

## Psychological Insights into the Strategic Competition between China and India in the Indian Ocean: A Comparative Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

The Indian Ocean holds significant importance as it serves as a crucial link connecting oil-rich countries in the Middle East to the rapidly growing economies of the Asia-Pacific region, which have experienced remarkable economic growth over the past three decades. In recent times, the Indian Ocean Region has gained substantial attention from major global powers due to a combination of geoeconomic and geopolitical factors. This increased significance has led various actors to develop specific strategies to secure their interests in the region. China has expanded its influence in the Indian Ocean by establishing connections, providing loans, and constructing infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India, on the other hand, has pursued a "neighborhood first" policy to maintain its traditional sphere of influence in the region. Consequently, the Indian Ocean Region has become a focal point for strategic competition, particularly between China and India, as the two powers vie for dominance. This strategic competition has placed countries in the Indian Ocean Region at a critical juncture, compelling them to make choices between the competing influences of China and India. Some countries in the region have adopted a hedging strategy, strengthening their defense capabilities and forming partnerships to counter China's growing power. Others employ alternative strategies to maintain a balance between China and India's influence in the region. In light of this dynamic context, this article aims to provide a detailed analysis of the Indian Ocean Region's importance and the escalating strategic competition between China and India within it. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the differing approaches taken by China and India in the region and to explore the response choices made by indigenous countries in the face of this competition. Through a comprehensive examination, this article aims to enhance understanding of the Indian Ocean Region's significance and shed light on the divergent strategies employed by China and India. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the response choices of indigenous countries as they navigate the rising influence of these two global powers.

**Keywords:** Competition, Strategy, China, India, The Indian Ocean

### INTRODUCTION

The definition of "competition" in political science can be understood as "dispute", prefer to "a battle or a flight of those having the opposition between demands, idealism, believes, values or targets (Emily Pia and Thomas Diez, 2007, pp.2). In the definition, "competition" always implies some level and intensity of antagonism, each side strives to increase its power and influence, in order to achieve objectives that are directly related to the other competitors. "Strategy" derived from the ancient Greek's word "strategos", which mainly uses in military field, emphasizing the role of the General in the army. By the time of Alexander the Great, the term "strategy" was used to refer to leadership skills, in order to defeat the opponents, and build a system of domination to other competitors. At the end of the nineteenth century, in Europe, the concept of "strategy" had the transaction from military to business, and by the twentieth century, this concept had moved into the field of state management. In the book *Makers of Modern Strategy* of Edward Meade Earleset, he coined the definition of strategy: "Strategy is the art of controlling and using the resources of a nation - or a coalition of nations - including its armed forces, for the purpose of achieving its vital interests effectively, guaranteed to succeed against the enemy in the actual

world, potentially or just hypothetical” Edward Meade Earle (ed.), 1943, p.viii). Strategy is also considered as “a set of methods and plans to determine goals, arrange or gather forces and solutions to achieve its goals by the most beneficial way, create a new state of development of a field, the society or the whole world in a certain period” (Institute of Police Science and Strategy, 2005, pp.211).

Thus, “strategy competition” in International relations is the race and “combat” of a nation or an alliance of nations with its rival, throughout its mottos, strategies and policies which are planned for a certain period of time, aiming to achieve the goals of its the national interests set out to create superiority over the opponent, or the dominance related to position, power, influence or interest in “competition” aspect.

This competition is formed when the actors of international relation have common goals in terms of power, influence, interests... In the context of current international relations, strategy competition can be understood as a countervailing relationship with each other, mainly competing for influence among international relations actors, but not in direct armed conflict.

China and India are always competing with each other in all fields to dominate the other's influence as well as demonstrate their own superior power. Nowadays, the Indian Ocean is traditionally India's sphere of influence, has received some “charm offensive” from China, adding to the fiercer rivalry between two sides. China approaches the Indian Ocean with “economic power”, along with tightening ties with some countries such as Pakistan; while India is trying to regain its influence with the “neighborhood first policy” under Prime Minister Modi. The power of any country that is asserted to be dominant in this region will be the “lever” for the process of reaching out to other regions beyond Asia.

Through the theoretical analysis of strategy competition, the article use Realism as the theoretical framework which is the main framework in the article. This theory stresses that “The international environment is anarchic, so countries must compete with each other to protect their own sovereignty and interests, all countries are pursuing power in the international arena, emphasizing competition in the international system in which states are racing in pursuit of goals such as international power and status” (Hoang Khac Nam, 2017, pp.47).

For the research methodology, the research design of this research follows a way of qualitative analysis with the case study as the main research methodology. Besides, the main research questions of this research are: What is the important of Indian Ocean Region for the development of India and China? How do China and India increase in strategic competition in this region? To answer these questions, the paper focus the sections as follows: (1) the introduction, (2) the analyzing of China and India's core interest in Indian Ocean Region, (3) the analyzing the ways to promote competition between China and India in Indian Ocean Region, the last section is the conclusion and findings.

## Literature

Muhammad Abbas Hassan with “Growing China-India Competition in the Indian Ocean: Implications for Pakistan” gave an overview of India’s ambitions as well as China’s growing strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Based on their growing interests, the study will highlight the implications of this competition for Pakistan. It will also try to present a way forward, which Pakistan must adopt to avoid its interests being compromised. “Sino-Indian Strategic Competition in the Indian Ocean Region and Future of China’s Maritime Interests” of Sheikh Imran Nasir and Muhammad Zeeshan Munir<sup>1</sup> is also an outstanding study. Their opinions affirms that the instigator behind the tussle between China and India in the IOR is a race for economic gains. Stakeholders on both sides think that these economic gains can be instrumental for growth and progress. Extra-regional powers are also active here which has exacerbated conventional, non-conventional and nuclear threats in the IOR. India has emerged as a bogeyman of Western powers who intend to choke China’s supply of fuel and raw materials passing through the Indian Ocean Region. Around eighty percent of India’s trade is seaborne while eighty four percent of China’s trade passes through the Straits of Malacca. Both these states are vying to control the maritime passageways. This has resulted in a strategic competition with nuclear dimension adding to the qualms. The operationalization of nuclear submarines in IOR has a long-term strategic impact which is bound to alter the security dynamics of this region forever. An assessment of the capabilities of both China and India indicate that Beijing might emerge as a dominant naval power in IOR.

Bruce Vaughn also published “China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress”. The author pointed out that Competition between China and India is driven to a large extent by their

economic rise and the rapid associated growth in, and dependence on, seaborne trade and imported energy, much of which transits the Indian Ocean. There seems to be a new strategic focus on the maritime and littoral regions that are adjacent to the sea lanes that link the energy rich Persian Gulf with the energy dependent economies of Asia. Any disruption of this supply would likely be detrimental to the United States' and the world's economy. China's dependence on seaborne trade and imported energy, and the strategic vulnerability that this represents, has been labeled China's "Malacca dilemma" after the Strait of Malacca, the key strategic choke point through which a large proportion of China's trade and energy flows.

Much of the activity associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can be viewed as an attempt by China to minimize its strategic vulnerabilities by diversifying its trade and energy routes while also enhancing its political influence through expanded trade and infrastructure investments. China's BRI in South and Central Asia and the IOR, when set in context with China's assertive behavior in the East China Sea and the South China Sea and border tensions with India, is contributing to a growing rivalry between India and China. This rivalry, which previously had been largely limited to the Himalayan region where the two nations fought a border war in 1962, is now increasingly maritime-focused. Some in India feel encircled by China's strategic moves in the region while China feels threatened by its limited ability to secure its sea lanes. Understanding and effectively managing this evolving security dynamic may be crucial to preserving regional stability and U.S. national interests.

Some IOR states appear to be hedging against China's rising power by building their defense capabilities and partnerships, while others utilize more accommodative strategies with China or employ a mix of both. Some also see an opportunity to balance India's influence in the region. Hedging strategies by Asian states include increasing intra-Asian strategic ties, as well as seeking to enhance ties with the United States. This may present an opportunity for enhanced security collaboration particularly with like-minded democracies such as the United States, India,

Australia and Japan. While forces of nationalism and rivalry may increase tensions, shared trade interests and interdependencies between China and India, as well as forces of regional economic integration in Asia more broadly, have the potential to dampen their rivalry. The United States presence as a balancing power can also contribute to regional stability.

These are studies that are considered by the authors to be quite typical, and can provide additional bases for the article's point of view.

### **The value of The Indian Ocean to China and India**

The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world with important trade routes, including straits such as Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Malacca... Strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan once said, "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean, can rule Asia". This has confirmed the strategy position of the Indian Ocean. The region possesses extremely rich natural resources, with 62% of the world's oil reserves, 35% natural gas, 40% gold, 60% uranium and 80% diamonds (Erickson, AS, Walter III, LC & Mikolay, JD, 2010, pp.216). It is also an essential oil route from the Persian Gulf to Europe and Asia. The most prominent are China and India trying to show more and more of their role in this region. The reason is because both countries have closer interests in this key geostrategic region.

For China, in terms of economic security, the Indian Ocean region is an extremely value route to ensure its energy security. China's economy has undergone the process of reform, opening up and has risen strongly. This poses a requirement for a stable energy supply for the development of the Chinese economy. In terms of energy, 60% of China's oil and natural gas needs come from the reserves of the Middle East and Central Asia, more than 80% of China's oil and natural gas imports must be transported via long sea routes which protracted, most of it passes through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (Weimar, N.D, 2013, pp.9). With the world's second-largest economy, closely connected with outside economies, China's prosperity is tied to its trade routes, including the Indian Ocean. This is also one of the means connecting China with the Middle East and Africa, which is extremely important for China's energy security. It can be said that China's greatest interest in the Indian Ocean is the smoothness of the sea lanes from the Strait of Hormuz to the Persian Gulf, the Bay of Bengal and through the Strait of Malacca. Therefore, China is forced to find a way to secure the Indian Ocean's trade route. It can protect the access to energy resources in the Middle East through establishing and maintaining a strong naval presence in the region and create close relations with the coastal states of the Indian Ocean region.

In addition, since China announced its grand "Belt and Road Initiative - BRI" strategy, most of its activities have been China's efforts to minimize vulnerabilities of the strategy by diversifying trade and energy routes, and enhancing political influence through expanding trade and infrastructure investment. As a part of this strategy, China has been involved in financing and building commercial port facilities in South Asian countries at Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar and Gwadar in Pakistan.

In terms of military security, China's "string of pearls" strategy is its ambition to connect South China Sea with the Indian Ocean. Within the strategy, China wants to expand its influence from Hainan Island, through the busiest sea lanes in the world, towards the Persian Gulf, the main goal is to dominant India's influence in the region, as well as ensure energy security and control important shipping lanes. This strategy also helps China to increase its energy, economic and military power. Therefore, the Indian Ocean plays a decisive role in formulating the "string of pearls" strategy, aiming to control this sea and constrain India's strategic area. In addition, this is also an area with the presence of nuclear weapons states such as Pakistan, China and India and the US naval base at Diego Garcia. With the US strategy to protect its interests in Asia, the Indian Ocean is also an important area for the US to consolidate its influence. This makes this region a value "link" in the process of increasing China's influence, directly competing with the US.

For India, the Indian Ocean is of particular importance to this country. Geographically, India is located in the center of the Ocean and has more than 7,500 km of coastline. Currently, 95% of India's trade by volume and 68% of trade by value must pass through the Indian Ocean (Ministry of Shipping, 2016, pp.4), almost 80% of India's crude oil needs - imported by sea through the Indian Ocean. According to the Indian Navy, if India's offshore oil production and oil exports are taken into account, India's maritime dependence for oil will be around 93% (Indian Navy, 2016, pp.25). Moreover, India is heavily dependent on the resources of the Indian Ocean such as mineral resources, fish resources. Thus, it can be seen that the Indian economy is reliant on trades and resources in the Indian Ocean. Strategically, the Indian Ocean region can be considered as India's "security valve". India's main objective in the region is also to protect the sea lines of communication, which have many non-traditional security threats. India has established Information Fusion Center- the Indian Ocean Regional (IFC – IOR) to closely monitor the movements of ships in the region. Predominance and control over the Indian Ocean would potentially allow India to exert significant influence eastward. From there, the country has the ability to expand its maritime reach into the Asia-Pacific region. This has important implications for India's development strategy - this will be an opportunity for India to reduce the influence of China's "string of pearls". Nowadays, the rise of China creates obstacles for India's development. As a result, India needs to increase its naval power first and foremost in the Indian Ocean region.

With strategic interests related to national prosperity, both China and India are trying to preserve and increase their influence and control in the Indian Ocean region. This creates a fierce competition of these two countries in this region to protect the strategic interests of each.

### **The current situation of China-India competition in the Indian Ocean region**

Many analysts believe that the emergence of a China-centric - "Asian system" does not bring much benefit to India, especially in the context that India also has ambitions to become one of leading power in Asia. The Indian Ocean region in particular is an area that directly and profoundly affects India's economic and security interests. Therefore, the effort to increase the influence of this country in the Indian Ocean is completely understandable. For China, in the process of becoming a global power, increasing its presence in the other regions is essential, while the Indian Ocean is a key maritime area with an important strategic position. Thus, China cannot ignore this area in its strategy of expanding its influence. The current China-India competition in the Indian Ocean region can be considered based on the policies and strategies of each country as follows:

#### **For China**

The Indian Ocean and South Asia become an important junction for China's energy supply routes. Not only that, China's 21st-century "Maritime Silk Road" embodies a vision of interconnected ports and nodes across the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, China is undertaking the "attacks" on the marginal states of the Indian peninsula in order to secure its foothold in the Indian Ocean.

Firstly, China quickly established and developed a complex infrastructure network at important seaport points in the Indian Ocean region. Over the past decade, Beijing has directed its efforts towards building a chain of ports and maritime facilities of the Indian Ocean, extending from Kenya to Malaysia. Beijing has signed agreements to develop maritime facilities in various countries, including Kenya, Sudan, Pakistan, Maldives, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia and Malaysia. In the past few years, China has not only built Indian Ocean coastal ports for maritime activities, but also expanded into a complex model. China has taken the Shekou model (Shekou Model - 蛇口模式) as a template for the development of a number of strategic port zones in the Indian Ocean region, in order to take advantage of China's influences to transform the port's functions. This model is named after and inspired by Shekou - a small fishing village in China's Guangdong province. China Merchants Group (CMG) developed a seaport and export processing zone here in the early 1980s, turning the village into a world-class commercial, financial and industrial hub (Deng Yangzi, 2017). This transformation requires the construction of transport infrastructure, industrial parks, free trade zones and export processing zones, development of commercial services and residential areas adjacent to the port. Shekou model, in which the beginning is the construction of the port, develop into the industrial park and the last is the city model (Port – Park – City Model) (林佳铭, 章强, 2019, 第 26 页). This signature approach is designed to facilitate not only the movement of goods, but also to foster a larger business system. According to Sun Hai Yong - a Chinese scholar, China's port projects along the Indian Ocean are seen as a comprehensive test of China's economic viability, hedging the risks and ability to set international agendas (孙海泳, 2017, 第 54 页). He emphasizes Chinese enterprises have enough capacity to build ports and establish a strong foothold in the port system in the Indian Ocean. Two typical proves of China's strategy of building a port city in the Indian Ocean region are Djibouti city and Colombo city. For Djibouti city, by assembling industrial, logistics and business services facilities near the port of Djibouti, Chinese companies hope to successfully replicate Shenzhen's city model. Chinese companies see Djibouti as a major transit hub and “key” to opening up the economies of the Horn of Africa and connecting Asia-Europe (Julien Wagner, Oliver Caslin, 2019). The supports from industrial and banking groups such as CM Port, China Exim Bank, CMG has established a financial, infrastructure and commercial platform that allows many Chinese companies able to do business in an unattractive economic environment (中华人民共和国商务部, 2018). The total investment of about \$15 billion in port and inland development, China is the largest external trade participant in the Djibouti port city project (Port de Djibouti, 2015). By building rail, pipeline and road infrastructure, Djibouti city is expected to become the Shekou of East Africa, in order to be a platform of transport, logistics and trade in the region (Deng Yangzi, 2017).

The city of port Colombo (CPC) in Sri Lanka is planned on land reclaimed in the Indian Ocean region, with an area of about 269 hectares, to form the country's first special economic zone for service-oriented industries. The city is scheduled for completion in 2041, is divided into five distinct areas: the financial area, the marina area, the central residential area, the island residential area, and the international island area. CPC is by far Sri Lanka's largest foreign direct investment project worth around \$1.4 billion and will spur an additional \$13 billion in secondary investment (The Times of India, 2021). CPC is fully funded by China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), and is a key project within China's BRI framework. The vision of the project is to transform CPC into a world-class city for South Asia and the most dynamic economic hub in the region. CPC is expected to become a regional business center and a city with high-quality public space and infrastructure, attracting domestic and foreign investors. International investment is estimated to bring in \$15 billion and create 83,000 local jobs (Manu Gupta, 2021). Being included in the construction plan since 2011, after many pauses due to many economic and political factors, in May 2021, the CPC project was officially approved by the National Assembly of Sri Lanka with some Amendments to the constitution of this country.

Secondly, China tries to control the Indian Ocean by increasing its military presence there. In the 1990s, the Chinese navy (PLAN) did not make any visits to ports in the Indian Ocean region. Since 2010, PLAN has had an average of nearly 20 port visits per year in this region. In Chinese's view, the Indian Ocean is controlled by China's rivals, including the US and India. Therefore, in recent years, China has made efforts to increase its military presence in this region. The concept of China's "string of pearls" strategy has shown the country's ambition to build strategic port points in the Indian Ocean to contain India. Increasing its military presence in the Indian Ocean

is one of the most effective ways for China to expand its maritime power. To achieve its goal, China needs to develop strategic fulcrums in the Indian Ocean which can resupply and support to the strategic role for China's maritime power.

One of China's successes in controlling the Indian Ocean was the construction of its military base in Djibouti city in August 2017. This is seen as part of a dual strategy of "string of pearls" and the BRI has been central to Beijing's goals in the Indian Ocean. Djibouti city is considered the first trial for establishing regional shipping routes and developing seaports, creating a foundation for military presence. Currently, China has expanded the wharf at this military base, enough to accommodate at least a fleet of four ships, including the large Type 901 sub-ship. The PLAN has officially used one of the six berths at Djibouti's Doraleh Multipurpose Commercial Port (The Economic Times, 2020).

Another case is Gwadar, a strategic deep-sea port in Pakistan that is invested and leased by China until 2059. Gwadar is an important component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with an investment of up to \$54 billion, designed to create transport infrastructure and promote industrial development in Pakistan. Indeed, China has commercial and political interests in the development of the Gwadar port in Pakistan. The port could provide Beijing with a connection by road and rail through the Strait of Malacca. Chinese goods could also take a shortcut through Pakistan, instead of going around South Asia. Gwadar is considered to be a future overseas base for the Chinese Navy, complementing the existing base at Djibouti city in the Horn of Africa, the first time China was reported to be planning to build a naval base at Gwadar was January 2018. In June 2020 it appeared on satellite images of construction sites including protected complex (HI Sutton, 2020). There are even rumors that China deployed its marines there in March 2017 (Maritime Executive, 2017). The process of China's naval base presence in Gwadar remains to be followed up. But if this presence becomes a reality, PLAN will be able to strengthen their capabilities in the Indian Ocean, along with warships or submarines, which could change the naval balance in the region.

China has been quite successful in using "financial diplomacy" in the Indian Ocean region to build influence here. Its economic strength has allowed China to compete and gain an edge in the race with other great powers, including India. China's growing presence and influence in the Indian Ocean today is undeniable.

### **For India**

In the previous period, the difference in power asymmetry and the ongoing bilateral conflicts among the member states, of SAARC has not support India with a platform to build strong bilateral partnerships with member states. Besides, it has shaped the political changes and foreign policy choices of its smaller neighbors by using hard power - military intervention and economic blockade has not resulted in effective. It even creates a tendency for these neighboring countries to move away from India, facilitating the infiltration of Chinese influence in the region. New Delhi under Prime Minister Modi has come up with a new approach to better interact with countries in the region.

In the political-diplomatic field, the Indian Ocean and neighboring regions of India have become a priority in India's foreign policy. Prime Minister Modi's vision for the Indian Ocean is the "Sagar" doctrine. Sagar means ocean in Hindi and stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region". According to this doctrine, India's objective is to seek an "atmosphere" of trust and transparency, peaceful settlement and enhanced maritime cooperation. As soon as becoming Prime Minister of India, Modi invited the leaders of SAARC countries to attend the swearing-in ceremony. This is the first move that shows special importance to neighboring countries in India's foreign policy. Besides, India's leaders continuously visit to most of neighboring countries. Not only stopping at visits, India also actively demonstrates its responsibility and influential country in the region. India has reached a Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh and new proposals on energy, connectivity and counter-terrorism have forged stronger ties between the two nations (Communist Party of Vietnam Newspaper Online, 2015). In addition, the termination of the Sonadia project with China which is a deep-sea port, southwest of Bangladesh (Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, 2020), is a clear sign that India-Bangladesh relations are growing and developing in a good way. Relations with Sri Lanka have also been actively improved by India. The country has signed an agreement with Sri Lanka to provide a currency exchange service worth \$400 million to help Sri Lanka deal with the economic hardship caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the agreement has officially been in operation since February 2021 (Meera Srinivasan, 2021).

In particular, India is also trying to increase its presence in strategically located seaports. The country is developing the Iranian port of Chabahar. This is Iran's only deep-sea port with direct access to the ocean. India has approved an initial investment of \$85.21 million to develop the port. In December 2018, India took over the operations of Shahid Behesti Port in Chabahar, which was the first time India took control of a port on a foreign coast. The port of Chabahar is of great strategic importance due to its location in the Gulf of Oman and at the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz, allowing Iran to have direct access to the Indian Ocean. The Chabahar port is also quite close to the Gwadar port of Pakistani which is being developed by China. The port of Chabahar is also quite close to the Pakistani port of Gwadar which is being developed by China. Thus, by participating in the development of Chabahar Port, India will have a presence in a strategically important area of the world, while also helping it to keep a close eye on China's developments in Gwadar Port. . India has commenced operation at Chabahar port from May 2021 (Manoj Kumar, Nidhi Verma, 2021).

In the economic field, with concerns about Chinese investment in important ports such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan, India is investing in the development of commercial ports and airports in the region. India can gain the access to important ports such as Djibouti, the Reunion Islands near Madagascar, Diego Garcia in the southern Indian Ocean and the Duqm port of Oman. The Indian Navy also actively kicked off the Indo-Pacific Business Summit from 2018, in recognition of the importance of the Indo-Pacific region (Jatin Verma, 2020). In investment, India has shown its flexibility when cooperating with Japan to develop the "Free Corridor" plan by implementing a series of infrastructure projects across Africa, Iran, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. This is seen as a strategy to confront China's unilateral infrastructure strategy BRI connecting Europe and Africa. In Eastern Sri Lanka, Japan and India are expected to participate in the expansion of the Trincomalee port. Moreover, the two countries will also cooperate in the development of Dawei port along the Thailand-Myanmar border. The "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" plan will also focus specifically on Africa, especially east Africa, in order to unlock the region's true economic potential. India and Japan will focus on exploiting the connection between the Mekong - India Economic Corridor (MIEC) with the Kenya - Tanzania - Mozambique Special Economic Zone (KTM) through Jawaharlal Nehru and Kochi ports (Gurjit Singh, 2019). This Asia-Africa connection promises to bring many economic and strategic values.

It must be recognized that the purpose of this cooperation is to bring stability to the region in the context of China's implementation of the BRI strategy, causing many countries to have doubts. In order to create an advantage over China's BRI, India and Japan focus on improving the quality of infrastructure projects, on the other hands, BRI is creating worries for participating governments join the project because of the quality of infrastructure. The quality of infrastructure will be one of the better attractions of cooperation of local governments preferring to India and Japan. In fact, BRI strategy becomes a concern for India because of concerns related to national security. This led the government of Indian to expand cooperation with Japan as a response to China's "expansion" moves. The strengthening of relations and tightening cooperation between India and Japan will boost the Japanese economy and India's development of strategy to expand to the entire Indo-Pacific region.

In the security – military field, not only increasing and improving relations with neighboring countries in the region, India is also trying to increase its military strength, especially its maritime power to have better control over the Indian Ocean region. The "Make in India" initiative is seen as one of the government's approaches to the Navy's modernization goals. Under this initiative, several major maritime projects have been carried out and are estimated to be completed within the next 5 to 10 years, turning India into a country with a strong navy by 2030. Clearly, the Indian government is taking a multi-pronged approach to developing and achieving national capabilities while improving the infrastructure supporting a holistic approach towards maritime modernization goals. Estimates are given that by 2030, if all the plans are carried out on time as planned, the Indian Navy will grow to deter any form of maritime threats in the Indian Ocean region.

Maritime diplomacy is also seen as strong steps by India in shaping its role in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy has conducted EEZ patrols together with Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius, to provide comprehensive live feed of ship activities in the Indian Ocean region, ensuring safety issues Non-traditional security at sea (Dinakar Peri, 2020). New Delhi is also expanding military ties with other major powers in the Indo-Pacific. This effort includes the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement signed with the US in August 2016. The agreement gives the two sides access to each other's military facilities for replenishment and refueling (The Hindu, 2016). In 2018, New Delhi signed similar agreements to expand access to French facilities, particularly the naval

base at Réunion, and Singapore's Changi Naval Base. India also signed a fourth logistics agreement with South Korea in September 2019 and on the other hand, finalizing similar arrangements with Australia, Japan, and Russia.

India also actively participates in a number of bilateral and multilateral military exercises in the Indian Ocean. The MILAN Navy exercise, organized by the Indian Navy most recently on November 8, 2019 with the participation of the navies of 17 other countries. This exercise for 2020, although not yet held due to the impact of Covid-19, also marks the expected participation of the navies of 30 countries. It has proved India's position and prestige in expanding its military connectivity and influence in the Indian Ocean region. Another maritime event named Malabar between India, Japan and the US is aimed at enhancing cooperation and enhancing military skills among the participants. In the context of the Indo-Pacific strategy becoming increasingly clear and realistic, in 2020, India has invited Australia to participate.

After the border clash with China in June 2020, India seems more determined to engage closely with the members of the Quad to counter China's assertiveness, enhancing New Delhi's position towards Beijing. Since June 2020, the Indian Navy has also increased surveillance and operational deployment in the Indian Ocean, in the context of the Galwan clash. In essence, India's military exercises and increased presence in the Indian Ocean region are important in counterbalancing China's power.

### CONCLUSION

The India-China competition is no longer limited to economic or military strength, but has become a combination of many factors and spreads across many fields and locations. However, economics and security are considered to be the two most prominent areas. This competition can be seen through the following characteristics:

Firstly, China has advantages in the Indian Ocean region, although China's presence raises many doubts about political and military purposes. China's approach to each country in the Indian Ocean region is considered quite flexible. China seems to have quite quickly and closely approached the countries in Indian Ocean region through its economic strength. A detail example, the relation of the President of the Maldives to Beijing has led to an increase in infrastructure development projects in the country. China completed the airport project here, after President Yameen's government canceled a \$511 million infrastructure deal with India. According to official reports, Maldives has provided a number of islands for China to develop. Meanwhile, President Xi Jinping's visit to Myanmar in January 2020 also restarted the development of the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, which includes the controversial plan to build the Kyaukpyu deep-water port financed by China with the aid worth 1.3 billion USD. If the port on the Bay of Bengal completes, It will allow Beijing to directly access oil supplies from the Middle East, avoiding the need to go through the Strait of Malacca, connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea, which has become a flashpoint in the maritime competition between India and China.

China's establishment of strategic partnerships with a number of coastal states in the Indian Ocean to surround India with a series of naval bases as a step of defense tactics to prepare for the outbreak of possible direct conflict. Pakistan's port of Gwadar, India's most tense neighbor, has become a mean for China to diversify its energy security and connect its western regions to the Indian Ocean. Along with other maritime and infrastructure developments in coastal countries including Somalia, Kenya, the Seychelles and Mauritius, China is being assessed as an important and enduring benefactor which providing these countries with many economic benefits, technical and military assistance (Marantidou, 2014, pp.7). It should be recognized that the costs of China's complex megaprojects in the Indian Ocean region greatly outweigh the costs and benefits of marine shipping. Thus, the ultimate goal of China's activities largely affirms China's preponderance and military presence in the region, as well as its strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean.

Secondly, in the face of competition with China, India has become more flexible and responsive in its policies towards Indian Ocean Region. Maldives is a prime example. In the context of China's growing presence in Sri-Lanka, India has been quite flexible and has taken advantage of closer ties with the Maldives - another important country in the region. In October 2020, EXIM Bank of India signed a credit agreement in the amount of \$400 million for the Greater Male Connectivity Project (The Indian Express, 2020). It is believed to be the second most important connectivity project in the Maldives, after the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge connecting the Hulhule airport island with the capital's island. The current aid package complements the previous \$800 million credit, which is one of the largest loan packages India has made available to any country in the vicinity (The Economic Times, 2020). India has also given Maldives \$1.4 billion in aid to overcome the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic



(Livemint, 2020). The developments in relations with the Maldives have even led some Indian politicians view it as a model for developing relations with its neighbours, as part of the Neighborhood First Policy. Furthermore, the growing competition with China may provide additional impetus for India to further develop its relationship with the US and other regional partners in the Indo-Pacific, such as Australia or Japan.

Thirdly, the India-China competition presents both opportunities and challenges for the countries of the Indian Ocean Region. In terms of opportunities, the interest of these two powers countries could provide increasing opportunities for Indian Ocean coastal states to choose partners to develop their countries. Investment projects with huge capital have changed the face of many underdeveloped economies in the region. However, it also exposes these countries to the challenges of debt traps, political dependence or being a bargaining chip in the game of two powers. Some countries in the region appear to be hedging against China's rising power by building up their defense capabilities and partnerships with other states, while others use strategies more compatible with China or a combination of both. They also see an opportunity to balance India's influence in the region.

Fourthly, China-India competition needs to be viewed more broadly in the whole Asia-Pacific region, with a focus on the East Sea. India's strategy in the Indian Ocean can be considered in terms of defensive realism - as a response to the threat of Chinese influence. Particularly, India is working in securing its economy and energy dependence which confirms its visible presence in the South China Sea. The "Act East Policy" has helped India gain increased cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, New Delhi has developed "one of the largest and most powerful navies in the world" (Katyul. R, 2014), not only to gain dominance in the Indian Ocean, but also to expand its reach beyond its water borders. India is trying to have a stronger presence in the east of the South China Sea. At present, India's role in the disputed territories in the South China Sea is being consolidated. China's Defense White Paper asserts that new threats have emerged from hegemony, power politics, and neo-interventionism, as well as intensifying competition to redistribute power, rights and interests: "On issues related to China's territorial sovereignty as well as maritime rights and interests, some of its distant neighbors have taken provocations Chinese military by reinforced their military presence on China's reefs and islands that they are illegally occupied" (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015). Nowadays, the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea are becoming more interconnected because Indian Ocean and the South China Sea play more important role in the economy, energy and national security of both India and China.

For the Indian Ocean region in particular, the trend of India-China competition focusing more on maritime is gradually taking shape. It could create a military power race here. Therefore, the region will also face various challenges as there is an increase in military intervention. Competition between China and India in the context of the two countries still has many tensions in the relationship, leading to each country's efforts to strengthen military control over the Indian Ocean region. However, this competition tends to be a counterweight of two countries to maintain the motivation of developing regional power rather than finding a single dominant state to become the hegemon. To India, cooperate with Japan to maintain and consolidate its influence is essential and also a wise choice against the strategies of its giant neighbor - China. At the same time, India is also trying to strategize as a mediator between China and the United States to maximize its advantage in the Indian Ocean region.

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