

**RESEARCH PAPER****India–United States Strategic Convergence in the Indian Ocean Regions: Implications for Pakistan’s Maritime Security****¹Amjad Khan and ²Dr. Syed Nouman Ali Shah**

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Corresponding Author amjadkhanjee@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to examine the evolving dynamics of India–U.S. relations and their impact on Pakistan's security environment. The study covers the period from the Cold War era to the present. The Indian Ocean is a strategically important region due to its significance for energy transit, maritime routes, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and geostrategic location. In the contemporary era, competition among major powers has further increased the region's strategic importance. Security agreements, joint naval exercises, intelligence sharing, and diplomatic convergence between India and the United States have gradually strengthened their strategic partnership. The rise of China and the revival of the Quad have further reinforced this cooperation. This partnership has influenced the regional security architecture, altered the balance of power, and generated security concerns among regional states. This study is based on a qualitative research design and includes research articles, books, policy documents, and strategic reports, so that the trends, patterns, and impacts between India and the US can be understood and identified properly. The results of this research show that the relationship between India and the US has been changed into a strong strategic partnership. The prominent characteristics of this partnership are maritime cooperation and diplomatic convergence. Moreover, this partnership has changed the regional balance of power. These changes can create challenges regarding Gwadar Port and CPEC and other securities. It is recommended that Pakistan should strengthen its naval capabilities and must establish a system of maritime surveillance. Pakistan should also adopt active diplomatic relations along with develop and increase strong partnerships with close friendly countries.

Keywords: India–US Convergence, Pakistan Maritime Security, IOR, Offensive Realism, Regional Security Complex Theory, Indo-Pacific Strategy**Introduction**

In the present age, the IOR has great importance due to its strategic position. This region is one of the key maritime areas with important routes for maritime trade and energy transit. The increasing geopolitical competition is the main reason major powers are actively pursuing their strategic interests in this region. The IOR is also a key maritime transport route between Asia, Africa and the Middle East regions and is crucial to global trade and regional security (Brewster, 2014). Over the past decade, the strategic partnership between India and the United States has become a very important element in the Indo-Pacific region. This is due to intelligence-sharing frameworks, growth in maritime surveillance, and defense cooperation. It is also important to note that the QUAD and Malabar maritime exercises have further strengthened the growing relationship between India and the United States (Khurana, 2017; Mishra, 2018; Hanif & Muzaffar, 2024). The aim of both countries, India and the US, is to counter increasing presence of China in this zone through their key partnership and to strengthen a rules-based maritime order (Pant & Rej, 2018; Medcalf, 2020; Hanif & Muzaffar, 2024a). This evolving India-US partnership has serious implications for Pakistan’s security. Recently, India’s advancements in maritime

capabilities and increasing U.S. support may change the strategic balance in the northern Indian Ocean. These changes can create problems and challenges for Pakistan regarding the safety of critical assets such as Gwadar Port and CPEC, as well as maritime security and deterrence capacity (Ahmed, 2020; Rafique & Masood, 2022).

Literature Review

The strategic location of the IOR, its important sea lines of communications (SLOCs) and importance for global transportation of trade and energy has caused it to become an important area of geopolitical competition. This area is serving as a key nexus between Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and is a key component of today's international security framework and economic development as interdependence (Kaplan, 2010, Alpers, 2014). As the importance of maritime power has increasingly been acknowledged in the region of Indian Ocean, regional and other powers of region have increasingly expanded their strategic regional footprint and influence (Brewster, 2014; Hanif & Muzaffar, 2025; Scott, 2012). There has been a significant amount of research on the advancement of India-US Indo-Pacific strategic partnership. The US sees India as a strategic partner in this region that can help stabilize South Asia and counter emerging new threats in the region, particularly in Asia (Tellis, 2005; Tellis 2020). An important aspect of this partnership has been its maritime cooperation, which is achieved through military exchanges, regional intelligence sharing, and deep cooperation in the military sphere (Khurana, 2017; Mishra, 2017). Strategic convergence between the two countries has become stronger with greater interoperability, as seen in the Malabar exercise (Mishra, 2018).

India-U.S. ties have also been growing, with the emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept, accelerating the partnership. The importance of the presence of China and its growing influence in the Indian Ocean has made Washington look at New Delhi as its closest strategic partner (Pant & Rej, 2018; Medcalf, 2020). The Indo Pacific approach has paved the way for India to augment its role in the Indian Ocean and to become a key player in the Asian Indian Ocean Region (IAMR) security architecture (Mohan, 2012; Panda, 2019). This convergence has attracted growing academic interest for the implications it has for Pakistan. The improved capabilities of the Indian marine forces and the technological and strategic cooperation with the U.S. are considered to be elements that can change the regional power balance in the northern Indian Ocean (NIO) (Rafique & Masood, 2022). Moreover, Pakistan is living a sensitive time due to the strategic significance of Gwadar Port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the region linked to the presence of shifting maritime geopolitical dynamics (Ahmed, 2020). New emerging issues are the ability to monitor in the rising surveillance level, the asymmetry in deterrence and potential liabilities on Pakistan's maritime security interests (Farooq & Qazi, 2023). Although there has been a considerable amount of literature on Indo - U.S. strategic cooperation and Indo-Oceanic geopolitics, these are dealt separately in often disciplinary, analyses. Although the sea is considerable, there is limited systematic analysis and theorisation of the impact of India - United States strategic convergence on Pakistan's maritime security. Hence this study strives to bridge this arena by examining the strategic, operational and security implications of Indo - US maritime relations for Pakistan using the lenses of Regional Security Complex Theory and Offensive realism.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and Offensive Realism, with a focus on examining the implications of India-U.S. strategic convergence for Pakistan's maritime security. RSCT explains how, within a particular area, geographic proximity and interdependent threat perception influence security dynamics. From the perspectives of India, Pakistan, the US, and China, the IOR reflects an additional layer of complexity, where interactions among these actors are closely interconnected, and developments in one state affect the security calculations of others. (Pant & Rej, 2018;

Mohan, 2012). In contrast, an alternative view is offered by Offensive Realism, which focuses on a competition for power and influence in an anarchic international order to increase security. Given this context, it is hardly surprising that the rising cooperation between the Indian Navy and the US, as reflected in foreign policy of India can be interpreted as a strategic effort to strengthen the regional influence and balancing the power dynamics in the Indo Pacific region (Tellis, 2020; Medcalf, 2020; Khurana, 2017). These two theoretical perspectives are complementary and help explain the impact of these changing maritime partnerships on Pakistan's strategic and oceanic security interests.

Material and Methods

A qualitative research approach and design have been used in this study to examine the strategic convergence between the United States and India and its implications for Pakistan's maritime security. The study employs secondary data obtained from a range of reliable sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, government reports, and publications of reputable research institutions. It employs an analytical-descriptive approach to examine evolving maritime dynamics, defense cooperation, and regional security developments. The analysis is guided by Regional Security Complex Theory and Offensive Realism, which are used to systematically assess strategic interactions, shifts in power distribution, and their implications for Pakistan's maritime interests.

Results and Discussion

The IOR has also always been a key maritime area but in today's world it has emerged as an integral part of global geopolitical competition. The area is home to key Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) which are essential for the supply of global energy and the flow of trade and tourism between Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Comments by scholars place the importance of the Indian Ocean region at the heart of the strategic positioning of great powers for gaining access to inter ocean shipping lanes (Kaplan, 2010; Alpers, 2014). The region has been always viewed predominantly with the Trade and Colonization perspective, but now it has looked like a military dominated region and an area of strategic defense contestation. Competition has grown more pronounced with the deployment of more ships by the major powers, including the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb (Brewster, 2014). The future of the IOR is likely to continue to be a battleground for great powers—particularly China, the United States and India—and will further strain regional smaller powers on the principle of less stability that comes with more pressure.

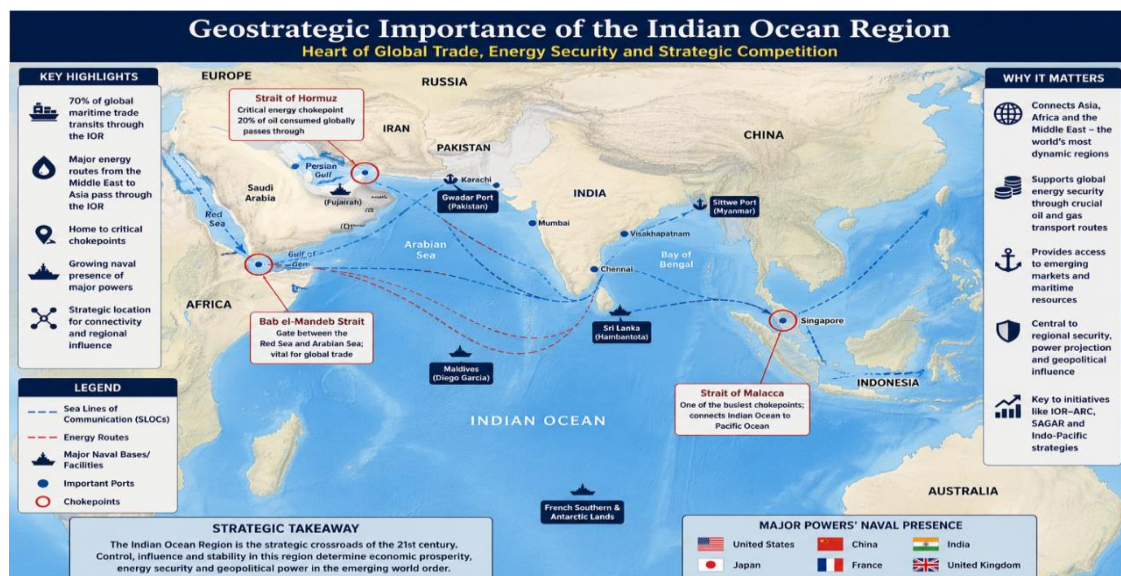


Figure 1: Geostrategic Importance of IOR

Evolution of India-US Strategic Convergence

The strategic alignment of India and the United States has grown over time, from the post-Cold War hesitant engagement to an all-round strategic partnership in the 21st century. After bipolar geopolitical conditions, there was increased trust for a variety of arrangements to take the place of the earlier mistrust. The U.S. started to see India as a beneficiary of stability in the region and a rising force for solving some new security challenges (Tellis 2005). Contemporary areas of the relationship have become related to the domains of Defence cooperation, intelligence sharing and interoperability. Strategic trust and operational cooperation between the two countries have already been encapsulated in agreements like LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA (Khurana, 2017). This convergence is also seen in the maritime domain, as India and China conduct increasingly frequent joint naval exercises and engage in greater naval cooperation and shared strategic interests, including the Malabar naval exercises (Mishra, 2018). In the future, the partnership may be further strengthened on shared issues related to maritime security, particularly in view of China's growing presence and its role in influencing strategic calculations of both India and the United States (Medcalf 2020).

Indo-Pacific Strategy and Maritime Realignment

The 'Indo-Pacific' policy marks an important shift in global maritime geopolitics. This is a new Indian oceanisation of Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean as a single strategic space. Especially the Indian and the U.S. perspectives have been prominent in the development of the concept to create a "free and open Indo-Pacific" (Pant & Rej, 2018). Until now, the region has been divided on strategic thinking, and recent developments underscore growing integration in maritime policies. This shift of geopolitical alliances is seen in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) led by Australia, India, Japan and the United States. Indian naval evolution has come a long way from the South Asian sphere, transforming the country to one of the leading players of Indo-Pacific landscape, according to Mohan (2012). The Indo-Pacific strategy will continue the establishment of these guidelines for maritime cooperation, integration of intelligence, and maritime awareness in the future, which likely will impact the power dynamics in the region in a direct manner that could work to Pakistan's strategic benefit.

China Factor and Strategic Balancing Dynamics

The rise of China as a maritime capability is one of the most important factors in driving the India-USA convergence. China and the United States are increasingly uneasy about each other's engagement in the Indian Ocean, a sentiment shared by China and the United States. This perception has since prompted additional efforts for coordination in the region to keep it in balance (Pant & Rej, 2018; Medcalf, 2020). Although China has had a modest role in the ocean in the past, in the current time the government is focusing on shaping a new role for the Chinese sea power, e.g. the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the establishment of overseas naval bases. India believes these developments are encirclement and the United States believes they pose a challenge of freedom of navigation. Future scenarios suggest the further escalation of strategic rivalry regionally in the Indian Ocean, with India-US naval partnerships likely to deepen in the areas of surveillance, anti-submarine warfare and intelligence sharing regarding the maritime domain and environment, further complicating Pakistan's security landscape (Brewster, 2014).

Pakistan needs to reimagine its Maritime Security strategy for effective implementation

The India-U.S. partnership is a dynamic one that impacts directly and indirectly Pakistan's maritime security system. In the history of Pakistan, the country kept its focus on security challenges on the land, as compared to water. But, as the strategic significance of

the Arabian Sea and Gwadar port has been growing, maritime defense has gained importance (Ahmed, 2020). Amidst the present geopolitical settings, the quality of Pakistan's maritime surveillance has been put under pressure due to advanced Indian ships with US technology and intelligence assistance (Rafique & Masood, 2022). This leads to imbalance in deterrence capability and reach. The security of Pakistan's critical infrastructure – such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – has become more difficult. Moving forward, it is anticipated that Pakistan will focus more on naval modernization, coastal defense infrastructure, and maritime awareness to provide sustainable deterrence and to safeguard Pakistan's strategic assets (Farooq & Qazi, 2023). Emerging Maritime Security Challenges in the Arabian Sea. The Arabian Sea is increasingly assuming a central role in India's Indian Ocean and is now a strategic field. It historically worked as a fairly safe shipping route for commercial and energy driven trade and activity and provided the states in the region with both commercial and strategic benefits. But, in recent years, the increased maritime activity has added layers of security complexity in conjunction with India's increased collaboration with the United States. Efforts of Surveillance, Intelligence and Maritime patrolling have increased significantly around Pakistan's area of waters (Mishra, 2017). Such developments have sparked doubts on the strategic transparency and the susceptibility of maritime operations in the region. Better interoperability between the Indian and U.S. navies boosts the capabilities of both navies and could ultimately transform the regional security landscape (Khurana, 2017). In the future, environmental focus on the Arabian Sea is expected to be a battleground zone. Hence, Pakistan must invest in the advancement of its maritime domain awareness systems and boost its maritime deterrence stance to keep up with the potential risks it will face in the future.

Maritime Chokepoints and Strategic Vulnerabilities

Maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and Malacca Strait significantly influence the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean. They have historically been important for world energy and world trade, but now are so militarized that they are zones of strategic competition (Kaplan 2010). What Brewster (2014) points out is the importance of control and surveillance of these chokepoints for regional power projection. The convergence of India and the US in the sea will provide better monitoring of these critical shipping lanes, further accounting for India's influence over these sea lanes. Greater chokepoint militarization will make the threat of maritime escalation higher in the future, especially as part of geopolitical tensions. In Pakistan, on the other hand, reliance on the Arabian Sea routes makes them more vulnerable, and uninterrupted and unhindered access to the sea is a national security concern.

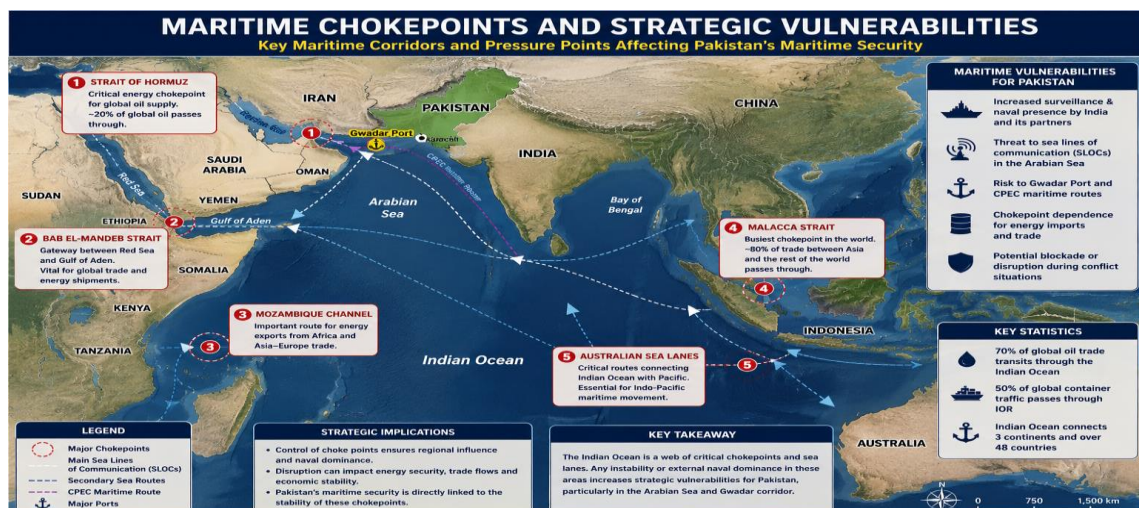


Figure 2: Maritime Chokepoints and Strategic Vulnerabilities

Improving Intelligence and Maritime Surveillance. Enhance Intelligence and Maritime Surveillance.

Enhanced India – US cooperation through intelligence sharing and maritime surveillance cooperation is one major key aspect of the strategic convergence between India and the USA. The cooperation in intelligence between the two countries was in the initial stages, but now under the framework, the agreements made like COMCASA and BECA have started facilitating real-time data exchange and integration of advanced surveillance between the two countries more cohesively (Khurana, 2017). This has greatly enhanced India's demonstrates improved maritime domain awareness in the IOR. In a digitization and intelligence sharing partnership, India's capacity to track the movements of naval forces and obtain maritime superiority grows, as does builders' capacity to create the most technologically advanced surveillance systems ever seen, says Tellis (2020). Asymmetry between regional actors is projected to grow even more than AI systems for maritime surveillance, satellite networks and cyber-intelligence integration become even more effective in the future. This development has indirect implications on the surveillance and security aspect of Pakistan's maritime zone.

QUAD Emerging and evolving Maritime Security Architecture

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is a developing maritime security association between India, the United States, Japan and Australia. Strategically, the QUAD provided a platform that was largely dormant following its inception, but has re-emerged as an important mechanism for security in the Indo-Pacific region in today's circumstances (Medcalf, 2020). The QUAD emphasizes a “free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific” that chiefly aims to keep the balance on the seas with China. India's rise to QUAD participation demonstrates its growing presence in the Indian Ocean, as noted by Mohan (2012). As for the future, QUAD could become more institutionalized into a security arrangement with better naval coordination and joint operational planning. This will further ensure a convergence of India – USA on the maritime front and impact the regional security architecture, thus providing a further strategic challenge for Pakistan.

Maritime security competition in the IOR is very much rooted in economic interests. The Indian Ocean has a history of being a trade way, but it now plays a field of contestation for the objectives of economic stability and security at sea because it is an economic space. The Belt and Road Initiative in China and India's regional connectivity initiative has sharpened the trade route/port access rivalry between the two countries (Pant & Rej, 2018). Gwadar Port and CPEC are Pakistan's most important strategic economic resources, and are therefore vulnerable to the fluctuations of the region's sea moves (Ahmed, 2020). Maritime Trade routes will have geopolitical implications, much of which will be dependent upon control in the future, given the link between economic power and naval capability. Indian-Pakistani ties in the economic-security mainstream further consolidate cooperation for securing sea lanes as indirectly impacting Pakistan's maritime economic security.

India's strategic autonomy and its balancing behavior

However, India still aims to maintain strategic balance in its policy while working towards making its foreign and security policies independent of the United States. Historically, India's strategic lessons have been based on non-alignment and it has practiced a balancing approach. In the current scenario, India has to deal with the United States, and also has to act independently from major powers such as Russia and regional powers (Mohan, 2012). Brewster (2014) says that India's maritime policy is based on the dual conviction about its aspiration to be a champion in the region and its awareness of balancing international powers. This dichotomy – combining diplomacy with cooperation on maritime issues with the United States without getting into formal alliance commitments – is likely to continue in India's future affairs. This balancing behavior brings complexity to this

convergence between India and the USA and uncertainty to long-term security calculations in the region.

Strategic Outlook for Pakistan in an Evolving Maritime Order

Pakistan's long-term maritime strategy needs to also be flexible in responding to the dynamic openings of the Indo-Pacific security landscape. The maritime focus for Pakistan was limited in the past as opposed to security priorities on the continent. But in the present context, the rising competition in the seas of the region compels towards adopting a more proactive naval approach (Farooq & Qazi, 2023). It is clear that the navy needs to be more robust and its keenness on surveillance should be increased in order to neutralize threats which are now heading towards Pakistan, which has been mentioned by Rafique and Masood (2022). Pakistan's future security strategy will rely on several factors, such as modernizing the navy, strengthening strategic alliances and adopting emerging naval technologies. Not adapting could lead to more of a capability divergence in the Arabian Sea region. On the other hand, strategic adaptation, coupled with a virtuous contribution of Pakistani defense forces, can ensure that Pakistan could also serve as a credible deterrent against the growing contested Indo Pacific order and safeguard its rights in the ocean.

Conclusion

This study highlights and evaluates the strategic fit between India and US in the IOR and evaluates its implications for Pakistan's maritime security. This analysis shows that Indo-US cooperation, which was once restricted, has now gradually developed into a strategic partnership involving shared interests that revolve around the maintenance of the seaways with security at sea communication lines and countering regional threats. This alignment has transformed the security landscape of the Indian Ocean over the years as naval capabilities, surveillance proficiency, and maritime technological superiority have become the main criteria for measuring one's influence in the sea.

India's maritime strength has significantly improved through defense cooperation, intelligence sharing, and interoperability with the United States. But, at the same time, it is a strategic challenge for Pakistan because it brings more balance in naval power and monitoring in the Arabian Sea. On the security of the sea, it contributes to overall maritime security, but it also raises concerns regarding the security of critical infrastructure like Gwadar Port and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), this changing scenario has made them more vulnerable.

The Indo-US collaboration in maritime security is expected to make a difference in shaping the security landscape of the region in the coming days, the paper finds. Given a swiftly evolving maritime setting, a robust maritime deterrence in Pakistan will require the Pakistan Navy to consistently work on modernizing the fleet, enhancing the understanding of the maritime domain, and forming strategic partnerships with different other countries to safeguard Pakistan's maritime interests.

Recommendations

The following are recommendation based on the above findings:

Given the occurrence of 'strategic convergence' between India and the USA in the IOR and the implications of that for Pakistan's maritime security, policy-oriented recommendations have been put forward. Pakistan needs to equip its navy thoroughly through acquisitions of the most modern surface vessels, submarines, and surveillance equipment kind of meet the changing regional dynamics.

- The first move calls for Pakistan to commit comprehensive naval modernization and guarantee funding for state-of-the-art surface ships, submarines, and surveillance technologies to effectively handle the inadequacies of naval capabilities exposed by changes in the region. Acquiring maritime domain awareness through the satellite-based monitoring system is crucial to counter the escalating stress from surveillance in the Arabian Sea.
- Secondly, Pakistan should seek to diversify strategic partnership in the maritime domain with China, and should also adopt an 'extra-regional, selective' approach towards regional and extra-regional maritime partnerships which would help Pakistan achieve greater naval interoperability and balance in the emerging Indo-US influence in the Indian Ocean. Crisis response and strategic visibility can also be enhanced through maritime security exchanges with multi-lateral partners.
- Third, the doctrinal principles guiding the development of the Pakistan Navy should be based on the concepts of asymmetric deterrence, cyber-maritime security, and the protection of critical infrastructure, including Gwadar Port and the maritime routes associated with CPEC. Furthermore, Pakistan must address the challenge of insufficient long-term investment in naval defense production and human resource development. These measures are essential for maintaining a credible deterrence posture and enhancing Pakistan's ability to adapt to the evolving security environment of the Indo-Pacific amid growing India-US strategic convergence.

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