

Integrated Deterrence and Geopolitics in the Indian Ocean Region

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ABSTRACT

Asia-Pacific has been christened as a decider launch-pad for the global power transition in the 21st century where the US is confronting the rise of China. Integrated deterrence approach is adopted by the US in its National Defence strategy to counter the growing influence of China. To curtail China, in Indian Ocean the US is involved in different strategic engagements such as QUAD, AUKUS, I2U2, and other strategic alliances with India. The research is analyzed through the lens of Security Dilemma by John Herz that how the rise of China is instilling security dilemma in the US as threat to status quo. Consequently, to maintain international order the US has directed its focus to overwhelm China and the power struggle has shifted to Indian Ocean. This paper tries to scrutinize how the integrated deterrence approach in Indian Ocean is making it highly militarized and nuclearized water body around the globe.

Key Words: Indian Ocean, QUAD, AUKUS, China, US, India

Introduction

With the change in geo-strategic environment, Indian Ocean Region which was somehow ignored by great powers has gained spotlight. The contemporary geopolitical slogan is "free and open Indo-Pacific," Pacific and Indian Ocean both are included in it. The term 'Indo-Pacific' when used by strategists they mostly refer to Western side of the Pacific Ocean, which includes the East-China Sea and the South-China Sea. There, the region which has been dominated by the US since World War II, is engaged in a violent power battle with a rising China. The once-overlooked Indian Ocean is now becoming a center of great power rivalry. (The Economist, 2023)

The economic significance of Ocean recognized as crucial player in world trade and a major driver of economic growth along its periphery. Its strategic importance has now begun to catch up. However, China is expanding its influence into its waterways, with the initiation of Belt and Road Initiative, a huge infrastructure investment by China, it is securing route to Indian Ocean. (Singh, 2017) It makes the other powers feel threatened from the rise of China and jumped into Indian Ocean to curtail its growing influence. The US has adopted integrated

deterrence approach in its National Defense Strategy 2022, to deter its competitors. (National Security Strategy, 2022) As per this approach, US is strengthening its key allies through different strategic alliances. In this regards, there are different geo-strategic engagements in Indian Ocean with ambitions to restrain China such as QUAD, AUKUS, and I2U2. Besides this there are different US-India strategic engagements to counter China. The age of big power competition in the oceans has started. (Thudium, 2021)

Freedom of navigation exercises are expanded by the American military in the Indian Ocean after ignoring it for years. Along with other members of the "Quad" security grouping—Australia, India, and Japan— to oppose China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, they are increasing the military drills. (Emma Chanlett-Avery, 2022) The US Navy plans to recreate the First Fleet, which was decommissioned fifty years ago, and station it in the Indian Ocean. (Jaipragas, 2020) Since establishing a submarine base at Fremantle during World War II Australia has been recognized as a key player in the Indian Ocean. (Western Australian Museum, 2015) Now a nuclear submarine base at the same port as part of the defense technology accord between the US, Australia, and the UK will significantly increase its visibility. (Ministry of Defence, 2023) Chinese naval development in the Pacific and Indian Oceans is supposed to be opposed by the AUKUS. In Indian Ocean's northern side the greatest naval force is maintained by India, while seeing its primary adversaries, Pakistan and China, as mostly land-based. It is worried that China would become too powerful in the area, therefore it is working more closely with the United States Navy. These strategic engagements in Indian Ocean is threatening the peace prospect that encompasses the whole world. (The Economist, 2023)

Great Power Rivalry and Security Dilemma

John Herz coined the term security dilemma, (Tang, 2009) as a phenomenon where state attempts to enhance its security triggers response in other states, consequently, the security of state declines rather than upsurge. The security dilemma considered by some international relations researchers to be the main source of conflict in these relations. As per realist school of thought there is no global authority and states cannot rely on others for their security. They have to rely on themselves for their security and survival. Owing to this, the top priority of state is to secure its interests. (Wivel, 2011)

The lens of security Dilemma deciphers the great power rivalry that how the action of one state creates insecurity in the other states. For the West, and the United States in particular, the speed with which China is rising is cause for concern. The rise of China through soft power creates insecurity in the US who takes it as threat to the status quo. China is expanding its influence in Indian Ocean. To restrain China, the US also jumped in Indian Ocean through different strategic engagements. To curtail China and maintain the international order, the US in its national security strategy chalk out an integrated deterrence approach. Its

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security documents highlights Russia as an immediate threat, Iran as an irritant, while China as long-term threat. (National Security Strategy, 2022) Its strategy to restrain China revolves around strengthening the key allies while utilizing their capabilities to counter the competitor. The US strategic alliances are anti-China coalitions as per analysts in China. (Salil, 2021) These engagements are creating security dilemma against the West. However, China claims its rise is peaceful, but if its national interest will be at stake it will not remain passive. With growing strategic alliances in Indian Ocean, consequently, China is also enhancing its military presence in the region to safeguard its economic and strategic interests. As in India, there is assumption about China having installed radars in Sri Lanka (The Economic Times, 2023) and listening post on Coco Islands of Myanmar. (Sharma, 2023) The shift of great powers in Indian Ocean is initiating an arm race in the Indian Ocean region threatening the maritime trade while polluting the Ocean and endangering the sea life. It is becoming the most militarized and nuclearized body of water in the world. (The Economist, 2023)

From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific

The word Indo-Pacific itself has a strategic significance, prior to 2011, the United States had only used the word "Asia Pacific" to describe this area, while this term was used by former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2010. At the Shangri-La Dialogue 2009, then-United States Defense Secretary Robert Gates used term "net security provider" to describe India. Since the term, "Asia Pacific" contradicts with strategic aims of the US, so they changed conceptual grounding to retitle this region as "Indo-Asia-Pacific" and then in 2017 it changed to "Indo-Pacific". The Obama administration's foreign strategy toward Asia known as "Rebalancing Asia," but President Trump changed the phrase in 2017 to "Indo Pacific," which places an emphasis on India. This phrase not only outlines the shift in American geopolitical strategy in the Indian and Pacific oceans, but also elevates India's status within these regions. Instead, it implies that a certain perspective (i.e. Asia) being used. (Berkofsky & Miracola , 2019)

India's strategic significance in the Indo-Pacific is evident. The Asia-Pacific concept did not favor India as the Indo-Pacific. India is provided an opportunity to surpass its status as middle-power via close ties of India with the US and its accession to the club of super-powers, particularly the US and Japan, and strategic ties with regional allies. It serves India's ambitions of becoming a regional hegemon and projecting power via Indo-Pacific and beyond. India is strengthening defence ties with the US serves as a powerful counterbalance to other powers. (Jash, 2021)

Strategic Engagements to Ensure Integrated Deterrence in Indian Ocean

The Deterrence is the corner stone of the US defense. The US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin asserted that moving forward, deterrence must be distinct from how it has previously operated, the new strategy termed as integrated deterrence approach. It revolves around making use of present abilities and skills, building new ones, and utilizing all of these in networked ways along with our partners and allies. The logic behind deterrence is same, but now it encompasses a variety of realms that all need to be skilled at in order to guarantee security in the twenty-first century. Lloyd Austin emphasized need of having the best weaponry and cutting-edge technology to deter potential enemies. This involves, for instance, the creation of technologies that leverage quantum computing and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, Austin explains Integrated Deterrence as 'all of us giving our all'; here the focus is on the key allies to integrate their capabilities in deterring the competitors. (Department of Defence, 2021)

In this regard, the strategic engagements of the US in Indian Ocean under integrated deterrence approach is evident through QUAD, AUKUS, US-India engagements and I2U2. Under these engagements, the states are collaborating on emerging technologies as well including artificial intelligence and quantum computing. These are discuss in detail below.

QUAD

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, strategic engagement among the US, Australia, Japan, and India was created in aftermath of Tsunami 2004 to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. After that group was inactive until in 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe highlighted the need of such platform for coordination. Thought the group remains dormant as at that time its member countries were not willing to stand against China. The group resurrects recently in 2021 through its Malabar exercises that shows the changing attitude of states towards China. (Rasheed, 2020)

The implicit and even explicit goal and driving force behind QUAD has been "balancing China" ever since it was initially established as a quadrilateral security discussion in 2007. What was once Japan's dominant economic position in Asia overshadowed for the country by China's expanding power and economic influence (Wei, 2022) Regarding India, the border issues between the two countries and China's comprehensive strategic alliance with Pakistan have always been a sore spot for India. India's feeling of "encirclement" further grew after the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) inaugurated in 2014, with India openly criticizing China's Belt and Road Initiative in general and CPEC in particular. India joined the Quad in an effort to gain backing from the United States, Japan, and Australia as it competed against China. (Baruah, 2018) Donald J. Trump declared China to be the United States' main geopolitical rival after

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taking office in 2017. He then put his "America First" foreign policy vision into action. The United States' approach to China changed from being more balanced and centered on "competition plus cooperation" to being imbalanced and primarily centered on containment. According to the United States, the old "hub and spoke" alliance system in the Asia-Pacific needs to be supplemented by the addition of more capable and "willing" partners in order to be able to handle a rising and more "assertive" China. As the part of US integrated deterrence approach, the US can integrate the capabilities of key allies under Quad. The United States can better compete with China and balance China's power and influence in the Indo-Pacific by reviving the Quad, which brings together the resources of the economic and technological giant Japan, the culturally similar and strategically significant Australia, and the South Asia heavyweight India. (Wei, 2022) The US under Quad has increased the naval drills in Indian Ocean militarizing the ocean initiating an arm race in Indian Ocean Region. The China has raised apprehensions against the Quad calling it as an Asian NATO threatening the peace and stability of Indian Ocean region. (Akhtar, 2021)

AUKUS

Australia, UK, and the US announced formation of heightened trilateral strategic partnership known as "AUKUS". The motives behind agreement as also outlined in integrated deterrence is to strengthen the ability of each of the three partners to ensure the security and defense interests in particular through amplifying technology and information sharing and integrating institutions and exercises related to defense and security. The AUKUS planned to contain rise of China that was perceived as threat. (Wintour, 2021) The deal originally conceived as a way to help Australia buy a bunch of nuclear submarines. Cyber capability, AI, quantum computing, new vital technologies, and underwater capabilities other than submarines are among areas where the trilateral partnership hopes to improve joint capabilities and interoperability. (The White House, 2023) To become part of AUKUS, Australia decided to back out of a multibillion-dollar deal to purchase French diesel-electric submarines. President Emmanuel Macron of France criticized the incident, calling it a "stab in the back". (Zarrar & Gichki, 2022)

The AUKUS though did not particularly mention China but it is evident that its purpose is to retaliate China. It is the part of the US integrated deterrence approach aims to utilize the capabilities of key allies and strengthening them. The China raised apprehensions against this strategic engagement calling it "obsolete cold war zero sum mentality and narrow-minded geopolitical concepts" and raised concerns regarding nuclear non-proliferation. (Wei, 2022)

The US-India Alliance

With rise of China, the US and India now have many common interest in Indian Ocean. Due to the anticipated danger presented by China, the US is strengthening India through different strategic engagements as part of integrated deterrence

approach. In October 2020, the United States and India inked an agreement to exchange sensitive satellite data and imagery. For geospatial cooperation, they also signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). To address the threat the US perceived from China to security and freedom strategic dialogue held in New Delhi. The agreement will grant India access to wide variety of nautical, aeronautical, and topographical data essential to target drones and missiles. (Arora & Miglani, 2020) The United States has three primary agreements with nations with whom it has close military connections; this one is the second. By agreeing on shared norms and processes, the signatory parties may lay the framework for future military cooperation. After ten years of talks, the US and India finally inked another agreement on Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA) in 2016. The United States would profit from Indian facilities as the dominant actor in the region, while India would get access to the United States' extensive network of military bases across the world. (The Hindu, 2016) In 2018, parties to the Communication Capability and Security Agreement signed the 26th agreement in the series. (The Print, 2020) Furthermore, the improved relationship significantly improves India's military capability, especially in hitting targets with pin-point precision—a crucial requirement for India to closely monitor Chinese movements across the Himalayan border and map China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean. (Ali, 2020)

The US and India signed another agreement in 2002 under which Indian Navy vessels would accompany US warships carrying valuable cargo across the Straits of Malacca. (Khurana, 2016) In addition, export of the US weaponry to India have increased to 15 billion USD. Furthermore, the US and India are having frequent military drills such Tiger Triumph, the first bilateral tri-service amphibious military exercise, these interactions have significantly enhanced interoperability and cooperation. The membership of Blue Dot Network also gives India an alternative to BRI of China. (Jash, 2021)

The US hosted an official state visit of Indian Prime Minister where they agreed on significant strategic deals. The US and India has concluded Master Ship Repair agreement that will make India a naval logistic hub for the US as it was short of maintenance facility in this region. (Thomas, 2023) The General Electric (GE) deal secured by India will boost its defence capabilities, as India will coproduce jet engines with the US for its military jets. (Hunnicut, Kaushik, & Singh, 2023) The strategic engagement between the US and India aims to strengthen India as counter weight to China. (The Times of India, 2023)

India's economy grew rapidly; the fifth largest economy is aiming to become the second largest economy by 2075. (Shan, 2023) As a result, the country is increasingly asserting itself regionally and internationally. In Indian Ocean, a big section of India forms a rim as it has a lengthy coastline of 7,500 kilometers (30 miles). (Kanwal, 2022) The economic and strategic stability of states in the Indian Ocean Region is under jeopardy due to India's hegemonic ambitions, which aimed directly at restraining China's ascent having implications for regional states as well. Twelve main ports and two hundred secondary ports built in India. It has

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begun the Sagarmala project, which aims to increase its marine capacity. (Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterway, 2023) In a region where China plays a dominant role, the United States is actively supporting and enabling India's hegemonic and belligerent position. India designated as a "Net Security Provider" in the Indian Ocean by the US. In the United States' strategy to exert influence in the area and surround China, this word represents the overarching, most significant strategic function that India has been assigned. This phrase suggests that India is not only capable of protecting itself, but also of securing the states in the Indian Ocean region and helping them improve their own defenses through measures such as training, equipment, and direct deployment. (Wong, 2018) India's completion of the operational deployment of the INS Arihant, a ballistic-missile armed nuclear submarine, poses an obvious threat to the strategic stability of the Indian Ocean region from a security standpoint. Under Modi's leadership, the approach of India towards Indian Ocean has changed significantly. In comparison to other eras, this one is far more proactive and aggressive. India has installed several monitoring and surveillance facilities on Indian Ocean islands. India's strategy for the next half century includes deploying five SSBNs in the Indian Ocean, the first of which is the Arihant. These will serve as a significant deterrent against Islamabad in favor of New Delhi by keeping watch over key maritime channels of communication in the area. (Hussain Y. , 2018)

To facilitate travel the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, India has established a naval facility in Duqm, Oman. The military will be benefiting from the base's ability to repair equipment and store supplies. In Indian Ocean Indian Navy together with the United States Navy, will have much greater operational leeway because of signing of strategic agreements like LEMOA. Modi has strengthened relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two countries whose warships have long been allies of Pakistan. By 2027, the Navy of India hopes to be having a fleet of 200 ships, with three aircraft carriers and several nuclear submarines serving as the force's backbone. It leads to a serious threat to national security of Pakistan as well. (Ahmed, 2022)

CPEC and Indian Ocean

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is part of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in which China aims to secure route to warm waters via Gwadar port. (Singh, 2017) Once this project materialized, it will be game changer for the region. The Chinese investment in soft power in the region through different infrastructure projects has boost China's rise as an irresistible power. Anticipating the prospects of Belt and Road Initiative and CPEC giving China access to the India Ocean shortening and securing its trade route through Pakistan. India being key ally of the US is attempting to destabilize the project. Because it will go through Gilgit Baltistan, which India claims is part of the contested Jammu and Kashmir area, India has rejected CPEC outright. (Dutta, 2019) India's attempts to deter China and Pakistan from CPEC is evident from its decision to repeal Article 370 related to the

disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir area and in its declaration of the Ladakh as part of the union, even though China had claim on it. (Ahmed, 2022) This territorial shift directly affects the safety of the Indian Ocean. India's strategic alliance with Iran and its participation in the building and expansion of Chabahar Port's infrastructure and logistics intended to restrain trade of China through the CPEC. Through the Chabahar Port, India is one of the main consumers of Iranian oil, but its desire to establish a connection with Central Asia was heavily reliant on Afghanistan's security situation. (Hassan M. A., 2018) Due to economic restrictions, the strategic cooperation with India would not be benefitting Iran. However, the recent 25-year China-Iran Strategic Partnership Agreement has outsmarted India. The distinguished feature of this deal is that China and Iran both assure to work together to counter the American efforts of containment and attempts to destabilize theocratic government in Iran via economic sanctions. (Saleh & Yazdanshenas, 2020)

Besides CPEC, China is going to pay billions of dollars to Iran with the purpose to create long-term infrastructure and oil facilities. Tehran has kicked out India from the Chabahar project. Along with initiatives by foreign nations to set up bases in littoral states, there is a competition for control over islands in the Indian Ocean. Among those receiving attention are the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Djibouti, and Duqm (Oman). It is also impossible to disregard the development of naval forces by regional and non-regional nations along with military nuclearization. (Ahmed, 2022)

I2U2

I2U2 is another quadrilateral group of Israel, India, US and UK also known as new Quad. (Markey & Youssef, 2022) The development of I2U2 reflects the United States' wider policy of using the G7 to challenge China's global geo-economic dominance, notably via its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The US is integrating its allies as chalked out in its integrated deterrence approach to counter the growing influence of China. The G7 has stepped up its attempts to position itself as a viable alternative investment and technology source in the Indo-Pacific from the year 2021. The G7 unveiled the Build Back Better World Partnership in June 2021 with the goal of attracting "hundreds of billions of dollars of infrastructure investment" to "help narrow the \$40 trillion infrastructure need in the developing world." (The White House, 2021) To raise "\$600 billion by 2027 in global infrastructure investments," the G7 renamed the program the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment a year later. (The White House, 2022) The United States has also attempted to mold international standards that support such expenditures. Australia, Japan, and the United States have created a certification program called Blue Dot Network in November 2019 to aid poor nations in reducing the risks associated with infrastructure finance and, indirectly, to undermine the legitimacy of the Belt and Road Initiative. (Jash, 2021) Through I2U2, the US is able to reach out to new allies in South Asia and Middle East.

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While, the United Arab Emirates and Israel have established the strongest economic relations to Beijing, in the Middle East, particularly in the fields of infrastructure and information technology. (Nouwens, Lons, Shehab, Malcomson, & Neill, 2021)

Investments of China in ports and telecommunications infrastructure in the United Arab Emirates and Israel have come under increased scrutiny from the US in recent years. (Hussain T. , 2022) To curtail China's growing influence and presence in the region because of the BRI, India has also pushed to give alternative infrastructure finance to its South Asian and Indian Ocean neighbors. The United States (US) may be expecting that the goals of the I2U2 group would supplement its own attempts to compete with the BRI by concentrating I2U2 debates on practical concerns like infrastructure, health, food, and energy. This strategy provides options to engagement with Beijing for Israel, the UAE, and, to a lesser degree, India, while also downplaying areas of dispute among I2U2 members over China. (Alhassan & Solanki, 2022)

To counter Belt and Road Initiative, in G20 New Delhi Summit 2023, a new corridor proposed, that is officially termed as India-Middle East-Europe-Economic Corridor. (Kartik, 2023) The great power competition has shifted towards the politics of connectivity, where the major powers are trying to counter an economic initiative of one major power by proposing other routes to it. (Mazarr, 2022)

Conclusion

The strategic alignments of the US under the integrated deterrence approach in Indian Ocean via Quad, AUKUS, I2U2 and the US-India agreements are creating security dilemma in Indian Ocean Region. There are indications of escalating enmity everywhere. The navy of the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, India, Japan, and Singapore have all conducted patrols in the Indian Ocean. (The Economist, 2023) The fleets of China, Russia and Iran conducted joint drills there in March, 2023. (Al Jazeera, 2023) More information about a plan to station next-generation nuclear-powered submarines in Western Australia recently made public by the United States, Britain, and Australia. (Armstrong, Mao, & Housden, 2023) The prime minister of Japan, Kishida Fumio, visited India last month and pledged \$75 billion in investments for the Indo-Pacific region. (Murakami & Kaushik, 2023) Consequently, it has initiated an arm race in the region and turned Indian Ocean into highly militarized and nuclearized body of water around the globe. The Indian Ocean is becoming a new ground for proxy between great power rivalries.

Conceivably, Competition between the West and China might harm relations between smaller nations and both camps, particularly if major powers disregard the various security concerns of smaller nations. They are significantly more concerned with issues like climate change, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, plastic pollution, and tourism-threatening oil spills than they are with military rivalry. Small states must protect their ability to act independently. That

will entail conducting business with China despite the opposition of the United States and its allies. Rich nations have pledged money and other forms of assistance for climate adaptation. However, it is still rare in most tiny states. Another simple victory would be to assist them in preserving their fisheries. Big countries' relatively modest actions can result in significant victories for smaller ones. The regional security environment is becoming more intricate, multifaceted, and unstable. That is the emerging new reality of Indian Ocean.

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