The Indian Ocean is the third largest water body on earth. It acts as a connecting bridge from the Middle East, Africa and East Asia to Europe and the Western hemisphere. The Indian Ocean is not only used for transporting petroleum and petroleum products from the oil fields of the Persian Gulf and Indonesia through the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs), but itself a major source of oil.¹

The Indian Ocean alone comprises approximately about 20 percent of the earth’s water surface area. On the north it is bordered by Asia including the Indian subcontinent, after which it is named, on the west by Africa, south by Antarctica and east by Indo-China. The Indian Ocean includes the Andaman Sea, Arabian

¹ Indian Ocean Region

Sea, Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Mozambique Channel, Laccadive Sea, Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Great Australian Bight, and Strait of Malacca.²

The Indian Ocean and the states on its littorals are significant and have growing importance because it contains one third of the world’s population, twenty five percent of its landmass, 40 percent of the world’s oil and gas reserves.³ About 80 per cent of the world’s sea borne oil trade passes through the choke points of this ocean.⁴

The Indian Ocean is the centre of attraction because it is all time navigable and strategically positioned as an ‘expressway’ of sea lanes. Due to its position, the IOR suffers from high levels of international as well as internal (regional) conflicts and is the centre of gravity for international terrorism⁵. Maritime issues in Asia simply refer to the issues in the Indian Ocean littoral and the hinterland states that comprise the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The IOR comprises of 33 countries along with the two extra regional states that are maintaining their territory within the region. They are Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, Thailand, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Dijbouti, Mozambique, Madagascar, Comoros, South Africa, Seychelles and
Mauritius. The two extra regional countries with territories are France and the UK.⁶

Due to its diversified nature, the IOR is viewed from different angles by states and there are so many issues that arise, sometime with contradictory parameters. According to the needs and wants of states and the issues raised, it is perceived that there is no successful identification of common security interest among the states in the IOR which is necessary to establish sustainable security architecture. Piracy is the only threat that is in workable process among the states that can be mutually resolved⁷.

It is important to note that access to the Indian Ocean can only be through the critical chokepoints - Strait of Malacca, the Cape of Good Hope, Bab el Mandeb, the Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, the Sunda Strait and the Lombak Strait.⁸

From a historical perspective, after the British largely withdrew from the IOR after Second World War and after the Independence of India and Pakistan (i.e. after the colonial era) there is no trace that this ocean is unilaterally dominated by any nation⁹.

**Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean:**

By tracing the history of the Indian Ocean it is evident that the ocean has allowed its space for maritime activities primarily for trade purposes. Many centuries ago, the Indian Ocean was used for transportation of silk, spices and other resources. These historical facts are studied in schools even today. The British entered India
for trade and due to its rich and varied resources slowly they dominated and the India was under British rule and only in 1947 did India get its independence. The Persian Gulf contains 65 per cent of the world’s proven reserves and accounts for more than half of the world’s oil exports and almost all of Asia-Pacific’s imports. The worldwide demand for oil import is from gulf through the Indian Ocean to the other states for their economic growth is expected to grow because of the needs and wants of the people keep increasing therefore it is in this regard the geostrategic position of Indian Ocean become more significant. Despite efforts by nations to diversify sources, disruption of oil supplies is bound to impact severely on national economies leading to inflation and widespread unemployment.

The world trade is the most important reason for the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean because it links the world with the oil-rich Arabian Gulf area. It is estimated that over 90 percent of international trade is carried by Sea and nearly half of the trade takes place in the Indian Ocean. In economical terms nearly 7 trillion US dollars in international trade crosses the Indian Ocean every year and nearly 70 percent of global oil and gas exports are taken place in Indian Ocean. At current levels of consumption, the oil import dependence of India is expected to reach 91.6 percent by 2020. In the case of China it will be 76.9 percent, while for rest of South Asia it will be 96.1 percent.

The presence of major powers in the IOR and also the presence of regional nuclear powers - particularly India and Pakistan inevitably put the Indian Ocean in
a strategic position. It is commonly believed that there are three categories of players in the Indian Ocean: Big, Regional and Passive. The big players include countries that have stake in the entire Indian Ocean. There are only three big players in this category here - USA, China and India. The regional players are the nations that seek to influence a part of the ocean that is relevant to their strategic interest. These include Japan, Saudi Arabia, Australia, France, the UK, Indonesia, Israel, Iran, Malaysia, South Africa, Korea, Russia, Singapore and Pakistan. The last category of countries is the Passive Actors who are in a difficult position to exert any influence. They include Kenya, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Somalia, Madagascar, Maldives, Djibouti, Oman, Seychelles, Myanmar and Yemen. In order to deter hegemony of any power, whether territorial or extra territorial, the regional powers are placing great reliance on the deployment of a strong fleet for their second strike capability.

Today the world is entering into the Geo-energy era in which energy security - that is security of demand and security of supply - will condition both inter-state relations and may lead to reconfiguration of world power hierarchy. It is pertinent that in the near future Energy Security will play a decisive role in creating conflict and cooperation-like situations.

Currently, the powerful US naval force is dominating the Indian Ocean region. China is trying to balance US’ power in this region in order to protect its interest with relation to its economic prosperity and particularly energy needs. For littoral
countries like Pakistan, the third largest ocean is more significant. Pakistan’s only coastline is on the Indian Ocean\textsuperscript{16}. Therefore, the Indian Ocean becomes as a vital access point for Pakistan’s trade and especially for Energy Supply. The major interest for China would be to enhance its presence in the Indian Ocean which would also mean preventing India from dominating the IOR. Pakistan stands to benefit from the ‘String of Pearls’ and therefore it joined hands with China which again forces India to tighten security.\textsuperscript{17}

The Indian Ocean has become a hub of energy resources. As a regional player India seeks to augment its influence in the IOR. It is estimated that in near future India is to be the world’s fourth largest energy consumer after the United States, China, and Japan\textsuperscript{18}. In this regard, India should focus much more on Strait of Hormuz because it is close to the Pakistan’s Makran coast, where the Chinese are helping Pakistan in establishing facilities. To protect its vital interest as well as to establish itself as a supreme power in the IOR, India is enlarging its naval force which is currently 155 warships-strong. The Indian navy by 2015 is expected to add three nuclear powered submarines and three aircraft carriers to its arsenal thus giving the Indian navy blue water capability. The critical objective of India is to attain strategic autonomy in the IOR\textsuperscript{19}. It is for this reason that India keeps opposing the presence of extra regional powers in Indian Ocean. Due to this extra regional presence India is under pressure and keeps spending on security issues rather than economic issues, with the hope of making it a dominant player in this region.
The SLOCs play a very critical role in the global economy as a whole and it also identifies that the nations of the Middle East, Africa and Asia and also rising powers like India and China, which should act cooperatively to attain their national objective in the IOR. Oil import is a security issue and is especially important for Japan, nearly 80 percent of oil imports come from the Middle East. For China it is 30 percent, for Europe it is 21 percent, and the United States it is 16 percent. It should be highlighted that in 2006 more than 80 percent of the world’s seaborne trade in oil passed through only three Indian Ocean Choke points – that is from Strait of Hormuz it is 40 percent, from Strait of Malacca it is 35 percent and from Bab el-Mandab it is 8 percent.\textsuperscript{20}

The threats may be natural or manmade. Besides global commerce, the Indian Ocean is also witness to the world’s most enduring international rivalries. A tension between India and Pakistan is the most common one; besides this the Indian Ocean is attracting other extra regional players which will ultimately lead to the emergence of new rivalries. Regionally, the dominant player in the Indian Ocean is India, but the US and China with their powerful navies are also look to increase influence in the IOR in order to secure access to waterways and raw materials.\textsuperscript{21} The growing number of large powers competing in the Indian Ocean for resource, influence and access add to tension besides the threats from Non-State actors and natural calamities which might increase the potential for misunderstanding and conflict.
The number of nations interested in the Indian Ocean are concerned about the safe passage of energy supply chain in this region because of the intensity of threats, including piracy, gunrunning, maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, human smuggling, pollution, accidents both natural and manmade and interstate conflicts are increasing. In order to play a safe and sustainable role, the players in the Indian Ocean kept their bird’s eye view on critical sea lanes and communications and choke points in it.

According to military analysts, the SLOCs are related to the maritime instruments of power, and maritime geography becomes the pivot on which force must be deployed. For a politician, SLOCs signify the state of relations with countries located along the routes; on the other hand for an economist it is just the shortest
and most economical travel distance between two destinations. Likewise, for some nations multilateral cooperation on SLOCs may mean a perceived intrusion into aspects of sovereignty. SLOCs hold tremendous strategic importance and geopolitical value to their users. In times of conflicts, it is not unusual to find SLOCs being blocked by naval powers seeking to deny their enemies of critical seaborne supplies to cripple the latter.  

In the near future the volume of world trade will keep increasing therefore shipping traffic will also increase. As it is already pointed out that it is not only used for transport purposes it also facilitates a host of other activities such as offshore oil and gas exploration and production, fishery and civilian ships for tourism. In addition to the merchant shipping in the near future SLOCs are expected to host more number of naval vessels that are acting in this region due to its strategic significance.

It is important to look back at the frequent attacks on oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz during the Iran–Iraq war in the 80s and also the Gulf war in 90s – they pose serious threats to the world oil economy. Other SLOCs and neighbouring waters have also been subject to tension that could pose a threat to shipping traffic affects the strategic interest of their littoral states.

The Indian Ocean has many choke points, such as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Lombok and the Sunda Straits. Any disruption in this flow will have its great impact on the states that are playing in that region. The disruption of energy flows in particular is a considerable security concern for littoral states, as a
majority of their energy lifelines are sea-based. Energy is critical in influencing the geo-political strategies of a nation; any turbulence in its supply has serious security consequences.

It is inevitable that the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and choke points of the IOR have become strategically important for these countries and they are also extremely sensitive to their security environment.

**Figure 5: Geographic Choke Points**

![Geographic Choke Points](http://www.americansecurityproject.org/climate-energy-and-security/energy/todays-supply/geographic-choke-points/)

The SLOCs in the Indian Ocean gained its importance when the period of globalisation sparked world economic progress, which has resulted in increased consumption and competitive trade creating an upsurge in global oil demand in both developed nations as well as developing economies. Due to its prominence Indian Ocean sea lanes, particularly the choke points, inevitably led to a competitive situation for dominance in the region.
**Major Choke Points of the Indian Ocean:**

The choke points serve as a connecting bridge and through this it provides a way to critical trade route for global oil and transportation, and if there is any disruption to the shipments that pass through these critical points would have its consequences by affecting oil price and it also add thousands of miles of transit in an alternate direction. Also it will take more time, more money must be spent to take another route, the increasing fuel cost, and as well as adding unknown threats that need to be faced in the new routes.

**Figure 6 - Choke points in the Indian Ocean**


**Source:** http://forums.bharat-rakshak.com/viewtopic.php?p=1564409

Figure 7 shows the world choke points for oil movement. Of these choke points, three are crucial to India’s trade in oil energy and were discussed elaborately with the statistical data to authenticate the importance of Indian Ocean in improving the economy.
Figure 7 - World choke point for oil movement:


Strait of Hormuz:

The Strait of Hormuz is located between Oman and Iran. It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil chokepoint due to its daily oil flow of about 17 million barrels/day in 2011, up from somewhere between 15.7-15.9 million barrels/day in 2009-10. Flows through the Strait in 2011 were roughly 35 percent of all seaborne traded oil, or almost 20 percent of oil traded worldwide. More than 85 percent of these crude oil exports went to Asian markets, with Japan, India, South Korea, and China representing the largest destinations. In addition, Qatar exports about 2 trillion cubic feet per year of liquefied natural gas (LNG) through the Strait of Hormuz, accounting for almost 20 percent of global LNG trade. Furthermore, Kuwait imports LNG volumes that travel northward through the Strait of Hormuz. These flows totalled about 100 billion cubic feet per year in 2010.
Among the major oil exporters that ship oil through the Persian Gulf, only Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) presently have pipelines to bypass Hormuz, and only the latter two countries currently have unutilized pipeline capacity on these pipelines. At the start of 2012, the total unused pipeline capacity from Saudi Arabia and the UAE combined was approximately 1 million bbl/d. The amount available could potentially increase to 4.3 million bbl/d by the end of this year, as both countries have recently completed steps to increase their capacity to bypass the Strait.

At its narrowest point, the Strait is 21 miles wide, but the width of the shipping lane in either direction is only two miles, separated by a two mile separation zone. The Strait is deep and wide enough to handle the world's largest crude oil tankers, with about two-thirds of oil shipments carried by tankers in excess of 150,000 deadweight tons.

**Strait of Malacca:**

The Strait of Malacca links the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is the shortest sea route between the Middle East and growing Asian markets. The strait, located between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Malacca is the shortest sea route between Persian Gulf suppliers and the Asian markets, notably China, Japan, South Korea, and the Pacific Rim countries. Oil shipments through the Strait of Malacca supply
China and Indonesia, two of the world's fastest growing economies. It is the key chokepoint in South East Asia with an estimated 15 million barrels/day flow in 2011, compared to 13.8 million barrels/day in 2007. Crude oil makes up about 90 percent of flows, with the remainder being other petroleum products.

At its narrowest point in the Phillips Channel of the Singapore Strait, Malacca is only 1.7 miles wide creating a natural bottleneck, as well as a potential zone for collisions, grounding, or oil spills. According to the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre, piracy, including attempted theft and hijackings, is a constant threat to tankers in the Strait of Malacca, although the number of attacks has dropped due to the increased coordination and patrols by the littoral states' authorities since July 2005.

It is estimated that over 60,000 vessels transit the Strait of Malacca per year. If the strait were blocked, nearly half of the world's fleet would be required to reroute around the Indonesian archipelago through Lombok Strait, located between the islands of Bali and Lombok, or the Sunda Strait, located between Java and Sumatra

**Bab el-Mandeb:**

The Bab el-Mandeb is a chokepoint between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, and a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. It is located between Yemen, Djibouti, and Eritrea, and connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. Most exports from the Persian Gulf that transit
the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline also pass through the Bab el-Mandeb. Closure of the Bab el-Mandeb could keep tankers from the Persian Gulf from reaching the Suez Canal and the SUMED pipeline, diverting them around the southern tip of Africa.

An estimated 3.3 million barrels/day flowed through this waterway in 2011 toward Europe, the United States, and Asia, a drop from 4.5 million barrels/day in 2008, but an increase from 2.9 million barrels/day in 2009. Oil shipped through the strait decreased by almost one-third in 2009 as a result of the global economic downturn and the decline in northbound oil shipments to Europe. Northbound traffic through the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline also reflects the adverse effects of the global economic crisis in 2009 and 2010, when total oil flows through the complex declined significantly, as noted in the previous section. Northbound oil shipments increased through Bab el-Mandeb in 2011 and over half of the traffic, about 2.0 million barrels/day, moved northbound enroute to the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline.

The Bab el-Mandeb is 18 miles wide at its narrowest point, making tanker traffic difficult and limited to two 2-mile-wide channels for inbound and outbound shipments. Closure of the strait could keep tankers from the Persian Gulf from reaching the Suez Canal or SUMED pipeline, diverting them around the southern tip of Africa, adding to transit time and costs. In addition, closure of Bab el-Mandeb would mean that oil entering the Red Sea from Sudan and other countries could no longer take the most direct route to Asian markets. This oil would
instead have to go north into the Mediterranean Sea through other potential choke points, such as the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline.

**Six Degree Channel:**

The Six Degree Channel or the Great channel is the primary passage through the Andaman and Nicobar islands to the Strait of Malacca. It stretches from Indira Point on Great Nicobar to Banda Aceh on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. It is considered as an easy passage without any deep limitations. There are numerous alternative passages which will add distance to the voyage. The Ten degree Channel between the Nicobar Islands and the Andaman Islands is the primary alternative route.

These strategic locations offer India the opportunity to monitor and to some extent to control traffic approaching the western entrance of the Strait of Malacca.

**Threats in the Indian Ocean:**

The IOR is vulnerable to common threats such as dominant power vacuum, piracy, maritime terrorism, drug trafficking and gunrunning, maritime pollution, environmental issues, instability of littorals and influence by extra regional powers.
Dominant Power Vacuum in IOR:

Due to variety of reasons today global distribution of power in the IOR will remain in a state of unrest as there is a power vacuum. This vacuum will generate competition between regional and extra regional powers in the IOR. The main reason is due to the lack of dominant regional power that can assert control over Southern Asia. India is in the process of building capabilities whereas the US and China will try to prevent the rise of a hegemonic state in Asia. Thus, to keep vigil on China, US will continue to shape the trajectory of the region. While the rise of a global competitor in the sub-continent is still uncertain, non state actors will play a predominant role in making the region unstable, and the armed forces of the region would have to deal with military and non-military crises. Such crises would affect the economic development of the state. Technology will spread rapidly along with the proliferation of weapon systems²⁸.

Piracy

Piracy is the biggest menace to modern day shipping and exploits the convergence of merchant traffic at choke points. Numerous cases of reported and unreported piracy have led to considerable concern and multinational efforts to control this violent menace. Due to these kinds of activities there are indirect and direct costs being incurred the world over due to piracy. These include the cost of ransoms, piracy insurance premiums, and deterrent equipment, re-routing vessels away from piracy risk zones, naval deployments in piracy prone zones, piracy prosecutions, and organisation budgets dedicated to reducing piracy.
Countries like India, China and Japan also undertake counter piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden. As per the 2010 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on Maritime Security, one U.S. navy vessel costs around US $82,794 to operate per steaming day. Multiplying this by the total 43 vessels deployed for 365 days, the approximate cost of these military vessels is estimated to be around US $1.3 billion per year.

This huge amount spent towards anti-piracy shows clearly that this kind of activity in the high seas will have serious impact on the economy which ultimately becomes a threat to nations’ security.

**Maritime Terrorism**

Maritime terrorism refers to terrorist attacks that take place in the sea and capturing of vessels, attacking and capturing of harbours or ports, closing the straits under their control. The presence of violent terrorists groups like al Shabab in East Africa, al Qaeda in the Middle East and Central Asia, Lashkar-e-Toiba in South Asia, or Jemaah Islamiyya in Southeast Asia pose a direct threat to nations throughout the IOR and beyond.

The terrorist attack in Mumbai during 2008 has exposed the daunting weakness of India’s maritime–littoral operational matrix.

**Drug Trafficking and Gunrunning:**

The geostrategic location of Indian Ocean becomes a home to the narcotic trade from both the Golden Triangle that includes Myanmar and the Golden Crescent
encompassing Afghanistan. Therefore due to its proximity, the Indian Ocean has emerged as an important transit route for the dispatch of large number of narcotics. This trade is considered as the one of most important factors for the rise of narco-terrorism in the IOR. There is a possibility that some of the uninhabited Indian Ocean Islands may become safe heavens for the drug traffickers. This transportation of drug may find their way into Indian markets adding concern.

Gunrunning is the supply of arms to militant groups who work against the government and this act creates a major problem in South Asian region. The money laundering is another problem related to gun running. The drug sale and gunrunning are converted into gold and smuggled to various countries, which affects the economic situation of the affected countries\(^\text{32}\).

**Maritime Pollution:**

Marine pollution becomes a serious threat to Indian Ocean biodiversity and marine resources. Marine pollution can occur due to a variety of reasons. Based on the source of the pollutant they are divided into land-based marine pollution, Pollution created by ship transportation\(^\text{33}\).

Among the above classifications the land-based pollution creates the biggest damage. Industrial and agricultural waste, plastic particles, chemicals, and municipal sewage enter into the marine ecosystem through rain water drains, rivers. These kinds of activity have a devastating effect on the health of coral reefs, mangroves, birds and also the fish stocks and in turn aqua life, food webs in
general. The sea based pollution includes oil discharge, ballast water and bilge water discharges during routine ship operations and illegal dumping of solid wastes into designated dumping grounds at sea and accidental spills from ships carrying hazardous substance like oil, gas and nuclear materials etc.

**Environmental Issues:**

One of the serious threats that the earth is facing is due to environmental degradation. The Indian Ocean coastal region is a key area of vulnerability in the case of global warming. The IOR and its littoral states are blooming industrially. Today and in the near future, climate change is the most vulnerable key area which requires added focus. All the coastal areas in the Asia and Africa are facing increasing range of stress and shocks due to climate change. The inter government panel on climate change has concluded that the warming of the globe climate system is really taking place. It is also important to note that the Indian Ocean, especially around the equator, would face higher temperature rises than average increase in other areas of the world. This factor brings unpredictable climatic conditions like more frequent storms, heavier rains, and longer spells of droughts, which affects the people living in and around the Indian Ocean.

Along with this countries may also face extreme weather and rise in sea water level which affects the people living in the low lying areas. These conditions will also affect fish stocks. Countries that have more advanced and better equipped fishing industry will try to exploit the high seas more effectively and encroach into the exclusive economic zones of countries with comparatively weak fishing
industry. Resource exploitation would thus result in conflicts between individual countries.

**Instability of Littorals**

The instability of littorals can be traced through the Nation-State conflicts, political and economic instability.

a) **Nation-State Conflict and boundary disputes:**

The IOR has witnessed a number of wars between the littoral countries that includes India-Pakistan, India-China, Iran-Iraq, and Ethiopia-Eritrea\(^\text{35}\) for example there are so many conflicts in the Middle East which includes Jordan – Palestinian civil war (1970-71), Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974), Lebanese civil war (1975-90), Islamic uprising in Syria (1976-82), Iranian revolution (1979), Saudi Eastern Province unrest (1979-83), most importantly the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), South Yemen civil war (1986), Damascus bombings (1986), Gulf War (1990-91), Terrorism in Egypt (1992-2000), civil war in Yemen (1994), Operation desert fox (1998), Iraq war (2003-11), Egyptian revolution (2011), Syrian civil war (2011), Yemeni revolution (2011), Bahraini uprising (2011), Iraq insurgency post U.S. withdrawal (2011), Islamist unrest in Egypt (2013)\(^\text{36}\) etc., these conflicts clearly shows that these states are more vulnerable and need a tight security. Theses war like situations and political unrest leads to economic instability. Unresolved territorial disputes have their repercussion on IOR.
a) Political and economic instability:

It is basically perceived that the large number of ungoverned and under governed areas among the Indian Ocean littorals pave way for extremist and criminal activities in the form of piracy and other terrorist activities. Therefore, in order to safeguard the IOR, states spend more money to address these issues which has its adverse effect on state’s economy. It is also perceived that the large number developing countries in IOR have fragile economies\textsuperscript{37}.

Security of Offshore Properties and Personnel:

The offshore facilities can include all those related to exploration, drilling, observation, experimentation and mining including artificial islands, underwater pipelines and cables and other structure that are in the maritime zones. The above listed properties and their security from unwarranted activities and disaster situations is vital to maritime security. For example, India’s offshore oil fields like Bombay High are vulnerable to terror attacks\textsuperscript{38}.

The Role of Extra –Regional Powers in the IOR:

The world energy trade is dependent more on sea transport. With the emerging international oil supply shortage, the issue of energy shipping is paid real-time attention from international communities for their economic development. Sufficient and sustainable energy supply is necessary for a state to attain its economic growth as well as economic security. It is in this regard that the security
of energy supply plays a vital role and which ultimately reflects on the stable ocean shipping which becomes an important part in the oil supply.

The IOR is potentially more unstable due to its strategically significant position in the globe. All the extra regional powers are concerned about their energy security which is largely dependent on the Persian Gulf which supplies through the Indian Ocean Choke points. The other non-traditional issues that the IOR is facing are piracy and maritime terrorism. Additionally these powers are competing to increase the influence in this region.

India has a geographically advantageous position in the IOR and therefore India has to perform a balancing act to protect her interest in the region while checking the presence of extra regional powers.

The 1973 Arab-Israel war and the subsequent oil embargo resulted in strong efforts being made to ensure oil traffic and price security. The US Navy maintains a permanent presence of between 15 to 35 warships in the Indian Ocean at any given time. US’ role and policy in the IOR depends on fulfilling the following self-interests:- Energy Security, Economic Security, Restrict China’s influence in IOR, Support/Basing facilities for War against Terror, Strategic Partnership with India.\(^{39}\)

In Diego Garcia, USA has established its naval base in the Indian Ocean\(^ {40}\) which poses a threat to the regional states as well as stands to protect the US vital
interests in the region. Political relations in and around the Indian Ocean can have significant implications for the US as far as its regional security strategy is concerned.

Washington was developing a long term strategy in Indian Ocean which was linked to its technological innovations in the sophisticated weapons, both conventional and nuclear. By 1970 United States has converted Diego Garcia into a well-equipped and modernised military arsenal depot with ample facilities for fuel storage, landing of aircraft and anchoring of naval ships and submarines. In 1996, the United States has concluded a fifty years agreement with United Kingdom for joint construction of military communication facility in Diego Garcia. The runway’s length was increased to 12,000 feet to facilitate landing of larger aircraft including B-52 strategic bombers and tanker aircrafts, etc. The storage capacity for aviation fuel was increased to 3,80,000 barrels and the total storage capacity could eventual provide enough fuel to supply the needs of a typical carrier task force for about a month. Due to its strategic interest US has showered attention to India to maintain peaceful relationship. One of the biggest challenges USA is facing in the world politics is in the Indian Ocean is due to emerging economic giants in the IOR such as China. Besides, the presence of US Sixth Fleet in the Pacific Ocean and Seventh Fleet in the Pacific Ocean and Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf provides United States a predominant position in the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{41}
Over the years, China has been widening her influence in the region. Today, China imports 32 percent of its oil needs, 58 % of which comes from Middle East. This figure is expected to double by near future with almost 70% oil requirement being met from Middle East. Chinese state owned oil corporations are acquiring oil assets in Australia, Indonesia, Central Asia and Africa. The relationship between China and Myanmar (Communication facilities at Coco Islands, Sittwe Naval base), Bangladesh (Modernisation of Chittagong harbour), Sri Lanka (Construction of Hambantota harbour), Maldives (Submarine base) and Pakistan (Deep Sea port at Gwadar) have strategic intentions to encircle India through a ‘String of Pearls’ . The establishment of a Chinese free trade area with ASEAN countries is another attempt at strengthening its foothold in the Indian Ocean.

Chinese interests in the IOR keep growing and it wants to dominate IOR to compete against India economically, because it is the only country that can pose threat in the near future. It also seeks to influence to maintain a second strike capability. At the same time China also would like to counter US threat and also monitor US presence in the IOR. Apart from this, the foremost aim is to secure its oil supply from the Persian Gulf. To safeguard these supply lines China acts as powerful player in IOR though it is not a regional player.

Thus it is very clear that the extra regional players look to dominate the IOR in order to mainly ensure the safety and security of their energy supply through the SLOCs. There is fierce competition among littoral states and extra regional actors
in Indian Ocean which pose obstacles for India in achieving its National security in general and Energy Security in particular.

**India’s Interest in the IOR:**

On analysing the geopolitics of the region and the economic dependence of the world on the region the following factors clearly indicates that the region holds strategic reserves. This region is becoming the centre of attraction due to its fastest growing economies, strategic SLOCs pass through most volatile choke points in this region. The economic growth of India is highly dependent on the flow of oil from the Gulf though India is trying to find alternative sources of supply. It is conceived that India is the sole regional power in the IOR due to its geographic position unless it surrenders the advantage to other extra regional powers which might be possible in the near future.

**Development of Missiles and India’s Security:**

India is situated in an environment which is confronted with a multitude of missile threats from all around and these threats are growing enormously. These threats extend from China in the north, to the missile-equipped foreign naval fleets in the Indian Ocean and Israel and Saudi Arabia also have missiles, besides this two of India’s neighbours Pakistan and Iran took the world by surprise by testing Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). These missiles can reach every nook and corner of India. During the 1991 Gulf War Iraq displayed its missile power which alarmed the international community to think about the dangers from the proliferation of ballistic missiles in developing countries, which is a
serious threat. The growing proliferation and use of missiles in various parts of the world entails dangerous implications for India’s security. Due to this compulsion India started its Missile development Program, not to threaten, but to show its second strike capability. It is imperative to note that India is not a signatory member of Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Though India started on a program to diversify the source it is mentioned already that the India is depended highly on Persian Gulf oil. India’s future depends on foreign trade therefore India’s interests in this region are largely economic in nature, with energy access and growing regional economic engagement prompting concerns about the safety of shipping transiting the entire Indian Ocean littoral. In recent years, official statements have underscored increasingly the importance India is paying to energy security, which is vital for an assured high rate of economic growth which in turn would contribute to strengthen India’s National Security. India’s oil demand is expected to grow by over five percent annually from 2.4 million barrels a day (mbd) in 2003 to 6 mbd in 2025 which would make it the world’s third largest energy consumer, after the United States and China. At present, India imports more than half of its natural gas and 70 percent of its oil, the majority of which comes from the Persian Gulf. With roughly 90 percent of its external trade by volume and 77 percent by value travelling by sea, it is not surprising that the security of shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean are a major concern for India.
It is perceived that to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty in India, the trade related economic growth should be given utmost importance and should be the ultimate goal of India’s national Security. Due to its cost effectiveness compared to land transportation or lack of utilizing the other alternatives land routes as well as air routes, the only viable route is through the seas.

India is and will remain a maritime nation. Its 7,516 km long coastlines, 27 islands of the Lakshadweep chain, and 572 islands of the Andaman and Nicobar Chain, close to 200 major and minor ports and a Indian merchant shipping fleet registered over 1,071 ships, makes India’s maritime security imperative. Due to its sheer size and strategic location, some of these imperatives do not merely impinge upon India’s maritime security. The other factors like regional security environment is also composed of, and affected by, these imperatives.

India’s naval and maritime interest primarily comprises of the defence of country’s territorial integrity, safety of off-shore oil installations and natural resources of EEZ. India has off-shore oil installations to protect. It has made huge investments in the off-shore oil field which includes the off-shore oil platforms, pipelines and other structures with an investment worth millions and billions. These installations need to be in high degree of surveillance not only in the war time but also during peace times.

Another area of prime maritime interest to India is its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which measures around 18 million sq. Kms, running approximately 200
nautical miles contiguous to the coast line and around the islands. India’s EEZ area constitutes more than half of the mainland area. The International Sea Bed Authority has allocated 15 million Sq Km seabed area to India for exploration of sea-bed resources.\(^{52}\)

Extraction and marketing of these resources requires huge investments and vast infrastructural base for which India has ambitious plans. The exploration of seabed resources, including hydrocarbon, manganese, and modules, etc. have added significance in the view of the fast depleting land resources. To safeguard these valuable resources as well to protect India’s national interest the Indian Navy should play a competent role to ensure a free and uninterrupted access to EEZ.

**India and Naval cooperation**

In support of the foreign policy objectives of a country of India’s size and its international standing, the Indian naval force plays a specific role on account of their flexibility, visibility and mobility as well as the unique nature of the medium upon which they transverse. The size and composition of deployment of force may vary to achieve its mission, but they could be withdrawn from foreign waters to suit the requirements of diplomacy.

“Naval Diplomacy”, a term well established in the theory and practice of international relations could range from acts involving the application of force often termed as “gunboat diplomacy” to those that improve relations between
states. Unlike the presence of army or air force it is unable to describe the presence of an armoured division on foreign territory as a friendly visit\textsuperscript{53}.

The Indian Navy is the most active naval force in South Asia in establishing and enhancing cooperation with other navies. This is seen primarily in terms of an exchange of visits and hosting of conferences conducting and hosting ship visits disaster relief operations the conduct of joint bilateral and multilateral SAR exercises, coordination of a multinational gathering of warships joint bilateral naval exercises as well as coordinated patrols and joint operations.

In addition to this, the navies using these waters are reworking on ‘Power projection’. The littoral states think in terms of power projection as a means of deployment of standoff military capabilities to deliver significant force either to deter or coerce. Power projection thus, becomes the centrepiece of the navies. Thus, it also becomes critical for the Indian Navy to take measures to maintain presence, especially in and around critical SLOCs.\textsuperscript{54}

The role of extra regional forces in the IOR poses a security threat to India’s aspirations in this region. To overcome this situation the Indian Navy should play a predominant role in the region to overcome the feeling of insecurity, so that India’s energy need as well as the objective of national security can be achieved.
End notes:


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid.


26. Ibid.


33. Lakshman Illangakoon, “A Mechanism for cooperation and Confidence Building” in
Pradeep Kaushiva Abhijit Singh edited, “Indian Ocean Challenges: A quest for cooperative solutions”,
K W Publisher Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2013, Page 144
34. Ibid Page 143
35. Hugh D. Wetherald, “Indian Ocean Maritime Security: challenges and opportunities” in
Pradeep Kaushiva Abhijit Singh edited “Indian Ocean Challenges: A Quest for Cooperative Solutions”,
36. En.wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_modern_conflicts_in_the_Middle_East
37. Ibid Page 125
38. Prabhakaran Paleri, “Role of the Coast Guard in the Maritime Security of India”, Knowledge World,
New Delhi, 2003 Page 147
41. Ibid Page 50
44. http://www.acronym.org.uk/spagni.htm
47. Anil Kumar Singh, “India’s Security Concerns in the IOR”, Har-Anand Publications Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2003 Page 111
52. Ibid Page 123
53. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, “India’s Maritime Security”, K W Publisher New Delhi, 2000 Page 172