

## CHINA POTENTIAL MILITARY BASES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: STRATEGIC CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

China's expanding military presence in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) poses significant strategic challenges for India. This study examines that the China's potential military bases initiatives in IOR including Gwadar, Hambantota, Bay of Bengal and other will likely enhance China's naval presence and power projection capabilities that might threaten the Indian geopolitical position and economic interests in the region. The findings highlight the potential implications of China's military bases on India's national security, Maritime and regional influence, and economic interests. This research contributes to the understanding of the complex dynamics of China-India relations IOR and provides insights for policy makers to develop effective strategies to address these challenges. Moreover, this paper also addresses the question of how China's potential military bases in the Indian Ocean Region will pose strategic challenges to the India.

**Keywords:** China, military bases, Indian Ocean Region, India economic interests, geopolitical position of India, Maritime.

### INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean is the third largest Ocean in the world after Pacific and Atlantic. The region stretching from the Eastern coast of Africa to the Western coast Australia. It comprised of thirty three nations and around 2.9 Billion people. The Indian Ocean has significantly important for many states and they trying established healthy relationship with the regional states to access the warm water. Moreover, the region also comprised of some of the world fastest growing states mostly economic. It also has some valuable fishing and minerals resources due to which the security of the region is always in high alert and threatens. Meanwhile, the Ocean enjoys a privileged location due to crossroad to the world trade, connecting the two largest Oceans Atlantic and Pacific, and use for international economic purpose. According to the report, two-third of the world oil ships pass through the Ocean which means 36 million barrel oil pass through the Indian Ocean per day (Darshana M.Baruah 2023). However, the region is home to many great powers such as India, US, UK, France, Japan while some emerging players in the region are China, Saudi Arabia and UAE.

However, the traditions of military bases were started back in 1800s by the US when they opposed to the European to do not interfere in the affairs of western hemisphere in 1823 during Monroe Doctrine. The US expanded its military bases after the World War II and by 1989; US have around 1500 military bases. However, by 2021, the American has 750 military bases around the globe (Vine 2015). The purpose of the bases is to provide logistic support to the military, surveillance and to monitor the region or state and to protect/safeguard the country interest in abroad. Only in Japan and Germany, the US has 119 bases and in South Korea, the US has 76 bases (Vine 2015). Although, besides from the US, other states have also foreign military bases such as Japan, UK, France, India etc. China, which is considered one of the emerging economic and military power has established their first not the last foreign military base in Djibouti back in 2017. The state (Djibouti) has already home to foreign military bases such Italian support base, Japanese Base, French airbase, American military base etc. According to the Chinese, the purpose of the base is to protect its trade and

investments from the pirates in the region and to provide support to the peacekeeping mission in the African continent (Chang Nov 2023).

However, the intentions of the China are to establish more military base in the Indian Ocean such as in Gwadar, Hambantuta, and Chittagong etc. China has the potential to establish more bases in the Indian Ocean region. For this, China leases the Hambantuta port for 99 years while also largely investing in Gwadar port (Brewster 2018). Therefore, the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region can be pose significant threats to the Indian state security. India perceives threats from the growing China influence. The Indian state recently took the Chabahar port from Iran on 10 years lease to increase their influence. Moreover, they also have military base in Madagascar, Mauritius which are the part of Indian Ocean. The growing China influence and from their potential military bases, India might perceive economic insecurity and it might pose challenges to their traditional dominant geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean. The region is strategically vital for India because around 80% of its crude oil and around 95% (by volume) of its trade pass through the Ocean water (Suyesha Dutta 2024). The increase China investment in infrastructure, and military installations in the area heightened the sense of insecurity for India as they are traditionally dominant in the region.

Although, the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region through its military presence will likely alter the balance power and might escalate security threats to for India. While the Indian response to the China's military bases might intense the situation (Baruah 2022). Therefore, this paper will explore the China potential for establishment of military bases around the Indian Ocean and how these bases will pose strategic challenges to India such as threat to economic security and challenges for its geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean region. Moreover, this paper will also analyze either the Indian state is perceives threats or not from the China's military bases. Meanwhile, this paper will explore the rationale behind Chinese military bases in the Indian Ocean region and also the potential capabilities of Indian state to respond these military bases.

### **Literature review**

The presence of Chinese in the Indian Ocean region and especially developing their bases for military purpose might put Indian security in a vulnerable condition. As china has already developed one of the military bases in African region Djibuti and have the capability to develop more in other area's such Gawadar, Hambantuta, Chitagong and also in Myanmar. By developing these bases around the Indian Ocean, it might create security dilemma between China and India. Although, numerous author have discussed the possible challenges can be arise for India due to the increase presence of China in the region. However, the main themes has reviewed from the existing literature such as the Chinese presence in the Gawadar port and ramification for India security, the response of the Indian navy to the Chinese strategy in the Indian Ocean, security threats to Indian interest in the region, and the response of the Indian allies to the these Chinese bases. Moreover, this literature will also highlight the missing areas that other scholars did not discuss.

Neo explain the Chinese strategy in the Indian Ocean through the "String of Pearls" theory which describes China's geopolitical and strategic interest to secure maritime routes and ports across the Indian Ocean region. The writer argued that the acquisition of the Gawadar port by China is a potential threat to Indian maritime security and regional influence. He point out that the location of Gawadar port near the strait of Harmuz offer China strategic advantage in term of energy and trade. The writer also claimed that Pakistan has also made their intention to develop Gawadar port with projection of military capabilities (Neo 2013). Xiaoyan argued that China is not a Sea power yet. Its Ocean economic development is still behind of the World power and its land economy. Moreover, China is also facing many daunting challenges across their sea territory. China has disputes with neighboring state on sovereignty of islands, demarcation of sea lines etc (Xiaoyan, China's Sea power Nation strategy 2014) . According to the author, the situation was further deteriorated when the US announced "Pivot to Asia" policy which seeks to strengthen its relationship with China neighboring states as to encircle and confront China. The writer describe the main theme of the article that the China vision to assert to control

maritime routes, secure its Sea line of Communication and safeguard its national interests. The writer describes the Chinese strategy that maritime security should be based on strong and modern maritime force.

Babu argued that the presence of the Chinese submarine in the Indian Ocean raised many questions for the Indian security interests in the region. The naval force presence can boost national power, reduce India dominance over the Indian Ocean which can be a threat to the Indian security and it will be difficult for India to maintain its status quo in the Indian Ocean. The author claimed that the increase Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean is a significant challenge for India to counter it (Babu 2018). Moreover, the writer argued that the primary interest of China in the Ocean is to protect its sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Additionally, China imported its oil from the Middle Eastern States through the Indian Ocean which is constituted around 82% of its total oil import (Babu 2018).

Chaziza argued that for the first time China established its military base beyond the territory in Djibouti. The main potential behind the establishment of the base in Djibouti might be two for China, one can be geostrategic and the other can be geo-economic. However, China describe the purpose of the base is to give support to the region and protect its peacekeeping mission in the region (Chaziza, China's Military base in Djibouti" 2018). Cabestan explain the importance of Djibouti that it's a small country, strategically very important located in the mouth of Bab el- mandeeb strait and the Red sea and confluence the state of Africa, Middle East and Indian Ocean. The China decision was surprising because in the past China was opposed of establishing military bases overseas. The base was opened in 2017 and today it has more than 2000 soldiers there. The writer argued that China claimed that the base is only to provide support to Chinese anti-piracy and peacekeeping mission in the Gulf of Aden and in the African region (Jean Pierre Cabestan 2019). The writer further added that in Djibouti other great powers such US, Japan, and France had already established their military base. Therefore, China might seek to counter their power by established their military base. He further added that Djibouti is also part of BRI project, China might want to provide security to their economic interest and investment through

military base. Kardon explain the importance of the Indian Ocean Region as it Connect the Mediterranean and Atlantic sea to the Pacific Ocean and South China Sea. While the region has also some important choke points where most of the world trade happened such as Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Bab al Mandeeb and the Persian Gulf (Kardon 2023).

Therefore, the existing literature well explained the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region and how China is going to establish more military bases across the region. Moreover, the literature also explained that it will create security dilemma between India and China and will pose some strategic challenges to the Indian State. The main purpose of the Chinese bases from their rhetoric is it will provide security to their economic interests. But some authors also discussed that these bases will also use for other purposes such as to dominate the region, to influence the regional states etc. However, still there is a gap exist in the above literature that how these military bases will pose challenges to the Indian state and threaten their economic security and geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean region. If so, how the Indian state will respond to the Challenges.

### **Research design**

To start the research, it is necessary to provide the philosophical position of the research topic. The philosophical position of this paper is Scientific Realism because it will cover both empirical and interpretive literature. To explain, the ontology of this research title is both subjective as well as objective, because in the title, some variables are observable such as China military bases. We can observe it and it's a fact that the Chinese has established its base in the Indian Ocean like Djibouti. While on the other hand, strategic challenges for India are subjective and unobservable because from Chinese rhetoric, they established (one in Djibouti)/establishing (have potential to establish more in the Indian Ocean such as in Gwadar, Hambantuta etc.) base to protect their own economic interest in the region. But Indian economic security and geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean will be threatened from these bases. Although, different states give different meaning to the Chinese action regarding Chinese bases. Here, we would interpret the Chinese action and activities they performing in the Indian Ocean

and will interpret the effects of her action. While on the other hand, the actions of India are subjective and can be interpreted in different ways, either Indian will perceive threat or not to their economic security and geopolitical position. This research paper will be non-experimental. The design of this paper is explanatory case study design because it shows cause-effect relations, such as with the establishment of Chinese bases, it might directly affect Indian security. Moreover, Qualitative method will be used to analyze the data. For strategic challenges, perception of threat and security dilemma, qualitative analysis allows in-depth understanding of the rationale behind China's military bases in the Indian Ocean region. The paper will analyze data from policy documents, strategic reports, Journal articles, expert interviews and media reports. By using content analysis, this research paper will systematically analyze the data and provide comprehensive understanding of the strategic challenges and security challenges in the Indian Ocean region. This paper will also do comparative analysis of both China and India by comparing the Chinese explanation/rhetoric about military bases and the Indian perception of whether they perceive bases as a threat or not. For data collection, both primary and secondary sources will be used. Primary data will also be used in this paper by analyzing official government documents and analyzing the official's interviews etc. This paper will conduct semi-structured interviews with experts in this field. This research will mostly analyze the secondary data. The

research will be conducted through explanatory qualitative method by explaining the cause and effect relationship. It will explain the effects of China's military on the Indian state's security. However, the secondary data will be collected by observing and contextualizing the existing literature, key Military and defense reports of both states, content analysis of journals, books, and analyzing the context of key international and regional media news reports.

**Theoretical framework**

An offshoot of Structural realism/neo realism called security dilemma which was coined by British historian John Hertz in 1950 in the context of US-USSR competition during the Cold War. Security dilemma is a situation in which one state seeks to maximize their security cause insecurity for other state. As an offshoot of structural realism, they believe that there is anarchy on the global level, (no world government) so; every state should take care of their own security. Therefore, the primary goal of the states is maximizing their own security. If states solely focus on this goal and have no intention of harming others, just to increase their own security such development of military capabilities and technology acquisition, will decrease the security of the other states. In the anarchic world, no state knows the intention of other states. Therefore, sometimes states maximize their own military capabilities to balance with arming states or sometimes they seek alliance with powerful states (Wive, 2011).

**Security dilemma (assumptions)**

<b>Imbalance of Power</b>	<b>Action-reaction dynamics</b>	<b>Int'l Anarchic system</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China establishment of military bases in the Indian Ocean will enhance imbalance of power between China and India.</li> <li>Increase naval patrolling and deployments of submarine of China showing imbalance of power between China and India.</li> <li>Defense agreements of China with other Indian Ocean states such as recently with Maldives, lease of Hambantota port.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the establishment of China military bases, India will also react by enhance its military power capabilities. As India signed defence agreements with other states like Japan, US and Australia.</li> <li>Arms race; arms race might start between China and India due to China greater power projection capabilities after establishment of military bases. India will counter the China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One of the assumption of security dilemma is there is no world power, anarchic system prevailed at International level. This concept apply in the same way in the Indian Ocean region that there is no states that can solely enjoy the dominancy over the Indian Ocean region.</li> <li>In the absence of central governments, China takes proactive measures by securing its trade routes and energy projects by establishing military bases.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large scale China investment in infrastructure like BRI project also indicator of imbalance of power.</li> <li>• Enhanced military, economic and diplomatics cooperation between China and other Indian Ocean states.</li> </ul>	<p>presence due to which arms race is potentially possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India also increases its naval patrolling and conduction joint military drill with allies' states.</li> <li>• India increasing naval surveillance, deployment of submarine.</li> <li>• Alternative to the China's BRI, India enhancing their own capabilities in the region and prompting alternative projects with Japan and US.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the absence of central authority, China invests in dual-use project by enhancing both civilian and military capabilities.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
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In the context of the China military bases in the Indian Ocean, China seeks to maximize their naval security and establishing military bases across the region to provide security to their Sea Lines of Communication and safeguard their investment especially the BRI investment. By maximizing their own security, it directly threatens the Indian state security and decrease their security and dominance in the Indian Ocean Region. India perceives Chinese military bases is a direct threat to their state security due to historical border disputes, competition for regional dominance etc. while on the other hand, India seeks to increase their military capabilities and trying to establish closer defense alliance with the United States and other regional states such Japan and Australia through QUAD. The growing competition between China and India in the Indian Ocean created security dilemma between them. China seeks dominance over the Indian Ocean while Indian trying to prevent China from regional hegemon. Through the race between two Asian powers, the regional stability might reduce.

**China strategy in IOR; An overview of Military bases initiatives**

More than thirty years of reforming and opening up China to the foreign market, now China has emerged the second largest economy in the world, lagging behind United States. China has strong economic influence across the globe through its infrastructure projects and developments. Similarly, the state also has many disputes with its neighbors such sovereignty disputes, territorial and maritime sovereignty. China has not strong

maritime power, like other states such as US, UK. Therefore, in 2012 during 18<sup>th</sup> congress of Communist party, they announced a strategy that aims to “building China into a Sea power nation”. The strategy aims to further expand maritime influence to secure trade routes to boost up economy and also to enhance power projection capabilities. The strategy also refers to the development, utilizations, management and control of the Ocean (Xiaoyan 2014). Through the strategy, China will gain more economic resources, develop ocean economy, and to protect the ecological environment of the Sea. Further, the strategy sole aim to protect the China’s maritime sovereignty, rights and interests in the Oceans. To enhance power projection capabilities and implement the maritime strategy, China started influencing in the Ocean such as South China Sea, Arctic Ocean, and Indian Ocean. In the Indian Ocean, China established its first ever military base in Djibouti in 2017. This was the first foreign military base China ever established. Further, China also started BRI projects through China aims to link Asia with Europe through maritime routes. China invested in the CPEC project to access into warm water of the Indian Ocean through Gwadar port. Some analysts argued that China will likely be established military bases with the aim to protect its economy and influence the Indian Ocean region in Gwadar port (Babu 2018). Additionally, China also leased port of Hambantuta from Sri Lanka in 2017 to protect its economics interests in the region. Some analysts also claimed of military bases in the Hambantuta port. Some argued that China has started working secretly on military base

in the Sri Lankan port. Following are some potential areas where China will likely go for military bases to strengthen its position in the Indian Ocean Region.

Currently China has deployed 6-8 warships in the Indian Ocean. While back in 2017, China deployed 636A hydrographic ship Hayang class 22 in the Indian Ocean water. Moreover, in 2018 China deployed Xiang Yang Hong 03 in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, China is working in different areas to develop military infrastructure. As China develop 300 meter long area for ships and aircraft near Djibouti (Panneerselvam Dec, 2022). Moreover, China development in Gwadar, Hambantuta and other ports are recommended the China's potential for military bases. Meanwhile, China consistently involve in exercising in the water of Indian Ocean. Recently, in March 2024, China performed drill with Russia and Iran while in previous year 2023, near the gulf of Oman China exercised military drills with Pakistan (White June 2022). Although, in 2022, China launched 815 electronic surveillance ship in the Indian Ocean to monitor the activities. To enhance its influence, China has military presence in the Indian Ocean. Around 2000 PLA persons are currently located in Djibouti (Chaziza 2018).

### **Gwadar Port Pakistan**

The growing energy demands in the world and limitations of resources are proportional circumstances. According to a survey, energy requirement in the world has enhanced by 95% in the past thirty years and expected to further increase by 45% in the next 20 years. However, a large market and large populations of China demand more energy. For this, China needs more reliable and secure routes to transport energy. Currently, China is confronting uncertain circumstances during transport of energy through conventional trade Malacca from the African and the Gulf region. Chinese strategic makers are dredging for alternative trade routes to expand further its oil and gas transport. Therefore, Gwadar is one of the reliable route and inexpensive for Chinese transport. In 2013, Xi Jinping announced the BRI project and also CPEC with Pakistan to link the Gwadar city with the Xinjiang and Tibet region of the China. This route for Chinese transport is time consuming and inexpensive compare to the conventional route of Malacca

(Hussain 2020). Gwadar is significant for China geopolitically, it link the Middle East with South Asia and also Central Asia. Moreover, China will likely expand its economic activities to militarial activities in the Indian Ocean through the port of Gwadar. The Economic time reported that PLA navy wills likely deployed submarines, maintain the port vessels, and provide logistics support. Further, they might transfer eight of its conventional type 039 submarine by 2028. They also quoted the Washington bases US institution of peace that China will project military power in the Indian Ocean region from Pakistan western coast (Time 2023). Further, China might deploy PLA navy Marine Corps unite to provide security support to Gwadar.

### **Hambantuta Port Sri Lanka**

China has signed an agreement with Sri Lanka in 2017 for the Hambantuta port, leased for 99-years as a part of Belt and Road Initiative project. When the Xi's took the administration, he announced the BRI project that seems the adoptions of China expansionist policies. Prior to the BRI, China believes on non-expansionist policies and respect of sovereignty of other nations. But now, it seems that they China his stance in global affairs to attain and achieve core interests of China. The China BRI project has two main components, one is economic belt, initiating infrastructure, development project while the other one is Maritime Silk road, by connecting Oceans, African region and Indian Oceans region. Therefore, Sri Lanka has strategic importance because of its location. It's located on the world busiest trade and shipping route. Sri Lank has received substantial amount of loans and aids from China in the past. China interest in the region is not economy only but to project power in the Indian Ocean and constrain India. China has emerged is a global player in the economic as well as in political affairs. They want to enhance its power projection capabilities in all regions. Some analysts argued that China has secretly started working on PLA navy base in the Hambantota port. The Reuters reported that China survey ship Yuang Wang reached to the Hambantota port, describing by the analysts as a high-tech ship for tracking objects in space. Moreover, they also argued that China might use the port as military base in the near future (Jayasinghe 2022). Furthermore, the AidData reported that China might establish naval

base in Sri Lanka in the next two to five years. They further stated that China has plan to develop further eight bases across the Indian Ocean region that will create serious concerns for India and US, as both are the main players in the Indian Ocean region (Alexander Wooley July, 2023).

### **Bay of Bengal Bangladesh**

China is quietly deepening its influence in Bangladesh. The region linked with the China oversea military and economic interests. The satellite images show that significant progress has made in the development of naval base for Bangladesh by China. The base also has some submarine that is received by Dhaka from Beijing. Beijing is struggling to strengthen ties with Dhaka to influence the region from the Bay of Bengal to counter the Indian influence in the region. China is using its soft power diplomacy by influence a state through economic mode. The reported also stated China might influence so deeply in the naval base and might secure permanent PLA naval position there.

### **Maldives**

According to the Fayyaz Ismail, chairperson of the Maldivian Democratic Party, the principle opposition party that China might working on military base in Maldives, as China Harbor Engineering Company signed a memorandum of understanding with Maldives industrial development free zone to construct an agricultural economic zone to boost up the internal economic output (shrotyria April, 2024). Further, analyst argued that China might establish military base under the agricultural project. Moreover, Maldives also signed a military agreement with China that will help Maldives to provide essential military equipment for their troops. This move of China further shift away India from Maldives. The Maldives president also ordered of complete withdraw of Indian military personal from the archipelago nations, reported by the president office of t Maldives (regan March, 2024).

### **India Strategic Concerns**

Historically, India had dominancy over the Indian Ocean Region. They enjoyed the trades and goods transportations for a long time without serious concerns and threats from other Indian Ocean states. However, with the emergence of China as

global leader and the second strongest economy in the World, India perceives threats to its dominancy in the Indian Ocean. China has established a military base in the Indian Ocean region, Djibouti. However, they also have the potential to extend its influence further in other areas. Beijing is spending a lot of money through its BRI project and invested in foreign states for development and infrastructure project such in Gwadar, Hambantota. To expend its economic influence, they also have the capabilities to merge these economic ports in military bases. Some reports stated that China is secretly building military bases in Gwadar, Hambantota and heavily invested in Bay of Bengal to develop a naval base for Bangladesh Navy. As the American institute claimed that China is establishing military base in Hambantota port it will officially operate in the two to five years. If China succeeds to develop bases across the Indian Ocean region, it will bring serious concerns and challenges for Indian economy and its geopolitical positions in the Indian Ocean region.

### **Maritime challenges for India**

China is conducting almost 80% of its trade through Indian Ocean region. Its main transport route is through Strait of Malacca from Gulf States as well as from African states. Like China, India also conducts its trade through Indian Ocean region. Indian consider itself as dominant regional power in the Indian Ocean region and have established good relations with other Indian Ocean states such as Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Mauritius. However, China has established strong relationship with these states by investing in infrastructures and development projects. Therefore, their relationship with former has almost dismantled. Likewise, some Indian military have presence in Maldives, few months ago the Maldives president ordered to expel the Indian Military persons from the states. On other hand, Sri Lanka also did an agreement with China on Hambantota port. China leases the port for 99 years. Moreover, China's presence in the Gwadar port also creates trouble for India. Therefore, India perceives threats from the Increase presence of China's in the Indian Ocean region. The mistrust over the China is worsened over the last few years and almost 80% of Indian considers the China's presence in the Indian Ocean Region as a threat for India (Babu 2018). Although, this growing influence will likely creates troubles

for Indian navy and for Sea Lines of Communications. Moreover, India also launched initiatives like SAGAR and IONS which means to conduct meetings with all stakeholders of the Sea to secure all the routes for trade. It specifies that India wants security and growth in the region as due to China growing influence in the region (Sarangi 2019).

### **Economic Challenges**

China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region and establishment of military bases will likely encircle India and their trade routes might face difficulties. China's strong presence and control of key ports and shipping lanes could give regional advantages to them and potentially marginalized the Indian trade interests in the region. Furthermore, China's massive investments and infrastructure projects across the Indian Ocean will likely attract the foreign investments and can also jeopardize India's economy. As both India and China fulfill their energy needs through the Indian Ocean region, China's control over the key ports has the capabilities to give tough time to the Indian energy needs (Omid Nov, 2023). Meanwhile, as China heavily invests in foreign states' infrastructure and development, the neighboring states might depend on Chinese finance, potentially creating trouble for India to limit their influence. Moreover, The US State Department reported that the China military basing in the region will likely disrupt the energy flow across the region while it can create potential challenges for regional states.

### **Geopolitical challenges for India**

China's establishment of military bases in the Indian Ocean region will likely shift the traditional balance of power. The Indian Ocean is at the center of major geopolitical and has an important sea line of communication. Here, in the Indian Ocean, China's ambitions are ambiguous yet. For India, it is important to secure the free trade across the Indian Ocean region, as the area is geographically connected with the Indian state. Since the establishment of China's first overseas military bases in Djibouti and the development of ports across the Indian Ocean such as in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka, has created some serious challenges for India's presence in the Ocean. India has some serious concerns on increasing China's activities in the Indian Ocean region where China's research

vessels and fishing boats have been seen regularly, even in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The research vessels are used for many purposes and it has been observed that these vessels are collecting data for the PLA navy. Some fishing boats are used for surveillance and intelligence activities (Jain 2022). Therefore, the growing presence of China will alter the traditional balance in China's favor that will likely put challenges to Indian dominance in the region. Traditionally, there was a balance of power among all Indian Ocean stakeholders, if China has succeeded to establish more military bases in the region. It will be harmful for India's sovereignty and interests. Some scholars argued that Beijing seeks to dominate the region while stating that Beijing's presence in the region may permit to increase regional influences.

### **Conclusion**

The growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region and the establishment of military bases across the region will likely bring some troubles for India. However, this will also encourage India to counter the growing influence of China through cooperation and engagement regionally with other neighboring states. Recently, India has reached an agreement with Iran to develop the Chabahar port for Iran. Further, India also has started engagement with other stakeholders such as Mauritius and Bangladesh. Both states are working to establish strong alliances to counter the influence of each other. Meanwhile, Beijing has a strong bond with Islamabad and they seek to strengthen the relations further through collaboration and conducting mutual military exercises in the Indian Ocean region. Pakistan and China both have border disputes with India due to which both states are cooperating against the opponent.

Although, the establishment of China's military bases in the Indian Ocean region will likely create troubles in the sea line of communication and influence the regional states through economic policies and debt-trap diplomacy. Moreover, it will further strengthen China's relations with Pakistan and Sri Lanka to further collaborate to develop the ports for other purposes than economics. As the US State Department reported that China is secretly working on to establish a naval base in the Hambantota port, got images through satellite. Consequently, these activities will bring serious



troubles for Indian economy and its geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean region. The Indian traditional dominance influence will likely demolish in near future, and China's influence will likely expand across the Indian Ocean region and will sustain its strong military presence.

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