

# MARITIME SECURITY IN INDO-PACIFIC: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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## ABSTRACT

This article elucidates the importance of Indo-Pacific in maritime security today. In the 21st century, the region has gained the world's attention due to dramatic growth of China's economy, steady rise of India, the more proactive regional countries, and the increasing oil exports to the region. With such importance, the region has been contested with powerful nations, such as China, India, Australia, Japan, the Southeast Asia nations, and even the United States. China's increasing military presence in Indo-Pacific has been perceived as assertive by some of the regional countries. Meanwhile, the United States has become a more prominent actor in the region since the application of Rebalance policy in 2012. The paper discusses the issues, challenges and prospects of maritime security in Indo Pacific.

**Keywords:** maritime security; maritime security cooperation; regional security; security dynamics; strategic environment

## ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini menjelaskan arti penting Indo-Pasifik dalam keamanan maritim dewasa ini. Pada abad ke-21, kawasan ini telah mendapat perhatian dunia karena pertumbuhan ekonomi China yang dramatis, bangkitnya India, negara-negara regional yang lebih proaktif, dan meningkatnya ekspor minyak ke wilayah ini. Arti penting kawasan ini telah diperebutkan dengan negara-negara kuat, seperti China, India, Australia, Jepang, negara-negara Asia Tenggara, dan bahkan Amerika Serikat. Kehadiran militer China yang meningkat di Indo-Pasifik telah dipandang secara serius oleh beberapa negara regional. Sementara itu, Amerika Serikat telah menjadi aktor yang lebih menonjol di kawasan ini sejak penerapan kebijakan Rebalance pada tahun 2012. Makalah ini membahas masalah, tantangan dan prospek keamanan maritim di Indo Pasifik.*

**Kata Kunci:** keamanan maritim; kerjasama keamanan maritim; keamanan regional; dinamika keamanan; strategi lingkungan

## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region stretches from the east part of Indian Ocean to the west Pacific Ocean and connected by Strait of Malacca. Indo-Pacific has become the central area for maritime geopolitics, security, trade, and environment activities.<sup>1</sup> The Indo-Pacific region also stands at

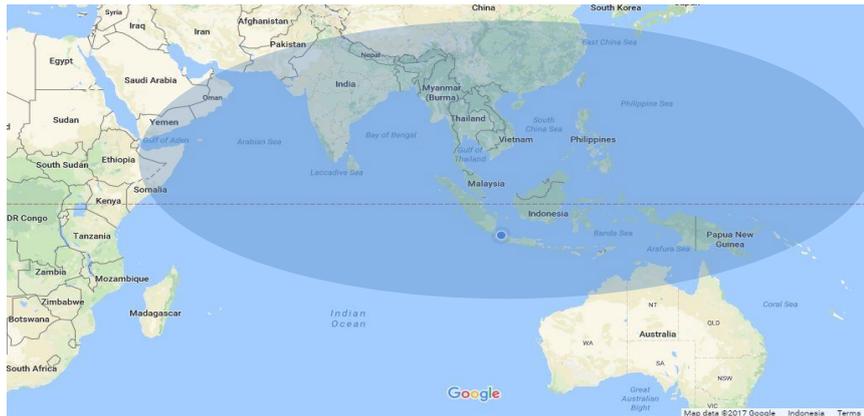
the intersection of international trade, with around 32.2 million barrels of crude oil pass through annually and 40% of global exports come from the region. With such importance, the region has been contested with powerful nations, such as China, India, Australia, Japan, the Southeast Asia nations, and even the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> David Michel and R. Passarelli, *Sea Change: Evolving Maritime Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific*

*Region* (pp. 11-17). Washington DC: Stimson Center. 2014.

**Figure 1.** Map of Indo-Pacific.



Power competition between Beijing and Washington have been driving the security dynamics of Indo-Pacific. Throughout the years, China has been increasing the military budget to modernize the military technology and its capacity on the denial strategy. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea has caused border disputes with the Southeast Asian nations, and eventually it draws the attention of the United States. Meanwhile, the United States has also increased the frequency of regional cooperation with Japan, Australia, ROK, New Zealand, India, and the Southeast Asian nations under the Rebalance policy. Whereas, the United States applies deterrence approach to address DPRK's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) activities and China's increasing military capability.<sup>2</sup>

The increased sea-borne activity has also raised new maritime security challenges in the region. Ensuing maritime disputes in East and South China Seas are increasing the security risks of sea lines of communications (SLOCs) protection. In the Indian Ocean, China and India are flexing their naval forces, which have increased animosity towards each other. At the same time, the Rebalance policy has enabled the United States to conduct various maritime

security operations across the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile other regional countries, such as Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Pakistan are also increasing their maritime reach to secure the SLOCs and to exploit more resources. Not to mention the emergence of non-traditional threats in the sea, such as piracy, maritime terrorism, illegal trafficking, and environmental degradation. The many issues of maritime security have then shaped the security dynamics in Indo-Pacific region.

The paper discusses the issues, challenges and prospects of maritime security in Indo Pacific. The analysis in this paper is divided into several sections. The first section elaborated the maritime disputes in the region. It then followed by the discussions on the role of major actors, namely China, the United States, and India. It also highlights the issue of non-traditional threats in the Indo Pacific. This paper argues that maritime security is the most important aspect in the shaping of security architecture in Indo-Pacific. Therefore, many nation states are using the maritime security cooperation framework in translating their power approaches in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> S. Cheney-Peters, *US Maritime Security Relations and Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific: Opportunities*

*for Enhanced Operation.* In David Michel and R. Passarelli (pp. 31-44). 2014.

## Maritime Security Cooperation: The Framework

British maritime thinker, Geoffrey Till, describes maritime security concept as good order at the sea, where seaborne trade which contributes to many states logistic needs have to be protected from any kinds of risks and threats. However, the concept of good order at the sea lacks the discussion by whose standard is it that order at sea be considered good. It then continues on to the conception of peaceful use of the seas regulated by UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Nation states may refer their maritime boundaries to UNCLOS, however nation states which seeks maritime supremacy will tend to ignore UNCLOS. Strong maritime nations then derived their strategic thinking from sea power concept by Alfred T. Mahan which explained as following:

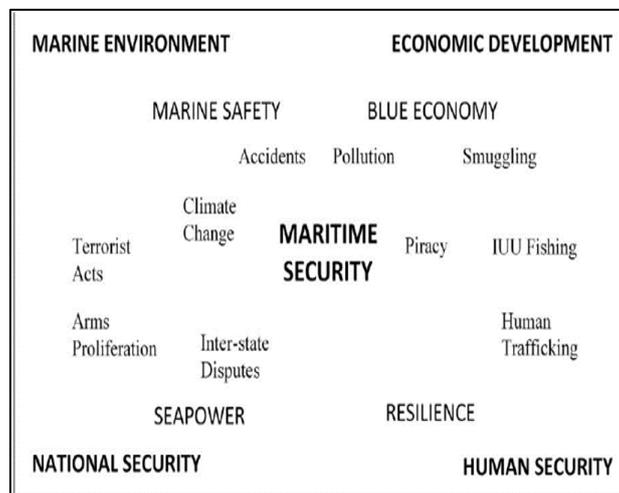
*“Control of the sea by maritime commerce and naval supremacy means predominant influence in the world... is the chief among the merely material elements in the power and prosperity of nations”* (Alfred Thayer Mahan, 1918 )

To Christian Bueger, maritime security extends beyond traditional dimension. Maritime security connects several issues through existing concepts of security, and adapts with emerging temporary issues. Bueger still considers the concept of seapower, especially the naval forces

as a tool for achieving national security. Seapower in maritime security also discuss how nation states operate their navies outside their territorial waters. The naval power projection of states for warfare means, to secure the SLOCs, and to increase the awareness of a states’ presence in international waters are the core purpose of traditional maritime security. Protecting the SLOCs also include search and rescue, preventing oil spills in in ocean, regulation of maritime installations, and counter operations against piracy and terrorism.

As mentioned before, the aims of maritime security is also to protect the SLOCs, either for trade shipping lines, gathering natural sea resources, and other sea-based activities. Thus beyond traditional notion, maritime security addresses the strategy in managing maritime economy or ‘blue economy’. Blue economy uses maritime security to create a safe maritime environment both through laws and regulations, and the management of marine resources. The management of blue economy links with another dimension in maritime security, which is human security. The humanity in maritime security relates with humanitarian actions /disaster reliefs, food security through protecting fishery industry from Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and also protection of marine environment.

**Figure 2.** Maritime Security Matrix by Christian Bueger (2015)



The writers combined the concept of maritime security with security cooperation framework to define the concept of maritime security cooperation. David Dewitt explained that security cooperation attributed the element of security should be designed towards 'reassurance' rather than 'deterrence' to establish a favourable security order where multilateral frameworks could be developed<sup>3</sup>. In this context, security relations would still be relevant in facilitating nation states to converge their common national interests and minimizing a zero-sum security dilemma condition<sup>4</sup>. Two or more states that have common perception toward certain adversaries then might engage in a security cooperation framework. This concept also recognizes the existing balance of power order in determining how the cooperative security manners could contribute to the regional or global security system<sup>5</sup>. In a multipolar order, small to middle power states will play a major role in creating cooperative security system<sup>6</sup>.

To establish such cooperative security, nation states must first engage in security

cooperation activities that will enable them to create an inclusive-relations, which eventually become the foundation for multilateral security frameworks. In terms of maritime security, security cooperation serves as bridge that connects maritime security understanding of one state to the others. The inclusiveness of security cooperation would enable nation states to become more involved to cooperate in common areas of maritime security despite the geopolitical restraints. Chris Rahman explained that maritime security cooperation has a comprehensive approach to address the growing contemporary maritime security issues<sup>7</sup>. In Indo-Pacific, for example, where maritime security issues continue to grow due to domestic political differences, maritime security cooperation offers a platform for regional states to communicate based on their commonalities to protect the regional SLOCs. However, to establish effective maritime security cooperation, it is needed to set up the spectrum of maritime security activities which are deemed as inclusive.

**Figure 3.** Claims over South China Sea.



Source: National Public Radio, 2016

<sup>3</sup> David Dewitt, Common, Comprehensive, and Cooperative Security. *The Pacific Review* 7, 1-15. 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Gregory J. Dyekman, *Security Cooperation: A Key to the Challenges of the 21st Century*. Washington DC: Strategic Studies Institute. 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Moodie, *Cooperative Security: Implications for National Security and International Relations*. Albuquerque: Sandia National Laboratories. 2000.

<sup>7</sup> C. Rahman, *Concepts of Maritime Security: A Strategic Perspective on Alternative Visions for Good Order and Security at Sea, with Policy Implications for New Zealand*. Wellington: Victoria University. 2009.

## The Issue of Maritime Disputes

There are several maritime areas which have been contested the most across the Indo-Pacific, namely the East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Although there have never been any direct military conflict in those areas, however those areas are the sources for rising the security risks in the region. The contestation of those areas is caused mainly by the different security needs of the regional countries. Moreover, those areas hold significant geostrategic importance, thus the disputes have been a complex matter in Indo-Pacific maritime security.

### South China Sea

South China Sea is in the northwest part of Southeast Asia, bordered by most of the Southeast Asian countries and China. Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands, Scarborough Shoal, Natuna Islands, and Macclesfield Bank are forming the major islands and reefs in the region. South China Sea has a strategic location for global shipping trade, with around USD3.37 trillion trade values passed through in 2016.<sup>8</sup> The Strait of Malacca serves as the doorway to South China Sea and has been dubbed as the second-busiest oil shipping lines after Strait of Hormuz.<sup>9</sup> The Indo-Pacific countries have been relying on the aforementioned economic values of South China Sea.

Holding such strategic importance and surrounded by China and the Southeast Asian nations, South China Sea is embroiled with regional maritime disputes. It is claimed by Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and China as seen in Figure 3. The most notable claim is China

with its nine-dash line that covers most of the region. China's unilateral claim has then sparked disputes with the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia.<sup>10</sup> The confusing sea territory claim has also caused SLOCs insecurity in South China Sea, which put every country at risk.

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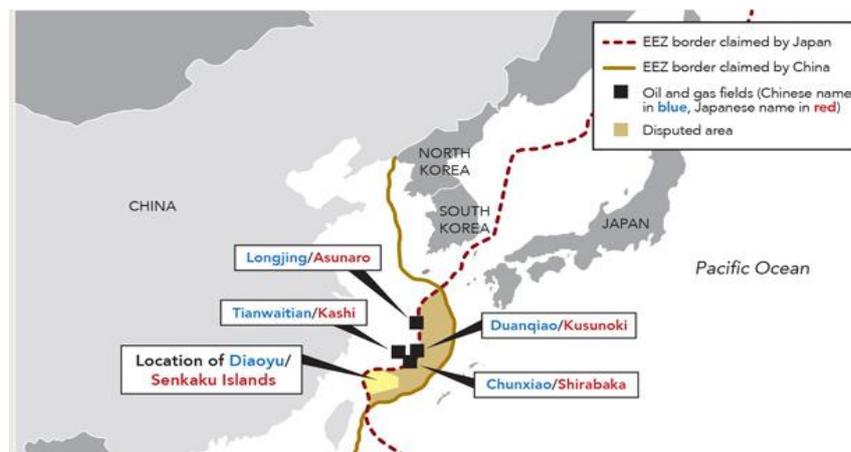
<sup>8</sup> China Power Team. *How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?*. China Power. October 2, 2017. Accessed December 8, 2017. <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

<sup>9</sup> Villar & Hamilton. *The Strait of Malacca, a Key Oil Trade Chokepoint, Links the Indian and Pacific Oceans*. EIA. August 11, 2017. Accessed December 8, 2017

<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32452>.

<sup>10</sup> CFR. *Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea*. Council on Foreign Relations. Updated December 7, 2017. Accessed December 8, 2017. <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/conflict/territorial-disputes-in-the-south-china-sea>

**Figure 4.** The Senkaku/Diayou Islands dispute.



Source: *Oil&Gas Financial Journal*, 2015

China's unilateral actions in the region have been the main concern in the disputes. China is building artificial islands across South China Sea to further expand its naval presence, while also began exploiting the natural resources within.<sup>11</sup> Vietnam and Philippines which face directly with China's nine-dash line have then increased sea patrols and coast guard activities to monitor and, if necessary, respond to any Chinese intrusion in their territories. Philippines even filed international arbitration case against China which the Philippines won in 2016. China has rejected the result of the tribunal and continued its maritime activities.<sup>12</sup> Although there has not been any major standoff lately, however the territorial maritime dispute still has the potential to resurface and disturb the regional stability.

### East China Sea

The East China Sea is home to the major economic powerhouse of Asia, namely China, Japan, and ROK. The three countries comprise around 23% of total world's GDP as of 2016.<sup>13</sup>

The East China Sea region continues the shipping lines from South China Sea, making the region to be strategically important. Natural resources, fisheries, and oil and natural gas deposits are also reportedly found in the region. The most notable maritime dispute in East China Sea is the Senkaku/Diayou Islands dispute. The Senkaku/Diayou Islands is located in southeast of Japan and at the southwestern tip of China. Both China and Japan claim the rights over the region within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles. Japan has been managing the islands since 1895; however, China reclaimed the region by citing the historic rights over the area.<sup>14</sup> Senkaku/Diayou Islands is strategically located overlooking the South China Sea, which would provide SLOCs security for both China and Japan. In 2012, Japan officially nationalized the islands in which China replied in the following year by declaring air defense identification zone (ADIZ) covering most of the region.<sup>15</sup> Tensions peaked between China and Japan, with each

<sup>11</sup> Since 2013 until now, China has built around 3,200 acres of land divided into seven islands in South China Sea. (CSIS. *Island Tracker: China*. AMTI CSIS. December 13, 2016. Accessed December 8, 2017. <https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/chinese-occupied-features/>)

<sup>12</sup> Euan Graham. *The Hague Tribunal's South China Sea Ruling: Empty Provocation or Slow-Burning Influence?* Council on Foreign Relations. August 18, 2016. Accessed December 8, 2017.

[https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global\\_memos/p38227](https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global_memos/p38227).

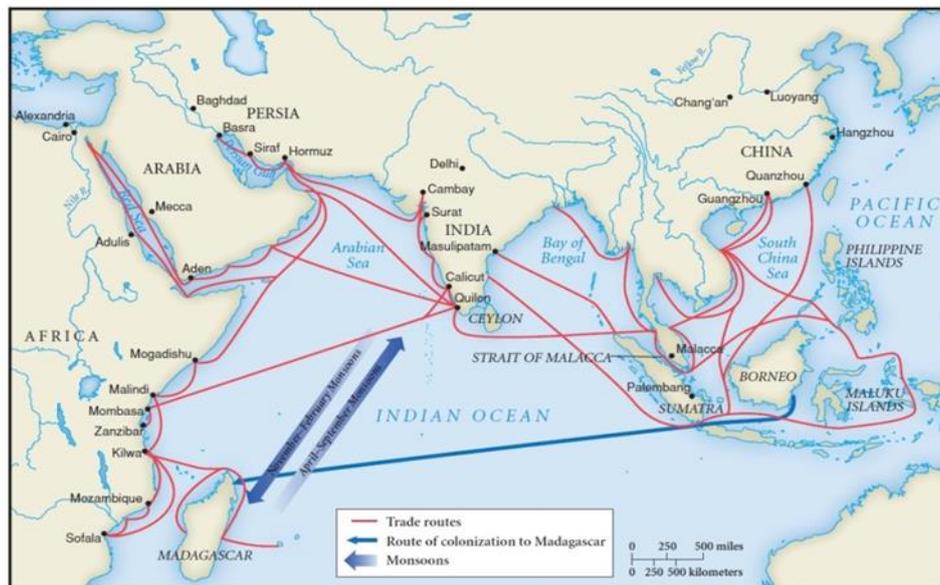
<sup>13</sup> Data taken from the World Bank's GDP Database 2016.

<sup>14</sup> CFR. *Tensions in East China Sea*. Council on Foreign Relations. Updated December 8, 2017. Accessed December 9, 2017. <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/conflict/tensions-in-the-east-china-sea>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

state's military flexing at one another in the region.

**Figure 4.** Indian Ocean trade route.



Source: Harvard World Map, 2014

## Indian Ocean

The territory of Indian Ocean stretches from the Arabian Sea, south India's coastal waters, until the Bay of Bengal near the entrance of Strait of Malacca. As seen in Figure 4, the Indian Ocean provides an important international shipping route. Oman, Yemen, Somalia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Indonesia are the littoral states surrounding the Indian Ocean. However Chinese boats is often found roaming the area through Pakistan and Sri Lanka<sup>16</sup>, so does the United States navy which annually held joint maritime exercise with India.<sup>17</sup> With the strategic importance and the

countries contesting the region, Indian Ocean's stability is being rattled.

At the heart of the Indian Ocean is India, which shares maritime border with its seven neighbors. According to the India's maritime papers, India has settled maritime boundaries with all neighboring countries, except Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> India and Pakistan have long history of border disputes, and one of which is the Sir Creek maritime dispute.<sup>19</sup> However, compared to the Kashmir border standoff, Sir Creek dispute is not big as a problem. Alas, India and Pakistan geopolitical rivalry has the potential to trigger a maritime dispute in Indian Ocean.

<sup>16</sup> Jayana Krupakar. *China's Naval Base(s) in the Indian Ocean – Signs of a Maritime Grand Strategy?* Strategic Analysis, Vol. 41, Issue 3. pg 207-222. 2017

<sup>17</sup> Malabar Exercise was a bilateral maritime exercise between the United States and India which began in 1992. (Shankar IAS Academy. (2017). *Malabar Exercise 2017*. Chennai: IAS Parliament.)

<sup>18</sup>India Ministry of Defence, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*. New Delhi: India Navy. 2015.

<sup>19</sup>Sir Creek is a 96 kilometers water strip separating the southern part of Pakistan from western India in Gujarat. (Hasan Ansari & Ravi Vohra, *Confidence Building Measures at Sea: Opportunities for India and Pakistan*. Alberquerque: Sandia National Laboratories. 2003.)

China's growing presence is currently the focus of discussion in Indian Ocean maritime security. India worries over the number of Chinese warships and even the nuclear-capable submarines roaming in the Indian Ocean. Although Chinese officials stated that its naval activities are to protect the shipping lines from piracy and such threats, however there are speculations saying China is asserting maritime dominance across Asia.<sup>20</sup> India through the Act East policy is also increasing maritime control in Indian Ocean and even seeking engagement in South China Sea.<sup>21</sup> As both states are emerging global powers with shared border, they see each other as regional rivals.

### **The Issue of Non-traditional Maritime Threats**

The most common non-traditional maritime threat is piracy. Piracy used to be a major threat in Strait of Malacca, however multilateral engagement has been successful in eliminating the danger. Then starting in 2005, Somali pirates began roaming the Indian Ocean with modern equipment which enable them to operate in the range of 1,500 nautical miles from Somali coastline. Moreover, the Somali pirates are also linked to terrorist organization such as Al-Qaeda and Al Shabab. Maritime terrorism began to be taken as serious threats after the 26/11 Mumbai attacks which killed 160 people. Maritime terrorist evolve from using the ship lines as supply chain to conduct terror attacks towards ships and vessels to send political message. Philippines-based terror group, Abu Sayyaf which pledged allegiance to ISIS, has been conducting strikes to cargo ships in Sulu Sea and abducting hostages. Although piracy and maritime terrorism aim different targets – the

former is economic-driven, while the latter is more political – however they have a common interest, which is to ensure weak states remain corrupt and vulnerable. Human smuggling and drug trafficking are also common transnational crimes found in Indo-Pacific. Drugs produced in Afghanistan, India, and Indonesia is distributed by sea to other countries through illegal markets. Moreover hundreds of percent profit margins are often used to fund other illegal activities such as terrorism and piracy. Strong link between the transnational crimes, piracy, and terrorism has advanced the complexity of non-traditional maritime threats in Indo-Pacific. Plus, drug trafficking and human smuggling are not dealt efficiently due to lack of counter measurement by the coast guards or port security facility. Seaborne economic activities, such as oil transfer and offshore drillings, fishing, and cruise ship movements have the potential to damage the surrounding marine environment. Major oil spills to the sea would affect the sea ecology and eventually killed many marine species. Illegal fishing that often use explosives and cruise ships are prone to endanger the coral reefs that harbor marine biodiversity. While the damage is threatening to marine ecology, such sea accidents may also disturb SLOCs, thus should be considered as common maritime threats, especially in busy waterway of Indo-Pacific.

### **The Challenges of China Maritime Expansion in Indo-Pacific**

China views its security environment in Indo-Pacific as generally peaceful. However, China addressed the United States' Rebalance and Japan's security policies as potential disturbance to the regional stability.<sup>22</sup> In the South China Sea issue, the 2017 China's Asia-

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<sup>20</sup> David Scott. *Chinese Maritime Strategy for the Indian Ocean*. Center for International Maritime Security. November 28, 2017. Accessed December 9, 2017. <http://cimsec.org/chinese-maritime-strategy-indian-ocean/34771>

<sup>21</sup>Amrita Jash, *South China Sea in India's Strategic Gambit: Interests and Policies*. Brussels: SADF Focus. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Xinhua. *Full Text: China's Military Strategy*. Full Text: *China's Military Strategy*. The Information Office of the State Council. May 26, 2015. Accessed December 9, 2017.

Pacific Security Cooperation Policies stated that China will cooperate in negotiating the CoC. However, China still claims sovereignty over South China Sea, though it does not mention any reference on the nine-dash line.<sup>23</sup> China acknowledges that its expanding national interest causes its national security to be more vulnerable to geopolitical turmoil, thus China needs a strong military. China is developing a “two ocean” strategy in order to expand its naval operations to reach the Indian Ocean.<sup>24</sup> This strategy will change Chinese Navy capability from only conducting far seas operations to actually project its naval force to protect far seas maritime assets. China is currently expanding its maritime dominance beyond the East and South China Seas.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the maritime strategy has increased Chinese naval presence in Indo-Pacific, especially in Indian Ocean, in order to take a larger role in 2017.

The most notable Chinese naval strategy is the A2/AD which started to be developed in 1990s. The A2/AD strategy includes development to carry out preemptive attacks at long ranges to any adversary forces within the range of western Pacific Ocean in the air and maritime area.<sup>26</sup> China’s coastal defense cruise missiles, submarines, and naval mines enable the PLAN to target any adversary entering the Chinese territorial water. Moreover, the PLAN South Sea Fleet whose area of responsibility is in the South China Sea, has been equipped with anti-aircraft destroyers which would cover air defense system in the A2/AD. Thus the A2/AD strategy will protect China’s territory during wartime, and secure the SLOCs for economic purposes during peacetime.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 6.** The PLAN routes in Indo-Pacific.



Source: DPG Conference Report, 2016

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c\\_134271001\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c_134271001_2.htm)

<sup>23</sup> Xinhua. *Full text: China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*. The Information Office of the State Council. January 11, 2017. Accessed December 10, 2017.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2017-01/11/c\\_135973695.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2017-01/11/c_135973695.htm)

<sup>24</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China. *Full text of the Vision for Maritime Cooperation under*

*the Belt and Road Initiative*. The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. June 20, 2017. Accessed December 9, 2017. [http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content\\_281475691873460.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content_281475691873460.htm)

<sup>25</sup> Jayana Krupakar. pg 207-222. 2017

<sup>26</sup> Si-fu Ou, *China's A2AD and Its Geographic Perspective*. Asia Pacific Research Forum, 81-124. 2014.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

From Figure 6, China is seeking to project its naval forces through the nine exits across the Indo-Pacific. However in its expansion, the PLAN's activities are perceived as assertive by the regional countries.

The following are the list of Chinese maritime assertive actions in Indo-Pacific.

**Table 1.** Chinese maritime activities which sparked tensions with the regional countries.

<b>Maritime region</b>	<b>Chinese actions</b>	<b>Time of occurrence</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>East China Sea</b>	Implementation of ADIZ	Since 2013	ADIZ has enabled Chinese aircraft to intrude Japan's airspace. Since then, Japan has intercepted Chinese aircrafts 664 times in 2016, the most since Cold War. <sup>28</sup>
	Claims on Senkaku/Diayou Islands	Since 1970s	China insists on claiming the Senkaku/Diayou Islands in its latest white paper. To assert its claim, the PLAN has conducted military drills near the territory.
<b>South China Sea<sup>29</sup></b>	Cable-cutting Vietnamese oil vessels	2011-2012	Vietnamese oil vessels explored to Chinese-claimed sea territory, which then China replied by disturbing the activity through cutting the cables.
	PLAN accompanying fishing boats in Scarborough Shoal	2012	China's fishing boats involved in stand-off with Philippines coast guard. The following days, the PLAN was stationed near the border. China-Philippines relations have been tense since then.
	Intervention against Philippines boats in Second Thomas Shoal	Since 2013	Chinese vessels blocked Philippines supply boats that deliver supply to the marines there. As of right now, Chinese vessels still patrolling the area.
	Chinese oil rig vessels and coast guards in Paracel Islands	2014	China deployed oil rig vessels that were accompanied by 80 coast guards inside Vietnam's water in Paracel Islands.
	Land reclamation and military outposts	Since 2014	South Sea Fleet of the PLAN has been patrolling the area with the help of military outposts scattered in the artificial islands across the region.
<b>Indian Ocean</b>	PLAN warships and submarines in eastern Indian Ocean	Since 2017	Chinese cruise missile destroyers <i>Haikou</i> and <i>Changsa</i> were spotted in anti-piracy missions and combat drills on February 2017. <sup>30</sup>
	PLAN military drills in western Indian Ocean	Since 2017	Chinese vessels were also spotted in western Indian Ocean conducting combat test to strike potential threat, however Chinese officials did not define who or what is the threat. <sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Clay Dillow. *Military Nightmare Scenario Brewing in the East China Sea*. CNBC. April 4, 2017. Accessed December 8, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/04/world-war-iii-nightmare-scenario-brewing-in-the-east-china-sea.html>

<sup>29</sup> Richard Q. Turscanyi, *Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea: Power Sources, Domestic Politics, and Reactive Foreign Policy*. Prague: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Rajat Pandit. *Amid Border Stand-Off, Chinese Ships on Prowl in Indian Ocean*. The Times of India. July 4, 2017. Accessed December 11, 2017. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/amid-border-stand-off-chinese-ships-on-prowl-in-indian-ocean/articleshow/59432702.cms>

<sup>31</sup> Teddy Ng and Shi Jiangtao. *Chinese Navy's Live-Fire Drill may be Warning Shot to India Amid Ongoing Doklam Stand-Off*. South China Morning Post. August 26, 2017. Accessed December 11, 2017. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2108410/chinese-navys-live-fire-drill-may-be-warning-shot-india>

Source: CSIS, AMTI, and individual researches.

In the Indian Ocean, Chinese maritime presence is supported by ports in foreign countries. Through the Maritime Silk Road, China built a deep-water port in Kyauk Pu, Myanmar and in Hambantota, Sri Lanka. Recently, China has also opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti. However China's major entry point is in Gwadar Port, Pakistan, which is part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Starting in 2017, the PLAN will use Gwadar Port as naval base for the next 40 years.<sup>32</sup> The ports and military overseas base would boost the PLAN's presence in the Indian Ocean.

### India as Emerging Power in Indo-Pacific

Facing directly towards Indian Ocean, India has become a prominent actor in Indo-Pacific. India's 'Look East' policy which was introduced in 1990s has expanded India's strategic engagement to the Southeast and East Asian countries. Over the years, India's engagement in the region transcended from economic relations to security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Act East' policy has strengthened India's approach in Indo-Pacific, in which the Act East will increase India's involvement through strategic partnerships. The Act East policy also reassures India's commitment to protect the SLOCs of Indian Ocean for every littoral state to use.

In its 2015 maritime security strategy paper, *Ensuring Secure Seas*, India is focusing on naval power to control the SLOCs and chokepoints across the Indian Ocean.<sup>33</sup> In protecting the SLOCs, India seeks cooperation with the United States, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia which are considered as maritime powers. India also seeks to upgrade the naval facility in Andaman and Nicobar Islands which later become India's naval outpost to reach Southeast Asia and beyond to the Pacific. In the western part of Indian Ocean, the Karwar port – India's largest naval base – serves as command post to counter and deny any threats from the Arabian Sea, with specific threat from Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, India is able to protect its territory from the west while expanding its reach to the east. However, India primary concern is China's maritime expansion in the Indian Ocean. As mentioned previously, China's ports in several Indian Ocean states are enabling the PLAN to roam freely in Indian Ocean. In the 2015 maritime security strategy paper, India worries over the PLAN activities that potentially disturb the freedom of navigation and SLOCs of Indian Ocean, based on its assertiveness in South China Sea.<sup>35</sup> The Act East policy also indicates India's willingness to suppress China's maritime influence in the region. India has also started to engage the South China Sea imbroglio by providing naval equipment to Vietnam and multilateral military platforms such as the MILAN Exercise.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> David Scott. *Chinese Maritime Strategy for the Indian Ocean*. Center for International Maritime Security. November 28, 2017. Accessed December 9, 2017. <http://cimsec.org/chinese-maritime-strategy-indian-ocean/34771>

<sup>33</sup> India Ministry of Defence, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (pp. 9-10). New Delhi: Indian Navy. 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Balaji Chandramohan, *India's Evolving Maritime Security Strategy and Force Posture*. Perth: Future Directions International. 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Satu Limaye, *Weighted West, Focused on the Indian Ocean and Cooperating across the Indo-Pacific: The Indian Navy's New Maritime Strategy, Capabilities, and Diplomacy* Arlington: CNA Analysis and Solutions. 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Ramanand Garge, *Maritime Outreach as Part of India's 'Act East' Policy*. *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs* 9, Issue 3, 150-167. 2017..

**Figure 7.** The United States military troops in Indo-Pacific.



Source: CSIS, 2016.

The role of a strong navy as stated in 2015 maritime security strategy paper is efficiently adapted to the Act East policy as a strategic diplomatic tool. Since 2015 the bilateral Malabar Exercise between the United States and India has become a trilateral form which includes Japan as permanent member.<sup>37</sup> Welcoming the framework of “free and open” Indo-Pacific, India has also enhanced the maritime partnership with Japan. Prior to ASEAN and East Asia summits in November 2017, India with the United States, Australia, and Japan held a discussion that indicates forming of a quadrilateral security relation in Indo-Pacific, which subsequently to contain China’s maritime assertiveness in South China Sea.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Future Role of the United States in Indo-Pacific**

The United States foreign and defense policy in Indo-Pacific have evolved over the years. Through the United States Pacific Command (PACOM) stationed in Hawaii and military bases in Australia, Japan, ROK, Guam, and Diego Garcia in Indian Ocean, the United States has maintained its presence in the region.<sup>39</sup> The United States alliance agreement with Japan, Australia, ROK, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines remain as the foundation of strategic actions in Indo-Pacific. Engagement with India as the emerging power has also strengthened the United States’ presence, especially in observing the Indian Ocean.<sup>40</sup> The holistic regional approach is deemed requisite in preserving the American dominance in Indo-Pacific.

Previously known as “the pivot to Asia,” the Rebalance policy has aimed to shift the United States’ focus to the region. Through the

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Harsh V. Pant. *Take Note: Asia’s Quad is Back*. The Diplomat. November 10, 2017. Accessed December 13, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/take-note-asias-quad-is-back/>

<sup>39</sup> USPACOM, *United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) Guidance*. Washington DC: Department of Defense. 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Vivek Mishra, US Power and Influence in the Asia-Pacific Region: The Decline of ‘Alliance Mutuality’. *Strategic Analysis* 40, Issue 3, 159-172. 2016.

Rebalance policy, the United States plan to post 60% of the naval and overseas air assets in the Pacific region by 2020.<sup>41</sup> China is undoubtedly the biggest factor in Rebalance policy. China's expansion presents the primary strategic challenge to the United States' security in Indo-Pacific. Chinese assertive maritime behavior – in East and South China Seas – has resulted in the United States to prepare a strategy to counter Chinese military actions, especially against China's A2/AD strategy.<sup>42</sup>

The Rebalance policy also realizes the growing geostrategic importance of the region, and has increased the approach to security and diplomatic relations with regional countries. The United States continued to engage through joint naval operations and exercises with Japan, ROK, Australia, Philippines, and India. The United States has also committed USD140 million in 2016 for maritime capacity building assistance to increase the regional countries capability in securing the SLOCs and resolving maritime disputes.<sup>43</sup> As tensions rise in Indo-Pacific maritime security, the United States remain engaged with the multilateral mechanism such as the ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Shangri-La Dialogue, and conducted the largest naval exercise in the world, the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) which include China. However, the election of President Donald Trump in 2017 has been speculated to bring a different Indo-Pacific approach. The United States' commitment in the region was questioned when President Trump decided to withdraw from the TPP.<sup>44</sup> However beyond the trade policy, the United States' security policy in Indo-Pacific

remains strong. Under President Trump's administration, the United States redefine the region as 'Indo-Pacific' to indicate an idea of "India to the west, and America to the East."<sup>45</sup> By addressing the region as Indo-Pacific and forging enhanced security cooperation with India, President Trump continues the Rebalance aim of containing China's expanding influence.

Through its latest 2017 National Security Strategy, the United States called for a "free and open Indo-Pacific," a term previously used by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to unveil Japan's maritime strategy.<sup>46</sup> The free and open Indo-Pacific called for the creation of regional democracy platform that will protect the maritime commons from the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Prime Minister Abe has been the vocal figure in involving Australia, India, and the United States to form quadrilateral security relations. The National Security Strategy 2017 has also stated to increase the quadrilateral relations with Australia, Japan, and India; additionally the United States will expand security cooperation with India.<sup>47</sup> With the four countries entering quadrilateral dialogue, President Trump's administration may be able to shift the geopolitical construct of Indo-Pacific.

## Conclusion

As Indo-Pacific becomes the center of global economic activities, geopolitics, and security dynamics, the region needs a comprehensive maritime security cooperation. The regional maritime security cooperation is needed to preserve the increasing seaborne activity and to maintain SLOCs stability. China's expanding maritime influence, emergence of

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<sup>41</sup>The United States Department of Defense, *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy: Achieving U.S. National Security Objectives in a Changing Environment*. Washington DC: Department of Defense. 2015.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 10-19.

<sup>43</sup> Kathleen Hicks, Mark F. Cancian, and Michael Green. (pp. 70). 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran. *What Trump's TPP Withdrawal Means for US Asia Policy*. The Diplomat. January 24, 2017. Accessed December 13, 2017.

<https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/what-trumps-tpp-withdrawal-means-for-us-asia-policy>

<sup>45</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Donald Trump's 'Indo-Pacific' and America's India Conundrum*. ISAS Insights, No. 476. 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017*. Tokyo: International Cooperation Bureau. 2017.

<sup>47</sup> SEAL of the President of the United States, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington DC: The White House. 2017.

India as regional power, the United States Indo-Pacific approach, and the regional non-traditional maritime issues have become the core discussions in Indo-Pacific maritime security. East and South China Seas disputes have raised the risks in the region. Indian Ocean SLOCs stability also needs to be managed, as the waterway has become the busiest sea lines in the world. A “free and open” Indo-Pacific implied by the quadrilateral Australia, India, Japan, and the United States should be treated carefully. The quad countries seem to agree on common strategic problem in Indo-Pacific, which is China’s maritime expansion. China on the other hand, has become an important partner for the region in terms of maritime trade and investment; however its naval presence is still not quite welcomed by some regional countries. Working closely with the Chinese military while maintaining the international maritime order, is important to avoid direct armed conflicts. Conducting capacity building such as joint training, ports visit, information exchange, etc. is will build trust and collective maritime security. The power competition between the above major powers will then shape the future pattern of interactions in Indo-Pacific.

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