

## Countering the mighty people's liberation army-navy in the Indian Ocean: A strategic response of Indian Navy

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### Abstract

The twenty-first century has changed the prevailing power equations among several countries across the world. India, being heavily affected by the pandemic has also undergone certain reforms in its maritime doctrines towards the neighbors; especially China. Along with other growing international problems like terrorism, environmental degradation, and cyber warfare, the security of state borders has been slowly becoming an important factor in world politics; whereas national interest is still a crucial factor in shaping a country's security policies. This paper would try to attempt to find the strategies that concern the growing turmoil between India and China regarding the Indian Ocean while taking into consideration the post twenty-first-century development of both naval forces, the current India-China border dispute and its reflection on the Indian and the Chinese Navy. It also aims to explore the strategic cooperation between the Pakistan Navy and the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the probable strategic balance on the behalf of a potent Blue Water force Indian Navy.

**Keywords:** Indian navy, blue water force, relation of India and China, peoples liberation army navy, Pakistan navy, Indian maritime strategy

### Introduction

The Naval fleet is the prime instrument that allows a country to exercise its hard power or back up its soft power in distant waters. Since independence the Indian Navy has been developing at a steady pace. From 'Freedom to use the seas' in 2007 to 'Ensuring Secure Seas' in 2015, the maritime strategy of the Indian Navy is evolving with the changes in its national interests. Indian Navy has emerged as a blue water navy from a brown-water force. The office of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Twitted "Indian Navy is Formidable Blue Water Force..." on December 4, Navy Day, as it has the capability of conducting operations far away from the home base (Kaushik). However, it is not the distant waters but the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) which is going to shape India's National Interest in the upcoming years. Firstly, the Trade war with the US followed by the pandemic situation, China's diplomatic relations with the rest of the world has been seeing ups and downs in the last few years. The sudden attack on the Indian army at Galwan Valley, Ladakh, by the Chinese Army proved the unpredictability of China's territorial ambition. There is no doubt that China is claiming small geographical parts from many of its neighbors and expanding its territory little by little. Even during the pandemic situation it has incorporated several archipelagos in the South China Sea in its list of executive districts; then used its 'debt-diplomacy' to claim forty-five percent of the territory of Tajikistan in the month of July 2020. Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines are some countries which have faced some sort of the standard 'salami-slicing' tactic that China has mastered very well. While everyone is looking at the LAC in the union territory of Ladakh, the PLAN started visiting IOR frequently. Also, it has created the 'String of Pearls' surrounding India and has protected it since then. In a situation of war, India has to be ready to face attacks from

the north as well as from the Indian Ocean in the south. Moreover, Pakistan Navy would join PLAN and charge a joint attack on Indian land and Indian naval vessels. The sum of Pakistan's conventional weapons and powers are much less than that of India's, however, China outnumbers India's figure of naval vessels by large. That is why India has to act strategically and swiftly. In 2007 India's Maritime Doctrine has openly stated that "The only measure of combat effectiveness at sea is the successful use of ocean areas or the denial of the same to an adversary, all aimed at furthering national interests, in war and peace. In other words, the capability of a navy to affect sea control or sea denial in the ocean areas of its interest would be a major determinant in the outcome of the war. (Mehta 54)". In India's 'Navy Year Book Diary 2020', Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Retired) stated that there are six principal maritime interests of India. These are focused on 'preservation', 'promotion', 'protection' of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), offshore infrastructure and maritime resources 'beyond' and 'within' the Maritime Zone of India (MZI) while they may "obtain and retain a regionally favorable maritime-position (Mohan)". Moreover, the presence of an ambitious neighbor, which is the second-largest naval power on earth, has shown us the need of securing India's maritime interests and protecting its allies from hostile naval power. More importantly, the maritime trade shares one third of the GDP of this country. India, being the second largest population and imminently largest population within the next decade, needs to secure its sources of energy for the future and ensure easy access to the foreign seashores. For this purpose and for many others, India has to build a strong relationship with not only its neighbors but also with the countries that are situated far across the oceans. Moreover, all of these are depending on the strength of the Indian Navy. Here, 'strength' represents a

collection of few things like navy personnel, vessels, warships, advanced technologies, and grand strategies and tactics to operate all of these together in times of crisis. India's maritime security strategy projects India as a global security provider like the United States Navy, the French Navy, and the Royal Navy. In the last few years, the engagements of the Indian Navy shows, that the Indian Navy can become a global security provider in the near future. In the coming decades, the Indian Ocean a "cockpit of great power rivalries" is going to play a crucial role in fulfilling the national interests of India, China, Pakistan, the USA, and some other countries. In this triangle of India, China, and USA, there exists a competition regarding the pivotal role in the IOR. The USA indeed the greatest naval power on Earth but it is not a regional power. There are more than five naval bases of the US Navy in the IOR, mainly for securing the trade routes of oil supply to the USA via Suez Canal and other straits. On the other hand, eighty percent of China's oil imports pass through the 'busiest' chokepoint of the Indian Ocean, Malacca Strait. Being a sub-regional power, Chinese military documents have stated the Indian Ocean as 'far seas'. Only India has the full strategic benefit and largest presence in the IOR. The other aspiring and rising navies are the Pakistan Navy and the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, of which the Pakistan Navy maintains a hard balancing strategy with the PLAN to counter the Indian Navy's rise to the pivotal role in the IOR. If India steps back from the race, India's national interests might recede in front of the hegemony of the USA and China; but if India's naval power grows stronger, a regional competition would emerge.

### Strategic Reach

Jaganath Sankaran, in his article, titled 'The Tactical Reach and Requirement of the Indian Navy', observed that one of the many strategic benefits that India has, is its ability to perform naval blockade missions. During the 1999 Kargil War Indian Navy performed a blockade of Karachi port and cut off Pakistan's oil supplies from the Arabian Peninsula, for which, later "Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif disclosed that Pakistan had been left with just six days of fuel to sustain combat operations had a full-scale war broken out (Sankaran and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies)." Therefore, is it possible for the Indian Navy to perform a similar kind of blockade at the Malacca Strait through where a large number of Chinese energy supplies pass? Naval analyst Zang Ming opined that Andaman Nicobar archipelago can be used as a 'Metal Chain' to block the Strait of Malacca. However, China can acquire energy from the land routes that goes through the countries of Central Asia. Nevertheless, the Indian Navy must not perform a mission against the Chinese navy involving a tense naval blockade; as Jaganath Sankaran has pointed out: "Approximately 10 percent of Chinese assets can completely destroy the entire massed fleet of Indian destroyers and frigates when they are in a simultaneous engagement, i.e. a naval melee. Since the Chinese possess naval force superiority (in terms of the number of ships) in ample measure, it would be very disadvantageous for India to engage in a force-on-force massed engagement with China without either capability to execute a surprise attack or to execute a first-strike before the Chinese can launch a retaliation strike. The Indian Navy should aim to execute better tactics rather than brute force against the Chinese

Navy (Sankaran and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies)."

These tactics are basically based on (a) operating successful first surprise-attack on the massed Chinese vessels, (b) staying undetected for as long as possible, (c) attacking from dispersed positions on massed Chinese naval assets and performing maneuvers etc. India, therefore, needs to enrich its arsenal and naval assets qualitatively. It needs to acquire more advanced sensors for its naval radars and advanced missiles for destroyers and frigates. The range of these missiles has to be longer than that of China in terms of precision-strike capability. China would try to create a distraction by the help of the Pakistan Navy which is a regional power that have gone through massive up-gradation since 1971. Theoretically, Pakistan and China should be seen as more committed partners than India has made diplomatically. Although, India's naval presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, access to the Changi port of Singapore, military presence at the Sabang port of Indonesia and good relations with Vietnam signify its strategic hold to the choke point of Malacca Strait. Moreover, the 'Quadrilateral Initiative' by the US, Japan, Australia, and India is interpreted as a balancing endeavor against China in the IOR and the Pacific Ocean.

The Indian Ocean, pre-occupied by large navies, has been going through a complex structure of balance for years. The US has its navy and air-force base in Diego Garcia where in Bahrein, the fifth fleet of the US Navy is deployed for providing security to the Suez Canal. China, tied up with Pakistan has encircled India tactically while invested in the making of commercial ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives. Furthermore, given the unpredictability of China's action towards India in the previous war of 1962 and face-offs of Ladakh, Nathula and Doklam, India has to do better than just increasing its naval assets.

### Combat Experience

The Indian Navy has an edge over PLAN in combat experiences. The first successful operation of the Indian Navy after independence, 'Operation Vijay', liberated Goa from the Portuguese in an open arms conflict. In the 1971 war with Pakistan, the Indian Navy significantly operated their missions in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal at the same time. On December 4th, 1971, Indian Navy had sunk the Pakistan Navy's minesweeper and destroyer (Operation Trident). After four days, the Indian Navy launched 'Operation Python' and nearly destroyed the oil depot of Karachi. In the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Navy established a blockade by INS Vikrant which in the action sank a submarine and several gunboats of Pakistan Navy. In 1988, the Indian Navy helped alongside Indian Special Forces to oust a coup d'état in Maldives (Operation Cactus). Its role in the Kargil War is already mentioned earlier. Indian Navy, having successfully blocked Pakistan in a full-scale war, has both recent combat experience and strategic reach by conducting successful operations along with the army and air force and by using the geography of the Indian Ocean at its own benefit. On the other hand, the Chinese Navy engaged in a minor naval skirmish with Vietnam in 1988, and before that, PLA lost to a seasoned Vietnamese military in 1979 when they attempted to invade Vietnam's territory. More importantly, as the last major engagement happened forty years ago, PLA would very soon become

devoid of army personnel with first-hand combat experience. Therefore, even after having high-tech modern arsenals, the Chinese Navy’s ability to use them effectively in combat is uncertain.

**Indian Navy through the Lens of China**

Sometimes, the best strategy is diplomacy itself. New Delhi was enlisted in the ‘Concert of Democracies’ by Washington in the late twentieth century. The US has shown little concern towards an ambitious and growing naval power of India because Washington sees New Delhi more as a strategic partner and less as a threat in the IOR. Previously though, India did not want itself to be seen as an ally of the US (Pant and Joshi 50). In February 2020, Trump on his two-day state visit to India stated that India-US cooperation along with Japan and Australia is needed to counter China’s urge for expansion in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in the South-China Sea. Unlike the US, China looks into India’s ambitious naval development as solely strategic in nature. Zhang Ming of Modern Ships stated that geographically India is in the best position to guard the Indian Ocean like a ‘giant and a never-sinking aircraft carrier’ (Holmes and Yoshihara 51). Some academicians in China, argue that with the Look East policy and India’s growing partnership with the ASEAN countries, it is quite clear that India is expanding its strategic hold beyond the IOR and the subcontinent.

“Zhang Xiaolin and Qu Yutao divide the evolution of Indian maritime strategy, particularly with regard to its geographic scope, into three distinct phases:

- Offshore defense (from independence to the late 1960s)
- Area control (from the early 1970s to the early 1990s)
- Open-ocean extension (from the mid-1990s to the present) (Holmes and Yoshihara 53).”

Therefore, many Chinese strategists believe that India has the ambition to emerge from a ‘brown water’ navy to a ‘blue water’ naval power by conducting naval operations beyond IOR and formulate ‘soft control’ power projection in the high sea areas. They have agreed upon the fact that the Indian Navy would come up as an influencing factor to the

choke points of Suez, Hormuz, and Malacca. Moreover, some Chinese thinkers have pointed out the Indian Navy’s intentions as a ‘blue water’ force vis. achieving sea control from the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea, developing the ability to conduct SLOC defense, achieving the strategic deterrence against sub-regional naval powers, acquiring long-range power projection to reach the enemy coastal area in time of conflict, building up a sea-based second-strike nuclear capability and lastly, three territorial goals- a) ‘enter east’, or going into the region of South-China Sea and the Pacific Ocean; b) ‘exit west’, or using and contributing in the protection of the Red Sea, Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea; and c) ‘go south’, or establishing soft control and influence in the region of Southern Africa or the Cape of Good Hope and accessing the territory of Atlantic Ocean (Holmes and Yoshihara 54).

**On the question of a potent ‘Blue’ water force**

Technically, a ‘blue water’ navy is taken as one which is able to operate over 200 miles (320 kilometers) from shore. Professor Daniel Todd and Michael Lindberg classified the blue water navy into four divisions: (a) navy that has the global reach or which operates throughout the world in different oceans simultaneously, (b) navy that has limited global reach or which had operated once in some sort of global operation at some time, (c) navy that has a multi-regional reach such as it sends warships or patrol vessels in several regions over time, (d) navy that has very limited regional reach such as it sends patrol vessels just outside their EEZs. The Indian Navy falls under the third kind of blue water navy (Todd and Lindberg 95-97). However, to become a ‘blue water force’ the developments need to be persuasive and potent, and the progress has to be satisfying in respect to the developments of the hostile countries. Also, the shipbuilding capability of India is much inferior to the capability of China. In April 2020, China has announced their latest ‘Blue Sea 2020’ or the “Bihai 2020” initiative which is based on fighting maritime illegal activities and eight other areas for development (Lee). At this point, an illustrative table would perhaps be useful to understand the present cross-currents of power.

**Table 1:** A Brief Power Comparison among the Prime Naval Assets of China, Pakistan, and India.

Naval Vessels	Chinese Platform	Pakistani Platform	Indian Platform
Nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN)	7	0	2
Diesel-powered attack submarine (SSK)	60	8	14
Aircraft Carriers	2 (another 2 under construction)	0	1 (1 in reserve, another 1 under construction)
Destroyers	36 (+10 expected by 2021)	0	10 (+ 2 under construction)
Frigates	52	9	13
Corvettes	50	2	23 (4 AWS)
Mine Warfare	29	3	3
Total assets	777	100	285
ASW/Attack Helicopters	24 (Attack)	23	14(ASW)
ASW/Attack Aircrafts	372 (60 aging + other multirole aircrafts)	17	98 (36 air superiority + 14 AWACs + 13 ASW + others)
Total naval Aircrafts	700+	40	270+

**Source:** tables in Global Firepower-World Military Strength; 2020 ed., Globalfirepower.com, 5 Aug. 2020, www.globalfirepower.com/navy-ships.asp. Wikipedia contributors. ‘List of Active Indian Navy Ships’. *Wikipedia*, 8Aug. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_active\_Indian\_Navy\_ships.

We can see from the Table 1 that PLAN outnumbers the number of vessels and naval aircraft of every category of Indian Navy where the Pakistan Navy alone does not project that much of threat to India. Hence, it has used its

diplomatic and military tie-up with China to form a credible deterrence in the North Arabian Sea. Indian naval aircrafts are capable of conducting air superiority roles with specialization in Anti-Submarine Warfare (AWS), keeping

in mind that the submarine fleet of PLAN is four times larger than the Indian Navy's. With two medium carriers China plans to build at least five or six aircraft carriers by 2030 and ten of them by 2049 whereas Indian Navy has planned three of these warships so that at least two of them stay operational at any given time. Clearly, India has not enough resources to match the capability of China's naval fleet any time sooner. Nonetheless, Indian Navy is primarily focusing on to match the capability of PLAN in the IOR; only then it could become a 'Blue' water force that provides security and expand its presence in the Pacific or Atlantic Ocean. The navy is planning to commission a total of 200 warships by 2027. India would try to operate a version of Rafale and LCA Tejas from its upcoming aircraft carriers. The slowly progressing nuclear submarine projects hint at the less potentiality of high sea battles while China has built forty four submarines between 2000 and 2016. Surely the Indian Navy gives more priority to make surface monsters rather than making underwater sneaky slayers. Regarding the indigenous stealth frigates and destroyers, the tactical shift of the navy is transparent. Indian Navy is focusing on the quality of the weapons more than the quantity of it. In the future war situations, the stealth technology would give an upper hand in the high sea confrontations. Detecting the enemy ships or vessels is as important as staying undetected for as long as possible and take action before the adversary knows about the presence of friendly forces. The rapid development in technology would help India to become an operator of a stealthy fleet of warships.

### Logistics and Supports

In the aftermath of the Chinese attack at Galwan Valley, Ladakh, China has increased its naval presence in IOR. With the continuation of the expansion of Chinese maritime facilities in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Pakistan, this Chinese encirclement of India is unsettling for New Delhi. A strategic step that would keep China under some pressure would be India's constant naval presence in China's backyard which is the South China Sea. Along with Japan, the USA and Australia, India would be welcomed by the other South China Sea countries like Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines for China has stretched its boundary in the maritime domains of these countries. India's figure of destroyers and aircraft carriers has to match with this objective to be present beyond the border of IOR and to guard the Indian Ocean at the same time. Indian Navy has already established the Far Eastern Naval Command in Andaman and Nicobar Island, where it has a joint navy and air force base that might serve as the only natural aircraft carrier of India.

The lack of sophisticated air defense systems in the present aircraft carriers will be fulfilled in the next 'Vikrant' class carriers. The United States of America is helping India in this process. In order to become a dauntless blue water force, a navy has to establish a developed network of command and control from its home base to the foreign oceans. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese strategists claim that the Indian Navy's ambition is to 'go south' i. e. the Atlantic Ocean. If India ventures into maritime activity and a constant presence in the waters of Atlantic, Indian naval presence in the South Indian Ocean would become essential. According to the Indian Navy's website "The Indian Navy has deployed a P8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft to Seychelles since 20 Mar 2016, for surveillance in the EEZs

of Seychelles that would also help the Indian Navy to learn more about the far sides of IOR" (2016). As far as the French are concerned they have advanced aircraft carriers with Rafale M aircrafts. They also have advanced stealth destroyers, frigates and other naval vessels. This blue water navy gives conspicuous subjects to the Indian Navy to learn about, particularly in the field of technology and development. On the other hand, over a million French live in the French islands in the Indian Ocean that cover almost Ten percent of the Indian Ocean's surface. France is also looking forward to balance China in the Indian Ocean with cooperation from the Indian Navy, and in turn India can access the French islands of Reunion and Mayotte for navigating China's movement in the region. As logistic supports are in concern, in 2019 FNS Cassard, an 'anti-aircraft destroyer' visited Mumbai port, fulfilling the first implementation of logistics and reciprocal support contract that has been talked about when President Emmanuel Macron visited India. Some speculate that India alongside Japan is installing a sound surveillance sensors (SOSUS) stretching from the tip of Sumatra to Indira Point to keep an eye on Chinese submarines. Tokyo more likely is going to fund India's undersea optical fiber cable network from Chennai to Indira Point which, later, might be connected with the existing "Fish Hook" SOSUS of US-Japan. This would develop a state of art SOSUS network that could monitor PLAN submarine movement in both IOR and South China Sea (Singh).

### Command and Control development

For a navy, being in the advantageous position in Electronic Warfare (EW) means a massive strategic advantageous point. EW is important to cut the strike capability of the enemy by jamming its C3I, or 'see cubed eye' (Command, control, communication and intelligence). The satellites and command centre of space research organisations assist the particular force by giving them access into their satellite control and the power to jam military command centre or equipment of the enemy. Thales Group of France has been assisting Indian Navy by supplying EW systems for boosting tactical capabilities. Currently, India has C4I EW systems supported by 'Samyukta', and 'Himshakti' systems that have helped the joint forces in Uri Surgical Strike. DRDO is trying to develop C5I (an acronym for command, control, communications, computers, combat systems, and interoperability) in India for over twenty years, whereas in China, the USA and some EU states, C5I has been successfully incorporated into the defense system (Sarkar). The official book on India's maritime strategy, *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Strategy* has stated EW as a significant power enhancer- "The increase in speed, connectivity and pervasiveness of information and communications technology will continue unabated, requiring continual adaptation for defense systems. C4ISR systems will remain a key force multiplier; however, our opponents would seek to contest this advantage through electronic warfare, cyber-attacks and asymmetric techniques" (Mehta 125). India is progressing steadily to incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) into C5I system to take firm decisions in the time of crisis and is also seeking help from foreign nations to develop more advanced communication and radar signal jamming technology. The overall development of all of these spheres will collectively help the information advantages of the Indian Navy.

Especially in the coming decades, communication, command, control and intelligence will have to be supported by an advanced reconnaissance and surveillance systems with counter measures. The Space-technology of a country helps it in the fields of communication, surveillance, positioning imaging and in the missile technology. The growing importance of defense system is well fed by the ISRO's new missions. Unfortunately, India is gaining onto these technologies very slowly. The material of stealth technology needs improvement and the Indian Navy is also way behind the deadline of developing most of its naval assets including aircraft carriers, destroyers, SSBNs, indigenous aircrafts for navy, unmanned surface and under water vehicles. Adding to this, due to the sluggish rate of recovery from the economic impact of corona virus outbreak, the Ministry of Defence in India will fall under sway. As India is depending on foreign nations for most of its defense equipment and technology and do not retain the economic parity with China, it needs to focus on the methods that would allow the navy to perform routine patrol and drills in a cost effective manner.

### India's Probable Responses

Unlike India, China's territorial expansion and far sea logistics and naval bases are largely based on its debt-diplomacy. China acquired Sri Lanka's Hambantota port in a debt exchange and Pakistan is also submerged in debt with China. In response to Chinese strategic encirclement, India could not have done much with its immediate maritime neighbours except civil nuclear deal, 2015 with Sri Lanka. However, India has managed to push its blue water ambition a little more by gaining the access to Singapore's Changi port for Indian naval vessels. It is adjacent to both the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. China's military presence in Gwadar and Djibouti can set up a blockade respectively at the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Bab el-Mandab against India's import of crude oils from the Middle East but gaining access to Oman's Duqm port for logistics and supports of Indian navy has loosened the strategic hold of China at these choke points. In 2018, India also achieved the military access to Indonesia's Sabang port, located at the entrance of the Strait of Malacca. However, the recent domestic unrests have drawn distance between India and its neighbours. Bangladesh, Myanmar, Iran and some other countries have criticized the CAA while slowly drifting towards China's strategic realm. The Chabahar project has acquired a feverish pace while domestic situation amid pandemic has worsened by natural disasters like cyclone, flood, drought, wildfire etc. The whole world is struggling against the pandemic but China keeps 'salami slicing' territories from its neighbours. This geopolitical agenda of China keeps pushing India towards the newest foreign policies and the bargaining of balance of power in all aspects of power projection in the region. China's economy is almost five times stronger than India and its military might (both conventional and nuclear) outruns India by large margin. By merging their naval fleets, China and Pakistan would try to dominate IOR in the near future. In this decisive juncture where India cannot match the military capability and naval outreach with a joint fleet of China and Pakistan, it would have to achieve certain diplomatic and strategic goals:

1. The Indian Navy would be in the dire need of cooperation with other 'blue water forces' in the IOR

like US Navy and French Navy for many reasons like upgrading its weapons, logistical supports and joint naval exercises to balance Chinese naval presence in the IOR. The Malabar Exercise, if India invites Australia along with US and Japan, would force the 'Quadrilateral Initiative' (QUAD) into action. China's naval presence in the IOR would then be credibly deterred by India's American bandwagon. Moreover, India should take a step further and revive the Quad by allowing logistics and supports of the Quad naval vessels in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

2. The Indian Navy will have to maintain diplomatic ties with the countries situated near to the choke points that are scattered all over the IOR for accessing the water routes beyond. For instance, a good relationship with countries like Oman, Iran and Iraq would help navy's passage to oil enriched gulf countries in the Persian Gulf. However, US sanction has put India in the back-foot and so, it is dragging its feet from the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project. Although it is considered as a partial diplomatic failure as to counter China, US is always a better ally than Iran. Strategically, Suez Canal and Red Sea are more important than Persian Gulf because these water bodies are surrounded by gulf countries and it extends access to the Mediterranean Sea; therefore, allows a navy to become a blue water force. Besides the anti-piracy missions, Indian Navy should have access and military support in this region as well. Diplomatic ties are needed to be built up by the Indian government with countries like Yemen, Sudan, and Egypt to counter China's military presence in Djibouti. India also has to reach south-west of IOR by developing naval presence and supports in the countries of Madagascar, South Africa, Mozambique etc. While venturing into new diplomatic ties, Indian Navy ought to find a way to start naval drills with other minor naval powers in the IOR viz. Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and Royal Saudi Navy.
3. Propulsion technology will be Indian Navy's next target, which needs to be upgraded. This is because of the age old propulsion system which tends to be back-dated in comparison to the advanced navies of the world; which needs to be replaced by nuclear propulsion that maximizes the endurance of a naval vessels and gives more speed in operational fields. Indian Navy is deciding upon indigenous nuclear propulsion in its newly launched warships.
4. Kenneth Waltz states that the absence of central authority is the ordering principle of the international system and the order in the IOR is threatened by increasing Chinese naval drills. Therefore, Indian Navy should have a double-edged maritime strategy in the coming decades. It has to acquire at least three Carrier Battle Groups (CBG), SSM and SLBM submarines which will provide India with a successful nuclear triad and a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that will support the naval intelligence and countermeasures to a new level. Along with these, the Indian Navy has to answer swiftly to the humanitarian calls, responding in search and rescue (SAR) operations and building up an influential face of itself in the region. US Navy operates over twelve aircraft carriers throughout the world. Each aircraft carrier has its own CBG, with the enormous support of self-

defense, firepower, advanced naval aircraft with maritime surveillance and reconnaissance system on board. Indian navy should build at least three of them without further delay or as a last resort align itself closely with the US led NATO.

5. India needs to use the IOR's geographic characteristics and its own location prudently. In case of a war situation, India would first try to cut off the supply lines of China's oil import by blocking the Malacca Strait. China would send a naval fleet to regain its position in Malacca. Then India would try to use the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to counter China and performing an all-out attack against the massed fleet of Chinese Navy. This is how India should bring the fight into the IOR, whereby countering the Chinese Navy with or without the support of an ally would become easier. Even after becoming a full-grown 'blue water force' of at least three CBGs, in a war-like situation, Indian navy would have to counter a hostile regional navy and an enormous sub-regional navy at the same time.
6. For building up a truly 'blue water force' that would be capable of performing naval missions far from the regional waters, India would need to give a boost to its pending projects and its sloth pace. For now, India is acquiring technologies and supports and maintaining diplomatic relations and building up new relations with countries that could help India reach out to the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans. India would never be short of active naval personnel and it is also capable of Nuclear Triad. What it really needs is developing naval assets and aircraft in its own land and not depending on other countries for acquiring them. Diesel attack and Nuclear Submarines, hence, would have to be built in India and Indian Navy also needs to commission two more aircraft carriers, one of them preferably a supercarrier, within the next decade.
7. Despite operating a listening center at Madagascar, very little attention is given to some of the less famous choke points in the IOR by the Indian Navy. These are The Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and the coast of Africa, The Sunda Strait between the Indian Ocean and Borneo and The Lombok Strait between the Indian Ocean and the Sulawesi. Indian naval presence near to these straits would give a twofold benefit *viz.* maritime interest for boosting the 'Blue' economy in the countries of East Africa, South-East Asia and Australia; and secondly, it would formulate some strategic locations for early warning and radar cover-up in case any enemy fleet tries an unconventional angle of attack.
8. To compensate the incapability to match China's investments in the making of commercial ports around the IOR, India should take diplomatic initiatives. India can establish trade relations and make bilateral agreements with countries like Tanzania, Sudan, Seychelles, and the Maldives where China has invested in logistics development so that these countries do not fall into the 'debt' trap of China and give up their sovereignty on their own land.
9. Aircraft carriers are the largest kind of warships but even they can be sunk easily by a well-guided missile.

This has been one of the reasons why Russia does not give priority to the development of large aircraft carriers. In response to China's mighty supercarrier-fleet of future, India's cost-effective options are mentioned below.

- a. Developing stealth fast attack crafts that stay undetected on Chinese radars and get into the strike-zone of aircraft carriers and conduct precision missile attacks on it.
- b. Develop stealth long-range bomber aircraft that can conduct operations far from the mainland of India and also have the competence to fly deep into the IOR to deter the PLAN's biggest warships.
- c. Indian manufacturing companies like DRDO can also work on stealth missiles which can defy the enemy radar and perform a precision strike on enemies.

"I think most of our people cannot understand that we are actually at war. They need to hear shells. They are not psychologically prepared for the concept that you can have a war when you don't have actual fighting" – said Admiral Hyman G of the United States Senate Committee on 6th January 1958. Sometimes the danger comes in a different and unexpected form. In a democratic country, the main purpose of an armed force is to provide security to the people and government and in order to do that, Indian Navy has premeditated to become a 200-warship force with approximately 600 aircraft and helicopters by 2027 to ensure the 'secure seas'. As the IOR is emerging as 'the world's centre of gravity', the effective guard of the Indian Navy must save the geo-strategic interests of India. Except the PLAN, every other advanced navy has a transparent relationship with the Indian Navy. India's engagements with states like Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines have become more important because India has supported Vietnam and the Philippines in their disputes with China. Indian naval ships have been visiting Vietnam in the South China Sea and the two nations have continued to cooperate on hydrocarbon exploration in the South China Sea, despite warnings of Beijing. They organise and perform navy-to-navy talks and naval exercises on a routine basis. The naval interactions in the various choke points of IOR are more inclined towards competition than cooperation. Mahan's view of geopolitics articulates that even for the US, the Indian Ocean is more important than the Pacific Ocean as it has not only geopolitical importance but also geo-economic significance. Thus, India ought to use the common interests of these two constitutional democracies and take the Indo-US cooperation one step ahead to counter China's mounting influence in IOR and safeguard its coastal areas from outside attacks. Furthermore, India must become the biggest force and security provider in the region and subsequently embark on its ambition to become a genuine 'blue' economy force. Looking from another perspective at the balance of power in IOR one could see that Chinese navy is the driving force that urges Indian Navy to be battle ready. The aggressive nature of the PLAN induces momentum to all the pending ship-building and development projects; more importantly the Indian Navy has gained a lot of tactics and strategies, while being faced by the threat of a double front naval confrontation. As of now, at the dusk of the first two decades of this century, the Indian Navy is still trying to follow the path of a blossoming Chinese Navy while aiming to become a formidable blue water force within the next two

decades. Till then, its diplomatic relations with allies and potential friends would define a large part of its maritime strategies and the overall depiction of balance in the zone of IOR.

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