

Evolving Geopolitics of Indian Ocean: In-depth Analysis

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Analysis Parameter

While much attention of the national policy making circles and the concerned public alike of the Indian Ocean countries is mostly focused on various internal and external issues of respective national importance, the much serious issue of the evolving geopolitics of Indian Ocean appears to be neglected. Basically this issue is being caused by the heightening endeavours of US and India to gain the overlordship over Indian Ocean region, because of their respective self-conceived geopolitical right to do so. Factually, this issue reflects a 'brewing flash-point' with the potential of severely endangering the national maritime interests of not only many countries of the Indian Ocean, but also of certain extra-regional countries whose maritime interests are linked with the sea-lanes of this ocean. There is, therefore, the urgent need that the effected countries pay due attention to this emerging threat. For that purpose it is essential to get a proper grasp of the 'intricate texture' of this issue. Since the 'misconstrued versions' of geopolitical right as conceived by US and India are fundamental to the issue, it is worth examining that aspect first. Besides that, the other aspects to be examined are the significant peculiarities of Indian Ocean region; significant naval/military aspects of the 'major contenders' (US, India, China, Iran) in the issue; and their related diplomatic endeavours. Proper understandings of these aspects can enable us to realistically analyse the evolving picture, and discern its implications for policy formulation by the effected countries.

Concept of Geopolitics and its Misconstrued Versions

From the academic concept point of view, Geopolitics is basically considered to be the "method of political analysis, popular in Central Europe during the first half of the 20th century that emphasized the role played by geography in international relations". This term was first used in 1916 by Rudolf Kjeflen, a Swedish political scientist¹. From that stand point it was, and still remains, a beneficial field of specialised study. However, its misconstrued versions, through which many major powers justify their external domineering, including military action to occupy or dominate other countries to exploit their resources, were/are certainly farcical. Factually, world history – ancient and medieval – was almost replete with such acts. However, the phenomenon of 'institutionalising' such acts as national policy, which germinated the subsequent misconstrued versions of geopolitics, commenced from 19th century. The generally known example in that regard is that of the Nazi Germany's concept of 'Lebensraum'. According to that concept, in order to remain healthy, all species including humans need to continually expand the space they occupy; and that, for humans it meant that one 'Völk', i.e. nation has to conquer the other(s) and colonise the conquered.² This idea was borrowed by Haushofer who founded the Institute of Geopolitics in 1922 in Munich, from which he proceeded to publicise geopolitical ideas, including Sir Walford J. Mackinder's theory of a European 'heartland' central to world domination. Haushofer's writings found favor with the Nazi leadership, and his ideas were used to justify German expansion during the Nazi era³. The concept of 'Lebensraum' lost its official status with the fall of Nazi

Germany. Incidentally similar misconstrued geopolitical versions of US and India, albeit not commonly known, are the underlying driving force of their actions in this issue. These need a clear understanding, because it is only these two powers which are asserting their own versions of 'geopolitical claim' on the entire Indian Ocean, whereas all other Indian Ocean littoral countries, as also the effected extra-regional powers/countries are basically endeavouring to safeguard their genuine maritime interests in this ocean.

In the case of US, history of the official development and application of similar misconstrued versions of geopolitics is fairly well-recorded from the early 19th century. One such version was 'Monroe Doctrine'. It was officially promulgated on 2 December 1823 by the then President Monroe, who officially promulgated it on 2 December 1823 and declared his government's assertion of unilaterally expanding its 'overlord-ship' over both the northern and southern continents of America, to the exclusion of all other European powers/countries. It is worth noting that this doctrine has not yet faded out; though it has been 're-modeled'/re-engineered by US' authorities when required to serve the US' expansionist design in the changed circumstances. That aspect is evidently clear from the elaboration provided by Rear Admiral Colby N. Chester, US Navy, as mentioned in the historical records ⁴ of America of July 1914. He asserted: "The Monroe Doctrine is the cardinal principle of the foreign policy of the United States. It has been so construed for nearly one hundred years of our national history, and it so remains today, in spite of some statements that have been made to the contrary" ⁵. And, in view of the changed geopolitical environment of that time, he also propounded the 're-modeling' of the original doctrine to include US' 'right' of expanding its domineering across the oceanic expanses ⁶.

Yet another similar concept, in tune with Monroe Doctrine, which is much more discernible in US' policies in the present day environment, is the theory of 'Manifest Destiny'. It originated in 1845, and is still operative with certain modifications and under different names. The concept of 'Manifest Destiny' is considered to have initially espoused the idea that America had to expand in the North American continent. However, research has established that the original concept, as also its subsequent 're-modeled' versions under different 'slogan titles' till the present times, clearly included/still include the conceptual ingredients of US' superiority notions of religion, race, and culture, and the dominant urge of expansionism and imperialism. Donald M. Scott, Professor of History Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, has published his scholarly essay about the realities of this theory and its 're-modeled' versions. His essay is titled 'The Religious Origins of Manifest Destiny'. Some of the excerpts of his essay, which succinctly clarify these mentioned aspects of the initial and subsequent 'models' of this concept, are:

"In 1845, an unsigned article in a popular American journal, a long standing Jacksonian publication, the Democratic Review, issued an unmistakable call for American expansionism. Focusing mainly on bringing the Republic of Texas into the union, it declared that expansion represented the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." -----
 "Manifest Destiny was also clearly a racial doctrine of white supremacy that granted no native American or nonwhite claims to any permanent possession of the lands on the North American continent and justified white American expropriation of Indian lands---". -----
 "It also was firmly anchored in a long standing and deep sense of a special and unique American Destiny, the belief that in the words of historian Conrad Cherry, "America is a nation called to a special destiny by God."; -----
 "It is also the constellation of ideas that has informed American nationalism and its actions at home and abroad to this day. ---
 President Woodrow Wilson invoked it to call Americans to fight to make the world "safe for

democracy”, as did President Franklin Roosevelt, when in World War II he rallied the American public behind the war against Fascist and Nazi Europeans and imperial Japan. --- The sense of American uniqueness and mission also underlay John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address. And President George W. Bush, considering himself to be an agent of divine will, has defended his policies in Iraq by invoking the idea that it is America’s duty and destiny to conquer terrorism and to secure democracy for Iraq and help spread it to other nations of the Middle East”; ----- and, “Not surprisingly, however, it remained for Abraham Lincoln to provide the most complex but nonetheless clear statement of the idea that America has a sacred duty to itself and to the world to preserve and protect liberty and democracy⁷ .”

This foregoing elaboration given by Professor Donald M. Scott suffices to establish that all such concepts and theories of US, like ‘Monroe Doctrine’, ‘Manifest Destiny’, etc., till the more recent concepts like ‘War on Terror’ and ‘Pivot Asia’, were/are basically the intentionally misconstrued versions of geopolitics, with the real ingredients as mentioned by him.

In the case of the India, the underlying point of her own version of geopolitical concept is her claim of being a sort of the ‘owner’ of the entire Indian Ocean Region, rather than merely having a claim of its ‘overlord-ship’. In a sense that concept presents a picture of the entire Indian Ocean as an ‘Indian Federation’, to the exclusion of the genuine existence of the other independent nation states of the region. That concept was initiated by the very first Indian leadership, headed by India’s first post-independence Prime Minister Jawahir Lal Nehru right from the days of the struggle for independence from the British rule, as evident from much of the published material. A real insight into that concept is provided by the published works of none less than Prime Minister Jawahir Lal Nehru himself. In that context, following excerpts from ‘People’s March, Volume 6, No. 11, December 2005’ are especially noteworthy⁸:

“While in jail (prior to independence) he wrote, “Whether India is considered properly to be described as a nation, or two, or more, does not really matter, for the modern idea of nationality has been almost divorced from statehood. The nation state is too small a unit today and small states can have no independent existence” (J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, London, 1956, p. 545)”; ----- “the small national state is doomed. It may survive as a cultural, autonomous area but not as an independent state (*The Discovery of India*, p. 550)”; ---- “He asserted that it was Nehru’s manifest destiny to become the centre of a “super national state” stretching from the Middle East to South-East Asia and to exercise “an important influence” in the Pacific region (p. 550)”; --- Nehru asserted, “so it seems that in the modern world it is inevitable for India to be the centre of things in Asia ----- India is going to be the centre of a very big federation --- (Nehru, *Selected Works* , Vol. XV, p.p. 562- 566)”; ---- “Nehru was quite prompt in affirming that “India is likely to dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region”. In August 1945, he stated: “I stand for a South Asia federation of India, Iraq, Afghanistan and Burma ---- in the world of today there are two big powers, Russia and America. In the world of tomorrow, there will be two more, India and China – there will be no fifth” (Nehru. *SW*, p.p. 440, 441-2)”; ---- “Nehru considered Sri Lanka to be “really part o India” and wanted her to be “an autonomous unit of Indian federation” (*SW*, Vol. XIV, p. 440; Vol. XV, p. 458; Vol. X, p. 32; Vol. XI, p.p. 788 - 89)”. He also claimed that Nepal was “certainly a part of India”, though she was a nominally independent country” (*ibid*, 2nd series, Vol. II, p. 470”.

It is worth noting that Nehru got the chance of heading the Indian government for a long spell of about one and a half decade after independence. Hence, this concept got firmly ingrained in the policy-making circles of India. This fact is evident not only from the repeated official pronouncements of the various post-Nehru Indian governments, but also from its actual application in the form of India’s post-independence military annexation of Hyderabad Deccan, Goa, Kashmir, etc., as also its ‘coercive intrusion’ in Sikkim, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and East Pakistan. That concept is still deep-rooted in Indian civil and military policy making spheres, as evident from the address of the Indian Chief of Naval Staff Admiral D. K. Joshi in the Institute of Defence and Strategic Analysis on 5 March 2013. He made it clear that, “The Indian Ocean Region, comprising the ocean and its littorals, is India’s regional or immediate

geo-strategic environment”]; and to support that concept he quoted the Indian Prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, who while recently addressing a Joint Commanders Conference had asserted that, “India’s strategic calculus has long encompassed the waters from the Gulf of Aden to the Strait of Malacca.”⁹ Besides that there are also indications that India is now even contemplating to stretch its ‘oceanic domineering’ to the South China Sea. That aspect is highlighted by Mr. Pant Professor Defense Studies at King’s College London and Emerging Leader Fellow of the Australia India Institute, in his article originally published In the Wall Street journal. He mentions, “The whole world is watching China's confrontations in the South China Sea and the East China Sea – but India is watching with particular concern. India has no territorial claims here per se, but one Indian official recently said that the South China Sea could be seen "as the antechamber of the Indian Ocean," given the flow of maritime traffic”¹⁰.

It is essential to keep in mind these US’ and Indian versions of geopolitics while studying and analysing the evolving maritime geopolitics in the Indian Ocean.

Significant Peculiarities of Indian Ocean Region

In that context, the first aspect to be taken into account is that for maritime purposes opinions and claims differ regarding the ‘accepted’ expanse of Indian Ocean, the de-jure status of certain coastal states as Indian Ocean littoral states, and the status of certain other land-locked states as Indian Ocean dependant state. There are certain ‘exaggerated’ claims about the expanse of the ocean – the aforementioned Indian official’s claim of South China Sea being an ante-chamber of Indian Ocean’ is an example. In that context, the elaboration provided by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), South Africa appears apt. It mentions, “Its western border is continental Africa to a longitude of 20° E, where it stretches south from Cape Agulhas; its northern border is continental Asia from Suez to the Malay Peninsula; in the east it incorporates Singapore, the Indonesian archipelago, Australia to longitude 147° E and Tasmania; while in the south it stretches to latitude 60°S as determined per the Antarctic Treaty of 1959”¹¹. In essence, therefore, the Indian Ocean encompasses many regional seas and gulf, including Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Andaman Sea, Laccadive Sea, and the Great Australian Bight, etc., located within its bounds from Suez Canal and the east coast of Africa in the west to the Pacific Ocean at 147°E meridian in the east. On the problematic side, however, this very ISS paper presents a questionable categorisation of the concerned states as Indian Ocean’s de-jure ‘littoral’ and ‘dependant’ states. It clarifies that while various criteria could be used to designate states as Indian Ocean states, for this (ISS) paper the term applies to 51 coastal and 13 landlocked states in that category. In the coastal states it includes 26 Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) states, 5 Red Sea states, 4 Persian Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, France, Britain; and in landlocked states, which are dependent upon Indian Ocean for trade and communication, it includes Afghanistan, but excludes Central Asian states¹². Obviously, this mentioned inclusion of France and Britain as coastal states, and exclusion of Central Asian states from the landlocked dependant states of Indian Ocean region, is debatable. Such variations of opinion are of significance while critically examining the geopolitical claims of various regional and extra-regional countries/powers, relating to Indian Ocean.

There are many reasons for the rather fast accelerating geopolitical competition between certain regional and extra-regional countries/powers for gaining control/dominance over the Indian Ocean arena. Those reasons are linked with certain geo-economic and geostrategic factors. The major geo-economic factor is the globally heightening significance of seaborne trade; and incidentally, it is now becoming more and more relevant to the Indian Ocean. The important point to note is that this element of seaborne

trade is significant not only in relation to the national commercial benefits, but also in the spheres of national aims and objectives in the realm of geostrategy and international politics.

As for the global seaborne trade, adequate data is available to show that by now its volume has expanded to a very high proportion of the total world trade. Though the estimates obviously differ on the basis of calculation methods, yet its enormity can be gauged from the fact that its estimates still range from the lower side ¹³ of 75% to the higher side ¹⁴ of 90%. UN data on International trade also supports the higher percentage of the world seaborne trade; it mentions, “Maritime transport handles over 80 per cent of the volume of global trade and accounts for over 70 per cent of its value”. That fact clearly brings to fore the extraordinary significance of the seaborne trade in the spheres of geo-economy, geostrategy – and hence, geopolitics. Besides that, UN data also highlights, “Since 1970, global seaborne trade has expanded on average by 3.1 per cent every year, reaching an estimated 8.4 billion tons in 2010. At this pace, and assuming no major upheaval in the world economy, global seaborne trade is expected to increase by 36 per cent in 2020 and to double ¹⁵ by 2033”.

The seaborne trade obviously traverses a number of the oceanic regions like the Northern Europe, Pacific, and the Mediterranean-Black Sea regions, etc; some of those have been rated higher than the Indian Ocean region in this regard. However, it is an accepted fact that by now the Indian Ocean region has become much more significant than the other oceanic regions. That aspect is due to certain factors. The first factor relates to the newly emerging pattern of world economic growth. It is clearly tilting sharply in favour of many Asian and African countries, besides certain Latin American and European countries, as already covered in many reports. The latest ‘Market Watch’ published by the Wall Street Journal has also highlighted that: “The best performing emerging markets are likely to either be “very poor countries that get the basics of policy making right,” or “middle-income emerging markets that develop a strong manufacturing base and have good governance”; -----“Most economies in Africa will grow at rates of 5% or more over the next decade”; -----“Meanwhile, manufacturing-based emerging markets in Asia and Europe should experience faster rates of growth than commodity-based ones in Latin America and the Middle East. Among those are the Philippines, Indonesia, Turkey and Poland”----- “China is likely to remain the fastest-growing major emerging economy over the next decade, but there is a good chance that the growth stars will outpace Brazil and Russia, with a handful – mainly in Africa and Southeast Asia – looking likely to outperform India too”. ¹⁶ These newly emerging patterns of economic growth have obviously caused the focus of the world seaborne trade flow to shift to the ‘south – south’ and ‘east – west’ equation.

Besides that, the fast increasing energy (oil and gas) demand by the countries of growing economies is yet another very significant factor. We know that most of the countries with much of the oil and gas potential and export facilities are located in Central, Western, and South-Western Asia, besides certain African countries; and that, the ‘energy-demanding’ countries like India, China, Japan, etc are located in the east and far-east, besides many of the Western/European countries. The urgent need, of the East Asian countries, of energy supply is also reflected by the Special Report of The National Bureau of Research, Australia, which brings to fore the fact, “East and Southeast Asian states are facing severe and increasing energy security challenges. Regional economies are generally poor in natural resources, trade-dependent, and energy-intensive in character. Regional energy demands, especially for natural gas and fuels derived from crude oil, continue to escalate. Simultaneously, indigenous production of oil and gas has been for the large part either plateauing or declining. This divergence between energy demands and domestic supplies has led to increasing reliance among East and Southeast Asian states on foreign sources of supply, including energy imports that are predominantly delivered by sea”. ¹⁷ That is why, according to

the Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, more than 80 percent of the world's seaborne trade in oil transits through Indian Ocean----. ¹⁸ Since these particular supply and demand areas are located around Indian Ocean, the critical energy (oil and gas) supply has obviously to be shipped through this very ocean in the west-east direction for the needy East Asian countries, and in the north-westerly direction for West/Europe. This aspect of the fast changing pattern of the flow of seaborne trade is also substantiated by the afore-mentioned UN data, which highlights, "Developing countries are driving growth in global merchandise trade, with South-South links emerging strongly. Africa and Latin America are increasingly becoming suppliers of China's primary commodity needs and, in return, China's consumer goods are being exported more and more to these regions. These developments are shaping the configuration of maritime transportation". ¹⁹

The second factor is the significant maritime economic potential of the Indian Ocean. Many publications on the economic importance of Indian Ocean Region are available. The one of Rear Admiral R. C. Wijegunrathne provides a comprehensive list of those. In brief, he has highlighted: that half of world's container traffic passes through Indian Ocean, the ports of which handle about 30% of world trade; 55% of known world oil reserves are present in the Ocean, and 40% of the world's natural gas reserves are in its littoral states; its continental shelves are reported to be very rich in not yet exploited minerals including Tin, Gold, Uranium, Cobalt, Nickel, Aluminum and Cadmium; and 40 types of raw materials used by U.S. industry are supplied by the Indian Ocean ²⁰.

Yet another significant peculiarity of the Indian Ocean is the location of the maritime choke points in this ocean. The oft-mentioned of these are the Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandab and Strait of Hormuz in the north-west, Mozambique Channel in the south-west; and Malacca Strait, Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait in the south-east of the ocean. These choke points typically have the potential of sort of 'controlling' the entering and exiting flow of maritime traffic in the Indian Ocean. Of these, the more significant ones are the Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandab, and Strait of Hormuz; and Malacca Strait. There are also a certain number of the oil and gas transit pipelines in some cases, like the SUEMED Pipeline in Egypt. According to the data of US Energy Information Administration ²¹, it consists of two parallel 200 miles pipelines with a capacity of about 2.4 million barrels per day (bbl/d), connecting Ain Sukhna oil terminal on the Red Sea coast to the Sidi Kerir terminal on the Mediterranean Sea. This pipeline is meant to transit the oil brought by the tankers which are too large to transit through Suez Canal.

The total volume of seaborne transit of oil and petroleum products, during the year 2011, was: Suez Canal and SUEMED Pipeline – 3.8 million bbl/d; Bab-el-Mandab – 3.4 million bbl/d; Strait of Hormuz – 17.0 million bbl/d; and Strait of Malacca – 15.2 million bbl/d ²². However, it is worth noting that there are many aspects of significance of all of these choke points, as following:-

- a. Though the volumes of such trade transit through the Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandab are lesser than those of Hormuz and Malacca, yet these choke points have an added geo-strategic significance. That is so, because Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandab are the unavoidable choke points in the oceanic link between Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Ocean, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean. Hence, any trade or naval/military seaborne movement of US and Europe toward/from Indian Ocean remains critically dependent upon the passage through these choke points.
- b. Strait of Hormuz is located east of Bab-el-Mandab between Oman and Iran. It connects Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean. According to the afore-mentioned data of US Energy Information Administration, Strait of Hormuz is world's most important oil chokepoint, with a seaborne trade transit flow (2011) of about 35 percent of all seaborne traded

oil, or almost 20 percent of oil traded worldwide. More than 85 percent of these crude oil exports went to Asian markets, with Japan, India, South Korea, and China representing the largest destinations. In addition, Qatar exports about 2 trillion cubic feet per year of liquefied natural gas (LNG) through the Strait of Hormuz, accounting for almost 20 percent of global LNG trade. Besides that, Kuwait imports LNG volumes that travel northward through the Strait of Hormuz. These flows totaled about 100 billion cubic feet per year in 2010. It is also worth noting that the oil transit pipelines bypassing the Strait of Hormuz do not diminish the importance of the Strait, because the capacity of these pipelines is not much yet. The mid-year 2012 data shows that the effective capacity of the Iraqi-owned Kirkuk-Ceyhan (Iraq-Turkey) Pipeline is 0.4 million bbl/d; the capacity of the Saudi Arabian-owned Petrolina (East-West Pipeline) is 4.8 million bbl/d, of which 2.8 million bbl/d remains unused; and of the United Emirates-owned Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline is 6.7 million bbl/d, of which 4.3 million bbl/d remains unused²³.

- c. Farther east, almost close to the eastern fringes of the Indian Ocean, is located the Strait of Malacca, between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. It provides the shortest sea route between the Persian Gulf suppliers and the Asian markets, particularly China, Japan, South Korea, and the Pacific Rim. Two of the fastest growing economies – China and Indonesia – get their oil shipments through this choke point. The number of ships transiting through this choke point is over 60,000 per year. Circumventing this choke point through Lombok Strait or Sunda Strait would require nearly half of the world fleet to meet the re-routed trade transit requirement. Many of the proposals to build oil/gas transit pipelines have been considered, but so far only the Chinese pipeline project (Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipeline) has taken shape. It is on schedule, and is likely to be completed this year (2013). It consists of two parallel oil and gas pipelines from Myanmar's port in Bay of Bengal to the Yunnan province of China. These pipelines are meant to provide an alternative to China to get its supplies from Middle East bypassing Strait of Malacca. The oil pipeline capacity is expected to be about 440,000 bbl/d²⁴.

The foregoing elaboration of the significant aspects deserves careful attention while analysing and evaluating the ongoing naval/military and diplomatic endeavours of the major contenders in the evolving maritime geopolitics in the Indian Ocean.

Naval/Military Endeavours of the Competing Powers/Countries

In the context of the geopolitical competition in this Ocean, the contending powers/countries may be considered in three categories – firstly, US and India, which are endeavouring to attain a dominant control over this Ocean; secondly, the Indian Ocean's littoral and dependent land-locked countries, and China, which are struggling to safeguard their maritime rights from being 'controlled or dominated' by either US or India; and thirdly, those extra-regional powers/countries who are also dependent in varying degrees upon the maritime expanses of this Ocean. Out of these contenders, US, India, China, and Iran are of significance.

US' version that the objectives of its endeavours in Indian Ocean are aimed at providing peace and stability, and providing security to sea-lanes for 'global prosperity'²⁵ are very similar to US' stated objectives in its endeavours termed 'war on terror' and 'pivot Asia', etc. The reality of such US' versions has been unveiled by many researches and scholars. Professor Jules Dufour is one of them. He is President of the United Nations Association of Canada (UNA-C) – Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean Branch, Research Associate at the Center for Research on Globalization (CRG), and the Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University of Quebec, Chicoutimi. He has asserted, "The worldwide control of humanity's economic, social and political activities is under the helm of US corporate and military power. Underlying this process are various schemes of direct and indirect military intervention. These US sponsored strategies ultimately consist in a process of global subordination". And to achieve that objective of 'coercing' subordination of the target countries, US operates a worldwide network of military bases. Regarding that arrangement, Professor Jules Dufour mentions: "US operates and/or controls between 700 and 800 military bases worldwide"; and that, "US Military has bases in 63 countries. He has

also published the graph of US' expenditure for it, which shows ²⁶ that the expenditure was around 350 billion US dollars in 1998 and rose sharply to 650 billion US dollars by 2008.

In the aspects of naval warfare, US navy is undoubtedly the largest and most powerful navy in the world. Its deployment corresponds to the above-mentioned US military arrangement. US covers the world with a number of combat military commands – NorthCom, SouthCom, EUCom, CentCom, and PaCom. Recently there were also news of establishment of AfCom (relating specifically to Africa). US' navy is correspondingly deployed in a number of fleet commands. According to the data provided by the unofficial US Navy website, these are: 2nd Fleet (Atlantic Ocean, headquarters at Norfolk Virginia), 3rd Fleet (Eastern and Central Pacific Ocean, headquarters at Pearl Harbor), 4th Fleet (Caribbean, Central and South America, headquarters at Mayport Fla.), 5th Fleet (Middle East – Red Sea, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, headquarters at Manama Bahrain), 6th Fleet (Mediterranean Sea, headquarters at Naples Italy), and 7th Fleet (Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, headquarters at Yokosuka Japan) ²⁷. From this deployment, it is clear the major portion of US navy is deployed to cover the Indian Ocean – 7th Fleet from the east, 5th Fleet in north-western part of the Indian Ocean, and 6th fleet is also available from the close by Mediterranean Sea through the passage of Suez Canal.

There are reports of some US military facilities in and around the Indian Ocean, like its Drone bases in Yemen, and Seychelles (Indian Ocean Island), etc. However, as for the naval bases and facilities of US navy in the Indian Ocean, there appears to be a problem, as highlighted by Andrews Erickson, et. al., “This region has long been a strategic backwater for the United States. Moreover, unlike in other critical subregions of Asia, the United States lacks significant host-nation bases and is unlikely to acquire them. The British territory of Diego Garcia, whose location and political reliability give it significant strategic utility, is thus central to US power projection in the Indian Ocean littoral region” ²⁸. There is no doubt that Diego Garcia is a very useful facility for the US for its military operations, because one-third of the entire US afloat prepositioning force is accommodated here, maintaining stocks of equipment such as tanks, armored infantry fighting vehicles, fuel, munitions, and spare parts on prepositioned ships; its naval facility provides units throughout the region with fuel, food, spare parts, munitions, and maintenance services; its airfield can support tactical and long-range aircraft; and its telecommunications station tracks satellites and relays fleet broadcasts to units in the area ²⁹. However, it is also apparent that US is facing the serious problem of depending mainly upon only one such base in the Indian Ocean arena, which is obviously fraught with potential danger. It is for this reason that US is now trying hard to get some naval facilities in the Indian Ocean countries, though without much success yet.

In the case of India – the second ‘geopolitical claimant’ of Indian Ocean – its relentless efforts to expand and strengthen its navy reflect its urge to achieve the objective of its ‘overlord-ship’ of the Ocean, in accord with its own version of its ‘geopolitical right’ as explained earlier in this paper.

Indian Navy is organised in four commands: Western Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command, Southern Naval Command, and Andaman & Nicobar Naval Command. These have a number of operational and other (training and hospital, etc.) bases and facilities, including those aboard naval ships. The operational bases/facilities of Western Command include those located at Bombay (dockyard), Goa (HQ naval aviation), Lakshadweep, Laccadive Is. (patrol craft), Colaba, Mumbai (HQ missile boat), Dabolim, Goa (naval air station), Karania, Karwar (naval base), Mumbai (Western Command, missile prep fac., helicopter base, and submarine facility), Dwarka, Okha (naval base). Bases/facilities of the Eastern Command are located at Calcutta (VLF station, and naval facility), Chennai (VLF station), Visakhapatnam (Eastern Command, shipyard, HQ submarines, and submarine facility), Arakonam, Tamil Nadu (naval air station), Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu (VLF station), and Kochi, Kerala (naval aircraft yard). Southern Command has its HQ and training centre at Cochin. The Andaman & Nicobar Command has the advance base at Nicobar, and support facility at Port Blair ³⁰.

Indian Navy is considered to be one of the larger and stronger navies in the world, with a number of aircraft carrier(s), destroyers, frigates, submarines (including one nuclear), amphibious transport dock,

landing ship tanks, corvettes, patrol vessels, mine countermeasure vessels, and a host of the auxiliary vessels. However, what is of particular note is its fast unfolding expansion and modernisation programme, and its growing indigenous capability to produce a considerable part of the desired naval wherewithal including naval vessels, high-tech weaponry and related systems. Indian Navy's plan includes both the long and short term objectives. According to the NDTV edited report, the report of the Standing Committee on Defence included a number of Navy's short term objectives. Some of those were: induction of shore-based aircraft, integral helos, carrier based aircraft, space based AIS and UAVs, along with suitable weapons and sensors; building adequate standoff capability for sea lift and expeditionary operations to achieve desired power projection force levels; development of battle-space dominance and low level marine operations capabilities; and development of the planned force level bases, facilities and infrastructure, etc. The NDTV report³¹ also mentions that Indian navy has the ambition of becoming a three battle carrier groups force by 2020, for which the induction/indigenous production of high-tech weapons and vessels is in progress in a big way. That includes aircraft carrier(s), nuclear-powered and other submarines, guided missile destroyers, stealth frigates, and various missiles, etc.

With that upbeat expansion and modernisation of India's naval strength and capability, therefore, it should be no wonder to find in the mentioned NDTV report that in accord with India's 'Look East' Policy four of the frontline Indian warships under command of the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet had a sustained operational deployment to the South China Sea and North West Pacific; that INS Tabar, remained on a sustained deployment in the Gulf of Aden; and that four ships of the Western Fleet were on an overseas deployment to Horn of Africa, Red Sea and the Western Mediterranean under the command of Flag Officer Commanding, Western Fleet.

The case of China is significantly different from the cases of India and US, because China does not claim either the over-lordship of Indian Ocean like the former, or the preeminent domination of this Ocean like the latter. China claims its right in its offshore 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ). According to the document of the Office of The Naval Intelligence, China of August 2009 that EEZ includes the sea areas in Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, seas around Spratly Islands and Taiwan, areas inside and outside the Okinawa island chain as well as the northern part of the Pacific Ocean. This includes areas outside of the "First Island Chain" as well as the more traditional coastal waters³². Beyond that, in the Indian Ocean, other seas/oceans and global commons, China endeavours to safeguard its rights according to the internationally accepted norms.

As for the potential and apparent ambitions of the PLA Navy (Peoples Liberation Army Navy), the published accounts differ in certain aspects of information and analytical inferences. It is, therefore necessary to very carefully scrutinise the data within the framework of the more credible information and the ground realities. The aforementioned official PLA Navy document of 2009 provides a better understanding of PLA Navy. The more significant of the mentioned aspects are:-

- a. PLA Navy has three geographically-oriented fleets. The North Sea Fleet – headquartered in Qingdao, is responsible for the Bohai, Yellow Sea, and the northern portion of the East China Sea; The East Sea Fleet – headquartered in Ningbo, covers the majority of the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait; and The South Sea Fleet – headquartered in Zhanjiang, is responsible for the South China Sea.
- b. It had 53 diesel attack submarines, 6 nuclear attack submarines, 3 nuclear ballistic missile submarines, 26 destroyers, 48 frigates, 58 amphibious ships, and over 80 Coastal Patrol (missile).
- c. Since 1990's Chinese Navy has been expanded and modernised at a noteworthy pace, purchasing military hardware from abroad, building increasingly complex naval platforms in China and making substantial upgrades to aging ships. Through that process, it more than quadrupled the number of submarines capable of firing anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM), installed missiles with longer ranges and more sophisticated guidance packages on its surface combatants, built over 50 high speed ASCM-carrying patrol crafts, and developed the anti-ship ballistic missile. Besides that, now it also possesses long-range surface-to-air missiles, and the Luyang II DDG with a sophisticated phased-array radar system similar to the western

AEGIS radar. To enhance its force projection, PLA Navy has increased its replenishment capability by 67 %, besides the aircraft carrier, amphibious and other aspects required for sustained distant oceanic naval operations.

- d. PLA Navy has its own component of air force (PLANAF), independent of PLA Air Force. Till 2009 it was mostly a land-based force, with some ship-borne helicopters. However, that configuration was to change with the reported induction of aircraft carrier(s). PLANAF fixed wing aircrafts include the fighters, maritime patrol aircrafts, airborne early warning, and airborne early warning & control aircrafts. Its rotary wing operates three main helicopter platforms – the Z-9C, the Z-8, and the Russian Ka-28 Helix. The Z-9C is the PRC's primary naval helicopter, which can also be fitted with surface search radar to detect surface ships far beyond the range of shipboard radar systems, and can engage surface ships with the ET-52 torpedo.³³

Though **Iran** does claim the status of a major regional power, yet it's official pronouncements donot reflect the claim of over-lordship of Indian Ocean; rather the emphasis of the Iranian version is on the concept of a 'foreign interference-free' Persian Gulf. As for the Iranian naval force, there is quite a bit of contradiction in the information and analytical inferences provided by the available published material. Some publications portray Iranian naval force as dangerous even for the US Navy, while others assert that it is no match to the US naval force. That aspect can be clarified with a comparative study of the information given in the official document of Iranian Navy and in some other credible publications.

The document of the Office of The Naval Intelligence, Iran (Fall 2009) mentions that Iran's naval forces have been shaped by the Islamic revolution, petroleum, and an often adversarial relationship with neighboring countries and the international community. These factors have influenced Iranian naval forces' organisation, equipment holding, and their interaction with external forces. Consequently, Iran has two naval forces: the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN), and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN). The IRIN is the naval branch of Iran's traditional military force that existed prior to the 1979 revolution. It was designed as a blue-water navy consisting mainly of mid-sized vessels like corvettes and missile-equipped patrol craft purchased from Western nations. The IRIN remained secondary in most respects to the IRGCN. Progressive process of reorganisation of Iran's naval force was undertaken since 2007, including induction/production of new naval assets/weaponry, opening of new bases and a well-coordinated re-tasking of the two naval components. In that re-tasking IRIN was assigned to the Gulf of Oman and the Caspian Sea, while IRGCN was given full responsibility of operations in the Persian Gulf. That reorganisation was in accord with the Iranian naval doctrine of access denial; whereby realignment of IRIN assets further into the Gulf of Oman and the concentration of IRGCN fast boats, suicide boats, and coastal defense cruise missiles in the Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf, better allow Iranian naval assets to contribute to and extend Iran's layered defense strategy, thus preventing the enemy from accessing the Strait of Hormuz and hence the Persian Gulf.³⁴

The document also highlights three noteworthy aspects of Iran's naval strategy, i.e. 'decentralisation', 'asymmetric warfare', and 'destabilisation'. Decentralisation implies a mosaic defense, in which the command structure has been decentralised to make Iranian forces more resilient in the face of initial strikes against their command and control structure. The aspect of 'asymmetric warfare' has been explained in the document as a loosely defined term, incorporating one or more of the four concepts: (a) use of conventional weapons in unconventional ways, for example using small boats to lay small mine lines directly in the path of a target; (b) capitalising on the strengths of atypical assets such as speed, maneuverability and stealth of small boats to target the weaknesses of more typical naval assets like the relative sluggishness of a large war ship; (c) incorporating concepts such as mass, in which assets leverage large numbers to overwhelm their targets; and (d) asymmetric warfare uniquely includes concepts of a revolutionary spirit, jihad, and martyrdom. For destabilisation the document mentions, "While controlling the Strait of Hormuz is the key tool by which Iran could internationalise any conflict, it has other options as well. Iran could strike regional countries that actively support or participate in a conflict against the Islamic Republic in an attempt to dissuade them from following such a course".³⁵

The information provided by many of the more credible publications generally corroborates the above-mentioned information about Iran's naval forces. The article published by the Centre of Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), Washington of July 2011 highlights that since 2007 both the IRIN and IRGCN have undergone the process of re-structuring and reorganisation in accord with the revised strategy of Iran's naval forces, redoubling efforts at domestic production of weapons, military platforms, and supporting command and control capabilities; that, IRGCN has aggressively improved its asymmetric warfare capabilities by building its inventory of smaller fast ships and lethal assets; that, IRIN's role outside the Gulf helps expand a more strategic Iranian "soft power" mission, reflecting a long-term vision for greater power projection; and that, there is evidence that IRGCN is enhancing its missile and radar capabilities. However, the inference drawn/indicated in that article, albeit based upon the statement of Commander of IRIN, that Iran aspires to extend its maritime influence in the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Malacca, appears debatable.³⁶ Another publication, of Anthony H. Cordesman, mentions that Iranian Navy (IRIN) has bases at Bandar-e Abbas, Bushehr, Kharg Island, Bander-e Anzelli, Chah Bahar, Bander-e Mahshahar, and Bander-e Khomeini; that it has 3 submarines, 3 frigates, 2 corvettes, 10 missile patrol craft, 7 mine warfare ships, 44 coastal and inshore patrol craft, and 9-10 amphibious ships; that its naval aviation branch, with 5 maritime patrol aircraft, and 19 armed helicopters, is one of the few air elements in any Gulf navy; and that its combination with the IRGCN reflects significant capabilities for both regular and asymmetric naval warfare. The same article also provides the information of the Iranian claim (of August 2000) of domestically producing the light submarine, which can be used for reconnaissance and laying mines.³⁷ Other recent publications also provide information about the furtherance of Iran's capabilities in producing high-tech weaponry and other assets for its military including its naval forces. One such report (25 April 2013) mentions that Iran is mass producing the 200-km range Qader anti-ship cruise missile, with coast to sea and surface to surface versions; that it enjoys automatic digital pilot system, high-precision navigation systems, high-precision striking capability, anti-jamming radar systems and a rapid deployment capability. It can be launched from coast, vessels and aircraft against enemy vessels, oil facilities and naval positions.³⁸

Related Diplomatic Endeavours of India, US and China

Since last some decades, India has been endeavouring to utilise the regional politico-economic forums to somehow establish its 'preeminent position', if not the 'overlord-ship', in the Indian Ocean Region. Those include South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC), and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), etc. However, India has not been able to achieve that objective so far, and is also not much likely to achieve it in the projected timeframe. That fact is amply clear from the assertion of none less than P K Ghosh himself, who was the Coordinator of the IONS 2008 inaugural seminar and who helped in conceptualising the initiative; he is currently the Senior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, (ORF) India, also the Co- Chairman of the CSCAP International Study Group on Maritime Security (Naval Enhancement). In his article he clarifies, "Given the atmospheric, India — with its large maritime capacity — has attempted to play the role of an 'unobtrusive fulcrum' and a 'balancer of power' in the region. It created the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2008 with enthusiasm from all participating littorals. Unfortunately, the focus of the movement seems to have diffused now, while it meanders along with its meetings — the most recent one held in the United Arab Emirates".³⁹

There are many reasons for India's failure in achieving that objective. The prime reason being the history of India's 'overbearing' and domineering posture in the region, including its covert application of offensive intelligence, and even military muscle-flexing to browbeat the target countries in the region – its creation of 'Mukti Bahini' in the former East Pakistan subsequently supported by the invasion by the Indian military to dismember Pakistan, and its creation of the LTTE in Sri Lanka to fight against the Sri Lanka government are some of the examples. It is thus obvious that the regional countries, even the smaller ones, are certainly going to resist any such domineering role of India in the region even if cloaked in the garb of mutual socio-economic 'clubbing together' of the regional countries. That fact is very obvious from the official/semi-official pronouncements of many of the regional countries. The example of

the recent article of Dr Sudath Gunasekara, ex-Ministry Secretary and one time President Sri Lanka Administrative Service Association elaborates this aspect. Following are the excerpts from his article:-

- a. “With its giant size, favourable geographical location with openings to the vast Indian ocean on three sides, and teaming billions India dreams to be the future leader of South Asia with the prospects of becoming a world power”.
- b. “Instead of transforming into a super power I wonder whether India is being transformed into to a disintegrated and weak country comprising a bunch of antagonistic ethnic, religious and tribal states fighting each other ----- . If this trend is not arrested in time, and the arrogant foreign policy is not updated to suit the demanding geopolitical realities of the region it will mark the end of the self acclaimed supremacy of the Delhi government-----”.
- c. “With regard to Indo-Sri Lankan relations whatever the sugar-coated diplomatic jargon might say the stark truth is that from the dawn of history or even prior to that, this country had been India’s craving. Invasion, tension and distrust had been the rule rather than the exception”
- d. “So much for internal confusion, there is also India’s problems with the countries in the periphery. She had antagonized all her neighbours in the periphery. Pakistan being the arch rival her relationship with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and even Maldives are at the lowest level in history. Her relationship with the other Asian giant China is of course appalling. In this scenario China appears to gaining acceptance as an alternative world power that is more reliable than India both in the political and economic fields. This situation is partly explained by India’s self centered narrow foreign policy and mainly by her arrogance and bullying attitude towards the neighbours”.
- e. “In recent history she had done everything possible to destabilize the Sri Lankan Sate, though Sri Lanka has tolerated all that nonsense. Starting from training the LTTE on Indian soil for decades and providing them with money, artillery and ammunition and all other support including moral and intelligence she also allowed South India to operate as the launching pad for all LTTE activities against this Island Nation in violation of all civilized diplomatic norms. The latest is her supporting the USA sponsored motion at the instigation of Tamilnadu in the Geneva HR Council both last year and this year. At the same time she continues to interfere with the internal politics as well as all socio-economic activities of this Island nation never realizing that there is a limit for any nuisance”.⁴⁰

Besides that, there are other reasons too. One of those is the fast increasing awareness and endeavour of many of the smaller Indian Ocean littoral countries, including some African countries, to diplomatically carve out their own positions in the regional geopolitical equation, independent of the undue dominance of either India or US. Out of the recent publications, the article published on 13 June 2010 by Maldives Live, captioned ‘Why We Need a Maritime Strategy in the Indian Ocean’ reflects that aspect. It mentions about the consultation meetings in this regard by the senior officials of Djibouti, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and South Africa with the representatives of US, EU, and several international organisations (AU, INTERPOL and UNODC). The purpose of these meetings has been to formulate the maritime safety and security (MSS) and development strategy to cater for the maritime threats.⁴¹

Even the once much media-hyped India-US Strategic Partnership also appears to be going on the ‘back burner’. Factually, in its urge to provide a quantum jump to its endeavours for achieving its objective of attaining at least regional supremacy over the Indian Ocean region, India had formulated a strategic partnership with Iran, as enshrined in the Delhi declaration 2005. However, in 2010 India preferred to have the strategic partnership with US; and in that process it squandered its partnership with Iran, because under US pressure India had to take many actions which were clearly detrimental to Iranian interests, including voting against Iran in IAEA, and back-tracking from the Iran-Pakistan-India gas

pipeline project, etc. There is no denying the fact that by entering this partnership with US India might have gained some advantages in trade, commerce and defence deals etc, yet the reality is now becoming clearly discernible that any such gains were at the most at tactical level, while at strategic level India made a major mistake. Otherwise too, there are no signs yet of India gaining any strategic advantage from its partnership with US. Published material is available to elaborate this aspect. Reference to the published articles of Dr. Subhash Kapila of Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, is worth. One article of 25 March 2013 is titled 'India Jettisons Strategic Partnership with Iran under US Pressure – Analysis'; and the other of 16 April 2013 is titled 'United States-India Strategic Partnership No Longer Strategic Nor a Partnership – Analysis'. In the first article Dr Kapila laments that in order to gain a strategic partnership with US, India voted against Iran in IAEA, abandoned the Iran-Pakistan India energy pipeline, and cut of oil supplies from Iran; thereby jettisoning its strategic partnership with Iran – which was of much importance for India, because in that Iran had over-ridden its Islamic affinity and Cold War era linkages with Pakistan, and an India-friendly Iran on Pakistan's western frontiers was an invaluable strategic asset for India's national security⁴². And in the other article, Dr. Kapila regrets that "Reviewing the US-India Strategic Partnership the regrettable conclusion reached is that expectations which India and its strategic community had invested in it have not materialised"; and, "Strategic Partnership appears in 2013 to have degenerated into a "mercenary relationship" where the United States seems to be more attracted in bagging massive defence sales contracts from India in billions of dollars without India even making a whimper for strategic quid-pro-quos"⁴³.

US' endeavours in the Indian Ocean region differ from that of India in terms of priority of objective(s); however, these too have so far remained unsuccessful like those of India. As elaborated in this paper, India has sufficient number of naval bases and facilities of its own to support its naval operations in Indian Ocean. Thus, India's priority appears to be higher for the objective of acquiring a sort of 'maritime incorporatio of Indian Ocean countries under its leadership, rather than merely acquiring naval base(s)/facilities. However, US has a serious problem in depending mainly on one naval base (Diego Garcia), and it certainly needs more naval base(s)/facilities in Indian Ocean so as to acquire real term capability of sustaining its naval operations in this ocean, if and when launched. For that purpose, US' efforts to acquire naval base facilities in Maldives (Indian Ocean island country) has come to light. US had tried to keep its effort secret before finalisation of an agreement; however, the draft of the proposed agreement was somehow unearthed and published by Maldivian current affairs blog Dhivehi Sitee. According to Minivan News, Maldives of 24 April 2013, the draft agreement is called 'Status of Forces Agreement' (SOFA). Some of its clauses, in brief, include: US would be authorised to control entry to areas provided for its exclusive use, and would be granted use of aerial ports, sea ports and agreed facilities for transit, support, bunkering of ships, training, exercises, etc; US personnel would be accorded the privileges, exemptions and immunities equivalent to those accorded to the staff of a diplomatic mission, and would be subject to the criminal jurisdiction of the United States; US personnel and contractors would be permitted to import and export personal property, equipment, supplies and technology without license, restriction or inspection, or the payment of any taxes, charges or customs duties; and, Vessels and vehicles operated by, and for, US would be permitted to enter and move freely within the territorial seas of the Maldives, free from boarding, inspection or the payment of landing, parking, port or harbour fees. And, according to Maldivian M.P. Mr. Hamid Abdul Ghafoor, the planned proposal supposedly concerned Laamu Atoll and the site of the former British airbase on Seenu Gan in the south of the country⁴⁴.

Though the official circles of both US and Maldives have not confirmed the validity of that leaked draft, yet much criticism of it has already been raised inside and outside of the parliament in Maldives, to

the extent that according to the published report of Ahmed Naif of 5 June 2013, the defence minister had to inform the parliamentary Executive Oversight Committee that the agreement is put on hold due to the concerns raised by the Attorney General and President Mohamed Waheed Hassan⁴⁵. Opposition to that proposal of US' base in Maldives appears to be very strong. Even the long standing former President of Maldives Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, while commenting upon that proposed agreement, expressed his feeling that it is U.S. rather than China that could upset the balance of power in the Indian Ocean by seeking to set up a base in his nation⁴⁶.

There has also been some indication of US' inclination to acquire the naval base/facilities in Sri Lanka. Certain US' circles highlight that from geostrategic point of view a US naval base in Sri Lanka would be most appropriate to meet the pressing requirements of US; and that, Sri Lanka might as well accept it in return of US meeting the priority requirement of assistance in the much needed reconstruction and development of the economic and social structures of Sri Lanka which suffered much destruction during the long war of the Tamil Tigers. However, actualisation of that idea too does not appear possible. That is clearly evident from the fact that Sri Lanka's government and opposition parliamentarians alike have strongly voiced their opposition of establishment of US' naval base even in Maldives. That uproar came when the news of the aforementioned leaked draft of US-Maldives SOFA reached Sri Lanka. Commenting upon that draft agreement, Sri Lanka's Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka emphasised that establishment of such a base had the potential to destabilise not just Maldives, but the entire region, with a direct impact being felt in Sri Lanka; JVP MP Anura Kumara Disanayake asserted that the base in the Maldives will pave the way for the US to gain an even stronger foothold in the region, which needs to be stopped; and Leader of NSSP Dr. Wickramabahu Karunaratne commented that establishment of such a military base "is one more signal of how we are becoming slaves of the global powers"⁴⁷.

In the case of China, there is much media-hype about China's unfolding 'Strategy of String of Pearls', which according to US' and Indian officials is the Chinese endeavour to ultimately establish its dominating maritime control over Indian Ocean. However, the publications of independent and credible institutions discredit those US' and Indian claims. Library of European Parliament's publication, titled 'China's Investment in Ports: What is Behind the String of Pearls Theory?', of 26 June 2013, mentions that the String of Pearls concept was first mentioned in a 2004 report of US Department of Defence, depicting each port with substantial Chinese investment as a 'Pearl', and the process of such Chinese investment as the rising Chinese geopolitical influence from the South China sea through the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. The generally mentioned 'Pearls' include those in Hainan Island (China), Vietnam, South China Sea, Thailand, Strait of Malacca, Burma (Myanmar), Bangladesh, Bay of Bengal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan; beyond that, near to the String of Pearls, China has also invested in the ports in Africa, North America, Greece and Belgium. The European Parliament's publication also clarifies: "Various reasons can be quoted for China's maritime activities all over the Indian and Pacific Oceans, ranging from resources and commercial interests to diplomatic and finally security and military interests. China, highly dependent on natural resources from the Middle East and Africa, is a country vulnerable to supply disruptions caused by political instability in supplier countries or problems, such as piracy or blockades, in choke points such as the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Malacca, South China Sea or Taiwan Strait. Through a presence in ports in these strategic regions, China is securing its energy routes and, at the same time, expanding commercial and diplomatic relations with many countries."⁴⁸ Publication of The Economist titled 'China's Growing Empire of Ports Abroad is Mainly about Trade, Not Aggression', of 8 June 2013 also provides a map of such Chinese 'Pearls' in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.⁴⁹

In essence, Chinese endeavour basically hinges upon offering real-time mutual benefits in terms of development of economic and social structures of partner countries, without any attached ‘strings’ like those evident in the aforementioned domineering endeavours of India and the ‘SOFA’ of US offered to Maldives. It is for this reason that more and more of the countries are accepting such partnership with China. A number of examples can be cited in this regard. However, it would suffice to quote the case of Myanmar. Despite the best efforts of India to the contrary, Myanmar is gradually accepting its partnership with China in many such projects which obviously have geostrategic connotations too. Those ongoing/planned projects include the Myanmar-China oil and gas pipelines mentioned earlier, deep seaport project, industrial zone in the port city Kyaukpyu and its planned expressway and rail link with southern China, development assistance in health, energy, and agriculture sectors of Myanmar, etc. Besides that the data provided by The Institute of Development Economics, Japan External Trade Organisation (October 2012) also shows ⁵⁰ the extent to which China-Myanmar economic development partnership has expanded in terms of mutual trade and Chinese investment in Myanmar. It shows that Chinese exports to Myanmar have risen from 496. 4 Million US\$ in 2000 to 4825. 0 Million US\$ in 2011; and Chinese imports from Myanmar have risen from 124. 8 Million US\$ in 2000 to 1677. 4 Million US\$ in 2011 (Source World Trade Atlas). It also shows the increasing amount of Chinese approved investment in Myanmar, as compared to the decrease in investment by many other countries (Source CSO Selected Monthly Economic Indicators). The excerpts of that data are shown in the following table.

Approved Foreign Investment in Myanmar by Countries (Million US\$ - Approximate)

Period	<u>China</u>	<u>Thailand</u>	<u>Hongkong</u>	<u>Korea</u>	<u>UK</u>	<u>Singapore</u>	<u>Others</u>
Cumulative until 2009	700	7,500	500	200	1,900	1,700	2,900
FY2010 and 2011	12,400	3,000	5,900	2,800	100	200	200

Salient Inferences

The foregoing analytical appraisal makes it evident that:-

- a. The emerging geopolitical tension in the Indian Ocean region is basically due to the overbearing endeavours of US and India to gain dominant control of this region, with a view to further enhancing their geopolitical clout; and that, the propagated danger of the ‘Chinese expansionist threat’ is used by US and India as a screen to hide their own designs. However the regional countries, being well aware of the history of the rather coercive external domineering of US and India under their own misconstrued versions of their ‘divinely ordained’ right to do so, are fully awake now to somehow oppose such US’ and Indian designs.
- b. Since many Indian Ocean countries are readily accepting the development partnership deals with China because these are mutually beneficial and have no attached ‘domineering strings’ of China, US and India are finding it too difficult to thwart these Chinese endeavours. Incidentally, that is the factor which is causing the increasing irritation of US and India – and, the chances of that irritation initiating a conflict situation cannot be ruled out.
- c. Though US navy is markedly strong and Indian navy is also a reckonable force, and history is not void of the ‘rash aggressive decisions’ made by major powers, yet the chances of US and India indulging in a full-fledge naval war against target country/countries appear to be lesser

- in view of the human and material attrition cost which they also have to suffer, and also in view of the prevailing global political environment.
- d. However, there are discernible chances that either US or India, or both in collusion in the name of their strategic partnership, may initiate a conflict situation to browbeat the target country. In that case the target country may be subjected to hostile actions like limited naval/military aggression, naval blockade, quarantine of shipping, US/UNO economic and other sanctions, etc.
 - e. Though both the areas, of Strait of Hormuz – Bab-el-Mandab and of Strait of Malacca, have their significance, yet the former has comparatively higher geoeconomic and geostrategic importance, due to the higher oil/gas potential of its littoral and its higher/priority maritime traffic, as explained earlier in this paper. Hence, the countries in the western part of Indian Ocean, particularly Iran and Pakistan, face comparatively higher chances of becoming target of such a conflict situation. Towards east, while China is already facing tremendous pressure from US and its regional allies in the South China Sea, the chances of countries around Strait of Malacca, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, also getting embroiled in the conflict cannot be ruled out too.
 - f. Cognizance of the background of rivalry of US and India against certain countries also helps in discerning the possibility as to against which country these two powers respectively might be more likely to initiate a hostile action. In that sense, US is more likely to take a lead in hostile actions against Iran and China, with indirect support from India; and India is more likely to be in lead role in hostile actions against Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with indirect support from US.

Policy Imperatives

Keeping in view of the foregoing appraisal, two major aspects are identified as imperative for formulation of policy by the effected countries as safeguard against the possible danger. Firstly, development of such a strong military deterrence which should have higher potential of deterring the likely aggressor from taking hostile action. Since it wouldn't be possible for most of the effected countries to match the naval/military strength of the likely aggressor, the answer lies in focusing on developing their 'devastatingly offensive-defensive' naval/military capability for defending their EEZ; and to deter the aggressor from interdicting the sea lines of communication, simultaneously developing the capability of striking such asset/interest of the aggressor which make the interdiction unbearably costly. Obviously for that purpose, in the military sphere, focused attention is required on formulating innovative strategy based upon the use of conventional/non-conventional and asymmetric weapons and methods; and at national level, sustained effort is required for developing and maintaining the 'strategic will' of the nation to fight the aggression at all cost. Secondly, the effected countries should immediately commence endeavours to develop mutual partnerships, on bilateral or/and multilateral basis, in all mutually beneficial fields including trade and commerce, development projects, maritime projects, transfer of technology, and military matters, etc; as also cooperation in international politics. It is felt that if the effected countries possess worthwhile military deterrence and are members of a vibrant regional coalition, then the chances of conflict situation in Indian Ocean will considerably decrease.

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