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Sino-Indian Rivalry and the contemporary significance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace in the Asian Century

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Abstract. With Asia is becoming the pivot of world affairs, the Indian Ocean is certain to become the main theatre where the great battles for world supremacy will be played. Asia's economic success to a greater extent relies on the peace and stability of the Indian Ocean. In 1971, during the Cold War period, having realized the growing tensions in the Indian Ocean, it was declared as a Zone of Peace. However, the growing Chinese presence the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative, has made India rethink of its strategy in the Indian Ocean as the country's security is intertwined with the security of the Indian Ocean. With Sino-Indian relations have always been highly complicated to comprehend, both India and China are now competing for supremacy in the Indian Ocean for both diverse and common interests. This growing Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean, has put the security and stability in the Indian Ocean in uncharted waters. Against this backdrop, this research attempts to examine the nature and scope of Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean, its impact on Asia-the next global powerhouse and importance of maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean to ensure continuous economic progress of the Asian region. This qualitative research is a desk study research based on both primary and secondary data. As far the findings are concerned, the interests or rather the hierarchy of the interests of China and India are different. While the main concern of China in the Indian Ocean is to secure Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), India's security relies on the security in the Indian Ocean. The challenge remains as to how to incorporate these diverse and conflicting challenges for mutual gain. As it stands now, this growing rivalry has significant impact on the IOR as well as the economic progress of the region. Thus, it is vital for both India and China to compromise and cooperate in order to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Keywords. Asian Century, China, India, Indian Ocean, Belt and Road Initiative

Introduction

Today the world is at a crucial juncture as it witnessing a global power shift from West to East with Asia gradually becoming the pivot of international affairs (Abeysinghe & Wijesinghe, 2021, p.545). The Asian Development Bank, in its report "Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century" notes;

"Asia is in the midst of historic transformation. If it continues to grow on its recent trajectory, it could by 2050 accounts for more than half of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), trade and investment and widespread affluence" (ADB, 2011, p.01)

With Asia becoming the pivot of world affairs, the Indian Ocean is certain to become the main theatre where the great battle for world supremacy will be played. Looking at world

history, the Indian Ocean has always been at the center of discussion. Its strategic location, availability of natural resources among many other reasons have attracted the attention of the international community. The great American naval strategist Alfred Mahan once prophesized 'Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. The ocean is the key to seven seas. In the 21st century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters' (Cited in Pant, 2009, p.281). As Mahan rightly pointed out the one who has the upper hand in the Indian Ocean has the ability to control Asia. Looking at the Indian Ocean Region, it is rich in natural resources, has critical fish stock, and is home to some of the world's fastest growing economies. 40% of the world's offshore oil production comes from the Indian Ocean. Moreover, 80% of the world's oil shipments travel through its waters, with the region at the heart of connections that extend on to the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Europe, and, the Americas (Davis & Balls, 2019, p.01.) Looking at today's context of international relations, China and India are at a competition in becoming the regional power in Asia. While some may have already declared China as Asia's supreme power and it is only a matter of time when it overtakes the USA and becoming the world leading power, in reality there is much to be decided in Asia. India, being one of the emerging economies in Asia and located in the Indian Ocean, it certainly has a great role in shaping both regional as well as international politics. Sino-Indian relations have always been hot and cold. The two countries both compete and cooperate. Today, from a geopolitical perspective, this rivalry takes place in the Indian Ocean which was declared as a zone of peace in 1971. Against this backdrop, this study attempts understand the significance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace in the Asian Century with special reference to Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean.

Literature Review

Ever since people started to travel via seas, sea power has been at the core of international relations. Looking at the course of world history, sea power had been a major aspect of national power and if any country had aspirations to dominate world politics, it was imperative for that country to have its authority over the seas. The American naval officer and strategist Alfred Mahan noted that notwithstanding all the familiar and unfamiliar dangers of the sea, both travel and traffic by water have always been easier and cheaper than by land (Mahan, 1890, p.25). According to Mahan, the sea lines are, the most numerous and easy, and they will probably be determinative of the courses of trade (Mahan, 1900, p.125). He identifies sea as the greatest medium of communication of commerce (ibid, p.126). Underscoring the contribution of sea power to the victory of the allied forces in the World War II, O'Conner (1969) noted that without a victory at sea, there would have been no victory on land or in the air. As per Nohara (2017) global leading powers all associated their status to the strength of their navies. Looking at the present context, maritime transport remains the backbone of globalized trade and manufacturing supply chain, as more than four fifths of world merchandise trade by value is carried by sea (UNCTAD, 2019). Today the world is at a crucial juncture as it is witnessing a global power shift from West to East with Asia gradually becoming the pivot of international affairs (Abeyasinghe & Wijesinghe, 2021, p.545). As Asia continues its economic ascent, two centuries of western domination of the world, first under Pax Britannica, and then under Pax Americana, are coming to an end (Haass & Kupchan, 2021). According to the Asian Development Bank, Asia could by 2050 accounts for more than half of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), trade and investment, and enjoy widespread affluence (ADB, 2011). With Asia becoming the pivot of international affairs, the Indian Ocean is set to become the main battleground where the struggle for world supremacy will be played. Alfred Mahan once prophesized whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. The Ocean is the key to seven

seas. In the 21st century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters (Cited in Pant, 2009). A number of studies have recognized this growing significance of Indian Ocean (Green & Shearer, 2012; Pant, 2009; Davis and Balls, 2019). Ghosh (2012) defines the Indian Ocean as the birthplace of maritime civilization. According to Davis and Balls (2019) the Indian Ocean was globalized long before the Atlantic was. There were well established trading routes around the Indian Ocean littoral, centuries before European ships made their way to the ocean in the 1500s. Jaishankar (2016) points out three elements which make the Indian Ocean significant. They are; location, population and availability of natural resources. This geopolitical and geoeconomic significance has made the region a hub of great power rivalry and the struggle for its domination has been a perennial feature of global politics (Pant, 2009). As this power struggle in the Indian Ocean was intensified during the Cold war, in 1971, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2832 (XXVI), by which the Indian Ocean, within limits to be determined, together with the airspace above and the ocean floor subjacent thereto, was designated for all time as zone of peace. The Assembly also called upon the great powers to enter into consultations with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean with a view to halting the further escalation of their military presence there and to eliminating from the area all bases, military installations, and logistical supply facilities, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (United Nations office for Disarmament Affairs, 1983, p.375).

China and India, being two giant economies in Asia continue to show great interest in the Indian Ocean. As far as China is concerned, its actions abroad are propelled by its need to secure energy, metals, and strategic minerals in order to support the rising living standards of its immense population, which amounts to about one-fifth of world's total (Kaplan, 2010,p.24). Robert Kaplan identifies China as an uber realist power. According to him, China seeks to develop a sturdy presence throughout the parts of Africa that are well endowed with oil and minerals and wants to secure port access throughout the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, which connect the hydrocarbon-rich Arab-Persian world to the Chinese Seaboard (ibid). When it comes to understanding contemporary Chinese influence over international affairs, the Belt and Road Initiative occupies a prominence place. As of January 2021, 140 countries are part of the BRI (Nedopil,2021a) The BRI is geared towards encouraging connectivity, economic flow, job opportunities, investment and consumption, cultural exchanges and the spirit of regional cooperation between Asia, Europe and Africa by creating jointly built trade routes emulating the ancient Silk Road (Lu et al,2018). During the period 2013-2018, by region, Asia has attracted the majority of BRI-related investment, and construction contracts, receiving just over half of such activity (Kong et al, 2019). Looking at the nature of Chinese investments, according to Russel and Berger (2020) port infrastructure is central to the BRI as they are critical to China's economy. Secure access to ports enables China to transport commodities to feed its industrial and domestic needs and to bring its products efficiently to market. Ports, and their associated sea-lanes have significant strategic value as conduits for energy as well as goods. Looking at the security aspect of the BRI, while China strives to downplay any military aspects or defense-related characteristics of the BRI or its specific projects (ibid), the available literature on BRI has brought forth the possible military dimension of the BRI (Russel & Berger, 2020; Brewster, 2018; Vaughn, 2018)

Looking at India's interests in the Indian Ocean, former Indian diplomat K.M. Panikkar reiterated that India's security lies on the Indian Ocean (Panikkar, 1945, p.92). Given country's location at the center of the Indian Ocean and the possession of over 7,500 kilometers of coastline, the Indian Ocean holds particular importance for India. Indian strategic thinkers have historically viewed the Indian Ocean as India's backyard and so have emphasized the need for India to play a greater role in underwriting its security and stability (Pant, 2009, p.281).

According to Berlin (2006), while India is a 'Continental' power, it occupies a central position in the Indian Ocean Region. As far the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean is concerned, it was only after China's BRI, India sensed a threat to its bilateral relationship with neighbors. As Anwer (2020) notes China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean Region challenges India dominated regional security architecture-as it leverages easy-cash and lucrative investment potentials to encourage smaller countries to tilt towards China.

Discussion

Sea power or authority over the oceans continues to remain a matter of greater concern in the decision-making process of any major power. Throughout the history of mankind authority over sea lanes had given states the upper hand in world affairs. Looking at today's context, particularly with the emergence of Asia as a great powerhouse, the Indian Ocean has become highly significant. The Indian Ocean covers a total area of 73.44 million square kilometers, and accounts for about 20% of the total ocean area in the world (Jiancheng, 2017). Moreover, some of the key choke points of oil transportation are also located in the Indian Ocean. They are; Malacca strait, Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Given this significance, it is no exaggeration to state that the Indian Ocean is the greatest geopolitical prize of the 21st century. The same fierce competition for supremacy in the Indian Ocean was observed during the Cold War as well.

Understanding the inception and evolution of Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace

While the Cold war period to a greater extent was shaped by the super power rivalry between the USA and USSR, the period also saw the rise of the Non-aligned movement, where the newly independent states decided not aligned with any of the two Cold War power blocs, instead to follow a non-aligned foreign policy approach promoting international peace and security. The non-aligned movement condemned colonialism, imperialism and arms race. Most of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries obtained independence during the post Second World War period were active members of the non-aligned movement. During this time, the littoral states in the region observed the growing Cold War rivalry in the Indian Ocean. As noted by Romyantev (1988), supremacy on the high seas always has been seen in the United States as one of the cornerstones of its policy aimed at domination. Romyantev further noted that during the Cold War period the USA began encircling the socialist countries including the USSR with a network of military blocs and bases, and setting up pro-American regimes in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. Wingerter (1977) identifies four driving factors behind the US military presence in the Indian Ocean Region during the Cold War. They are; the growing economic importance of the littoral regions to the United States; rapid spread of anti-European Colonial revolution, the 1960 Congo situation and the 1962 India-China war. A number of military alliances were formed under the leadership guidance of USA and most of the India Ocean Region states were members of those military alliances. While Iraq, Iran and Pakistan were part of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), Australia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Thailand were members of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). However, most of the IOR states perceived the growing military presence and rivalry as a threat to the peace and security of the region. Against this backdrop, in 1964, at the second NAM conference held in Cairo, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) under the premiership of Sirimavo Bandaranaike put forth the idea of declaring Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and tranquility and in 1970, at the 3rd NAM Summit held in Lusaka, Sri Lanka expressed the need bring up the importance of declaring Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace at the United Nations (Romyantsev, 1988). As a result in 1971, Sri Lanka along with a number of other non-aligned states submitted

a draft resolution of the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace to the 26th session of the UN General Assembly and same year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2832 (XXVI), by which the Indian Ocean, within limits to be determined, together with the airspace above and the ocean floor subjacent thereto, was designated for all time as zone of peace. The Assembly also called upon the great powers to enter into consultations with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean with a view to halting the further escalation of their military presence there and to eliminating from the area all bases, military installations, and logistical supply facilities, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (United Nations office for Disarmament Affairs, 1983, p.375). While the Cold War is no more, the power struggle in the Indian Ocean still exists. In fact, today the competition has reached an unprecedented level of intensity. During the Cold War, this power struggle was limited to the United States and the Soviet Union. However, at present a significant number of major powers both regional and extra regional, continue to play a major role in shaping geopolitics in the Indian Ocean. When considering the current context of international affairs, particularly given the phenomenal rise of Asia as a global powerhouse, the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean is set to play a crucial role in shaping the future of international affairs. India and China whose bilateral ties have always been highly sophisticated are now in the struggle to ensure their authority over the region.

Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indian Ocean

The extent of Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region is understood by the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI is the largest transcontinental infrastructure scheme in the history of economic development (Wignaraja et al,2020) and it is identified as the cornerstone of President Xi Jinping's foreign policy (Mobley,2019). Experts see the BRI as one of the main planks of a bolder Chinese statecraft under Xi, alongside the Made in China 2025 economic development strategy (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). It should be noted that during the period 2013-2018 by region Asia has attracted the majority of BRI related investments and construction contracts (Kong et al, 2019). As far as the Indian Ocean Region is concerned, majority of the IOR countries are part of the BRI. China over the years have invested significantly in these countries and China remains the largest or second largest trading partner of virtually all BRI countries in the Indo-Pacific (Russel & Berger,2020)

Table 01: China's Investments and contracts in selected countries in IOR (2005-2020)

Country	Value (in Billion)
Malaysia	43.31
Indonesia	51.57
Thailand	9.61
Myanmar	9.88
Bangladesh	28.55
India	34.56
Sri Lanka	14.8
Pakistan	59.96
Iran	26.56
Saudi Arabia	39.86
Djibouti	1.72
Madagascar	2.08
Mozambique	10.41

Source: The American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation (2021)

One major aspect of the BRI has been port infrastructure development. The Chinese Government, in its 13th Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's

Republic of China (2016-2020) talks about constructing strategic maritime hubs along the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, participate in the building and operation of major ports along the road, and promote the joint development of industrial clusters around these ports to ensure that maritime trade routes are clear and free-flowing. According to Russel and Berger (2020) port infrastructure is central to the BRI as they are critical to China's economy. Today, under the BRI, China has already constructed or initiated port development projects in significant number of countries in the Indian Ocean Region. Moreover, as of 2018, Chinese companies have participated in the construction and operation of total of 42 ports in 34 countries under BRI (Stanzel, 2019). Some of the world-renowned Chinese companies engaged in the field of port construction include; China Overseas Port Holding, China Road and Bridge Corporation, China COSCO Shipping Group, China Merchants Port Holdings Co. Ltd, China Shipping Port Development Co. Ltd, and China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd (Sun & Zoubir, 2017). Here, what is important to understand is these companies regularly seek to maintain long-term financial control over their investments in the Indo-Pacific ports. One method for achieving this is obtaining equity in the ports or their management companies (Thorne & Spevack, 2017, p.30).

Berger & Russel (2020) calls these maritime hubs defined by China as BRI strategic strongpoints and according to them these strategic strongpoints fall on spectrum on military usage. At the low end are commercial ports that can provide indirect support for the Chinese military via civilian ships that replenish PLAN ships in open waters. In other cases, PLAN ships may be able to dock for resupply at the port's commercial facilities.

Table 02: Selected overseas port development projects under BRI

	Pakistan's Gwadar port	Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port	Myanmar's Kyaukphyu Port	Cambodia's Koh Kong Port/Dara Sakor Report
Geostrategic Location	-Situated along SLOC -Proximity to BRI projects -Combat terrorism	-Situated along SLOC in the Indian Ocean	-Situated in Proximity to Malacca Strait Chokepoint. -Access to the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal	-Situated in proximity to Malacca Strait Maritime Chokepoint
Ownership	-China Overseas Port Holdings holds a 40-year lease of the project	-CMPort holds a 70% stake and 99-year lease	-CITIC holds a 70% stake and 50 year lease	-Union Development Group holds a 70% stake and 99 year lease
Dual use facilities	-Shekou Model, includes bunkering, logistics facilities, and oil processing -Port is now or will soon be able to accommodate range of PLAN vessels	- Shekou Model, includes bunkering and logistics and refueling facilities - Port is now or will soon be able to accommodate range of PLAN vessels.	-Port is now or will soon be able to accommodate range of PLAN vessels.	-Shekou Model, includes bunkering and logistics and refueling facilities -Design is slated to accommodate Chinese destroyers' -Dora Sakor airport could accommodate Chinese military aircraft
Debt to China	7% of GDP	9.5% of GDP	40% of GDP	22% of GDP

Source: Russel & Berger (2020)

For China securing the maritime chokepoint remains vital to ensure its energy security as well as uninterrupted economic growth and stability. From energy security perspective, today China

remains the world's top crude oil importer surpassing the United States in 2017 (eia, 2017) and vast majority of its oil is imported via the main chokepoints in the region. In fact, some 64% of the global oil trade passes through the Indian Ocean and China alone imports nearly two-thirds of its oil through this maritime corridor (Tonchev, 2018). Furthermore, China is also the largest importer of Coal as well as Iron ore (Table 03).

Table 03: Major dry bulks and steel: exporters and importers 2018 (World market shares in percentage)

#	Iron Ore Exporters		#	Iron Ore Importers	
01	Australia	57	01	China	71
02	Brazil	26	02	Japan	08
03	South Africa	04	03	Europe	07
04	Canada	03	04	Republic of Korea	05
05	Sweden	02	05	Other	09
#	Coal Exporters		#	Coal importers	
01	Indonesia	33	01	China	19
02	Australia	30	02	India	18
03	Russian Federation	11	03	Japan	15
04	United States	08	04	EU	11
05	Colombia	06	05	Republic of Korea	11

Source: UNCTAD (2019)

Furthermore, today China remains the largest exporter as well as the second largest importer in world merchandise trade. Thus, for China, ensuring the security of the maritime trade routes remains vital. Any failure in ensuring this is certain to make a severe impact of country's economy. According to Russel and Berger (2020), China has used loans, aid, trade and less respectable means to give it a strong foothold throughout the Indo-Pacific. In fact, China has been accused of 'debt-trap diplomacy-that is saddling countries with high interest debt that they are unable to repay, giving leverage over the borrowing country (Dollar, 2019, p.02). Sri Lanka's Hambantota port provides one of the best-known examples of an unsustainable debt burden. In December 2017, Sri Lanka handed the port to China via a 99-year lease and reportedly with 70% equity in the project due to its inability to service debts of more than US\$ 8 billion to Chinese firms (Russel & Berger, 2020)

Table 04: China's economic relations with selected countries in the Indian Ocean Region (2017)- % GD.

Country	Imports from China	FDI from China	CFR Index of debt to China
Bangladesh	5.8	2.1	4.4
Egypt	4.9	-	2.8
Djibouti	108.4%	-	79.2
Maldives	6.7	-	12.3
Myanmar	13.5	56.5	5.2
Indonesia	3.4	2.2	1.3
Sri Lanka	4.7	10.4	9.5

Source: CFR Belt and Road Tracker

As shown in Table 04, countries in the Indian Ocean Region tend to rely heavily on China. Over the last decade or so, China has strengthened its economic relations with most of the countries in the region and made itself a major partner in their economies. Looking at Sri Lanka, over the last decade or so, a significant improvement is observed in its relations with China. In fact,

today Sri Lanka relies heavily on China when it comes to trade, investments, tourism and financial assistance. Today China remains the largest import partner as well as the second largest source of tourist arrivals for Sri Lanka. Furthermore, over the last several years, China has made huge investments in Sri Lanka. In fact, the value of cumulative Chinese infrastructure investment in Sri Lanka amounts to USD 12.1 billion between 2006 and July 2019 or equivalent to 14 per cent of Sri Lanka's 2018 GDP (Wignaraja et al., 2020), making it the largest source of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Sri Lanka (Bhatia et al,2016). Similar situation is observed in number of other IOR countries as well.

Table 05: CFR Index of debt to China 2008-2017 (% GDP)

Year	Sri Lanka	Myanmar	Maldives	Pakistan
2008	1.9	0	0.1	1.5
2009	4.7	0	0.1	1.6
2010	4.2	0	0.5	2.9
2011	5.2	0	0.4	2.2
2012	7.4	0.7	1.3	2.0
2013	7.6	1.1	1.0	1.8
2014	10.6	1.4	2.4	4.3
2015	10.1	4.6	5.4	5.8
2016	9.8	5.5	13.7	6.6
2017	9.5	5.2	12.3	6.9

*CFR Index of debt to China estimates countries' stock of external debt to China as a percentage of their GDP.

Source: CFR Belt and Road Tracker

As shown in Table 05, a significant increase is observed in some of the IOR countries' stock of debt to China. This is a clear indication of the growing Chinese influence in the region.

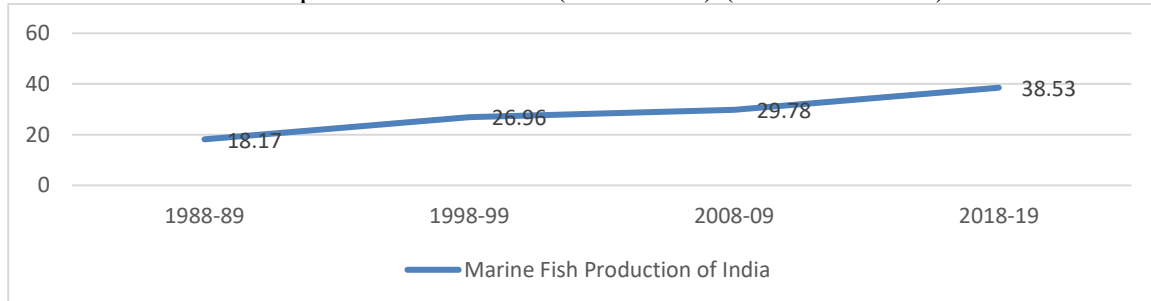
This Chinese influence is set to have significant impact on India. Looking at the current situation in the Indian Ocean Region, India remains the most powerful country in the region. Thus, India always remains vigilant about development of any kind in the region. Here, the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean has become a matter of great concern for India for number of reasons. First, India's security depends on the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean remain the most vital geopolitical prize for India. Making an address at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that

'The Indian Ocean has shaped much of India's history. It now holds the key to our future. The Ocean carries 90% of India's trade and our energy sources. It is also the life line of global commerce. The Indian Ocean connects regions of diverse cultures and different levels of peace and prosperity. It also now bears ships of major powers..... Our interests in the region are vast, and our engagement is deep.'

Sino-Indian relations have always been a roller-coaster ride. On land the two countries share the same borders and has had border disputes several times. Thus, given this background, India by no means wants to see China meddling in the Indian Ocean and strengthening its ties with other countries in the region. Sri Lanka provides the best example for this. India is not all pleased to see the growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka as the island nation is located in close proximity to India. Looking at the current geopolitical context, India on one side shares borders with Pakistan and on another side the country is bordered to China. Thus, Chinese presence in Sri Lanka makes India highly vulnerable and almost impossible to defend itself against any potential attack. Second is the economic interests. As noted by the Indian Prime Minister, India relies heavily on the Indian Ocean for its trade and energy sources. Moreover, when it comes to marine capture production, it plays a major role in India's economy. Over the last two decades

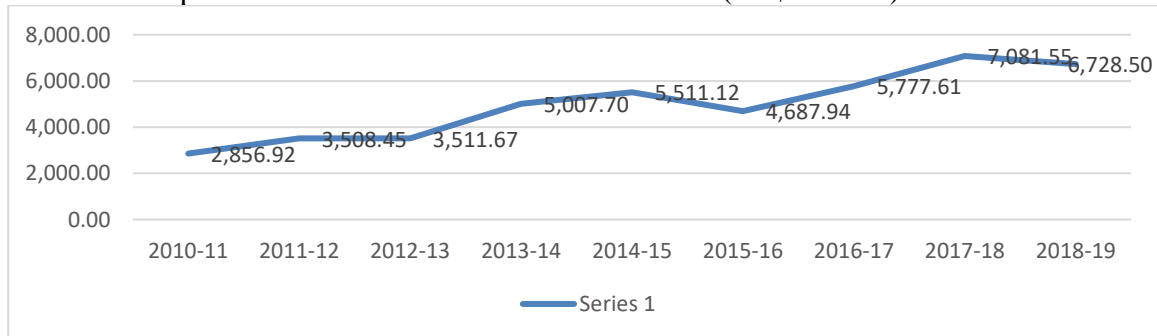
a significant increase is observed in both marine fish production as well as the export of fish and fish products (Figure 01 & Figure 02). Main export markets of India's fish and fish products includes the USA, Japan, China, European Union and Middle East. Furthermore, marine fishing industry supports livelihood of over 4.9 million Indians.

Chart 01: Marine Fish production of India (2010-2019) (In Lakh Tonnes)



Source: Department of Fisheries Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying Government of India, New Delhi. (2020)

Chart 02: Export of Fish and Fish Products 2010-2019 (US\$ million)



Source: Department of Fisheries Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Government of India, New Delhi. (2020)

Thus, for India, the Indian Ocean matters the most. If a hierarchy is made on the significance of the Indian Ocean for the countries in the international system, India is certain to be on the top spot. For Panikkar (1945) India's security lies on the Indian Ocean and India does not compromise its security for anything. Looking at the current context, the greatest threat for India in the Indian Ocean comes from China. To counter this growing threat from China, India has taken a multidimensional approach. Some of the key counter measures of India includes; Project Mausam, Project SAGAR, Project Sagarmala, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), working in collaboration with regional institutions such as BIMSTEC and IORA and alliance building.

During his visit to Mauritius in 2015, by unveiling Indian strategy in Indian Ocean, Modi highlighted the need to;

1. Safeguard the mainland and islands and the defense of the nation's interests but with an eye to generating security and prosperity of the region;
2. Deepen economic and security cooperation as well as help build maritime security capacities of neighbors and island states,
3. Promote collective action and cooperation through existing institutions like the IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium) and other regional mechanisms for maritime cooperation,
4. Enhance collaboration focusing on sustainable development, and

5. Work together with extra regional actors holding strong interests and stake in the region (Schöttli, 2019)

The safety and security of seaborne trade and energy routes in the IOR remains focus area of India's maritime strategy. The main objectives of India's maritime security are;

1. To deter conflict and coercion against India.
2. To conduct maritime military operations in a manner that enables early termination of conflict on terms favourable to India.
3. To shape a favourable and positive maritime environment, for enhancing net security in India's areas of maritime interest.
4. To protect Indian coastal and offshore assets against attacks and threats emanating from or at sea.
5. To develop requisite maritime force levels and maintain the capability for meeting India's maritime security requirements.

Looking at India's military presence in the Indian Ocean, the country is now building a military base in the North Agalega- island belongs to Mauritius. Moreover, today India continues to strengthen its military presence at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as well.

Looking at India's approach in the Indian Ocean it can be noted that India has given greater prominence to multilateralism. This comes as counter to China's bilateralism. The Quad, which is an informal alliance of the USA, India, Japan and Australia can be identified as a good example for this. The Quad is often identified as an alliance to counter the growing Chinese threat. Lee (2020) lists out five reasons which brought the four nations together. These reasons are; (1) Common interest in maintaining a stable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and preventing a regional state becoming dominant, (2) Common interest in deterring the use of forceful or coercive practices to resolve political and territorial disputes in the region, (3) Sharing a deep interest in maintaining a maritime order based on the free movement of goods and services across the world's oceans, (4) Commitment to the current rules-based economic order in the Indo-Pacific, and (5) Common interest in supporting and strengthening liberal democratic governance within the Indo-Pacific.

In addition to enhancing its military presence in the region, India is also working on its own port development project- Sagarmala. Sagarmala program is flagship program of the Ministry of shipping to promote port-led development in the country through harnessing India's 7,500 km long coastline, 14,500 km potentially navigable waterways and strategic location on key international maritime trade routes (Ministry of Shipping-Government of India, 2020). The vision of the program is to reduce logistics cost and time for the movement of EXIM and domestic cargo and development of port-proximate future industrial capacities near the coast (ibid). As of now, India has 12 major and 200 non-major ports (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence- Navy, 2015). Compared to China, Port infrastructure development and the quality of the ports has been a matter of great concern for India.

Table 06: Top 50 container ports

Rank	Port
01	Shanghai, China
02	Singapore
03	Shenzhen, China
04	Ningbo-Zhoushan, China
05	Guangzhou Harbor, China
06	Busan, South Korea
07	Hong Kong, S.A.R, China

08	Qingdao, China
09	Tianjin, China
10	Jebel Ali, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Source: World Shipping Council (2021)

Compared to India, China performs far better when it comes to the efficiency as well as the quality of ports. Ports remains at the core of international maritime trade. Thus, India has a daunting task in hand when it comes to improving the quality of their ports and related infrastructure development.

As the Sino-Indian rivalry is building up in the Indian Ocean, the relevance of maintaining the peace and stability in the region becomes indispensable. Looking at the current context, a situation of security dilemma is observed in the IOR between India and China. Both countries are at an intense competition to ensure its strong presence in the region. There is every chance of leading this competition to a conflict. As noted by Mearsheimer (2006), China's rise is unpeaceful and China is likely to dominate Asia. According to him, China will want to make sure that it is so powerful that no state in Asia has the wherewithal to threaten it (ibid). However, looking at India's approach in the Indian Ocean Region, it is not prepared to accept this growing Chinese influence in the region. Thus, a conflict escalation in the Indian Ocean is certain to have severe consequences on each and every country in the world. From India's perspective, unsecured Indian Ocean means an unsecured India. For India, maintaining peace and stability in the region remains vital to ensure its own security. Looking at China, unstable Indian Ocean region will have secure impact on its BRI project. As noted before, China has already made large investments in the region and does want the smooth implementation of the projects. Looking at the countries in the region, a military conflict would threaten their own national security. This would divide the entire region and create two camps and most importantly this would certainly hinder Asia's growth.

As noted earlier, this is considered as Asia's century and according to the Asian Development Bank, Asia's rise will be led by PRC, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Thailand. Out of these seven countries four countries are in the Indian Ocean Region. Apart from that Japan which does not belong to the Indian Ocean too is advocating for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Thus, ensuring peace and stability in the Indian Ocean remains vital not only for India and China but also for the rest of the International community. China and India shoulders the greater share of responsibility in maintaining the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. Alfred Mahan, referring to Germany, Britain and USA who possessed great naval strength during the late 19th century highlighted the importance of cooperation despite them being competitors. Mahan (1900, p.133) noted;

"..... a very large part of a nation's wisdom consists of reinforcing its own strength by cooperation with others, based upon a substantial identity of interests; and if such identity is found combined with community of character and tradition, fostering community of ideals, the prospect of continued and harmonious co-operation is greatly increased"

Unless the two countries work together in cooperation, maintaining peace and stability in the region becomes almost impossible. The more they consider themselves as competitors the more insecurity it creates across the region. When the region feels unsecured, more effort will be made by the countries in the region to ensure their security. The vast majority of the IOR countries are developing countries and they do not possess the sophisticated weapons to ensure their security. This would probably lead to a situation of alliance building the Indian Ocean, which would make the region more unsafe. Therefore, it is vital for both India and China to work together as it remain the most viable solution to keep the region of Indian Ocean as a zone

of peace. From India's perspective, it does not possess the same naval strength of China (Table 07).

Table 07: Comparison of Sino-Indian Naval Power 2021

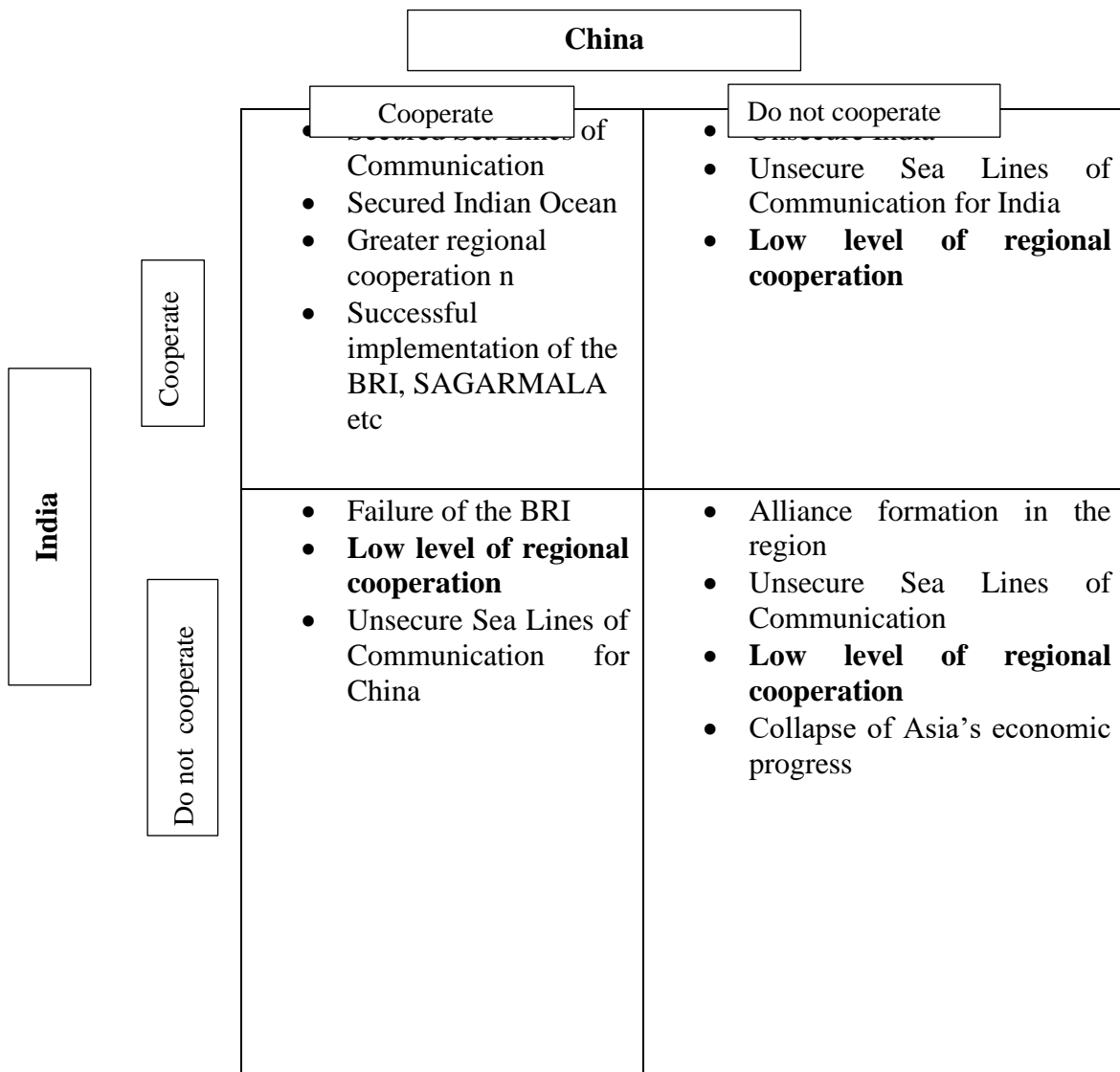
	China	India
Total Assets*	777	285
Aircraft carriers	02	01
Helicopters carriers	0	0
Destroyers	50	10
Frigates	46	13
Corvettes	72	23
Submarines	79	17
Patrol vessels	123	139
Mine warfare	36	0
Overall military strength ranking	03	04

*Total Assets value includes all possible/available vessels including auxiliaries, which are not showcased individually.

Source: Global Firepower Index

This would again make India more unsecured in its own backyard, and would lead to seek support from its allies like the USA, Britain, France and Japan. While in the short run, it remains a good solution to be in par with China, it would make the region more vulnerable for possible military establishments and attacks and would make the region more unstable. Therefore, it is vital for both the regional powers to compromise and cooperate.

Illustration 01: Dilemma of Sino-Indian cooperation in the Indian Ocean



As given in illustration 01, if India and China are not willing to compromise and cooperate in the Indian Ocean Region it will certainly have adverse impact on both the countries as well as on the region. It will lead to alliance formation, make the Sea Lines of Communication unsecure, affect the level of regional cooperation in the region and eventually affect the rise of Asia. Here, as the escalated tensions would have severe impact on the region, the IOR countries too has a major role to play in maintaining peace and stability in the region. Looking at illustration 01, any failure of the two Asian giants to compromise and cooperate would end up in influencing regional cooperation, which would affect every single country in the region. Therefore, IOR countries also have a share of responsibility in maintaining peace and stability in the region. This means that IOR countries are not bystanders in this issues but pivotal players in mitigating the growing rivalry in the Indian Ocean and maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Conclusion

With the rise of Asia as a powerhouse in the 21st century, the Indian Ocean has already become the main background where the great battle for world supremacy is played. China over the last few decades has made drastic changes in its foreign policy as it is now showing their desire to play a major role in world politics. Today, China particularly through its BRI project has able to make an unprecedented impact on world politics. As far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, it has been both a major hotspot as well as a battleground in world politics for many centuries. During the Cold War, the Indian Ocean was declared a Zone of Peace, and with the growing Chinese influence the significance of this declaration has yet again come to the center stage in world politics. India, being the largest country in the Indian Ocean and a regional power has always been cautious of the Chinese influence in the region. Fuelled by the existing border dispute between the two states, and the desire to become the regional power in Asia, the growing Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean has become a matter of greater concern. As far as the primary interests of India and China in the Indian Ocean are concerned, given its location, the security of India is closely linked with the security if the Indian Ocean. Looking at China, as the majority of its energy imports as well as the exports go via the Indian Ocean, securing the Sea Lines of Communication remains a major objective in China's foreign policy. There has been a significant increase in Chinese presence in the region over the last decade or so, which has now become a major concern for India. Both countries over the years have shown their military presence in the region particularly through the establishment of military bases and conducting naval exercises. This growing military tensions between the two Asian giants in the region hasn't been conducive as the two countries are at a competition in ensuring their presence in the region. However, this growing competition is to prove detrimental to the economies of both the countries as well as the region, particularly Asia. If Asia to continue its economic revival, peace and stability in the Indian Ocean remains vital. Looking at the current context, neither India, nor China has the ability to control the India Ocean. Thus, compromise and cooperation remain vital in maintaining peace and stability in the region. However, other littoral states in the region too has a major role to play in securing peace and stability in the region. Rather than being bystanders, these countries should become pivotal players in maintaining peace and stability in the region as the future of this world relies on the Indian Ocean.

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