



A Study on Maritime Silk Road and the India and China Puzzle

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Abstract: *Are the dynamics of the maritime relationship between India and China reaching “a new phase of power politics and the balance of power?” Over the last several years, India and China have concentrated a significant amount of their policy emphasis on “the South China Sea area and the Indian Ocean region (IOR).” Both geographically close nations are implementing novel approaches and expanding their spheres of influence in these strategically nearby areas. However, what is more noteworthy is howaging in power-balancing strategies that are cooperative and competitive about the two areas and regions. These two maritime zones are crucial to the energy security and economic survival of both nations, according to their stated policy wording. The strategic value of these maritime zones for China and India rests in the fact that they provide the two nations full control over their domestic politics and energy diplomacy inside Asia and beyond. This paper examines the developing aspects of the maritime complexity between India and China within the context of competitive and cooperating domains that have grown far-reaching and multipolar. It analyses the rising complexity of India-China interactions in both “the South China Sea area and the Indian Ocean area (IOR), and it contextualizes how the complexities in both of these places are related to India-China relations.”*

Key words: *Geopolitics, Maritime, South China Sea, Indian Ocean, Neighborhood.*

Introduction

Have power politics and the shifting balance of power entered a new phase in the maritime dynamics between India and China? Over the last several years, India and China have concentrated a significant amount of their policy emphasis on “the South China Sea area as well as the Indian Ocean area (IOR).” Both geographically close nations are implementing novel approaches and expanding their spheres of influence in these strategically nearby areas. However, what is more noteworthy is how the two nations are engaging in power-balancing strategies that are cooperative and competitive about the two areas and regions. According to “the official policy language of both nations, these two marine zones are significant for the countries' energy security and economic viability. The strategic importance of these marine zones for India and China” lies in enabling both countries to exercise complete control over the politics of their respective neighborhoods and international energy diplomacy, both in Asia and beyond the globe.

This paper examines the developing aspects of the maritime complexity between India and China within the context of competitive and cooperating domains that have grown far-reaching and multipolar. “It analyses the rising complexity of India-China interactions in both the South China Sea area and the Indian Ocean area (IOR), and it contextualizes how the complexities in both of these places are related to India-China relations. Some recent events show that the two nations are approaching a new phase of marine cooperative politics. This shows how politics in the maritime sector has become multipolar, varied, and constructive, with the potential for cooperation and competition to coexist. Reports from the media have recently suggested, for instance, that China has invited India to become a part of the recently proposed Maritime Silk Road.”^[1] While the two sides were in Beijing for discussions, including a Special Representative, the invitation was extended to the other side. “China first offered the idea of the Maritime Silk Road inside the ASEAN framework.” Its expansion to the Gulf region, South Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the African coast would have far-reaching consequences for India and other countries. In this regard, why would Beijing want to forge ties with its regional foe, India? This approach is a carbon copy of Beijing's long-standing and remarkable maritime strategy, in which the concept of a harmonious ocean has been espoused time and time again.^[2] Furthermore, it is significant to note that a “harmonious ocean” is being promoted simultaneously as China has just decided to place a far greater emphasis on maritime security concerns. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, the new Chinese government is placing a significant amount of emphasis on maritime security policy. In the midst of this, the maritime politics of Asia have grown more multipolar, which has resulted in “a new level of power politics among several of the region's nations, particularly between India and China.”

**“Between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean”:**

For a considerable time, the competitive relationship between India and China has been dominated by the disagreement surrounding the border problem, the historical animosity between “Tibet and the Tibetan discourse, and the recently growing water conflict.” These competition features have gradually spread to many regions of Asia, and they have even made their way into the marine industry. The two countries' economic dominance and authority in a variety of sub-regions of Asia have resulted in a power struggle that is multi-faceted, multi-layered, and multi-structured. Even though their ascent “in global politics has accelerated the multipolarism thesis to the maximum degree, their impact and importance in Asia have verified the argument that Asia is far more multipolar now than it was at any other time.” The multipolarity of Asia is a subject of the highest significance because China is widely influential and prominent. “Asia's maritime politics have become more multilaterally driven and have created an atmosphere of multipolarism, as evidenced by the recent Chinese proposal of a Maritime Silk Road, the continued China-ASEAN maritime dialogue proposal on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea, which is pushing forward the gradual implementation of the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties (DOC), India's involvement and proposition of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), and the newly formed India-Australia-Indonesia troika under the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).”^[3] These are just a few illustrations of “how Asia's maritime politics have become more multipolarized.” Taking this into consideration, not only is the maritime policy of India and China critical, but also their maritime relationship, as well as their mutual views “and misperceptions of one other, are essential to the maritime politics of Asia.” This is significant because both nations are working towards a more robust marine strategy. Both are devoting a significant amount of attention to energy sustainability and marine security concerns.

As globalization progresses, many nations are becoming more reliant on marine resources to maintain their economies. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to ensure maritime routes' safety and convey goods by water. India and China, both developing economies, have been driven to revamp their energy policy and marine strategy to meet the need for energy among their home constituency. In addition, they have been compelled to enhance their role as significant maritime powers in the South China Sea and the Interior of the Republic of China. India is physically exposed to the Sea from three different sides and is regarded “as a local power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Nevertheless, China is confronted with the ocean from both the East and the South, and it is now involved in two of the most notable maritime conflicts in Asia. These are the South China Sea dispute with some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East China Sea dispute with Japan. Meanwhile, the increasing power competition between India and China in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean Region has driven new dimensions in the relationship between India and China. The South China Sea enables Beijing to cement its superiority and position in East Asia and Southeast Asia and offers a steady conduit and gateway to the Indian Ocean. For India, the South China Sea opens the door for a more vigorous Look East policy. For Beijing, the South China Sea helps it solidify its position in East Asia and Southeast Asia. The seas that stretch from Singapore to the Taiwan Strait in the northeastern part of the Pacific Ocean are included in the South China Sea, which is also an essential part of the Pacific Ocean. The strengthening of Beijing's influence over the South China Sea enhances the country's power, reputation, and posture in China's maritime sector. Beijing is concerned about territorial rights in the South China Sea and its superiority and autonomy in the area, as shown by the fact that it objected to India's oil exploration effort with Vietnam a few years ago in the South China Sea.” Such an opposition proved that Beijing is serious about both of these issues. The Chinese authorities had made a strong statement, “referring to India's joint oil exploration with Vietnam as illegal and invalid. They stated, we hope that relevant foreign companies will not participate in the oil and gas exploration to stay away from the South China Sea dispute.”^[4] China poses a significant challenge to India in the South China Sea energy exploration because to the present complexity of Asian politics and the seas.

A new level of potential has been generated for India due to the conflict between China and Vietnam in “the South China Sea. Many nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), including Vietnam and the Philippines, perceive India as a potential alternative force in the area. However, the ASEAN community as a whole considers India to be a formidable state.” A more comprehensive ASEAN community has issued a call to India, urging it to be more open, to develop greater “institutional cooperation in commerce, economics, and marine security, and to adopt a more forceful attitude towards the area, which includes the South China Sea. For instance, the President of Vietnam and the Prime Minister of Thailand” have repeatedly asked India to adopt a proactive posture in matters about the area and improve the level of cooperation and connectivity between India and ASEAN.

Considering the policy stance that New Delhi takes towards ASEAN, India is interested in reciprocating these sentiments. A state prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, made a firm reference to this topic in wearing the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit on November 20–21, 2012, Prime Med, “As maritime nations, India and ASEAN nations should intensify their engagements for maritime security and safety, for freedom of navigation, and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes by international law.”^[5]



China takes “these perspectives very seriously. China's awareness of India's maritime viewpoint on the South China Sea and the territories close to it is continually expanding.” Additionally, Beijing regularly watches India's operations in the maritime sectors and other regional realms. This surveillance is being done continuously.

Recently, the maritime political debate between India and China in the area has been dominated by various topics and subject subjects. Additionally, it includes analogies that are both cooperative and contradictory. An important question that has to be investigated is “whether the cooperative drive will be able to control and stabilize the relationship discourse or if the conflicting courses can take precedence over the cooperative drive completely.” China has been compelled to improve its maritime force building and posture in the area due to the United States “pivot” to Asia and the growing dispute that has occurred in recent times over “the South China Sea and the East China Sea. New Delhi has been compelled to review and reevaluate its maritime policy strategy in the region due to the Chinese objection to India's oil exploration with Vietnam in the South China Sea region and Beijing's recent proposal to India to join its Maritime Silk Road proposal.”^[6]

On the other hand, “India has traditionally been vigilant about its position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Even though China's maritime dispute with Japan over Senkaku Island is not a direct result of the maritime factor in China's relations with India, the growing assertiveness of China in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has direct implications for India and has apparent connotations for India–China maritime relations. This is due to two straightforward reasons: first, maritime politics are going to be the determining factor in the direction that power politics in Asia will take in the years to come; second, the South China Sea is not geographically separated from the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), nor are there any conformist traditionalist geographical barriers that differentiate maritime politics in the two maritime regions.”^[7] The politics of these areas are, in some respects, parallel with one another, and they engage both India and China to a significant degree. This directly impacts the debate about their maritime relationship in the region.

Additionally, the marine areas have been brought together on a single platform as a result of the recent proposal made by China to build a new marine Silk Road to be implemented at the regional level. One of the factors that China considers in this endeavour is India. It explains a cooperative strategy; nonetheless, the concept is based on the continuous rise of Chinese influence in marine sectors while simultaneously linking up with regional nations regardless of how detrimental “they are to Chinese strategic maritime interests. Beijing's offer to India to join the Maritime Silk Road is an instance that demonstrates the rising balance-of-power dynamics in the India–China maritime intricacy that spans the South China Sea and the IOR.” This invitation was extended to India by Beijing.

The Silk Road Maritime Route and Multilateralism Across Regions

“President Xi Jinping of China proposed establishing a new Maritime Silk Road in Southeast Asia in October 2013 when he delivered a speech to the Indonesian Parliament. The primary focus of Xi's efforts was to strengthen the community between China and ASEAN by establishing a solid political basis and fostering economic collaboration between the two region's nations. Xi brought up two points in his proposal: first, the geographical closeness of China and ASEAN members and how that should be strengthened through cooperation and development; “and second, the financial potential of both China and ASEAN as rising markets in Asia,” which is significant for both their bilateral relations and the growth and integration of their region's economies. The idea of the Silk Road may be traced back to the formulation of Chinese foreign policy for a very long time. Beijing has used this idea to expand its corporate operations worldwide, as well as its commercial partnerships and connections. On the other hand, Beijing's consistent use of this concept in the marine sector demonstrates a new way of thinking in China's foreign policy, particularly about China's maritime and economic interests in other countries.”^[8]

Maritime Silk Road is a project connected “to China's ever-increasing security awareness in the surrounding area.” Additionally, it confirms “the Chinese postulation of a harmonious ocean.” In recent years, Beijing has been compelled to continually explore news of policy planning in the marine sector to reduce developments, conflicts, and escalating tensions in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea. “The new leadership in China is aware that how Beijing chooses to manage maritime conflicts and the security situation in the area will primarily define China's strategic posture in its neighbourhood and, more importantly, its position in the international community.”

Based on its history, China places significant emphasis on matters connected “to its national security interests. Beijing constantly explores new modes and techniques of regional involvement and partnership building in the spirit of coexistence.” This is done without sacrificing the nation's security, sovereignty, or strategic interests, which are all essential to the nation's interests.



“The new leadership in China has also addressed the concept of the Maritime Silk Road with Sri Lanka. This conversation occurred during the recent visit of Sri Lanka's Minister of External Affairs to China with the new leadership. In addition, recent reports indicate that China has reportedly explored this idea with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members.” Another possibility is that China would bring the matter with African nations. Before, the planned Maritime Silk Road encompassed the International Ocean Region (IOR), which includes not just South Asian nations but also other “countries or places that are significant to China's maritime interests.”^[9] Because of these factors, “India and New Delhi's maritime politics in the area will be significantly affected. Beijing's Maritime Silk Road may be an example of cooperative maritime politics; nevertheless, this also sets circumstances for China's emergence as an economic maritime power and a threat to India's authority in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).” The power and dominance that India has shown in IOR so far has been remarkable. At the same time as China is progressively increasing its economic and marine stance, the marine Silk Road endeavours to establish ties “with India and other regional nations at the regional level, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.”

The most important aspect of “the ASEAN Maritime Zone”

The balance-of-power politics in “the Maritime Silk Road dynamics embrace the maritime sector and strategic engagement with ASEAN, which both India and China want to pursue. Beijing's aim for the Maritime Silk Road is to include the nations of ASEAN and the region itself among its participants.” Throughout history, China has prioritized fostering an economic multilateralist ethos inside the ASEAN area. While Xi Jinping was pushing the notion of the Silk Road, he looked into the relationship between China and ASEAN during the fourteenth century. This relationship was established when the well-known “Chinese navigator Zheng conducted seven journeys to the Western Seas. Xi also brought attention to the tremendous disaster relief aid that China provided to the Indonesian people in the aftermath of the tsunami tragedy that occurred in 2004,” implying that both communities have a similar philosophy and spirit in various domains. ASEAN has, historically speaking, been an essential multilateral entity in the Chinese government's perspective on foreign policy. The present strategy that Beijing is using for “ASEAN is to strengthen both its economic and political position in the region. Even if there are disagreements between the two countries about the South China Sea, commerce between ASEAN and China is thriving and has surpassed 400 billion dollars in the United States.”^[10] Not only has Beijing proposed the establishment of an Asian infrastructure investment bank, but it has also suggested that 2014 be designated as the year of cultural exchanges between China and ASEAN. In October 2013, Beijing proposed various maritime cooperation projects with ASEAN.

The China–ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund was also established with 3 billion Yuan, equivalent to 484 million US dollars. The primary purpose of this fund is to enhance maritime research, rescue, navigation safety, and other related activities. There is little doubt that the Look East strategy of India, the "pivot to Asia" policy of “the United States of America, and the support that the United States has provided to Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea issue are some of the causes that have prompted Beijing to revitalize its approach and rethink its style of interaction with ASEAN.”

The Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, made a statement on December 20, 2012, during the Plenary Session of the India–ASEAN Commemorative Summit. In his address, he underlined India's goal of becoming “a maritime country in Southeast Asia, where there is potential for advancing and improving ties between India and ASEAN. At the moment, India's involvement with ASEAN is a significant distance behind that of China. The trade between India and ASEAN is around 80 billion US dollars. Regarding oil exploration in the South China Sea, India will face its greatest challenge due to the Maritime Silk Road programme. Vietnam and other nations would be involved in this endeavour.”^[11] Recently, China voiced its opposition to the joint oil exploration operation that India and Vietnam were undertaking. As part of implementing the Maritime Silk Road, Beijing may have the opportunity to adopt new rules and conditions with ASEAN countries. When it comes to India's efforts to explore the South China Sea area for potential energy sources, this will provide a hurdle. Following the implementation of “the Maritime Silk Road initiative, China's increased economic involvement with ASEAN will be another defining aspect of Beijing's economic dominance in the region.” As a result, China will be able to establish new friendships and economic alliances that benefit its interests and entice the littoral or Indian Ocean nations to join its maritime strategic fold.

Comparing the "String of Pearls" to the Maritime Silk Road

The so-called "String of Pearls" idea by Western researchers has never been acknowledged or verified by China. However, there's growing speculation in China that this theory may have inspired the Maritime Silk Road initiative. The "String of Pearls" term has given rise to the belief that China intends to militarily surround India by actively engaging in marine connections and cooperating with other South Asian nations such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Beijing can lawfully and gradually increase its “maritime presence in the ASEAN area and the IOR” via the Maritime Silk Road program, which also counters the String of Pearl's idea. To safeguard its sea lines of communication (SLoCs), China is keen to investigate economic prospects in the IOR and



establish more robust security agreements with neighboring nations.^[12] It is worth mentioning that Chinese authorities and scholars have brought up the concept of a "harmonious ocean" in the IOR, but in a worrying way, not about "the South China Sea or the East China Sea."

Alarming aspects that have implications for "that overlapped the Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese zones were a momentous development in this context. The posture of the People's Liberation Army Navy in the context of the Maritime Silk Road in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island, South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean are all examples of these still aspects. Over the last several years, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has also strengthened its stance in the South China Sea." It has been claimed that China commissioned seventeen new warships to be part of "the South Sea Fleet noteworthy orate on the South China Sea' area 051A multi-role warship, a 056 light posture ship, a 052C destroyer, and a 903A supply ship have also been commissioned by the PLAN in the area.^[13]

Additionally, there are ongoing efforts being made to revitalize the fleets that operate in the South Sea. "The South Sea fleet's area of operations extends from the north of the Taiwan Strait to the South of James Shoal. This region include the islands of Paracel and Spratly," in addition to Macclesfield Bank. China's rhetoric of a "peaceful rise" has been badly impacted due to such strong postures by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) over the South China Sea. Ongoing efforts are being Asian revitalize begun to regard "India as an alternative power" in the area, and the United States of America has begun to restart its influence in Southeast Asia.

Through the implementation of the Silk Road idea, China has been able to reestablish confidence in ASEAN countries in the efficacy of its goals poorly guidelines to policy; there has also been an emphasis placed on the debate of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Not only is Beijing advancing its maritime objectives via implementing this policy, but it is also demonstrating a degree of moderation in its maritime stance by implementing the Sea. It is a tried-and-true method of concealing a hard-power image while simultaneously applying the soft power stance. Concepts such as "win-win situation" and "hormone emphasis have been at the centre of this method, which will handle both the subtler and more difficult parts of PLAN. At the moment, PLAN is receptive to the concept of establishing marine bases abroad. As part of its cooperation with ASEAN, South Asian, coastal, and Indian Ocean Region regions (IOR), China is constructing ports, bases, and other infrastructure with these nations. The continual soft-powering exercises that PLAN has been conducting in the IOR have been implemented in addition to this commercial drive. As an example, "the South China Sea Fleet of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) conducted combat readiness training in the South China Sea, the West Pacific, and the East Indian Ocean during the months of January and February in 2014."

Comparing "Maritime Silk Road" with "Open Regionalism"

India has been a staunch supporter of "the open regionalism concept in the Indian Ocean. It has promoted this notion inside the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which was formerly known as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IOR-ARC). IORA is the only complete multilateral entity in the Indian Ocean." It was in July 2013 that Anand Sharma, the Minister of Trade and Industry for India, campaigned for the relaxation of trade barriers in the Indian Ocean area (IOR) and for the imp staunchly support in "the area that adheres to international standards and practices. The perspective of other members of the International Organization for Regional collaboration (IORA) that there should be more collaboration in the area of the marine security enforcement regime and that visa regimes should become more liberal in order to increase commerce and investment in the region has been backed by India. With the topic Deepening Economic Linkages for Balanced Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, India and Mauritius co-hosted the inaugural economic and commercial conference among the participating nations of the IORA." At the moment, twenty members of the IORA are members who agree to the principle of "open regionalism." IORA counts China as a discussion partner. Its concept of a Maritime Silk Road is an all-encompassing plan "that not only includes economic intricacies but also political and security considerations as well. However, India's open regionalism activity is restricted to economic multilateralism in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). China's use of the idea in maritime Asia includes aspects of both soft power and hard force to achieve its goals."^[14]

Not only does China have strong ties with ASEAN, but it also has strong ties with IORA. India's overall commerce with the IORA is around 206 billion, not only intricacies, and approximately 669 billion US dollars. By implementing the Maritime Silk Road programme, China can significantly strengthen its business involvement with both ASEAN and IORA. Beijing is becoming an increasingly important force in Southeast Asia, which will have significance. China has exerted its influence with ASEAN and South Asia over the last several years, putting India's status in the region that is being challenged. The countries of "Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal have emerged as China's most important international a luth Asian area." Taking into



account this fact, Chinese port construction projects are now underway at Gwadar, Hambantota, which will significantly influence the Road is being gradually improved via the implementation of a wide range of “strategic initiatives in the ASEAN area, in South Asia” and the International Ocean area (IOR).^[15] This method is connected to the notion of “comprehensive national power” that China subscribes to. Building a country and strengthening economic consideration into account security interests have all been concurrently moving forward in “China’s foreign policy initiatives. The report of the Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party implements how China might advance simultaneously on the economic, optical, and secure fronts. It advises that Beijing reform the sector while forcing it to make choices quickly.” A National Security Committee was established as a direct result of this shift in emphasis.

Concluding remarks

The maritime dynamics between India and China are now seeing new developments and a shift in the balance of power. India continues to face challenges posed by Beijing’s economic and maritime stance, which is becoming more common. China’s plan for the nautical Silk Road is a well-organized political, economic, and nautical drive for dominance, which India has to consider. By rebranding China as an economic, political, and marine force in the Indian Ocean area (IOR) and the neighboring area, one of the primary goals of this strategy is to achieve. This business is meant to incorporate “Beijing’s current levels of cooperation in the area and to look beyond those levels.” This is the official terminology for the enterprise. The spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hua Chunying, made the following statement on February 13, 2014: “This is an initiative and idea of cooperation, which will help integrate all the ongoing cooperation programmes, especially those in connectivity with the concept and spirit of the ancient Silk Road. India and other countries need to take note of this discourse and respond to it.”

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