
Oil Politics In The Indian Ocean: China's Emerging Role

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Historical Background

'Geopolitics' can be transformed but same can not be done with the 'Geography'. This formulation provides the logic that the continuity of the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean region is still on and may be vividly observed. The Indian Ocean is emerging as a major strategic arena of game changer in which traditional as well as emerging powers are all set to fray for gaining power according to their strength. The Indian Ocean which mirrored huge significance during the cold war is resuming its historic significance in the global geopolitics in the 21st century. The 19th century American naval strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan has rightly observed "whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia and in the 21st century the destiny of the world will

be decided on its waters" which highlights the importance of the Indian Ocean region. The Indian Ocean covers at least one fifth of the world's total ocean area and is bounded by Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (known as the western Indian Ocean), India's coastal waters (the central Indian Ocean), and the Bay of Bengal near Myanmar and Indonesia (the eastern Indian Ocean). 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 (Albert, Eleanor 2016).

In one sense where the traditional scramble for colonising the island territories had altered the erstwhile landscape of the Indian Ocean, in the other sense the aggressive engagements and strategic pace of China have substantially altered the contour of power equation in the

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region. Emergence of China in the Indian Ocean has raised enormous unforeseen questions pertaining to the security of the region. The current scenario unambiguously projects one hypothesis that the unprecedented rise of China in the region has redefined the historic role of the Indian Ocean while attaching great dependency on its island nations (Mohan, Raja 2009). The extension of Soviet Union's influence in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) was labelled as 'encirclement' by China as early as 1969-70 (Braun, Dieter 1983). In the 21st century, similar gesture is being adopted by China to encircle India to secure its multiple interests and position in the IOR.

Evidently, China is seeking priority in India's strategic vision. Not confined to India, China is also being seen as a permanent threat by the U.S. Under the prevailing circumstances when India is viewed incapable in countering China's encirclement policy in an effective manner, its dependency on the island nations of the IOR and importantly over the U.S has eventually become a salient component of India's maritime strategy. Collaborative initiatives of India and the U.S are the need of the time to deter the growing influence of China in the region and to make the Indian Ocean a harmonious space. The U.S, a mighty traditional power having

recorded its military power may generate friction to the comprehensive advancement of China through its strategic partnership with India. While the 'string of pearls' was analysed by Indian security experts as encircling India through land, in the 21st century intentions of China are seen to strike India grossly but imbibing a soft paradigm which is observed as china's "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) strategy. A brief history of the Indian Ocean spotlights the competitive nature of the traditional powers to wield their respective influence in order to achieve their dominance in the region. Even today their traditional positions continue which is somehow directing and influencing the strategic environment of the Indian Ocean. Notably, the way emerging powers, India and China are making inroads in the IOR, it highlights their overt assertiveness with covert interest to seek appropriate ways to achieve their geo-strategic goals.

The emerging power game

The intensity of the endeavours of the traditional powers can be seen through their present existence in the Indian Ocean. Despite decolonising their respective colonies they once had conquered, their substantive presence is visible in the present

century as well. Their strategic interests are driving them to establish their effective influence in the region. And this is the prime excuse that the extra regional forces seek to maintain security in the IOR to serve their earlier interests while defending their traditional positions. The Diego Garcia, a naval base in the central Indian Ocean, is the most strategically important military outpost the US has installed across the world. Diego Garcia is considerably the largest island of the Chagos Archipelago, and is a British Overseas territory that was captured during the subjugation of Mauritius (Harris, Peter 2015). Diego Garcia originally belongs to Mauritius but the Britain, during colonial period established its control over Mauritius and later gifted it to the American military force on a long-term lease. The strategic significance of the bases in the Indian Ocean can be understood through the facilitation attached to the Diego Garcia, that is an indigenous non-littoral military outpost of the US in the IOR and which provides it exceptional military power (Kumar, Ranjit 2012). In the aftermath of the Cold War period, Diego Garcia had gathered relatively more strategic prominence for the naval operations the United States had conducted in the Indian Ocean. Moreover it had fought myriad wars in the Persian Gulf also making Diego

Garcia a strong foothold to materialise its strategic vision (Pathak, Vidhan 2009). France, on the other hand, also retains an overseas territory in the Indian Ocean from its presence in the Reunion, an important island for France. France successfully sustained its commercial, cultural and military infrastructure benefitting itself on a long basis. Not merely this, after the United States it was France only that established its second largest and powerful naval presence in the Indian Ocean region. And it remained a strong factor which made France capable of claiming the status of an Indian Ocean state. Reunion territory served as a fertile base for the interests of France and eventually proved its indispensability in the process of Frenchification of the Indian Ocean (Roy, M.K 1991). Significant to know that Reunion is an overseas territory of France in the IOR which achieved the status of a region in 1974 while becoming an overseas department of France (Europa Year Book, 2005). During the Cold War period, the Soviet Union constantly raced for achieving dominance in the region but faced limited and occasional successes as witnessed in Seychelles (Pathak, Vidhan 2009). Australia, that is an island nation too, projects its existence with its advanced navy operation in the Ocean waters. Notably, the region of the

Indian Ocean is highly prioritised by the defence and maritime strategies of Canberra to cater the profound national interest (Albert, Eleanor, 2016).

In the case of emerging powers, activities of India and China in the Indian Ocean are seen in a manner that has consequently triggered a neo-geopolitical scenario in the region (Hornat, Jan 2015). The existing paradigm of their continuous efforts to achieve their respective clout and their eye-catching naval presence in the IOR reflect the inevitability of the IOR as reshuffling the core power equations of the world. The belligerent manner in which China's strategic interests are colliding with India's national aspirations, there are speculations by the global strategic experts that the Indian Ocean cannot remain uncontested. According to a Pentagon report, China is now not remote to conclude its "logistical support" facility in Djibouti, an East African country. The report further affirms that Beijing would try to construct uniform facilitations in other parts of the world. China initiated the building of Djibouti base in early 2016, which is located near the US special-operations outpost, Camp Lemonnier. In the similar vein, Marine Gen. Thomas

Waldhauser, chief of US Africa Command, said "you would have to characterise it as a military base. It's a first for them and they've never had an overseas base" (Woodyo, Christopher 2017). The heat of this strategic threat is not only felt by the US but India has also expressed its worries on this score. The architecting of this Djibouti base by China has compounded the security concerns of India as well. India, being a legitimate and vital part of the Indian Ocean seeks to establish peace and stability in the region for sustainably serving its national interests and the littorals of the IOR.

Raja C. Mohan maintains that: "Bases is going to be the name of the game in the Indian Ocean, and that game is going to be pretty attractive." This entire phenomenon is devoid of any dichotomy symptomized as the forthcoming radical contestation for power between the traditional and emerging powers. Indeed, it explicitly proves the theory of Realism introduced in the International Relations as pragmatic one that speaks about infinite desire by the state for optimising its power. All states must ultimately seek the maximum power obtainable under the given

circumstances irrespective of aiming at a balance that is equality of power (Morgenthau 1960, 210).

China as a Potential Polygonal Power

The waters of the world form one vast expanse. While land may be enveloped by the sea – and the Continents are so enveloped – the oceans are divided only by artificial boundaries (Panikkar, K. M. 1951). After acquiring impressive influence and power on the land, China is found imbibing unprecedented efforts to capture similar hegemony on the sea as well that is characterised by its remarkable presence in the IOR.

If the post-cold war period had diminished the geo-strategic salience of the Indian Ocean following the relative reluctance of the major competitive powers, the emergence of China has once again elevated its necessity for the external as well as internal powers of the region (Mohan, C.R 2009). Undoubtedly, this spatial transformation has decisively made the Indian Ocean to be prioritised by the global powers leading to the sprouting of renewed challenges in the region. Stretching these aspects, rising of China as a potential competitor has turned the Indian Ocean into a battle ground for power. The rapid rise of China on the

global front both on the land and equally on the sea has prompted the strategic community of the world to raise many security concerns. Suffice is to underscore that China's strategic intent for establishing a "geopolitical" presence in the Indian Ocean is not of recent origin. By 1960, Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean were more or less defined (Singh, K.R 1977).

Despite confronting an inherent strategic hindrance by not being an island territory like India which is an Indian Ocean Rim nation and possesses island territory as well, China has strengthened its global position utilising and mingling its soft power with the hard power. It has been using intangible elements for an effective application of its soft power. Its adopted policy is now well visited by the strategic experts, who claim that China's soft power diplomacy is governed by economic inducements and the objectives sustaining behind it are also rationally detected. China's engagement with the world are overtly observed with the inception of its economic aid and partnership which last until its self-centred goals are met sufficiently. Furthermore, China's massive soft diplomacy campaign and liberal aid to small underdeveloped but strategically vital oceanic countries to build roads, dams, railways and ports, offering

military assistance has changed the geo-strategic environment of the IOR (Pathak, Vidhan 2009). Thus, the China has chosen the mode of providing enormous Line of Credit (LoC) to woo the countries it toils to approach to serve its prolonged interests. New developments are being observed while assessing China's relations and proximity with countries across the world. Experts believe that China's bilateral commercialism dominates and shapes the behavioural approach and relations of China with the regional forces of the Indian Ocean (Panda, Jagannath P 2014).

Under its soft power approach, Chinese diaspora has considerably also played a vital role being a beneficial asset in serving the national interest of China. 'Diaspora', a new term under Globalisation has become an influential constituent of constructing and consolidating bilateral ties between the home and host land countries and therefore is identified as a crucial determinant while formulating its foreign policy (Rana, Kishan 2009). Thus, the rise of China is attributed to many factors including Chinese diaspora. Mauritius, that attracts global attention due to its geo-strategic location registers a substantial presence of Chinese diaspora on its territory. There are nearly 30,000

Chinese descendants in Mauritius as noted by Raja C Mohan (2009). Other parts of the world also reflect the same perception of Chinese diaspora as a productive resource of materialising China's interest.

Bhaskar, Uday (2014) says that China's PLAN is not confined to a sizable number of goodwill visits to a large number of Indian Ocean countries but its semi-permanent presence in the region is also visible with the passage of time that today looks even more sustained. The manifestation of rapid rise and modernisation of People's Liberation Army Navy has pushed the world strategists to interrogate China: what are China's motivations behind modernising its navy and how does it prioritise its modernisation (Singh, Udai Bhanu 2015)? China's maritime strategy dictates for strengthening the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in order to progress its maritime objectives. Late Dr. K. Subramanyam shed light on the same perspective and stated that China had plans to deploy its navy in the Indian Ocean "in the early years of the 21st century". Yves-Heng Lim's book, *China's Naval Power* provides that an offensive Realist Approach reflects the expansive aggressive policy of China to locate its hegemonic establishment in the region harnessing bilateral and

multilateral ties with the regional countries.

China has ever since strived to pursue a policy commensurate with the big powers of the world. Finding the American military establishment in the Diego Garcia of the Indian Ocean, China looks optimistic to equate its strategic position by retaining similar naval outpost in the region (Kumar, Ranjit 2012). Mishra, Raghavendra (2014) describes that until recently, China's maritime engagements within the IOR had centred on maritime access and resources to sustain the trajectory of economic development. However the recent articulations by the former and current Presidents, namely Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping provide the evidence of a more focussed reorientation in the strategic outlook of China towards the Ocean. Some old fears in New Delhi about Beijing's intention to *encircle India* have now been underscored on the maritime domain. China's speedy naval modernization and its growing presence in the Indian Ocean have raised eyebrows in the Indian strategic community. China's 'string of pearls' strategy linked with the establishment of a series of access points in and across the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, is challenging India's own Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and her general control, is a "new game"

(Mohan, C.R 2005).

China's concept of 'String of Pearls' introduces geopolitical lead and strategic attitude of China in the Indian Ocean. Evolving strategic alliance of China with the different island nations decides the paradigm of its enlarged set up while empowering it to keep surveillance over India's move and other maritime activities performed by major competitors in the IOR. China's 'String of Pearls' strategy exhibits its complex initiative to materialise its geo-strategic interests. The 'Pearls of String' capture a grand space encompassing the littoral states of the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf (Pathak, Vidhan 2009). After 'String of Pearl', this time China wishes to encircle India through sea (Mohan, C.R 2009). China's "Maritime Silk Route" is nothing short of revising its former String of Pearl strategy. Foreign Minister Wang Yi put the Silk Road initiative atop of China's diplomatic priorities in 2015. The initiative, which goes by the popular name "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR), was launched by President Xi Jinping at the end of 2013 aiming at building new ports and industrial zones in different parts of the Indian Ocean (Indian Express, 2015). Furthermore, comprehensive and sustainable presence of Chinese footprints in the

Indian Ocean region together with containment of India has been "China's Great Game" (Nalapat, M 2006).

Kumar Ranjit (2012) maintains that if China further accelerates its existing endeavours in a parallel manner and succeeds by any chance, privileged with its advanced naval arm, spreading in the broader region of the Indian Ocean, then there are high chances of face to face confrontation between the U.S and China while posing multiple obstacles before India as well. Such strategic development needs to be derailed by a sustained collective move of India and the U.S or else China can potentially jeopardise their strategic visions breaching the peace and stability in the region to some limited extent.

Oil Politics and Geopolitics

With the growing energy interest of the global powers, the Indian Ocean has emerged as a prominent economic hub sheltering the energy and trade interests of these powers and the global energy demands are supposed to further rise in the years to come. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil chokepoint situated in between Iran and Oman at the head of the Persian Gulf (Brewster, David 2014). A bulk

of energy supply is carried by the Indian Ocean. China heavily relies on the Strait of Malacca for its oil security through which a profound share of about 82 percent of its oil imports pass (including import sources of Sudan and West Africa) (Department of Defense, U.S 2012). Between 2011 and 2035, it is expected that global consumption of oil and natural gas will be go up by 28 per cent and 47 per cent respectively whereby much of the demand will be coming from India and China's oil imports from the Middle East and shockingly the direct significance of the Middle East as a source of energy for the U.S will be declining (International Energy Outlook, 2011). In the 21st century, with the growing economy the energy demand of China is swelling manifolds. Energy is an important component of China's economy and it can be claimed that securing energy is the foundational principle of its economy. And therefore, China is making deliberate efforts to flex its blue muscles across the Indian Ocean region (Parthasarathy, G. 2009).

For sustaining the growth of its economy, securing geo-strategic interest is of high importance for China as Strait of Malacca is considerably a source of strength as well as much vulnerable for Beijing (Chen, Shaofeng 2010). China's dependence on freedom of passage

through the choke points of the Indian Ocean led Chinese President Hu Jintao to declare that his country faces a 'Malacca Dilemma' (Lanteigne 2008, 143). Beijing's anxiety about free passage through Malacca is further exacerbated by remarks of Indian 'hawks', such as Bharat Karnad, (former member of India's National Security Advisory Board) who advocated that, in the event of a conflict with China, India would use sea denial strategies such as naval blockades to sever China's energy supply lines—by 'squeezing the Chinese oil and trade lanes in the Indian Ocean' (Joshi 2011, 159). India is heavily reliant upon energy imports with 68% of oil and approximately 85% of gas transiting the Indian Ocean Region from regional sources (Weimer, 2013). Whereas China - world's number two oil consumer has single-handedly accounted for 40 percent of the world's crude oil demand growth since the year 2000 (Asian Pacific Research Centre, 2004). Importantly, when over 70 percent of China's oil imports come from the Gulf region its dependency on the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) has augmented and the related protection of the SLOCs has become mandatory for China (Pathak, Vidhan 2009).

A flourishing China with its expanded economy is taking all

paces very tactfully to enlarge its maritime reach beyond its present existence. The 'String of Pearls' is a planned initiative to materialize its Grand National strategy to secure its global position.

Littorals and strategic vision of major powers

Raja C. Mohan (2009) expresses that after the cold war the importance which was obscured of the Indian Ocean and its western island territories is now being reinstated with the rise of China in a full-fledged manner. It has demarcated the western island nations on the global geopolitical map. Big powers are eyeing the African continent, especially its island nations to process their maritime interests. It is a strategically convincing fact that these island nations can provide a strong foothold to the littoral as well as non-littoral powers to step up their naval presence and can potentially assist in meeting their strategic vision (Kumar, Ranjit 2011). The Francophone Western Indian Ocean Island nations Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros and Seychelles, have drawn greater significance because of the increased military and diplomatic activities in the region. India's Prime Minister Mr. Narendar Modi's visit in 2015 to three island nations of the IOR showcases these

islands occupying place in the priority list of India. PM Modi pronounced that this visit was highly crucial to further strengthening ties with these island nations and to abort China's increasing scramble to the Indian Ocean. He additionally stated "we are providing patrol ships, surveillance radars and ocean mapping for the island states" (The Indian Express, 2015). India is viewed as fostering and shaping its security efforts in the Indian Ocean by transferring the Indian-made patrol vessel *Barracuda* to Mauritius, the deployment of P-8I aircraft to Seychelles for surveillance of its exclusive economic zone, the agreements to develop connectivity infrastructure on Assumption Island in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius (Raja C. Mohan 2015).

Although, India has island territories which secure its maritime assets and historically it has established progressive relations with different countries which are supposedly conducive signs for India, still China's robust approach in the IOR is multiplying India's worries and for that matter, India cannot afford ignoring such serious moves by China. The growing influence of China in the western Indian Ocean is sparked by its rising economic interests and other strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean. With

the passage of time China is evolving its economic, military and strategic linkages with the African countries and more importantly with the western island nations like Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar etc which seems more explicit subsequent to China-Africa Summit in Beijing in 2006 (Roy, Denny 2005). It may be recognized that India has enjoyed a historic alliance and has been a principal security and military partner of Mauritius, yet increased trade and economic surge of China with Mauritius signals the strategic behaviour of China to overtake India. The Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to two of the world's smallest countries Seychelles and Mauritius in February 2007 and February 2009 respectively, speak of the strategic significance of the two island nations (Pathak, Vidhan 2009). Mauritius's position is typical of the rest of Africa. A small island with no exploitable natural resources, growing labour shortages, and poor and declining cost competitiveness, Mauritius offers an unlikely destination for the kind of FDI that Chinese have generally offered. Ancharaz, Vinaye and Nowbutsing, Baboo (2010) argue that Mauritius is the very first country in Africa to host one of the seven economic zones that the Chinese government has promised to build around Africa. It is clear that the investment which flows into the zone

are neither market-seeking, nor resource-seeking nor indeed efficiency seeking. What could then explain China's choice of Mauritius as a host of its industrial zone? Mauritius, due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean is seen as a bridge between Asia and Africa and offers the perfect gateway to the emerging African market. It is this opportunity that China is eyeing on Mauritius. Raja C Mohan (2009) mentions that the former President of China, Hu Jintao's brief stopover in Mauritius in the year 2009 has no parallel with Beijing's resource diplomacy. In the first ever visit to Mauritius, President Hu announced a US\$260 million loan for the modernisation and expansion of the airport in Port Louis. These entire efforts are part of Beijing's soft power diplomacy to take full advantage of Mauritius as a gateway to Africa to gradually expand its area of influence.

On December 13, 2011 Chinese Defence Minister had officially announced that Seychelles had welcomed the Chinese navy to establish facilities in order to resupply and recuperate international ships during escort missions which had attracted worldwide media attention while helping China expand its naval fleet in the IOR. Speculations were also

being made that this kind of move will certainly made China's efforts efficient by helping it in setting up of a naval base on the Indian Ocean. As Diego Garcia is merely 600 km away from Seychelles in terms of geography, the U.S also expressed its deep tension over this development besides India (Kumar, Ranjit 2012). India in retaliation emphasises on foiling any effective move of China to sell arms or establishing any listening outposts and monitoring stations on the island state. In the other episode in 2005, Indian Naval Chief, Admiral Arun Prakash had gifted the 'INS Tarmugli', a fast attack craft to the Seychelles Coast Guard getting indications about Beijing's stepped up efforts to supply arms to Seychelles (Raja C. Mohan, 2009). Similar attempts have been initiated by China to woo Sri Lanka to serve its maritime strategy. In a recent development, China started building a 'logistical support' base in Djibouti in 2016. According to a Pentagon report, the Djibouti base, "along with regular naval vessel visits to foreign ports, both reflect and amplifies China's growing influence, extending the reach of its armed forces," and it may be the first of many such overseas bases (Woodyo, Christopher 2017). China has developed great proximity with the littoral states of the region that pronounce least objection to the

Chinese naval presence in their vicinity. Such moves are radically positive for China but meanwhile deeply threatening India's historic role in the region.

If India aims to establish its predominant clout and security in the region, it strictly needs to maintain its traditional cordial ties with the island nations of Africa by adopting aggressive policy of engagements. And for that purpose, gaining confidence of the U.S in its efforts to turn its maritime objectives into reality is just inevitable. Thereby, the U.S and India should proceed under the collaboration of each other so that ultimately a secure strategic environment can be established in the region favouring unanimously regional and extra-regional powers.

U.S. Role

The sustained attention that China has given to the Indian Ocean attached with its advanced maritime strategy has prodded India and the U.S to shake hands to derail the speedy pace and growing influence of China in the IOR. The theory of international relations reminds us about the vitality of the balance of power whether on the land or the sea. China's moves are being observed as decimating the stability in the region by undertaking an offensive

realist approach and China is relatively being viewed as securing a hegemonic space in the region by the global strategic community. Factually, China's image is at risk with its aggressive approach in the region. Chinese behaviour is seen as lacking legitimacy in following the principles of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Singh, Udai Bhanu 2015). It excessively claims much of the South China Sea in contravention of UNCLOS and further agreements it has signed. China claims sovereignty over all of South China Sea. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan have countered these claims made by China (Indian Express, 24 June 2017).

China's expanding economy coupled with mighty and modernised navy has become a matter of great concern for India and the U.S. If we look on its military expenditure, it should raise eyebrows of the major powers. From *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, we find a PPP-adjusted military expenditure figure for 2011 of \$711 billion for the US and \$228 billion for China. Whereas China's military expenditure figure for 2002–11 increased by 170 per cent, India's increased by a mere 59 per cent. Consequently the 2012–13 defence budget increase of 18 per cent on India's part hardly reduced the India-China military expenditure

gap than establishing any Indian superiority. Both India and China may be spending around two per cent of GDP on their military, in comparison to the United States' 4.7 per cent; but China's GDP is around triple the size of India's, thereby enabling greater relative military spending. (Scott, David 2013). However, in comparison to the other extra-regional actors like the US and China, India's military spending strategy is indeed less impressive. The Pentagon report issued details in 2017 that China had spent \$180 billion on its defence in the year 2016 which is greater than the \$140 billion officially allotted for its defense sector.

Contrary to China, India adheres to International law and overwhelmingly contributes in establishing peace globally. India would not passively watch moves of extra-regional forces in the region which become a factor in breaching the peace and security of the region under its Monroe Doctrine which disallows the ingress of external powers in the IOR (Brewster, David 2014).

Whether the broad strategic interest of China has been realised by it or not in its entirety, the Indian Ocean holds a priority place in the foreign policy of China (Bhaskar, Uday 2014). Given these facts,

undoubtedly the concerns of India and the U.S are sensed as legitimate for that matter. In this vein, constant and close surveillance over the footsteps of China in the region is inevitably needed to check its strategic psyche. Interestingly, the U.S had recently sent a navy warship near an artificial island in the South China Sea as part of the first "freedom of navigation" operation under President Trump, a move China has denounced in the name of challenging its sovereignty in the region (Indian Express, 24 June 2017).

What India and the U.S urgently require is to further promote their strategic partnership and inter-cooperation in an established manner. The U.S contains broad interest in the IOR but a systematic and requisite policy is absent to deal with the pertaining issues. Many parts geographically positioned between the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea have strategically remained crucial to the U.S. The area which is focussed more by the U.S is the east of the Malacca Straits that is considered primary for its interest.

India needs a maritime security partner in the Indian Ocean. The strategic ties between India and the U.S are now focussed on military cooperation. The U.S has remained committed towards improving the

conventional naval and air force capabilities of India in order to complement the presence of the U.S in the region. During 2003 to 2010, India has conducted over 50 military operations with the U.S.

Conclusion

As the 19th century American naval strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan maintains that “whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia and in the 21st century the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters”, a changing contour of power equation is appearing on the Indian Ocean. India being a legitimate part of the Indian Ocean is appearing reluctant in single-handedly dealing with China, whereas China, being a non-littoral state is racing to dominate the Indian Ocean region. The continuance of such kind of scenario can potentially threaten India's historic proximity with the island nations of the IOR. It is unanimously agreed by the global strategic community that the debut of China will result in declining the role of the U.S in the coming decades. Besides this, China's constant assertiveness to secure its energy interests and for that matter increasing naval fleet in the region has consequently intensified the competition between the major actors for gaining power in the region.

Much importantly this phenomenon has brought India and the U.S on a common platform pushing them towards more and more collaboration between each other to tackle the security threat posed by China.

An aggressive policy on the part of India is needed because under India's Maritime Military Strategy, India's chief area of strategic interest is broad that includes 'the choke points leading to and from the Indian Ocean – principally the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the Cape of Good Hope'. And this is the reason that India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had once said, 'We cannot afford to be weak at sea'. Furthermore, nearly all Indian defence and naval policy documents accentuate the inter-linkages between the Indian Ocean Region and Indian national security. It has been traditionally asserted by India that any threat and volatility in the region will have negative implications on the national security of India.

In this background, collective steps of India and the U.S are indispensable for evolving their respective clout and creating a harmonious Indian Ocean. Thus, in case they want to move forward

pursuing their geo-strategic objectives in the Indian Ocean, they need urgent identification of virtual challenges emanating from the IOR and subsequent formulation of requisite policies with the adoption of related strategy under the framework of collaboration while gathering confidence of the littorals in an impressive manner. ■

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