



Evolving Strategic Landscape of the Indian Ocean Region and Impact on South Asian Regional Order



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Report of CISS Roundtable

on

Evolving Strategic Landscape of the Indian Ocean Region and Impact on South Asian Regional Order



**Center for International Strategic Studies
Islamabad**



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Concept Note

The Indian Ocean's rim consists of thirty littoral and ten landlocked states. Its interregional geopolitics and intraregional security dynamics are extremely complex. According to various estimates, forty-two percent of active world conflicts are in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In addition to the permanent presence of multiple extra-regional powers and the resulting tensions and rivalries, there is a spectrum of non-traditional security threats in the region, such as terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, and climate change. Furthermore, India's nuclearization of the Indian Ocean and its shifting postures is a threat to all the littoral states, especially Pakistan which aims to maintain a balance and credible nuclear deterrence against India. This roundtable explored the evolving strategic landscape of the IOR and its impact on South Asian regional order.

Executive Summary

The Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS) Islamabad organized a roundtable discussion on the ‘Evolving Strategic Landscape of the Indian Ocean Region and its Impact on South Asian Regional Order.’ The discussion brought forth the altering strategic environment of the IOR and explored its implications for the South Asian security complex. Several approaches to reduce the prevailing hostility between Pakistan and India were identified. Policy options were discussed for Pakistan to maneuver through the complex contemporary geopolitical situations. CISS invited Dr Farhan Hanif Siddiqui, Associate Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, to provide his insight on the subject.

Key takeaways from the interactive roundtable are as follows:

- ◆ The evolving great power competition is becoming complex due to the increasing economic interdependence of states. Their contest for dominance has complicated security balance across the globe and the Indian Ocean region is at the forefront.
- ◆ Three strategic trade and energy supply routes in the IOR are the Straits of Malacca, Hormuz, and Bab-al-Mandeb. The possible choking of these routes creates strategic anxiety for China, the U.S., Russia, and many other states and has compelled regional and extra-regional players to stay active in the IOR and preserve their national interests.
- ◆ Extra-regional powers have aligned themselves with regional ones to maintain a prominent presence in the region and offer solutions for security anxieties. These activities have worsened the region’s already unhealthy condition.
- ◆ The U.S.-China-India competition is affecting the Pakistan-India dyad. In this situation, South Asia needs to learn from Southeast Asian countries, which changed their regional security concept towards a security community and decided to resolve conflicts.
- ◆ The growing bonhomie of U.S. with India must not affect regional stability, but so far it has resulted into unprecedented asymmetries in

the form of arms race and military modernization. The present form of this strategic partnership will only aggravate the security dilemma for other littoral states in the IOR. There is a direct negative impact on India-Pakistan decades-old hostile relationship and unresolved protracted disputes.

- ◆ India is the first littoral state, out of 33, that nuclearized the IOR. Its approach to Pakistan and the regional security equation is destabilizing. If one nuclear adversary has assured second strike capability and the other does not, the first will feel invulnerable.
- ◆ India's nuclear-oriented naval developments are deteriorating the regional deterrence equation, putting Pakistan in a difficult situation.
- ◆ The production of four SSBNs in the next few years suggests that India is likely to make more warheads for its delivery vehicles. In order to develop a large triad of nuclear forces with global reach, India would need large fissile material stocks and sustained production at a fast pace. That is why India has not placed eight nuclear power reactors under safeguards.
- ◆ The Indian Navy, which is the 7th largest navy in the world, is set to increase its strategic presence in IOR through nuclear arsenals and is also interested in exploring deep sea minerals.
- ◆ The shift in the Indian nuclear doctrine and its resistance towards confidence building measures and arms control arrangements intensify Pakistan's security dilemma, more because of the conventional asymmetry between the two states.
- ◆ Technological apartheid against Pakistan is alarming. Being an important regional member with credible stabilizing impact, Pakistan must not be isolated in any form.



ROUNDTABLE PROCEEDINGS

Welcome Remarks

Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi
Executive Director, CISS

The evolving strategic landscape of the Indian Ocean has a multi-dimensional impact on regional strategic concerns. Though submarines have plied through the Indian Ocean for years, India's introduction of nuclear weapons in these waters directly affects the security calculus of all littoral states, especially Pakistan. The likely Indian motivation for developing submarine-based nuclear capability and the implications of India's naval nuclearization on maritime security aggravate Islamabad's security dilemma.

India began developing nuclear submarines with ballistic missile launch capabilities, called SSBNs, in 1999 as part of its Advanced Technology Vessel Project. This project produced the Indian naval ship Arihant as its first SSBN that has completed its critical diving tests and the test launch of an unarmed ballistic missile.

India has taken advantage of the now weak and ineffective non-proliferation regime. Since nuclear submarines are technically a nuclear weapon system, the lease of the first nuclear submarine to India was an act of nuclear proliferation and a violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As it currently has the world's largest unsafeguarded nuclear weapons program, New Delhi is proceeding to proliferate nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean too. Currently, the hulls of two more SSBNs, including INS Aridhaman, have been completed; these vessels were launched in 2017. These measures would quickly lead to a fully

The unequivocal support of a particular extra-regional power for India's military rise has encouraged it to acquire naval nuclear capabilities. The design of lumping the Indian and Pacific Oceans into one region has led India to open a deterrence franchise in the region for a maritime power that would find it logistically and operationally untenable to operate long distances.

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India has also concluded many agreements with the U.S. including the one for logistic support, but little transparency is available in this regard. It is assumed that Indian bases shall increase the reach and endurance of American military. While these developments would serve the Pivot to Asia strategy, Pakistan's security, as well as that of other littoral states, gets directly affected as a consequence.

The U.S.-India Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) would impact long-term maritime trade and the economic and strategic interests of other states in Indian and Pacific Oceans. Maritime traffic will remain potentially vulnerable to myriad risks. The competition for securing the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC) would increase.

India's naval nuclear developments significantly undermine deterrence stability and place Pakistan in a difficult situation. The production of four SSBNs in the next few years suggests that India is likely to make more warheads for its delivery vehicles. In order to develop a large triad of nuclear forces with global reach, India would need large fissile material stocks and sustained production at a fast pace. That is why India has not

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placed eight nuclear power reactors under safeguards. That is also why it has Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) in excess of its requirements for fueling nuclear submarines, and that is also why New Delhi demurs from making any movement on even declaring a bilateral moratorium on nuclear testing.

The U.S.-India strategic partnership would further aggravate the maritime challenges of the littoral states, and, in this manner, the U.S. would bear the responsibility of encouraging New Delhi to maintain a continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence capacity.

In sum, the nuclearization of the Indian Ocean affects stability at both the capability and operational levels. Traditionally, it is believed that the second-strike capability strengthens the deterrence stability between adversaries. However, this element complements stability only if both adversaries possess such capability and the capacity to actualize that capability. If either of the adversaries lacks any of these aspects, it would lead to strategic imbalance and deterrence instability. Therefore, ambitious or irresponsible use of sea-based nuclear assets directly challenges the crisis stability in South Asia.

I will conclude by mentioning my experience in the United Nations when I was serving as the Pakistan Representative on the Ad-hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean in the 1980s. The Committee met regularly for some years but could not work out a regulatory mechanism largely due to the Indian representative's unwillingness to do so. Now that I see the nuclearization of Indian Ocean, I am reminded of the fact that the Indians were not willing to undertake commitment of any regulatory mechanism for the reason that they wanted to take these further steps in the future.

Geopolitical Landscape of Indian Ocean Region

Dr Farhan Hanif Siddiqui

Associate Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Backdrop

My interest in the IOR developed in recent months. One of my published articles, 'U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and Pakistan's Foreign Policy: The Hedging Option,' explores the implications of America's Indo-Pacific strategy for the South Asian region, particularly for Pakistan's foreign policy. It discovers how Pakistan can navigate between China and the U.S. by following a hedging strategy. Today, my discussion on the IOR will not be nuclear-specific. Rather, it will be focused on understanding the overall strategic dynamics that are being shaped in the region.

The rivalry between U.S. and China is the next defining phase of international politics. It is interesting if compared with what transpired during the Cold War, due to their strong economic interdependence.

State of Affairs

Through the lens of international politics, the term evolving means a situation that is transitory in nature, characterized by strategic uncertainty and anxiety. The rivalry between U.S. and China is the next defining phase of international politics. It is interesting if compared with what transpired during the Cold War, due to their strong economic interdependence including bilateral trade of around USD 650 billion. For the way this rivalry will unfold in the future, this interdependence must reduce substantially before any phase of conflict and strategic contention comes around. However, such a situation seems difficult as it has taken them four decades to achieve linkages. It is just not possible to reduce trade volume to a few billions within a few years and a herculean task to

shift investment from one country to another, and to close operational industries, businesses, and commercial transactions – they do not even have alternative markets.

There is substantial literature available on geopolitical and geo-economic powers but less on the geo-cultural form which implies how great powers or even regional powers define themselves and other states of different categories. In this regard, the narratives built by great powers, such as the U.S., set the direction of discourse and ideational frameworks, and create binaries – some states are ranked as ‘good,’ while some as ‘evil.’ Other states thus ascertain their role in international politics in a certain way.

Being a geographical reality, it is important how great powers and regional states see the IOR. For instance, for the U.S. it is an extension of its own power matrix while China perceives it as a region having security anxieties. It is imperative to note those trends in this region which add to insecurities that may lead to war, conflicts, and even cooperation.

Being a geographical reality, it is important how great powers and regional states see the IOR. For instance, for the U.S. it is an extension of its own power matrix while China perceives it as a region having security anxieties. It is imperative to note those trends in this region which add to insecurities that may lead to war, conflicts, and even cooperation.

As regards the security of a region or state, the traditional means do not suffice. Non-traditional security discourse is equally important, and it is evolving. The prevailing security issues of IOR include deteriorating economic indexes, piracy, smuggling, human security violations, pandemics, and weak environment protection. Given the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan, the geopolitical environment of South Asia is aggressive and competitive as compared with Southeast Asian states which have transformed into a security community and can now resolve their conflicts without much fighting.

Alfred Thayer Mahan noted that a state which controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia as this ocean is the key to seven seas. The concept

explains the interest of great powers in the region, which is home to around 2.7 billion people. Multilateralism exists in IOR in the form of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which includes twenty-three states. Around 40 percent of the global oil supplies go through the region. This is the point where most of the insecurities and anxieties arise.

Evolving Geopolitical Environment

The American National Security Strategy (NSS) considers IOR as the centerpiece of the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy. In fact, it reflects a form of ethnocentric strategic vision, believing itself superior as the center of all social, political, military, economic, and cultural progress and seeing other regions, countries, cultures, and religions as inferior. Other states, including China, are considered a threat to the progress, liberty, freedom, democracy, and true human security.

The NSS describes China as an aggressive country. In this way, the U.S. is creating binaries in contemporary international politics. The key phrases of NSS will shape the future dynamics of the region. China is termed as a 'revisionist' state which threatens the American rules-based international order. If one reads about Thucydides and E.H. Carr's scholarly work, it becomes clear that revisionist powers have been creating problems for the existing system. Germany, Italy, and Soviet Union were once considered revisionist states. The existing geopolitical discourse is marked by a particular U.S.-created debate about China. Status-quo powers, as they perceive themselves, portray themselves as good and nice and consider revisionists as problem-makers. The U.S. propounds a 'free and open' IOR, wants peaceful resolution of disputes, adheres to international norms, and supports freedom of trade and navigation.

From the maritime perspective, three key choke points generate contestation in IOR through which most of oil and energy supplies travel. Any aggressive power can threaten these points. The first point is the Strait of Malacca that lies between Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesian island of Sumatra. It also connects Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific to the Indian Ocean. Robert Kaplan quoted a phrase from the 15th century in his book to endorse its importance that 'whoever is the lord of Malacca

has his hand on the throat of Venice.’

China became the net importer of oil in 1993. Later in 2003, President Hu Jintao mentioned in his address to the Chinese Communist Party the ‘Malacca Dilemma,’ reflecting Chinese concerns about the region – what if the strait is closed for China or dominated by a rival power that stops Chinese energy supplies or creates a security or strategic threat. On the other hand, the ‘String of Pearls’ strategy is a

Western discourse proposed by an American scholar, about the Chinese influence from Malacca through Sri Lanka till Djibouti. It is said that China is trying to dominate littoral states. However, China views the Malacca Dilemma more as a feature of security anxiety.

Apart from other developments, the Indian Navy, which is the 7th largest navy in the world, is set to increase its strategic presence in IOR through nuclear arsenals and is also interested in exploring deep sea minerals.

The second choke point of interest for aggressive powers is the Strait of Hormuz. This sea passage connects the Persian Gulf with the Indian Ocean. The third is the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb which connects the Horn of Africa and Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula with Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. All these are vital strategic links and trade and energy routes. Given the constant fear of these being taken or controlled by rivals, the states stay alert and prepared.

From the military point of view, the U.S. military base on the Island of Diego Garcia increases security dilemma for China and Russia. In 2017, it created a lot of controversies, and this is why China opened its own military base in Djibouti. A surprising fact is that the U.S., Japan, and even France has military bases in Djibouti. Chinese presence in Djibouti is being perceived as a problem but China does not control Djibouti as portrayed by the West. In 2020, Russia established a new naval base in Sudan for a period of 25 years due to the fear of blocking of strategic choke points. And now, Russia is seen as a revitalized malign actor by the U.S. for its bold steps. China-India competition is another factor, and both are trying to invest in the Duqm port of Oman which is a major gateway in Gulf to the Indian Ocean.

Apart from other developments, the Indian Navy, which is the 7th largest navy in the world, is set to increase its strategic presence in IOR through nuclear arsenals and is also interested in exploring deep sea minerals. India launched the Deep Ocean Vision in 2019 and has introduced the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) maritime initiative. India sees itself as a state which is in a position to have a natural influence in the Indian Ocean – that is exactly how Pakistan sees itself. India wants to pursue great power status in international politics in the future.

The security dynamics of South Asia are characterized by a traditional rivalry. The Indian unilateral changes in the status of Kashmir by revoking Articles 370 and 35A of the constitution in 2019 have immensely added to the problems. The age-old rivalry between India and Pakistan is only getting more protracted now. Previously, there were chances of negotiations over Kashmir but now the situation has gotten worse as India has domesticated the conflict. Unfortunately, the South Asian region will continue on this trajectory of conflict and violence. Even for the next couple of decades, both India and Pakistan will keep muddling through several crises. As per historical analyses, major problem is the narrow and aggressive strategic calculation that both states keep for each other. Both only see how to take advantage of and defeat each other rather than thinking of improving relations.

So, the prospects of stability in South Asia are bleak. The competition among the U.S., China, and India is also affecting the Pakistan-India dyad. In this situation, South Asia needs to learn from Southeast Asian countries, which had similar problems but decided in the 1960s to move beyond it. These nations changed the entire regional security concept towards the security community and decided to resolve conflicts. The U.S. faces a quandary as they do not see the rise of China as a threat. They do not want to engage in security or strategic competition with China, making it difficult for the U.S. to vote them down.

The non-traditional security dynamics could push the IOR towards a situation where states will cooperate at some level. India and Pakistan must cooperate and align themselves over non-traditional security areas, including climate change, piracy, smuggling, and many others. The U.S.

and Pakistan Navy have cooperated in the Indian Ocean, Djibouti, and other places over drug trafficking, smuggling, and human trafficking. These areas pose equally strong challenges to any state. Environmental Security is another area where American and Chinese interests converge and can push other Indian Ocean countries to follow suit. The addition of around fifteen million tons of plastic to the Indian Ocean every year makes it the world's second most polluted ocean after the North Pacific, and that calls for constructive cooperation.

Geo-economics is another factor that can compel states to enhance trade with each other. There exist myopic and zero-sum strategies of states towards each other but there is interest in multilateralism as well. IORA, for instance, meets twice a year to discuss areas of collaboration to address non-traditional security threats.

Strategizing a Way Forward

Given the complex geopolitical environment, Pakistan needs to focus on the mechanism to deal with it. In its NSS 2022, the U.S. has stated its five partners – India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Pakistan has been deliberately excluded. The support for India has been reinforced as it has been designated as the ‘net security provider’ in the region. Such a situation reflects increasing security concerns for Pakistan. The U.S. has marked India as the offshore balancer vis-à-vis China and plans to enable it with the capacity to contain China. Here looms the pertinent challenge of the peripheralization of Pakistan, especially with the U.S., which is also an important economic partner. On the other hand, Pakistan has deep relations with China.

Pakistan needs to choose among the options of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. Balancing implies that considering the rising power of a rival state, a state engages in military buildup to deter the threat and to fight if the need arises. Bandwagoning is opposite to balancing where a state aligns itself with a greater power in the hope of reaping political and economic security dividends which that state cannot expect to gain on its own.

There arises the question whether Pakistan should bandwagon with the U.S. or with China to balance against India. Some of Pakistan's literature on foreign policy argues that Pakistan is balancing against the U.S. However, in reality, Pakistan has not adopted a balancing strategy against the U.S. or any other country except India due to its constant aggression against Pakistan. The only option left with Pakistan is the strategy of hedging which can be studied in light of comparative examples of Southeast Asian nations. The hedging policy

The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is clear – Pakistan is not there and is thus being pushed towards China. If Pakistan moves to that direction, it will automatically alienate the U.S. in its foreign policy options which needs to be avoided.

advocates a mixture of the return of maximization policy and risk contingency planning that circumvents the dominance of major powers. This is what the Southeast Asian states have been able to do magnificently. They have not strongly aligned with China or with the U.S. and have maintained their autonomy and independence by stabilizing military, strategic, and economic ties with both great powers. With an intensified China-U.S. conflict, the risk to choose sides also increases for Pakistan. The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is clear – Pakistan is not there and is thus being pushed towards China. If Pakistan moves to that direction, it will automatically alienate the U.S. in its foreign policy options which needs to be avoided. Indian military activities in the IOR increase Pakistan's strategic anxieties. Complete alliance with China will create problems as the U.S. dominates international financial institutions and could create severe economic challenges for Pakistan.

The hedging strategy stresses how to balance between both big powers without aligning with any one of them, and how the national security policy can be drafted to bring maximum output for political, economic, and military benefits. Over the years, Pakistan has diversified partnerships. In 2018, Pakistan released its first Maritime Doctrine focused, amongst other things, on preserving freedom of the seas, blue economy, and maritime security. The doctrine aimed at signaling Islamabad's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan has enhanced its engagements with China, Turkey, Iran, Russia, and several other states and conducted naval exercises with Moscow in 2017 and military exercises with China in 2020 in the north Arabian Sea.

The next five years are important for extensive and objective planning through a balanced approach. Pakistan needs to diversify its regional and global partners to adopt balance in great power competition. To compete with India, it requires an optimal strategy. To resolve the Kashmir conflict, Pakistan must avoid binaries between the U.S. and China. This entire process rests on two key pillars – domestic political stability and a diversified economy. Pakistan needs to have precise, accurate, and balanced policy choices under the hedging strategy.

Sea-Based Deterrence: Challenges and Prospects for Pakistan

Anum A. Khan

Associate Research Director, CISS

The Indian Ocean is a global common and is named after India in the geographical sense, but New Delhi has lately started self-believing that this Afro-Asian oceanic expanse is India's backyard. India is the first South Asian littoral state that is introducing nuclear weapons into this ocean. Like India nuclearized South Asia in 1974, the onus of provoking a response in the Indian Ocean rests with it.

New Delhi projects itself to be the 'net security provider' in the region hence it aspires to assume greater responsibilities in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Indian Navy has slowly drifted away from its traditional defensive posture and adopted an aggressive strategy that focuses on the projection of power, revision of global order, readiness to engage in littoral warfare, and the development and modernization of seaborne nuclear delivery capability to increase its influence in Indian Ocean rim and beyond. India has been constructing the first overseas naval base in Seychelles, a country strategically located in the Indian Ocean, which will allow it to monitor the SLOCs and support naval operations through coastal radar systems.

Indian Navy has slowly drifted away from its traditional defensive posture and adopted an aggressive strategy that focuses on the projection of power, revision of global order, readiness to engage in littoral warfare, and the development and modernization of seaborne nuclear delivery capability to increase its influence in Indian Ocean rim and beyond.

Recently, a debate developed on the possibility of a shift in the Indian nuclear doctrine. As India terms its sea-based leg of the nuclear triad a critical enabler of doctrine of No First Use (NFU), the potential change in NFU policy and the adoption of the First Use doctrine does not hold logic in this paradigm.¹

¹ Furthermore, the strategic logic underpinning India's SSBN program extends directly from the 1950s Cold War logic. India's 2007 maritime strategy document covertly mentions the Cold War in the explanation of its acquisition of nuclear triad. As it states, "Cold War experience has shown that reduction in the first-strike and increase in the second-strike (retaliatory) component considerably stabilizes and strengthens deterrence" (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015).

India portrays a two-front war bogey, that it faces a security trilemma due to two-front challenges in terms of security from China and Pakistan. Furthermore, by camouflaging behind South Asian naval nuclear trilemma, India plans to continue to enlarge and modernize its SSBN fleet due to an alleged threat from China. Such motivations and perceptions vis-à-vis China do not hold ground as Indian military program started before Chinese nuclear tests which were conducted in 1964. In 1963, Homi Bhabha wrote to Prime Minister Nehru stating that the Chinese nuclear test will be of no military significance and Chinese possession of a few bombs will not make any difference to the military situation.² Also, China possesses 250 nuclear weapons as compared to India which has the capability and capacity to produce approximately 2600 nuclear weapons.³ This capability, if acquired and goes unchecked by major powers, does not hold ground vis-à-vis regional ambitions. India wants to acquire a blue water navy and has global hegemonic ambitions which may pose serious security threats in future to the U.S. and Russia alike.

The security calculus which involves India, China, and Pakistan cannot be seen in isolation from the role of the U.S. in the region.

The security calculus which involves India, China, and Pakistan cannot be seen in isolation from the role of the U.S. in the region. The U.S. considers India as a major defense partner and is providing it a bigger role in the Asia Pacific. India is also part of a strategic security alliance i.e., Quad. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) between U.S. and India, coupled with Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) which permits both India and U.S. military forces to use each other's bases and other infrastructure, can be a cause of concern for China and affect the balance of power in the region. So, this situation can be termed as China-Pakistan-U.S.-India nuclear quadrangle.

The completion of nuclear triad by India and its naval nuclear modernization can persuade it to use non-violent compellence against Pakistan in the future. This strategy can include a naval blockade.⁴ Thus, the nuclearization of Indian Ocean by India can give it a more offensive edge, prompting possibilities of coercive nuclear escalation between

² Homi Bhabha To Shri Y. D. Gundevia, 1060.

³ Pakistan's Foreign Office, 2017.

⁴ Not War, Not Peace? Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism - George Perkovich, Toby Dalton - Google Books, 2016.

India and Pakistan in the case of a conflict. If the security scenario does not change, where India is modernizing its nuclear and conventional arsenal at the fastest pace coupled with acquisition of BMD system, Pakistan, after cost and benefit analysis, needs to shortlist the alternatives and opt for those which can still stay reliant when Pakistan acquires assured second-strike capability.

It is imperative to address the security issues between India and Pakistan which will be reverberated due to emerging Indian maritime nuclear capabilities. It is high time to reconcile India-Pakistan nuclear deterrence with arms control. However, turning a blind eye towards Indian developments and expecting Pakistan to take unilateral initiatives for arms control, while the Indian threat continues to loom large, would destabilize the region.

Concluding Remarks

Dr Atia Ali Kazmi

Director Research, CISS

It is a long-term debate whether security is more important for a state or its economy. Pakistan has very aptly adopted a balanced approach to deal with domestic challenges and foreign affairs. Given the competitive-cooperative interaction of various internal and external actors in the region, it is getting tougher to unilaterally manage peace and stability. The nuclearization of the Indian Ocean has brought more challenges into the regional security calculus. The Indian Ocean is not India's ocean, but India has developed a misplaced sense of entitlement not only here but also to many other places.

Given the competitive-cooperative interaction of various internal and external actors in the region, it is getting tougher to unilaterally manage peace and stability. The nuclearization of the Indian Ocean has brought more challenges into the regional security calculus.

The IOR has long been nuclearized. The P5's nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarines (SSN and SSBN) have been in these waters for quite some time. However, India is the first littoral state, out of 33, that nuclearized the IOR. Its approach to Pakistan and the regional security equation is destabilizing. If one nuclear adversary has assured second strike capability and the other does not, the first will feel invulnerable. Deterrence works in mutual vulnerability.

One step towards empowering India militarily takes the security environment of the entire region decades back into a new abnormal. Russia long aided India in developing assured second-strike capability and has also given it S-400 anti-ballistic missiles, and that is a lethal combination. To add insult to injury, the U.S. has offered India unprecedented spigots of technology, training, and resources, and may now offer it a deal similar to AUKUS. Although India takes measured

steps while reciprocating the formalities of strategic partnerships with these powers on account of the so-called strategic autonomy, Pakistan's strategic concerns keep amplifying. It cannot just let these developments go of – a state's non-traditional security is essentially subservient to its traditional security.

Just as Pakistan restored balance and deterrence in the region after India nuclearized South Asia, so will Islamabad stabilize deterrence in the IOR.

So, what is the recourse for Pakistan? Just as Pakistan restored balance and deterrence in the region after India nuclearized South Asia, so will Islamabad stabilize deterrence in the IOR. While Pakistan possesses second strike capability (Shaheen III, Ra'ad, and Babur), it has conventional submarines rather than nuclear ones. Making nuclear powered submarines, which are quieter and remain submerged underwater for a longer time, is not only expensive but also a long-term project that takes up to forty to fifty years.

The most alarming issue is the growing trends of creating technological apartheid against Pakistan, primarily because there is a concerted effort to contain China, its allies, and friends. On the other end, India, a non-NPT state, has been given nuclear submarines on lease and it enjoys a comprehensive strategic partnership with the U.S.-led West and a thriving socio-economic and trade relationship with China. Pakistan, being an important regional member with credible stabilizing impact must not be isolated in any form. Such a scenario will bring collective destruction for all stakeholders in the Indian Ocean Region.

Gallery









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