



Indo-Pak Maritime Struggle

Briefing Paper
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REPORT AUTHORS

“Indo-Pak Maritime Power Struggle” was researched, compiled and written by **Ahmad Ibrahim**, Contributing Analyst.

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PREFACE

Indian Ocean serves as linkage spot for global Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) emerging from both hemispheres. Presence of oil rich states in Middle East & transportation of major chunk of Oil trade through [Persian Gulf & Gulf of Oman is of significant eco strategic importance](#). The rise of two Economic Giants i.e. China & India in lieu of their Export-Import based trade economy has put Indian Ocean in lime light. Pakistan, a smaller economy but credible military power, also heavily relies on its sea-based trade for business and power-energy supplies making it direct competitor against India. This leading role has put New Delhi & Islamabad eye to eye particularly in maritime competition in lieu of rapidly developing China Pakistan Economic Corridor project (CPEC). CPEC project has significantly merged the interests of both China & Pakistan. As a result, both states are supporting each other at every level to secure their mutual interests. India, in similar fashion, in cooperation with United States is looking to tackle the combined threat of China & Pakistan in Indian Ocean. For China, Indian Ocean is survival route for its economy & back up for its supplies provided that Washington & its allies put blockade in South China Sea following some conflict. For United States, dominance in Indian Ocean can guarantee the monopoly of Washington over Global petroleum trade resulting in overwhelming advantages at economic, diplomatic & strategic levels.

India, the fastest growing economy & second largest population do not have its own hydrocarbon energy sources. In North & West, it is isolated by hostile neighbors with natural source rich Central Asia & Middle East. In West, there is no state with natural sources. This has put restriction on India to rely purely on sea for oil supplies. Thus, the security of its SLOCs in order to keep supplies open for Civilian & Military consumption is of prime focus for India. Moreover, India fears the existence of [Chinese Pearl of Stings Strategy](#), which upon implementation can introduce People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in Indian Ocean, can threaten Indian dominance. Beijing can achieve this strategy by winning military & political support in South Asian states in order to project power as pressurizing tool against India provided that a conflict emerge in the specific region. This dual threat has forced Indian navy to develop an offensive doctrine involving usage of its both Eastern command & Western naval commands.

Indian Eastern command head quartered in Vishakhapatnam is specifically raised to repel any Chinese naval threat and keep neighboring smaller states in check. Along-side mainland India, it also has naval bases in [strategically important Nicobar & Andaman Islands](#). Both these Islands serve as first line of defense for Indian navy by choking any possible PLAN strike force in Malacca straits. Key assets deployed by IN in this command are, INS Chakra which is SSN (Nuclear powered submarine) and in near future IN will move air craft carrier INS Viraat in Eastern Indian waters for developing carrier builder group (CBG) supported by Rajput class destroyers, Shavlik class frigates and Sindhu Ghosh class diesel electric subs. This CBG will be used for long range power projection in Eastern Indian Ocean against any eminent threat.

The Western Indian Ocean strategic environment is pretty interesting as it involves both Pakistan & India directly and China & United States in directly in competing grounds. India has specifically designed its Western fleet which has Head Quarter (HQ) in Mumbai. This fleet has air craft carrier INS Viraat which will be eventually replaced by INS Vikramditya.

INS Vikramditya along-side Kolkata class destroyers & Delhi class frigates are specifically meant for offensive power projection in Arabian Sea. This fleet is very likely to collide with Pakistan Navy (PN) in case of Sea conflict. The doctrinal posture of Western fleet revolves around the concept of naval blockade of Pakistan for choking Pakistan's supplies and secure its own oil SLOCs originating from Persian Gulf. This posture has seen its implementation by deployment of Anti Access – Area Denial (A2A-AD) assets like Maritime Petrol Air craft (P8 Neptune) and conventional hunter killer submarines (SSK).

Pakistan, in past has treated its navy like ignored child. Reason behind it was limited potential of sea-based trade and lack of proper policy making procedure for fully realizing the importance of maritime power projection. Now, after the development of Gwadar port and initiation of CPEC project, there is dire need to upgrade Pakistan navy off shore & sea-based capabilities. Unlike common perception, PN doctrine is defensive in nature with posture to keep safety of Pakistan's 1000+ km sea shores and related SLOCs. Unfortunately, due to geo political complications, so far Pakistan has failed to establish pipe line link with either Iran or Arab Gulf states for oil supply. Thus, despite of its supportive geo graphical location, Pakistan is still reliant on sea borne oil supplies to full fill its energy demands. Gwadar port functionality has encouraged Islamabad & Beijing to enhance the operational capabilities of PN particularly related to Anti Access Area Denial (A2-AD) operations. Induction of more Maritime Petrol Air Crafts (ATR72MPA, [P3C Orion](#)), agreements with Turkey for [Ada class Corvettes](#) and purchase/TOT deal of eight S20 SSK submarines¹ with China are some pivotal steps taken by PN in this regard. The shore is further secured by introduction of coastal anti-ship defense system ([Zarb](#)) for repelling naval blockade. The induction of new hardware, initiation of new training standards and expansion of naval doctrine are indicators of serious attempts made by Islamabad to counter emerging threats in Arabian Sea & Indian Ocean.

The threat environment of South Asia is going to receive a new dimension as far as nuclear doctrinal posture is concerned. Both nations are in process of developing sea based "assured second strike capability". Approach however, is different depending upon relevant eco strategic factors. India is inclined to develop limited number of nuclear-powered Ballistic Submarines (SSBN) armed with Sea Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM). Pakistan on the other hand is interested in arming existing & upcoming conventional diesel electric submarines (SSK) with Sea Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM). This nuclear arms race in Indian Ocean will further complicate the already complicated power balance in South Asian region.

As far as Maritime Indo-Pak territorial conflict is concerned, issue of Sir Creek is of prime importance. Though the Sir Creek has little military value, it holds immense economic gain. Much of the region is rich in oil and gas below the sea bed, and control over the creek would have a huge bearing on the energy potential of each nation. Also, once the boundaries are defined; it would help in the determination of the maritime boundaries which are drawn as an extension of onshore reference points. Maritime boundaries also help in determining the limits of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and continental shelves. EEZs extend to 200 nautical miles (370 km) and [can be subjected to commercial exploitation](#).

In contemporary South Asian geopolitical environment, India is aggressively pushing forward with pro-active measures to overcome near future Pak-China efforts for intimidation of their benefits particularly those linked with CPEC in Indian Ocean. United States stance will be limited but crucial as Washington intends to keep Beijing in pressure not only in South China Sea but also in Indian Ocean. For Pakistan, it will be challenging situation to counter Indian exertion of interests in Indian Ocean on one hand while to follow a balanced approach associated with USA-China power struggle on other hand. Islamabad policy should be of avoidance of conflict on military scale in order to evade the likelihood of increment of naval deployments from either New Delhi or Washington.

Best possible scenarios are to keep projecting economic power via CPEC, develop sea based assured second-strike capability for deterrence, enhance conventional defensive capabilities of Pakistan navy with credible offensive arms and ultimately to engage at diplomatic level in a more mature manner to earn more allies in region.

Following this coinciding strategy will grant most favorable outcomes with minimal risks at state level.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ahmad Ibrahim is a contributing analyst to CommandEleven on military strategy, tactics and operations. He is currently completing his MPhil in Strategic Studies from National Defense University in Islamabad.

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