



RESEARCH PAPER

Geopolitics of Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean: The Strategic Partnership between China and Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's maritime sector is one of the most underutilized industries. The maritime economy serves as the foundation for modern international politics. The objective of this research is to examine the impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) maritime strategic partnership on the geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean. The research aims to build a knowledge of the complicated connections between factors associated with the Indian Ocean Region and the maritime industry of Pakistan. The US's maritime policy shift toward India served as an impetus for China's and Pakistan's increased cooperation. A descriptive method with secondary data sources were used in the exploratory research design to investigate different dynamics associated with maritime trade security. For examination under this research framework, a detailed analysis of literature, including research papers, and journals from both local and foreign sources has been done. A cooperative maritime geopolitical strategy with an integrated approach of FDI is the expected solution for maritime trade security issues in the Indian Ocean.

Keywords: China, CPEC, Gwadar Port, Indian Ocean, Maritime Security, Port Logistics, Strategic Partnership

Introduction

Maritime security is now a crucial topic in international politics. It is essential to both personal and national security. This research conceptualizes every facet of maritime affairs, focusing on the Indian Ocean region. To maintain their marine advantages, states are also strengthening their maritime capabilities. Over many years, conflicts and wars have taken place in the vast amphitheater that is the oceans, which make up over 70% of the planet Earth. The marine framework shapes any nation's commitment to its policies, and ocean control has a major impact on the world at large (Singh, & Ort, 2020). The paper examines concepts and understandings of various aspects of marine endeavors. A significant portion of the literature focuses on the chronic aspects of marine problems. Pakistan, the CPEC's maritime security is crucial.

For this reason, the naval forces of China and Pakistan are actively modernizing their capabilities in terms of knowledge and technology. The level of military expenditure between the two governments grew steadily, encompassing collaborative partnerships for intellectual pursuits and exercises, as well as technological advancement. The Indian Ocean is the home of 35% of the world's combustible gas and 65% of the world's oil, as well as wellsprings for various other manufactured goods and raw minerals found in coastal states. For landlocked countries like Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, and western China, it provides the quickest route to the sea. The importance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to facilitate Chinese imports via Pakistani ports, particularly Gwadar, has grown significantly since the start (Ghani, et. al., 2017; Asif, 2018). Three factors are causing a noticeable shift in this region. China's economic ascent Asia serves as a pivotal or rebalanced region for the United States, with a few developing economies expanding into the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. East Asia's growing economies are

making the sensible move to secure power and meet their energy demands. This has an impact on the Indian Ocean's maritime communication routes, especially the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb (Klasra et al., 2024). These are curved up and powerfully piled with oil tankers, commercial ships, and maritime power vessels for security. In the Indian Ocean and other key locations around its periphery, the EU, China, India, the US, Japan, and Australia are steadily establishing their military control.

Powers like Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea all marginally weaker but strategically significant are all honing their drills and capabilities in the same area. The projection of power in the Indian Ocean is questionable due to the lack of a comprehensive international agreement on ocean security measures. In essence, it's a basic security problem. Furthermore, the political landscape of the surrounding countries is unstable. It has led to security issues in the Indian Ocean, such as robberies and smuggling (Banerjee et al., 1999).

With its focus on Gwadar, the CPEC has also provided impetus for maritime cooperation between China and Pakistan. The two states want to increase their respective involvement in the blue sea economy, pursuit and salvage, and marine security. Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that CPEC can garner significant participation. This methodology serves as a vital, empowering force in a world that is changing swiftly. In keeping with this, we must shift from outmoded geopolitical resentment from the 19th and 20th centuries to interstate critical play in the 21st century. A state's distant arrangement is determined by its collective passion for the global field. Equitable deployment of financial, discretionary, and military apparatuses is necessary for a successful distance strategy. National intrigue shapes the likely outcomes for the state as a whole. A well-thought-out distant strategy method can help the South Asian region achieve its remarkable advancements and establish itself as a peaceful, well-organized area.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the IOR and South and Central Asia is intensifying the rivalry between India and China. Initially restricted to the Himalayan region, where the two nations engaged in an external war in 1962. This concept has gradually expanded to encompass the entire maritime domain. While China feels undercut by its limited ability to hook its ocean ways, some in India feel enclosed by China's fundamental actions in the region. Understanding and effectively navigating this changing security dynamic may be critical to ensuring U.S. national interests and territorial dependability (Khurana, 2008).

Collaboration and coordination between various governments show that there is room for improved security when vote-based systems are used equally, as in the case of the US, India, Australia, and Japan. While rivalry and patriotism may grow stronger, similar trade interests and interdependencies between China and India, as well as their respective roles as major players in the local financial mix in Asia, may undermine their argument. The US's ability to adjust can also enhance local stability (Meredith, 2022).

Literature Review

The University of Copenhagen's Christine Beuger prepared a comprehensive paper titled "What is maritime security?" It examined the fundamental aspects of maritime security. According to the study, several marine domain experts have begun to integrate maritime security into their work or have reframed it in such terms. The current global political predicament stems from the lack of consensus regarding the importance of maritime security. Morgenthau argues in his book *Politics Among the Nations*, "that to modify or reinterpret any culture, one must first examine and comprehend the fundamental laws and customs that society adheres to. In light of Morgenthau's thesis, realists maintain that laws have not changed over the ages and that protecting one's interests, regardless of what other people may think or believe, is the most essential component of survival.

Realists go on to explain that states can only survive if they can exert control over all available resources. It will assist them in preserving their existence, enhancing their military and economic dominance, and solidifying their power structure. The International Maritime Organization and its Maritime Safety Committee, which functions as an all-inclusive authority for setting rules and regulations, are linked to maritime prosperity.

China and Pakistan are reliable allies and neighbors. Both China and Pakistan are making concerted efforts to conceal the Indian Ocean region, while simultaneously, the United States and India are collaborating to counter China's ascent and portray India as a significant regional power. Pragmatists have recently clarified each of these objectives, which is why this theory is incredibly relevant to our exploratory study (Ghosh, 2011). Darshana M. Baruah, Nitya Labh, and Jessica Greely's (2023) pragmatists' basic thesis posits that states are driven by a desire for power, a desire that powerful forces are actively pursuing in the Indian Ocean region to assert their dominance. Given the significance of the maritime sectors in any maritime nation, it is crucial to acknowledge their potential to significantly contribute to the GDP growth of the corresponding nation.

According to Kenneth Waltz, "hegemony leads to balance." When talking about the Indian Ocean, the concept of power balance also applies very strongly to this area. India's goal has always been to dominate the region. The USA is actively working to support India by providing technology and MOUs, but it also has very obvious interests in this region of the sea. One of the most recent examples of the Indo-US relationship in the region is the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which allows both nations to use their bases in addition to several other joint ventures. When the American and Indian Navies work together in this way, China and Pakistan the other two major regional stakeholders have enough opportunity to follow suit. In essence, China is strengthening its naval prowess in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, while Americans are working to establish India as a regional player to restrain China. One of the primary instances in front of us is also the Chinese String of Pearls concept.

China is establishing outposts around the Indian Ocean's periphery, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Pakistan. A significant example of Chinese and Pakistani cooperation in the areas of roads, trains, and naval cooperation is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Keeping this in mind, we may argue that every state looks for different ways to confront its enemies. Kenneth Waltz correctly noted that hegemony breeds balance; this idea also applies to Pakistani-Chinese cooperation, since China and Pakistan do not recognize India's hegemony in the area. Anis H. Bajrektarevic observes Asia needs to ask itself whether the most modern ideas, like the OBOR/CPEC versus the Indo-Pacific maritime triangle, are reciprocal to its advancement or the heartland-rimland kind of perilous encounter. True multilateralism is what Asia needs, not a situation where people find themselves caught in the crossfire (Safdar et al., 2021).

Professor John B. Hattendorf asserts that any state may always attain its predetermined goals with the aid of a marine strategy. According to him, maritime strategy is essentially the direction of all facets of national power that support the realization of a nation's maritime goals. Naval forces are undoubtedly one of the key players, but he reiterated that other states and their department's diplomacy, maritime cargo defense, and many others must assist and support this maritime strategy, which is not just about the navy. In summary, everything including the ground beneath the sea and the skies above it should be under the watchful eye of the government apparatus (Saint-Mezard, 2016).

Material and Methods

A descriptive method is used to investigate different dynamics associated with the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. Both primary and secondary data sources were used in the exploratory research design. For examination under this research framework, a detailed analysis of literature, including research papers, and journals from both local and foreign sources has been done. The research aims to build a knowledge of the complicated connections between factors associated with the Indian Ocean Region and the maritime industry of Pakistan as a whole. The exploratory research framework has done a detailed examination of collected data from the desired literature. To understand the research topic, the researcher visited relevant Islamabad institutions that dealt with the maritime domain of Pakistan. The researcher attends the presentations and seminars to collect more information for the research work. First, it starts with an explanation of the concept of the threat, and then it elaborates on the nature of the problem in the Indian Ocean Region. A few arguments also discuss an overview of international legal frameworks regulating the threat. The research work then narrows down its discussion to examine the regional legal frameworks governing the threat in the region.

Results and Discussion

China and India are expanding their influence in the Indo-Pacific area. They are gradually interacting with each other to further their expansionist goals and increase their influence. There are occasional issues with their connection. The security connection that exists between these two superpowers is often erratic and unclear. China's growing proximity to South Asia and other parts of the Indian Ocean Rim is a significant factor. The Indian state views China as a crucial actor in these regions, defining conditions and forming alliances that could potentially challenge New Delhi. One of the most important issues facing the area in the twenty-first century may be how China and India get along, whether through cooperation, rivalry, or confrontation (Drake & Doherty, 2016). The proven Great Connector, which runs from the Hope to the Strait of Malacca, is the foundation of all true power.

Baluchistan, an exclusive economic zone spanning around 180,000 square kilometers, requires the expansion of Gwadar Port and other infrastructure to reach its full potential. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor must build facilities in Gwadar when it acquires land for the Gwadar Port Authority. This would enable Chinese companies to build an exposition center next to the port where they could promote both Chinese and Pakistani goods, in addition to greatly increasing the number of items that these two countries import and export. This would be an economic zone near the port, covering 9.23 square kilometers. Gwadar, the main port of Makran, dominates the fishing industry in Baluchistan. The port's extension would provide fishing infrastructure. These alliances provide a collective response to regional security issues as well as a check on China's expanding influence. Over time, these alliances would enhance the packaging and processing of fish at or near fishing locations, generating significant revenue for the fishing industry.

Baluchistan contributes more than 34 percent of Pakistan's overall fishing production through its marine capture fisheries sector. Along the Baluchistan coastline, Jiwani, Pishukan, Gwadar, Surbandar, Pasni, Omara, Damb, and Gaddani are eight important fishing locations. Fishing production from Gwadar and Pasni, in that order (159798 t and 116036 t, respectively), was the highest contributor to the total. Together, these two stations yielded 47 percent of the entire catch between 2011 and 2014 (Khetran et al., 2017). Furthermore, landlocked countries such as Afghanistan, much of Central Asia, and even parts of Russia benefit from having the most practical and direct path to the ocean via Gwadar during the winter, when most of the nation's ports remain closed.

This line would hold significant importance for regional ties. It would also serve as a significant point of entry for China. Under the CPEC, trade with China would greatly increase

economic activity in Pakistan and the surrounding areas. Along the route, there would be greater employment and commercial prospects. Big container ships can load up here for additional transshipment because of Gwadar's strategic location as a natural seawater port.

Pakistan currently uses the ports of Karachi and Qasim to handle an estimated 67 million tons of maritime cargo. Dr. Azhar Ahmad claims that Gwadar port can handle 42–65 million tons of cargo during the next fifteen years. Over the next fifty years, this transaction could potentially handle 300 million tons. In many ways, Gwadar would boost Pakistan's standing abroad, and the nation can develop into a significant player on the world stage (Zaheer, & Asim, 2021). Pakistan had previously purchased Gwadar from the Sultanate of Oman. 1988–1992 saw the construction of a small port. In 2007, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf introduced its modern version.

In 2013, China formally won a multibillion-dollar contract to develop and maintain Gwadar Port, on the assumption that its expansion would facilitate Pakistan's improvement, particularly in Baluchistan. Pakistan will always own the port and China Overseas Port Holding Company, a state-owned Chinese enterprise, will manage it according to the conditions of the agreement (COPHC). The Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) previously held the concession (Pakistan Gives China a 40-Year Lease for the Gwadar Port, 2017). The Gwadar Power Generation Plant, the city's expansion, and the Gwadar International Airport are among the other projects planned in addition to the port's expansion. As a result, Pakistan benefits from the development of the port and city in three ways: it fortifies its strategic position against India; it boosts the economy by receiving revenue from transit trade fees; and it supports the tourist and hospitality industries. It has already attracted investors (Bukhari, 2024).

Economically, the port is very significant. Situated 250 miles away from the Strait of Hormuz, it serves as a major distribution hub for the entire region and provides a reliable and convenient point of entry to Gulf ports. Pakistan will be able to attract foreign direct investment by establishing the Baluchistan port as a regional economic hub. This would allow for the expansion of road and rail networks, linking the coastal region to the rest of Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. In addition to improving regional connectivity, this development would enhance the socioeconomic standing of the Balochis in the area and cultivate the region's natural riches. The third naval base in the nation is Gwadar Port, which is significant from a strategic standpoint. During the 1999 crisis, India threatened to shut down Karachi but did so during the war in 1971. Gwadar, which is 450 kilometers west of Karachi, offers vital strategic depth. (Gholizadeh, A., Madani, S., & Saneinia, S. 2020)

In 1999, China initially expressed interest in the area's development. Following multiple failed attempts to create a deep-sea port in Gwadar, China extended an offer to furnish technical and financial assistance to revive the project. Pervez Musharraf persuaded Zhu Rongji, the Chinese Prime Minister, to back Pakistan in exchange for the installation of a Chinese radar station in 2001, although this did not happen at first. Beginning on March 22, 2001, the port's construction took 72 months and cost a total of \$248 million.

Chinese engineers were willing to work on the facility, but the ongoing war on terror blocked any progress. Ultimately, a groundbreaking ceremony took place on March 22, 2002. During the event, Shaukat Aziz stated that they planned to complete Phase I of the project by 2005. Difficulties pushed back the original completion date for the first phase of this port's construction to June 2006. The pricing was also altered. It went up from US\$243 million to US\$298 million. The plan also included hiring operators to manage and operate the port following Phase I development. As a result, the Pakistani government issued a Request for Proposals and Expression of Interest on June 12, 2005. The Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) and Pakistan signed the port's management agreement.

At the time, China's lack of operational control over the port was due to two causes. First of all, it would have angered the US, which at the time was an ally. Secondly, the Indian media

reported that China was hesitant to fully commit to this endeavor because of the unstable security situation in Baluchistan at the time. The PSA agreement prompted the construction of four container berths. This included constructing an approaching canal, a bulk freight terminal, a grain terminal, and two oil terminals. The PSA received several benefits, including a 40-year duty waiver for bunker oil exports, duty-free imports of construction equipment, and a 20-year corporate tax exemption. However, security. The death of Baluchistan's nationalist leader, Nawab Akber Bhugti, on August 26, 2006, sparked a new insurgency campaign in the area. The second was the Supreme Court's stay order forbidding any foreign business from acquiring property for the Gwadar port, as well as the government's rejection of giving PSA 550 acres of land for the site's construction. Similar to this, security concerns prevented Pakistan's Navy from evacuating the area.

However, the Pakistani government ultimately approved the No Objection Certificate (NOC) that PSA received. In February 2013, the President House in Islamabad hosted a historic ceremony. After China renewed its interest in completing the project and struck a contract with Pakistan to take over port administration, the situation changed. China Overseas Ports Holding, a Chinese business, will run the Gwadar port for 43 years, starting in 2013. When both countries decided to implement the CPEC in 2015, Gwadar Port became part of it.

India feels that China's operational control over Gwadar encircles it. The counterargument states that Gwadar's 400-kilometer proximity to the Strait of Hormuz offers a quicker route to China, the second-largest oil consumer in the world. However, neither China nor India is particularly powerful or weak, so these claims are not very persuasive (Bhatti, Mustafa & Ahmad, F. 2020). The Chinese Foreign Ministry has defended the decision in this link, stating that it is a continuation of China-Pakistani cooperation. A.K. Antony, India's defense minister, thinks it's a big deal that Pakistan decided to give China sovereignty over Gwadar Port (Ahmad, 2023).

China and India are engaged in a growing struggle for dominance in the Indian Ocean Region. This dispute has fundamental implications for American strategic alliances and has highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to American security and economic strategies. Office of the Secretary of Defense, (2013) In December 2017, the US national security strategy described the Indo-Pacific region as "a geopolitical test among free and unforgiving dreams of world interest." (Vaughn, 2018).

China is one of the main players in the international community. Particularly Despite the daily expansion of the Indo-US nexus in the Indian Ocean, it remains a constant presence. China has always tried its level best to maintain the balance of power in this region. Keeping in mind the involvement of the US and India in this region, China has also started to build up cooperation with different states of this region just to counter the Indo-US nexus. For example, China has started to build up its deep cooperation not only with Pakistan but also with Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), and Djibouti. The fiscal ascension of China and India, along with their rapid progress in seaborne exchange and imported vitality, significantly intensifies their rivalry, impacting all facets of the Indian Ocean. The maritime and littoral areas adjacent to the ocean routes, which connect the vitality-rich Persian Gulf with the centrally subordinate economies of Asia, are a major focus (Bhutta & Ali, 2023).

Any disruption in this supply would likely have a negative impact on the economies of both the United States and the rest of the world. China's need for seaborne trade and imported centrality, along with the major problem of its location, has been named the "Malacca issue" after the Strait of Malacca, Rodrigue, (2004), one of the most important passageways through which a lot of China's trade and energy flows. One can interpret a significant portion of China's Belt and Road Initiative as an attempt to limit its fundamental vulnerabilities by isolating its exchange and notable courses, while simultaneously reshaping its political influence through expanded exchange and framework discussions.

Sino-Indian borders in the Himalayan region have never before contained this dispute, but the Doklam impasse has shown that tensions there have also increased. China-Indian competition is moving toward the Indian Ocean region and, as a result, is becoming more focused on the sea than it is presently (Berlin, 2006). This may lead to additional advancements in marine resources on opposing sides, which could be advantageous for US maritime acquisition and territorial positioning. The expansion of the fundamental test's geographic boundaries between China and India is bolstering the core connections between East and South Asia, as well as the Indian Ocean, thereby strengthening the bonds in the larger Indo-Pacific region. China and India see their roles in the world as expanding (Malik, 2018).

Her dissertation, *Growing India-USA Strategic Cooperation: An Analysis*, examined how the USA-India strategic alliance has evolved since the end of the Cold War. In 2000, both countries strengthened their strategic partnership by signing a civil nuclear deal. By 2005, both countries had signed a Mutual Defense Agreement that cemented the strategic partnership (Khan, 2015). 2015 saw the renewal of this mutual defense agreement. The author focuses on the developments in the strategic partnership between India and the USA under the Trump administration. The strategic partnership included the sale of US arms to India under defense cooperation, the exchange of cyber technology and security, maritime defense cooperation, and joint military exercises. The author argues that the strategic partnership between India and the USA aims to contain China, with India departing from its policy of non-alignment to become an ally of the USA. It is undeniable that both countries share a common perception of the threat posed by China's rise and its implications for the balance of power in Asia. Some argue that India, despite signing certain defense agreements and participating in military exercises, has not become an ally of the USA. India is seeking to succeed China as the dominant country in the area, and it has supported the USA's strategy of offshore balancing to counterbalance China regionally. India is also expanding its relations with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean in the same manner as China has. Therefore, it is important to consider India's response to the USA's offshore balancing policy.

The Indian Ocean has united the Act East policy of India and the Rebalance policy of the USA. Mishra (2018) provides a detailed discussion of the bilateral defense trade during the Obama administration. In addition to the increase in bilateral defense trade, joint activities between India and the United States have increased over the last decade. The USA assists India in developing its local aircraft carrier by providing technical expertise. The joint military exercises, such as the naval exercise MALABAR, initiated in 1990, have persisted. The USA has also provided India with the P-8 aircraft, which can detect the movement of submarines. Chinese nuclear submarines have been present in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal since 2010. The defense cooperation between the two countries continued with the establishment of President Trump's administration.

The recent developments in the USA-India strategic cooperation concerning the Indian Ocean. However, the author largely ignored India's response to the USA's offshore balancing policy, leading to increased multilateral cooperation between India and the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. It has acquired a central position in regional cooperation organizations like IORA and IONS. These organizations are disseminating diplomatic and naval cooperation between India and the other Indian Ocean littoral states.

The threatening vibe toward India is the point of convergence for the key relationship. Pakistan and China have maintained a solid relationship for a long time. India maintains special relations with the two countries. The association is finance-based defense-related and geopolitical. Beijing can never overlook Pakistan's importance. China is developing strategies to strengthen its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project and expand its influence across the South Asian and Indo-Pacific regions. China's "all-weather friendship" provides the opportunity for much-needed initiatives and upgrades, and serves as a fundamental counterbalance to Pakistan's full association with India.

Some surveyors estimated China's share of the CPEC's focal points to be approximately \$46 billion. Many professionals find such large-scale initiatives implausible and have observed that many previously announced projects have fallen short of meeting the requirements. In that limit, there is an abnormal condition of lack of protection over the correct extent of the undertaking included, which might not really be uncovered (Gehlot & Satsangi, 2004). The China Pak Investment Corporation portrays CPEC in the following way: CPEC wants to enhance Pakistani foundations and develop money-related and political ties between China and Pakistan. CPEC will wrap up being a solid sewing factor among China and Pakistan, which share a past stacked up with sensible key relations and a versatile campaign of standard vitality stretching out for more than six decades. CPEC is China's most noticeable craze spent on fiscal movement in another nation.

Conclusion

Pakistan is a key stakeholder in the South Asian region. IOR has huge natural resources, so international players are trying to build up their dominance in the region. Particularly, the US and China are considered to be strategic competitors in this region. Secondly, the geographical location and possession of the most critical choke points in the Indian Ocean also increase its significance. Pakistan holds significant interests in the aforementioned region, particularly the Arabian Sea, as well as adjacent areas of influence. With a history of conflicts and unresolved issues, harmony is a distant dream. India's possession of Kashmir is a distinctive expression of the regional foundations of its vital culture, conveyed consistently on all occasions (Jahangir & Anis, 2016). Given these historical facts and the inherent animosity with India, Pakistan felt compelled to act not only to ensure its survival but also to expand its trade with the rest of the world for a more robust and stable economy.

China is Pakistan's dearest friend and a trustworthy, vital partner. It is important to understand that China does not have to solely support and advance Pakistan's interests. The fact is, that China is trying to pursue or fulfill its global interests, for which it also needs Pakistan's support. This suggests that China is more concerned with its global interests than with advancing the interests of Pakistan. India is attempting to constrain Pakistan's ties with the US and China through its influence. Knowing this reality, it is considerably more imperative to rethink and enhance ties with these nations by arguing our case in all dimensions. Overall, the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan has stabilized their maritime interests and prompted a broader re-evaluation of security and economic policies across the Indian Ocean region. This realignment underscores the dynamic nature of regional geopolitics and the critical role that strategic alliances play in shaping the future landscape of international relations and security.

Recommendations

- Pakistan supports FDI and the private sector in building a robust maritime security system.
- Increase regional cooperation and develop a cooperative maritime policy with surrounding countries.
- Pakistan implemented a workable geopolitical strategy for the US, China, and other regional players such as the Gulf states and Iran.
- Collaboration between marine policy and regulatory bodies and international environmental standard maintenance organizations should increase to build a cooperative environment in the Indian Ocean,
- Improved regional security, economic integration, and a more cooperative atmosphere can be achieved by Pakistan forging stronger diplomatic ties with international and regional countries through multilateral organizations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

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