

**RESEARCH PAPER**

Navigating Maritime Security in Indian Ocean: A Case Study of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The smuggling, illegal fishing, and geopolitical tensions with their regional and extra regional powers. This study argues that Pakistan's maritime strategy, naval modernization, and cooperation with other international actors-from IORA to CMF-can help foster stability in considerations of maritime security. Also in consideration are discussions on the implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the development of Gwadar port for the regional maritime security paradigm. The qualitative methodology largely examines the effects that might be exerted on Pakistan's maritime security policy, strategic partnerships with others, and the considerations of balancing the national interests of Pakistan against the wider regional security concerns. Consequently, these findings enhance an understanding of patterns of governance in relation to Indian Ocean maritime security and offer policy recommendations for greater regional cooperation.

Keywords: Maritime, Indian Oceans, Security, Pakistan, Challenges

Introduction

Covering Africa to Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean is one of the most important maritime crossroads in the world. This is very important for businesses and trade around the world because it connects major regions even like the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa, making it easier for more than half of the world's container ships to go through. Nearly forty percent of the oil transits through Indian Ocean's major chokepoints, which include the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca (Khan, Rahim & Muzaffar, 2020). All these factors have been contributing to the ever-increasing importance of the region as an emerging trade route. Wider marine structures keep spinning and developing the economic stability of the world and any disruption in them will have repercussions on other markets all over the globe. Seeing this, one cannot overestimate the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean, since it is still being used as a vital axis by countries- both regional and global- to safeguard their interests. Pakistan holds a peculiar geopolitical strength, being located at the confluence of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. With almost a 1 000-kilometre-long coastline along the Arabian Sea, Pakistan has an open door to the Indian Ocean and essential trade routes that link Europe and West Africa with East Asia. On the heels of the above advantages, the very location of Pakistan is a huge gain as a gatekeeper for global trade and energy transit. Apart from trade, another important reason the Arabian Sea is crucial for the security of Pakistan is that the security of maritime routes guarantees Pakistan's internal security, regional stability, and clout. Maritime domains gained prominence with the developments related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an offshoot of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Rahim, Khan & Muzaffar, 2018). Gwadar Port, the CPEC flagship project, offers a deep-sea port for the fast forward movement of heavy cargo, thus giving China a direct route to the Indian Ocean; this bodes well for making Pakistan come out as a regional hub for trade and logistics. Also, strategic importance for Gwadar is substantiated since it lies near the Strait of Hormuz, a vast chokepoint through which a bulk of the world oil supply passes. With Gwadar's ascent,

Pakistan will increasingly engage in maritime regional affairs, thus becoming a critical factor in shielding energy lifelines sustaining the world's functioning (Ghani, Ahmed & Muzaffar, 2017).

Pakistan is enduring many of its own troubles in maritime security. The Indian Ocean is equally important to trade and development and has some security challenges associated with it. Pakistan is facing many threats, ranging from illegal fishing and terrorism to seas and piracy. Given the ongoing violence and instability in the affected regions near the Arabian Peninsula and Horn of Africa, non-state actors are now attempting to channel loose networked activities through the sea routes against their criminal ends. In this context, while still safeguarding financial benefits, Pakistan has to develop its naval force and coastal defense capabilities to guard and defend its maritime borders in the Arabian Sea. To modernize its navy in line with the current world conditions, Pakistan continued its modernization programs of acquiring new ships, submarines, and maritime surveillance paraphernalia which also reflected the need for maritime security.

The nautical policy of Pakistan is entirely focused on protecting its economic interests, directly linked to the security of its sea routes. The coastal cities such as Gwadar and Karachi are prime drivers of the economy for the development of the country. The bulk of foreign trade of Pakistan is managed through Karachi, which is the number one port city of the country, while Gwadar is perfectly located to become the hub of regional connectivity under the CPEC. Secure ports and shipping routes that connect these ports to the rest of the world are thus key ingredients towards sustaining solid economic resilience in Pakistan. Under this malicious perspective, Pakistan's naval policy incorporates the defense and deterrence philosophies with the requirements for multilateral collaboration and diplomatic engagement to address shared security concerns. With the increased significance of maritime security, Pakistan has also attempted to develop relations with its immediate and distant partners. Events such as the IONS and CMF are clear indications of Pakistan's commitment to enhancing stability and security within the Indian Ocean. Pakistan can collaborate with different countries through these multilateral platforms to counter piracy, provide safety to merchant vessels, and enhance naval capabilities through intelligence sharing or joint exercises. Thus, with the strategic tie that Pakistan shares with China, mainly through CPEC, it stresses the cultivation of bilateral relations that may reinforce its maritime economic and military agendas (Shah, Muzaffar & Yaseen, 2020).

Subsequently, the country that is in between great power competition, non-state actors, and regional rivalries must balance that with the opportunities and challenges that come from the Indian Ocean, a feature of its strategic location. Pakistan has now made itself a major player in the rapidly changing maritime dynamics of the Indian Ocean, primarily by development of Gwadar Port, by upgrading its naval capabilities, and then its involvement in regional diplomacy. Protecting maritime interests also depends on proper balancing between the aspirations of economic growth and security as well as cooperation with other regional and international powers for peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region.

Literature Review

With the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) being transformed, it is perceived that the Indian Ocean is fast becoming one of the fronts for strategic competition. Transitioning from this process also calls for littoral states such as Pakistan to rethink their maritime policies because of far-reaching implications. The Indian Ocean's changing strategic milieu has, therefore, prompted rethinking among regional governments as to their core beliefs about the region's relevance and their interest in it, now subject to superpower interventions and the securitization of nontraditional elements of state power, such as semiconductors and political loyalties. Another important variable in the dynamism of the strategic equation is the Indo-US Quad Security Initiative. For Pakistan, competition for influence in the Indian Ocean poses both opportunities and threats. Hence, there is a

need to massively reassess and clandestinely shift the maritime security strategy of Pakistan regarding risk mitigation and opportunity enhancement vis-à-vis the multifaceted dynamic of rivalry and alliance in the region. Additional thought should be given to the policy choices, as well as the military strategies which are open to Pakistan against this strategic backdrop (Farooq & Qazi, 2023).

This is the most definitive study of informal non-government initiatives toward establishing peace between two rival postures. Track Two diplomacy between India and Pakistan is part of this larger enterprise. It addresses earlier arguments, showing how informal discussions between academic scholars, ex-officials, and leaders of civil society add value to official processes for establishing peace. It focuses on documenting how back-channel processes build gaps, encourage trust, and afford imaginative solutions to intractable problems, by exploring the impact that non-state actors have on formal talk and bilateral relations. Such dialogues would thus enrich and supplement Track Two diplomacy within the wider remit of peace-building and conflict resolution initiatives (Ahmad, 2023).

The concern of India's ocean-centric foreign policy has shifted from increasing cooperation to the consideration of security to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). For now, India and China will therefore receive increasingly competitive claims on the Indian Ocean Rim, putting regional stability as well as international trade in peril. In turn, this prompted Pakistan to develop its navy and maritime strategy to deter the full spectrum of direct security threats, which would include it being able to counter conventional as well as unconventional threats, and serving its economic interests, specifically, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Since gaining independence, there has been a paradigm shift in Pakistan's naval policy from focusing on fleet modernization and regional maritime security considerations to the importance of the naval forces and maritime strategy in Pakistan's foreign policy and the regional security paradigm in the light of increasing importance to be attached to the IOR (Karim, Naazer, & Bukhari, 2023).

International maritime shipping, being one of the busiest in the world, traverses the Indian Ocean, which thus becomes an important maritime zone. Marine security, with an eye toward economic initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is becoming an increasing focus in the region, if not in the entire region; Pakistan itself, being a regional power, is fine-tuning its maritime strategy to counter both conventional and non-traditional threats. With the changing maritime environment in the Indian Ocean, transnational relations and security protocols have since entered the question. Geopolitical rivalry is rife in the area, particularly between China and India, with the US backing India to the hilt to contain China-specific ambitions. As competition grows, the US and its allies are working to retain their presence in the area. On the other hand, this US-led alliance poses a threat, and therefore, China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia are trying to evolve and strengthen their maritime security capabilities (Shah & Ahmed, 2022).

Configuration with their resource endowment has endowed the Indian Ocean with sufficient high status in the world politics for about three decades now; it ranks only third in size worldwide. It continues to serve as an alternator to various global trade routes and a sustainer of natural resource availability very especially for fast-growing economies of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The extremely important, "Blue Economy," concept stresses the utilization of oceans as an engine of growth by employing marine resources within the ambit of prudent management for sustainable development of economy. The Indian Ocean, however, remains a surface theatre of power politics with the naval presence of the United States and India's maritime policy with which regional actors such as China and Pakistan will be faced with bitter contestations. Looking at the Blue Economy framework, it is on both advantageous and disadvantageous grounds for China and Pakistan in terms of the Indian Ocean. While the natural resources and trade routes of the ocean bring great opportunities, US and Indian domination in the region makes it a very predicamental challenge. Deep understanding of the dynamics of these waters, both strategic and economic, is needed to

navigate this tangled terrain. Further studies need to be carried out to pinpoint exactly where China and Pakistan could benefit from the Blue Economy as a strategy to overcome the challenges posed by the US and India in the Indian Ocean (Asif, 2022).

Materials and Methods

It has been multidisciplinary for analyzing the strategic priorities and maritime security concerns of Pakistan on Indian Ocean. Diverse ways have been investigated such as policy study, literature review, and strategic assessment. The strategic assessments are based on original data collected from academic journals, official pronouncements, government reports, and naval publications, and are identified key concepts, ideas, and research needs. The data later be manipulated through statistical means to actualize the understanding of economic interests, security risks, regional rivalries, and diplomatic ties. Achievements contextualized within a conceptual framework integrating research into international relations, maritime security, and strategic studies. Research summarized key findings and its recommendations for academics, practitioners, and policymakers towards decision making in strategy and understanding of Pakistan's marine domain.

Results and Discussions

Pakistan with a stretch of about 1,046 kilometers lies on the northern Arabian Sea and occupies a strategically important location in South Asia. So far, waters have been crucial for Pakistan's marine security and socio-economic interests. They serve the critical lifeline of national security, trade, energy, and international relations for the country. Marine security specifically refers to the protection of Pakistan's maritime borders, securing the safety of international shipping lanes, protection from maritime threats, and resource management. These are then identified as being primarily concerned with the trade through the seas themselves, fisheries, and offshore energy resources. Thus, it is an all-encompassing narrative that brings into focus marine security and economic interests along with their importance and challenges faced by Pakistan in maintaining both.

Geo strategically vital, the marine area constitutes a part of Pakistan

It has economic and strategic importance for Pakistan with respect to the sea water and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The coastline of Pakistan lies through major global sea lines, with the major arteries of international trade coursing through the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.. It has economic and strategic importance for Pakistan with respect to the seawater and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The coastline of Pakistan lies through major global sea lines, with the major arteries of international trade coursing through the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz (Farooq & Qazi, 2023).

Influence of China in the Indian Ocean

In the 1980s, China incorporated oceans into its strategy to establish blue water navy to safeguard its own interests in the western Pacific Ocean. As China's economic and military might increase throughout time, its Influence extended to other regions of the world, including the Indian Ocean. 90% of China's trade with the rest of the world now occurs over the seas, thanks to the country's expanding economy. At the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Beijing established a three-pronged plan to expand its maritime industry. Initially, through broadening its scope through the One Belt One Road (OBOR) vision. Second, by providing the newest technology to its naval force through the navy modernization program, i.e., building aircraft carriers to protect its global economic and security goals and change its strategy from concentrating on just one ocean—the Pacific Ocean—to concentrating on both the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Third, by giving Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan additional access to the Indian Ocean's ports and by offering them military and economic support.

It is believed that Chinese investment in the ports of Gwadar, Pakistan; Payra, Bangladesh; and Hambantota, Sri Lanka, is a component of their "string of pearls" strategy, also known as the New Maritime Silk Road. This is part of the larger OBOR initiative, which links Beijing with the rest of Africa, Europe, and Asia. China recently increased the size of its military station in Doraleh, Djibouti, which New Delhi views as a danger to India's economic and military power in the international region. One of the major projects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has the potential to expand social and economic prospects significantly advancement. China's contribution to the growth of Gwadar port allows Pakistan to expand its blue economy. Through Pakistan, India can reach resource-rich Central field of naval technologies to keep pace with those of India. This has a serious impact on the effectiveness of deterrence posed by Pakistan's navy and at the same time, its ability to respond to contemporary threats (Ali et al., 2025).

Realism Theory

Realism is possibly the most important theory of international relations, which stresses the role of power and security in the behavior of states. Realists are saying that states are primarily concerned with their secure environment where military strength and alliances based on self-interest are dealt with in a very anarchic international system. Realism suggests that the states find themselves in insecurity and are, therefore, compelled to act based primarily on that notion, one that invariably refers to relative power. The realist view holds that Pakistan's foremost national interest is to secure and survive in an environment defined by a hostile neighbor (India) and a competitive regional setting. Dominantly, the idea of the Pakistan Navy revolves around ensuring maritime security, protecting economic interests (especially concerning shipping routes and port facilities), and acting as a deterrent against any possible threats from the Indian Navy. Considering the competitive regional environment and limited resources, Pakistan's naval strategy incorporates these factors in its own conception. With India being in a constant threat, Pakistan aims to maintain a credible minimal deterrent and calls for reliance on asymmetric naval strategies of warfare: missile boats and submarines to counter India's sea power, which is bigger and more technologically advanced.

Overview of Maritime Security Regionally

Pakistan's maritime industry has continued to be mostly ignored, both militarily and economically. Because of the policymakers' land-oriented perspective, this field is now empty. We have observed the change in attitude both domestically and globally in recent years. The country of Pakistan has grown to be a very active state throughout the years, and in 2018 it started a Maritime Security Patrols effort. Furthermore, when Indian forces won the war in 1971 by using both the land and the shoreline, Pakistan's approach to maritime issues underwent a significant change. The significance of Pakistan's marine security was further highlighted by CPEC. The CTF 150 has been spearheaded by it in an effort to broaden the "maritime cooperative continuum." Being the nation's first official maritime doctrine, Pakistan's standing with regard to of maritime security became more apparent after it was announced.

Although maritime security was still disregarded in Pakistan, as was already indicated, the previous events signaled a significant shift in the country's overall attitude toward the marine industry. The Navy increased its activity in both soft power projection and military operations. It's formed partnerships with Turkey and China. In the USA, its reliance on military hardware declined, particularly following the Pressler Amendment. Pakistan then set out to find new allies in this field. Continuing with the CPEC developments under the BRI banner, enhancing maritime security became increasingly important. Being close to the Gulf of Hormuz, Gwadar's advantageous location might draw a variety of unconventional threats, such as drug and robbery, piracy, human trafficking, and maritime

terrorism. In order to ensure the safety of the entire economy, more work was needed in this sector (Shahzad & Gillani, 2022).

Issues with Maritime Security in the Region:

Pakistan's Challenges and Piracy

Piracy-related occurrences have been a significant problem in Pakistan because they are rapidly reaching the country's coast. One state that is well-known for overcoming its piracy problems is Pakistan. The problem of piracy has grown significantly in Pakistan over time and is getting closer to the country's coast. The only regionally operating navy that continues to play a leading role in overseas operations in the Gulf of Aden is the Navy of Pakistan, which has twice ordered Combined Task Forces 151. Additionally, Pakistani residents have had to deal with a number of difficulties as a result of piracy, which primarily affects fishermen and sailors. Additionally, a number of international conferences were held, such as the one in Karachi in February 2012, which concentrated on the difficulties associated with Pakistan's significance in the fight against piracy on a national and global scale (Zafar et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The literary contour within the Indian Ocean encompasses maritime security, geopolitics, economy, as well as strategy. Pakistan is inherently placed, being land and economy dependent, and therefore, plays a very important role in ensuring regional stability. This study has covered the main issues that Pakistan is facing related to maritime security challenges, strategic responses, as well as implications for the region and global security architecture at large level. Pakistan's maritime security environment presents multiple geopolitical rivalries and economic compulsion, non-traditional security threats and rising regional and extra-regional powers such as India, China, and the United States in these waters augment competition in the Indian Ocean. This leads to militarization and deterrence by Pakistan of a much more dynamic and adaptive maritime security strategy. It means trade and energy security through the Arabian Sea, the arms tack of very robust Indian naval force cooperation on much greater regional forces.

Complex as to threats to Pakistan's maritime security, earlier threats, such as state-led aggression and naval conflicts, ceased to exist, but non-traditional threats of great seriousness now stood: piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, and environmental degradation. These altogether must be tackled through a multidimensional approach of integrating military preparedness, diplomacy, and international collaboration.

It is indeed reasonable to say that regional cooperation is effective in addressing challenges to maritime safety. Pakistan's membership in, for instance, such regional organizations as the IORA and IONS strengthens the multilateral security architecture. Further strengthening of Pakistan's security regimes would be possible through further maritime diplomacy with neighboring countries, and most importantly Iran, China, and the Gulf states. Meanwhile, further consolidation of strategic cooperation with large countries, particularly through international security mechanisms like UNCLOS and international naval coalition partnerships, will remain relevant to regional stability. Intelligence-sharing, joint maritime patrols, and coordinated disaster response mechanisms may also augment regional cooperation in maritime security.

Recommendations

- Pakistan needs to invest modern naval fleet capabilities in new warships, submarines, and maritime surveillance technologies to counter both historic and unconventional threats that threaten its Indian Ocean shores.

- Pakistan must beef up its interests among regional maritime organizations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Combined Maritime Forces, realizing that there is an urgent and necessary need to increase interaction among the states in the Rimbasin framework aimed at bolstering efforts at improving regional security cooperation and intelligence sharing.
- Pakistan should therefore have a holistic approach toward anti-piracy and anti-terrorism strategies-increase naval patrolling, intelligence sharing, and international capacity- building programs.
- Strategically, Gwadar Port should be developed to its full potential, which includes developing port infrastructure, port security, and attracting global maritime trade.
- Enhancement of the blue economy through sustainable marine resource use and marine fisheries development while promoting maritime tourism-an endeavor that will further boost economic development.
- Updating the existing national laws to ensure their applicability with international conventions, including UNCLOS, would enhance the existing legal framework under which maritime governance exists.
- Establishment of a single maritime security institution will enhance coordination among naval, coast guard, and other maritime institutions for effective implementation of policy.
- Pakistan has to equip modern satellite-based monitoring system and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology for maritime monitoring and threat detections.
- Initiation of a diplomatic dialog and confidence-building measures could resolve maritime disputes and defuse tensions in Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).
- Pakistan should strengthen its strategic partnerships with major regional and extra-regional players, such as China, Turkey, and the Gulf countries, to shore up its maritime interests.

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