

GREAT POWERS MARITIME INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN'S SECURITY

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*If the world were an egg, Hormuz would be its yolk; Whoever
is lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice*

— **Felipe Fernandez-Armesto**

Introduction

This paper reviews Sino-US offshore balancing of maritime interests as an instance of great power politics in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ It relies on the realist perspective to argue that clash or overlap of Sino-US maritime interests carries an immense impact on Pakistan's security interests. The argument is based on historical analogy holding that great powers' involvement has been an experience of expediency, opportunism and short-term gain in South Asia which the strong have imposed on the weak. This paper is divided into three sections: 1) Sino-US maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean; 2) Sino-US convergence and divergence of interests and; 3) Implications for Pakistan's maritime security.

Sino-US maritime strategy in the Indian ocean

This section discusses Sino-US and the US' maritime interests and strategy in the Indian Ocean region. First used by Karl Haushofer as *Indopazifischen Raum* in the 1920s, the term Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian Ocean, Western Pacific region, and South China Sea as a single strategic concept.² According to Ashley Tellis, both politics and economics join to make a fantastical integration of these two ocean spaces possible.³ The region, in

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conceptual and dialectical frameworks, constitutes the fulcrum of a global geopolitics — an area of global re-balancing of strategic interests.⁴ According to Robert Kaplan, the greatest drama of the 21st century is that the US — as hegemon of the western hemisphere — would prevent the rise of rival hegemon in the eastern hemisphere.⁵ He also asserts that the fight for democracy, energy independence and religious freedom would either be lost or won in the Indian Ocean.⁶ Similarly, John Mearsheimer regards China's peaceful rise thesis to be based on incorrect historical analogy. According to him, despite high claims, states are always doubtful about one another's intentions — whether they are revisionist or status quo powers. Moreover, it is equally difficult to distinguish between a state's offensive and defensive military capabilities. Mearsheimer further maintains that China would considerably increase its offensive military power by 2030. Consequently, according to him, as the Sino-US power asymmetry shrinks, the US' maintained strategic primacy in the Asia-Pacific region since 1945 would diminish.⁷ Interestingly, the present Indian Ocean's security architecture is marked with partnership alliances.⁸ If history remains a guide for the future, important lessons could be drawn from China's naval expansion in the Indo-Pacific region.

China's naval projection, at the heyday of Qing dynasty (1644–1912), stretched not far beyond the 'Cape of Good Hope'. Contradicting imperial naval legacy, China's naval growth has drawn attention to Beijing's maritime strategy.⁹ As far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, China has already acquired off the shore operational capability. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) extends its reach as far as the Gulf of Aden and the shores of Libya with Chinese warships making routine port calls in the Middle East. China aspires to build blue water navy which is supported through its operational long-term presence in the Indian Ocean. Simultaneously, China has also increased its participation in multilateral institutions.¹⁰ Its participation in the UN peacekeeping, international disaster relief, counter-terrorism and counter-piracy missions grant a soft image to Beijing's international policy stance, winning China diplomatic favours from several African and Asian states.¹¹

However, "the IMF, using the purchasing power parity (PPP) methodology, announced that China had become the largest world economy. By the end of 2014, its PPP-based national product was estimated at \$18.96 trillion, 4.6 per cent higher than the US' \$18.12 trillion. This gap is likely to increase to 25.3 per cent by 2020".¹² China's neighbours increasingly view Beijing's naval projection as a formidable offensive force. Equally interesting to study is the Sino-US competing maritime dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. Washington has considered Beijing's naval modernization as a potential threat to stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Chinese scholars, however, defend Chinese strategy of naval expansion, 'as deriving out of China's trade interests requiring maintenance of blue water navy in the High Seas and not due to any mala-fide intentions of rivalry with the US'.¹³ As China builds a dominant naval position, its ambitions increasingly clash with those of the US.¹⁴ PLAN's modernization allows Beijing enough military means to lay claim on the Yellow Sea, East China and South China Sea, which supports China's verbal rhetoric.

The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, was the first US official to express concern about China as a potential source of instability in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵ In March 2010, Chinese officials warned the US not to interfere in the South China Sea, imposing a no-fly zone in 2013. On 8 April 2014, Chuck Hagel, the US former Defence Secretary, while addressing a press conference on US-China's defence summit, dismissed Beijing's unilateral establishment of a no-fly zone over the disputed islands in South China Sea.¹⁶ Hagel invoked the US defence treaty obligations to defend allies locked in disputes with Beijing. In a press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shiuzo Abe on 24 April 2014, the US President Barack Obama reiterated American commitment to provide an absolute security to Japan. The US President declared that Article V of US-Japan's defence treaty committed the US to defend all territories under Tokyo's administration, including the Senkaku islands, dismissing unilateral change.¹⁷ Reiterating Beijing's 'indisputable sovereignty' over the islands, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, warned that the US-Japan alliance should be careful not to impinge on China's territorial rights.¹⁸ The statement advised the US 'to respect facts, speak and act cautiously, without taking sides on territory and sovereignty issues and play a constructive role towards regional peace and stability.'¹⁹

China's latest move of land reclamation in May 2015 has provoked a tough US response. The new US Defence Secretary, Ashton Carter, speaking at Honolulu, Hawaii, demanded China's 'immediate and lasting halt to land reclamation'.²⁰ He declared that the US intended to remain 'the principal security power in the Asia-Pacific for decades to come.'²¹ Carter threatened to deploy the US warships and surveillance aircraft within 12 nautical miles of Chinese maritime claim asserting the US will 'to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows.'²² Asserting Beijing's exclusive sovereignty, Chang Wanquan, the Chinese defence minister, warned the US not to support Tokyo and the Philippines.²³ The Chinese minister expressed Beijing's resolve to use force, if needed, with the incredible will of its military to assemble as soon as summoned, fight any battle and win.²⁴ However, despite Chinese concerns, on 3 June 2015 Carter took a ten-day tour to partner nations to affirm the US commitment to Asia-Pacific region.

Chinese leaders have defended the Chinese naval expansion as being defensively oriented, terming it 'Far Sea Defence,' holding that the Korean peninsula, Japan, Taiwan, Philippines and Vietnam are China's 'First Island Chain of Defence' in the Western Pacific. Beijing's 'Second Island Chain of Defence' comprises archipelago extension of Guam and Northern Mariana Islands.²⁵ Restricted currently to coastal periphery, China has built offshore oceanic capability with blue water navy being beyond its territorial periphery.²⁶ However, recently in July 2015, Zhou Bo, an Honorary Fellow at the *PLA Academy of Military Science*, pointed out in an article that:

Contrary to the fears about China's maritime expansion, the facts on the ground point elsewhere. These 'bases' are found nowhere in the Indian Ocean. The most telling evidence is that the PLA Navy has been conducting counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of the Aden

for five years without any base of its own. Access, rather than bases, is what the Chinese Navy is really interested in the Indian Ocean.²⁷

China has sought naval expansion in two key directions. First, beyond the 'First Island Chain' referred to as Washington's 'Forward Defence Perimeter', generally referred to as the 'US great wall in reverse'. Coined by Dean Acheson and Douglas MacArthur in the 1950s, the term implies Japan, Taiwan, Philippines and the islands in between. The US forward defence deployment along the peripheral region has provided for preservation of maritime hegemony in the Asia-Pacific. In 2010, Beijing deployed North and East Sea Fleets through and beyond the 'First Island Chain', and further between the Japanese islands of Okinawa and Miyako in June 2011. China's naval expansion has sought a breakthrough into the US protective shield in order to alter the balance of power which would make the US position unsustainable in the long run.²⁸ Naval deployment by China led to the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) officials complain about Beijing's restriction of international, in particular, the US maritime and air activities in the near seas. As evidence for the unfolding maritime rivalry, Chinese ships, operating in international waters, 75 miles south of China's new Yalong Bay submarine base on Hainan islands, surrounded the 'USS Impeccable' on 8 March 2009.²⁹ China's current policy aims at holding down strategic costs for itself while increasing it for rivals in the region.

The 'Second Island Chain' comprises another geopolitical zone of Sino-US competition in the Western Pacific.³⁰ China plans to stretch its naval influence beyond the Second Island Chain — the Japanese-held Bonin Islands, the US-held Northern Marianas, Guam, Palau and the Carolinas. Its naval submarines creep as far as the waters off Guam — the bastion of the US naval power in Asia-Pacific — making it wary of Beijing's growing naval capabilities, while creating a long-term strategic challenge for the US.³¹ China may block access to Korea, Japan and the Philippines, incapacitating the US to intervene in the South China Sea.³²

Chinese maritime strategy portrays Mearsheimer's offensive positionalist strategy i.e. minimizing gaps in favour of one's own, while increasing gaps with respect to the adversary. China's maritime strategy can be viewed from neo-structural realism that can be interpreted as a mark of offensive positionalism. China's indigenous compulsion of gaining energy security and exogenous compulsion of acquiring security underlie the Chinese drive for naval modernization.

Nuclear-powered submarines

China's naval modernization aims to achieve superiority in maritime strategic nuclear forces. The shift in the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific occurs on account of China's key naval developments: nuclear-powered submarine, missile warships and Supersonic Maritime Strike Aircrafts. China's 'Defence White Paper' has stated that PLAN enhances its nuclear counterattack capability by the introduction of DF-31 and DF-31A road mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and the JL-2 Submarine-Launched

Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) missiles, launched from nuclear-powered submarine — SSBNs.³³ China has built SSBNs, Type 094, or *Jin* class with improved missile launch, 7,200 miles target capability.³⁴ Although, scholars invoke prestige and inter-service politics as motivational factors for submarine development, yet *Jin* class-submarines have enhanced China's capacity to deter third party intervention in a regional conflict. The US Office of Naval Intelligence has referred this development as China's Anti Access/Area Denial or A2/AD capability.³⁵ In addition, improved submarine force would allow China to expand patrol capability in the Western Pacific. China's first-generation Type 092 Xia SSBN is equipped with short-range 1,770 miles JL-1 SLBMs, incapable of conducting an extended patrol.³⁶

The development of the credible second strike nuclear capability depends on reducing the probability of detection, enhanced naval sea training and nuclear command and control. *Jin* class JL-2 submarines can evade the US missile defence interception, if launched from certain patrol areas of operation. Ambiguity persists regarding the number of SSBNs China plans to build, their bastions for deployment, command and control in case of crisis and instability.³⁷ However, the US Office of Naval Intelligence and Quadrennial Defence Review state that China plans to build a fleet of five *Jin* class SSBNs to provide for a near continuous presence at sea, preventing surveillance of area of operations through deployment at Xiaopingdao, Huludao and Yalong Bay.³⁸

Supersonic Missile Aircrafts and ASBM

The US forward defence strategy over the past years rested successfully on three carrier task forces positioned in the Western Pacific.³⁹ China's Naval modernization strains the US to maintain 11 to 12 large-deck nuclear-powered carriers for maritime stability. China's development of long range supersonic maritime attack aircraft supported by nuclear-powered submarines neutralizes much of the US Fleet carriers and expeditionary strike groups' naval capability. Moreover, China's development of the Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBMs) would be the ultimate naval weaponry which could potentially change the strategic equation.⁴⁰

So far, China has relied on Land-Based Strategic Missiles and SLBMs for nuclear deterrence. However, the US intelligence sources state that Beijing possesses 1500 kilo metre plus range DF-21/CSS-5 solid propellant Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM).⁴¹ China plans to develop Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBMs), making it a high priority for its military 'Research and Development programme'.⁴² ASBMs could hold the US carrier strike groups at risk in the Western Pacific. It seeks to achieve the kill chain of detection, tracking, and guidance including pinpoint accuracy necessary to hit a fast moving target. This requires a prescribed angle of impact to break in a carrier's protective covering or armour.⁴³ An ASBM with a nuclear warhead solves the accuracy problem. The US Navy implements a strategy of Air and Sea Battle concept to create deterrence. The US aircraft carrier striking forces are ever ready to respond to Chinese aggressive actions against allies in the region.⁴⁴ Pivot Asia entails the US naval reinforcement to defend allies by encircling

China along the eastern and southern flanks of the 'First Island Chain' periphery. Moving in Central Command (CENTCOM) from Iraq and Afghanistan in addition to the Pacific Command (PACOM),⁴⁵ the US has positioned combat ships at Singapore, the Bay of Bengal in eastern Indian Ocean, and northeast into the South China Sea. It patrols Seventh Fleet to show resilience to China in its support of allies in the region.⁴⁶

In order to contain China, the US has tried to build a strategic ring, mainly by the expansion of its defence treaties which always remained a part of the Indo-Pacific war plan. Western scholars have cited historical evidence to guard allies against Beijing's coercive tactics.⁴⁷ The US renews defence treaties with allies for land operations in the region, which Beijing has interpreted as a strategic ring of encirclement.⁴⁸ Based at Hawaii, the US Pacific Command monitors the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁹ The US plans to shift 60 additional naval fleets and six more aircraft carriers to the region.⁵⁰ For example, at the strategic juncture of the Indo-Pacific nexus — the South China Sea, Strait of Malacca, and the Bay of Bengal, the US projects power at Australia's north-western coast. The US has expanded its joint naval exercises with Japan and the Vietnamese navy, the Obama administration has sold arms to the Philippines and built defence ties with India, Singapore, Indonesia and New Zealand.⁵¹

Sino-US convergence and divergence of interests

The contours of Sino-US power competition in the Indo-Pacific relate to the South China Sea territorial disputes and the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs). Extending in between the Strait of Malacca in the Southwest to the Strait of Taiwan in the Northeast, the South China Sea comprises 250 small islands spreading over an area of two square miles, which are part of either the Paracel or Spratly Islands.⁵² The contested region includes:

- East China Sea archipelago atolls/extensions between China and Japan on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Japan refers to these islands as Senkaku and China as Diaoyu.⁵³
- South China Sea claims on the Spratly Islands between China and the Archipelago states of Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia.

The South China Sea has become a bone of contention between the littoral states, China and the US.⁵⁴ In a bid to prevent China's expansion of influence, the US global defence strategy seeks to control the resources of the South and East China Seas. The quest for energy security underlies competing claims on hydrocarbon and mineral reserves of the disputed islands' continental shelves.⁵⁵ Economic interests lead to the construction of infrastructure facilities increasing regional anxieties.⁵⁶ China's claim extends to Senkaku and Ryukyu, located towards its eastern Seaboard on the way to the wider Pacific Ocean in close proximity to Taiwan, based on maps as early as 1914.⁵⁷ Administered by Japan, Chinese naval and commercial vessels navigate the islands as an outlet to the sea.⁵⁸ Defining the islands as an 'arc of freedom and prosperity',⁵⁹ Japan's revised 'National Defence Programme Guidelines' announced enhanced surveillance and reconnaissance operations with additional support for

submarine activities.⁶⁰ China, Japan and South Korea heavily depend on the South China Sea for communication and trade with \$5.3 trillion of world trade passing through the South China Sea.⁶¹ The US trade accounts for \$1.2 trillion of this total.⁶²

American scholars interpret Chinese regional claims as 'broad and sometimes without total merit.'⁶³ The United Nations Convention on Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) enjoins upon states to surrender historical claims in favour of the 1982-UNCLOS. The US and China interpret the clause differently. Article 58 of UNCLOS provides freedom of navigation and over-flight within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), while it stresses states to respect the rights of the coastal state, its laws and regulations while availing 'transit passage.'⁶⁴ Article 38, paragraph 2 of the UNCLOS defines transit passage as freedom of navigation and over flight 'for continuous and expeditious transit'. This implies that vessels and ships of other states may use the EEZ of a coastal state for transit, but not without consent of the coastal state. China terms surveillance and the US intelligence gathering objectionable and unacceptable as per UNCLOS provisions in Articles 38, 39 and 40. Beijing asserts that foreign warships obtain advance approval before entering the EEZ.⁶⁵ Series of incidents strain Sino-US relations over the South China Sea.⁶⁶ China resents the US involvement, preferring a bilateral approach for settlement.⁶⁷

Chinese armed force strategy maintains coordinated plans to promote military preparedness alarming, in turn, the US policymakers believe that Beijing aims to disrupt the US military balance which is structured on maintenance of the status quo.⁶⁸ The US interprets its strategy as one of defensive positionalist signifying maintenance the gap in the US favour while prevention of it with respect to China. Pivot Asia appears to be counter-effective.⁶⁹ President Obama has maintained a clear support for the littoral states favouring Japan against China, while renouncing the earlier neutral approach of previous US administrations. South East Asian states' joint defence collaboration with the US can be interpreted as the US alliances against China.⁷⁰

International Sea Lanes of Communication

SLOCs in the Indo-Pacific region from east to west comprise the South China Sea, the Bay of Bengal extending to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf as a major transportation route between Far Asia and Europe. Energy procurement along with security of the main supply routes determines the contours of next global power hegemony.⁷¹ The sustenance and growth of Chinese economy invariably depends on free and secure navigation passage for import of energy, raw materials and foreign trade along the SLOCs.⁷² China accounts for 20 per cent of global energy consumption, investing \$44 billion in African oil production networks, ranking as the world's second-largest oil consumer surpassing the United States in 2010.⁷³ Its oil imports from the Middle East and Central Asia would exceed 7.3 million barrels per day.⁷⁴ Sino-US maritime collaboration displays in the provision of sea-lane security, counter terrorism, non-proliferation and disaster relief operations.⁷⁵ However, China needs to check revisionist ambitions on its economic growth by ensuring safe

passage along three water passages connecting South China Sea with the Indian Ocean along the littorals.

- First is the narrow, five hundred mile long, less than two miles wide passage between Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula known as the Straits of Malacca surrounded by Singapore;
- Second is the Lombok Strait farther towards the south in the Indian Ocean;
- Third is the Sunda Strait cutting along with Lombok through Indonesia towards the south, located in the open waters of the Indian Ocean just to the north-west of Australia.

The US security architecture builds on nuclear deterrence, defence alliances with the littorals and forward-deployment of military forces in the Indian Ocean region.⁷⁶ Singapore sits astride the Malacca Strait allied to the US in a defence treaty, building recently a deep-water pier at Changi (an area at the eastern end of Singapore) for the US aircraft carrier operations. The world's most heavily-travelled maritime chokepoint comprises the eastern doorway of SLOCs.⁷⁷ Malacca Dilemma refers to 85 per cent of China's oil shipment from the Middle East vulnerable to the US encroachment in case of any war.⁷⁸ Clearly, advantage rests with the US superior sea power in the region as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia and now with India patrolling the SLOC with the US. Realism tends to dictate the US horizontal escalation strategy of building joint naval defence with India, Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, and Australia. Moreover, multilateral institutions provide a shared ground for the US cooperation with Australia and India in Asian maritime security.⁷⁹ Trilateral cooperation entails joint Indo-US-Australia naval strategic collaboration in naval activities.⁸⁰ Employing Mearsheimer's analysis, one could discern the US working on the defensive strategy of 'gap maximizer'. The Pivot Asia's strategy is a manifestation of the US additional naval deployment in the region. The Lombok and Sunda Straits offer an alternate naval passage to China. However, the US defence strategic encirclement makes Australia and Japan sit tight in the region. Beijing must maintain military presence in the waters off the northern coast of Australia and Indonesia to ensure safety of passage.⁸¹ Divided into three fleets, North Sea fleet of the Chinese Navy is stationed in the Yellow Sea; East Sea Fleet in the East China Sea; and South Sea Fleet in the South China Sea. Although, Beijing's development of ASBM Dong Feng 21D holding 1,100 nautical miles range can take a large sized US aircraft carrier in one blow, China's naval capability, however, remains inferior to the US. The US bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Diego Garcia have provided logistical support to the US nuclear sub-marines, blue-water fleets and multiple carrier strike groups. Employing offensive realism, China has acted as a 'gap minimizer viz-a-viz the US, seeking to minimize power asymmetry while maximizing it with respect to Southeast Asian littorals.⁸²

Indo-US Maritime Connection: The China Factor

A combination of traditional and non-traditional threats has converted the Indian Ocean into a zone of international maritime intervention.⁸³ The 'US

Strategic Guidance 2014' has linked economy and security to developments in the Indo-Pacific, elevating Indian role to a net security provider in the region.⁸⁴ President Obama declared US-India relationship as 'defining partnerships in the 21st century.'⁸⁵ Within this context, the US Senate Armed Services Committee declared Indo-US joint naval exercises as a 'vital pillar of stability in the Indo-Pacific region.'⁸⁶ Indo-US 'Maritime Security Framework Agreement 2006' provides for the US naval technology transfers and co-production of weapons to India.⁸⁷ Co-chaired by US-India military cooperation group and India's integrated defence staff, the US Pacific Command supported marine collaboration with India on two prime features: one, Indian naval dominance and military capability, and two, Indo-US common perspective on regional stability through conducting joint maritime exercises.⁸⁸

In the Indian Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India's Far Eastern Naval Command (FENC) overlooks the Indo-Pacific regional security architecture through construction of a new Indian Naval Base *Baaz* at Port Blair. Overlooking the six degree channel, Baaz symbolizes a brilliant strategic location — a bottleneck from where 50,000 merchant ships and 40 per cent of the international seaborne navigation would pass.⁸⁹ To supplement Indian naval stretch of influence, the US has delivered India INS Jalashwa and P-8I Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft (MMA) with maritime reconnaissance and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities. Indo-US maritime interoperability provides long-range surveillance, air interdiction, including airlift and patrolling capability, offering expanded leverage of power and influence to India in the Indo-Pacific. The US strategy works on neo-structural realist balancing against China, while the Indian rationale has sought an informal strategic alliance with the US to contain China. Malabar naval exercises provide for shared sea drills, aircraft-carrier operations and joint amphibious exercises to establish procedural and technological compatibility.⁹⁰ While the Indian navy capitalizes on the US nuclear submarine, the US navy has learnt operational capability from Indian diesel-fuelled electric submarines.

Based on rival claims of great power hegemonic ambitions and offshore balancing, Indo-US maritime nexus builds on the history of Sino-Indian contentious relationship history;⁹¹ and energy competition in the Middle East, Central and Southwest Asia.⁹² The Indian navy extends its influence as far as Oceania and the South Pacific Rim threatening China. Both resort to internal balancing to maintain independence in foreign policy, while balancing externally against China. The Indo-US overlapping maritime security interests signify a tough security competition which could have dire implications for South Asian regional stability. Power squabble would change the geostrategic landscape of South Asia. China's traditional counter-balancing and preventive strategy manifests in string of pearls strategy in the Strait of Hormuz. Acting as China's node of influence, the string of pearls allows China the diverse acquisition of energy resources. Xi Jinping's Maritime Corridor Belt Strategy bypasses the SLOC via ports constructed along the rim of the Indian Ocean, linked directly through roads to China's mainland. The policy has manifested itself in China's development of commercial maritime bases in the Arabian Sea

in Pakistan (Gwadar, Pasni), in the Indian Ocean Sri Lanka (Hambantota), in the Bay of Bengal Myanmar (Sittwe and Kyaukpyu) and Bangladesh (Chittagong). The Chinese official position defends the ports as commercial in nature serving as trade storage facilities. The US-Indian coalition terms Chinese ports reconnaissance and surveillance facilities along the Indian Ocean Rim. Scholars do not rule out China's naval espionage via the alleged Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) facilities in Coco Islands or via discreet hydrographic research.⁹³

The core of China's string of pearls strategy has demonstrated China's strong desire to reduce vulnerability to its key energy imports, protect massive investments, reinforce deterrence and enhance geo-strategic leverage.⁹⁴ Chinese navy, however, has not engaged in activities of an overtly military nature on its maritime bases. India and China would counterbalance to prevent domination of one against the other. Indian maritime exercises with the US allies create a reverse string — a necklace of diamonds in the Indo-Pacific.⁹⁵ Interesting features of maritime competition can be observed as India excludes China in the Milan exercises involving 15 participants.⁹⁶ Indian navy systematically stretches its naval access to Mauritius — 1,200 miles southwest of Addu Atoll in the Maldives, 960 miles off Diego Garcia.⁹⁷ To Pakistan's alarm, India can use the atolls as combat base for logistics and reconnaissance using maritime patrol aircraft and Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAVs).⁹⁸ Deployment of combat aircrafts in the southwest expands Indian stretch of naval influence as far as Africa and Alaska.⁹⁹ India has held a key position in the PACOM enjoying access to a vast expanse of the Indian Ocean.¹⁰⁰ Indian naval deployment demonstrates appreciation for all key entry and exit points in the Indian Ocean — the Cape of Good Horn in the southwest, the Red Sea to the west, Straits of Malacca, Lombok and Sunda in the east, and the waters around Australia. Indian Far Eastern Naval Command in Andaman and Nicobar allows for India's naval eastward expansion, extending from the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca.¹⁰¹

Sino-Indian navies show maritime strategic competition expanding along the southern stretch of the Arabian Sea. India has developed aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines and stealth frigates, sent military satellites to space and established naval bases at Chabahar, Mauritius, Vietnam and Oman.¹⁰² The Chinese counter manoeuvres including joint naval exercises with Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, defence cooperation with Bangladesh and Maldives, construction of a naval base at Marao Atolls, and a resupply port facility with Seychelles.¹⁰³ Defence agreement with Bangladesh allows China's navy access to a re-fuelling station for aircraft in Chittagong, exposing India to be kept under pressure. The Middle Eastern oil accounts for about 67 per cent of India's oil imports, 90 per cent of trade and 75 per cent of oil transportation by the sea. In the event of a conflict, if India tries to choke Malacca strait in the Indo-Pacific, China would be poised to equalize it by increasing its strategic presence adjacent to the Persian Gulf at Gwadar. All these developments would have dire implications for Pakistan's maritime interests and security.

Implications for Pakistan's maritime security

Gwadar Port could unduly draw Pakistan into great power's maritime rivalry, linking it to the 'new great game' fought on the strategic chessboard in close proximity to Central Asia and Afghanistan. According to Selig S. Harrison:

Pakistan has granted China a base at Gwadar, in the heart of Baloch territory. So, an independent Baluchistan serves the US strategic interests. Without Gwadar, it would be difficult to imagine anyone fighting over this unwelcoming deserted and hostile land.¹⁰⁴

Simultaneously, Gwadar port's inland route raises genuine concern that it would become a tug of war among Pakistan's politicians. Security challenges would further delay if not dampen Gwadar's future prospects. The US grand design aims to neutralize China's geostrategic and economic advantage in Pakistan.¹⁰⁵

Caught between the devil and the blue sea, the interplay of Sino-US maritime power politics in the Indian Ocean allows for great powers' involvement in the region. Chinese manoeuvres to prevent strategic encirclement that leads to Indian response of maritime expansion in the Arabian Sea, may create a security impediment for Pakistan. The Indo-US maritime collaboration can push Pakistan to counteract by developing a Pakistan-China maritime nexus as a strategic necessity. On the positive side, Gwadar would serve as the farthest seaport from Indian naval bases and airfields. As an additional port further west from Karachi, Pasni and Ormara, Gwadar would provide a strategic edge against Indian maritime dominance. The strategic bottleneck of Gwadar would evade the possibility of Indian imposition of a naval blockade, as was the case in the 1971 war. In September 2014, a flotilla of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy ships made a friendly visit to Karachi, although Pakistan did not allow PLAN bases at Gwadar.¹⁰⁶ These were followed by several other visits of Chinese naval warships.¹⁰⁷ However, Pakistan could face a volatile security threat along its southern borders, along with its regional neighbours Iran and India. Great powers' regional involvement in the Indian Ocean, on the roller-coaster ride of their proxy collaborators, leads to the inherent prisoner's dilemma of overt maritime balancing for regional rivals i.e. India and Pakistan.

Moreover, Gwadar offers financial opportunities as well as strategic challenges for Pakistan. An integral southern tier of China's Silk Road Economic Belt Strategy and a vital lifeline of the proposed \$45 billion Pakistan-China Economic Corridor, as well as the Maritime Silk Route, construction of the port holds a huge potential to transform Pakistan's economic landscape by linking South, Central and Western Asian regions.¹⁰⁸ The development of the economic corridor and the port are mutually beneficial projects, providing Pakistan with a substantial revenue generation resource as a transshipment port for natural resources from land-locked states in Central Asia.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the port entails the prospects of generating economic activity in Pakistan's under developed hinterland.

Global economy requires the vast oil and gas reserves of Russia, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Over the years, Western Asia has emerged as the energy hub for the rapidly growing economies in Asia-Pacific and South Asia. South Asia's security climate is riddled with undesirable complexities due to external factors.¹¹⁰ With Pakistan's prime location offshore on the Indian Ocean, China has contemplated numerous energy delivery options, including pipelines and rail/road network connections. With China doubling the present figures of oil consumption by 2025 pooled from the Middle East, Gwadar offers the closest access.¹¹¹ Pakistan holds importance to China's bid for energy access both for global and regional influence. Gwadar reinvents Pakistan's role as the most significant player on the global arena. Pakistan's strategic location as a gateway to the West and Central Asia is significant in securing energy routes amid China's growing economic needs.

Gwadar can serve more to China's strategic advantage in the interplay of great powers' quest for energy. Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (PCEC) could serve as the oil and gas outlet for energy reserves of the Middle East. Leased for a period of 40 years and operated by China's Port Holding, China Merchant and Cosco Shipping, ideally, Gwadar would be integrated into China's vision of grand strategy. The port would allow China to emerge as the only great power with access to two seas — Arabian Sea and Western Pacific. Located 72 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz, the port would curtail China's sea transportation from 24 to 10 days. Linked to China's western regions, the proposed corridor from Pakistan would reduce China's oil shipment by more than 4,000 nautical miles, allowing overland oil transportation to China. Gwadar would be a feasible strategic solution to China's Malacca Dilemma, overcoming the energy vulnerability amidst Indian Ocean's growing militarization. The upstream land based energy transport route would secure China from external disruptive influences. Gwadar also offers the shortest possible distance from Central Asian energy reserves to the sea outlet in the Arabian Sea. It materializes China's plans to pipe down petrochemicals from Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) and minerals from Afghanistan for sea transportation to China as well as, land transportation through KKH to Western China.

Simultaneously, Indo-US support to the construction of Chabahar, would strain Pakistan's relations with India and Iran.¹¹² The US fifth fleet exercises a total geo-political control over China's hydrocarbon lifeline in the Persian Gulf. Hence, Beijing's rationale for naval presence in the Arabian Sea is to secure energy investments in Africa and the Middle East. Pakistan may be tempted to provide berthing rights to PLAN warships. Hosting PLAN bases would be in Islamabad's national interest. However, transformation of commercial ports into defendable forward naval bases would require high levels of technical, logistic and strategic expertise. Gwadar has in store a number of ship ready options for China's eventual naval expansion. The port allows China a strategic foothold through the provision of logistics, supplies and repairing facilities to sustain long time maritime operations on the sea. However, China

may find it difficult to defend isolated naval bases from the US or Indian cruise missile strikes or airborne attacks during wartime.

The Gwadar project also faces security impediments for Chinese workers and engineers in the attempt to foil prospects of the energy corridor.¹¹³ In 2004, a car bomb killed three Chinese engineers, two Chinese engineers were kidnapped at the Gomal Zam Dam in South Waziristan, Gwadar airport too came under rocket attack, three Chinese working at the Gwadar seaport were gunned down by unknown attackers at Hub in 2006¹¹⁴ and three Chinese mechanics were killed in an attack in Peshawar on 8 July 2007. Pakistan has substantial evidence of Indian RAW agents' involvement in the attacks on Chinese workers.¹¹⁵ Evidently, the Chinese deaths have discouraged private enterprise resulting in a general reluctance to invest in projects in Pakistan.¹¹⁶ To prevent derailment of Pakistan's economic growth and strategic partnership with China,¹¹⁷ a task force to ensure foolproof security for Chinese nationals has been formed.¹¹⁸

Pakistan has 990 kilometres long coastline west to east, and its EEZ covers 240,000 square kilometres coastal line. Conditional to settlement of the maritime boundary with India, almost 50,000 square kilometre of continental shelf will be added to Pakistan's territory. Islamabad became an active member of US-led multinational Combined Task Force, CTF 150, covering an area of responsibility from Gulf of Aden to the Gulf of Oman, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea as part of international maritime collaboration.¹¹⁹ In January 2009, the Combined Maritime Task Forces headquarters in Bahrain formed CTF 151, comprising ships and aircrafts from 20 countries.¹²⁰ To reinforce regional maritime security, Pakistan's navy has also instituted multinational exercises called AMAN since 2007.¹²¹ Pakistan Maritime Doctrine entitled 'Preserving Freedom of the Seas' provides for national perspective on maritime security.

Pak-China strategic convergence of interests envisions energy corridor from Central Asia and the Persian Gulf while investing in mega projects in Pakistan. For Islamabad, this is an opportunity to promote trade and expand its economy.¹²² Apparently, the realist model frames Indo-US desire to prevent prospects for China's transit route to Central Asia by obstructing developmental projects in and along the PCEC and Gwadar.

Realist balancing frames Indo-US policy designs in Gwadar and Baluchistan. Indian advantageous position in geography and maritime capability allows the US to build political, strategic and economic ties with India, while it maintains fluctuating and fluid security relations with Pakistan. If Gwadar develops, Indian financial stakes in the Gulf centres would be dimmed. Moreover, a full scale operational Gwadar would allow China a speedy access to energy reserves in Africa and the Middle East. Conversely, instability retards implementation of PCEC in the southern belt, which would retard or delay China's economic development and growth. The success of PCEC would make the region a strong foothold for China. The larger global design to engender regional instability would restrict Pakistan's prospects to benefit from the region's wealth. Insecurity in Baluchistan would increase the prospects for Chabahar, forcing China to divert investments from Pakistan. India funds a 200

kilometres long road to link Chabahar to Zaranj and then Herat in Afghanistan bypassing the transit to Central Asia available through Pakistan.¹²³ Chabahar's development at a fast pace, its well-connected rail/road infrastructure would make the port a better strategic option in the prevalent strategic environment. Iran, India and Afghanistan accord on Chabahar constitute a strategic threat for Pakistan in the post 2014 geo-strategic environment.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the patterns of great powers involvement in the region, it has argued that Sino-US off-shore balancing of their maritime interests carries immense security implications for maritime regional stability along the South Asian coastal periphery. The Indo-US collusion of maritime security interests has inflated the role of Indian navy in the Indian Ocean region. The move compels Pakistan's counter balancing response to neutralize Indian preponderance along its coastal belt. It has allowed Pakistan to increase its maritime collaboration with China as a strategic necessity. The Indo-US maritime and strategic collaboration increases the propensity for armed polarization along the long stretch of Indo-Pak coastal periphery.

Pakistan has advocated sovereign equality, non-interference, territorial integrity and mutual coexistence. Its leadership is poised to resist hegemonic and dictatorial ambitions of regional dominance from any single state in Southwest and Central Asia. In a recent development, Pakistan's Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif highlighted Pakistan's firm commitment to provide for speedy operationalization of Gwadar and the PCEC. Civil-military amicable relations in Pakistan provide for swift implementation of the projects. Pakistan has been committed to implement the grand agenda of Pak-China national rejuvenation, stability and growth. Pakistan's establishment has held that peace and stability cannot be confined to territorial boundaries. It needs to be shared across borders in today's world of trans-border interconnectivity and regional integration.

Embarking on an open door policy of regional cooperation, Pakistan wants friendly relations with all its neighbours including India. With unflinching faith in joint stakes of mutual development, Pak-China strategic partnership offers collective prospects for countering formidable challenges of regional dominance, hegemony and cross-border terrorism in the region. PCEC will prove to be a game-changer, which would empower the three billion people in the wider hinterland of Southwest and Central Asian region. Pak-China strategic partnership offers the prospects for mutual development and growth, dwelling on win-win strategy of good neighbourly relations.

Notes and References

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Amphibious Simulation Landing* exercises in the East China Sea in
September 2010 alarmed the Chinese. While India attended the US-
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2010, China was not invited. Indian officials went to Hawaii for *Operation
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