

China as an Indian Ocean power: trends and implications

Gurpreet S. Khurana

Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, India

ABSTRACT

Lately, China's politico-diplomatic and economic engagements with the Indian Ocean littorals, and its naval activities in the region, have become increasingly conspicuous. This paper aims to undertake a comprehensive assessment, not only of the trends, but also of the underlying factors shaping these trends, which makes China potentially an Indian Ocean power. The underlying factors examined are China's economic, strategic and geopolitical objectives and imperatives, and its national strategy – including its maritime military strategy – in the region. The paper concludes with a prognosis, and its implications for the region and India.

KEYWORDS

Indian Ocean; China's Maritime Strategy; Maritime Silk Road (MSR); String of Pearls; China's 'March West' Policy; Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, China has been increasing its “visibility” in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This ranges from China's politico-diplomatic and economic engagements with the regional countries to its naval operations in the Indian Ocean, including for diplomatic, constabulary and benign missions. However, these developments and events are merely “tail-end” manifestations of China's national strategy in the Indian Ocean, including its maritime military strategy. This paper aims to undertake a comprehensive assessment of China's potential to be an Indian Ocean power, beginning with an inquiry into its broader objectives and imperatives in the region.

National objectives and imperatives

Adequate empirical evidence exists to indicate China's overarching objectives are driven by economics and geopolitics. The “economic” imperative – evidenced by China's “Blue Book” on the Indian Ocean¹ Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative of the Chinese President Xi Jinping² – stems from China's insatiable quest to enhance its comprehensive national power (CNP), which is necessary for it to challenge the United States, and regain the stature of the “middle kingdom between earth and heaven”, as a predominant global power. However, China's “adverse geography” poses major challenges. Firstly, most of China is continental, far away from the sea, where the locus of economic activity lies. Secondly, while nature has endowed China with a fairly long coastline, its maritime frontier lies far away from the major sources of hydrocarbons and other natural resources in West Asia and Africa. To

make matters worse, China's shipping routes to the source countries lie across maritime choke points of the Indian Ocean, which are often insecure due to various reasons. Besides "economics", these adversities also translate into China's strategic vulnerability. For Chinese exports too, the emerging markets of the IOR are also far from Chinese ports.

China's "geopolitical" imperatives in the IOR are closely related to "economics". Money brings along geopolitical influence and leverages. A non-*status quo* power like China earnestly seeks such influence to meet its core national objectives of territorial consolidation, and also to reorient the global geopolitical and economic order in its favour.

In more recent years, China's geographical adversity has been aggravated by the US's rebalance strategy. In China's perception, the US strategy is aimed at its containment. The strategy has three dimensions: economic, diplomatic and strategic. China's "March West" policy is its response on all three fronts.

Economics

The US-led economic containment is best represented by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). In May 2014, Singapore's Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam stated that the TPP "must form the centrepiece of the US' economic rebalancing to the region".³ China needs to offset this by establishing economic links with the IOR countries.

Geopolitics/diplomacy

Through its support for China's opponents in the maritime territorial disputes in the western Pacific, the US seems to be succeeding in displacing Chinese influence in the region. China must, therefore, enhance its engagement with some key IOR countries to offset its "losses" in eastern Asia in terms of its regional influence. The MSR is the latest instrument of such engagement.

Military strategy

From the Chinese perspective, the US seeks to contain China's military power by limiting its strategic depth within the first island chain of the western Pacific. So, China must pose a "strategic distraction" for the Americans, by increasing its naval activities in the Indian Ocean.

National strategy

Altering geography

To meet its national objectives, China has been seeking to alter geography in its favour through various measures. Among these are the overland oil and gas pipeline projects (in Myanmar and Pakistan) and the multi-modal Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor that seek to provide maritime access to China's western regions to the northern Indian Ocean.

Notably, on various occasions, prominent Chinese English-language newspapers like *China Daily* and *Global Times* reported the agreement to build a canal across Thailand's

Kra Isthmus. The latest reports emerged in May 2015,⁴ with Bangkok denying any such agreement.⁵ Although the project may not fructify due to Thailand's national security considerations and/or the US pressure on Bangkok, the repeated reportage by the China's state-controlled media is a clear indication of Beijing's intent to fundamentally alter the geography of the Indo-Pacific region.

Enhancing stakes and engagements

China's economic engagement with the IOR countries is not all about economic dividends and "altering geography". It is also to enhance its stakes in the region for geopolitical and strategic reasons. This would not only assist China's economic growth, but also enhance its profile as a major stakeholder in the IOR, thereby increasing its influence among IOR countries, enhancing its role in the region's multilateral security organisations and legitimising its military "presence" in the region.

The MSR initiative is among few of these measures. It is necessary for Beijing to "enrol" New Delhi into the MSR,⁶ not because its participation is critical for the success of MSR's "economic" agenda, but to wean it from Washington's tightening embrace.

Seabed mining in the Indian Ocean is another such initiative. In 2011, China signed a 15-year contract with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) for mineral exploration in a 10,000-km² seabed area of the southwest Indian Ocean ridge.⁷ Earlier, in 2001, China had obtained similar exploration rights in a 75,000 -km² area in central Pacific Ocean. Notably, the area lies barely 500 nautical miles south of the US island state of Hawaii that houses the Pearl Harbor military base. In April 2014, China signed another 15-year contract with ISA for exploration of a 3,000-km² seabed area in the western Pacific Ocean.⁸ The area lies only 600 nautical miles east of the US territory and key military hub of Guam. Like in the Pacific, China's increasing stakes in the IOR are likely to be driven by geopolitical and strategic factors. In April 2015, China proposed to India a joint seabed mining venture in the Indian Ocean. The US does not subscribe to the prevailing global understanding on seabed mining and this presents an opportunity for China to build bridges with India.

Defence hardware sales

China's proactive approach to export defence hardware to IOR countries goes much beyond "economic engagement". It is a critical element of China's foreign policy meant to create security dependence, and accrue military-strategic dividends. In May 2015, a Chinese Yuan-class submarine entered the Indian Ocean and made a week-long port call at Karachi (Pakistan).⁹ Pakistan is likely to acquire eight of these boats. The week-long docking of the Yuan at Karachi – too long merely for replenishment – is likely to have been utilised for training of the Pakistan Navy personnel to operate the submarine and its machinery and weapon systems, particularly its Sterling Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system. Beijing also plays on the advantage of its ability to "sweeten" the terms of its offers of defence hardware. For example, the contract for selling three submarines to Thailand was sealed by China since it offered not only a relatively low price but also a soft loan, and technology transfer and training as part of the package.¹⁰ (The deal was later suspended, reportedly owing to its adverse effect on Thailand's relations with the US.¹¹)

Security multilateralism

Lately, China is increasing seeking representation in IOR's two nascent multilateral security forums – the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) – even if as a “tier-two” participant. It has secured for itself the status of a “dialogue partner” in IORA and an “observer” in IONS.

Security multilateralism in the IOR is a recent phenomenon, which China sees as an opportunity to be seized. It implies that no other major power – the US included, notwithstanding its major contribution – possesses the advantage of a “head start” or primacy in regional security affairs. On the other hand, if Beijing plays its cards deftly in terms of engaging the regional countries, it could attain a degree of eminence, if not primacy. Notably, during the fourth IONS meeting in 2014, while China was admitted as an observer in IONS, the US was denied observer status due to objections raised by Iran.¹² Has China played its cards through Iran?

To be a part of IOR's security multilateralism, Beijing has leveraged the “inclusive” approach of countries in the region. Such an approach welcomes the role of major extra-regional powers, not only to tide over the region's capacity constraints to ensure maritime security, but because it is also necessary for maintaining a stable balance of power and geopolitical “hedging”.

China's approach to security multilateralism in the IOR is likely to be driven by four foreign policy imperatives: symbolism/influence, policy shaping, access to information and seizing opportunities.¹³ Being a part of IOR multilateralism is critical for Beijing to buttress its claim to “global power” status. As a “tier-two” participant, China cannot “make” policy, but it could “shape” policy to make it more favourable for itself. It could do this by altering the behaviour of participants by putting forth its perceptions and views. It would also be aware of the multilateral transactions, including the official positions of the full-fledged members, and seize opportunities to further its interests in the region. This is best exemplified by the negotiations of September 2007 at the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) meeting on a draft nuclear waiver for India. While NSG operates at a global (rather than regional) level, China's modus operandi is the same in all forums. While China was opposed to the waiver to India, it preferred to encourage the smaller countries, who had very rigid positions on non-proliferation, to take the lead in proposing killer amendments to the draft decision. Hence, through effective situational awareness, it ensured that it was not alone to scuttle India's aspiration to NSG membership.¹⁴

To meet its national strategic objectives in the IOR, China also needs to “manage” its relations with other major extra-regional powers that have stakes in the region, and are also seeking a role in the regional security architecture. Besides the US, these include the UK and France individually, and the EU in collective terms. Japan and Russia are also seeking to influence events in the IOR. China seems to effectively leverage its economic influence among some key US allies that are stakeholders in the IOR, to obviate a US-led coalition acting against China's objectives in the IOR. The decision of the UK to become a founder member of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – intended to rival the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)¹⁵ – and the French support to the MSR concept¹⁶ are cases in point. Notably, in the IOR, Australia (also a formal ally of the US) is among the largest stakeholders of the AIIB.¹⁷

Maritime military strategy

China's maritime military strategy in the Indian Ocean presents a puzzle. Although China's 2013 "Blue Book" on the Indian Ocean talks much about its economic interests in IOR, Beijing says it has no maritime (-military) strategy for the region. Yet it adds that "if India or the US impede the attainment of its objectives (in the Indian Ocean), it would not desist from resorting to confrontation".¹⁸

The MSR initiative is much about sea trade, but avoids any reference to maritime security or safety of shipping and seafarers, despite China's active participation in a counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008. Notably, in 2015, China conducted a combined counter-terrorism exercise with the Sri Lankan Army called "Silk Road Cooperation-2015".¹⁹

On May 26, 2015, China released its Defence White Paper of 2014, titled *China's Military Strategy*. The document contains no explicit mention of the Indian Ocean; neither in terms of its security interests nor its strategy. It makes only a brief mention of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy's counter-piracy "escort missions in the Gulf of Aden", and in the context of "fulfilling China's international obligations".²⁰ Yet it refers to the need to protect "strategic Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)". The emphasis on the adjective "strategic" indicates that China considers itself vulnerable to the interdiction of its energy SLOCs in the Indian Ocean.

The inference is that the aforesaid "omissions" are well considered and deliberate. It is highly unlikely that the PLA Navy has not catered for adverse contingencies to secure its interests in IOR, particularly in terms of the security of its SLOCs. The various facets of China's maritime military strategy for the Indian Ocean are examined below.

Fungible missions and capabilities

Since 2008, China's Defence White Papers have been emphasising the PLA Navy's commitment to "Military Operations Other than War" (MOOTW), leading to various instances when such missions have been undertaken. These range from the counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden to the periodic deployments of the *Peace Ark* hospital ship. The MOOTW missions are intended for presence and surveillance, besides providing familiarisation to the PLA Navy to operate in these waters. These missions have also been accompanied by Chinese warships making port calls at IOR ports for replenishment and furthering diplomatic engagement with the regional countries.

China's pitch for MOOTW missions is not unusual, since all navies do this. China's Defence White papers of 2012 and 2014 state that the PLA Navy would maintain "military presence in relevant sea areas",²¹ which clearly include the areas in the Indian Ocean. While such presence may be primarily for MOOTW missions, it is likely to be dovetailed with preparing for "wartime" operations. This is borne out by Beijing's assertion in September 2014 that its Song-class submarine deployed in the Indian Ocean was meant for counter-piracy. The credibility of this rationale was dismissed by naval analysts in India on operational grounds. While this may be weird to naval practitioners in India and elsewhere, it is China's doctrinal thought. The 2014 White Paper adds that the "PLA Navy will work to incorporate MOOTW capacity building into ... Preparation for

Military Struggle (PMS)”,²² thereby implying the China would also seek to develop fungible capabilities, including multi-mission platforms.

It is pertinent to mention that China already possesses advanced civilian research vessels, and technologies including for underwater mapping, which also have military applications. In December 2014, its deep-sea manned submersible *Jiaolong* carried out its first dive in the seabed mining area allotted to China in the southwest Indian Ocean.²³ Such capabilities may be used by China to collate hydrographic data for submarine operations in the Indian Ocean.

Sea control and power projection

China’s Defence White Paper 2014, released on May 26, 2015, provides an implicit reference to its long-term naval strategy for the Indian Ocean. It indicates a shift in the PLA Navy’s focus from “offshore waters defence” to “open seas protection” of China’s “overseas interests”.²⁴ (It is pertinent to note that a few weeks later, on July 1, 2015, China’s National People’s Congress passed a new domestic law that confers upon the PLA Navy the duty to defend these “overseas interests”, through military action if necessary.²⁵)

The mention of “open seas protection” along with China’s ongoing aircraft carrier programme indicates an evolving strategy for “sea control”. Furthermore, “open seas protection”, in conjunction with an emphasis on the protection of “strategic SLOCs and overseas interests”, implies that China seeks to expand the PLA Navy’s operations in a military role (PMS) beyond the Western Pacific, and to undertake maritime power projection in the Indian Ocean. However, this indicates China’s doctrinal intent. Given that China has yet to operationalise a carrier task force, it is unlikely that the PLA Navy will be able to establish carrier-based sea control westwards of the Malacca Straits, until at least a decade from now.

Sustenance of naval forces

China’s latest Defence White Paper also hints at the PLA Navy’s strategy for the “sustenance” of the forward-deployed naval platforms through “strategic prepositioning”. This seems to give credence to the China’s intent to establish military bases in the IOR and thus to the theory of the “String of Pearls”.²⁶

Since 2011, China has been seeking a hub-and-spoke Logistics Support Agreement with the IOR states like Seychelles²⁷ and Djibouti.²⁸ In July 2015, news reports indicated that Maldives was encouraging foreign entities to own its island territories for undertaking land reclamation.²⁹ Coming amidst the growing anxieties caused by China’s controversial “island-building” activities in the South China Sea,³⁰ this reinforced the theory of “Chinese military bases” in the Indian Ocean. Notably, the Indians and Americans are not the only ones wary of the potential of the PLA Navy’s use of the maritime facilities in the IOR. Notwithstanding the strategic convergence between Indonesia’s “global maritime axis” and China’s MSR concepts, the eminent Indonesian statesman Hasyim Djalal has advised Jakarta to be cautious since the maritime infrastructure being constructed through MSR could be used by China for “military penetration”.³¹

Undeniably, China is seeking access facilities in the Indian Ocean, whether known by the “String of Pearls” nomenclature, or fructified through the “MSR Concept”.³² Some

more bilateral pacts may be added over time. An analysis indicates that the “facilities are most likely to appear first in East Africa, where China has the greatest freedom of action and room for manoeuvre in diplomatic and strategic terms”.³³ However, these are not potential Chinese “military bases”, but agreements for peacetime replenishment of fuel, food and water for Chinese naval units, something that even India has forged with many countries, including those in the western Pacific littoral.³⁴

China could supplement its peacetime “access facilities” in the IOR with the concept of “sea-basing”, which has not received due attention. The concept refers to the capability of a navy to undertake overseas military missions of expeditionary nature without reliance on land-based operational logistics and command and control infrastructure, either from at-home bases or from overseas bases. The concept was developed by the US expeditionary forces, largely due to the increasing constraints to maintain overseas military bases, besides catering to the emerging concepts of amphibious warfare.³⁵

The high probability of the PLA Navy resorting to the “sea-basing” concept is supported by the July 2015 induction of its first “Mobile Landing Platform” (MLP), which is similar to the US design.³⁶ The US expeditionary forces are themselves new to the MLP concept. China is also known to be building naval Logistic Support Ships with roll-on, roll-off (ro-ro) design and bow and stern ramps optimised for amphibious operations.³⁷

The numbers of the PLA Navy’s advanced underway replenishment ships are increasing. Notably, news reports indicate that in June 2015, China launched its fifth Type 903A replenishment ship,³⁸ with three more likely to be built. With these eight new replenishment vessels added to the older fleet tankers, the PLA Navy is clearly being given the means to support distant missions in the IOR. Added to these are the state-owned commercial ships. In June 2015, the Chinese government approved the new guidelines called “Technical Standards for New Civilian Ships to Implement National Defense Requirements”, which lay down not only the provisions to requisition civilian ships for naval missions, but also how future construction of Chinese merchant vessels would need to adhere to naval specifications.³⁹ China is also formulating a “National Defense Transport Law” to cover the additional financial costs of shipbuilding and insurance for employment for military missions.⁴⁰ These commercial vessels are numerous. According to statistics from China’s ministry of transportation, in 2014, about 2600 ships were capable of ocean transport,⁴¹ which represents a major element of asymmetry with any major navy operating in the Indian Ocean. The US Navy’s 31 Maritime Prepositioning Ships (MPS) of its Military Sealift Command (MSC) pale in comparison.⁴²

Prognosis

Presently, the US and French navies are the only two extra-regional navies that maintain a permanent presence in the Indian Ocean. The PLA Navy is likely to be the third very soon. Although China withdrew its anti-piracy task force from the Gulf of Aden in July 2014, its 2014 Defence White Paper clearly indicates that its navy would continue to undertake such missions as required to “secure international SLOCs.”⁴³ Hence, China is likely to use MOOTW as an alibi to maintain naval presence in the Indian Ocean, with all its attendant strategic spinoffs.

Until the PLA Navy is able to establish carrier-based sea control in the Indian Ocean, it is likely to deploy its nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) in these waters as part of its “deterrence-by-punishment” strategy. Notably, Chinese media reports indicate that the PLA Navy is likely to commission upgraded versions (Type 093G) of its six existing Type 093 SSNs.⁴⁴ Armed with land-attack-cruise missiles, these SSNs are optimised for distant power projection. These boats are likely to be based at the underground submarine base in Yalong Bay (Hainan). As, and when, China secures its maritime territorial objectives in the Western Pacific, it is likely to focus on establishing carrier-based sea-control in the Indian Ocean.

An unconfirmed report indicates China’s plans to establish a Fourth Fleet for the Indian Ocean, based in Sanya/Yalong Bay (Hainan). Analysts have expressed such a possibility since the Yalong Bay underground submarine base was revealed by satellite pictures in 2005. However, the proposition was dismissed by many due to complications of China’s naval access (across Southeast Asia’s maritime choke points).⁴⁵ China may have sought to resolve the former hurdle through the Kra Canal project (as mentioned earlier). Even if the Kra Canal project does not fructify, China could still establish the Indian Ocean fleet in a decade or so when it is able to garner adequate numbers of long-legged platforms and ensure their sustainability in the Indian Ocean.

To overcome its challenge of naval sustenance in the Indian Ocean, in the short to medium term, China is likely to resort to a combination of peacetime access facilities and sea-basing, rather than developing full-fledged military bases. Even while Maldives is under severe strain of the long-term effects of sea-level rise caused by climate change, its government is unlikely to be ignorant of the near-term adverse geopolitical and security consequences of permitting Chinese military bases on its territory. Over the long term, however, China’s access facilities and sea-basing could be supplemented by “virtual military bases”. China’s growing exports of naval hardware to the IOR countries could support PLA Navy deployments in the region through overseas technical and ordnance support, virtually akin to overseas military bases.

Implications

Leading from China’s increasing military presence in the Indian Ocean and its substantially enhanced stakes and influence in the IOR, the region is likely to witness a fundamental, albeit progressive, shift in the regional balance of power. Even if the balance remained in favour of the US, its allies and its partners, it is likely to be precarious, leading to brinkmanship and reducing regional stability.

The IOR is known to be inherently volatile on account of political instabilities and socio-economic disparities in the many “fragile states” of the region. Until recently, the geopolitical and strategic interests of all major military powers in the IOR were broadly congruent. This ensured that the region remained largely stable, except for some aberrations. Lately, China has also demonstrated its will and capacity to contribute to regional security and stability through the deployment of the PLA Navy for various constabulary and benign missions. However, given that China is a non-*status quo* (revisionist) power, its overarching national strategic objectives are divergent with a majority of other major powers. In a future scenario wherein China is firmly “entrenched” in the IOR, a contingency involving instability in a regional country may lead to China or the

other major powers to undertake a hasty military intervention to preempt the rival. This would make the IOR less, rather than more, stable.

China's established presence in the Indian Ocean would have significant implications for India. First, the reinforcement of China's sphere of influence within India's geostrategic frontiers could potentially induce the countries therein – particularly those in its immediate neighbourhood such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar – to pit one regional power against another. This would narrow down India's foreign policy options and also adversely affect its relations with these neighbouring countries. The geopolitical ramifications for India would be particularly severe in context of Pakistan which is likely to demonstrate an increasing intransigence, particularly in reforming its proxy-war strategy against India. Pakistan's hardened stance would hem India within the subcontinent, thereby encouraging China to increase its politico-military assertiveness against India, at international forums and across the land border.

Second, owing to the persisting territorial/land border dispute between China and India, coupled with the lack of demonstrated will on part of China to resolve it, China's established military presence in the IOR directly impinges on India's national security by adding the maritime element to India's military strategy vis-à-vis China, and an additional seaward flank to defend. India would need to cater for the worst-case two-front (China-Pakistan) conflict scenario. Even if the PLA Navy is unable to establish sea control in the Indian Ocean in the next few decades, the strategic assets and infrastructure in India's littoral areas would be vulnerable to Chinese submarines armed with land-attack missiles.

Even in a business-as-usual (peacetime) scenario, Indian naval forces are likely to face unintentional encounters at sea with the PLA Navy units, which is a complex proposition, considering that the IOR security architecture has not yet evolved to establish a code of conduct to regulate such encounters. Also, India would need to contend with the Chinese merchant ships and marine research vessels deployed in the Indian Ocean – particularly in the maritime zones of India – to collate strategic and operational intelligence. Furthermore, while Chinese ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) may not undertake deterrent patrols in the Indian Ocean, the PLA Navy's non-strategic naval platforms are likely to encounter (and may even trail) India's SSBNs in its sea-based nuclear bastion in the Bay of Bengal, which could lead to tensions.⁴⁶ In India's western operational theatre, China's technological assistance to Pakistan to base its tactical nuclear weapons at sea could also lead to insecurities for India.⁴⁷

Way ahead for India

The key question that arises is: How should India deal with the emerging geopolitical and security environment? The views are divided across the entire spectrum. A viewpoint at one end of the spectrum suggests that China's primary strategic contention is against the United States, and by extrapolation, against its allies in Asia, not India. Hence, India – given its advantage of a multivector independent foreign policy – should wean itself away from the intensifying geopolitical tussle between China and the United States, which could well potentially spill over from the Western Pacific into the Indian Ocean. While India should keep its power dry, it should seek broader

geopolitical convergences with China and capitalise on the benefits in terms of trade, manufacturing and infrastructure development that China offers, such as through its MSR initiative.

The viewpoint at the other end of the spectrum recommends that notwithstanding the lack of an alliance relationship, India needs an enhanced partnership with US as a leverage to exert pressure upon China to resolve its lingering contentions with India. This must be done sooner rather than later, since in a few decades, China's comprehensive power may grow to an extent that it matches America's power (or even exceed it), thereby reducing the leverage against China.

Notes

1. 'Development Report in the Indian Ocean', Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), 6 Jun 13, cited in Ananth Krishnan, 'China details Indian Ocean strategy and interests', *The Hindu*, June 9, 2013, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/china-details-indian-ocean-strategy-and-interests/article4795550.ece> (accessed 21st April 2016).
2. Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, ASEAN–China Centre, October 3, 2013, http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed 13th August 2015).
3. 'TPP must form centrepiece of US economic rebalancing: Shanmugam', *Channel News Asia*, May 16, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/international/tpp-mustform-centrepiece/1109400.html> (accessed 13th August 2015).
4. Chan Kai Yee, "China announces strategically important Kra Isthmus Canal in Thailand", *China Daily*, May 17, 2015, <http://chinadaily.com/2015/05/17/china-announces-strategically-important-kra-isthmus-canal-in-thailand/> (Accessed 13th August 2015); Hu Weijia, "Reported Kra Isthmus Canal could offer huge advantages for global trade", *Global Times*, May 20, 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/922690.shtml> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
5. PanuWongcha-um, "Thailand denies Kra Canal deal", *Channel News Asia*, May 19, 2015, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/thailand-denies-kra-canal/1856758.html> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
6. In March 2014, the Chinese Ambassador to New Delhi proposed to merge MSR with the India's projects "Mausam" and "Spice Route". "China seeks India's 'Spice Route' link with its 'Silk Road'", *Times of India* (New Delhi), March 6, 2015, p. 13.
7. Amitav Ranjan, "China set to mine central Indian Ocean, Delhi worried", *Indian Express*, July 31, 2011, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/china-set-to-mine-central-indian-ocean-delhi-worried/824900/0> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
8. International Seabed Authority (ISA), "China Ocean Mineral Resources Research And Development Association (COMRA) and ISA Sign Exploration Contract", 2014, <https://www.isa.org/jm/news/china-ocean-mineral-resources-research-and-development-association-comra-and-isa-sign> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
9. "Exclusive: Chinese submarine lurked past Indian waters, docked in Karachi?", *India Today*, June 27, 2015, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/chinese-submarine-indian-navy-karachi-indian-ocean-pm-modi/1/447505.html> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
10. Prashanth Parameswaran, "How Did China Just Win Thailand's New Submarine Bid?", *The Diplomat*, June 26, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/how-did-china-just-win-thailands-new-submarine-bid/> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
11. Michelle FlorCruz, "Thailand-China Submarine Deal Suspended Following Concern Over Jeopardizing Ties With Washington", *International Business Times*, July 19, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/thailand-china-submarine-deal-suspended-following-concern-over-jeopardizing-ties-2012291> (Accessed 28th July 2015).

12. “To increase footprint in Indian Ocean, Centre signs key charter”, *Indian Express*, March 18, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/to-increase-footprint-in-indian-ocean-centre-signs-key-charter/#> (Accessed 27th July 2015).
13. Based on the analytical framework propounded by Nick Bisley and Brendan Taylor, “China’s Engagement with Regional Security Multilateralism: The Case Study of the Shangri-La Dialogue”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (ISEAS), 37, no. 1, (2015): 29–48.
14. Shyam Saran, “The Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement – Ten Years After”, Changing Asia Series Lecture, July 20, 2015, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.
15. China is the largest stakeholder in AIIB, with a stake of more than 30%..“US anger at Britain joining Chinese-led investment bank AIIB”, *The Guardian*, March 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/13/white-house-pointedly-asks-uk-to-use-its-voice-as-part-of-chinese-led-bank> (Accessed 2nd August 2015).
16. “France’s foreign minister on board with Belt and Road plan”, *Xinhua*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20150615000036&cid=1202> (Accessed 2nd August 2015).
17. “Australia confirms it will join China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank”, *The Guardian*, March 28, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/mar/29/australia-confirms-it-will-join-chinas-asian-infrastructure-investment-bank> (Accessed 2nd August 2015).
18. Development Report in the Indian Ocean’, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), 6 Jun 13, cited in Ananth Krishnan, ‘China details Indian Ocean strategy and interests’, *The Hindu*, June 9, 2013, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/china-details-indian-ocean-strategy-and-interests/article4795550.ece> (Accessed 21st April 2016).
19. “China, Sri Lanka hold ‘Silk Road Cooperation–2015’ joint drill”, *PRC Ministry of National Defence*, March 31, 2015, at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2015-03/31/content_4577899.htm (Accessed 25th July 2015). “Sri Lanka: China military exercise concluded”, *LankaSri News*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.lankasrinews.com/view.php?224OIX2acV5YK04ecyMCd02eAmB2dd2fBmA3030gAm2e4cY5L3ca4lO4b3> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
20. ‘China’s Military Strategy’, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, May 2015, Beijing, at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/>
21. ‘China’s Military Strategy’, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, May 2015, Beijing, at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/>
22. The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Military Strategy”, May 2015, Beijing, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
23. “China Deploys Submersible in Indian Ocean to Explore Metals”, *Economic Times*, December 23, 2014, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-23/news/57350099_1_international-seabed-authority-polymetallic-indian-ocean (Accessed 7th August 2015).
24. State Council Information Office, “China’s Military Strategy”.
25. Minnie Chan, “PLA tasked with protecting ‘overseas interests’ under new China security law”, *South China Morning Post*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1831564/chinas-national-security-law-gives-pla-mission-protect> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
26. Booz-Allen & Hamilton, *Energy Futures in Asia*, 2004 report, cited in “China builds up strategic sea lanes”, *The Washington Times*, January 17, 2005, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/17/20050117-115550-1929r/?page=all> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
27. Li Xiaokun and Li Lianxing, “Navy looks at offer from Seychelles”, *China Daily*, December 13, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/13/content_14254395.htm (Accessed 25th July 2015).
28. “Djibouti President: China Negotiating Horn of Africa Military Base”, *Defence News*, May 10, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/mideast-africa/2015/05/10/djibouti-president-china-negotiating-horn-africa-military-base/27082879/> (Accessed 25th July 2015). Also see Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Sea-Based PLA Navy May Not Need ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean”, in *Maritime Perspectives 2015*, ed. Vijay Sakhua and Gurpreet Khurana (New Delhi, NMF: 2016), p. 202.

29. Zachary Keck, “Get Ready: China Could Build New Artificial Islands Near India”, *The National Interest*, July 29, 2015, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/get-ready-china-could-build-new-artificial-islands-near-13446> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
30. “Philippine official: China island-building in full swing”, *CBS News*, June 26, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/philippines-official-china-constructing-islands-reclamation-south-china-sea/> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
31. Erwida Maulia, “In Indonesia, Caution Urged With China’s New ‘Silk Road’ Plans”, *Jakarta Globe*, May 31, 2015, <http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/indonesia-caution-urged-chinas-new-silk-road-plans/> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
32. Gurpreet Khurana, “Maritime Silk Road: Beyond: Economics>”, *NMF Issue Brief*, April 16, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/11968181/China_s_Maritime_Silk_Road_Beyond_Economics_ (Accessed 13th August 2015).
33. Morgan Clemens, “The Maritime Silk Road and the PLA: Part One”, *China Brief*, XV, no. 6 (March 19, 2015), p. 7.
34. Khurana, “Sea-based PLA Navy may not need ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean”, p. 202.
35. Khurana, “Sea-based PLA Navy may not need ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean”, pp. 202–203.
36. Alvin Ybanez, “PLA Navy Receives Its First Mobile Landing Platform”, *Yibada*, July 1, 2015, at <http://en.yibada.com/articles/42062/20150701/pla-navy-receives-first-mobile-landing-platform.htm>
37. Khurana, “Sea-based PLA Navy may not need ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean”, p. 203.
38. “PLA’s 5th ‘Super Nanny’ Type 903A Replenishment Ship Launched” *Want China Times*, June 10, 2015, <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1101&MainCatID=11&id=20150610000066> (Accessed 25th July 2015).
39. Zhao Lei, “New Rules Mean Ships Can Be Used by Military”, *China Daily*, June 18, 2015, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-06/18/content_21042373.htm (Accessed 13th August 2015).
40. “China Sea Strategy Boosts Military Use of Civilian Ships”, *Voice of America*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/china-sea-strategy-boost-military-use-of-civilian-ships/2836413.html> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
41. Zhao Lei, “New rules mean ships can be used by military”.
42. Khurana, “Sea-based PLA Navy may not need ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean”, p. 203.
43. ‘China’s Military Strategy’, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, May 2015, Beijing, at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/>
44. Zhao Lee, “Navy to Get 3 New Nuclear Subs”, *China Daily*, April 3, 2015, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/03/content_19989106.htm (Accessed 13th August 2015).
45. Wendell Minnick, “Experts: Chinese ‘4th Fleet’ Appears Unlikely”, *Defense News*, February 6, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/navy/2015/02/06/taiwan/22913337/> (Accessed 13th August 2015).
46. Iskander Rehman, *Murky Waters: Naval Nuclear Dynamics in the Indian Ocean* (Washington, DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: 2015), pp. 42–47.
47. *Ibid.*

Notes on contributor

Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S. Khurana is the Executive Director of the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi. The views expressed are his own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the NMF, the Indian Navy or the Government of India.