

India-Indonesia Maritime Security Collaboration: Strategic Challenges And Implications For China's Influence In The Indian Ocean

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Abstract

The India-Indonesia maritime security partnership has emerged as a crucial development in the Indo Pacific's evolving geopolitical landscape. United by concerns over critical sea lane security and China's assertive ambitions, both nations have forged a strategic alliance. Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country, views¹ India as a vital partner in countering China's hegemonic pursuits, while Beijing, reliant on uninterrupted energy supplies, adopts an aggressive maritime policy to deter rival alliances. This partnership serves as a strategic counterbalance to China's expansionist policies, addressing shared threats and reshaping regional dynamics. By enhancing maritime readiness, promoting a rules-based order, and fostering regional cooperation, the collaboration checks China's aspirations for dominance in the Indo Pacific. Grounded in classical and structural realist theories, this qualitative study examines the drivers and implications of this partnership, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping the region's future maritime security and maintaining strategic stability.

Key Words : *India-Indonesia maritime security, Indo Pacific geopolitics, China's maritime ambitions, strategic partnership, regional stability.*

Introduction

This research examines the rise of the India-Indonesia maritime security partnership and its strategic implications for China in the Indian Ocean. The chapter includes a literature review, problem statement, theoretical framework, research questions, objectives, and structural organization. It begins with a detailed introduction and systematically explores how this partnership addresses shared security concerns while countering China's growing influence in the region. The Indian Ocean, the world's third-largest ocean, is a critical arena for global trade and geopolitics. Stretching across Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, it encompasses 36 littoral states and 11 hinterland nations, such as Afghanistan and Nepal, which, despite being landlocked, are impacted by the region's

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maritime dynamics. This study highlights how the India-Indonesia partnership strengthens maritime security, fosters regional cooperation, and challenges China's expansionist ambitions in this strategically vital area (Jha, 2006).

The Indian Ocean region (IOR) is a strategically crucial area, with potential for global conflict as territorial disputes between India, China, and other littoral states intensify (Davis & Balls, 2020). A significant portion of oil and gas transportation to East Asia passes through this volatile region, where tensions between emerging powers like China and India, along with the US-China rivalry, could threaten global security. Major powers, including the US, China, and India, are securing strategic footholds and controlling key sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the IOR, particularly along vital passages such as the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, and Bab El Mandab (Pant, 2009). Contemporary world politics is increasingly shaped by geo-energy, with energy security—ensuring both demand and supply—becoming a top priority for every state. In the future, geo-energy will define interstate relations, and the reconfiguration of global power hierarchies will depend on each nation's energy security, particularly in the realm of green energy. Energy security will play a crucial role in fostering cooperation or escalating conflicts among states (Vermeer, 2017).

This research article will examine the energy security concerns of two key Indian Ocean states, India and Indonesia, and explore the geopolitical and geo-economic aspects of their emerging maritime security partnership. The study will assess how this partnership could challenge China's exclusive influence in the region. Additionally, the paper will analyze the role of Xi Jinping in reshaping China's foreign policy. As the successor to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, Xi is driving China towards becoming a dominant global power in the 21st century. His shift from a low-profile foreign policy to a more assertive one aims to reshape international norms and multilateral institutions, with Xi emphasizing China's desire to “construct international playgrounds” and establish the global rules (Ruan, Xiao, and Yapa, 2019). The Belt and Road Initiative is Xi Jinping's strategy to revive the ancient Silk Road, while China is expanding its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea and southeastern Indian Ocean through militarization and the creation of artificial islands. This initiative, combined with military expansions, enhances China's global military reach. A recent report revealed China's ambitions to gain control of Djibouti, the US's only military base in the Indian Ocean and Africa, prompting US officials to intervene. These developments make the Indian Ocean a contested region, raising concerns among regional powers and global rivals (Economy, 2018).

For India to emerge as a key political and security player, it must forge strategic partnerships with regional actors who view China as a growing threat. India aims to strengthen its maritime influence in the Malacca Strait to counter China's rise under Xi Jinping. Similarly, Indonesia sees India as a valuable ally in shaping Asia's regional order. The national interests of both nations align in countering China's expansion. Historically, India and Indonesia shared a strategic outlook, especially during the Cold War, as both were non-aligned, opposed neo-imperialism, and concerned about China's expansionist ambitions (Brewster, 2011). China's increasing control over cross-border water resources, particularly through projects like the disputed lake and efforts to regulate the hydrology of shared rivers, aligns with its broader strategy to assert regional power. This approach, often referred to as “water imperialism,” exacerbates existing geopolitical tensions, especially with countries like India, where water sharing and management are already contentious. India's concerns, particularly over China's water control projects on rivers flowing into India, intensify these tensions, with both environmental and security implications. The presence of the Dalai Lama in India adds another layer of complexity to these issues, as China views India's support for him as a challenge to its sovereignty, especially in regions such as Tibet, which are integral to China's control over water resources. Thus, the growing hydropolitical dynamics between India and China, combined with the Dalai Lama's activities, make it clear that China's strategies in both water management and regional

diplomacy will continue to have a profound impact on India-China relations. In this context, there is an urgent need for enhanced international cooperation, legal frameworks, and sustainable practices to manage shared water resources fairly and responsibly (Bukhari, et al, 2024).

India and Indonesia's alliance is driven by shared concerns over regional stability, economic interests, and geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean. Both nations seek to safeguard critical shipping lanes and prevent external powers like China or the US from disrupting their economic and security goals. The Indian Ocean is vital for trade, energy security, and maritime activities. India's role in securing the Strait of Malacca is crucial, but piracy and terrorism pose risks. Indonesia and Malaysia oppose foreign military presence in the region, as seen in their resistance to the US-led Maritime Security Initiative. Historically, India and Indonesia have worked together to limit outside naval influence, highlighted by their joint proposal for an "Indian Ocean Zone of Peace," signaling a warning to China (Brewster, 2011).

India and Indonesia are strengthening their bilateral partnership to ensure lasting maritime peace in the Indian Ocean. Both countries' strategic cultures shaped by their history, values, and beliefs affect their international behaviors. India's strategic culture is influenced by its nonalignment policy, commitment to peaceful dispute resolution, and a focus on regional leadership without disturbing stability. It also emphasizes credible deterrence and a No First Use nuclear policy. Indonesia's strategic culture is defined by its non-confrontational foreign policy, commitment to international norms, and strong focus on maritime security. It promotes regional cooperation through ASEAN and emphasizes maintaining autonomy in international affairs. China's strategic culture, based on its long history, emphasizes central authority, assertiveness in foreign policy, and achieving global prominence through initiatives like the Belt and Road. The problem statement highlights the contested control over the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait, with China's growing influence causing tensions. This research explores how the India-Indonesia partnership counters these threats and examines its impact on China and its allies, particularly in the context of regional power dynamics and maritime security.

Research Questions

- ❖ What are the common factors for India and Indonesia, causing the rise of India and Indonesia's maritime security partnership?
- ❖ What are the implications for China due to India Indonesia maritime security partnership?

Research Objectives

- ❖ To know the common factors between India and Indonesia, causing the strengthening of India and Indonesia maritime security partnership.
- ❖ To understand the implications for China due to India Indonesia Maritime security pact.

Significance of the Study

South and Southeast Asia hold significant political and economic influence due to power dynamics among key nuclear states like the US, India, China, and Pakistan. China's rise has led India to form strategic alliances, including with Indonesia, to counterbalance its influence. This research explores the India-Indonesia maritime partnership, focusing on its impact on regional alliances and global power dynamics. It emphasizes addressing issues like piracy, maritime terrorism, and illegal fishing while promoting peaceful resource exploration. Unlike prior studies focused on major powers, this study highlights the critical role of smaller states in shaping regional stability and global politics.

Literature Review

This research examines the India-Indonesia maritime partnership, focusing on secondary sources like research articles and official statements. Previous studies have primarily covered strategic aspects but lacked in-depth analysis, particularly regarding specific maritime cooperation and China's responses. The research highlights the need for further exploration of the cultural, historical, and economic dimensions of the partnership, as well as the application of international law in maritime governance. A significant development was the December 2021 meeting between Indian and Indonesian officials, followed by the 2024 CORPAT exercises, reinforcing their commitment to strengthening maritime security collaboration. This partnership aims to enhance stability in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions (Embassy of India 2024). Indonesia and India are strategically positioned as key guardians of the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesia sits at the crossroads of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, while India's Nicobar and Andaman Islands, near the vital Malacca Strait, control a critical maritime route. Both countries hold significant Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), essential for regional economic growth. Given the rising assertiveness of China, India and Indonesia must strengthen their roles as responsible powers, safeguarding these vital routes and upholding a rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific (Gill, 2021).

Shared threat perception for both nations is another notable factor that can add further momentum to the Indian-Indonesia Maritime Security Partnership. The growing economic and military capabilities and assertive actions of China in the region are the causes of concern for the aforementioned states. (Frankel 2011) Military advancement and naval capabilities of China under Xi Jinping have immensely accelerated its influence in the South China Sea. In addition, the position of Beijing's nine-dash line against the Natuna islands of Indonesia, along with recurring aggression by China in the surrounding of the Exclusive Economic Zone is infuriating Indonesia's apprehensions (Xavier, 2018). Similarly growing Beijing's strategic presence in the Indian Ocean and its expanding collaboration and maritime joint ventures with Pakistan Navy have also greatly perturbed the stability and threat perception in the region and for India respectively. As a result, the maximization of India and Indonesia's partnership to neutralize these common threats serves in the best interest of both states. The formation of the Global Maritime Fulcrum by Indonesia and the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiatives are obvious examples of the reorientation of individual policies by both states toward changes in the world geopolitical landscape (Mohan and Wagle, 2018). India and Indonesia's growing maritime cooperation plays a crucial role in enhancing the security of the Indo-Pacific and countering China's influence. Indonesia's confidence in this partnership was highlighted by Luhut Panjaitan, the coordinating minister for maritime affairs, who emphasized the need for stronger maritime cooperation between Jakarta and Delhi. While the bilateral relations date back to their founding, recent efforts to strengthen the partnership began in 2018. The introduction of the "Samudera Shakti" naval exercise marked a significant step in expanding defense ties. Additionally, both nations have agreed to develop a strategic deep-sea port in Sabang and a task force to improve connectivity between Sabang and the Andaman Islands, further deepening their collaboration (Chaudhri, 2018). The location of Sabang port is ideal as it is located on the brink of Samatra island of Indonesia. The island is located at the opening of the Strait of Malacca and is also situated close to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India (Nugroho, Bastari, and Suharyo 2021). As relations among states are not perpetual nor absolute according to international relations scholars, only the interests of states are permanent given all realists' schools of thought (Morgenthau 1948).

Indonesia's relations with China have faced several challenges, including disputes over the nine-dash line and equal access to ocean resources. However, under President Joko Widodo's leadership, ties have improved. During his fifth visit to China, Widodo met with President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang at the Winter Olympics opening

ceremony. His discussions included the “Nusantara” project, a \$34 billion initiative for a new capital, as well as the development of the delayed Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway. This visit highlighted Indonesia's strategic engagement with China beyond mere diplomatic formalities (Quinn, 2022). Analysts suggest that Indonesia's evolving relationship with China may soften its previously firm stance against Beijing, especially as Russia also seeks to expand China's influence. While India isn't opposed to improved Indonesia-China relations, seeing it as a potential stabilizer for regional peace and development, India may face challenges in countering China if the relationship between the two Southeast Asian nations deepens further. China's growing commitment to Indonesia is evident in its support for Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship and its promise to strengthen trade relations. Beijing now regards Indonesia as a "Model Strategic Partner," highlighting its importance in the region (Anwar 2019). Indonesia has its unique importance as the world's second-largest economy in terms of major resources of natural gas, copper, coal, and ferronickel. After Russia, Indonesia's exports to China, mostly commodities, hiked 34% on year in the first half of 2022. China plans to further increase one million, the imports of crude oil from Indonesia (Reuters, 2022). India faces several challenges in countering China's rise and establishing itself as a global power. These include a strategic deficit in formulating and executing a long-term national security strategy, as well as internal political fragmentation that hinders its regional ambitions. Protests by left-wing parties have impeded multilateral military exercises like the Malabar Exercise. Militarily, India is still developing its capacity to project naval power beyond the Indian Ocean. Additionally, its military spending ranks ninth globally and may shrink further due to economic constraints, limiting its ability to compete with China (Desli and Gkoulgkoutsika 2020).

India's economic growth has not alleviated widespread poverty, with much of the population still living below the poverty line. Internally, what Stephen Cohen terms India's "Inner Ring" poses challenges to its focus on the Asia-Pacific. Externally, neighboring states like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh face persistent political and economic instability, with Pakistan's nuclear capabilities being a significant concern for India's defense and foreign policy. These internal and external factors hinder India's efforts to assert its influence in the region (Ladwig, 2009). India's strategic integration faces obstacles due to internal and regional challenges, hindering its ability to pursue regional interests with Indonesia. Meanwhile, China's vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean stem from its geography, including limited entry points, extended sea routes, and dependence on crucial energy pathways prone to disruption. Additionally, inadequate overland transport routes and natural barriers like mountains and deserts further expose China to strategic risks, making control over key checkpoints in the region vital (Brewster, 2015). The Indian Ocean is vital to India's security, economy, and geopolitical influence. K.M. Panikkar emphasized its importance for India's freedom, industrial growth, and stability, linking national success to securing its waters. India's Defense Ministry highlights its strategic location in relation to both Asia and the Indian Ocean, reinforcing the region's significance for safeguarding national interests (Pant 2018). The literature review reveals that India and Indonesia are strengthening their maritime partnership under the Act East policy, focusing on maritime trade, infrastructure, and security. Scholars believe this collaboration counters China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. It boosts India's presence in Southeast Asia while Indonesia benefits from India's investments and technology. The deepening ties promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, challenging Beijing's territorial ambitions (Horam 2024). The India-Indonesia partnership strategically counters China's influence, enhancing security and regional influence for both nations. Rooted in neorealism, it focuses on security, national interests, and reducing reliance on single powers, challenging Beijing's regional dominance (Meibauer 2023). The Indian Ocean is crucial to the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, aiming to maintain security, stability, and economic growth in the region. The US sees India as a key partner, supporting its leadership and democratic values. By forming alliances with like-minded states, the US seeks to counterbalance China's growing

influence. The US is also strengthening maritime cooperation, providing security aid, and funding infrastructure projects to align the region with its interests and a rule-based order (Jung, Lee, and Lee 2021).

The Indian Ocean region is a hub of intense geopolitical competition, with major powers like India, the US, France, and China vying for influence. This has led to increased militarization, including naval expansions and the establishment of military bases, alongside regional alliances like the Quad. Infrastructure projects, such as ports and shipping lanes, are also central to these rivalries. Security challenges like terrorism, piracy, and maritime threats further complicate the region's stability. In this context, the India-Indonesia maritime security partnership emerges as a key effort to prevent the rise of hegemonic powers and maintain regional balance amidst US-China and China-India tensions. Due to the complexity and significance of the ongoing geopolitical developments in the region, it is crucial to conduct thorough and careful academic research. The evolving power dynamics, security challenges, and strategic alliances require detailed examination to understand their implications, anticipate future trends, and make informed decisions. In other words, the complexity of the situation makes it essential to analyze these developments systematically and critically (Ramraj 2023).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the India-Indonesia maritime security partnership and its implications for China in the Indian Ocean. Secondary sources such as books, articles, and official documents are analyzed using a descriptive technique to identify patterns and themes. Guided by structural realism, the research takes an inductive approach to explore state behavior and interactions. The case study approach offers an in-depth understanding of the partnership's strategic impacts on regional power dynamics and potential threats to China. It involves a thorough investigation of contemporary events, focusing on "why" and "how" questions, with data collection, coding, and analysis to present the findings based on recent developments (Lichtman, 2011; Njie and Asimiran 2014; Kohlbacher 2006).

This research relies on secondary sources for data collection, including articles, books, journals, videos, and other related materials. The data analysis technique employed is descriptive analysis, which is ideal for analyzing textual data such as official statements, academic papers, and agreements. This method helps identify patterns, themes, and strategies in the India-Indonesia maritime partnership, and how India, Indonesia, and China forecast their actions in the maritime domain. The data collection procedure includes various sources like discussions, articles, online content, and expert analysis to complement the research thesis and provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Carr, et. al, 2019; Luo, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework always serves as the marked foundation upon which the edifice of any research is constructed. It is a framework constructed on an already existing theory in a field of inquiry that shows a study's hypothesis (Largan and Morris, 2019). As it has been shown above that for any academic investigation a set of theoretical frameworks is indispensable to guide the study and draw a logical conclusion. Selection of a particular theory that resembles the area of inquiry is again a tricky job. For my problem and topic, a combo of classical and structural realism is used. Classical realism is a major school of thought that discusses the nature of human beings and the state as pugnacious and warmonger. According to classical realists, state interests are permanent and there is always a scant regard towards international morality and law. Structural realism squarely blamed the conflict on the nature of the international system which incites states to wage war against each other (Comer and Douglas, 2015).

Both theories have certain common assumptions but the perpetual nature of state interests, balance of power phenomenon, security dilemma, and rise and fall of hegemon are the striking ones. For India and Indonesia, the maritime security and exploration of natural resources of the Indian Ocean without the interference and intimidation of any other state, namely China, are permanent interests. Indonesia to counter the rise of China is making strategic alliances to maintain the balance of power. For India, the expansion of China's ports network through the Belt and Road initiative and the rise of artificial Iceland poses a security threat. Realism also best explains the Chinese permanent interest in securing her trade and oil supply in the Indian Ocean specifically in the Strait of Malacca. The growing anti-Chinese alliances in the form of US Indo-Pacific strategic partnership, AUKUS, Quadrilateral security dialogue, and India-Indonesia strategic maritime security partnership are alarming Chinese interests in the region and globally (Deb and Wilson, 2021).

Discussion

The notable limitation of the studies is that the scholar is not able to generalize the analysis extracted from the collected data as the Indian Ocean is a large region having more than three dozen littoral states. Moreover, the exact demarcation of the Indian Ocean is a difficult and tricky job due to different political and economic perspectives. Delhi as an important stakeholder in the Indian Ocean region has diverse political, economic, and military relations in the region. However, my primary concern will be the rise of maritime security partnership with Indonesia and its objectives. In terms of China, her interests are as dynamic and diversified as her adversaries but the scholar has specifically focused on the threats which are direct and indirect outcomes of India Indonesia partnership. This research explores the factors behind the strengthening of the India-Indonesia maritime partnership, focusing on the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean for both countries. It examines Indonesia's motivations, including security, economic interests, and geopolitical positioning, while analyzing their shared concerns over China's expansion. The study reviews their maritime strategies, agreements, and the reactions of regional powers, particularly the U.S., to the growing partnership.

- ❖ **Historical Evolution of Bilateral Relations between India and Indonesia into a Strategic Partnership and Chinese Factor:** Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sukarno, India and Indonesia shared common views on anti-apartheid, anti-imperialism, and the non-aligned movement. India played a key role in organizing pan-Asian conferences, and Indonesia, under Dutch colonial rule, looked to India for inspiration. Their relationship improved after Indonesia's independence in 1949, with shared opposition to colonialism and support for non-alignment. However, tensions arose in the late 1950s over China and political differences. Relations improved after Suharto's rise in 1967, with China uniting the countries due to its hostility towards India and its support for the Indonesian Communist Party. Tensions in the region, particularly regarding India's rise, led to further concerns, but the 1986 visit by Rajiv Gandhi and assurances of support improved ties. Post-Cold War, India's 'Look East Policy' and its participation in regional forums strengthened its relations with Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. During Indonesia's 1997–1998 financial crisis, India's assistance further cemented bilateral relations. Strategically, both countries share maritime borders, with Indonesia's Aceh province close to India's Bay of Bengal. As China expanded its influence, India and Indonesia recognized the need to strengthen their partnership to safeguard the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Straits. India's enhanced naval diplomacy and joint exercises with Indonesia reflect their shared security interests (Anwar, 2020).
- ❖ **Strategic Importance of India for Indonesia:** India holds strategic importance for Indonesia, especially given Indonesia's growing dissatisfaction with its military

alliances with countries like the U.S. and Australia during the East Timor dispute. Abdur Rahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia, envisioned a trilateral relationship between China, India, and Indonesia to strengthen Asia's global influence. Both countries, with the world's largest Muslim populations, have developed strong political and social ties, strengthened by their shared multiethnic and multicultural societies. Indonesia's focus on developing democratic institutions and India's support, such as timely humanitarian aid to Aceh after the tsunami, further deepens this partnership. Given these shared interests and India's regional significance, Indonesia views India as a key partner in security cooperation, seeking areas of alignment with India's strategic goals.

- ❖ **Implications of Act East policy of India:** India's "Act East" policy, launched in 2014, aims to strengthen economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region, countering China's growing influence, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Key elements include economic integration via projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, strategic partnerships with nations such as Australia, Japan, and the U.S., cultural exchanges like the India-ASEAN cultural festival, and development assistance through initiatives like the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation framework. The policy seeks to enhance India's geopolitical influence and foster deeper regional ties.
- ❖ **Indian Ocean Strategic Significance for India and Indonesia:** The Indian Ocean is of strategic importance to India and Indonesia due to its vital trade routes, energy resources, and geopolitical significance. Both countries have strong economic interests in the region, as it supports critical sea lanes for their exports and energy security. Located at key crossroads, they play pivotal roles in regional stability and security, with India emerging as a growing naval power and Indonesia acting as a major player in regional diplomacy through ASEAN. Together, India and Indonesia are crucial to maintaining peace, security, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- ❖ **Indonesia's quest for partnerships:** Indonesia is a key player in the Indo-Pacific region, engaging in various regional partnerships. While not a formal member of the Quad, it participates in the Quad Plus format with countries like New Zealand and South Korea. As a member of ASEAN, Indonesia contributes to regional security and economic cooperation through platforms like the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum. It also participates in the Indian Ocean Rim Association to foster economic and cultural ties. Through bilateral partnerships with nations like Australia, China, and Japan, Indonesia aims to maintain regional stability, boost economic growth, and protect its strategic autonomy.
- ❖ **Maritime Strategy of India for the Indian Ocean:** India's maritime strategy aims to strengthen its naval capabilities to secure key sea lanes and counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean. India seeks to be the net security provider in the region, fostering cooperation through naval presence, surveillance, and humanitarian efforts. While strengthening ties with regional partners, particularly in Southeast Asia, India's relations with Pakistan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka remain limited. India's involvement in ASEAN and defense forums, along with the Act East policy supported by the U.S., bolsters its role in the Indo-Pacific. India's strategic interest in Iran and Chahbahar port further counters China's influence. However, India's maritime engagements with East Africa remain minimal due to fiscal constraints and limited naval capability in the region.
- ❖ **Expanding Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean and Implications for India:** By 2025, China's PLA Navy is expected to establish a permanent presence in the Indian Ocean, potentially including carrier groups and amphibious ships, which could challenge India's maritime dominance. Chinese bases in Pakistan and other regions would allow Beijing to counter India's vulnerabilities, especially regarding oil

trade routes. China's growing naval presence and involvement in humanitarian missions and evacuations could gradually diminish India's role as the region's main security provider. As a result, India may need to fortify strategic locations like the Andaman Islands and seek support from international powers to maintain its position.

- ❖ **Common factors Encouraging India-Indonesia maritime security partnership:** The partnership between India and Indonesia is not new but historically there existed a long-standing relationship as maritime neighbors in the Indian Ocean region and share common interests in securing regional stability and security. The key common factors that drive their maritime security partnership are:-
 - **Risks for regional stability:** Both India and Indonesia face common grave security challenges. These challenges include endemic piracy, global terrorism, illegal fishing, and the rise of Chinese naval capabilities, all these pose a threat to regional stability and require a robust collective response.
 - **Economic interests:** The Indian Ocean region is the home key and busiest shipping lane in the world and is significant to global trade and commerce. Both Delhi and Jakarta have important economic goals in the region and try hard to ensure its stability and security.
 - **Indian Ocean Strategic importance:** Among the prime reasons for the partnership between India and Indonesia is the recognition of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. Its importance in terms of security, trade, and energy has made all the littoral states secure their areas of interest. Thus, it is in the common interest of all states of the Indian Ocean region to promote regional cooperation to maintain stability and security.
 - **Shared cultural and historical Ties:** India and Indonesia have a rich history of cultural relationships, for both nations strengthening relationships by making partnerships in maritime security and trade plays a key role in regional stability and security. In a nutshell, these common elements drive India and Indonesia's maritime security partnership and form a solid basis for their efforts to enhance regional cooperation and promote stability and security, along with countering the rise hegemonic rise of China by maintaining a rules-based environment in the Indian Ocean region.

- ❖ **Brief Description of Recent Agreements between India and Indonesia:** India and Indonesia have strengthened their military partnership through several key agreements in recent years, including the 2015 Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), 2018 Joint Statement on Defense Cooperation, and 2018 Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Industry Cooperation. These agreements focus on enhancing defense collaboration, joint military exercises, maritime security, counter terrorism, and defense industry cooperation. The DCA promotes trust, interoperability, and regional stability, while serving as a signal to China regarding their commitment to security. The 2018 Joint Statement calls for closer collaboration in maritime security and defense industry cooperation, particularly in response to China's growing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean. The MOU further deepens defense ties with joint ventures, technology transfers, and research and development (R&D) in defense technologies. Together, these agreements aim to counter common regional security threats such as piracy, terrorism, and illegal fishing, while promoting a secure and stable environment for trade and investment. The defense partnership also serves to deter hegemonic powers, particularly China, and enhance India's and Indonesia's roles in regional security forums like the Indian Ocean Rim Association and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus.

- ❖ **Justifications for Indonesia's Preference for India as a Maritime Security Partner in the Region Against any other state:** Indonesia's decision to partner with India on maritime security is driven by several key factors:-

- **Concerns about China:** Both countries share concerns over China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, which threatens regional stability. By aligning with India, Indonesia aims to counterbalance China's influence and promote regional security.
- **Strategic Location:** Indonesia's position, with its vital shipping lanes, makes it a crucial maritime state in the Indo-Pacific. Partnering with India helps secure these strategic waterways and safeguard its geopolitical and economic interests.
- **Historical Ties:** India and Indonesia have a long history of strong bilateral relations, dating back to the nonaligned movement of the 1960s. Their deep economic, cultural, and political ties provide a solid foundation for their current partnership.
- **Shared Interests:** Both nations are committed to promoting regional stability, ensuring free and open navigation, and fostering economic growth and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

Indonesia's partnership with India serves as the best option to counter China's influence and achieve its economic and political goals in the region.

- ❖ **Enhancing India and Indonesia's joint maritime presence as a way to check China's expanding geopolitical reach in the Indo-Pacific:** The maritime partnership between India and Indonesia plays a crucial role in countering China's rising influence in the Indo-Pacific, but it cannot fully negate Beijing's dominance. While this collaboration, along with other regional partnerships, contributes to long-term stability and security, it must be considered as one element in a broader strategy. The relative economic, military, and political power of India and Indonesia, alongside the actions of other regional players like the US and the Quad, will shape the balance of power. Ultimately, China's own strategies will continue to influence the region's dynamics, making it a complex and evolving situation.
- ❖ **Reaction of Chins on the Strengthening of India-Indonesia's Maritime and Security Partnership:** The reactions of other regional states to the strengthening of the India-Indonesia maritime and security partnership vary based on their interests and relationships with India, Indonesia, and China. Countries with close ties to India and Indonesia, who share concerns about China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, are likely to support the partnership, viewing it as a positive step toward regional stability and security. Conversely, nations with strong ties to China, or those aligned with Beijing's vision for the region, may view this partnership with caution, seeing it as an attempt to counterbalance China and potentially disrupt the existing regional order. These states may see the partnership as a challenge to their interests and security, given their alignment with China's strategic goals.
- ❖ **American Reaction to India-Indonesia Partnership:** The U.S. views the India-Indonesia maritime security partnership with both support and caution. While recognizing its potential to promote stability in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. also values India as a key regional player and competitor to China. However, Washington is wary of the partnership potentially causing regional divisions or undermining U.S. interests, particularly in terms of safe passage and economic stability. If the partnership is seen as countering China's influence in a way that conflicts with U.S. strategic priorities, the U.S. may approach it with more caution.
- ❖ **Factors impacting the durability of the India-Indonesia Maritime Partnership:** The India-Indonesia maritime security partnership relies on political will, economic cooperation, and shared security concerns. It strengthens Indonesia's maritime capabilities through joint training, exercises, and access to India's advanced naval resources. While addressing regional threats and transnational crime, challenges like

regional rivalries and perceptions of countering China may strain relations. Overall, the partnership enhances Indonesia's defense and fosters regional stability.

- ❖ **Indian Ocean region as a hot Arena of Cooperation and Competition:** Indian Ocean region is the most significant area of 21st-century politics. Almost half of the world's population resides in this region. Three nuclear states are observed to be in the dagger-drawn position since the establishment of their relations. India as the biggest consumer market and a rapidly developing most dense state is considered to be the reservoir of Western democratic norms. China, a rising world power is also bent on becoming a global hegemon in trade, production, and politics as well. Pakistan as a nuclear Muslim state is more often termed a terrorist sponsor state, which debatable in itself, has a high stake in regional peace and stability. Hence, we can say that the Indian Ocean is a hot arena of cooperation and competition due to its economic and political clout and the presence of important actors. Coming to the opportunities for cooperation, below briefly mentioned areas are need to be explored.
 - **Competition Areas:** China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's "Act East" Policy have intensified competition in the Indian Ocean region. While BRI investments boost infrastructure, concerns over debt burdens and China's naval expansion raise geopolitical tensions. India's alliances, like AUKUS and the Quad, counter China's influence but risk regional instability. Additionally, resource rivalry over the Indian Ocean's wealth in oil, gas, and minerals further strains relations between the two nations.
 - **Cooperation Chances:** Cooperation in the Indian Ocean region has focused on maritime security, economic development, environmental protection, and pandemic response. Joint naval exercises, such as the Quad alliance drills, enhance regional stability. Economic efforts led by the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) promote sustainable development, connectivity, and trade. Environmental initiatives by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) tackle climate change and marine biodiversity protection. During the COVID-19 pandemic, regional states collaborated on shared strategies for effective management. These efforts underscore the potential for deeper integration and collective progress in the region.

Areas of Bilateral Disagreement between India and China

The relationship between India and China is characterized by hesitation and mutual mistrust, despite shared goals of rapid economic growth. Both countries are navigating their roles in the global economy and support a multi-polar world alongside the U.S. China seeks peaceful relations with India to strengthen its economy and avoid anti-China alliances, while India aims to maintain good relations for its own domestic growth. However, political divides in India, with left-leaning parties favoring closer ties and right-leaning parties seeing China as a security threat, add complexity to the relationship. Competition and misunderstandings further strain their interactions (Ahmad, 2014)

- ❖ **Border issues:** China and India's border dispute dates back to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Since then, the two nations have engaged in negotiations and discussions to achieve a peaceful resolution. Along the disputed border, intermittent tensions and infrequent military standoffs have occurred, but no definitive resolution has been reached so far. Efforts to resolve the border issues have been ongoing for many years. Several rounds of diplomatic talks and agreements have taken place, including the formation of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China border affairs. The two countries have also signed various agreements to maintain stability and peace along the boundaries, such as the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Stability along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the India-China Border Areas. However, two of the border issues are still present to cause

a serious battle between both nuclear-armed nations (Jain, 2004).

- ❖ **Aksai Chin:** It is a region located on the China-India frontier in the western portion. It is approximately 37,244 square kilometers in size. Currently, China administers Aksai Chin as part of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Due to the prevalence of key transportation routes, including the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway and the Karakoram Highway, the region is of strategic importance. India lays claim to Aksai Chin within the Union Territory of Ladakh. The dispute over Aksai Chin dates back to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 when hostilities broke out between the two nations. During the conflict, China seized control of Aksai Chin; since then, India has sought its return. The issue has been the subject of multiple sessions of discussions and negotiations over the years, but no definitive resolution has been reached.
- ❖ **Arunachal Pradesh:** Arunachal Pradesh is a state in eastern India that shares a border with Tibet, a Chinese autonomous province. China refers to Arunachal Pradesh as "South Tibet" and asserts sovereignty over the whole province. The state of Arunachal Pradesh has a total size of 83,743 square kilometers and is home to several ethnic groups, including native tribes. Arunachal Pradesh, on the other hand, is an essential component of India's sovereign territory. After British colonial officials left the area in 1951, it took control of it. After the war of 1962, the boundary dispute in Arunachal Pradesh became more intense, and it is still a source of contention between the two nations.
- ❖ **Water Issues between India and China:** Water is a vital resource with significant geopolitical implications, particularly between neighboring countries like China and India. Disagreements over water usage and sharing are emerging as a major source of tension. India is concerned about China's large dam projects and the diversion of river water for its own use, especially since all four major rivers connecting the two countries are affected. China's strategic control over these rivers exacerbates their conflicts, further complicated by territorial disputes, such as the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The lack of binding agreements on water-sharing, along with China's reluctance to adhere to international conventions on shared waterways, deepens the problem. Recent efforts to exchange hydrological data for flood management have been inconsistent, and China's ongoing water projects, including potential dams on the Brahmaputra, threaten regional stability.
- ❖ **India's perspective on Dalai lama:** Chinese have a strong belief that the Indian administration is treating the Dalai Lama as a government-in-exile in Dharmasala, merely 300 kilometers from the Chinese frontier. In addition, the refugee facilities of one million Tibetan refugees in India and India's continuous disposition to provide refuge to the Dalai Lama continue to irritate China-India relations. China also claimed that the Dalai Lama and his entourage incited the suicides by distributing an online "self-immolation guide" and "openly encouraging Tibetans within the Chinese border to carry out self-immolations" against China. During the visits of the Chinese president in March 2012 and the Chinese premier on May 21, 2013, China accused the Dalai Lama of orchestrating a self-immolation protest by a Tibetan exile in India. Therefore, the presence of the Dalai Lama in India and his anti-China activities have negative effects on India-China relations.

Indian Ocean and Middle East as Regions of Interest for both India and China

The Middle East has long been a region of power rivalry due to its strategic location and energy resources, with global powers like the U.S. and Russia vying for influence. Key issues, such as the Palestinian conflict and the Saudi-Iran rivalry, remain unresolved. As U.S. influence declines, China and India have expanded their presence, capitalizing on regional discontent. While both countries face challenges in security and terrorism, their growing cooperation in managing regional security and economic interests is expected. Their collaboration could help stabilize the region, secure vital sea lanes, and contribute to

global stability, but balancing regional powers' interests will be crucial for success. (Sevilla 2020)

Impacts of India-China Rivalry on South Asia

South Asia, with its vast population and critical maritime routes, has emerged as a key geopolitical battleground between China and India. Despite shared characteristics such as rapid economic growth, nuclear capabilities, and large populations, mutual distrust drives their competition for influence in the region and the Indian Ocean. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has significantly strengthened its ties with South Asian nations, making it the largest foreign investor in countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldives. This expansion, coupled with China's growing military presence, has intensified Indian concerns over potential encirclement, prompting India to implement its "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" policies to reinforce regional ties and counterbalance China's influence. However, both nations face challenges in expanding their influence: China's BRI has been criticized for fostering debt traps and economic dependence, while India grapples with anti-Indian sentiment and accusations of regional dominance. Smaller South Asian nations, caught between this rivalry and broader US-China tensions, must carefully balance their relations with both powers to avoid being drawn into larger geopolitical conflicts. As the region's strategic landscape continues to evolve, prudent navigation is essential for maintaining stability and cooperation.

- ❖ **Chinese Strategic Culture:** China's strategic culture is deeply influenced by both Confucianism and its historical experiences, particularly the "century of humiliation" by imperialist powers. This culture is defensive-minded and non-expansionist, shaped by the belief in the importance of national security and unity. Chinese military thought also emphasizes minimal use of force, focusing on limited wars as seen in the Sino-Indian and Sino-Vietnamese wars. Sun Tzu's principles of surprise and deception remain key, and there is a focus on modernizing military strategies with "trump weapons" that impede adversaries. National development and material strength now dominate China's security strategy, with the perception of internal and external threats influencing its behavior.
- ❖ **Indian Strategic Culture:** India's strategic culture is rooted in its ancient civilizational values and shaped by its colonial past. It emphasizes restraint, sovereignty, and peaceful conflict resolution, while also embracing non-alignment and diplomatic engagement. As India's global influence has grown, its strategic culture has evolved, becoming more assertive with increased defense modernization and active participation in regional security initiatives. India's strategic culture reflects its self-perception as a rising global power, aspiring to shape global governance, economic systems, and security frameworks, particularly through multilateral engagements and leadership in addressing global challenges like climate change and cybersecurity (Ryan & Army, 2019).
- ❖ **Indonesia Strategic Culture:** Indonesia's strategic culture is shaped by its history, geography, and national interests. The country follows a non-aligned foreign policy to maintain independence and engage with multiple global and regional powers. Regional stability is a key priority, and Indonesia plays a prominent role in ASEAN. It focuses on safeguarding its territorial integrity, particularly in the South China Sea, and supports a rules-based international order. Economically, Indonesia balances relationships with China, its main trading partner, while also collaborating with other powers like the US, Japan, and Australia to protect its interests.

Beijing Maritime Objectives in the Indian Ocean Region

China's expanding military and economic presence in the Indian Ocean has sparked significant concerns both locally and internationally. Indian analysts have raised alarms

about China's growing military influence and its expanding missions beyond the western Pacific. Meanwhile, American strategists warn of China's alleged "debt-trap diplomacy," citing examples like Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port. These fears are compounded by the potential for proxy rivalry between the US and China in the region. Since the 1990s, China's increasing oil imports and economic growth have led it to extend its influence into the Indian Ocean as part of a broader regional strategy. While China seeks to bolster its national power to rival the US and regain dominance, it faces challenges due to its continental geography, long distance from major resource-rich regions, and reliance on maritime choke points in the Indian Ocean. These strategic vulnerabilities are compounded by the US's rebalancing efforts, which China views as an attempt to contain its rise. China's objectives in the Indian Ocean are threefold: economic, diplomatic, and strategic. These goals are deeply intertwined, as economic power enables China to exert geopolitical influence and reshape the global order in its favor. (Carmody 2020)(Bukhari 2022) (Khurana 2016) (Duha and Saputro 2022)

- ❖ **Economics:** The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is the most effective embodiment of the US-led economic containment. Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam of Singapore remarked in May 2014 that the TPP "must form the centerpiece of the US' economic rebalancing to the region." China has to counteract this by developing trade ties with the IOR nations.
- ❖ **Geopolitics/ Diplomacy:** The American administration appears to be successful in removing communist influence in the area by backing China's adversaries in maritime regional conflicts in the western Pacific. Therefore, to make up for its "losses" in the eastern part of Asia in terms of its regional influence, China needs to increase its involvement with several important IOR nations. The most recent tool for such participation is the multilateral platform.
- ❖ **Military strategy:** According to the Chinese viewpoint, America aims to limit Beijing's strategic depth inside the first island chain of the western Pacific to restrain China's military might. Therefore, by stepping up its naval operations in the Indian Ocean, China is trying to provide a "strategic distraction" for the Americans.

Findings and Results

The India-Indonesia partnership is increasingly important in the Indo-Pacific region, driven by shared maritime security concerns such as piracy, illegal fishing, and China's growing influence. Their collaboration has the potential to shift the regional power dynamics, providing a counterbalance to China. Key aspects of the partnership include safeguarding maritime security, increasing naval presence, and boosting economic and diplomatic cooperation. This partnership is not only about maritime collaboration but also involves joint economic ventures, which could reshape the geopolitical landscape, particularly in relation to China's regional ambitions. Additionally, it offers prospects for enhancing the security and stability of the Indian Ocean, a region critical for global trade and energy flow. Through increased naval exercises and cooperation, India and Indonesia aim to address regional challenges and contribute to regional forums like IORA and ASEAN. The partnership also acknowledges climate change as a growing threat, expanding its focus on resilience and adaptation. The future of the region remains uncertain due to evolving security threats, technological advancements, and geopolitical shifts.

Conclusion

China's economic rise remains one of the most transformative developments of the modern era, reshaping the global economic and political landscape. From the implementation of the Open-Door Policy in 1979 to its current position as the world's second-largest economy, China has demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience. Its centralized planning,

export-driven growth, and strategic investments both domestically and internationally have positioned it as a dominant player in global markets. However, China's economic trajectory also faces challenges, including rising labor costs, demographic shifts, and increasing geopolitical tensions, particularly with Western powers. As China continues to consolidate its influence, its role in global governance, trade, and technology innovation is set to grow, fostering both collaboration and competition with other major economies. This underscores the importance of balancing its domestic economic priorities with international integration, ensuring sustainable growth while navigating the complexities of an evolving global order. Ultimately, China's ability to maintain its economic momentum will significantly shape the 21st-century global economy.

Implications for China Due to India-Indonesia Maritime Partnership

An overview of China's rise as an economic and military power in the Indian Ocean region and its conflicting interests with India and Indonesia. It explores China's pursuit of resources, markets, and strategic influence, leading to tensions with other regional powers. The chapter also addresses issues like competing objectives in the Indian Ocean, border disputes, and China's military expansion. Additionally, it examines India and Indonesia's goals in the Middle East, a key area for trade and energy security. The chapter concludes by analyzing the potential impacts of the rivalry between China, India, and Indonesia, including arms races and geopolitical tensions.

- ❖ **Phenomenal Rise of China's Economic and Military Power:** Over the past three decades, China's economy has experienced remarkable growth, making it the world's second-largest economy, contributing 14.8% of global output. This growth has lifted nearly 800 million people out of poverty. China's expanding economy has strengthened its political, military, and economic influence globally. With a defense budget that has quadrupled since 2008, China now has the second-largest military expenditures, ranking third in military strength after the US and Russia. It also possesses a significant nuclear arsenal, including ballistic missiles and nuclear-powered submarines. Scholars like Mearsheimer highlight China's military might and latent power, driven by its large population and national assets, positioning it as a rising global power (Zhou, 2022; Liu, 2020; Bronder, 2021; Ghazala Yasmin Jalil 2019; Mearsheimer 2022).
- ❖ **Factors contributing to the rise of China:** China's rise is largely due to its strategic geographical position and vast physical size. As the fourth-largest country, it spans diverse terrains from fertile lands to deserts and high mountains. Its coastlines along key seas give China access to global trade routes. Additionally, its shared borders with Russia, a powerful ally, enhance its geopolitical strength. By combining economic and cultural influence with military power, China has become a significant force in the region and beyond (Nouwens 2019).
- ❖ **China As an Economic Might of the 21st Century World Economy:** China's rise as a global economic power has been driven by rapid and sustained growth since 1979, with its GDP increasing from US\$ 178 billion to US\$ 14.72 trillion. This success is largely attributed to centralized planning and the effective execution of five-year plans by the Chinese Communist Party (CPC). The country has encouraged exports while allowing capitalism and free enterprise to flourish. With its low labor costs, China has become a hub for transnational corporations, flooding global markets with affordable goods. Additionally, its growing middle and upper classes are driving demand for luxury products, further enhancing China's economic influence and restoring its historic economic dominance (Morrison 2019).
- ❖ **Geography as a Blessing Factor for Beijing's Rise:** China's geography has fueled its global rise, enabling economic growth, trade dominance, and strategic influence.

Its coastlines provide access to vital shipping lanes and support military power in areas like the South China Sea. Proximity to resource-rich regions and central positioning in Asia have bolstered its Belt and Road Initiative, extending its global reach. These advantages have solidified China's role as a key geopolitical player (Tatum 2022; Alpermann and Zhan 2019).

- ❖ **One-party System and Exclusive Political System Helped Chinese Rise:** Since 2010, under Xi Jinping, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has become a totalitarian regime with strict control over political activity and cultural expression. While Xi has boosted China's economy, human rights concerns have risen, especially regarding the treatment of minority groups like Tibetans and Uighurs, with critics accusing China of genocide. Prominent figures, such as entrepreneur Jack Ma, have been silenced, and the "Great Firewall" restricts access to international media. The COVID-19 lockdowns have further impacted millions, and there are growing concerns over Xi's long-term control, given internal economic pressures and rising tensions with the US and its allies (Garside, 2021; Huang 2019).
- ❖ **Rich Resources and Military Advancement of China:** China is rich in natural resources, particularly in Xinjiang, where vast coal, natural gas, oil, and valuable metals like magnesium, gold, and rare earths are found. These resources are crucial for China's economic power and regional stability, leading the government to harshly regulate the Uighur population due to past secessionist attempts. Additionally, China secures resources through partnerships with Africa, Kazakhstan, and Russia, further boosting its economic influence. Militarily, China boasts the world's largest army with 2.8 million active soldiers and rapidly expanding nuclear and conventional forces. Its military strategy focuses on defending territorial claims, especially in Taiwan and the South China Sea, which are critical for both resource extraction and access to global trade routes like the Straits of Malacca. China's military presence in the region and its strategic conflicts with nations like India and the US highlight its growing assertiveness (Forrest, 2022; Khan, 2020; Almotairi, 2021; Muhammad and Zaidi, 2022).
- ❖ **Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean for China:** China has long sought to build a world-class economy and a powerful military, with a particular focus on reclaiming disputed islands and Taiwan. After the Cold War, the Chinese leadership, under Jiang Zemin, recognized the need for a strong navy as part of a broader military strategy. The modernization of the navy became a priority, with a focus on acquiring advanced armaments and adopting a blue-water naval strategy. Admiral Shi Yunsheng outlined key goals for the navy's development, including offshore defense, a scientifically advanced military, improved weapon systems, and better-trained personnel (Jae-Hyung, 2002).
- ❖ **Energy security:** China's growing energy needs, driven by rapid economic expansion, are central to its ambitions in the Indian Ocean. As the world's second-largest oil consumer, China relies heavily on foreign oil imports, which account for over 30% of its consumption. Projections indicate that by 2025, China's oil demand will increase significantly, with foreign imports meeting 75% of its needs. This dependency on external energy sources heightens China's focus on securing maritime routes in the Indian Ocean to ensure continued economic growth. (Liu, 2024; Walsh and Harding, 2024)
- ❖ **Uninterrupted Supply of Energy dependent Safe and Secure Sea-lanes of Trade:** China's growing energy demands have pushed it to secure oil and gas reserves from distant regions like the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf. This has made the protection of maritime routes, particularly those linking China to the Indian Ocean, a strategic priority. As China and India both vie for control over energy supplies, their

rivalry intensifies, especially in the Indian Ocean. India's "Look East Policy" and its expanding naval presence, aimed at increasing control over critical maritime chokepoints like the Malacca Strait, pose a challenge to China's energy security. Chinese analysts recognize India's ambition to dominate the Indian Ocean, which threatens China's traditional influence and its energy interests (Riaz, et al, 2018; Scholten, 2023).

- ❖ **American presence In the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and Persian Gulf:** China is concerned about its energy security due to its reliance on the Malacca Strait for oil imports, fearing that the U.S. and its allies could block the strait in times of conflict, potentially stranding its maritime economy. Strategists also worry about the U.S. military's presence in the Asia-Pacific, with its island chains potentially encircling China and limiting its strategic space. While some believe that the U.S. could create a naval blockade in extreme cases, others argue that such a move would be unlikely unless a major conflict, such as over Taiwan, occurs. Despite these concerns, Chinese analysts recognize that energy disruption would harm all nations, and the growing detente between China and India may ease tensions, making the "China threat theory" less significant (Ji, 2007; Shorter, 2020).

Implications For China Due to India-Indonesia Maritime Security Partnership

- ❖ **Counterbalancing Of Beijing's Rising Influence in the Region:** The growing partnership between India and Indonesia presents a significant counterbalance to China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean region. India and China, both competing for control, project their naval power and seek political influence over island nations in the region. While China focuses more on South Asia, India sees the Indian Ocean as crucial for its security and economic interests, asserting its role as the region's primary security provider. This stance reduces China's chances of dominating the Indian Ocean solely. In contrast, China is increasing its naval presence to protect vital sea lanes and counter the U.S. Navy, which it views, along with India and Indonesia, as its main threats. As a result, China continues regular naval exercises, framing them as efforts to combat piracy (USIP China-South Asia Senior Study Group, 2020).
- ❖ **Compromised Dominance of China and Alternative Trade Routes:** The India-Indonesia maritime security partnership will gradually reduce China's influence in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The development of alternative ports, such as Sabang Deep Seaport, and projects like the Trilateral Highway and Chabahar Port, supported by trade agreements, will challenge China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Quad, with India as a key player, is strengthening security partnerships, while regional platforms and India's growing military and naval presence further undermine China's dominance in the region (Shekhar, 2020; Yadav, 2021).
- ❖ **Maritime Security Cooperation Will Control Beijing's Military Rise:** Enhanced security collaboration between India and Indonesia could curb China's military rise in the Indian Ocean. Through joint naval exercises, shared intelligence, and strengthened marine defense capabilities like Indonesia's Submarine Fleet, both countries can limit Beijing's regional influence. India should support Indonesia with military aid and training to bolster counterterrorism and anti-piracy efforts. Developing a joint strategic vision and promoting free navigation through regular defense negotiations will foster closer ties and reduce conflicts of interest. This partnership could help balance power dynamics and control China's military expansion in the region (Moudgil, 2022).
- ❖ **Impacts on Beijing's Economic Rise:** The growing partnership between India and Indonesia is expected to intensify economic competition in the region and diminish China's dominant economic position. This collaboration will limit the effectiveness of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as regional trade and

investment are increasingly shaped by alternative forums led by India, the US, Japan, and the EU. Bilateral trade between India and Indonesia surged by 22% in 2021-22, and regional trade is projected to reach \$250 billion by 2025. These developments, supported by trade agreements like the India-ASEAN FTA and RCEP, will reduce dependence on Chinese investments and challenge China's economic hegemony (Padmapati, 2023).

Recommendations

To address the water-related tensions between China and India, considering both the strategic importance of water resources and the broader geopolitical dynamics:-

- ❖ **Establish Bilateral Water Sharing Agreements:** Both China and India should prioritize establishing clear, formal agreements on water sharing, particularly concerning the Brahmaputra, Indus, and other shared rivers. These agreements should outline water allocation, dam construction regulations, and emergency response protocols in case of natural disasters or water shortages.
- ❖ **Create a Multilateral Water Cooperation Framework:** To promote regional stability, China, India, and other riparian states (such as Bangladesh and Pakistan) should work together within an inclusive framework for water management. A regional water-sharing agreement, perhaps under the auspices of the United Nations or a dedicated regional organization, can help ensure fair and sustainable water distribution.
- ❖ **Enhance Hydrological Data Sharing and Transparency:** China and India should agree on transparent and regular exchanges of hydrological data, especially concerning water levels, dam operations, and flood forecasts. This would enhance mutual trust and allow both countries to prepare for and manage floods or droughts that could have significant downstream impacts.
- ❖ **Strengthen Diplomatic Engagement on Water Security:** Diplomatic channels between China and India should be strengthened to ensure that water issues are addressed proactively and not left to escalate into conflict. Regular high-level meetings focused specifically on water security can help prevent misunderstandings and foster cooperation.
- ❖ **Promote Environmental Impact Assessments:** Before embarking on large-scale hydrological projects such as dams, China and India should conduct thorough, transparent environmental impact assessments (EIA) in collaboration with other affected countries. These assessments should consider the long-term ecological impacts, as well as social and economic consequences for neighboring populations.
- ❖ **Develop Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms:** In the event of conflicts arising from water resource management, both countries should agree on clear, peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms. This could involve third-party mediation or arbitration, which would help avoid escalation into broader geopolitical tensions.
- ❖ **Improve Public Awareness and Engagement:** Governments should engage the public on the importance of water conservation and sustainable management, both in China and India. Public awareness campaigns could help mitigate the tension surrounding water resources by fostering a sense of shared responsibility among citizens.
- ❖ **Leverage International Water Governance Models:** China and India can learn from successful international water governance models, such as the Nile Basin Initiative or the Mekong River Commission, which provide frameworks for cooperation and conflict resolution over shared water resources.
- ❖ **Address the Role of Non-State Actors:** Both governments should work together to ensure that non-state actors, such as the Dalai Lama and Tibet-related advocacy groups, do not exacerbate tensions or undermine diplomatic efforts on water sharing. Open and honest dialogue about how such figures influence public perception can help minimize misunderstandings.

- ❖ **Focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Both countries should align their water management strategies with the broader Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Collaboration towards these goals will not only address water issues but also foster broader cooperation in other areas such as environmental protection and poverty alleviation.

These recommendations aim to foster cooperative management of shared water resources, mitigate tensions, and ensure long-term regional stability and peace between China, India, and neighboring countries.

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