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## **Navigating Strategic Stability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**

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### **Abstract**

The strategic location, resource-rich waters, and geopolitical dynamics makes the Indian Ocean region (IOR) a point of great strategic importance. Global economy and peace of the countries bordering the region depend heavily on the security and stability of the region, and sea-based deterrence is a key tool in preserving both. Due to power dynamics between the US-India and Pakistan-China ties and these states' hostile actions towards one another, the IOR has turned into a battleground for South Asian regional and global powers, making it less likely that any regional or worldwide arms control or disarmament program will be supported. However, this study develops the understanding of the growing complexity and urgency as strategic concerns in the IOR regarding four nuclear powers' and the deteriorating effects of this politics on the region's strategic stability. The prime objective of the study is to explore the nature of the expanding strategic competition in the oceanic politics of the Indo-Pacific region (IOR) between two regional and two global powers and discuss the threats this region faces.

**Key Words: Cold War, Nuclear Weapons, Geo-Significance, Eco-Nomic Lifeline, India-Pakistan Dispute, China-US Competition, Indian Ocean Region, Maritime Arms Race, Strategic Stability**

### **Introduction**

The Indian Ocean (IO), an important commercial route, sometimes referred to as the "eco-nomic lifeline" of the world, is home to a variety of tribulations ranging from established security threats to newly developing non-traditional issues. It also serves as the lifeblood of global trade (CISS Roundtable Report ,2024). It encompasses some of the most strategically significant chokepoints in the world, especially for energy shipping. For instance, the Indian Ocean links the Persian Gulf and the Middle East to Asia, Europe, and Africa through the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most significant chokepoints for oil flow worldwide and Bab-el-Mandeb,

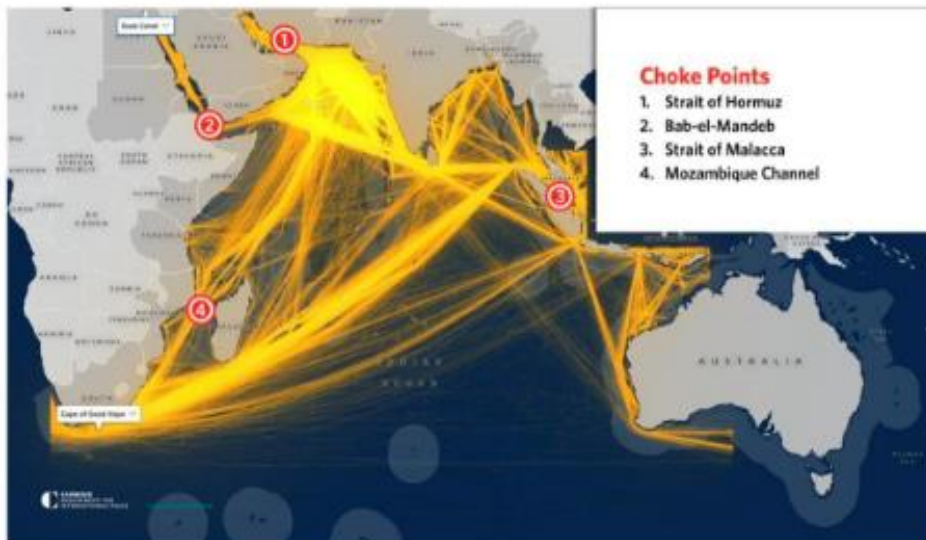
which is located in the water between the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Suez Canal (Baruah, 2023).

The Power balances have emerged as a result of the Indian Ocean's "balanced" topography. However, it is important to know when and how precisely did the Indian Ocean's geostrategic and interregional nature translate into maritime balance-of-power considerations? The history of the Indian Ocean and its peoples, from prehistoric times to the early modern era, is marked by protracted cooperation that resulted in the peaceful exchange of goods and cultures, with only sporadic naval warfare aimed at controlling maritime trade. For example, the Chola rulers of southern India and the "Indianized" kingdom of Srivijaya in Sumatra developed a naval rivalry during the eleventh century. Admiral Zheng He's spectacular naval expeditions during the fifteenth century extended the Chinese maritime sphere of influence westward and, for a brief period, as far as the shores of Arabia and Africa. But there was little to discuss about the maritime balance of power, whether in terms of associative partnerships or antagonistic posturing which centered on Pax Indica and Pax Sinica. Naval rivalries did emerge episodically out of long and largely peaceful centuries of Indianization in the pre-modern Indian Ocean arena.

(Chew, 2007)

The contemporary debates in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where rival governments of regional and international powers have complicated the region's security, cannot be used to weaken the positions of different states in modern nuclear politics. The competing claims of major powers and the divergent stances taken by different states against one another have begun to complicate the IOR's maritime politics and its reliance on the larger Asian power balance. The complex political order of the Indian Ocean Rim has been generated by the mix of regional and global contending claims, placing it under the strategic contests of several powers. Washington and Beijing are witnessing an increasing number of strategic differences due to the current political complications between the IOR states and the strong stances of extra-regional countries. However, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as part of China's worldwide economic goals, has

raised serious concerns for



Source: <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/04/surrounding-the-ocean-prc-influence-in-the-indian-ocean?lang=en>

Washington denotes China as its "greatest strategic competitor" in recent years and has stepped up its efforts to thwart Beijing's expanding sway. Even if American viewers have generally praised Washington's more powerful approach, rising hostilities between the US and China pose a threat to South Asia's security. Beijing and Washington need to be careful in this struggle not to inflame already-existing tensions in the area. Nevertheless, halting an increasing arms race is the first step (Naseem, 2023).

The growing rivalry between Beijing and Washington is a mirror of global power politics, which has begun to shift international politics overall in the direction of maritime politics, leading it to the beginning of a new Cold War. The current international arms race between the US and China has erupted into an increasingly antagonistic political environment in the Indo-Pacific region (IOR), where the introduction of nuclear weapons has complicated the region's conventional security framework. The primary points of strategic politics between the US and China in the IOR are the nuclear weapons of India and Pakistan, as well as the respective favored plans of both countries for building their international networks of allies in other regions.

Nearly ten years ago, China had no impact in the Indian Ocean; nevertheless, China's recent partnerships and infrastructure development have led India to doubt China's strategic importance in the area. India finds it difficult to preserve its standing in the area and its connections with its neighbors as China's influence increases (Payal, 2019).

The US and China's current attention on the IOR is inextricably linked to New Delhi and Islamabad's contested claims in South Asia's territorial and maritime issues. Thus, Beijing and Washington have had ample opportunity to strengthen their influence over the maritime political order of the Indo-Pacific region, the Arabian Sea in particular and India-Pakistan's location within the larger IOR. The primary arguments in its favor are the newly developing interstate linkages between Islamabad and Beijing and Washington and New Delhi. The governments of India and Pakistan are adamant that, in the face of nuclear weapons, they can secure the strategic backing of other nations in their internal regional affairs.

Thus, Washington and Beijing find the multileveled animosity between India and Pakistan to be the most intriguing aspect of the Indo-Pacific region, and this aspect has persuaded both governments' mainstream defense planners of the importance of Islamabad and New Delhi. The IOR is now a battleground for the competing nuclear powers because to the growing ties between two regional and two global powers. This enormous, politically unstable area, which includes the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, 42 littoral states, and a third of the world's population, is one of the most explosive superpower rivalry venues (Harrison & Subrahmanyam, 1989).

### **Issue of Strategic Stability**

Among all the geographic zones on Earth, the Indian Ocean is still the least researched. However, from the third millennium BCE to the present, there have been significant cultural interactions across its waters and along its coastlines (Alpers, 2014). It is nigh impossible to separate the emerging politics of multi-leveled strategic contests between many states from the concept of strategic stability. The concept of strategic stability, which refers to a stable security environment between hostile or contending states, can be used to measure the politics of various states in general and nuclear weapon states in particular.

However, the idea of strategic stability describes a scenario in which there is no motivation for any state to initiate or choose to initiate first action. In the context of international power politics, this scenario paints a contrasting picture of a strategic competition between nuclear states in parallel with the creation of a strategically secure security environment. The concept of strategic stability can be comprehended through the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons in any given region between specific nuclear armed states.

Nuclear weapons serve as a deterrent, which typically forces the contending states to refrain from going to war in their declared areas of hostilities without compromising their formal conflicts. The idea of deterrence reduced the likelihood of nuclear war between two superpowers that might launch nuclear attacks in any extreme situation, and proponents of this idea claim that the real purpose of nuclear weapons is connected to the idea of deterrence. The idea of mutual assured destruction, which is dependent on the ability of strategic forces to survive any nuclear attack after the first strike, reduced the likelihood of conflict in any strategic animosity between two nuclear powers by establishing deterrence.

The ability to withstand a first attack in an interstate strategic competition establishes the value of deterrence and poses a threat to state authorities preparing to control any crisis-related escalation scenario. Thus, the concept of strategic stability is not guaranteed to survive the prevalence of deterrence in any interstate strategic competition. Beyond the real battlefields where the states' conventional and unconventional defense forces engage in combat, the deterrent has preserved a troubled international climate.

A unique combination of four nuclear powers facing off in the form of an alliance has been forged by the strategic alignment of two global powers with the two regional powers. The top decision makers in four countries have refused to take account of how their changing strategies could alter the level of strategic stability within the IOR, without considering what that might mean for them. Nonetheless, the issue of strategic stability has emerged as an overlooked aspect of the rivalry over nuclear powers in IOR politics. Stated differently, the increasing contestation of specific governments' nuclear weapon statuses has a direct impact on the IOR's strategic stability values while weakening the Indian Ocean's (IO) regional security environment. Given the failure of the proponents of arms control and disarmament in the South Asian region, it is important to highlight New Delhi's and Islamabad's views on the world efforts in these areas.

With the backing of major countries, the two nuclear-armed states from South Asia have now entered the surrounding maritime politics. One of the world's most serious nuclear rivalries is that between India and Pakistan. In their bilateral ties, arms races, security quandaries, stability and instability, and enduring rivalry are at the forefront. The competition between India and Pakistan began with the hastily divided 1947, but with the overt nuclearization of both countries in 1998, the stakes were raised significantly. International engagement has been essential in the past for bringing the neighbors that possess nuclear weapons' tensions down. However, this delicate balance is in danger of being upset by China's and the United States' growing competition (Naseem, 2023). The US has been acknowledged by Indian defense strategists as a crucial strategic ally in New Delhi's maritime rivalry with Beijing and Islamabad. An additional element raising concerns about Indian and American security is the expansion of bilateral Sino-Pak trading links and its transformation into an economic corridor project known as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

One of the biggest coastal states, India has 200 small and major seaports spread across 7500 kilometers of coastline (Ports Wing | Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, n.d.). These enormous oceanic foundations are a reflection of India's long-term goals. Delhi's dominant patterns demonstrate its assertive involvement in the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, the US has fully backed India, as seen by its 2013 renaming of the Pacific region as the "Indo-Pacific" to emphasize India's geo-significance as a key regional power to manage maritime affairs in the Indian Ocean. The Indian strategic community has begun to pay close attention to the growing Chinese trade-centric influence in the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) in reaction to China's efforts to establish a deep sphere of influence in the surrounding waters. In line with the traditional geostrategic tenets of New Delhi, the Indian government has made the decision to increase its interaction with other littoral states of the surrounding oceans in order to preserve its leadership position over others. The strategic community focused on New Delhi has understood the geopolitical, geo-economic, and geostrategic values of IOR by imitating China. Due to New Delhi's strategic thinking and the promotion of this thinking in Indian foreign relations, the pursuit of empowering its notion of blue-water navy is the fundamental reason of establishing competing political order in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

## **Role of Nuclear Weapons**

One of the key components of modern international politics, the epicenter on the competing stances of major nations against one another, is the role of nuclear weapons. The political structures of different regions have been impacted by the rival claims of major powers, and the states have strained relationships with one another. The South Asian region, where the competition between India and Pakistan has drawn the attention of the entire international community due to the threat of nuclear weapons, is a suitable application of this scenario. The security of the entire region has been impacted by the close proximity of both states' borders as well as the long-standing animosity between India and Pakistan. This is because both countries' attempts to control the shifting dynamics of the regional security environment have become ingrained in their hostile actions toward one another. It would be more accurate to argue that, in addition to undermining the prospects for arms control and disarmament agreements and the extent of strategic stability between the rival governments of both neighboring states, the growing rivalry between India and Pakistan has complicated the regional security environment of South Asia. The ongoing intensification of the rivalry between India and Pakistan has begun to direct both countries' strategic planners towards the surrounding oceanic waters while strengthening their naval capabilities.

The ever increasing reliance of States on modern weaponry under the cover of bilateral and multilateral strategic agreements has resulted in ineffective arms control efforts and a lack of agreement on presented and suggested arms control proposals. These agreements underestimate the importance of peace and development in the divisive politics of IO while fundamentally challenging the extent of strategic stability in the IOR. Nevertheless, the complex security structure of regional politics is what is primarily responsible for the weakening of the strategic matrix between nuclear weapon nations and the precarious status of arms control agreements in the IOR. The main competing nuclear countries' security calculations are notified by the element of uncertainty in the expanding security complications of the IOR, and they concentrate more on strengthening their strategic capabilities in the oceanic politics of IO. Thus, the security-driven framework of the IOR fosters a never-ending strategic competition amongst states, undermining

the idea of strategic stability in the area and undermining the influence of the few proposed and signed arms limitation agreements and proposals.

### **Geo-Political Trends**

Competition and conflict are seen as the two persistent elements of the anarchic international system, where collaboration is rare, according to the fundamental assumptions of this dimension of Realism. Hence, states need to act differently for the security and defense of their existence due to Neo-realism's emphasis on the structure of the international system. Under this scenario, it is important to note that state governments have created their own conceptions of security and survival, which are mostly derived from the geopolitical calculations of world power politics. An enormous wave of multi-leveled defense agreements at the bilateral and multilateral levels has been produced as a result of the vicious regional security competition amongst the IOR participating states. The IOR has produced a complicated system in which the states around the IO and the extra-regional great powers have always remained ambitious for attaining the influential positions in the IOR due to its undeniable geo-strategic relevance in world politics.

Growing great power competition has made the first few years of the twenty-first century a very volatile period for global strategic stability and is increasingly providing opportunities for new realignments and alignments. Because of its strategic alliances with powerful nations worldwide, India stands to gain greatly from the battle for global dominance. As a result, these alliances are strengthening India's armed forces and conventional might. The world and South Asian peace and security situations are greatly impacted by these events.

Recent geo-political trends have run the risk of consolidating into diametrically opposed blocs, with China-Pakistan's all-weather cooperation and the strategic partnership between the United States and India on the one hand. Superpowers and their South Asian allies have become more aligned as the anti-competitive factors have decreased. In the past, border management between China and India and counter-terrorism cooperation between the United States and Pakistan have balanced geo-political tendencies. However, the few common interests that once restrained rivalry have been eliminated by the 2021 withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and the ongoing Chinese advances into Indian territory along the Line of Actual Control. Rather, it



seems likely that competition between the US, China, India, and Pakistan will only get stronger (Naseem, 2023). Apart from diverging their traditional efforts at arms control and disarmament, the mainstream defense planners of both countries have persuaded their respective governments to focus their strategic energies in the Indian Ocean Region, thereby expanding the area of strategic stability between India and Pakistan.

The IOR's regional security environment is made more complex by the extreme prevalent ambiguity in the region, which gave the contending governments the opportunity to strengthen their conventional and non-conventional capabilities against possible security threats. Taking into account the globally recognized, IOR values for larger water sources, many research organizations have estimated that IOR contributes to approximately one-fifth of the world's water. Water makes up a large portion of the earth's surface, which makes it a major source of benefits for the trading and economic sectors, both of which heavily rely on the undeveloped natural resources in this area.

The rivalry between the two domains alerts states to the fundamental shifts in great power competition in the IOR, which ultimately jeopardizes the states' aspirations for arms control.

The states' weakened efforts to achieve arms control are mostly related to the IOR's steadily deteriorating regional security climate. The current models of strategic competition between various states have been strengthened by the theoretically sound but practically unsatisfactory notion of weapons control in the IOR.

### **Power Politics in Contemporary Times**

The post-Cold War international system, where the Soviet Union's withdrawal from the international arena compelled several states to reevaluate their conventional assessments of national security, is where multi-state models of strategic engagement with other states first appeared. The interaction between politics and economics in international relations can be best understood by Gilpin (1975: 21-22), where he states that "Politics and economy are correlated with one another. On the one hand, the structure of economic activity is largely determined by politics. However, power and wealth are generally redistributed as a result of the economic process itself. This ultimately results in a change in the political system, which creates a new framework for economic interactions. Therefore, the reciprocal relationship between politics and

economics plays a major role in shaping the dynamics of international relations in the modern world". Even while the economies of the US and China are still very much linked and dependent on one another, US-China relations have emerged more competitive and confrontational in a variety of areas, from trade and intellectual property rights to foreign aid and technical advancement. China and the US are not directly competing with one another for geographical domination, unlike previous great power conflicts like the Cold War and the Great Game (Rolf, 2016: 249-273).

Since Beijing has explored many facets of its bilateral and multilateral relations with various IOR states, current IOR developments center on China's place in the oceanic political system. The current diplomatic, commercial, political, and military exchanges between Beijing and other governments have given the Western power centers reason to view China as a major economic danger to their international prestige. This has resulted in bilateral and multilateral designs of collaboration between Beijing and other states.

### **Geo-Strategic Relevance of the IOR**

The geo-strategic relevance of the IOR in the modern international order has been significantly underscored by a continuing evolution of the competing political ideologies of various states within the IOR. The origins of the IOR have been extremely valuable in the context of the world's expanding power politics, and the evolving conflicting state behaviors within the IOR have given rise to the complex regional security environment that is IO politics in the modern day. The idea of strategic stability in the region is doubted due to the recent history of various shifts, including multiple stages of power struggles between multiple governments, which have led to the degradation of IOR's security and stability systems. The stability and security of the many shipping lanes and commerce routes form the foundation of the geo-strategic significance of the IOR in the modern world order.

The development of these trade routes and shipping lanes has elevated the IOR to the status of a hub for global trade since the region's diverse trading activity has established it as a potential hub

for business in the modern international economy. By tracking the rising trade volume within the IOR between various states and the rising strategic stances of those states within the IOR, one can assess the growing economic strength of the IOR. More than one-third of global oil shipments and cargo trade originate from business activity in the IOR, which links the region to great power politics globally and increases its relevance in the states' dynamic geo-economic calculations.

The IOR's geographic features extend from the eastern coast of Africa to the South Pacific region, touching the western coast of Australia. According to criteria given by different authors in their geographical studies, the states of Asia, Africa, and Australia bordered the International Ocean Rim (IOR) parallel to the surrounding lands of Antarctica or the Southern Ocean. The Arabian Sea, Laccadive Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Andaman Sea are the divisions of the larger Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and the states that border these seas have established opposing Geo-Economic interests.

The states that surround these seas are assertively extending their dominance in the adjacent oceanic waterways, as these seas represent the principal and rational means of trade with the outside world. In this sense, it is more reasonable to argue that the complex oceanic political order of the IOR is created by the competing geo-economic interests of the states sharing borders with it. Targeting vital waterways for trade routes and natural resources for the long-term viability of their economies are the states with the opposing geo-economic interests.

The principal players in the politics of the IOR are the states, most of which are found in the regions of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. The thirty-eight nations, which range in size from continental islands to archipelagos, have unified the states in the three sub-regions of the world indicated above under the IOR political framework. With 2.9 billion people living there, the IOR is the most populous region in the world due to the locations of the 38 nations that share its boundaries (Baruah, Labh & Greely, 2023).

Due to its abundance of natural resources and ability to support a wide range of marine species in addition to being a rich source of seafood, IOR has become increasingly important in the global ecosystem. Additionally, the world's most populous ocean draws extra-regional entities that exacerbate the security rivalry amongst regional states. Nevertheless, the leaders of major

countries have consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to expanding their influence in the IOR for both strategic and economic reasons. Strategically speaking, the IOR's continuing political plans are essential to maintaining world peace and security, as these two aspects are connected to the region's level of stability. Since all of the governments surrounding the IO prioritize having access to vital rivers and abundant natural resources, the issue of strategic stability has become difficult for the regional states. States with significant stakes in the IOR have recognized the region's significance in global power politics, making it a link between the Eastern and Western pillars of the international order. As a result, an endless race between states has brought up a number of challenges, including overfishing, environmental dangers, and territorial disputes, in addition to enabling extra-regional players to meddle in IOR politics.

### **Diverse Scenarios**

There are various scenarios of the current great power dynamics in the international system that highlights the precarious relationship between deterrence and strategic stability. Deterrence and strategic stability are inextricably linked, as acknowledged by the elite circles of the global strategic community. According to the notion of deterrence, governments possessing nuclear weapons are prevented from initiating full-scale warfare against one another. As strategic competition changes over time, it continues to be a major source of conflict between rival powers. The states' competing defense strategies and their steadfast advances against one another typically pose a danger to the strategic stability. The idea of strategic stability in a particular region is called into question by the states' developing strategic capabilities and their expanding strategic links both inside and outside of their home regions (Noor, 2023: 64-94).

Under these conditions, the agreements or plans that have been proposed for the arms control efforts do not represent a great accomplishment because it is widely seen as difficult to create an arms control proposal that is based on mutual consent and protects against shared dangers of nuclear proliferation. This situation is best applied in the politics of the Indian Ocean region, where the major players in the IOR are constantly devoting their multileveled efforts to negotiating various security and defense agreements with other countries. The primary elements undermining the extent of strategic stability in the regional political system of IO are the

strategic supplies provided by the extra-regional powers under the terms of their signed defense agreements with other countries.

Stated differently, there has been an unparalleled expansion of New Delhi's bilateral, regional, and multilateral strategic interactions with other countries over the threats to the IOR's strategic stability values. Thus, the argument concerning the increasing strategic rivalry among nations and its deteriorating consequences for the state of strategic stability in the area is primarily rooted in the anarchic character of the international system.

The worldwide system's anarchic structure gives rise to contradicting claims from statistics in many locations, including the IOR.

### **Contesting Strategic Stability and Nuclear Powers**

Since strengthening strategic capabilities against prospective security threats has become a crucial component of a state's global position, the contending patterns of great power politics have had an impact on the traditional political systems of many regions. The real area of concern in this regard is the integration of the national security doctrines of great powers with the nuclear deterrent effect, since modern great power politics rely on the evolving characteristics of the global strategic culture. The multi-leveled strategic interactions among states with and against one another make up this strategic culture. Alongside the signing of various security and defense agreements, both with and against one another, a complex form of anarchy has developed worldwide, with competing state leaders determined to secure significant advancements in their conventional and non-conventional weaponry. Weapon systems let states feel more confident about their security posture by enabling them to upgrade various aspects of their warfighting capacities. The development of war-fighting capabilities has sparked a new nuclear arms race and persuaded state governments to employ cutting-edge technologies in their conventional defense systems.

The comparative analysis of this kind of strategic rivalry between various states reveals that, rather than focusing on territorial issues, the advancements in this area are witnessing a wider

spectrum of strategic development in the marine affairs of the states. States bordering the ocean are being forced to become involved in the politics of the oceans around them as a result of their growing interests in the maritime domain, which has strengthened the modern oceanic orders of various regions. The deterrent effect of nuclear weapons in naval disputes between competing states has been called into question by the expansion of the world's already-existing maritime arrangements through various strategic agreements and the modernization of their armaments systems under more expansive strategic partnerships.

Thus, it is easily argued that the current wave of great power politics has opened a new chapter in world history by directing it toward the oceanic seas of various regions, while IOR may be viewed as an exception to a certain extent. The crucial aspect in this context is the states of the IOR regions' continued increase in strategic agreement, notwithstanding their inability to agree on the main problems pertaining to arms control. These weapons control challenges are more oriented toward great power strategic competitions than they are toward state cooperation on a multilateral basis. The nuclear powers have played a crucial role in determining the region's security outlook, wherein the major countries have established conflicting strategic stances against one another.

However, under this scenario, what matters most is that the IOR areas' governments have continued to strengthen their level of strategic agreement despite their inability to reach a consensus on the primary issues surrounding arms control. These weapons control problems are less focused on state collaboration on a multilateral basis and more on great power strategic rivalry. The nuclear powers have been instrumental in shaping the security landscape of the region, with the key participating nations taking opposing strategic positions against one other.

### **The Impact of Arms Control Politics on Strategic stability in the IOR**

In contemporary international civilization, security is derived from a balance of power among sovereign states rather than from the concentration of military might in the hands of an authority greater than those states. The complex and dynamic geo-political environment reflects the many problems that the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) faces in maintaining strategic stability and weapons control. A combination of historical rivalries, new strategic rivalries, non-state

threats, and structural problems with regional security institutions give rise to these concerns. Here are the key factors that influence the strategic stability in IOR.

### 1. Rivalries between Great Powers

**a. US-China Competition:** The IOR is greatly impacted by the strategic rivalry between the US and China. China wants to increase its influence through projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the establishment of military outposts (like Djibouti), whereas the US wants to preserve its influence and guarantee freedom of navigation. An insecure security environment is created and an arms race is fueled by this rivalry.

### 2. Tensions and Rivalries in the Region

**a. Tensions between India and Pakistan:** As two nuclear-armed nations, India and Pakistan have long-standing rivalries that make regional stability difficult. The two countries are competing in the maritime sphere as they both increase their naval power.

**b. India-China Maritime Competition:** This rivalry between the two countries is becoming more and more complex in the maritime domain. India has increased its naval presence in response to China's "String of Pearls" plan, which involves the construction of a network of ports and bases and is seen by India as a strategic encirclement.

### 3. Strategic Doctrines and Asymmetric Capabilities

**a. Various Military Proficiencies:** The military prowess and strategic priorities of the IOR states differ. While many smaller IOR states concentrate on coastal defense, India aspires to have a blue-water navy that can project strength. Attempts to regulate weapons are complicated by this discrepancy.

**b. Various Strategic Doctrines:** The approaches used by various nations toward weapons control are influenced by their differing strategic doctrines.

## **Threats to Strategic Stability and Arms Control**

### **1. Absence of an All-encompassing Regional Framework**

The IOR does not have a comprehensive regional security architecture, in contrast to other regions (like Europe's OSCE) that have created arms control regimes. This increases the difficulty of coordinating weapons control initiatives.

### **2. Imbalanced Knowledge and Beliefs:**

Arms control initiatives are complicated by the different military prowess and strategic ideologies of IOR states.

### **3. Threats to Maritime Security from Non-State Actors:**

Trafficking, terrorism, and piracy present serious security risks. Beyond conventional arms control measures, coordinated security mechanisms are needed to address issues.

## **Recommendations**

**a.** Increasing the influence and capability of regional organizations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IONS) will help advance successful arms control and collective security.

Encouraging Openness and Communication

**b.** Maintaining open lines of communication and implementing transparency initiatives, such as disclosing details about military drills and naval deployments.

**c.** Broadening the focus of security discussions to cover not just conventional arms control but also non-traditional security concerns (such as environmental security and humanitarian aid)

**d.** Making the Most of Technology to Promote Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)



e. Investing in MDA programs to improve maritime activity observation, surveillance and monitoring can assist in addressing security risks and promote collaboration among IOR governments.

## **Conclusion**

The rivalry between the great nations is not a passing change in their relationship. This is a paradigm change in systems that will continue for some time. The great power conflict of today is multipolar, as opposed to bipolar as it was during the Cold War, and this is what is causing new global realignments and alliances. Furthermore, there is a significant deal of instability in regional relationships as a result of great power struggle. As a result, rivalry between the US and Russia, China and the US, China and India, India and Pakistan, and North Korea and the US is igniting arms races of differing intensities in the various regions, leading to a "hub and spoke deterrence cascade" on a global scale.

Because of their own geopolitical conflicts with the backing of extra-regional powers, regional nations' attempts to establish greater cooperation at the regional level have already produced feeble proposals. As a result, the regional governments now face challenging tasks in maintaining sustainable development, regional cooperation, strategic stability, and peaceful interstate relations. The strategic competition between the states and the ubiquity of the security quandary situation in the IOR have mostly hampered efforts to establish regional stability from a strategic standpoint. States in the region have been compelled by this security conundrum to increase their strategic capabilities against one another without coming to an agreement on the fundamental problems of disarmament and arms control.

The lack of significant advancements in the areas of arms control and disarmament indicates that the IOR has evolved into a focal point of modern power politics, which is easily explained by the international system's anarchic structure and its historically unprecedented expansion.

The politics of arms control in the participating states are closely related to the strategic stability of the Indian Ocean region. A multidimensional strategy involving strict arms control regulations, steps to boost confidence, and extensive regional collaboration is needed to achieve stability. It is possible for IOR governments to work toward a more stable and secure marine

environment by tackling both conventional and non-traditional security concerns. The strategic rivalry between the United States and China does not only exacerbate or limit the India-Pakistan rivalry but as a result of China and US competition, weaponry has been amassed more quickly, putting India and Pakistan's capabilities against one another. This increases the threat posed to the region's security quandary by the existing defensive alliance between China, Pakistan, and the United States and India. As an alternative, both superpowers ought to embrace an Indo-Pacific defense cooperation strategy in order to avert future military confrontations between China and India or Pakistan and India.

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