

**THE 21st CENTURY MARITIME SILK ROAD INITIATIVE IN
THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: CHALLENGES AND
PROSPECTS FOR CHINA**



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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Imtiaz Ahamd. He has fulfilled my life and given it meaning.

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ABSTRACT

Maritime Silk Road Initiative, one of the main projections of the Chinese ambitious initiative, one Belt One Road, officially announced in 2013, has multifaceted implications on global order in general, and Indo-Pacific politics, in particular. This study aims to explore the opportunities and challenges of MSRI for China and the reservations anticipated by the West, regarding the said multilateral project. The fundamental vision of China behind this dream project is to get rid of the insecurity for Sino trade in the South China Sea and the Malacca dilemma, along with the soaring food insecurities. China Pakistan Economic Corridor, the offshoot of Belt and Road Initiative provides the safest and shortest excess to exports and imports by connecting its Western province, Xinjiang to Gwadar Port, Pakistan, adjacent to the Middle East, an alternative to its precarious southern route. Moreover, dozens of seaports being constructed by China in different littoral states will strengthen the Chinese economy which has already increased in the last decades. Similarly, to feed almost one and a half billion people was not plain sailing for the Communist Government, nonetheless, she had already acquired massive lands in various parts of the world for farming to carry out their food requirements. MSRI, perhaps is going to be the linchpin, by bridging China with those agricultural lands. Western allies, particularly America denounced it by deeming it as a part of the hegemonic desire of the Communist regime, which would be an existential threat to the pre-existing world order, especially Western liberal democracy. Realistically, Western apprehension sounds abstruse as MSRI covers those states that are not democratic or have pseudo-democracy. Despite this narrative, obscurity in bilateral deals, as China enforces not to disclose agreements and treaties also wither its objectives. Therefore, it is the test of the political acumen of Chinese leadership to bring transparency in bilateral agreements and nudge Western narratives by prudent diplomacy, to accomplish maximum out of it. The unprecedented and active role of China, both militarily and economically in the Indo-Pacific and the American alignments to counter China are exacerbating the appeasement of this region. If this adversary carries on it will bring political calamity to the global realm, and Indo-Pacific is going to be its pivot soon.

Keywords: maritime, hegemony, Indian Ocean, MSRI, natural resources, UNCLOS, geoeconomics, geopolitics.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BCIM-EC	Bangladesh China India Myanmar Economic Corridor
DOD	Department of Defense
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
CPC	Communist Party of China
EASI	East Asia Security Initiative
ECS	East China Sea
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GB	Great Britain
GDP	Gross domestic product
INS	Indian Navy Ship
IMB	International Maritime Bureau
IOR	Indian Ocean region
JWG	Joint Working Group China–India
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China

MSRI	Maritime Silk Road Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSMS	National Strategy for Maritime Security
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People’s Republic of China
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) known as QUAD.
SAARC	South Asai Association for Regional Cooperation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication
USA	United States of America
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
IOR	Indian Ocean Region

CHAPTER 1

Introduction /Background

Resource scarcity, identity and ideological conflicts, misperception, disinformation, and geopolitical and strategic rivalries are some common factors that prove to be the major impediments to understanding the politics of the world. It is quite evident in the intellectual and scholarly discourse that the center of power is making a rapid transition from the west to the east. In economic terms, Asia observed a significant boom with Japanese progress in the 1960s. In the next decade, countries of Southeast Asia like, Taiwan, and South Korea started developing their economic might. Moreover, the socio-economic and political reforms brought by the Communist Regime of China under the leadership of Den Xiaoping in the 1970s further strengthen Asian influence on global economic order. The USA and the western world faced a real shock when the IMF announced China as the largest economy based on power purchase parity in 2014. Japan and India also secured a position in the top five economies. China is the world's largest manufacturer and exporter, and it is also the world's largest market for Western products, for instance, electronics, medicines, and agricultural products. Although the US still enjoys a leading role in diplomacy, military, and institutional power but is in constant fear regarding the escalating economic might of the Asian powers, as a strong economy certainly helps in developing the military might.¹

On September 2013 Xi Jinping the president of the People's Republic of China announced the mega project One Belt, One Road (OBOR) in Astana. OBOR, later named the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), consists of two separate initiatives: Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). The idea of the Maritime Silk Road initiative (MSRI) was presented the Chinese president XI Jinping in October 2013 while on a visit to Indonesia. The proposed Maritime Silk Road starts from Fujian and connects the South China Sea to Southeast Asia, it will pass through the Malacca straits and will connect Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean and will end in Europe. The 21st Century MSRI will engage 29 coastal countries. The basic aim of building the MSRI according to the Chinese perspective is to build a community of the shared

¹ Gideon Rachman, "Easternisation: War and Peace in the Asian century", *The Bodley Head Vintage*, United Kingdom, 2016.

interests and provide a connectivity network from the coasts to the Hinterland.² The MSRI also aims to enhance cooperation to obtain mutual gains, and conflict eradication through interdependence. Unlike the ancient Silk Road, the Modern MSRI will have a deep emphasis on constructing ports, roads, and railway networks to make access from the port cities to the far-flung areas.

The MSRI has triggered severe competition between China and India. Rising economic growth and resource scarcity are the major reasons that have resulted in tense competition between these two states in the Indian Ocean region. China and India are dependent on sea-borne trade and energy, needed to fulfill their industrial requirements. On the other hand, any disturbance in the energy flow and other trade commodities will be harmful to the United States and the world economy. China also feels vulnerable to its imports and energy needs due to the ‘Malacca dilemma’. All these factors have made the Indian Ocean a hot spot in the geopolitical arena of world politics.

The tributary Seas of the Indian Ocean; The Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal have gained critical importance for China’s 21st century MSRI. Five out of nine proposed ports in the MSRI are in the Indian Ocean. Gwadar port in the Arabian Sea and Kyaukpyu in the Bay of Bengal are also called the gateway ports. Kyaukpyu will connect south China’s province Yunnan while Gwadar port will provide access to the landlocked western province of China, Xinjiang. The Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port has significant importance for China. All the port projects in the Indian Ocean have great potential to provide economic gains and easy access to the hinterland and underdeveloped regions of China viz a viz prosperity to the South Asian littoral states. But due to the tumultuous political and security situation in the South Asian littoral states, the influence of extra-regional powers and India’s ambivalence will pose several challenges for China to make MSRI a successful project.

1.2 Research Gap

The existing literature about this research has been examined in detail. Necessary background about the topic has been provided by scholars. The literature review has revealed certain neglected aspects that this study will try to address. China’s domestic imperatives behind BRI generally and MSRI particularly are neglected by most scholars. These imperatives are China’s food security,

²Cuiping Zhu, “India’s Ocean: Can China and India Coexist?”, Singapore: *Springer Nature Singapore*, 2018. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-10-5726-7>

energy needs, and geographical impediments. The present study has put an endeavor to overcome these shortcomings.

1.2.1 Theoretical Gap:

It seems premature to apply conventional theories of International Relations like Realism and Liberalism to the present study due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders with their own interests and imperatives. Various narratives have been inculcated regarding MSRI by different actors reducing its concreteness and vitiating the application of mainstream theories. China takes MSRI as a liberal initiative, as it produces interdependency among states and is also a source of economic prosperity. However, Western block, particularly, America deems it as a Chinese tool to control global politics, a true application of the realist approach. Therefore, geopolitical context, particularly, the Rimland theory seem to be more appropriate to understand and analyze this study.

1.2. 2 Contextual Gap

Though, the immensity and dynamics of MSRI are so diverse, due to its overextended initiatives both in Pacific and Indian oceans. Its repercussions are also predominated on global politics, geoeconomics and geostrategic fronts. Nonetheless, for better understanding and deeper analysis researcher has restricted this study in the context of the Indian Ocean. Moreover, its importance for China regarding its industrial production, fulfillment of energy needs, food security to accomplish its domestic needs are also the core context of the present study.

1.3 Problem statement

Indian Ocean is considered as the pivot of global politics due to its economic and strategic importance. The expansion of global trade after the Second World War further increased the significance of this region. China being the rising power, is trying to use the Indian Ocean as a trade route, as well as an arena to explore its natural resources and the 21st-century MSRI is the mega initiative to fulfill her aspirations. This visionary step, on the one side, will strengthen the Chinese economy and its influence, and on the other side, it will also become a huge challenge for China, as the regional and global actors seem skeptical and vigilant. These changing dynamics have made the Indian Ocean region, the center of geopolitical and strategic competition.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the likely impact of Maritim Silk Road Initiative on the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean?
2. How does the Indian Maritime maneuvering in the Indian Ocean impact the success of Maritim Silk Road Initiative?
3. Why China feels vulnerable due to the Western concerns about Maritim Silk Road Initiative?

1.5 Research objective

The objective of the present study is to understand the dynamics of challenges and prospects for China in the implementation of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative in the Indian Ocean Region.

1.6 Significance of the study

China's rapid economic growth is unprecedented in history. Its substantial industrial productivity, huge foreign currency reserves, the quest for natural resources, and geographical constraints have resulted in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative. The proposed study's focus is on the second component of the BRI, which is the 21st Century MSRI. As it is said that Land divides and Sea unites, China's maritime connectivity project is perceived as a real threat by the regional and the status quo powers. The proposed study will help to understand the complex relationship among socio-economic, political, and geographical factors.

Owing to its socio-political, economic, and strategic implications on the region as well as on the global realm, MSRI is one of the most debated topics in the field of international relations. Despite its theoretical importance the MSRI as a project has a serious impact on practical grounds; an increase in Chinese industrial productivity, and its strategic values, particularly in the maritime domain, which can be a serious blow to pre-existing global order, led by America. The present study has provided various insides for policymakers to understand the importance and challenges of MSRI for the development of interests of China and its participants. Moreover, it will also open new avenues for future scholars to dig out this analysis in different dimensions.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Due to the overwhelming impact of MSRI on global and regional dynamics, various scholars and writers have interpreted it in multiple ways. Some of them believe that this initiative will become the silver line to eradicate global poverty by redeeming the infrastructure and economic system of third-world nations. Nevertheless, several scholars seem skeptical and take MSRI as a ‘death trap’ to control other state affairs, wisely oriented by China to become a global hegemon. A school of thought refutes both points of view stated above and acclaims that the consequences solely depend on the approach and policies of participating nations, that they are making it as a source of boom or a source of a curse.

To understand the objectives of this research, the understanding of various concepts is inevitable for the reader. The majority of the social science concepts specifically, in International Relations and Political Science don’t have an agreed definition. Almost every concept has multiple connotations,³ depending on the context or situation. Richard Little and Michael Smith, “Perspectives on World Politics” have succinctly described three different and competing perspectives as conceptual tools to understand the ambiguity of world politics. These perspectives are the relationship of politics in terms of power and security, interdependence in transnational relations, and finally the politics of dominance and dependence. To understand the outcome and objective of this research, the relevant existing literature is examined and will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), due to its important geopolitical location has great importance for extra-regional powers, especially the United States of America. The Indian Ocean links the energy-rich “Middle East” to the energetic and rising economies of Asia. Congressional Research Service (CRS) report has highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region with a deep concern for the US economic and strategic interests.⁴ As Indo-Pacific is the main arena for China’s proposed, 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), so we can expect great power

³ Richard Little and Michael Smith, “Perspectives on World Politics”, *Routledge London and New York*, 1991.

⁴ “China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress”, *Congressional Research Service*, 2018.

<https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20180420R45`943d4bf676130e76924f5fea6d2e54d3a78e2200a9.pdf>

competition in this region. The report recommends that the US should contain the surging Chinese influence and further posits that the USA should forge new alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. However, this report only propagates the American interests in the region without analyzing the interests of other regional countries.

Robert D. Kaplan in his book “Monsoon” has comprehensively described the importance of the Indian Ocean in contemporary global politics. Kaplan says that 20th Century politics was defined in terms of the European map, but in the Twenty-first century, global politics will be defined with a special reference to the greater Indian Ocean’s iconic map. The ⁵Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world having an arch shape, which is stretching from the Horn of Africa to the Indonesian archipelago and goes beyond as well. The author posits that China’s growing military role especially in the Naval domain and America’s declining military power is a matter of concern for the USA in the Indian Ocean region. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the strategic, economic, security, and cultural aspects of the littoral states. Keeping in view, the 21st century Maritime Silk Road initiative of China, specifically in the Indian Ocean region Monsoon is helpful to understand the changing regional dynamics and geopolitical competition in the IOR.

To understand the 21st century Maritime Silk Road Initiative of China, there is a dire need to understand the “Silk Road” as a concept itself. The term Silk Road has a historically different connotation and denotation. Cuiping Zhu in the book, “India’s Ocean: Can China and India Coexist?”, has discussed the different connotations of the term Silk Road.⁶ According to Zhu, the term “Silk Road” was first coined by a German geographer, Baron Ferdinand Von Richthofen in 1877. Later, Misugi Takatoshi, used this term in his study, “An Exploration of the maritime silk Road” in 1967. According to the Baidu Encyclopedia (Baidu Baike), Silk Road was an ancient maritime passage that was used for trade and cultural exchanges⁷. With the number of ports, this passage was used as an international trade network between the West and the East. The Haosou Encyclopedia (Haosou Baik) defines Maritime Silk Road as an extension of the land silk Road. This

³ Robert D. Kaplan, “Monsoon: The Indian Ocean & the Future of American Power”, *Random House Publishing Group*, New York, 2010.

⁶Cuiping Zhu, “India’s Ocean: Can China and India Coexist?”, Singapore: *Springer Nature Singapore*, 2018.
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-10-5726-7>

⁷ Ibid.

road was also called Porcelain Road, later it was also known as the Spice Road.⁸ Zhao posits that the Maritime Silk Road is not a simple route for Maritime trade and communication, it refers to a special kind of relationship between China and distant countries with the same spirit as it was in ancient times.⁹ Zhao further says the concept of the Maritime Silk Road must be defined as the relationship between China and foreign countries in terms of trade, and silk should be the prime commodity as it happened to be in ancient times.

The Belt and Road Initiative has escalated the geopolitical competition among the major powers of the world, more specifically it has created deep concerns for the USA. According to the US National Security Strategy, China is enhancing its aggregate power In almost all the domains and further, it will try to alter the existing order, especially in the Indo-Pacific region by asserting its influence by completing its mega initiative. In the US National Security Strategy, China is perceived as a major threat to global order, and further, it recommends that every possible step be taken to contain China¹⁰. It is probable that the American stance will result in Chinese concerns and will pose a big challenge to its mega initiative in the Indo-Pacific region where the US enjoys good support and Influence.

Khalid Manzoor Butt and Sadaf Jan Siddiqui have discussed the growing presence of China in the Indian Ocean Region on the basis of the geopolitical context. According to the authors, China has always preferred to be engaged in the Southeast Asian region, but at the start of the 21st century, China has started to pay its focus on South Asia, especially in the maritime domain. The announcement of the BRI in 2013 spurred a debate about the proposed Chinese intention and its effect on global politics. This was also a time that a political hardliner Narendra Modi was elected as the prime minister of India. Modi government assessed the Chinese growing engagement in the Indian Ocean generally and in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal in particular, as a big threat to India and attributed it to the encirclement of India later it was named the “String of Pearls strategy” of China. India thinks that Chinese MSRI will erode Indian footprints in the Region with

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cuiping Zhu, “Thoughts on the definition of “Maritime Silk Road” and its historical extension”, *Acad Res*, 2002
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-0167-3_1

¹⁰“National Security Strategy”, *The White House Washington*, October 2022.

https://www.google.com/search?q=national+security+strategy+october+2022&rlz=1C1GGRV_enPK942PK942&oq=National+Security+Strategy+October+2022&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgAEAAyGAQyBwgAEAAyGAQyCggBEAAyhgMYigUYcggCEAAyhgMYigXSAQk1Mzl3ajBqMTWoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

the completion of the Bangladesh China India Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).¹¹ Upon perceiving China as a threat, India has started actively maneuvering in the Island states like Mauritius, Madagascar, and Seychelles and in the Nicobar and the Andaman seas. Chinese mounting interests in the Indian Ocean Region have given birth to not only Indian concerns but have also created unrest among extra-regional powers, more precisely the USA Western powers. So, the biggest challenge for China will be to address these concerns in order to make the MSRI a success.

China's vision and subsequent action plans for the Belt and Road initiative are described in the National Development and Reform Commission, 2017.¹² According to the commission's report, providing connectivity through the construction of ports and a network of railways and roads is the most important task. The basic aim of the Maritime Silk Road (MSRI) is to facilitate trade by connecting the ports to the far-flung hinterland. The initiative will be based on cooperation and consultation in terms of diplomacy, economy, and culture. The report further highlights the constraints which are sea rights, the influence of regional and extra-regional powers in the proposed routes, and a sense of insecurity amongst the participant states and other stakeholders. The report illustrates that the MSRI is based on geo-economics and as a development initiative instead of geopolitical interests.

Graham Allison in his book, "Destined for War" has written about the Chinese grand strategy. The author has quoted Singapore's former prime minister Lee Kau Yew, that China is the biggest player in world history. Allison says that China's announcement of One Belt, One Road (OBOR) in 2013, is not a simple economic and development project. According to the author, the mega project BRI is the manifestation of Chinese geopolitical intentions, which will trigger and escalate competition among major powers as it happened in ancient times. Allison further posits that; China is

¹¹Butt, Khalid Manzoor, and Sadaf Jan Siddiqui. "Growing Chinese Presence in the Indian Ocean: Prospects and Challenges." *Strategic Studies* 41, no. 2 (2021): 64–81. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48732275>.

¹² Vision and Proposed actions outlined on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-century maritime silk Road, National Development and Reform Commission, 2015. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=Vision+and+Proposed+actions+outlined+on+Jointly+Building+Silk+Road+Economic+Belt+and+21st-century+maritime+silk+Road%2C+National+Development+and+Reform+Commission%2C+2017.&cvid=82b3da48b4cc4093a126dc33300a6027&aqs=edge..69i57j69i11004.1379j0j9&FORM=ANAB01&PC=U531>

determined to pursue a strategy that will make Sir Halford Mackinder's concept of commanding the 'world Island' into a reality¹³.

Henry Kissinger in his book, "On China" tells the reader about the Chinese strategic thought with a special comparison to the western power politics approach.¹⁴In Henry Kissinger's view, the Chinese leadership has learned from their tumultuous history that there are some inherent problems for them we cannot have a permanent solution, and the narrative of the zero-sum game is dangerous for the world's harmony. Kissinger substantiates this strategic thought by drawing a comparison between the Chinese and western forms of chess. In Chinese word for chess is called 'Wei qi'. The common form of chess consists of 32 pieces, while Wei qi is comprised of 180 pieces. In the western form of chess, victory is gained by knocking the opponent out while in Wei qi victory is achieved through the encirclement of the opponent's pieces. The winner of the wei qi wins only by a smaller margin and sometimes it becomes difficult to know who the winner is. Kissinger makes a point here that Wei qi shows flexibility and relative and negates the notion of the zero-sum game which is inherent in western strategic thought. From Kissinger's observation, we can draw a demarcation line between the western and Chinese ways of engagement with world affairs. The former is purely based on military might while the latter has a deep emphasis on psychological and political aspects while engaging with world affairs. The observations made by Henry Kissinger will help in understanding the Chinese mega project, the BRI generally, and the MSRI specifically due to the participation of many countries in this unprecedented mega project.

In "Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order", Bruno Macaes makes a point that China's Belt and Road initiative is not a development or an infrastructural project. The initiative has geopolitical intentions. The BRI is a combination of tools in the form of building infrastructure and enhancement in technology and economy under the Chinese auspicious¹⁵. The author further claims that with the help of this ambitious project China is heading towards new world order. The author has named this project a kind of "Faustian Pact", which he thinks is a debt and structural trap that will captivate almost half of the world in its orbit. The book posits that the participant countries will get small benefits by compromising the sovereignty of their respective state. The

¹³Graham Allison, "Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?" United States: *HarperCollins*, 2017.

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger, "On China", United Kingdom: *Penguin*, 2011.

¹⁵ Bruno Macaes, "Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order", United Kingdom: *Hurst*, 2018.

book shows greater concern amongst the western block with context to the 21st century MSRI. The author claims that the launching of MSRI will result in the presence of several warships and their presence will attract others, which will create a security risk in the Indian Ocean Region.

The author further illustrates that MSRI will result in a tense rivalry between the key regional player India and China. India is already concerned with China's investment in Gwadar, Hambantutua, and Kyaukpyu ports in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal respectively. According to Bruno China is trying to get easy access to extract Myanmar's rich oil and gas resources from the Bay of Bengal, which India thinks is its own backyard. The major Chinese objective is to get influence, exploit natural resources and avoid the Malacca dilemma.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute report, China's 21st-century MSRI is an unprecedented project, and it is very difficult to fathom its scope and commitment. According to the report the rationale behind this mega project is based on the political, economic, and security interests of China, which can damage or further aggravate the tumultuous situation in the Maritime space of the Indo-Pacific region¹⁶. China is developing five ports in the Indian Ocean Region, which are: Kyaukpyu (Myanmar), Obock (Djibouti), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Gwadar (Pakistan), and Feydhoo Finolhu (Maldieves). By keeping in view, the fragile nature of these states, China is taking a huge risk by developing these ports. There is also a growing concern amongst the Regional and extra-regional powers that China will use these ports for military purposes, and this will create a sense of insecurity in the region. Finally, it will result in severe security competition, which further escalates the arms race in the region.

Tim Marshal's book, "Prisoners of Geography", provides an in-depth analysis of the role of geography in shaping the country's future course of action.¹⁷ The author posits that historically geographic compulsions have played a decisive role in the civilizational, strategic, economic, and religious affairs of the states. Marshall argues that China always prospered from the wealth generated by its coastal cities, but the wealth and prosperity could not be transferred to its western countryside due to a lack of connectivity networks. Marshall posits that China's Belt and Road initiative is based on China's geographic compulsions to provide an infrastructural network within

¹⁶ Richard Ghiasy, Feisu, Lora Saalman, "The 21st century Maritime Silk Road security implications and ways forward for the European Union", 2018. Front Matter from THE 21ST CENTURY MARITIME SILK ROAD: Security implications and ways forward for the European Union on JSTOR

¹⁷ Tim Marshall, "Prisoners of Geography", *Scribner, an imprint of Simon and Schuster, USA*, 2015.

the country and its relationship with the outside world. Marshall argues that the Chinese naval expeditions of the 15th century in the Indian Ocean region were only for trade and cultural exchange. These sea expeditions were not intended for acquiring bases and power projection. The book highlights the existing challenges for in the maritime domain in south and East China seas. China is indulged in the territorial disputes into its own backyard as majority of these states are in American camp, these disputes can have dangerous consequences for Chinese trade and can enhance the Chinese Malacca dilemma. China's MSRI can be seen as the outcome of its geographical impediments and specifically to avoid the Malacca dilemma to secure its trade routes and this will provide shorter passage for its imports and exports.

In "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics", John J Mearsheimer says that international political system is shaped by the attributes of the great powers. In an anarchic world, the states are in constant fear of each other. To be secure these states compete relentlessly to achieve more power.¹⁸ according to Mearsheimer the power of a state depends upon the socio-economic conditions like; wealth, large population, technology, and huge industrial capacity to translate the potential power into the military might. Professor Mearsheimer has also talked about the primacy of land power which plays an effective role in acquiring and controlling offshore territories. Naval and air combatant forces play only a helping role. According to the author continental powers have a clear advantage over the insular powers. Mearsheimer says that Oceans can hindrance for achieving hegemony due to the stopping power of the water. The author has also criticized the strategy of the Naval blockade presented by Alfred Mahan and Corbett, as they called it, the most striving and awful mark of the Sea power. mearsheimer claims that cutting off trade communication network can make a country's economy fragile, but this strategy cannot result in a decisive victory.

The author has shown deep concern about China's growing influence in Asia. He posits that China's growing economy, large population and immense industrial capacity qualifies China to become a hegemon and this is a real matter of concern for America. Professor John says that US policy on China is not appropriate, instead of engaging, the US should contain China. Now by keeping an eye on the US intentions and their intellectual debate China's Belt and Road initiative

¹⁸ John J Mearsheimer, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics", *W W. Norton & Company, New York, and London*, 2001.

is a great concern for the USA. China's 21st century MSRI and America's Indo-Pacific strategy will make the Indian Ocean the future hotspot of world politics.

Xinmin Sui in "China's Strategy towards south Asia in the context of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative", illustrates China's historical relationship with the South Asian countries. Sui says that the success of MSRI is beneficial to all the South Asian states. China's massive investment in the construction of ports, overland pathways, and industrial parks will uplift the fragile economies of the South Asian states.¹⁹ With a special reference to the Hegemonic Stability Theory, Sui posits that China's objective of creating a "community of shared interests" is completely aligned with the interdependence of the states. The inclusiveness of the MSRI will result in the stability and prosperity of the region. Sui has also highlighted the challenges that include political instability and the unpredictable security situation of the region. Sui says that India's attitude will play an important role in the success or failure of this mega project. According to the author, China's Naval presence in the Indian Ocean region is solely for the protection of its economic interests. China is neither interested in containing India nor has the intention to attain a dominant position in the Indian Ocean region.

David Brewster in his study, "The MSRI and the evolving Naval Balance in the Indian Ocean" has discussed the strategic issues related to the MSRI in South Asia.²⁰ David states that historically Indian ocean has been controlled by the Sea powers and the continental or land powers have played a minimum role in the Indian ocean. Dominant sea powers have controlled the Indian Ocean due to its close strategic space, by controlling the choke points. According to Brewster China's 21st century, MSRI with an aim to construct ports and overland pathways will change the strategic nature of the Indian Ocean. The project will make it necessary for China to play an active role in the security of the region. MSRI will change China's role from an extra-regional power to a resident power in the region. David claims that China does not possess the necessary naval strength to protect its massive economic interests. He postulates that a Dominant Chinese role in the region does not look feasible soon, and this will be a major challenge for China.

¹⁹ Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, "China's Maritime Silk Road initiative and South Asia: A Political Economic Analysis of its Purposes; Perils, and Promise", *Palgrave Macmillan Springer Nature*, 2018.

²⁰ *ibid*

Geography often provides the most appropriate way to understand a state's strengths and weaknesses, that usually drive the foreign policy of a country. Robert D. Kaplan has pointed out the geographic importance of Xinjiang for the successful completion of the BRI, that will connect China with the European continent and the Greater Middle East by sea and land. Apart from Xinjiang's geographic importance, it is also very important for China in demographic terms as well. China is criticized by the West due to its alleged brutal treatment of Uighur Muslims, and it is a matter of concern for China, as any domestic political turmoil can seriously damage the mega connectivity initiative started by the Chinese government. So, the study has helped to understand the domestic challenges for China, as to keep order in the region which will be important for the successful completion of the BRI²¹.

According to the study conducted by Shuneng Zhong and Xili Wu, island countries have different approaches to sustainable development as compared to non-island states. The Indian Ocean presents an excellent relevance between the phenomenon of the sustainable development of the island territories and China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative. The Indian Ocean contains strategically located Island territories like Seychelles, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mayotte, etc. The island states lie at the center of the world's largest ecosystems like the Oceans. So, it is very important to have a meticulous plan for sustainable development in these territories. As China has promulgated the MSRI as a development project, it will be a great challenge for her to integrate the various stakeholders for the successful completion of the initiative along with ensuring sustainable development²².

Yasmin Jalil in her paper, "India's development of sea-based Nuclear capabilities: implications for Pakistan", postulates that India's emphasis on the enhancement of submarine capabilities is a matter of concern for regional security. The building of the Scorpion submarine with the help of France is a major step in this regard. This initiative will provide an upper hand to the Indians in the Indian Ocean and will create a sense of insecurity among the other stakeholders.²³ M Ihsan and Saifur Rahman, have also discussed the aggressive Naval intentions of India with a special

²¹ Robert D. Kaplan, "The Loom Of Time", *Random House, New York*, 2023.

²² Zhong, Shuneng, and Xili Wu. "Indian Ocean island sustainable development in the context of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road." *Island Studies Journal* 15, no. 2 (2020): 119-130.

²³ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "India's development of Sea-based nuclear capabilities: Implications for Pakistan", *Institute of strategic studies Islamabad*, 2018.

reference to the development of the Arihant nuclear submarine.²⁴ India's aggressive attitude and enmity towards China's MSRI will be a major impediment to the success of this mega project generally and a real threat to regional security particularly.

Abhijit Singh in his article, "Maritime security; partner in the Indo-Pacific" has discussed the geopolitical importance of the Indo-Pacific and India's role as a net security provider in the region.

The author postulates that China's MSRI in the Indo-Pacific region is a matter of grave concern to regional security in general and to India's security in particular.²⁵ According to the author, China's growing interest in the development of ports, railways, road networks, and deep economic penetration in the region is strategic in nature and shows Chinese aggression. Abhijit further says that India is a resident power in the region and China's assertive attitude has made it imperative for India to take the lead as a net security provider in the region. India is making engagement with small Island states like Mauritius, and Seychelles by providing them with small ships, surveillance aircrafts, and other necessary military equipment. India is engaged in Naval exercises and is also providing military training and equipment to some ASEAN states. The author claims that most of the participants in the MSRI are unaware of the Chinese strategic intentions. The countries have accepted the Chinese Publicity blindly. The author says that Maritime Asia needs to play an effective military role to deter and contain China.

Clive Hamilton and Marieke Ohlberg in the book, "hidden hand", discussed the ambitions of the Communist Party of China to alter the world's image according to its own vision.²⁶ The book postulates that²⁷ Chinese investment in the development of infrastructure of ports and other connecting networks is the vehicle to inject the communist ideology in the participating states. The authors have highlighted the ownership of ports and airports in various parts of the world as a major threat to the democracy of the world. Authors have named the BRI the 'Trojan Horse' and a perfect tool to spread and implement the Chinese discourse power. with regards to China's notion of the community of shared interests, the authors illustrate this is a real threat to the US lead

²⁴ Ihsan Qadir and Saif ur Rehman, "Emerging Paradigm of the Indian Ocean", *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, 2017.

²⁵ Abhijit Singh, "India as a security provider", *Asian strategic Review*, 2015. *Asian Strategic Review 2015: India as a Security Provider* | Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (idsa.in)

²⁶ Clive Hamilton & Mareike Ohlberg, "Hidden Hand exposing how the Chinese Communist Party is reshaping the world", *Oneworld publications* London, England. 2020

²⁷ Geoffrey Till, "Regional Naval Trends in the Indian Ocean" *Directorate of Naval Educational Services and NHQ Islamabad*, 1995.

hegemonic world order. Finally, the writers have claimed that the community of shared interests will spread the ideology of the of Chinese Communist Party.

In the “Regional Naval Trends in the Indian Ocean”, Geoffrey Till highlighted the importance of Oceans and Sea Power. Professor Till says that it is impossible to study the concept of Sea Power in isolation. All the happenings on the Sea have a direct effect on the shores. Geoffery Till has observed that expansion in the maritime domain has resulted in the prosperity of the states. He further posits that maritime affairs are more political in nature. Naval Forces, due to their mobile nature and flexibility, are less threatening and can play a better diplomatic role as compared to the Air and Land-based military forces. The author has described three basic roles of the Navy which can be enumerated: to provide deterrence, cooperation, and provides common security coalitions.

With a special reference to the Indian Ocean, the author makes a point that in the future there will be a major expansion rather than contraction in the Asia-Pacific region. The thriving economies, territorial disputes, and dependence on the Seaborn trade are identified as the major challenges. As the Indian Ocean is rich in natural resources and the South Asian states are facing intense demographic pressure which will result in the exploitation of the natural resources, which will aggravate an atmosphere of competition.

The rivalry between China and the USA has become the talk of the town in the recent past, and the major arena for this great power rivalry is the Indo-Pacific region. China’s growing engagement in this volatile region in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative has become a matter of real concern for Americans. The USA has categorically declared that no country should have the right to make a connectivity network and name it as the one road and belt, with context to the Chinese BRI. In order to contain China, former US president Trump during his election campaign declared India the true friend²⁸. By keeping in view, the Indian geographical position in the Indian Ocean, its rivalry with China, and an aspiration to be a regional power, it seems that the geopolitical environment will remain charged and will pose a huge challenge for the Chinese Maritime Silk Road Initiative.

²⁸ Peter Frankopan, “The New Silk Roads the Present and Future Of The World”, *Bloomsbury Publishing, Great Britain*, 2018.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides a systemic way to describe, prescribe and predict a specific phenomenon in any discipline. It provides a specific lens to understand a particular issue in a certain way. However, theories are quite bleak in International Relations than the other disciplines like the physical sciences. Professor Mearsheimer has failed to understand the functioning of the international system even after the study of 350 years of great power competition.

The scholarly study of international relations is almost impossible without the application of an adequate theory. On the other hand, the practitioners of international politics mostly care little about academic theories, but there exists an inseparable link between the actual practice of policy and the abstract nature of a theory. The abstract nature of theory itself makes it very difficult to analyze an issue with a singular approach.²⁹ In order to explain a certain issue a scholar should choose a theoretical framework, which should have the capacity to address multiple factors about the area of inquiry, by removing the vagueness from the study as much as possible. Ideally, a theory should have the substance to be able to make a prediction after the description and explanation of a concept or an issue, as described earlier most of the theories are based on abstract assumptions, and any prediction on the basis of abstraction will be less fruitful.³⁰

Nicholas J. Spykman's, Rimland Thesis has been taken as the theoretical framework for the present study. Rimland thesis is based on the concept, associated with the field of political geography and Geopolitics. Before Spykman, Alfred Mahan and Sir Halford Mackinder considered geography as the most important and constant factor in the elements of a nation's power. Half Mackinder, founder of geopolitics and geostrategy, in his essay, "the Geographic Pivot of History" has made the historical analysis of the course of history with a special focus on geography. In short, he has divided the world into three zones. These were the World Island, the offshore Island, and the Outlying Islands. Mackinder included Africa, Asia, and Europe in his 'world Island'. Due to the

²⁹ Stephan M. Walt, "One World, Many Theories", *Foreign Policy*, Spring, 1998.
<https://www.jstore.org/stable/1149275>.

³⁰ Harold Guetzkow cited in, "Classics of International Relations", *Prentice-Hall International*, United Kingdom, 1990.

geographical proximity, large population, and rich natural resources, he made a prediction that whoever controls the World Island will dominate the world.³¹

Alfred Thayer Mahan is considered the most prominent figure in modern naval strategic thought. The elements of the national power were first promulgated by US Navy Captain and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan in his landmark study, “The influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783”. Mahan posits that a strong naval fleet has played an important role in making countries powerful and that ultimately leads them to dominate the world. Apart from a strong combatant navy, Mahan says that sea power must constitute other elements of maritime power such as ports and harbors and merchant marine.³² Though being a Naval officer, Mahan was also a geostrategic as well. Mahan predicted that the future destiny of world geopolitics will be decided in the Indo-Pacific region. Mahan called the countries located in the North of the Indian Ocean and Southern part parts of Russia the “debatable ground”.

Nicholas J. Spykman was a Dutch-born American geostrategic expert. He was an ardent advocate of the overwhelming role of geography in the successful foreign policy of a country. He thinks that geography encompasses all.³³ According to Nicholas America’s location rather than his ideas is responsible for America’s rise to prominence. He says that the geographical proximity of America to the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean has made it a dominant power. Following the footprints of his predecessors Mahan and Mackinder he proposed the Rimland thesis based on geographical location. It was indeed Mackinder’s inner crescent and Mahan’s debatable zone which was named “The Rimland” being the Pivot area for future conflicts and where the destiny of the world will be defined.

The objective of the proposed study can best be understood through the lens of Spykman’s Rimland land theory, that also confirms Mahan and Mackinder’s ideas. China’s Belt and Road initiative is generally perceived as a geopolitical project in the contemporary discourse. The concept of geopolitics is slightly used with negative connotations, it is associated with imperialism and expansionism. The term geopolitics is generally used to describe the rivalries among the states or synonymously used with imperialism. The distinction between geopolitics and imperialism can be

³¹ Halford John Mackinder, “The Geographic Pivot of History”, United Kingdom: *Royal Geographical Society*, 1904.

³² Alfred T. Mahan, “The influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783”, *Little Brown Boston*, 1890.

³³ Nicholas J. Spykman, “America’s strategy in the world politics”, *Routledge Publisher New York*, March 15, 2007.

made as the former denotes the rivalry between great powers and the latter is associated with the dominance of the powerful states over fragile countries.³⁴ In simple words, geopolitics can be defined as the use of geographical knowledge which can help political leaders to forge a course of action for the betterment of the state.

In the recent past, the Indian Ocean has gained immense geostrategic importance. Being rich in natural resources, passage for key trade routes, its semi-closed nature, and being home to the world's most critical choke points, it is deemed as a strategic hot spot for major actors. Mega policy initiatives of the major powers like 'China's 21st-century MSRI', The 'US Pivot to Asia' 'QUAD', India's claim of The Indian Ocean as India's Ocean, and its 'Act East Policy' have made this region valuable for the major powers to transform their interests into reality.

China is perceived as the biggest threat by the USA and her allies. The world was dominated by the western lead order after the 2nd World War by the victory of the US and her allies. America launched the Marshal plan to provide necessary financial aid to strengthen the western bloc. Due to the decline in the economic and military strength of America in the recent past, its claim as the sole global hegemon is suspicious. China's growing economic might, massive industrial production capacity and the involvement of 29 coastal states in the MSRI will expedite the flow of trade vis a vis encounter geopolitical implications. The announcement of the MSRI, has further exacerbated the western concerns and is being seen as a tool used by China to dilute the status quo and the western world order. The proposed benefits and challenges will have certain economic and political challenges that demand a serious inquiry into the matter.

Indeed, the 21st Century MSRI provides the best example to understand the role of geographical knowledge in relation to the prosperity of the state: in the present contest-China. Among the nine proposed port infrastructure projects, five are in the Indian Ocean region. Most importantly, the Gwadar and Kyaukpyu ports are of immense importance. The Gwadar Port provides access to the western Chinese province, of Xinjiang through China Pakistan Economic Corridor, "CPEC" and the Kyaukpyu Port in the Bay of Bengal connects the Southern Chinese province of Yunnan through Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor, "BCIM". The successful completion of these projects can bring fruitful results for China and the participating countries,

³⁴ Peter J Taylor, "Political Geography World-economy, Nation-State, and Locality", *Longman Group UK Ltd*, 1989.

whereas the same projects have already mounted an arch rivalry between China and other regional and extra-regional powers.

The Indian Ocean Region is becoming the major area for great power competition. The United States emphasis has been changed from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-pacific, and China has also made a paradigm shift from continental to maritime power in the 21st century. Advancement in technology and transportation facilities has made the difference between the Heartland and the Rimland very narrow. The American strategy of Indo-Pacific seems Spykmanesque, as it aims to contain China in the Asian maritime domain, like it did to contain the former Soviet Union from continental expansion during the cold war. As China is pursuing to connect the Heartland with the Rimland through the Belt and Road Initiative, it may enable China to dominate the World-Island, that may include the Spykman's Rimland as well. So, the Rimland theory will provide a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities for China and the future of the geopolitics in the Indian Ocean region with specific context to the 21st-century MSRI in the Indian Ocean.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

The study of International Politics as an academic discipline is complicated, confusing, and controversial. We can have multiple arguments and ideas about a single phenomenon. Research methods provide us with the necessary tools to differentiate among a variety of arguments. It helps us to convert the available data, present in the shape of information, into knowledge.

International Relations is a relatively new academic discipline, which can be called an extension or the sub-field of Political Science. Most of the terms used in the social sciences do not have an agreed and single definition, due to their subjectivity, which is also true for Political Science. Political Science consists of two words, politics, and science. The etymology of politics is derived from the Greek, 'Polic' which means science and arts.³⁵ On the other hand, the origin of the word 'science', is taken from the Latin word 'Scire', which means to know.³⁶ By keeping in mind, the origins of the term Political science, it becomes quite ambiguous, that how we can define it. Despite the vagueness of the term, the study of Political science is based on the basic principles and the nature of state related affairs.

In the study of International Relations, a scholar has to deal with different political systems, how these systems interact with each other, that makes this this field of study diverse, and challenging for research and accumulation of knowledge. there are multiple ways to obtain knowledge and it is usually a cumbersome task for a scholar to extract, interpret and finally convert that information into knowledge. According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, a scholar should be the 'man thinking', he further says that a scholar gets information from the nature, past books, and actions around him.

In the past before the age of rapid information, books were the main source of information and knowledge, but books only provide the knowledge of the past and mostly are written under certain milieu. Unfortunately, there is no concept of universal books, except the divine texts, which are only considered authentic among the believers of the specific religion. So, the reading and interpretation of the text should be creative, and a scholar should avoid the popular opinion about

³⁵ James Wilford Garner, "Political Science and Government", *The World Press Private Limited, Calcutta*, 1951.

³⁶ Chana Frankfort & David Nachmias, "Research Methods in the Social sciences", *Worth Publishers, New York*, 1996.

a certain phenomenon. The scholar should be like the eyes and heart of the world, and he should feel and see for others, to overcome the lopsidedness as much as possible.³⁷

Understanding contemporary political happenings around the world can sometimes become more difficult due to advanced technology, which provides a myriad of information and opinions. The plethora of information makes it more difficult to bridge the gap between information and knowledge. usually, decisions are made on the basis of abstraction and that makes the existing situation even more complicated in the international arena. Research should be based on “deep literacy”, which is a way to participate in the reading material, by keeping in mind the author’s intension and meanings. The best remedy to acquire the deep literacy is the extensive reading.³⁸

The process of creating new facts by sifting through the existing material by extensive study is called research.³⁹ A careful and meticulous research study contributes in the addition to the knowledge, and the accumulated knowledge helps in either solving a problem or providing a way to understand the complexity of a certain issue. Research process is based on multiple assumptions, which are usually based on certain philosophical grounds. The meaning of the term ‘philosophy’, in simple words is the deep understanding of the nature of reality of something.⁴⁰

3.1 Ontology and Epistemology of Research

Extensive study helps to understand the nature of an area of inquiry, which is primarily based on philosophical grounds. In the research process ontology and epistemology provide the foundation for going deep into a phenomenon that needs to be inquired. Ontology in simple words deals with the nature of reality and the state of the being of an idea needs to be inquired, and the nature of the state of being is always present in the mind of the researcher. So, the ontological ground in research is generally subjective in nature.

Historically the ontological argument’s origin is associated with the nature and existence of God, and this idea was first promulgated by Anselm.⁴¹ Ontological bases provide an impetus for further inquiry through the research process. The ontology of the present study is, China’s 21st Century

³⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Selected essays and Poems”, *Famous Products, Lahore*, 2007.

³⁸ Henry Kissinger, “Leadership Six Studies in World Strategy”, *Penguin Random House, UK*, 2022.

³⁹ Leonie Hey, “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 9th Edition”, *Oxford University Press, Uk*, 2015.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Godfrey Norman Agmondisham Vesey & Paul Foulkes, “Collins Dictionary of Philosophy”, United Kingdom: *HarperCollins Publishers*, 1990.

Maritime Silk Road Initiative in the Indian Ocean Region. The announcement of this initiative has resulted in multiple assumptions regarding the nature of the initiative and its impact on the world stage through different angles.

Epistemology in the research process provides evidence to investigate the nature of reality, which is based on the ontology of the subject matter by using different research methods and approaches. Epistemology deals with what is knowable in the real world. In simple words, epistemology generally provides legitimacy to the inquiry through logical reasoning amidst colossal skepticism. The present study has dealt with the challenges and prospects for China with reference to its 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, by keeping in view the geographical and domestic impediments faced by China.

3.2 Research Approach

The research has followed the qualitative method based on explanatory design with a deductive approach. A critical examination of the discourse relevant to the proposed study has been made on the basis of interpretation. Discourse as a term in the language is associated with every kind of information, it can be verbal, non-verbal, written, or even a specific kind of attire worn at specific events is termed as a discourse.

3.3 Data Collection

The collection of the secondary data has included published articles in accredited journals, books, published dissertations, documentaries, media reports, and seminars, which have been critically analyzed. The availability of the primary data is quite limited, as the MSRI is an ongoing project, and its contours are still not fully defined. However, interviews given by the various stakeholders of the 21st Century MSRI to different electronic and print media outlets and think tanks, state-released reports, and briefings have also been analyzed in this study.

3.4 Research Ethics

Ethics are generally defined as a set of moral principles that prevent doing any harm in certain actions performed in various walks of life. It is the narrow definition of the term but in philosophy, ethics is considered a major branch like ontology, epistemology, logic, etc. According to Aristotle ethics is the highest form of pleasure that can only be achieved by bringing the excellence in any

task performed by a person or by any institution or the government⁴². By keeping in view, the importance of ethics in the research process, the present study has adhered to ethical principles by following the guidelines of the institution. All the data is obtained from credible sources. Information and analysis provided in this research are assured to be unbiased and substantiated by authentic references. An easy and unambiguous pattern is followed in the present study to make the subject matter of the study understandable.

⁴² Robert Audi, "The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy", *Cambridge University Press, UK*, 1995. Page 247-249.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Significance Of Oceans

A large part of the planet Earth is covered by water, which amounts to almost 71% of the total Earth's surface. All the oceans, rivers, and canals contribute to making Earth a water planet, which makes it a unique planet in the cosmos. There is no substantial evidence of water presence on any other planet. The fluid nature of oceans makes them a single whole. As Admiral James Stavridis says, the sea is one.⁴³ The oceans have influenced human life and world affairs. Water is a key ingredient of living things, as there is no concept of life. Without it, an analogy can be made between oceans and human life sustenance on the earth. More than 80% of the world's countries contain coastlines, and approximately 70% of people reside in the states. Most of the state capital industrial cities of the world are located on the coastal belt. The transportation of world trade by sea amounts to 90% in volume. That shows how oceanic waters are contributing colossally to the world economy.⁴⁴

Oceans are also a very important source of numerous renewable and non-renewable natural resources. Oceans contain important energy resources like oil and gas and plenty of metals and raw materials necessary for scientific and industrial use. Oceanic waters provide flora and fauna in abundance. They also provide livelihood in the form of fishing and other port-related activities at government and commercial levels. Overall establishment of ports, providing employment opportunities, infrastructure building road connectivity with the mainland, ultimately plays a wider role in the development of the coastal areas.⁴⁵

4.2 Roots Of Maritime Strategy

The theoretical concept of naval warfare was usually borrowed from land warfare until the first half of the 19th century. The fleets resembled the armies in the field. The steamships were meant

⁴³ James Stavridis, "SEA POWER The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans", *Penguin Press, New York*, 2017.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Till, "Guide to Seapower in the 21st Century", *Frank Cass, London*, 2004.

⁴⁵ Azhar Ahmad, "Gwadar Balance in Transition", *Yunan University Press, China*, 2015.

only to transport the troops and the concept of the naval war was limited to attack on the enemy's dockyard by marines.⁴⁶ France was known as the home of strategic thought before 1890 and the rivalry between France and Great Britain was the conventional way of assessing the foreign policy. In the early years of the 20th century, the rivalry between France and Germany started eroding the Anglo-French rivalry.

To counter a continental Germany brought a clear shift in French strategic thinking. To overcome the German threat, a strong land force was required, and France was not able to afford a strong army and navy together. The French admiral Theophile Aube propagated the concept of the trade warfare *Guerre de course* during the 1880s. Aube's basic purpose was to exploit Britain's weakness in economic and food security, which was heavily dependent on the imports of raw materials and food items for its industry and population.⁴⁷

A *Guerre de course* was a much cheaper idea to economically damage Great Britain as compared to a full-fledged naval battle. Although Aube's concept was not free of flaws, it provided some concept of dealing with the national circumstances based on the maritime strategy. Technological development in naval shipbuilding also played a vital role in enhancing the theoretical framework of naval warfare. The steam-powered shipbuilding by Robert Fulton in 1814 and the manufacturing of the screw propeller by the 1840s were major novelties in the naval domain. The 1870s witnessed the arrival of modern warships based on iron-hulled compound engines based on coal energy and equipped with guns. Modification and alteration in warships and other essential weapons like firing guns and torpedoes were part of the naval fleets by 1890.⁴⁸

Another important factor that contributed to enhancing the strategic concept was the growing competition between the states in the latter half of the 19th century. In Europe, the industrial growth of France, Germany, and Russia started minimizing as well as the Great Britain's industrial might. The United States and Japan were the two other countries with mounting industrial capacity. The Great World Depression started in the 1870s and up to 1896 also surged the international rivalry. The demand for resources and lust for power resulted in the colonization of uncaptured territories and redistribution of the territories whose westerns were losing control

⁴⁶ Colin S. Gray, Roger W. Barnett, "Seapower and Strategy", *United States: Naval Institute Press*, 1989.

⁴⁷ Paul Kennedy, "Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945", *Fontana Press, Great Britain*, 1983.

⁴⁸ Colin S. Gray, Roger W. Barnett, "Seapower and Strategy", *Tr-Service Press, UK* 1989.

over them. Many of the European powers strived from America and collided for control in China.⁴⁹ The only instrument for the power projection into far-flung territories was the supremacy over the use of the sea or sea power. This was the golden time for Mahan's ideas to flourish.

4.3 Conceptualization Of Maritime Power

Usually, ocean-related activities are discussed under the umbrella of maritime. The term maritime is further discussed as a maritime strategy or it is associated with the concept of sea power. In the narrow perspective, the concepts of maritime and sea power are associated with the combatant navy. Historians and strategists have discussed the concept of maritime with different perspectives and multiple approaches that have applied to describe and prescribe the maritime strategy. Human beings live on land, but life is dependent on the sea. Maritime and sea power cannot be understood in isolation. Happening at the land impacts the activities of the sea and in a reciprocal way, events at the sea have the tendency to affect the land-based activities.

The term maritime encompasses various ingredients that are present on the surface of the sea, beneath the ocean surface, and is closely related to shore-based infrastructure and other activities. The most important elements are port infrastructure and harbors, commercial shipping, ocean economic resources, and combatant navy. All these elements contribute to the national power of a state. It involves all the civil and military resources to form a comprehensive maritime strategy to achieve the political objectives of the state. Maritime strategy is all about the organization and management of all the elements of national power.⁵⁰

Strategists and historians have interpreted the concept of sea power under various attributes. The US naval officer and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan is considered as the chief proponent of the supremacy of sea power. Mahan believed that trade by means of the sea helps in accumulating wealth and ultimately enhances the state's greatness. Mahan's theory of sea power is often considered the first general theory about the concept and the use of sea power in the modern era. Mahan believed that war at the sea was a tool to attain a larger and particular purpose. Being an anglophile, his message to America was that America should play a global role by becoming a potential maritime power which helped Great Britain to dominate world affairs.

⁴⁹ Andrew Lambert, "Seapower States Maritime Culture, Continental empires and the Conflict that made the modern world", *Yale University Press*, USA 2018.

⁵⁰ Azhar Ahmad, "Gwadar Balance in Transition", *Yunan University Press, China*, 2015.

Although Mahan's concept of sea power was criticized on the notion that Mahan has foreshadowed the importance of the continental powers and further emphasized that induction of the technology into the military domain specifically the air combatant power will erode Mahan's thesis.⁵¹ But if we realistically see USA has been able to play a hegemonic role in the world through its global reach provided by maritime superiority, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the state's overall policy objectives can only be achieved through a maritime approach and as a comprehensive maritime strategy may include the political, social, economic, and strategic objectives based on the national interest of a state.

4.4 The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative

The MSRI is the second component of the Chinese mega project, known as “One Belt One Road,” OBOR, which was later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Belt is the land route while the road is associated with the sea-based route, both roads will connect the various proposed economic corridors with each other. The MSRI will connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. The initiative is generally associated with the ancient Silk Road of China. The MSRI aims to integrate global trade and economy by providing access through building ports and other essential connectivity infrastructure.

4.5 MSRI's Proposed Routes

The maritime Silk Road initiative consists of multiple infrastructure projects that will connect the sea routes with the hinterland. The projects range from road, rail, power generation, overland bridges, and a network of pipelines. Development of special economic zones (SEZs), and industrialization units are also the prominent features of the initiative in different countries.⁵²

⁵¹ Peter Paret, “Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to The Nuclear Age”, *Oxford University Press, New York, 1986*.

⁵²“Vision and Proposed Actions outlined on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century maritime Silk Road”, *National Development and Reform Commission*, 2015.<https://www.bing.com/search?q=Vision+and+Proposed+actions+outlined+on+Jointly+Building+Silk+Road+Economic+Belt+and+21st-century+maritime+silk+Road%2C+National+Development+and+Reform+Commission%2C+2017.&cvid=82b3da48b4cc4093a126dc33300a6027&aqs=edge..69i57j69i11004.1379j0j9&FORM=ANAB01&PC=U531>

Initially, the Eastern and Western routes were proposed for the initiative, later, it was modified into three routes under the vision of maritime cooperation in 2017. The first route is supposed to connect with the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and Africa by expanding westward through the South China Sea. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, (CPEC), and the Bangladesh-China-Myanmar and India Corridor are very important projects in the Indian Ocean. These corridors will connect the Chinese hinterland with the Indian Ocean with the help of overland pathways.

The second route will expand southwards and will connect, the South China Sea with the Southern Pacific Ocean, this is also known as the China-Oceania South Pacific Corridor economic passage. The third route is intended to connect Eastern Chinese Coasts with Europe through the Arctic Ocean.⁵³

4.6 Financial Institutions

China takes MSRI as an economic and development project, which will enhance cooperation among the participant states. Further, according to Xi Jinping's vision, it will boost people-to-people connectivity. To make this initiative successful, China has established multiple financial institutions and has provided handsome capital. The government of China has established the Silk Road Fund (SRF), which amounts to forty billion US dollars. Along with the SRF, an amount of fifty billion USD is also allocated for this mega initiative, this will be provided by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Other financial needs are also planned to be provided by the China Development Bank (CDB), the proposed amount for the road is approximately, a staggering 890 billion US dollars. Chinese Exim Bank is providing the required monetary funding for more than a thousand projects, which are proposed in the Belt and Road Combined in 2015.⁵⁴

4.7 MSRI Infrastructure in the Indian Ocean

The MSRI primarily aims to enhance economic integration among the participant states. The cooperation will be made by the construction and development of the ports in the Indian Ocean region. The capacity of the existing ports will be improved further, which will provide the passage for the smooth flow of trade.

⁵³Bruno Macaes, "Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order", United Kingdom: *Hurst*, 2018.

⁵⁴ Scot Morris and Gailin Portelance, "Examining the debt implications of the Belt and Road initiative from a policy perspective", *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy, and Development* 3. No 1, 2019.

China's westward expansion is inevitable for its international trade because China is facing maritime territorial disputes on its eastern front.⁵⁵ By keeping in view, the tumultuous situation of China's eastern maritime borders, it becomes necessary for China to seek an alternative route and access to the second ocean, which is the Indian Ocean. China is increasing her maritime capacity in the IOR, by upgrading and leasing the existing ports.⁵⁶ For this purpose, China is providing financial, technical, and manpower support.

China is the largest trading partner of most littoral states of the Indian Ocean region. Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives are the significant ones, especially in South Asia, where China has invested heavily. Although China intends to develop multiple ports in various parts of the world, its five important projects lie in the Indian Ocean.

These are Gwadar (Pakistan), Kyaukpyu (Myanmar), Obock (Djibouti), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), and Feydhoo Finolhu (Maldives)⁵⁷. The basic aim of MSRI is to synergize the Belt through Road, which will ultimately connect China with distant markets. It is difficult to see Belt and Road in isolation as both are inevitable for each other, as, to develop a port, it is compulsory to construct various infrastructures, required to run the whole mechanism of import and export-related activities.

4.8 Gwadar Port Project

The Indian Ocean, due to its semi-closed geography provides numerous connectivity facilities with other parts of the world. Gwadar is taken as a gateway port, as it connects the western part of China with the Indian Ocean. Gwadar is strategically located in the IO, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has pivotal importance and it is also called the pilot project of the BRI. CPEC provides the shortest route from Xinjiang to Gwadar, which is only 600 km away from Strait of Hormuz.

CPEC is called the pilot project of MSRI as it connects China with 60 countries of different continents like Europe, Africa, and Asia. The most important artery of the CPEC is the 3000 km

⁵⁵ Donald B. Freeman, "The Straits of Malacca: Gateway or Gauntlet?", *Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press*, 2003.

⁵⁶ Abhijit Singh, "China's Maritime Bases in the IOR, A chronicle of Dominance foretold", *Strategic Analysis* 39, no 3, 2015.

⁵⁷ Richard Ghiasy, Fei Su and Lora Salman, "Security Implications and ways forward for the European Union", *SIPRI-Stockholm Peace Research Institute*, 2018.

long road and railway network that connects China and Pakistan through conversions with the old Karakoram Highway. It is called the pilot project because it is a well-defined corridor, and the all-weather friendship between Pakistan and China makes it more conducive to be materialized, than any other project.⁵⁸ The project has an estimated cost of 62 billion dollars, but with the passage of time, it seems that it will be raised in the future.

Gwadar Port will provide easy and short access for oil imports from the Persian Gulf to China with the help of overland pipelines. CPEC is not only limited to road, rail, and pipeline networks, rather it is a comprehensive initiative that is comprised of Nemours projects like power generation, special economic zones, and various infrastructures projects.

4.9 Kyaukpyu Port Project

The Kyaukpyu Port project in the Bay of Bengal is also called a gateway for China's southern province, Yunan to provide access Indian Ocean. Yunan is also a less developed region in comparison to the eastern region of China. The development of Kyaukpyu Port in Myanmar is one of the important projects of the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar economic corridor (BCIM-EC). The importance of this corridor can be understood by keeping in mind that BCIM-EC is home to almost forty percent of the world population and 14 trillion dollars in GDP combined.⁵⁹

Unlike CPEC the BCIMEC is not a well-defined project for several reasons. First, the length and breadth of this initiative are very vast, big countries like China, India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh are the participants. The waterways and overland pathways must trespass from different countries' territories. The focus of the present study is only limited to the Kunming-Malandy connectivity network which provides access to China into the Indian Ocean. multiple trades and development programs being committed and signed between China and Myanmar. The agreements arrange from various special economic zones and most importantly the Kyaukpyu Port in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. It is estimated that will be this port will have ten berths. China has also proposed a pipe

⁵⁸ Shahid Javed Burki, Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdry and Asad Ejaz Butt, "Pakistan at Seventy A handbook on development in economics, politics and society", *Routledge, New York*, 2019.

⁵⁹ B R Deepak, "China's global Rebalancing and the new Silk Road", *Springer Nature Singapore*, 2018.

oil line that will provide oil supply from the Gulf through overland pathways that will pass through the Rakhine State⁶⁰.

The proposed projects, upon materialization, would prove to be beneficial for China as they will help China to avoid the “Malacca Dilemma” and further it will bring development and prosperity to the underdeveloped southern region of China. Kyaukpyu Port project is almost a lifetime for Chinese needs and has access to the Indian Ocean for trade, but this important gateway is full of challenges.

The Rakhine State in Myanmar is facing unrest and violence, which is proving detrimental to the development of the Kyaukpyu Port project and its related connective network. It is assumed that regional and extra-regional forces are contributing to halting Chinese projects. Moreover, the Maritime Silk Road can prove to be a possible replacement to integrate the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal apart from the terrestrial BCIM.⁶¹

4.10 Hambantota Port Project

Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port is located at a very important strategic position in the Indian Ocean. Being at the southern extreme of Sri Lanka, it is adjacent to the world’s most important shipping route. More than thirty thousand ships and vessels sail through this route and transport energy and other raw materials to East Asia from the Persian Gulf. China is investing heavily in the Hambantota Port project. Various projects of Hambantota Port range from an LNG refinery station to multiple dock facilities, energy storage arrangements, and shipbuilding. A repair facility. Transshipment and replenishment arrangements for the ships and other air and road transport carriages.⁶²

Chinese companies are investing heavily in Sri Lanka, and this has led to a debate that China is putting Sri Lanka under the debt trap and China will gain political and military advantages. The narrative is specially constructed by India. In a real sense, this Indian narrative is to cover the nefarious role of India in Sri Lankan affairs. India in the past has supported the insurgences of

⁶⁰ Martin Riegl, Jakub Landovsky, “Strategic Regions in 21st Century Power Politics Zones of Consensus and Zones of Conflict”, *Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK2014*.

⁶¹ Mohd Aminul Karim, “China’s Proposed Maritime Silk Road: Challenges and opportunities with Special Reference to the Bay of Bengal Region”, *Pacific Focus, Inha Journal of International Studies*, 2015.

⁶² B Raman, “Hambantota and Gwadar an update”, *Institute for Topical Studies, Chennai India*, 2009.

LTTE, and further, Sri Lanka and India are at a very close geographical proximity through land and sea that connects Sri Lanka with the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The Hambantota Port project was initiated by Sri Lanka not by China at the earliest stages Canada provided the necessary support for this project and in 2007 China and Sri Lanka made a deal⁶³. It was impossible for the fragile economic state of Sri Lanka to finance this mega initiative, so Sri Lankan authorities turned to China, which could provide financial and technical support. So Indian propaganda is unable to gain sufficient acknowledgment.

4.11 The FeydhooFinolhu Port Project

China has also developed a good relationship with Maldives which is very strategically located in the Indian Ocean. Historically Chinese Admiral Zheng He sailed twice to Maldives during his sea expeditions during the Ming dynasty. From 1972 and onward various Chinese top officials paid visits to this important island country. After multiple visits from both sides, Maldives established its embassy in Beijing in the year 2007. After 4 years China did the same in Maldives.

Chinese President Xi-Jinping visited Maldives in 2014 which was the first time that a Chinese president visited Maldives. In the joint declaration of the visit, Maldives showed keen interest in participating in the MSRI. President Yamin agreed to cooperate in various maritime domains like security, economy, marine research, and issues related to environmental degradation and disaster management. Maldives' participation in the MSRI is through the Ihavandhippolhu atoll, which is located at a very crucial seven-degree channel.⁶⁴ This channel connects the eastern and western routes and provides access to China towards Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Approximately more than 17 trillion dollars' worth of trade is carried out through the seven-degree channel.⁶⁵ The channel is very close to the Andaman Sea which is controlled by India and that makes it a very crucial strategic hotspot in the Indian Ocean and is aggravating the tense Sino-Indian competition.

⁶³Robert D. Kaplan, "Monsoon: The Indian Ocean & the Future of American Power", *Random House Publishing Group*, New York, 2010.

⁶⁴"Maldives Gov't Targets Special Economic Zones, Eyes Trade with China", *Xinhua*, June 5, 2014.

⁶⁵ Kondapalli, Srikanth, "The Maritime Silk Road and China-Maldives Relations: China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative and South Asia; A Political Economic Analysis of its Purposes, Perils, and Promise", *Palgrave Macmillan, California, USA*, 2018.

The Chinese vision is to create a community of shared interest by connecting the world through land and sea. China is also helping Maldives to develop Ibrahim Nasir International Airport which will promote tourism. The Maldives is a famous tourist spot. Over the years the number of Chinese tourists has outnumbered the overall visitors from the rest of the world, who had visited Maldives.

4.12 China's Shift From Continental To Maritime Power

To understand a state's aspirations in international relations is a difficult task. This cannot be determined by keeping a single factor in consideration. In the recent past, the most common question in international affairs is about China's aspirations and its future worldview⁶⁶. China's unprecedented economic growth in the past four decades along with strong military and technological development has triggered debate amongst scholars and practitioners about the Chinese future rule in the world. Mega infrastructure and policy initiatives often provide some clue of a country's aspiration.

The Belt and Road initiative is an extraordinary connectivity network project whose contours are not fully defined yet. The emphasis of the parent study is on the road component of the BRI which is named Maritime Silk Road. To understand Chinese objectives, from the MSRI we need to know the very short introduction to Chinese maritime history. China has been known as the grand continental power for the past 4- 5 centuries, but China also remained a great maritime power in different phases of history, but it enjoyed its zenith during the Ming dynasty. The sea expeditions of Eunuch Admiral Zheng He along with his grand fleet had no equal in that era⁶⁷. After the downfall of Chinese maritime supremacy, western maritime powers emerged and with the help of sea power, they gained economic prosperity by colonizing the various parts of the world. China witnessed several sea defeats after abandoning its grand fleet and learned a lesson that to territorial sovereignty and economic prosperity, a potent maritime power is inevitable. The rise and fall of the state are directly proportional to the rise and decline in her maritime capabilities. Li Huaqing envisioned if China wanted to become a prosperous and safe country it should acquire a powerful

⁶⁶ Kerry Brown, "China's world What Does China want?", *I B Tauris, London*, 2017.

⁶⁷ Howard W. French, "Everything Under the Heavens how the Past shape China's Push for Global Power", *Vintage Books, New York*, 2018.

navy and a broader maritime vision. His revolutionary thoughts are responsible for China's shift from continental to maritime engagement.⁶⁸

4.13 Objectives Of China's Maritime Power

China is traditionally known as the continental power at least for the last 3-4 centuries. Since the dawn of the 21st century, China has shifted its focus from land to sea. The announcement of making China a maritime power was made in May 2003 by the States Council of National Maritime Economic Development Program. It was in November 2012; that Chinese President Hu Jintao officially announced the aim to become a strong maritime power after the CPC's report of the 18th National Congress.⁶⁹ The aim was further promulgated in the Chinese defense white paper of 2013 and 2015. The objective of the Chinese maritime power is not restricted only to the combatant navy but will encompass a comprehensive maritime approach that includes the seabed, projection of marine ecology, and sea environment.

Generally, objectives are defined based on requirements and needs. Some Chinese requirements can be summarized as continuous economic and social development, territorial sovereignty, and the need to be a responsible maritime power. By keeping in view, the Chinese requirements and geographical considerations, China's maritime objectives can be based on three aspects.⁷⁰

Chinese objective is not to become a sea power based on the conventional concept of the term or to be an oceanic hegemon. Traditionally, naval powers are categorized as coastal, regional, and global in nature.⁷¹ Coastal navies lack the ability to power projection beyond the territorial waters, regional power possesses a sufficient capability to provide control in the distant sea, and finally, the global sea power should have the capacity to project power anywhere in the ocean. Only the US Navy can be termed as the global sea hegemon. The majority of the world's navies are coastal in nature. Contrary to Western expert opinion, Chinese experts put China's navy in the coastal category. In the prevailing international order, the concept of absolute power does not exist, however, remains a relative concept.

⁶⁸ Kerry Brown, "China's world What Does China want?", *I B Tauris, London*, 2017

⁶⁹ Hu Jintao, "Firmly March on the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects", http://np.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/Diplomacy/201211/t20121118_1586373.html.

⁷⁰ Wang Shuguang, "A Discussion on China's Oceanic management", *Beijing: China Ocean Press*, 2004.

⁷¹ K R Singh, "Navies of South Asia", *Rupa & Co, New Delhi*, 2002.

Offshore control is also an important objective for China. China has settled the majority the land-based disputes but is facing serious sea based territorial disputes mainly in south and east China sea. China claims the ownership of Senkaku and Spratly Island claims and Taiwan. Senkaku and Spratly Islands are also claimed by Japan and Philippines, which are US allies. Furthermore, US has also taken the responsibility of Taiwan's security in case of Chinese aggression. China is facing a kind of maritime encirclement in the eastern sea frontiers, so China is relying on land-based technology in the forum of AZ/AD strategy for offshore security.

Another important objective for China is to show a regional presence. As 85% of Chinese trade is dependent on sea, so it becomes inevitable for China to protect the sea lanes of communications. For this purpose, China needs an effective military presence especially in the north IO and the western pacific. By effective regional presence mean that the state should be able to defend the interest related to a particular regional maritime space, and in a more threatening situation should be able to counterattack, and the more effective regional presence require that the power and presence must be recognized and acknowledged by the international community.⁷² By and large China is not blessed with advantages maritime frontiers, as it is facing maritime territorial disputes on the backyard and lack the direct access towards the IO, which can provide alternative route to enhance and protect China's export-oriented economy and necessary imports like natural resources, a raw material and food items. Although there is a certain decrease in armed robbery and piracy, but still according to the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB), 2016 reports more than 80 cases of robbery or piracy were reported in the SCS alone and almost 35 piracy incidents happened in the Indian Ocean.⁷³ Chinese objectives to maintain an effective regional presence seems to be rational choice.

The systemic study of Chinese maritime objectives shows that China wants to become a strong global maritime power. In March 2018, Xi-Jinping said that ocean is the main arena for high quality

⁷² Hu Bo, "Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century Strategic Planning, Policy and Predictions", *Routledge, London*, 2020.

⁷³ International Maritime Organization, "Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed robbery against ships", www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/SecDocs/Documents/PiracyReports/245%20Annual%202016.pdf.

development, he stressed that China should double its endeavors in the construction of ports and a comprehensive industrial system based on innovation in marine science and technology.⁷⁴

By aspiring to become a global maritime power, China does not want a predatory approach to dominate the oceans by fighting naval battles with other parts just like European powers did in the past. China is trading with much of the world in almost every part of the globe. China has invested approximately 1357 billion dollars in the forms of foreign direct investment (FDI) in more than 150 countries through 24,400 Chinese domestic investors⁷⁵. Furthermore, China wants to explore and exploit the national resources under the seabed in the high seas which accounts for almost 70% of oceanic space, which is common for all. The United Nations Convention on Laws of Sea UNCLOS provides the legitimacy to use the resources of high seas.

By keeping the vast amounts of Chinese investments across the globe, it becomes inescapable for China to guard its economic interest by means of global influence. China is modernizing its navy so that it can provide protection to China's economic interests by effective response and deterrence to traditional and nontraditional threats. As a global power, it needs to show more responsibility by providing disaster relief, protection, freedom of navigation, and peaceful maritime environments.

4.14 China's Interests In The Indian Ocean

During the previous 40 years, China has emerged as a global economic power primarily based on its industrial production and export-oriented economy. China relies heavily on natural resources to fuel its industry and it cannot produce the desired amount of energy by itself. China imports approximately 85% of its energy needs and more than 50% of its oil imports come from the Middle East and are transported through the Indian Ocean.⁷⁶ China is also acquiring energy resources from Africa, and the Indian Ocean is the most conducive pathway.

Apart from oil-based energy resources, the Indian Ocean has great strategic importance due to its estimated enrichment of nonrenewable raw materials necessary for various industries.⁷⁷ Precious

⁷⁴ Xi Jinping, "The Governance of China 3", *Foreign language Press Ltd, Beijing*, 2020.

⁷⁵ Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, "2016 Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment", <http://fec.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tjsj/tjgb/201709/20170902653690.shtml>

⁷⁶Qiang. Wang, "Effects of urbanization on energy consumption in China." *Energy Policy* 65 (2014): 332-339

⁷⁷David Zweig and Bi Jianhai, "China's global hunt for energy," *Foreign affairs* (2005): 25-38.

Metals like manganese, chromium, and uranium are present in the Indian Ocean which constitutes more than 50% of the world's total reserves. It is also estimated that the Indian Ocean is home to the world's largest iron ore reserves. So, the quest for new raw materials makes the Indian Ocean strategically very important for China. The Indian Ocean's closed geographical position and its importance in connecting various parts of the globe through narrow straits make it inevitable for China to have a regional presence to protect its trade and energy imports from a possible blockade.⁷⁸

Other than the quest for natural resources and protection of sea line communications, China wants to strengthen its economic relationships with the Indian Ocean littoral states. China's trade with South Asian and Southeast Asian countries is on the rise. Amicable diplomatic ties among the states are the necessary prerequisites to strengthen the economic relationship. China is pursuing an "all-around opening up" policy for which the Indian Ocean is very crucial for its westward economic expansion.⁷⁹ With the help of MSRI, China is developing multiple ports in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. China is facing certain resistance from India and other Western powers under the American leadership that is primarily based on non-concrete perceptions.

4.15 The US Interests In the Indian Ocean

Geopolitical strategists of the first half of the 20th century had prophesized that the future of the world's destiny would be decided in the Asian waters. The Indian Ocean has now become the center of gravity for great power competition. The Indian Ocean is known as the ocean of trade and presently control of the IO is considered directly proportional to the world's control. Great Britain has enjoyed the supremacy of being unchallenged sea powers for more than two centuries. Great Britain's ascendancy started eroding from the last decades of the 19th century and this was the time for the USA to replace the United Kingdom. The USA became the preponderant sea power after the 2nd World War.⁸⁰

The Indian Ocean's importance as a major trade route and its richness in energy resources like oil and gas provided the impetus for the US to have a strong presence in this region. The USA took

⁷⁸ Robert D, Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean", *Foreign Affairs*, No 2, 2009

⁷⁹Zhang Wenmu, "Seapower and China's strategic choices" *China Security* 2, no. 2 (2006)

⁸⁰ Paul Kennedy, "The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery", *Penguin Books, Great Britain*, 1976.

Diego Garcia from the United Kingdom in 1966.⁸¹ till then this island has served as the most important US Naval Base in the Indian Ocean. Other than Diego Garcia, three US aircraft carriers named as 5th, 6th, and 7th Fleet are operating in this region.

America's interest in the Indian Ocean can be summed as protection of smooth flow of trade, the US fight against terrorism and radicalism, and undermining the Chinese footprints in the region. The need to secure the energy flows was strongly felt after the oil embargo which resulted due to the Arab-Israel war in the 1970s.⁸² The Indian Ocean has a diversified ethnic and religious population and is home to major religions like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. Armed conflicts, piracy, and religious ridicule are prominent factors and matters of concern for the USA⁸³. The former USSR's invasion of Afghanistan and America's military interventions in Iran and Kuwait provided the USA with the necessary space to maneuver into the Indian Ocean region. The Twin Tower attack in the USA changed the whole security paradigm of South Asia in particular. The USA and its allies launched an operation enduring freedom that lasted for almost two decades. The Indian Ocean provided necessary access to operate in the region.

The end of the Cold War brought in the debate of the unipolar moment for America, which assumed that, After the collapse of the USSR, there was no single power equaling US might.⁸⁴ From the start of the last decade of the 20th century, the US government started to focus on the Asia Pacific region which was based on the Department of the Defense Report (DOD). The Two East Asia Strategy Initiative (EASI) was proposed by the Bush senior administration to Congress in 1990, which was primarily the roadmap for the US engagement in the world's affairs for the 21st century. In 1992, the 2nd EASI report, which was the extension of the 1st report, was presented. And this report encompassed the strategic framework to operate in the Asia Pacific rim.⁸⁵ The subsequent reports were continued during the Clinton presidency. They were published in 1995 and 1998.⁸⁶ The whole sequence was disrupted after the 9/11 incident.

⁸¹ ibid

⁸² Ference A. Vali, "Politics of the Indian Ocean Region, The Balance of Power", *The Free Press, New York*, 1976.

⁸³ Christopher Davidson, "Power and Politics in The Persian Gulf Monarchies", *Hurst and Company, London*, 2011.

⁸⁴ Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign affairs*, 23, 1990.

⁸⁵ US Department of Defense, A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress, April 1992. <https://babel.hatitrust.org/cgi/pt?d=ucl.31822015339674&view=1up&seq=1>

⁸⁶ US Department of Defense, The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, 1998. <http://Ryukyu-okinawa.net/downloads/usdod-easr98.pdf>

Although the priority of the United States was to fight against terrorism the Asian dynamism was not completely diminished. During the Bush administration, the new security strategy for the Asia Pacific region was published in 2009. In the context of the maritime domain, the US report on the Asia Pacific maritime security strategy was published in 2015.⁸⁷ The report suggested enhancing military power by forging more allies which seems to campaign the growing Chinese role in the Indian Ocean region. The IO report of 2009 also declares China as an assertive power and perceives that China is seeking to change the existing order in the region through predatory military and economic policies. So, it looks like the major interest of the US in the IO region is to contain China on the perception based on conviction that China will replace the US global leadership.

4.16 Britain's Interests In the Indian Ocean

Apart from the US, and the United Kingdom, the UK is an important extra-regional power in the Indian region. In the past, Great Britain has enjoyed unchallenged maritime supremacy that paved the way for the British empire to rule almost every corner of the globe but in the recent past, it looks like England is pursuing an isolationist foreign policy and Brexit provides the evidence. The USA also showed some tendency towards isolation with Trump's America's first slogan but that does not mean that these two torchbearers of democracy and liberalism are putting away their eyes from the world.⁸⁸ As we have discussed precisely in the previous section about America's interest in the Indian Ocean region and its policy toward Asia, Britain is also having a unique dual Asia policy.

UK is supporting the US Indo-Pacific strategy and the rule-based order in the Asian waters, but this does not mean that the UK has no interest in the Pacific region. National Strategy for Maritime Security (NSMS) shows that 95% UK's trade is sea-dependent and further depicts that China is

⁸⁷ US Department of Defense, Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy, 2015.
https://www.google.com/search?q=US+Department+of+Defense%2C+Asia-Pacific+Maritime+Security+Strategy%2C+2015&rlz=1C1GGRV_enPK942PK942&oq=US+Department+of+Defense%2C+Asia-Pacific+Maritime+Security+Strategy%2C+2015&aqs=chrome.69i59.57974j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-

⁸⁸ John Hemmings, "What Kind of Foreign Policy and Security Policy should a Post-Brexit Britain Adopt?", *RUSI Commentary*, July 4, 2016. <http://rusi.org/commentary/what-kind-foreign-policy-and-security-posture-should-post-brexit-britain-adopt>.

Britain's 2nd largest export destination⁸⁹. President Xi paid a visit to the UK in 2015 and promised a golden era of bilateral relations between the two. In 2018 the British Prime Minister also visited China with a delegation of top British business leaders and made a commitment to enhance the "Golden Era" of relationship.⁹⁰

This shows that the UK is pursuing a two-Asia approach. UK's alliance with the US according to the latter's Indo-Pacific strategy is security-oriented in which China is assumed as a challenger. On the other hand, England's strategy towards China is economic in nature and in this respect, China is an important strategic partner. The former British PM Boris Johnson showed keen interest in Chinese BRI, abstaining from Trump's Trade Alliance formed against Beijing. As the Indian Ocean region is the major arena for MSRI, the supposed strategic partnership between the UK and China may drive her to actively engage herself in the Indian Ocean's maritime affairs.

4.17 French Interests In The Indian Ocean

Among the European Powers, France can be considered as the most active player in the Indian Ocean region. Unlike other European powers, France has permanent stakes in the Indian Ocean. In Djibouti and UAE, France has a strong military existence. Moreover, it exercises total control of the Mayotte and La Reunion islands located in the Southern part of the Indian Ocean. France possesses the capability of important Naval recognizance ability with aerial surveillance and patrolling on the water surface.⁹¹

The close relationship between the French and Indian governments is crucial for the development of geographical engagement in the region. As India is the resident and aspiring maritime power due to its conducive geographical location in the Indian Ocean, 97% of Indian trade is dependent on the sea, and Indian leadership has associated her ascend with relation to supremacy in the IO because India thinks, Indian ocean is in fact India's ocean. France is providing the necessary equipment, and arms to modernize Indian defense capabilities. India and France are also engaged in various military exercises in the Indian Ocean, even Charles de Gaulle, the French air crafted

⁸⁹ HM Government, "The UK National Strategy for Maritime Security", May2014.http://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/322813/20140623-40221-national-maritime-strat-Cm-8829-accessible.pdf.

⁹⁰ Weida Li, "British Prime Minister to visit China on January 31", *GB Times*, January 29, 2018.<http://gbtimes.com/British-prime-minister-to-visit-china-on-january-31>.

⁹¹ Satoru Nagao, "Strategies for the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions of the US and Like-Minded Countries", *Hudson Institute*, Washington, 2019.

has participated in the exercises that show the seriousness of close military ties between France and India.⁹²

France is also planning a bridge role to bring India and the European Union closer, as the French government has played a leading role in obtaining monetary requirements, from the EU to enhance maritime security in the island states of Seychelles and Madagascar, which are under the Indian orbit. France apart from other European states possesses a certain amount of freedom to play its role in the region, due to its alliance with India and permanent footprints in the ocean.⁹³ This will be a real concern for Chinese MSRI, as President Macron has stated that China can threaten the balance of power, and rule-based order in the region. The current French stance is contradictory to the previous French administration's business-oriented approach towards the region. Further, the EU, Asia connectivity strategy promulgated in 2018 proposed that the EU can be a substitute for the MSRI, to help the fragile economic states of the region.

4.18 India And The Indian Ocean

India's geographical proximity makes it the most important state in the whole Indian Ocean region. In fact, the IO is the only ocean named after a country. So symbolically, India considers herself as the custodian of the Indian Ocean. India's territorial extension is more than 1500 KM in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, India is surrounded by the Gulf of Aden, Persian, and the Bay of Bengal.⁹⁴ India's centrality in the Indian Ocean is important for India's development and a source of vulnerability as well. In the last decade and a half, India has emerged among the top growing economies of the world. A population of more than one billion, a huge land mass, and a growing economy have brought India to a position where it can aspire to be a regional or even a global power.

It has been assessed that Indian military modernization efforts will pave the way for India to become a strong Indian Ocean power. The proclamation of the 21st century as the "Century of Seas" confirms the Indian aspiration. Since the start of the 21st century, India has posited a keen

⁹² Ministry of the Armed Forces, "France unveils its defense policy in the Asia-Pacific", June 8, 2018. <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/dgris/international-action/region-al-issues/france-unveils-its-defense-policy-in-the-asia-pacific>.

⁹³ Edmund Goldrick, "France and India: a reunion in the Indian Ocean," International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 2, 2018. <http://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/03/france-and-india-reunion>

⁹⁴ James Stavridis, "SEA POWER The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans", *Penguin Press, New York*, 2017.

interest in modernizing her naval fleet and becoming a blue water navy based on the “theory of India”, which was released in 2004, a key strategic document that provides a roadmap to achieve strategic interests ranging from economic to military goals. Generally, Indian interests in the Indian Ocean are related to maritime reconnaissance, protection of sea-borne trade, strong combatant presence, and the exploration of natural resources.⁹⁵

Like any other country, India is highly dependent on the sea for its economic and industrial activity. The volume of Indian sea trade is more than 90% and the value of the trade amounts to more than 70%. This shows how critical it is for India to focus on its maritime capabilities. India owns more than 1000 islands and 212 ports of which 12 ports are categorized as major ports. Most of the Indian industry is installed in the coastal cities and Indian nuclear power stations are also located on its coastline.⁹⁶

India is heavily dependent on natural energy resources like oil and gas to run its industrial needs. Energy security implies the supply of important resources as well as the ability to explore and exploit. The extraction of raw material under the seabed also remains a matter of crucial importance for developing states like India. The Indian maritime doctrine has categorized the primary and secondary maritime areas of interest. The doctrine inculcates protection of the Indian coastline, its exclusive economic zone, and the territorial waters as the primary interest of India. The important choke points like six-, eight- and nine-degree channels, important straits like Malacca, and Hormuz, and various entry points of the Indian Ocean are considered as primary interests. The secondary areas of interest include the southern part of the Indian Ocean, the south and east China Sea and further includes the political relationship with the littoral states of the India ocean region.

The Indian maritime doctrine shows how ambitious India is to be an important maritime power in this region. This also shows that India wants to play a global role. Indian interests in the South and East China Sea are the pathways to materialize her look east policy which is altered now as an act east policy. In the first stage, India wants to forge good economic ties with ASEAN, and after that India might look to be active in the security affairs in the Chinese backyard. If we tried to read

⁹⁵Cuiping Zhu, “India’s Ocean: Can China and India Coexist?”, Singapore: *Springer Nature Singapore*, 2018. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-10-5726-7>

⁹⁶India’s Maritime Doctrine 2009 updated online version 2015; integrated Headquarters, *Ministry of Defense (Navy)*2015.

between the lines, this strategy seems to contain China in the Indian Ocean and add more perplexity for China in the South and East China Sea. India assumes China to be her big rival and any Chinese engagement in the Indian Ocean is taken as a threat by India into her own backyard.

India always remained very concerned for its maritime territorial security. India well before partition, was attacked through land but was never conquered. It happened only through the sea, when the European powers came, attacked, and finally colonized the subcontinent. Indian Strategic Thinker K M Panikkar stated that Indian security is totally dependent on the Indian Ocean and if India does not overcome its sea blindness, then the security of India will remain vulnerable.⁹⁷ So, if we look at the Indian aspiration to become a regional or global power, sea supremacy will be crucial for India as it is said by Admiral Barbosa, that those who are strong at sea have the advantage to rule on the shores.⁹⁸

Apart from the protection of sea lines of communications, India is also ambitious in showing a strong military presence and wants to become a net security provider in the region. India owns the fifth largest fleet and according to the “maritime capabilities prospective plan” it wants to expand its fleet up to 160 vessels and the acquisition of 24 submarines is also included in the proposed documents which are supposed to be acquired by the year 2030. India still has a potent naval fleet consisting of two aircraft carriers, frigates, destroyers, minesweepers, submarines, and auxiliary vessels. India has also acquired 14 submarines and more importantly, it has commissioned its first locally constructed nuclear submarine, INS Arahant.

In the quest for regional hegemony, India has launched the strategy of “Sapphires”. This strategy aims to make close contact with small island states like Seychelles, Mauritius, and Madagascar, all of which are strategically located in the India ocean.⁹⁹ India is also providing surveillance equipment, and training and has donated a warship, Barracuda to Mauritius. India wants to enhance its strategic reach based on favorable geographical conditions in the IO. Like China, India has shifted its strategic interests from land to sea. India’s new defense diplomacy demonstrates that India is aiming to play the role of a key balancer in the region.

⁹⁷ K M Panikkar, “India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the influence of Sea Power on Indian History”, *World Affairs Press, Beijing*, 1965.

⁹⁸Ernle Bradford, “The Sultan’s Admiral the Life of Barbarossa”, *Hodder and Stoughton, Great Britain*,1969.

⁹⁹Gurpreet S Khurana, “China’s String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean and its security implications”, *Strategic Analysis* 32, No. 1, 2008.

The former Indian foreign secretary and current foreign minister Mr. Jaishankar has talked about resuscitating the idea of geopolitics with special reference to the IOR in Singapore during September 2016. India has shown a strong tendency of naval diplomacy with the help of the 'Port Call' initiative in 2015, in which Indian navy vessels visited 41 ports that covered the maritime space from Europe, Southeast Asia, and Russia's far east up to Vladivostok.¹⁰⁰ This port call expedition was an enormous extension of the previous initiative that was restricted to the 14 ports in 2002-2003. India has now shifted its stance from the use of seas to secure the seas. For this purpose, India has conducted Malabar Naval exercises and is also a key member of a security-based alliance like QUAD, whose primary objective is to contain China in the region.

India's maritime engagements in the Indian ocean are not totally confined to security and economic interest only, the Modi-led regime is also trying to forge cultural and civilizational ties as well. Project Mausam initiated by the cultural ministry of India aims to revive the ancient relationship with East Africa and gulf states, based on civilizational and trade links.¹⁰¹

Due to unpleasant historical lessons in the maritime realm, India has the ambition to control the Indian ocean. The founding father and the first Indian Prime Minister Nehru said that we could not afford some power other than India should control the Indian Ocean as this happened Indian trade will always remain under the dependency of others. Former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi declared publicly that India should be powerful enough to control the important straits that will ultimately help India to keep the maritime space between the Pacific and Indian Ocean conducive for her.¹⁰²

To control the important entry points in the southeastern part of the Indian Ocean, India established the eastern naval command in 2001. The eastern command consists of Indian control over Andaman and Nicobar Islands with sufficient military presence. The island chain is comprised of 572 islands of different sizes. The strategic locations of these islands provide India a passage to the east and are very important to materialize its Act East policy. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands

¹⁰⁰ Alyssa Ayres, "OUR TIME HAS COME How India Is Making Its Place in the World", *United States: Oxford University Press*, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Government of India, Press Information Bureau, "Government to Establish Cross Cultural Linkages with 39 Indian Ocean countries under project Mausam", Ministry of Culture, March 9, 2015. www.indiaculture.nic.in

¹⁰² Hu Bo, "Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century Strategic Planning, Policy and Predictions", *Routledge, London*, 2020.

are located at a very short distance from Myanmar and Indonesia and provide a significant edge to India to have a strong presence at the tip of the Malacca Strait.¹⁰³

All the discussion reveals that India is showing a strong will and an ambition to be a dominant power in the Indian Ocean region. Indian initiatives seem to be the stark contrast with the Chinese initiatives in this region. India takes Chinese advancement in the IO as a threat to its own security, on the other hand, India's east world and China's world expansion have made the Indian Ocean a hot spot for the geopolitical struggle in the 21st century.

¹⁰³ Rahul Roy-Chaudry, "India's Official Maritime Strategy", IISS, December 14, 2015.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Importance Of The Indian Ocean

It is the third largest ocean which covers approximately 68 million square kilometers. The Indian Ocean has a unique physical geography. Unlike the Atlantic and Pacific which are known as the open highways, the Indian Ocean is a semi-closed water body. The continents of Australia, Asia, and Africa almost encircle the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean has an arc shape that stretches between the Cape of Goodhope and the southern Australian Cape of Levi.¹⁰⁴ The north side of the Indian Ocean is closed while it is open to the south. The Indian Ocean is comprised of important tributary seas like the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal.

Further, the important gulfs, like other Persian and Gulf of Oman, are in this ocean. These tributary seas and gulfs connect various parts of the Indian Ocean region and to the continents that surround the ocean. The Indian Ocean is also home to the world's most important strategic choke points, like the Straits of and the Malacca Straits. Both are located at the western and eastern edge of the ocean, respectively. The Strait of Malacca connects the Indian Ocean with the South and East China Sea. The Gulf of Southern provides access to the Red Sea, whereas Homo Strait is located at the entrance point of the Persian Gulf. The ability to connect various important parts makes these passages the most pivotal routes in the Indian Ocean.

Apart from strategic narrow streets and important trading routes, the Indian Ocean also contains strategically located islands that have facilitated the maritime powers to exercise desired control in the region. Small island states like Seychelles and Mauritius are located at a significant strategic location and are quite helpful in the presence scenario for India to provide monitoring, Surveillance gold recognition capabilities. After the discussion of the 21st-century MSRI in detail, and the Chinese development projects under MSRI in the Indian Ocean region, interests of China, India, the USA, and other important Western powers in the IOR, it becomes pertinent to analyze the possible effects of this mega initiative with the special reference to the interests of the important stakeholders mentioned above.

¹⁰⁴ Ference A. Vali, "Politics of the Indian Ocean Region, The Balance of Power", *The Free Press, New York*, 1976.

5.2 Prospects For China

Although China is expanding its economic and military might on a global scale, that does not mean China has no obstacles. China must counter the negative perceptions of the regional and non-regional states with reference to her 21st-century Maritime Silk Road initiative. On the political front, China needs a prudent diplomatic approach, and it should try to mitigate the conflictual issues regarding India's concern over its assumed breach of territorial sovereignty. It will be a challenge for China to keep the economic and financial terms and conditions more transparent so that countries who are hesitant to participate in the MSRI can remove their confusion. The safety of Chinese officials and workers will remain a serious issue and Chinese workers are being attacked in different parts of the world. On the other hand, the successful completion of the proposed 21st-century MSRI will be helpful for China to sustain and enhance its economic growth and influence in world affairs and it will also provide the necessary help to boost the infrastructure and economic development of the littoral states of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean region, where five of the proposed nine ports are being developed.

5.3 Chinese Economic Success

China has achieved phenomenal economic growth over the past three decades and most of the time during this phase her growth remained uninterrupted during the Asian financial crisis of the late 90s and in the great economic recession of 2008 China remained less affected as compared to the other strong economic powers.¹⁰⁵ China's Belt and Road initiative is unprecedented in history due to its strength and breadth. The initiative has given birth to numerous speculations that create uncertainty all around the world, what does China want to achieve and what are the likely reactions of the other strong states specifically and the middle or the weak countries generally? The strong states think that China is going to achieve global hegemony money and will go through the existing Western, lead world order and during this process, China will treat the weaker states as an imperialist power by subjugating economic and military ways.

¹⁰⁵ John W. Young and John Kent, "International Relations Since 1945 A Global History", *United Kingdom: Oxford*,2012.

However, the present study sees the road component of the BRI not as a hegemonic but as geographical and various domestic imperatives that made it inevitable for China to initiate this project. Geography plays a very important role in a state's relationship with the outside world. Unlike the United States, China is not blessed with a conducive geography. China shares its contiguous borders with many states almost 20 in number. Some of them are immensely populous like India, Russia, Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, and Pakistan. With some of the countries like India, Japan, Vietnam, and Russia, China remained at war during the last seven decades. Furthermore, China is also surrounded by different disturbed states like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.¹⁰⁶

5.4 Diplomatic And Security Engagement Of China In the IOR

China is also playing the role of a mediator and security provider, as it helped to resolve the issue of, oil rigging made by Myanmar in the territorial waters of Bangladesh in 2008. China also remained concerned about the peaceful solution of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India. Even US President Barack Obama sought help from China to play its role in bringing stability and peace and to cut down the nuclear proliferation during his 2009 visit to China. China has played a positive security role in the Southeast South Asian region Sri Lanka acknowledged Chinese help to suppress the 2008-2009 anti-LTTE war, where China provided the necessary supplies and weapons, while the same requirements were denied by India. Other than the supply of military equipment, China has provided diplomatic support to the regional countries with its veto power. China showed solidarity with Pakistan in 1972 by vetoing the resolution, which would favor Bangladesh to become a member of the United Nations. In 2008 and 2009 China used the veto power in favor of Myanmar, which restricted Western demand to act against Myanmar's Judicial decision that favored Aung San Suu Kyi and not the American citizen.

5.5 China's Maritime Disputes And Domestic Imperatives

Although many of China's land borders are now settled, China is still facing serious territorial issues in the maritime geography. China claims the Senkaku and Spratly Islands in the East and South China Sea, but these islands are also claimed by Japan and the Philippines, respectively. Apart from the island disputes, the Taiwan issue is also a real bone of contention in the South

¹⁰⁶ Jeffery Reaves, "Chinese Foreign Relations with Weak Peripheral States, Asymmetrical economic Power and Insecurity", *Routledge, New York*, 2016.

China Sea that can bring the USA and China eyeball to eyeball with each other. The USA has established a potent maritime military base at Okinawa, and moreover, most of the eastern borders are under the auspices of the USA-led security alliances.¹⁰⁷

China's eastern borders and sea frontiers are the only openings for Chinese ships for her imports and exports, which are the backbone of China's huge and growing economy. China feels vulnerable to facing a possible sea blockade that is commonly known as the Malacca Dilemma. Ensuring food security for its huge population is also a serious domestic issue for China. Due to heavy industrialization and desertification, there has been a clear shortage of arable land that has badly affected the agricultural sector.¹⁰⁸ Due to more demand for food and less productive arable land, China relies on food imports which come from Panama and Malacca Straits, and these imports amount to 39%. Both the Malacca and Panama are important choke points, and China has a small capacity and presence to secure the much-needed imported food items. China is primarily an export-oriented economy that is highly dependent on imported energy to fulfill its industrial necessities. According to one estimate, by 2035, China will be required to import almost 80% of oil to run its industry, and much of the energy will come to China through the Malacca Straits, where it has already been discussed that China has minimum capacity and presence and always remains vulnerable to a possible interdiction or blockade by hostile powers. Moreover, China wants to integrate its western and southern regions internally and with the outside world, as both these regions are less developed as compared to China's eastern front. The MSRI can provide the facility to connect the western and southern Chinese regions with the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, respectively. This will help China overcome her Malacca dilemma.

5.6 Indian Aspirations A Big Challenge For China

India is a major stakeholder in the Indian Ocean region. It has a large territory, a huge population, and a growing economy. Indian role is very critical for regional stability and prosperity. Since its birth, India has maintained almost a non-aligned diplomacy, especially with the great powers. As far as the maritime domain is concerned, India had been badly affected by the British maritime policies that remained prevalent during the first two decades after India's independence. India was

¹⁰⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, "ASIA'S CAULDRON The South China Sea and the end of a stable Pacific", Random House, New York, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Jared Diamond, "COLLAPSE: How societies choose to fail or survive", *Penguin Random House, UK*, 2011.

restricted to remaining a coastal and territorial water navy under the British Admiralty. But now, the situation has changed significantly.¹⁰⁹

India is now a big economy and market with one of the world's largest military forces. It is a major trading partner with regional and non-regional powers. Its service sector and cultural appeal, through its vibrant showbiz industry, is almost spreading all over the world. India's maritime maneuvering discussed earlier in this study shows that India wants to be a key regional player with a cautious approach to maintaining its own separate stature. Indo-US LEOMA materialized after ten years of deliberation. India's geopolitical intentions show that it is now seeking its rightful place in world affairs because of its aggregate power based on its territorial size, population, and space in the global economy. India demands a high status in the international governing institutions like UNSC, World Bank, etc.¹¹⁰

India is really concerned about the Chinese MSRI in its backyard. Although India holds control of important islands and sea routes and has established good relations with strategically located island countries like Mauritius and Seychelles, but still thinks the Chinese port project is an encroachment in the Indian Ocean region. India's Act East policy and Chinese westward expansion have created a kind of security dilemma in the region. India thinks that Chinese projects are violating Indian territorial sovereignty as it passes through disputed regions like Kashmir and some parts of the Line of Actual Control.

Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean is one of the most important features of the geopolitical discourse in this region. India is an aspiring regional hegemon and more specifically, it is the most powerful and dominant country in the South Asian region, where China is developing ports like Gwadar, Hambantota, Kyaukpyu, Chittagong, and Maldives. In this region, China enjoys a good friendly relationship with Pakistan and Bangladesh. This close relationship is a sign of irritation for India. Most of the South Asian states see China as a counterbalance to India. The South Asian states primarily see China as an opportunity to improve their fragile economy Not to mention the

¹⁰⁹ Jaswant Singh, "DEFENDING INDIA", *Macmillan India LTD, Bangalore*, 1999.

¹¹⁰ Alyssa Ayres, "OUR TIME HAS COME How India Is Making Its Place in the World", *Oxford University Press, USA*, 2018.

other projects Only the BRI is supposed to provide a huge boost to integrate this region with other regions apart from the development of the South Asian states.¹¹¹

5.7 Western Narratives As Threat To MSRI

All these developments show that China is increasing its footprints in the region and that is a major concern for India and the supposed reason to oppose Chinese MSRI in the region. The successful completion of this initiative will further erode Western and Indian influence in the region. The discussion reveals that America and India's vital national interests are not threatened due to MSRI. America emerged as an ambivalent superpower after the end of the Cold War.

As is evident from world history, the rise of one big power always creates fear and anxiety amongst the established powers, and this fear is usually based on perceptions. The USA and India are the two most important powers that take the Chinese rise and more specifically are disturbed by China's 21st century maritime Silk Road initiative. India is in great perplexity due to China's initiatives in the Indian Ocean region. The problem for the USA and India is two-fold. At one instinct, America feels that China will dominate and eventually change the rule-based international order that is currently the prerogative of the USA as a leader and its allies all over the world.

The second one is India which wants to become the regional power in the Asiatic waters with the US help. Foreign policy is the major tool by which states try to achieve their objectives based on the national interest. The objectives and the national interests can never be truly defined. There cannot be a single natural interest or a single objective for any state as both concepts can vary according to the domestic and international happenings in the world. There is always an ephemeral line between the objectives, means, and the ends.¹¹² The only thing which is constant in international affairs is the change itself. Along with the changing dynamics of the situation, objectives, and the national interest keep on modifying. Henry Kissinger rightly said that states would determine what is there to achieve or something to protect based on the national interest.¹¹³

¹¹¹ S D. Muni and Tan Tai Yong, "A RESURGENT CHINA South Asian Perspectives", *Routledge, New Dehli*,2012.

¹¹² Keith R. Legg and James F. Morrison, "Politics and the International System: An Introduction", *Harper and Row, New York*,1971.

¹¹³ Henry Kissinger, "Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century", *Simon & Schuster, London*,2001.

The Cold War ended with the disintegration of the former USSR and was perceived as a unipolar movement for the USA as there was no rival power that could stand in front of America. That unipolar movement generated heated debate about America's future role in world affairs. It was perceived that the USA had become the sole global leader, and it would spread liberal notions and democracy and a capitalist economy as the world had witnessed the end of history. If we deeply look at the USA's engagement in world affairs after the Cold War, it seems that America has preferred military involvement in various parts of the world to bring peace and democracy to the disturbed regions.

The Twin Tower attacks at the dawn of the 21st century changed the whole paradigm and created the seeds of multipolarity. Earlier it was deemed that there was no other power that could challenge the US hegemony. With a lot of focus on military aspects in world affairs, the USA neglected the economic domain resulted in the rise of the EU and some Asian powers, and the world balance of power started shifting from the West to the East. Apart from the debate of the unipolar movement, Professor Huntington also predicted that the unification of the European countries will be an important impediment to the USA's unipolarity and may produce multipolarity in the 21st Century.¹¹⁴ European countries almost got rid of every colonial responsibility well before the end of the Cold War. This also generated a hot debate that the West is not truly a unified whole. Every Western interest is not Europe's interest, and every American interest is not fruitful for the Western countries. Multilateralism suits the European states more but is less fruitful for the USA. These disparities make the Western bloc and the USA vulnerable to sustaining Western dominance.¹¹⁵

The American-led Western bloc thinks that the Chinese MSRI is an attempt to alter the rule-based liberal order in the Indian Ocean region does not look too sound. Western-led world order after the decolonization has never completely dominated the Indian Ocean region. Rather, it has enjoyed a thin hegemony. The Indian Ocean cannot be called a single unit like the EU. Rather, it is very huge and diverse and has different political, ethical, and religious beliefs. The proposed US-led liberal order based on democracy and rules does not truly exist in this region. In some countries, governments are made through the electoral process. But in practice, governments did not follow liberal and democratic values and can be called authoritarian democracies like India Pakistan

¹¹⁴ Samuel p. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Affairs*, 78, March/April 1999.

¹¹⁵ Robert Kagan, "OF PARADISE AND POWER: America and Europe in the New World Order", *Alfred A. Knopf, New York*, 2003.

Myanmar, Etc. Even close USA allies and partner states haven't adopted liberal values. And more interesting, America has not forced them either to adopt free values.¹¹⁶

American scholarly discussion has remained centered on the notion that America should take a clear path regarding its role in international affairs. Stephen Walt has highlighted that there is a dire need to tame the American power, and the American predatory approach is creating more problems and enemies for itself. According to Richard Haass, the gradual downfall of the liberal order is the result of dysfunctional international institutions that have created a trust deficit among the US allies. Present America is fragmented politically and is stretched on the military ground. Further, it seems less willing to promote the liberal order in the world.¹¹⁷ Fareed Zakaria also highlighted that it is not only the West declining, but more importantly, the rise of the rest of the nations is a major challenge for the US.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, China has accelerated the acceleration.

China is enhancing its global reach at a tremendous pace.¹¹⁹ China has shown huge potential to complete mega-projects in a very short time. In the high-tech arena, China has almost surpassed the USA, which is a matter of concern for the United States.

5.8 Likely Future Of The Geopolitics In The IOR

It is always difficult to predict the future, but the lessons from history often suggest some useful insights for the future. There seems to be no doubt that Asia and more specifically the Indo-Pacific region has become the global hotspot for world politics, but this does not mean that the West has lost totally. In the Indian Ocean region, American vital territorial interests are not threatened by China, as territorial sovereignty is often considered as the vital interest of any state to defend.¹²⁰ Moreover, a big growing economy like China needs access to the second ocean as the USA and Great Britain have enjoyed in the past. CPEC is a reliable passage for China to get into the Indian Ocean to reduce the distance for Chinese oil imports and other necessary items. China is a trading partner of most of the Indian Ocean littoral states, and so far, China has not shown any hegemonic

¹¹⁶ Harry Verhoeven and Anatol Lieven, "Beyond Liberal order States, societies and Markets in the Global Indian Ocean", *Hurst & Company London*,2021.

¹¹⁷ Richard Hass, "The World A Brief Introduction", *Penguin Press, New York*,2020.

¹¹⁸ Fareed Zakaria, "The Post American World and the rise of the Rest", *Penguin Random House, India*,2008.

¹¹⁹ Alvin & Heidi Toffler, "Revolutionary Wealth", *Currency Doubleday, New York*,2006.

¹²⁰ Vali Nasir, "The Dispensable Nation American Foreign Policy in Retreat", *Random House LLC, USA*, 2013.

or military ambitions in this region. With the presence of developed and rising powers like the USA, China, India, Japan, Indonesia, South Asia, and South Korea, multipolarity seems to be the future order in the Indian Ocean region. India's role will be very crucial for the future of the geopolitics in the region, as the Sino-Indian cooperation or the ongoing enmity between the two gigantic nations will have consequences for the Indian Ocean region. In the age of rapid information, it will be a real test of the diplomatic prudence of the decision-makers, cooperation, and competition among the key players seems to be the future of the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean Region.

Findings

- This multilateral initiative can effectively comprehend China's aspirations to overcome its internal and external concerns, for instance, its food and energy requirements along with a panacea for the Malacca Dilemma, respectively.
- China will galvanize its influence within the Indian Ocean region by augmenting its relationships with multiple littoral states. It seems like a counterbalance for US dominance in this part of the world.
- Western blocks particularly America perpetually indoctrinating that China is deeming it as a tool for expansionism. This study, however, refutes this narrative, as China has its own imperatives rather than acclaim as a world hegemon.
- The impracticality of international laws and norms, particularly UNCLOS is quite evident in both Chinese and Western approaches, which ultimately becomes a challenge for themselves.
- Sino-Indian rivalry is inevitable for India, owing to its territorial claims as well as economic vulnerabilities. This adversary subdues the success of MSRI.

Recommendations

- China and India need to revisit their approaches, especially in the maritime realm. Both the Asian powers should respect each other's claims and interests in the Indian Ocean Region.

- To protect the rules-based order in the region America should behave responsibly by integrating itself within the order, rather than acting like a predator or a world police immune from international law and other Conventions.
- In order to make MSRI a successful initiative, China should make the terms and conditions more open and transparent to eradicate the negative perceptions that deem China as a threat to global order by indulging the world in the alleged debt trap.
- The Chinese way of domestic governance and its dealing with the outside world is comparatively different from the rest of the world as China never remained part of the world balance of power, to deal with a rising China the world needs to understand the Chinese characteristics of governance.
- India has a growing industrial economy and is hungry for the natural resources like China but lacks the capital and technological capability to explore and exploit the Oceans, so cooperation between these two Asian giants can bring regional stability and prosperity.
- It has become evident now that the gradual transition of power is being shifted from the West to the East, and the best to deal with the transition is to let it happen, any strong preemptive measures by the rising or the established powers can push the world into the havoc.

CONCLUSION

The announcement of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road initiative is the single most mega initiative of the 21st century in the maritime domain. Chinese initiative has spurred hot debate in the international political discourse, based on the assumption that ranges from the eradication of the existing liberal world order in world affairs and China wanting to be the authoritarian global hegemon. The present study reveals that China has a minimal naval presence in the Indian Ocean this shows that China only wants to ensure the protection of the sea lines of communications, and it wants to open new pathways to overcome its geographical and domestic impediments, mainly to secure the food and energy security for its huge population and enormous industrial production. History shows that even at the zenith of its maritime power Under the admiralty of Zheng He, China did not pursue hegemonic ambitions. In the present context, China cannot afford to be a predatory power that would only damage its economic growth and will be Perceived as a major threat among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region where China is investing heavily

It will be inevitable for China to follow a neutral and nonpredatory stance to ensure its maritime interests in the Indian Ocean region, so far China has emerged as a responsible power and three major stakeholders America India and China are not damaging the vital interests of each other, so the trend of cooperation and competition seems to be continued in the Indian Ocean region in future.

The study achieved its objective and tried to fill the identified literature gap by answering the research questions. The study has dealt in detail with the various aspects of the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road initiative and maritime interests of the regional and non-regional powers' perceived challenges and prospects for China.

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