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## **Geopolitical Study of Indian Ocean: An analysis of India-China Relations**

**Dr. Priyanka Gupta**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Maitreyi College, University of Delhi**  
**E-mail: [pjnuir@gmail.com](mailto:pjnuir@gmail.com)**

‘Geopolitics’ focuses on geography through the lens of politics. In other words, Geopolitics thinks about politics but the idea behind this thinking is the geographical conceptualization. Geopolitics is the study of the effects of geography on international politics and international relations, it is the method of studying foreign policy to understand, explain, and predict international political behaviour through geographical variables. Geopolitics is the interaction between geography and politics where geographical exercises played a leading role in the politics of a state. Haushofer stated as “Geopolitics is the new national science of the state, a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography” (Gyorgy 1944). This paper is about the geopolitical and strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. Also traces China’s impact on the Indian Ocean region. These questions follow the case study of India-China relations. In short, the mainly discusses firstly, the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean then how China is making efforts to dominate the region with its expansionist policies. After that, the study seeks to define the contradictions over the region that happened due to China’s expansionist policies.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, Geopolitics, China’s dominance, China’s expansionist behaviour, Geopolitical competition

### **Background**

Geopolitics is concerned with how geographical factors, including territory, population, strategic location, and natural resource endowments, as modified by economics and technology, affect the relations between states and the struggle for world domination. After that, this paper will talk about the evolution of the term geopolitics by different scholars over time to time. Firstly, this term is coined by Rudolf Kjellen in 1899- “the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space. Secondly, “Geopolitics is the new national science of the state... a doctrine

on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography” (Gyorgy 1944). Thirdly, “Geopolitics may be defined, crudely, as the influence of geography upon politics: how distance and terrain and climate affect the affairs of states and men. Because of geography, for example, Athens was a sea empire - whereas Sparta was a land power” (Sir Halford Mackinder). How geopolitics leads to the sea power concept, land power concept, and at the end airpower concept? These concepts are the ways to how a state or a country become a superpower through its geographical position. Especially through land dominance and water body dominance. For this elaboration, the study will discuss the theories of A.T. Mahan (Seapower), Sir Halford Mackinder (Heartland theory), and Nicholas J. Spykman (Rimland theory). Based on these theories, the study will investigate the sea power domination still relevant in the current scenario, in contrast to China’s Activities in the Indian Ocean. Firstly, Mahan “emphasizes sea power and claimed that sea power necessary to facilitate trade and peaceful commerce, thus put an emphasis on a strong Navy, according to him, development of a strong navy was an essential ingredient to a powerful state as was the country’s location. Most power would be held by a country with accessible relative location and connected with a long coastline and good harbors (Germany and Russia). He contended that the mastery of commercial activities that ignore seaborne transportation was critical not only in terms of war but also in times of peace. He felt that any country building a fleet that could destroy an enemy’s main force in a single battle would become a hegemonic state. Secondly, Mackinder- “his ideas were based on the geographical distribution of landmass and water bodies on the earth. According to him ‘history is essentially a struggle between the land and sea power’. He formed his ideas about land power first, in 1904, and then modified it two times- in 1919 and 1943. Thirdly, Spykman- is talking about the concept of Rimland, “surrounding tier of the heartland, the inner or marginal crescent, partly continental and partly oceanic” it was accessible to the sea and interior regions. These continental margins contained dense populations, abundant resources, and had controlling access both to the seas and to the continental interior (western Europe, Middle East, South Asia Southeast Asia, and the far East). We cannot say that the only land power is essential or we cannot say the land power is only essential for state or country but both the land and sea power are essential for the countries. So, now in current aspects countries want to do control over the land

or sea power both, and this paper reflects China's strategy to control over land and sea power. The Indian ocean covers at least one-fifth of the world's total ocean area and is bounded by Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, India's coastal waters, and the Bay of Bengal near Myanmar and Indonesia. It provides critical sea trade routes that connect the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia with the broader Asian continent to the east and Europe to the west. Indian ocean is strategically very important for the coastal areas, because of their minerals, trade routes, natural gases, gems, and oil. That is why every country wants to control the Indian Ocean and the Indian Ocean Region. Nowadays, China is doing many practices in the Indian ocean, do not know that what is the reason behind this but the activities show a threat to India and Southeast Asia. The Indian Ocean is strategically important, especially in the commercial sector, this ocean has many sea routes, chokepoints, passages, straits, etc. to moving ships from east to west in the Indian Ocean region. China and India are dependent on energy resources transported via the secure sea lanes in the Indian Ocean to fuel their economies.

### **Literature Review**

Theories of geopolitics have shown their significance in the political sphere and distinguish it from the geographical perspectives with the political ideologies. Many authors and geographers talk about the idea of expansion in geopolitical terms to conquer the area of the strategic location, which was in history, a core to the powerful territory. For this study, I am using many approaches to the study of geopolitics in the Indian ocean. Here we are looking into those approaches – the significance of the Indian ocean is loud and clear to the international community, specifically in the recent times of globalization where maritime trade in resources, communications, and interactions have become all too frequent. There are also some other new developments in the region, including the emerging contest for power between the United States and a rising resource-hungry China as reflected in the Obama administration's "rebalance" strategy and the idea of Indo-Pacific and Xi Jinping's "maritime silk road" initiative, apart from non-traditional challenges such as piracy and natural disasters. China sending two submarines in as many months recently to Sri Lanka thus is no surprise in this backdrop. As a resident country, India has several challenges to face as well as some prospects in the region. With the new government led by Modi, there is already a keen interest evinced on the region as reflected in the Prime Minister's visits –

unprecedented so far- to the commissioning of two new naval vessels in his first hundred days of assuming office (Konadapalli 2015).

At the core, India, and China today are rivals, not friends. Both compete for power and influence regionally and globally in the pursuit of becoming global powers, although as of today, as we have shown, the PRC is far ahead of India. China invested heavily in developing the deep-sea port at the naval base at Gwadar at the western end of the Makran coast in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan. With the establishment of a blue-water navy at the Gwadar port, China has accentuated its power projection in the Indian Ocean Region to allow it to secure oil and gas from the Persian Gulf. China has also sought bases in the Indian Ocean in littoral states such as Maldives, and Seychelles. China undertook to widen and improve the old Stilwell Road on the Myanmar side and connect it to Yunnan province, gaining access to the port of Sittwe in the Bay of Bengal, which gave China direct access to the Indian Ocean. By acquiring bases in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, China has sought to protect the sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean through which it imports nearly 70 percent of its oil from the Middle East and Africa, but also at the same time use these countries as springboards for limiting India's maritime activities in the Indian Ocean and undermines its leverage. India has a long coastal border with the Indian Ocean, which gives it leverage in safeguarding the sea lanes into the Pacific Ocean through the Strait of Malacca. The Chinese strategy to limit India's leverage in the Indian Ocean is often referred to as the "String of Pearls" (Indurthy 2016). Setting aside the nuclear deterrence problem the deployment of sea power by the superpowers, in particular, has become so widespread and common in the past decade or so that it presents a special kind of real and growing threat to peace (Alford 1980). This threat to peace is increasingly felt by a majority of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and, for that reason, is extracted from the maze of transactions for separate consideration. Although under very different tenets and rules of the game since the writings of Mackinder or Mahan sea power remains flexible, visible, universal, and persuasive (House 1984). Critical geopolitics seeks to problematize the concept of environmental security and its relationship to social and political practices of dominance in local, national, and international politics. While environmental problems do undoubtedly exist in the Indian Ocean, conflicting perspectives and prospects for common security within and between

countries, sub-regions, and social groups, suggest that a better understanding of how ecological threats are described, prioritized, and globalized and how knowledge about the environmental degradation and sustainable development is produced as a political resource, is possible only by contesting, or at least by going beyond, the conventional categories and typologies which privilege and protect certain actors, interests, and priorities (Chaturvedi 1998).

In February 2008, India hosted naval chiefs from around the Indian Ocean in what was named the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, highlighting the role of the Indian navy as an important instrument of the nation's foreign and security policy. It was also an attempt by India to promote a multilateral approach in the management of the security of the Indian Ocean. India signalled that as a rising power it is willing to fulfil its maritime responsibilities in the region but, unlike in the past when India had been suspicious of what it saw as "extra-regional navies," it is now ready to cooperate with other navies in and around the Indian Ocean. Whether India's leadership will be enough to promote genuine maritime multilateralism in the region, however, remains to be seen. This is an empirical analysis of India's role in the Indian Ocean region, not a theoretical exposition of the issue. It argues that though India has historically viewed the Indian Ocean region as one in which it would like to establish its own predominance, its limited material capabilities have constrained its options. With the expansion, however, of India's economic and military capabilities, Indian ambitions vis-a-vis this region are soaring once again. India is also trying its best to respond to the challenge that growing Chinese capabilities in the Indian Ocean are posing to the region and beyond (Pant 2009). The new economic superpowers, India and China, exert palpable global influence. Their internecine competition plays itself out in the Indian Ocean, where the two Asian powers squabble for control of shipping lanes and oil supplies and dominance of African markets and minerals (Hofmeyr 2010).

Admiral Shi's blueprint for the development of the PLAN seems to focus on Jiang's doctrine to achieve China's national objectives of the unification of Taiwan, the control of the South China Sea, and the expansion of maritime influence over the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Any attempt to invade Taiwan by the People's Republic of China (PRC) would invite U.S. naval intervention. Likewise, island disputes in the South China Sea and the exploration of offshore

resources in those areas are confronted with other claimants' responses, including that of Vietnam and the Philippines. China also has to safeguard sea-lanes for its increasing oil imports. More significantly, China attempts to become a great sea-power to compete with America's hegemonic position in the world's oceans. These strategic issues have prodded China to expand its maritime influence in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of fleet units of the United States and the USSR from the Philippines and Vietnam respectively, China has been expanding its sphere of influence into the Indian Ocean region as an initial stage of a broader scheme of involvement throughout the Asian region. China's fast-growing economy has increased significantly its patterns of oil consumption, thus making it a net oil importer since 1993. In 1996, China's net oil imports were 0.21 million barrels of oil per day, but by 2000 China had become the third-biggest oil consumer in the world, amounting to 4.6 million, with its net oil imports reaching 1.4 million (Hyung 2002). The footprints of the two expanding navies begin to overlap, as the Chinese navy moves from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, and the Indian navy moves in the opposite direction. China is interested in building several bases in the Indian Ocean, including one in Chittagong (Bangladesh), one in Yangon (Burma), one in Coco Island (Burma), one in Trincomalee (Sri Lanka), and one in Gwadar (Pakistan) and one in Hambantota (Sri Lanka). China's activities in these areas, mostly for refuelling and docking of its naval ships, give rise to fears in India of a Chinese encirclement of the country. Lack of mutual trust leads to misinterpretation of economic activities as strategic competition. The protracted boundary dispute is a major source of irritant between Beijing and New Delhi. India largely sticks to a de facto boundary based on the McMahon Line, drawn by the British Indian administration and imposed on the Tibetan authorities in 1914 under the Shimla Accord. The successive Chinese governments never recognized such a boundary. The disputed territory of approximately 90,000 square kilometres, Arunachal Pradesh - referred to by China as southern Tibet remains under India's actual control in the eastern section of the 4,000 km border. China particularly resents being deprived of Tawang, south of the McMahon Line. Tawang is a centre of Tibet's Buddhist culture and was the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama in the 17th century. Prime Minister Singh's visit to Tawang in 2009 was deemed as "provocative and dangerous" by China. China strongly objected to the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in

November 2009 (Zhu 2011). In 2009 China dispatched destroyers to the Gulf of Aden to protect Chinese merchant ships from Somali pirates rampant in that area. The flotilla's long voyage through the Indian Ocean caused some concerns in India. There was also a reported but unconfirmed tense standoff involving Indian and Chinese warships (BBC Monitoring South Asia 2009). According to the Chinese perspective - Until now Chinese elite discourse on India has been predominantly informed by realism. This observation contains several aspects. As already mentioned, the 1962 war and the unresolved territorial disputes have importantly and continually conditioned the Chinese perception of India. Then there are contending spheres of influence: China concedes South Asia as India's sphere of influence. It seeks to confine India in that region by establishing good relations with India's other South Asian neighbours (particularly Pakistan) - a balance-of-power strategy - while preventing India from getting deeply involved in East Asia. In recent years, each has treated into the other's sphere of influence: As a result of its growing dependence on foreign trade and raw materials and its desire to develop maritime power commensurate with its growing stature and interests, China has become more active in the Indian Ocean. What does the future hold for Indo-Chinese relations? Generally speaking, there are three scenarios. The first is continued, even heightened, rivalry, guided by the logic of the geopolitics paradigm. Indications of this are not difficult to find. China figures prominently in Indian defence planning. China's growing military and economic power may deeply unsettle India. With newly accumulated wealth from almost two decades of fast growth, India can now devote greater resources to the military. It will become more aligned with the United States, in a reversal of its stance during the Cold War. The US-Indian nuclear agreement epitomizes this trend. China may enhance its support of Pakistan and increase its influence in the South Asian continent, the Indian Ocean, and Southwest Asia. The second possibility is "Chindia" driven by the logic of the geoeconomics paradigm. Here, China and India would jointly promote a multipolar world and a more equitable global order (e.g., reforming the United Nations). However, an Indo-Chinese entente aimed at the United States is unlikely, as each derives many benefits by maintaining a good relationship with the United States. The third possibility is pragmatic management of their relationship, seeking solutions to their unresolved disputes while exploring areas of cooperation.

Compared to the hot war of 1962 and the cold war that ensued, the Indo-Chinese relationship has shown promise of normalization (Wang 2011).

China and India have divergent political ideologies, characteristics, aspirations, anxieties, and hence their strategic perceptions and orientations differ. Their strategic interaction in southern Asia has for its backdrop the 1962 border conflict. In terms of maritime security, the Pacific–Indian Ocean continuum has become the centre of gravity post-9/11 with both China and India having long-term growth trajectories in terms of naval power, a process skewed in favour of the PLA Navy (PLAN). Cognizance of the maritime dependency index for energy and anxieties about secure sea-lines of communication (SLOC) by China and India give rise to a ‘Malacca dilemma’ and a ‘Hormuz dilemma’ respectively. The firm belief at the politico-military apex that Beijing’s future strategic profile and relevance is inexorably linked with its naval capability gives the PLAN a steadily increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Active political engagements and long-term port investments in the IOR by Beijing, though presented as benign, trigger concerns in India. These equations are influenced by a three-tiered strategic subalternity in Asia between the US (and its allies), China, and India. How contested territoriality between the Asian neighbours will be resolved is the key on which future outcomes depend. While this may point towards China acquiring a military edge in the IOR, India's prudence, restraint, and capacity-building remain vital. The whole study of regarding the topic relevant in the current scenario and coming with the writings of prominent authors or scholars, it is very deepened by the strategic issues and ideologies to manipulate the oppositions validly or possibly to transcend their evaluation. It would probably a good and beneficial study for the establishment of coastal dominance by the other countries, with the formation of the alliances and cooperation with the nations and the countries to make their limits to control or sustain their developmental movements. Economically Indian ocean is very important for the countries and they have to be secure with their territories and their limits to control and existence for their troops.

### **Definition, Rationale, and Scope**

Geopolitics is about the study of politics through a geographical view, to understand international territorial limits, and to understand the world with their geographical variations. We understand

geopolitics through their elements - location (regional & global), resources, transportation, borders, technology, territory, imaginations, and representations. “Geopolitics should be understood as a project dedicated to the production, circulation, and interpretation of global political space” (Dodds 2007). It conjures – (a) geopolitics is the practice of states controlling and competing for territory. (b) geopolitics creates images: in theory, language and practice classify swathes of territory and masses of people (Flint 2006). Geopolitics is the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and on the other hand, political processes. The settings are composed of geographical features and patterns and the multi-layered regions that they form. The political processes include forces that operate at the international level and those on the domestic scene that influence international behaviour. Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, each influence and are influenced by the other (Cohen 2015).

In this paper, the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean between India and China trying to investigate the prospects and impacts of the strategies of China in the Indian ocean. We know that the Indian ocean is strategically very important for the coastal countries because it has many natural gases, oil, gas, etc. which is basically important for all the countries or necessary to increase their strength as a strategically important thing. The main focus of this paper is China’s movements which happens always near the surroundings of the Indian territorial limits. China made its ports in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, they are the 3 corners of India (East, South, and North West). China gives their reasons for port establishment on the surroundings of India that, he made it only for their economic purposes or commerce, but in my view, it would be the cause of dominance. History shows that every developed country wants to conquer the countries through trading experiments. Indian ocean is very important for China because it has many natural resources, minerals which are very precious in the current scenario. In the future, if China would go beyond this kind of strategic movement then it is predicted that it will definitely conquer the Indian territories. China develops its commercial prospects to expand its commercial arena which relates to cover more of the strategic points to capture the world. Basically, my basic statement about the rationale of this study that, China is trying to cover areas of the world maximum in its limit to expend their commercials and made ports for its trading prospects. This research aims to

look at the geopolitical movements in territorial limits happens always in the arenas of the world and we have to focus on that movements because if we miss it then the other country can conquer their territory by the dominance of their strategical movements. This study also shows the importance of the Indian ocean for the coastal countries, and how these countries want to dominate the resourceful areas of the ocean. This study may be successful to find the loopholes of India, that how Chinese marines enter into Indian territory, and why always it happens. So finally, my paper will state the geopolitical importance of the land bodies or water bodies to know their importance in the way through the other country's interests. Indian peninsular area is a very strategic point to make the trade and commercial activities through the water.

### **Hypothesis**

China is making its ports in Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, located south, east, and north-west of India's outer location. Is reviving the Silk route a plan of China to encircle India from all the strategic positions?

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the impacts of cooperation agreements and the formation of social or economic organizations on India-China relations?
2. Why China establishes its ports in the surroundings of India, is there any strategic plan or 'expansionism'?
3. Why the Indian Ocean strategically important for coastal countries?

### **Research Methodology**

The study employs a mixed-method for the study, where secondary resources are basically focused on the study. For the primary data, the study has focused on online news portals and government organizations. The research is mainly based on a qualitative method that will look for the presence of Sea power dominance and its impacts on the coastal regions. This research will borrow from the ancient geographical works which were classical works based on the geostrategic location. Drawing largely from the academic works on geostrategic dominance, the

research will try to look at the practice of classical geographers who basically trying to show the power of the nations defined by its strength, which is basically through their geographical location, physical conformation, and extent of territory. The research also aims to look at the varying practices of neighbouring countries of the domination over the land and the water body. The empirical studies aim that the powerful state or country is defined by its strength, which would be both, land power, sea power, and also as air power.

### **Conclusion**

Geopolitics and its link with Indian Ocean are already an important phenomenon where many international practices have taken place. For the globalization, Indian Ocean already played very important role for the movement of goods, especially for the commercial purposes. After the detailed analysis the study concluding that China's revival of silk route is a commercial establishment. On the basis of the literatures and online data the study inferences that the China's port establishment only related with the trade or the economic development for self and the related countries. But in international system there were also a security dilemma or a complex security threat observed. Every country wants to secure its territory from the external threats to maintain its sovereignty. So, it is common to worry about the encircling process of China to India, because there arises a security concern. So, India have to take into account this process of China and have to make proper security establishment around the Indian territory.

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