubling for India. Of particular note is what has been termed as China's 'string of pearls' strategy, some elements of which are no doubt hyped, that has significantly expanded its strategic depth in India's backyard. It is possible to explain the construction of these ports and facilities by China along India's periphery on purely economic. India inevitably views the sum total of China's diplomatic and military efforts in the Indian Ocean as projecting power vis-a-vis competing rivals.

Moreover, most Chinese naval facilities in the Indian Ocean are dual use in nature and no serious strategy can discount their future military use. China is merely following in the footsteps of other major global powers who have established military bases abroad to secure their interests. There is only one kind of great power, and one kind of great power tradition. China is not going to be any different. The sooner India acknowledges this, the better it will be able to manage China's rise and protect its own vital interests.

The naval fleet may seek supplies or recuperate at appropriate harbours in Seychelles or other countries as needed during escort missions. China has already cemented its foothold in the Indian Ocean by signing contract with the UN backed International Seabed Authority to gain rights to explore polymetallic sulphide ore deposit in Indian Ocean

The Contract awarded to a Chinese association exclusive rights to explore a 10,000 sq. km. of international seabed in the southwest Indian Ocean. The base in Seychelles is regarded significant by analysts as China is about to launch its first aircraft carrier. It is currently undergoing final trials.

The decision to establish its first naval base abroad was taken during Chinese Defence Minister, Gen Liang Guanglie's goodwill visit to Seychelles during the first week of



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December 2011. During the visit, Seychelles Foreign Affairs Minister, Jean-Paul Adam said that his country has invited China to set up a military base on the archipelago to beef up the fight against piracy. “We have invited the Chinese government to set up a military presence on Mahe to fight the pirate attacks that the Seychelles face on a regular basis,” Adam was quoted as saying in the media reports. “For the time being China is studying this possibility because it has economic interests in the region and Beijing is also involved in the fight against piracy,” he said.

### **China's Interest in the Indian Ocean Region**

Looking specifically at China’s growing interface with the Indian Ocean rim, it was at the Oman Special Session that the Council of Ministers of Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC) had formally conferred on China the status of Dialogue Member. While China’s official first response was to emphasis on “tremendous potentials for economic and trade cooperation: this sure had far reaching political connotations for Beijing. China’s induction into the IOR had been facilitated by factors like the rise of China coinciding with the collapse of the former Soviet Union as also new trends of globalization strengthening China’s engagement with the Indian Ocean littoral countries.

However, other than these immediate politico-diplomatic reason for engaging the Indian Ocean rim networks, China’s enduring and more visible reasons for such enthusiasm and success in engaging Indian Ocean littoral may include the following :

- China’s new enthusiasm about China-IOR engagement fully conforms to Beijing’s inherent macro vision about its self-profile and priorities of gradually but surely moving beyond its immediate periphery into the larger region of the sea lanes of its concern.
- Secondly, following rapid regional and global political developments and success of China’s economic experiments since the early 1900s, China has evolved an unprecedented resources capability to sustain its initiatives and attraction vis-a-vis the Indian Ocean littoral.
- Thirdly, China’s foreign policy has lately witnessed a general strategic shift from inward-looking bilateral channels to now multilateralism. In this, engagement with IOR remains only one more example of China’s increasing participation in several Asian and global forums.
- And finally, while China still finds numerous hurdles un-developing its access either into the Atlantic or the Pacific Ocean which involve more powerful adversaries, the



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generous attitude amongst the largely weak states of Indian Ocean seem to greatly facilitate China's involvement in the Indian Ocean rim.

### **Security Implications for India**

On analyzing the geo-politics of the regions and economic dependence of the world on the region, the following factors emerge clearly :

- The region holds 65 percent of the world's known reserves of strategic raw material, 31 percent of gas and more than 50 percent of the world's oil exports.
- The region has some of the fastest growing economies of the world.
- Strategic SLOCs pass through most volatile choke points which have the potential to affect the global economy and trade.
- Energy security is the key to economic growth; growth of the ASEAN countries is dependent on flow of oil from the Gulf.
- The Indian Ocean Rim countries are not part of any multilateral military alliance; as a result, they are at the mercy of regional and extra-regional powers to protect their strategic interests.

India is in the show window of the IOR and is in a position to influence and dominate the region due to its geo-strategic location, its size and its economic prowess. More importantly, India is willy-nilly the sole regional power in the region unless it surrenders the geo-strategic advantage to China and other extra-regional powers. A Chinese foray in the Indian Ocean is a calibrated move to exert influence and reduce Indo- US influence in the region. To achieve this game plan, China has already established its foothold in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and the geo-strategically located Indian Ocean island state-Mauritius. According to a Chinese studies expert in South Africa, "Mauritius is the key economy in the Indian Ocean region. Traditionally, Mauritius has been under the Indian Ocean region. Traditionally, Mauritius has been under the Indian sphere of influence. Now, China is looking to challenge that." The advantage which India had over China with regard to choke-points, SLOCs passing through the '6' and '9' degree channels and Chinese vulnerability to the Malacca predicament is slowly diminishing with the increased presence of Chinese lily pad in the form of the "string of pearls". Therefore, it puts Indian strategic and economic interests at risk. The impact of increased influence of the China Pakistan nexus and the rise of non-state actors will have the following security impact on India.



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- Threat to the SLOCs directly impinging on economic security. This threat can come from both state and non-state actors on the high seas.
  - India has a large number of offshore assets located in various lookouts to exploit vulnerabilities should India fail to provide security and deterrence in the years ahead.
  - Assets located on the sea shore, including refineries and container ports, are threatened.
  - India has 1,197 islands and atolls spread in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. Large numbers of them are uninhabited and are vulnerable to occupation by adversaries and non-state actors with or without proxy support of traditional competitors.
  - The India Diaspora has faced threats during internal conflicts and even during war. The gulf evacuation and exodus of the Indian community from Uganda during Idi Amin's regime and recent evacuation from Yemen are examples of the vulnerability that the Indian Diaspora faces in the region.
  - India has intervened in Sri Lanka (1987) and Maldives (1988) at the request of the host countries without a UN mandate. It was obligatory for India to respond, and respond with speed, to come to the aid of both the Indian Ocean Region island countries at a time of crisis. Therefore, it is an obligation, and part of military diplomacy to be prepared to protect the interest of allies and partners.

In a speech several months before he became the President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam summed up the nation's experience: In 3,000 years of our history, people from all over the world have come and invaded us, captured our lands, conquered our minds. From Alexander onwards, the Greeks, the Turks, the Mughals, the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Dutch, all of them came and looted us, took over what was ours. yet we have not done this to any nation.

The answer to the above security predicament lies in capability building for military intervention. India can no longer remain a mute spectator to the security implications of rising competition in the Indian Ocean region. So far, intervention has been on humanitarian grounds, for a legitimate national cause and under the UN mandate. India has never resorted to military intervention for territorial aspirations or against the will of the host country. As a regional power, India must not shy away from fighting "just wars for a just cause". The tide is changing and India should enunciate the policy that it will intervene if stated red lines are crossed by either state or non-state actors.



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## **India's Response**

India's Strategic Options. In the long term, IOR and the resultant diverging interests in the region coupled with economic and geopolitical compulsions may create a flash point leading to a military confrontation. Therefore, in order to have successful diplomacy backed by credible military strength all efforts must be concentrated to attain 'strategic engagement' or 'counter-strategic encirclement' of China to curtail the might of the Red Dragon. Former President Kalam had said "Strength respects strength".

## **Conclusion**

India remains concerned about the rising power and influence of China, now the world's second largest economy, projected to surpass the U.S. in size as soon as 2020. India has for some time been alarmed by China's military links with Pakistan and its growing presence in the Indian Ocean. We are fortunate that a far sighted naval leadership launched the navy on the path of self-reliance nearly 40 years ago. Our shipyards have delivered to us till today, over 80 warships, of which the latest warship has an indigenous content of 85 percent.

As we know, our shipyards have reached a level of competence where the Indian Navy has today on order with them, 21 vessels which cover the full spectrum of warship building: from patrol boats, landing ships and corvettes, to frigates, destroyers and an aircraft carrier; and of course, submarines in a few years time. We have also aggressively sought out centers of excellence, whether in the public or private sectors, and Indian industry now supports our warship building endeavors by producing ship-building steel, propulsion systems (steam and diesel), gear boxes, gun mounts, torpedo tubes, power generation, air conditioning, hydraulic, pneumatic and hundreds of other ship-board systems. Having said that, we must also admit that total self-reliance is a goal that is still very distant: that is if we want to aim for it at all. We have, and we will continue to have platforms, weapons, sensors and systems of foreign origin in our inventory for a long time to come.

In the coming decades, India will be among the foremost centers of power- economic, technological and cultural. This needs to be matched by a concomitant accretion of military power, of which the maritime power will be a critical dimension. The Indian Navy can be the catalyst for peace, tranquility and stability in the Indian Ocean Region, across a wide range of conditions and circumstances that one can envisage in peacetime. It can be used to engage other maritime nations and extend a hand of friendship and cooperation. Its robust



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presence in a particular area or region could contribute to stability and ensure peace. Lastly, it can act as a strong deterrent with the ability to prevent conflict, or to respond, should it become necessary. We are confident that the maritime strategy that India will craft will protect our interest and that will be equal to the challenges of our times.<sup>1</sup>

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