

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



**MJSSH**  
Muallim Journal of  
Social Science and Humanities

## CHINA REACTIONS TOWARDS INDIA'S MILITARY MODERNIZATION AT ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

Ahmad Shibli Bin Md Hashim\*<sup>1</sup>; Noraini Zulkifli <sup>2</sup>  
Forbes, V. L <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Malaysian Staff College, Puspahanas, Malaysia. Email: [sshibli.hashim@yahoo.com.my](mailto:sshibli.hashim@yahoo.com.my)

<sup>2</sup> Department of International Relations, Security and Law, Faculty of Management and Defence Studies, National Defence University of Malaysia. Email: [noraini@upnm.edu.my](mailto:noraini@upnm.edu.my)

<sup>3</sup> The School of Earth and Environment, University of Western Australia, Malaysia.  
Email: [vivian.forbes@uwa.edu.au](mailto:vivian.forbes@uwa.edu.au)

\*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/258>

### Abstract

This research studies the factors that lead to India's military modernisation in Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI). The research focuses on the geostrategic elements of the ANI and the contemporary Sino-Indian relationship. This research has three objectives namely 1) to study the factors that led to India's military modernization, 2) to examine the impact of India's military modernisation on China and 3) to analyse the China's reaction to it. The theory of realism was applied to support the argument of Sino-Indian relations, as both countries have a particular interest in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This research uses a qualitative technique that is based on secondary data references from credible sources, both printed and online. This research findings that the Andaman and Nicobar archipelagos consist of 572 islands and islets chain stretched from the southern tip of Myanmar to the north-western tip of Sumatra is India's potential fortress of defence in the Bay of Bengal. Since 2001, the Indian government has established a tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) at Port Blair to protect its sovereignty in the Indian Ocean. India announced the massive weapon procurement plan forecast for a 15 years period (2012-2027), followed by establishment of the Island Development Agency (IDA) in 2017 in effort to shift the archipelago from a merely military base into an active economic hub. This gained reaction from China as it sees India is projecting supremacy over its backyard, creating a possible "security chain" that would suppresses China besides the existing "Malacca's Dilemma". This research concludes Andaman and Nicobar has a great potential in the future due to its location between two major seas, the South China Sea (SCS) and the Indian Ocean. Its proximity to the Straits of Malacca (SOM) gives leverage over one of the world's busiest trade chokepoints.

**Keywords:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI), Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), Belt Road, Initiatives (BRI), China, India.

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License



Received 25<sup>th</sup> June 2023, revised 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2023, accepted 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023

## Introduction

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) are two archipelagos of 572 islands and islets stretching from the southern tip of Myanmar to the north-western tip of Sumatra. The islands became India's territory when India acquire independence from the British in 1947 (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. The Andaman archipelagos comprise more than 300 islands with only 38 islands are inhabited. Its main islands comprise of North, Middle and South Andaman are popularly known as Great Andaman. Meanwhile, the Nicobar archipelago has in total 22 islands and only 13 are inhabited (Rajasekaran & Kannan, 2012)<sup>2</sup>. The most prominent islands are Car Nicobar in the north; Camorta, Katchall and Nancowry in the centre; and Great Nicobar in the south of the chain. The capital city is Port Blair located on South Andaman Island.

According to the census conducted in 2011, the population of Andaman is 379, 944 (Ministry of Home Affairs India, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. The North, Middle, South, and Little Andaman are the most populated islands of the Andaman while Car Nicobar, Great Nicobar, Katchall, and Camorta are the most populated islands of the Nicobar. The ANI climate is tropical to subtropical with 79-89% humidity and a temperature range from 21 - 33° C. The two main entrance to the islands is through the airport at Car Nicobar, which is also an air force base and the seaport at Port Blair which serves as a naval base. The weather station at Port Blair has been in operation since 1868, providing meteorological data for ships in the Bay of Bengal (Bandopadhyay & Carter, 2017)<sup>4</sup>. ANI gains strategic advantages by sitting between two main seas, the South China Sea (SCS) and the Indian Ocean. The Great Nicobar Island is only 80 miles from the western entrance of the Straits of Malacca (SOM), a well-known world oil transit chokepoint that raised a concern to China because more than 80% of China's oil imports being transported by tanker ships through the SOM. The closure of Straits of Malacca is not a major issue for China because it can utilise alternate routes such as the Sunda Straits and the Lombok-Makasar Straits, but the cost of re-routing maritime traffic could be very high. Any impediment to this route will affect their economy greatly (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

The threat of Somali piracy has escalated into a worldwide economic crisis. Additionally, the continuous intrusion of China's navy and the incapability of regional navies to patrol the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) triggered Prime Minister Modi's immediate countermeasure. In order to protect its maritime interests in the Indian Ocean, India is building its foothold in the island states that may serve as forward base. As part of its "String of Flower", as coined by a United States (US) scholar, India had established an electronic listening post in Madagascar to monitor foreign navy activities in the southwest of the Indian Ocean. India also make an engagement with the island nations of Seychelles, Mauritius and the Maldives in conducting maritime patrol by Indian naval warships, patrol boats and surveillance aircraft around the region as well as training their soldiers in using military equipment supplied to them. Meanwhile, India's forward base in the eastern Indian Ocean has been established in ANI through a significant amount of budget allocated for upgrading military facilities at Car Nicobar and Port Blair, mainly because the islands dominate the sea lanes of communication (SLOC) (Das, 2011)<sup>5</sup>. China anxiously sees India's seriousness

in modernizing its military facilities in ANI as a potential threat to their Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) (formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR)). Besides from their claims in SCS, China has been allegedly engaged in the Bay of Bengal through various means, including the establishment of intelligence gathering posts on Myanmar's Coco Island (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

### Factor of India's Military Modernization at Andaman And Nicobar Islands

There are six (6) factors that has been identified that might determine India to modernize her military at ANI. These factors consist of:

#### i. Securing India maritime interest

India's strong interest in maritime security is not only limited to its own territorial waters but expands beyond the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. India had approximately 7,516.60 km long coastline covering its nine States—West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat, as well as four Union Territories— ANI, Daman and Diu, Puducherry and Lakshadweep (Kumar, 2020)<sup>6</sup>. Since ancient times, India has maintained maritime contacts with the outside world, notably western Asian nations and Burma (Myanmar). Ports were also used for commerce and political affairs in the latter period of ancient Indian history. Furthermore, India is one of the key members in the establishment of the Indo Pacific concept, alongside the US, Japan and Australia – also known as the Quad. The Indo Pacific idea, which began in 2007, has had a significant influence on the nautical domain by combining the two major oceans, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, into a single frame. The Indo Pacific is concentrating on freedom of navigation, common maritime challenges, improving connectivity, and bolstering maritime security within the domain.



Map 1.1. Location of Indo-Pacific Region

Source: Hari (2020)<sup>7</sup>

By referring to the Map 1.1 above, India is at the centre of the Indo Pacific domain that stretches from Bab-al-Mandab and the Straits of Hormuz to Australia as well as the Western Pacific through the Straits of Malacca and the SCS. The Indo Pacific region, which runs from India to the Western Pacific, has a population of approximately 3.5 billion people and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than USD20 trillion. It is home to three of the world's four economic giants: China, Japan, and India (Singh, 2014)<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, the ANI, located at the

intersection of the Indian Ocean, the SCS, and the Pacific Ocean is indeed a key fulcrum of the Indo Pacific strategic concept (Chinoy, 2020)<sup>9</sup>. To cope with contemporary challenges and issues in the maritime domain, India needs to keep its navies in a state of readiness. Taken from Prof. Aparajit Biswas's quote, “*Andaman & Nicobar Islands provide the key to the eventual success of India's Look East Policy enunciated by the Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1990s.*” (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. According to Rosenfield (2010)<sup>10</sup> India's naval strategists are becoming increasingly active in their efforts to broaden their country's horizons. As a result, India is developing power-projection assets, with a particular emphasis on the maritime domain. India plans to have three carrier battle groups operational by 2025, each in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

## ii. Impacts of piracy in the Straits of Malacca towards Andaman and Nicobar Islands

According to Hari (2020)<sup>7</sup>, the Indian Union's southern and eastern borders are formed by the Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands, which are physically near to Southeast Asia. ANI is situated very close to the SOM, which is among the busiest and most important sea passages in the world. Therefore, the aspect of security in the Straits of Malacca is indispensable, predominantly in terms of safety as well as uninterrupted trading from an external threat such as piracy and terrorism at sea. Situated in between the Bay of Bengal and SCS, it is geopolitically one of the most important SLOC in the Asian region, widely known as the “mother” of all straits. The Andaman Sea's Six Degree and Ten Degree Channels crossing in the ANI connects directly to the SOM, and are considered critical chokepoints to the SLOC that carry trade and commerce, particularly energy transactions, through Asia, Africa, and the Pacific (Chinoy, 2020)<sup>9</sup>. The 900 km long and narrow straits congested with merchant ships has attracted the attention of pirates around the archipelago since the Malacca Sultanate in the 14th century. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB)<sup>a</sup>, the Straits of Malacca accounted for 40% of all piracy globally in 2004. Malaysian, Indonesian, Singaporean, and Thai navies had joined forces in a combined patrol to combat piracy in the SOM. In 2006, India joined the operation with the participation of the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guards (Kaul, 2015). The joint patrol had successfully secured Straits of Malacca from piracy and other maritime criminal. In IMB's 2021 report, attacks against ships in the Straits of Malacca has drastically decreased in 15 years time, from 50 in 2006 to only 1 case in 2021 (ICC-IMB, 2022).

## iii. Control over maritime trade

India is geographically placed in the centre of the world, between the East and the West. As a result, India's maritime links and related foreign policy challenges in the modern era are centred on the Indian Ocean. Kaul (2015)<sup>1</sup> has stated that India has a significant trade volume with countries in the east of India and the west coast of the US that goes through Straits of Malacca and SCS (p. 109). As part of this commerce flow, fifty percent of the world's container traffic and seventy per cent of total petroleum product traffic travel across the Indian Ocean approximately. The physical location of the Indian coastlines makes the latter crucial in terms of the transit of international shipping goods, making the function of Indian ports vital in the overall economic

---

<sup>a</sup> The ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) is a specialised subsidiary of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) is a non-profit organisation that was founded in 1981 to serve as a focal point in the battle against all sorts of maritime crime and misconduct. Outraged by the alarming rise of piracy in the maritime sector has been prompting the establishment of the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB PRC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in October 1992 (ICC-IMB, 2022)

growth of the region. Meanwhile, this ocean's chokepoints (through ANI and SOM) carry over eighty percent of the world's sea-borne oil traffic (Kumar, 2020)<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, the bright prospects of the ANI have mostly been neglected by the Indian government and had stayed unexplored in the past. According to Chinoy (2020)<sup>9</sup>, the Indian government lately has pursued a proactive policy aimed at upgrading the ANI from a tri-services command, into an economic powerhouse as well as one of India's major hubs of defence and security strategy. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017, the Island Development Agency (IDA) was established for the development of these islands. For the first time, a project for sustainable development in the selected Islands has been launched under the jurisdiction of the IDA. The initial phase of the development project encompassing four islands in Andaman and Nicobar aimed at creating job employment opportunities through the promotion of the coconut sector, tourism and seafood, among other things. In the second phase, 12 more islands in Andaman and Nicobar were identified for the next development.

#### **iv. Andaman and Nicobar Island geostrategic**

Chinoy (2020)<sup>9</sup> further emphasised that ANI offers India a commanding geostrategic position in the Bay of Bengal as well as access to South and Southeast Asia. It mainly benefits India's defence and strategic consideration as it contains four vital trade lane crossings for any merchant ship bound for Southeast and East Asia, namely Duncan's Passage, the Ten Degree Channel, the Preparis Channel and the Six Degree Channel. Thus, a targeted development strategy for the Islands is believed to increase the country's geopolitical power in the Indian Ocean Region substantially (p.1). As an example of India expanding Andaman and Nicobar Island geostrategic in the security aspect, India is already exercising and strengthening its bond with the navies of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) of the tri-services has gradually evolved as a cornerstone of India's regional maritime participation in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. (Chinoy, 2020)<sup>9</sup>. Regional maritime forces from Southeast Asian countries has been establishing their cooperation with Indian Navy in recent years through multilateral and bilateral engagements, notably the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), series of MILAN exercises with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) as well as coordinated patrols and bilateral exercises with the littoral states in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.

#### **v. India is increasing its sea denial capabilities**

For a long period of time, India held possession of the Indian Ocean all to herself and was often seen as its own backyard. Unlike China and the SCS, when China tried to establish its territorial “nine-dash line” claims based on their perceived historical facts, had sparked tensions among its neighbours while the disputes that arise between the claimant states have yet to be resolved until now. In Southeast Asia, there is a growing recognition of India's ability to counterbalance China's domination over littoral Asia. Chinoy (2020)<sup>9</sup> had mentioned that regional warships from Southeast Asian countries have made frequent port calls to Andaman's Port Blair, including Royal Australian Navy warships during the MILAN exercise (from 2003 onwards), United Kingdom Royal Navy flotilla in 2003, French's navy logistic support ship in 2006 and Japanese flotilla of minesweepers in 2011. While other major navies, including the United States have expressed interest in visiting the Andaman Islands for port calls and training (p. 3). The importance of ANI geostrategic has led to some anticipation for a coordinated straits surveillance of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Ombai Wetar through the collaborative use of ANI and Keeling Islands in Australia. There have been also some recommendations for collaborative anti-submarine warfare (ASW)

exercise in the Indian Ocean Region with ANI playing a critical role. Nevertheless, the strategic involvement of India's partner countries through visits by their militaries to the ANI should not be interpreted as an alliance framework. Chinoy (2020)<sup>9</sup> further emphasised that it is up to India to determine whether and which foreign navies can access to the ANI, given that India has got an absolute sovereignty, control and rights over its own maritime territory.

#### **vi. Growing competitions between India and China**

According to Pardesi (2021)<sup>11</sup>, the Sino-Indian competition began as a one-sided conflict in the late 1940s, with China viewing India as an asymmetrical opponent. Chinese fears arose as a result of India's meddling in China's domestic affairs in Tibet, which resulted in the imposition of international reputational costs on China, complicating the Sino-Indian territorial conflict further (p. 342). As mention by Malik (1995)<sup>12</sup>, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, China associated itself with India's neighbors such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh to undermine India's ambitions to achieve regional domination in South Asia. In response, India strengthened ties with China's adversary, Vietnam and Cambodia (during the Hun Sen administration) (p. 318). However, other scholars such as Garver (2002) and Fang (2013) (cited by Pardesi, 2021)<sup>11</sup> had a varied threat assessment of the Sino-Indian rivalry, with China being more worried about the US and Japan than India, while India is more concerned with China than Pakistan. But nevertheless, Pu (2017) (cited by Pardesi, 2021)<sup>11</sup> stated that the emphasis on Sino-Indian asymmetric rivalry is more towards different levels of status, as India pursues recognition as a great power, whilst China is already recognized as one. China is regarded as a top-tier world power due to its participation in international councils and organisations. India may be hoping to emulate its climb to prominence. Rosenfield (2010)<sup>10</sup> concluded that by classifying China as a peer rival, India intends to engage in bigger strategic alliances, enter towards strategic alignment with nations such as the United States, expand its role in East Asia, and become a more important global actor. (p. 6). Kumar (2020)<sup>6</sup> said, looking through the eyes of China, it appears that the country has been improving its naval assets in order to achieve its ambitious maritime aspirations. Since the 1990s, Chinese military commanders have been increasingly concerned about the modernisation of the Chinese navy. This is attained through the acquisition of cutting-edge armaments, as well as the modernization of its blue-water naval strategy. (p. 114). Looking at these circumstances, Hari (2020) stressed out that ANI's strategic and economic importance cannot be overstated. Through India's lenses, the potential of these islands should be assessed and capitalised on in order to offset China's expanding influence and presence in India's neighbouring nations as well as to boost India's national security (p. 9).

### **The Impacts of India's Military Modernization Towards China**

#### **a. China's economic concern**

China's national interest as affirmed by China's former Minister for National Defence, Mr Liang Guanglie in 2011 constitutes on several "core interests". Among the most important cores are the establishment of a "peaceful development", besides maintaining the existence of a socialist political system and territorial sovereignty (Koh (2016) as cited in Mukherjee & C Raja, 2016)<sup>13</sup>. To achieve peaceful development, sustainable economic growth is important as it forms the basis for all investment planning. Thus, energy security remains as the ultimate concern for China as it remains dependent on petroleum imports from the Middle East and African Continent.

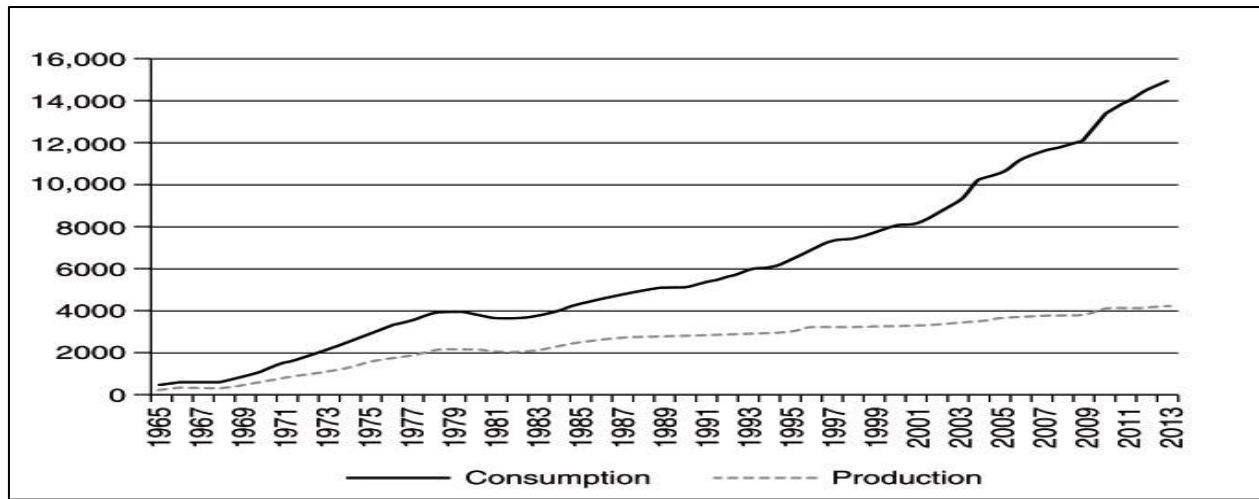
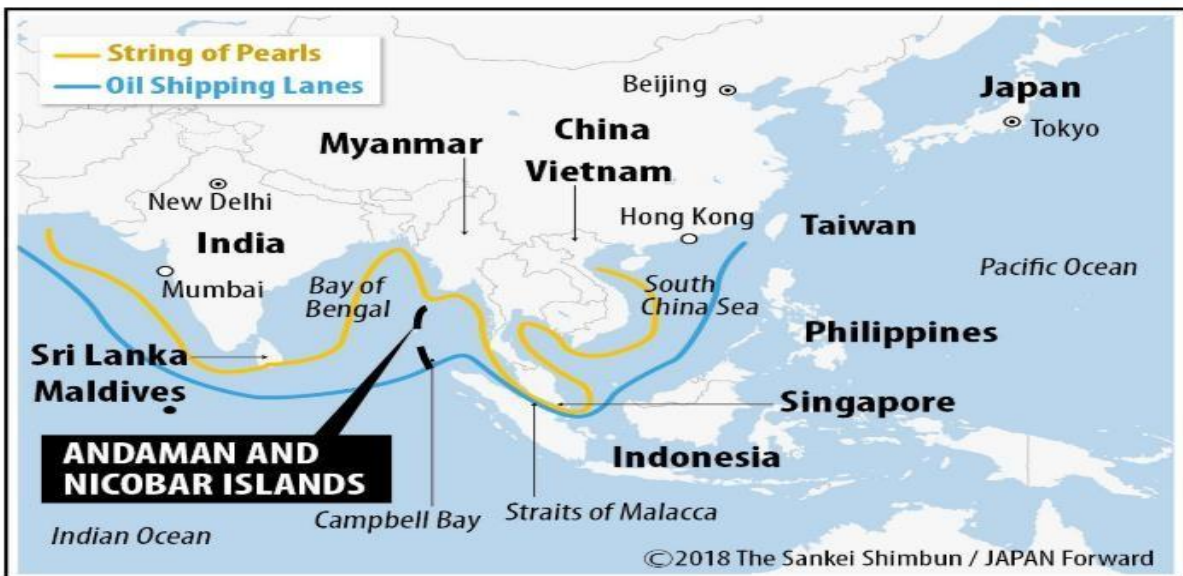


Figure 1.1. Comparison of China’s oil consumption versus production in barrels daily  
 Source: Mukherjee & C Raja, (2016)<sup>13</sup>.

Figure 1.1 above shows that China’s domestic oil production itself is unable to meet its own demand as its energy consumption (measured in thousands of barrels) is increasing each year as shown in comparative data. According to Rosenfield (2010)<sup>10</sup>, China’s main challenge comes from the need to secure its energy supply shipments from the Middle East by preserving SLOC from the Persian Gulf, through the Indian Ocean and subsequently to China. In addition, the Straits of Malacca dilemma also remains as China’s “soft belly” in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, India’s increasing interests, activities, and presence in the Indian Ocean, particularly in ANI have raised China’s concerns where Beijing has accused India of being a hegemon, thus, presenting a possible challenge to China’s ability to preserve important SLOC (p. 4).



Map 1.2 Chinese oil shipping route SLOC

Source: Pradeep (2019)<sup>14</sup>

Map 1.2 above shows China's oil shipping route via maritime SLOC that compliments BRI's "String of Pearls" economic strategy. Under the BRI, it was made understood that it is an attempt by China to revive the historical role of the Silk Road as the vein of China's economic domination. It is indicated by the map how the ANI stands in between the SLOC chokepoint. The island's strategic location forming a possible "security chain" for India is another security concern for China besides its centuries-old "Malacca's Dilemma". According to Yu Jie, China's aspiration and self-perception of the middle kingdom complex may continue to be a fundamental element in determining the mindset of China's political and economic elite Bisht (2020) as cited in Kumar, (2020)<sup>6</sup>. However, China has already exploited the maritime route to expand its economic influence and secure its position in littoral regions, notably those of the Indian Ocean. According to a research made in the year 2016, the top five nations that are actively collaborating with China on BRI are Russia, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Thailand, and Indonesia.

According to Saimum (2017)<sup>15</sup>, China has previously expressed interest in expanding its economic base in the Bay of Bengal by planning to build a deep seaport in Bangladesh. This project was launched as part of the foundation of the 21st-century maritime Silk Road. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have been signed between the Chinese and Bangladeshi governments, with the goal of constructing several components of the Pyra deep seaport. Bangladesh will soon be a member of the anticipated Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridor (BCIM), one of the BRI's six corridors<sup>3</sup>. China's intentions to invest up to USD 4 trillion in BRI-related projects over the next several decades demonstrate that China's economic revolution from low to high technology sectors is taking place at a fundamental level. China's communist government has been a closed and applied rural system since 1949. Kumar (2020)<sup>6</sup> mentioned that China geopolitical orientation all this while was continental, with a focus on the Eurasian Continental Realm<sup>4</sup>. As a result, during the twentieth century, China evolved predominantly as a continental power. However, China has recently started to exploits the maritime route to expand its economic influence and gain supremacy in coastal regions, notably those of the Indian Ocean (p. 113). China's position and conflicting international orientations would necessitate China combining aspects of continental (land) and maritime dominance within itself by embracing through the Rimland<sup>b</sup> theory concept. In fact, a literal analysis of BRI would show that this is exactly what China seeks to do with this strategy (p. 122).

## **b. Diplomatic ties between China and India**

Currently, China-India relations are at an all-time low. While senior officials on both sides have emphasised their desire to mend bilateral relations, there are still discrepancies on how to proceed, and it is difficult to reach an agreement. India and China had gotten down to diplomatic negotiations to resolve the issue of Chinese force intrusion in Galwan Valley and military build-up in eastern Ladakh (The Times of India, 2020)<sup>16</sup>. During the skirmishes on 15 June 2020, at least 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese soldiers were killed. The Indian government insisted on the "restoration status-quo ante before April 2020" for resolution on Line of Actual Control with

---

Spykman, an American geopolitical theorist of the twentieth century and the inventor of the "Rimland" geographical idea, emphasised that "whoever would control the Rimland (in other words, to contained the Heartland), would eventually control the World Island. Whoever would control the World Island would soon control the world". Southwest Asia, the Middle East, Western Europe, and East Asia, including China, were all included in Spykman's notion of Rimland. Meanwhile, Heartland theory was introduced by Halford John Mackinder in 1904 regarding to political struggle between land and sea powers with the ultimate victory going to the continental power which is represented by the world island that include Eurasia, the Middle-East, India and the Far-East.



China, at the same time New Delhi accused Beijing of keeping the boundary issues alive. According to Zongyi (2022)<sup>17</sup>, from China's point of view, military conflict with India is more likely when India has consistently increased its troop deployment to the border, strengthening its weapons and equipment, double up investment in infrastructure construction on its side, as well as enhancing its military deployment along the Indian Ocean sea lanes, particularly in the ANI. This situation led to action by India to reduce its trade dependency on China commodities or “de-Sinicization” of its economy. Although it would not be easy to get rid of industrial and supply chains from China, in a short term, the Indian government will be imposing more restrictions on goods from China entering India.

Another factor that forced China-India diplomatic relations to a stalemate is the competition of both countries in South Asia, particularly in the IOR. India is taking various measures to eradicate China's influence in other South Asia countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka through strengthening military and strategic cooperation among Quad members, promoting the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) as a new age economic arrangement that has been launched during the Tokyo Summit on May 24, 2022 (Luthra, 2022)<sup>18</sup>. It is another India alternative to counterbalance China-led BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) by moving closer to the US. Keeping these issues in mind, India's maritime diplomacy is not reactive to China's efforts, which have been frequently referred to in strategic communities as China's “String of Pearls” or “encirclement” policy. India has established strong relationships with the littoral countries. In the process, India has extended her relationship to the nations of the Indian Ocean and the countries to her east, particularly to the smaller littoral countries of Madagascar, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Seychelles, and Mauritius. These countries have also expressed trust in India's good attitude in the region (Kumar, 2020)<sup>6</sup>.

### **c. China being monitored by India**

As China and India increase their interests, activities, and presence in South and East Asia, they are increasingly operating in each other's perceived zones of interest, raising the prospect of rivalry and war. China is concerned about India's growing attempts to strengthen military connections with nearby ASEAN nations, as well as the extent of Indian naval action in the Indian Ocean, which it sees as a potential danger to China's sea lane access. India, on the other hand, perceives China's expanding interest and activity in the Indian Ocean, as well as its growing links with India's bordering states such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Burma, as invading its own land. Rosenfield (2010)<sup>10</sup> also pointed out China's rising naval activity and presence in the Indian Ocean, which historically regarded as India's home waters, is also a source of discomfort for India (p. 7). It was stated that India is extremely alert to Chinese encroachment, such as military ship visits and port building, all around the Indian Ocean's rim, including Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Pakistan (Gwadar), Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and other Indian Ocean islands. The ANI has long been India's leading asset in the Indian Ocean, functioning as the country's eyes and ears when it comes to monitoring Chinese activity across the Malacca Strait and, eventually, the Indo Pacific (Ranhotra, 2021)<sup>19</sup>.

### **d. India and US alliance through Quad**

India and other Quad partners are using Indo Pacific as a platform to focus on issues ranging from freedom of navigation and enhancing connectivity to tightening maritime security. India has stated unequivocally that it does not support any structure designed to challenge China, as stressed by

Modi, the Indo Pacific concept is not “directed against any country” nor is it a “grouping that seeks to dominate”. On the contrary, the presence of Quad has posed the most significant threat to China's maritime interests in the Indian Ocean. China launched the BRI in 2013 with one of the major motives being energy security, while also proactively forming new relationships as well as strengthening existing relations with important littoral states. China's intimate relationship with the Indian Ocean littoral states is a direct response to India's growing interest in the region. Nonetheless, India confronts these obstacles with more partners and bidders than ever before, with the United States topping the list (Shashank, 2016)<sup>20</sup>. To alleviate its concerns, China has been developing its blue-water navy capability to increase its influence in the Middle East area. Kumar (2020)<sup>6</sup> explained that the Chinese navy is being modernised in four stages, which include an offshore defence strategy, a technologically equipped strong navy with a concentration on scientific R&D, more advanced weapon systems for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and well-trained staff and more competent individuals. PLAN also plans to strengthen its ASW capabilities and expand its influence on the vitally important Panama and Suez canals (p. 114).

#### **e. Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a blockade against China's expansions**

Pradeep (2019)<sup>14</sup> had mentioned about a ‘blind spot’ in the US - India military cooperation since India's independence 70 years ago. The ‘blind spot’ is the ANI - the neglected Indian islands in the Bay of Bengal that overlook the western entrance to the SOM. This ‘blind spot’ includes a key military demand for India as well as a proven capability for military purposes. Furthermore, it is a geographical location that is key to the whole Indo Pacific region, making it the lynchpin of military affairs in the Bay of Bengal (p. 3). Ranhotra (2021)<sup>19</sup> stated that India has the capability of blocking all supplies to China that enter the SOM, a key chokepoint linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans just south of the ANI. All-important Chinese goods, including petroleum bound for China, must transit the SOM. The ANI oversee this chokepoint, and India has always regarded the chain's several islands as immovable aircraft carriers that will play an important role during confrontations with China. As a piece of evidence, India has previously banned BRI due to China's participation in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which it claims breaches its sovereignty. India, like Japan, has stated its intention to oppose BRI. Given India's influence in South Asia, it can substantially delay or disrupt BRI-related projects in the area (Saimum, 2017)<sup>15</sup>.

Aside from economic concerns regarding SLOC and BRI impediments in the Indian Ocean, China is concerned about India's military capabilities in light of recent longrange missile and anti-missile tests, since India has said that its missiles are capable of reaching Beijing. This raises the prospect of future Indian hostilities toward China (Rosenfield, 2010)<sup>10</sup>. TFI Global stated in April that India and Japan are collaborating to weaponize these Andaman Islands. For the first time, India has enabled Japan to make a massive investment in the islands through an Official Development Aid (ODA) initiative, allowing Japan to invest approximately 4.02 billion Yen, or Rs. 265.00 crores, in the island chain. Japan's initiative would increase the islands' power supply while also emphasising the islands' key geopolitical location for an inclusive Indo Pacific (Ranhotra, 2021)<sup>19</sup>.

India, according to Pradeep (2019)<sup>14</sup>, has become the US's major defense partner within the past decade. This has been proved by the US National Defence Authorisation Act 2019 (US NDAA) which guided the US government to take all steps to enhance its military cooperation with India (p. 3). The Indian Ocean Region falls under the area of interest for the US INDOPACOM. To develop US INDOPACOM's operational capabilities in the IOR, the United States and India

are looking forward to work together to build and improve military infrastructure in the ANI. Under the total 10-year infrastructure development "roll-on" plan, India will be allowed to base more warships, aircraft, ballistic missiles, and infantry battalions in the ANI, which also includes an airfield area with a 10,000-foot runway on Kamorta Island.

## China's Reaction

### a. China's Strategic Cooperation

Beijing has legitimate interests in the IOR. China is a major power and trading country that relies heavily on Indian Ocean sea routes for fuel imports and cargo shipments. According to Medcalf (2016)<sup>21</sup>, due to the rational consideration of collaborating with China as a security provider of "public goods" in the Indian Ocean, China's now permanent presence in the Indian Ocean has been generally accepted by other countries. (p. 62). Harnessing China's growing expeditionary capabilities and network of access points and partnerships, as demonstrated in the counter-piracy coalition and the search for the missing airliner MH370, would allow for significant contributions to global activities other than war, such as disaster relief, preservation, search and rescue, as well as the maintenance of order at sea. The rising China's forceful regional expansion policy has resulted in a complicated power relationship and balancing and rebalancing power structure in the IP. It (the power structure) is shifting from unipolar to bipolar, and China is executing a profound economic-driven geopolitical expansion agenda through a massive infrastructure drive. According to traditional realist views, China is reluctant to allow India to rise as a force beyond South Asia. China has already formed alliances and collaborations with nations on India's periphery, most significantly Pakistan, and also Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and, most lately, Afghanistan (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010)<sup>22</sup>.



Map 1.3. China's "String of Pearls" strategy

Source: [www.indiatimes.com](http://www.indiatimes.com)

Beijing's long-term grand strategy that could expand Chinese influence not just in the Indian Ocean, but across the IP, is known as the “String of Pearls” strategy. The “String of Pearls” is a policy of geopolitical impact or military strategy driven by the Chinese government to establish a strong diplomatic connection through investments and port development projects at several checkpoints in the Indian Ocean with its littoral states, primarily in economic infrastructure projects, such as the Chinese seaport project at Gwadar seaport development in Pakistan, Maldives’s Ihavandhippolhu seaport, Sri Lanka’s Hambantota seaport, Bangladesh’s Chittagong seaport and different port development in Myanmar. All these seaports are strategically important locations in Indian Ocean Region because of their existence along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, that is part of the China’s BRI. Due to its strategic importance, these seaport could become a potential Chinese navy port in the future.

As seen by Medcalf (2016)<sup>21</sup>, despite Chinese President Xi Jinping's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road strategy began as an economic and trade project, it will surely feature a security dimension that validates China's Indo Pacific security footprint. (p. 62). According to Pehrson (2006)<sup>23</sup>, this would indirectly broaden the domain of Chinese military influence, countering other superpowers as well as establishing its maritime doctrine within that area. Consider the Pakistan-China joint venture project of Gwadar Port, which was funded by USD 198 million preferential credit from China while Pakistan raised USD 50 million. After completion, port administration was handed over to Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) International, which was awarded a 30-year contract. However, due to the operational loss, Port of Singapore Authority has exited the business and has been taken over by China using one of their Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) with the Chinese Overseas Port Holdings Company (COPHC). Because 60% of China's oil supply came from the Gulf, the COPHC has promised to invest another USD 750 million promptly to enhance its infrastructure (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Because of China's huge investment in various development projects via infrastructure ties and logistical assistance to shield its SLOC, the BRI must play a critical role in forging a solid relationship. This initiative is a plan to address three points of focus: economic, diplomatic, and geostrategic. Despite the fact that the BCIM Economic Corridor, one of the BRI's six corridors, has failed to owe to India's mistrust of China, Bangladesh has benefited from its participation. Bangladesh became a member of the BRI when Xi Jinping visited Dhaka in October 2016. China is reported to have invested USD 9.75 billion in Bangladesh infrastructure projects. In Bangladesh, nine projects are now under construction as part of the BRI, including the Padma Bridge Rail Link, the Bangabandhu tunnel across the Karnaphuli River, and the Dasher Kandi Sewerage Treatment Plant. Furthermore, Bangladesh avoided over-reliance on Chinese financing by using Indian and Japanese banking and construction expertise. If Pakistan is viewed as a textbook example of a debt problem, Bangladesh might be viewed as an example of achieving a “win-win situation” through the BRI (Rahman, 2021)<sup>24</sup>.

#### **b. China’s “soft power” policy towards India**

Foreign policy intellectuals and the political elite in China have long tried to persuade the world that Beijing's rising would be peaceful, that it will have no imperialist goals, and that it will be an unique great power (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. According to Cheng Ruisheng<sup>c</sup>, China values its relationship with India because it is the country's second-largest neighbour after Russia. Both China and India

---

Cheng Ruisheng, was a seasoned diplomat and a former Chinese ambassador to India from 19 Sep 1991 to 1 Nov 1994 during the China premiership of Li Peng. India Prime Minister during that period was Narasimha Rao.

are rapidly rising economically, although China's GDP growth rate is at least 1 to 2 percent greater than India's. (Ishak, 2011)<sup>25</sup>. Nonetheless, Chinese businesspeople believe that India's infrastructure is outdated. As a result, Beijing wishes to have a long-term, stable, and overall relationship with New Delhi, as both have a six-year strategic cooperative partnership with a clear policy – “China's policy toward India is one of friendship and cooperation”. However, Gokhale (2021)<sup>26</sup> claimed that, China has been the only major power that appeared to be opposed to India's rise. India has not been a central priority of Chinese foreign policy since it is not regarded as an independent player with great importance. (p. 9). He referred to former People's Republic of China Chairman, Mao Zedong<sup>d</sup> labelling India as a capitalist “lackey”, and former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as a “collaborator of imperialism”. Former Premier, Zhou Enlai<sup>e</sup> described India as a “bottomless pit” in dire need of international economic assistance.

Meanwhile, Deng Xiaopeng<sup>f</sup>'s foreign policy, based on the “*Tao Guang Yang Hui*” philosophy (Hide Brightness, Nourish Obscurity), proposed an inwardly oriented policy of strengthening domestic economic power and distancing China from international affairs (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010)<sup>22</sup>. Concurrent relationship issues, the new millennium saw the restoration of high-level diplomatic interactions. The year 2006 was designated as “India-China Friendship Year”, and it was marked by the exchange of diplomats and a year-long programme of cultural events. India and China held their first-ever bilateral military drills in December 2007. In January 2008, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reaffirmed, with Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, that their countries shared a “common vision for the twenty-first century”. According to Malone & Mukherjee (2010)<sup>22</sup>, India-China trade surpassed India-US trade in 2009, making China India's largest trading partner. However, friction continue to hamper the relationship, particularly as it relates to the borderline issue (p. 144).

When Xi Jinping declared the Indian Ocean Region a priority for Chinese foreign policy, he saw it as evidence of China's transition from a regional to global power. As a result, one important Chinese goal was to create an “area of shared security” inside the outer region. Ruisheng perceived China was trapped in South Asia, with India cautiously observing China's policy of building unilateral and concurrent connections with her neighbours. China was dissatisfied

---

Mao Zedong (1893-1976) was a founder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and played a significant role in establishing the Red Army. He became the CCP Chairman in 1945. Following the PRC (People's Republic of China) establishment in 1949, he advocated many political initiatives that transformed China namely, “Great Leap Forward” - a self-reliant campaign in rural development, severed diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s and initiated the 1966's “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”.

Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) was a prominent and respected leaders of CCP that came from an upperclass family. He was in charge of the labour union activity in Shanghai that involved with planning the “Nanchang Uprising” against Nationalist's Chiang Kaishek in Apr 1927. Upon the establishment of PRC in 1949 he became the premier of Government Affairs and Foreign Minister. Zhou played a critical role in rebuilding political institution and mediator to numerous political crises. He was a strong advocate of China modernization where his policy of “Four Modernizations” (industry, agriculture, defence and science & technology) had been fully endorsed by new CCP leadership after his demised on January 8, 1976.

Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) was among the first generations of CCP leaders. He held several prominent positions in the government before being prosecuted and prisoned in 1966 during the Mao's Cultural Revolution. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, he rised as China premier that set China back on the course to economic development based on Zhou's “Four Modernizations” policy.

because India saw their regional participation as a zero-sum game, whereas China was willing to endure and cooperate within India's established dominance (Ishak, 2011)<sup>25</sup>. China concluded that under Modi, India was moving more deliberately toward America. Modi's strategy was the unspoken message intended to challenge China on both a regional and global scale. China believes it has sought to accommodate India on the BRI plan by offering the “China and India Plus One” structure. However, India has failed to recognise the significance of China's Maritime Silk Road (Gokhale, 2021)<sup>26</sup>. The Sino-Indian relationship, however, remained volatile, subject to temporal swings in global and bilateral environments, as well as domestic politics. India's focus on the maritime region of the Indian Ocean was also noted as the Modi government's intention to create an India-led maritime defense chain in the Indian Ocean while pivoting to the Pacific by shifting from policies of Look East to Act East (Gokhale, 2021)<sup>26</sup>.

### c. China's “hard power” –Military bases abroad

The territorial expansion policy is nothing new to China. It was primarily based on the continent extensions for decades. However, according to Ji (2008)<sup>27</sup>, China has adopted an open-up economy policy and redefined its geostrategic policy since 1980 to include naval strategy, with the aim to make the PLAN a powerful navy and acquire absolute control over the sea by 2050. According to McDevitt (2016)<sup>28</sup>, the aim of achieving command of the sea is stated clearly in the China Defense White Paper 2004. While continuing to prioritise Army construction, the PLA prioritises Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery force development to achieve balanced development of the combat force structure and strengthen capabilities for winning both command of the sea and command of the air, as well as conducting strategic counter-attacks (p. 3). Meanwhile, the 2015 Chinese Defense White Paper clearly stated that the PLAN will progressively move its priority from “offshore waters defence” to the combination of “offshore waters defence” and “open seas protection”, and develop a combined, multi-functional, and efficient marine combat force structure. (p. 1). According to Kaul (2015)<sup>1</sup>, China's new “far sea defence”<sup>g</sup> navy programme intends to provide Beijing the ability to project power in crucial oceanic areas, most notably the Indian Ocean. (p. 129).

Rising competition between India and China led to increasingly difficult ties between the two countries, which were quickly strained in resolving a crucial irritant: the SinoIndian boundary, which was stirred up by the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010)<sup>22</sup>. As China emerges as a significant global power, it will increase its military footprint worldwide, much like the US, which has bases all over the world. In view of China's recent incursions into the IOR, the ANI has been regarded as India's critical military asset<sup>h</sup>. They frequently exercised as natural fortifications against approaching enemy maritime assets, as well as military warning and surveillance post (Pranay, 2017)<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>g</sup> Beijing's "far seas" ambitions belief that it must be able to secure its crucial water routes as well as its numerous political and economic foreign entities, for instance, the millions of Chinese nationals who work or travel abroad (McDevitt, 2016).

Since the formation of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) at Port Blair in 2001, its use and function in Indian national strategy has been shifting mainly to safeguard India's marine trade route through the IOR, near the Straits of Malacca as well as to preserve its maritime dominance in the region.



Picture 1.1. Chinese development of allegedly military base at Kennan Reef in the disputed Spratly Islands.

Source: Getty Images (2018)<sup>30</sup>

To counter India's defensive island chain of Andaman and Nicobar, China is utilising the SCS as the heart of its maritime plan and strategy to control this major sea checkpoint towards reaching the IP. The rapid expansion of the PLAN and the development of artificial island strongholds and other military facilities in the SCS have brought the Chinese 600-900 nautical miles closer to the ANI. (Singh & Shukla, 2019)<sup>31</sup> China claims practically the whole maritime zone in this region, including the Spratly, Pratas, and Paracel Islands – as defined by the nine-dash line<sup>1</sup>. In this regard, the facilities on the Spratly artificial island's Oceanic Rescue Centre (Picture 1.1) were constructed as such, so that it would suit to host any massive military logistic base support for PLAN operation in the SCS (p. 214).



(a) Fierry Cross Reef

(b) Subi Reef

Picture 1.2. Artificial island (a) and (b) in the disputed Spratly Islands

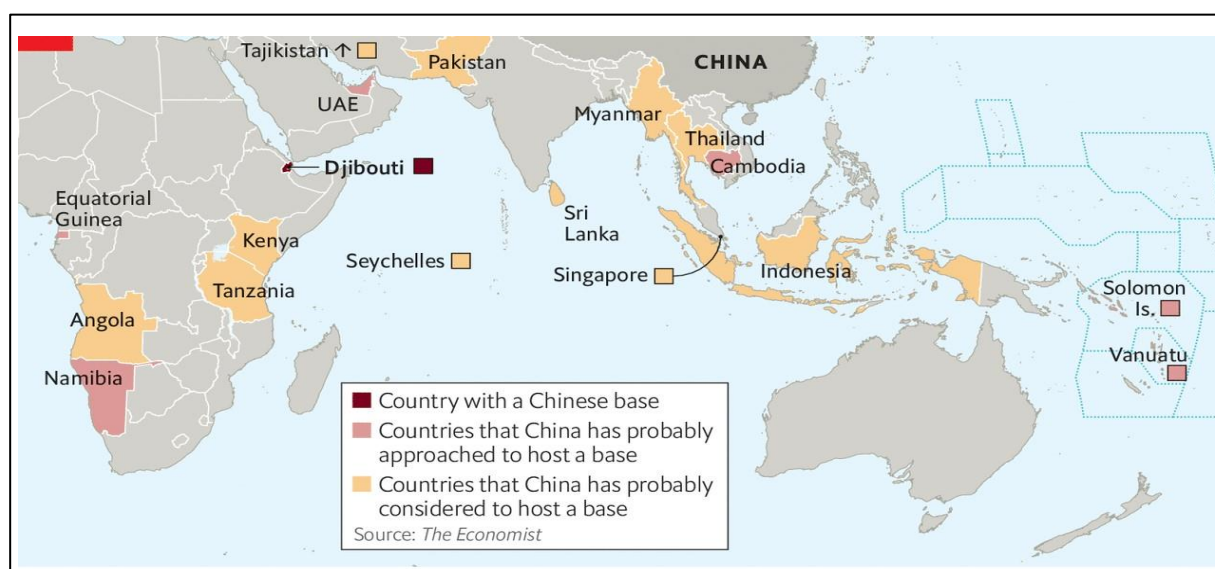
Source: <https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/china/>(2020)

The US Indo-Pacific Commander (INDO-PACOM) Adm. John C. Aquilino said China has fully militarized at least three artificial islands it built in the SCS. It matters the most especially when China's territorial claims over the SCS have been a frequent source of tension with the other claimant countries — Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam (Shapero, 2022)<sup>32</sup>. According to US military intelligence sources, China had armed the artificial island of

Although the PRC's nine-dash line or "U-Shaped Line" is not clear and it has no legal base particularly it violates the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which had approved by 160 countries including China.

Fiery Cross Reef and Subi Reef with military weapons namely; anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment as well as airstrips for fighter jets (as shown in Picture 1.2). Meanwhile, President Xi Jinping's previous statement denied that China would transform the artificial islands into military bases, according to the Associated Press (AP).

China is acting oppositely when it comes to the issues of claiming its self-claimed ownership of territorial water in the East China Sea (ECS) and SCS. For instance, disputes in the East China Sea over contested maritime borders with Japan have resulted in the ramming of Japanese boats by Chinese ships, followed by a Chinese embargo on rare earth material shipments to Japan. The Chinese also have been using force to impose maritime border claims in the Philippines. Vietnam has been subjected to Chinese military action over the disputed Parcel Islands several times (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. In its interactions with South Korea and Taiwan, China takes a similar “hard power” approach to maritime territorial conflicts. It has also asserted that China has “indisputable sovereignty” over the SCS and its islands and does not wish for other nations to become engaged in the conflict. China expects that foreign countries would leave it to settle the issue on a bilateral basis.

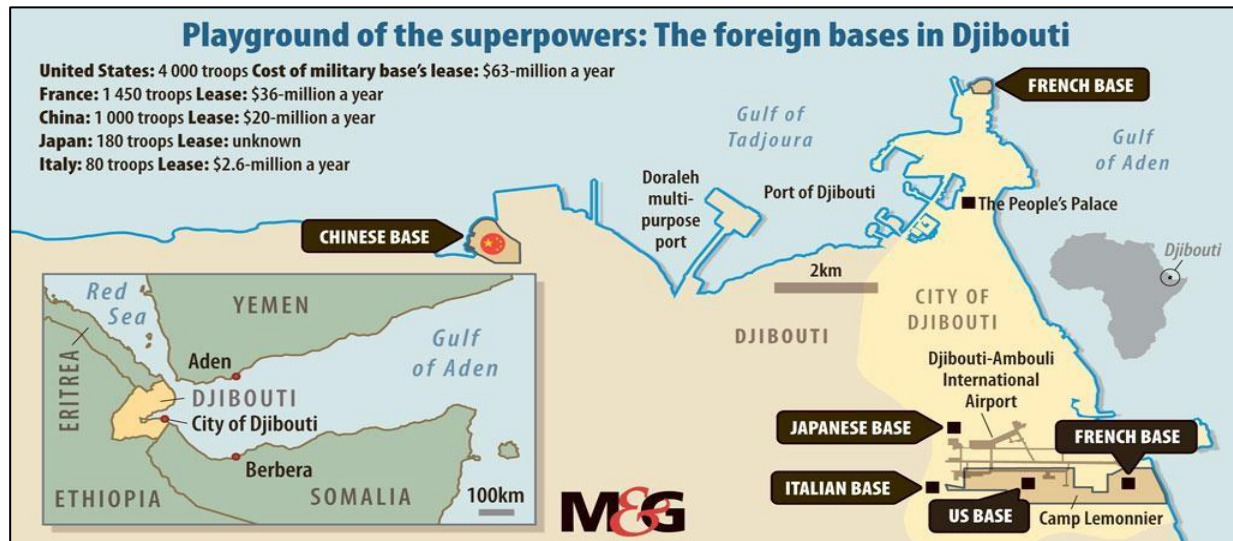


Map 1.4. China's military base abroad

Source: <https://www.economist.com/china/2022/05/05/china-wants-to-increase-itsmilitary-presence-abroad> (2022)

As stated by Medcalf (2016)<sup>21</sup>, China will have a challenging time imposing unilateral influence in the Indian Ocean, whether through military projection or minimally consultative infrastructure projects in the absence of reliable allies (p. 65). In a recent move, China confirmed the establishment of its first foreign military base in Seychelles to “seek supplies and recuperate” facilities for its fleet (as shown in Map 4.2). The Seychelles government backed up its decision by claiming that it had welcomed China to establish a military facility off its coast to counter the piracy threat. Beijing has dismissed the issue by addressing that it is common global practice for naval ships to resupply at the nearest port of a neighbouring state during longdistance deployments. (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.





Map 1.5. China's military base in Djibouti

Source: <https://africachinareporting.com/djiboutis-greatest-threat-may-come-from-within/> (2018)

China had decided to establish its first permanent naval base in the Middle East and North Africa area, in Djibouti as shown in Map 1.5 above. Due to its strategic geopolitics, few nations are more strategically quintessential than Djibouti. It is located on the Bab-el-Mandeb, the Red Sea's narrowest point. This is one of the world's busiest maritime channels, connecting Asia to Europe and serving as a superpower playground for the U. S., France, Japan, and Italy. (Allison, 2018). Beijing has been cautious not to refer to its facility in Djibouti as a “military” or “naval” base, instead using the terms “support facilities” or “logistical facilities” (Chaziza, 2018)<sup>33</sup>. Malone & Mukherjee (2010)<sup>22</sup> stated that China does not appear to be seriously threatened by India, although India exhibits considerable unease in the face of Chinese economic success and military development at times. Both have nuclear weapons, rising military budgets, and enormous reserves of manpower, and appear to be competing for dominance in the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, Africa, Central Asia, and East Asia (p. 137). But there should be no doubt that China's presence in the Indian Ocean has grown and will likely grow in the future. This is the initial expression of China's “String of Pearls” policy. The second is the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, which has been taken over by the Chinese after Singapore Ports decided to leave (Kaul, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

## Analysis

China factors might be the main push factors for India to compete economically and security. India has to make immediate progress because failure to do so could cost its supremacy in the Indian Ocean Region as the role may be overtaken by China. One way of doing it is through the modernization of military capability, technology and weaponry to secure its territory and strategic interest. By modernizing its defence assets in the ANI, India is projecting to China and the rest of the world that its territorial waters were not a place to play around and enter at will without the owner's prior permission. India has spent the last five to ten years focusing on developing relations with the United States, Japan, Australia, Southeast Asia, as well as South Korea. India has also recently increased its emphasis on establishing links with the island states in the Indian Ocean. As

part of these efforts, Indian navy ships are often seen patrolling the territorial seas of Seychelles to fill a vacuum in the latter's capabilities. In addition, India and the Maldives have also established a bilateral defence agreement. To face an incoming threat, it was a forward-looking move by India to establish a good connection with its strategic alliances. Indirectly, India is sending a message that it intends to mark its presence and projects its supremacy over the IOR, by taking care of its own backyard.

India's involvement in the Indo Pacific pact known as the Quad is clearly showing India's effort to be an important player in the Indo Pacific domain. Realizing the need to balance the forces among the Quad members, India is preparing its navies with the latest technology and weaponry capabilities. The impacts of crime activities and piracy in Straits of Malacca also affect the stability of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, due to the proximity of Andaman and Nicobar Island with the straits. Being one of the most critical chokepoints of the world and its busy traffics of merchant ships, Straits of Malacca has attracted lots of illegal activities and crimes due to the scattering of islands that provided safe haven to these pirates and criminal offenders. Thanks to the joint patrolling efforts by Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand navies, this criminal activity was successfully inhibited. India realized the need to ensure security in the Indian Ocean Region in order to boost the maritime trade volume. For the time being, approximately 50% of the world's container traffic and 70% of petroleum-based products are being traded through the SLOC. Being in the centre of the main maritime trade, India's ANI are the key point of security in the region. It contains four critical trade crossings that could generate income for India if exploited properly. The geostrategic of ANI is being taken advantage of by foreign navies to conduct military exercises here. Furthermore, these archipelagos could play an important role as India's stronghold for defence as well as the security hub of the whole region.

Meanwhile, China's interest in Indian Ocean Region can no longer be denied, through their relationship with India's neighbouring countries; Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. It is like pushing India into a corner. But India is not without a fight, by modernizing its military and reaching out for strategic alliance primarily with the US, China's archrival. It is seen as a counterbalance measure taken by India to restrain China's military presence in the Bay of Bengal (Myanmar) and the Indian Ocean. By doing so it can also balance its economic dominance and protects its own economic growth from a total monopoly from China. China's legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean Region are due to its nature as a major power and a trading country that is dependent on Indian Ocean sea routes for fuel imports and cargo shipments from Africa and the Middle East. Its expansion strategy in Middle Asia is mainly driven by economic strategy through numerous infrastructure projects as well as funding assistance to India's neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. In the midst of Sino-Indian relationship struggles and rivalry, China is exerting the "String of Pearls" strategy realisation of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road through the development of strategic deep-sea ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

China's rise in dominating the international economic sector is perceived as a peaceful one. Chinese businesspeople wished to have a long-term, stable relationship with India, as its foreign policy clearly stated "China's policy toward India is one of friendship and cooperation". Earlier Chinese policy does not view India as an independent player with great importance. But current Chinese policy in the new millennium acknowledged India as China's largest trading partner as well as restoration of diplomatic confidence in both countries. Nevertheless, the Sino-Indian

borderline dispute remains the main friction that hampers further advancement in China and India relationship.

China's emergence as a significant global power was determined in the Chinese Defense White Paper which proposes the need for military bases abroad to support their policy of territorial expansion oversea. Among the strategies includes the aim to make the PLAN a powerful blue-water navy acquiring absolute control over the sea by 2050. The Chinese navy's new "far sea defence" programme aims to provide Beijing with the capacity to project force in critical oceanic areas, most notably the Indian Ocean. Realizing that China is nearing its own water, India is using the ANI as an island chain defence against China's presence in the Indian Ocean Region which is already overwhelming. China responds by fortifying its artificial islands in the contested area of SCS with military instalments such as long-range weaponry, radar and logistic facilities to support a strategic forward base in case of future conflict with India.

## **Conclusion**

The realisation of the BRI strategy is based on the Rimland concept – to control the coastal area where the population is dense, and where all the economic activities are based. Achieving this requires sea supremacy to protect China's interests. BRI is important to China not only as it symbolizes a historical value. Due to increasing demand for energy, China is expanding its economic base in Bay of Bengal with investment to infrastructure projects in the littoral states (i.e. Bangladesh) to further secure its maritime trading route or SLOC. BRI is seen as a strategy to ensure China's uninterrupted supply of energy imports. China's investment in BRI total up to USD 4 trillion shows China seriousness in succeeding this strategy.

Meanwhile, ANI is a potential threat to China because it strategically sits in between its important SLOC and Straits of Malacca chokepoint. India is deeply concerned about the Chinese blue-water navy boats that are operating in its waters. India's reason for modernizing its military capabilities in its territorial waters is a measure taken to contain China's expansion in the Indian Ocean. Diplomatic ties between India and China is at an all-time low. There is still no concrete solution regarding this border issue and it caused the increment in the security personnel of both sides being stationed at the border - land and sea. In a reaction of this situation, India is looking forward to reduce its economic dependency on China. Furthermore, India is trying to eradicate China's influence in Indian Ocean Region through establishment of IPEF to strengthen ties among Quad members as well as to counterbalance China's "Strings of Pearls" or an "encirclement policy" as seen by the Indians.

China is being monitored by India who perceives China expanding interest and activity in Indian Ocean as invading its own backyard. Meanwhile China is concerned about India strengthening its military elements as a potential threat to its economic interest. Among India's objectives as Quad members is to enhance freedom of navigation and tightening maritime security in the Indo Pacific and IOR. Nevertheless Quad posed a significant threat to China due to US involvement in it. In a direct response to this, China is increasing its PLAN's blue-water capabilities to protect its strategic SLOC to the Persian Gulf as its energy imports mainly depend on these maritime routes. China's navy will progressively continue its operations in the Indian Ocean with the assistance of neighbouring nations such as Pakistan and Myanmar.

It can be stated that Beijing structured its Indian Ocean Region policy to serve the three border interests of commercial, diplomatic, and geostrategic significance. China's reaction toward India's planning to modernize its military in ANI was merely an act to protect its interest in SLOC in the Indian Ocean as a large portion of its imports of energy resources, raw materials, and trade transportation from the Middle East transit through the Indian Ocean and SOM. It would be China's top priority to realize the grand strategy of BRI through the implementation of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the "String of Pearls" strategy. Political/foreign policy disputes mixed with military episodes are more likely to materialise in modern war; a succession of political events with military elements. Force, rather than total military victory, is more likely to facilitate political negotiations, even though political initiatives without a military anvil are unlikely to succeed.

## References

1. Kaul, S. (2015). *Andaman and Nicobar Islands: India's untapped strategic assets* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). Pentagon Press.
2. Rajasekaran, & Kannan, R. (2012). Problems and prospects of island tourism industry in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *International Journal of Scientific Research*, 3(6), 485–487. <https://doi.org/10.15373/22778179/june2014/189>
3. Ministry of Home Affairs India. (2011). *Census of India 2011: Andaman & Nicobar Islands*. <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/41312>
4. Bandoopathyay, P. C., & Carter, A. (2017). Introduction to the geography and geomorphology of the Andaman-Nicobar Islands. *Geological Society Memoir*, 47(1), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.1144/M47.2>
5. Das, P. (2011). Securing the Andaman and Nicobar islands. *Strategic Analysis*, 35(3), 465–478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2011.559988>
6. Kumar, P. (2020). A Geopolitical Study of the Indo-Pacific through the Theories of Ancient East and Modern West. *The Journal of Society and Media*, 4(1), 91-132. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v4n1.p91-132>
7. Hari, S. (2020). Major Research Project Report: A study of the strategic and economic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *Major Research Project*, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University.
8. Singh, S. (2014). Indo-Pacific: A Construct for peace and stability. *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, 9(2), 100–105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45341917>
9. Chinoy, S. R. (2020). Time to leverage the strategic potential of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. *MP-IDSA Policy Brief*, 11.
10. Rosenfield, J. M. (2010). *Roundtable report: Exploring the China-India relationship*. CNA China Studies website: <https://www.cna.org/reports/2010/D0023594.A1.pdf> .
11. Pardesi, M. S. (2021). Explaining the asymmetry in the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 75(3), 341–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2021.1893267>
12. Malik, J. M. (1995). China-India Relations in the Post-Soviet Era: The Continuing Rivalry. *The China Quarterly*, 142, 317-355. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000034962>
13. Mukherjee, A., & C Raja, M. (2016). *India's naval strategy and Asian security*. Routledge.
14. Pradeep, R. (2019). The great wall of Andaman and Nicobar Islands – US INDOPACOM gateway to IOR. *Master Thesis*, Naval War College Newport.

15. Saimum, R. (2017, November 1<sup>st</sup>). What one belt one road means for Bangladesh. *Dhaka Tribune*, <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/opinion/oped/2017/10/31/one-belt-one-road-means-bangladesh>
16. The Times of India (2020, June 25). *Line of Actual Control face-off: Diplomatic talks on, but government sceptical*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/diplomatic-talks-on-but-government-sceptical-of-china/articleshow/76600644.cms>
17. Zongyi, L. (2022, June 5). To improve China-India relations, the ball is in India's court. *Global Times*, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1267283.shtml>
18. Ranhotra, S. S. (2021, October 11). India prepares Andaman and Nicobar islands for war with China as the PLA flexes its muscles on Indo-Tibet border. *TFI Post.com*, <https://tfipost.com/2021/10/india-prepares-andaman-and-nicobar-islands-for-war-with-china-as-the-pla-flexes-its-muscles-on-indo-tibet-border/> Romana, F., Shahid Hussain, B., & Shakeel, A. (2020). India's military procurement programs & economic capacity: Compatibility & pragmatism. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies*, 6(1), 135–164. <https://doi.org/10.26710/jbsee.v6i1.1033>
19. Shashank, J. (2016). A survey of India's strategic environment. *Asian Affairs*, 47(2), 234–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2016.1170988>
20. Medcalf, R. (2016). The western Indo-Pacific: India, China, and the terms of engagement. *Asia Policy*, 22(1), 61–67. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2016.0038>
21. Malone, D. M., & Mukherjee, R. (2010). India and China: Conflict and cooperation. *Survival*, 52(1), 137–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396331003612513>
22. Rahman, S. A. (2021, November 9). The BRI in Bangladesh: 'win-win' or a 'debt trap'? *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/the-bri-in-bangladesh-win-win-or-a-debt-trap/>
23. Ishak, D. (2011). Reflections from China: an interview with Cheng Ruisheng. *Journal of International Affairs*, 64(2). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A254825845/AONE?u=anon~d2defbb2&sid=googleScholar&xid=c31cc5b9>
24. Gokhale, V. (2021). *The Road from Galwan: The Future of India-China Relations* (Issue March). <https://carnegieendowment.org/>
25. McDevitt, M. (2016, April). *China's far sea's navy: The implications of the "open seas protection" mission*. "China as a Maritime Power" Conference 2016, Arlington, Virginia. [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/china-farseas-navy.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/china-farseas-navy.pdf)
26. Pranay, V. (2017). *Strategic salience of Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Economic and military dimensions*. National Maritime Foundation website: <https://maritimeindia.org/strategic-salience-of-andaman-and-nicobar-islandseconomic-and-military-dimensions/>
27. Singh, A. K., & Shukla, R. (2019). *Military Strategy for India in the 21st Century*. KW Publishers Pt Ltd.
28. Shapero, J. (Mar 21, 2022). Report: U.S. admiral says China has fully militarized three islands in South China Sea. *Axios.com*, <https://www.axios.com/2022/03/20/china-fully-militarized-three-islandssouth-china-sea>
29. Chaziza, M. (2018). China's military base in Djibouti. *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* (Issue 153). [www.besacenter.org](http://www.besacenter.org)