

# MARITIME DIPLOMACY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: A WAY FORWARD FOR PAKISTAN

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## Introduction

“Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas. In the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters” (Holmes 2004).

The Indian Ocean (IO), although the smallest of three large oceans, on the geopolitical landscape commands a prominent region. It covers an area of 73,600,000 sq km that equals almost one-seventh of the entire global surface. Representing 20 percent of the total oceanographic area being 9500km wide is located between the Southern tip of Africa and Antarctica (Goel, 2005). It steadily narrows towards the North where it is intersected by the Arabia Sea and the Bengal Bay. The Strait of Bab el Mandeb connects the Arabian and Red Sea to the Persian Gulf. The Oceanic region is bounded on the North by Iran, Pakistan, India, Burma and Bangladesh whereas on the West by the Arabian Peninsula and Africa; on the East side by the Malayan peninsula and the continent of Australia; and on the South by the icy continent of Antarctica.

Therefore, the Indian Ocean is considered as a tropical Ocean that extends from 700° S to 300° N. It has an average depth of 12,700 ft (3890m) with a volume of 70,086,000 cubic miles and a maximum depth of 24,442 ft (7450m) located at the Java Trench (Rao & Griffiths 1998). It is the only major ocean that does not extend from pole to pole, at the same time it is large enough to extend from the Indian peninsula to Antarctica. The world's oldest and most densely populated countries are located on the Northern part of the Indian Ocean rim. Unlike the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Indian Ocean

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is unique as it is closed from the North by the Asia continents but open in the South. Vulnerable, this is the place from which invasions have occurred. The European colonizer came from the sea to reach its shores. The Indian Ocean is symmetrical in the sense of a 'North-South axis,' running down the length of the archipelago of Maldives (Bowmann 1988).

In the contemporary times, the sea has transformed to be the critical lifeline for safety, security, economics, environment, and maritime geopolitics. There are contested and often intersecting interests that characterizes the complex environment represented by competition, interdependence, rivalry, susceptibility in the strategic maritime picture (Holmes & Yoshihara 2008). Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in this regard, is essential for cooperative governance at the sea (Boraz 2009). It is defined as the understanding of the nature and characteristics of the maritime domain that have an overlying impact over security, economics, and the environment. Effective MDA can be possible only via a partnership of inter-state government agencies, coast guards and the navy (Campion 2008).

Pakistan is blessed to be located in a geostrategic location in close vicinity to the oil rich Gulf States, providing an opportunity to share its expertise and experience in the maritime realm as part of MDA. By leading the MDA initiative, it can play a pivotal role in providing maritime cooperation in the IO. The past developments in the region including China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), adds to the geo-economic dimension which Pakistan can capitalize on to further its national interests (Bueger & Stockbreugger, 2016). The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) therefore requires handy scrutiny by stakeholders at the highest levels of policy procedures. Pakistan needs to consider the WIO as an arena for regional cooperation. It has the potential to offer multilateral platforms such as AMAN and Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP). A key priority area would be to further collaborate on maritime issues with states of Africa and the Middle East.

## Research Methods

The study is carried out using qualitative examination of primary and secondary sources of data relating to maritime strategy and diplomacy. Primary data comprises of government documents, strategy papers and discussions held informally with dignitaries, academics, and speakers of International Maritime Conference. Secondary data including dissertations, research articles served as important source of information. They were

examined along with the thought-process of prominent regional states of the Indian Ocean. The latter was studied using techniques of discourse analysis to avoid policy bias and address the literature gap.

## Diplomacy in International Relations

Diplomacy remains to have a significant position in the art and practice of International Relations, where states continue to use it as a tool to further their national security objectives in a changing geopolitical world characterized by complex interdependence. The transition in international power corridors have had profound effects in shaping the diplomatic mechanisms that include the wide range of non-state entities such as global financial conglomerates and institutions. Traditionally diplomacy was thought to be the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of state-to-state relations by peaceful means. Harold Nicolson has called it “the process and machinery by which negotiations are carried out” (Nicolson 1961).

For Peter Barber, a renowned European historian it is the “peaceful management of international relations” (Barbet 1979). James Der Derian called it the very process of mediation that facilitates estranged individuals and entities. The role of diplomacy in this context would be to facilitate in opening spaces for cultural exchange (Sharp 1999). However, concurring to the changing character of the 21st Century which has seen the ‘Rise of Asia,’ diplomacy consists more of being a general system that provides for information gathering in a world challenged and flashed by media manipulation and disinformation operations that have the potential to trigger hostilities between adversaries (Black 1990).

The paper studies how maritime segment of an overarching diplomacy continues to play a major role in providing for a collaborative and peaceful mechanism in order to address the issues for potential conflict at the sea. It should be noted that the region has attained a prominent stature at the global chessboard where interests of regional and extra-regional actors converge on major sea lines of communications. The maritime realm of security in the Indian Ocean is on the surge whereas regional cooperative security arrangements are still at an embryonic stage.

## Conceptual Framework: The Essentials of Maritime Power

“The navy has always been an instrument of the policy of states, an important aid to diplomacy in peacetime” (Admiral Gorshkov 1979, 248).

In the subject-matter of international relations there are varying accounts pertaining to the absolute definition of power. James Cable has defined it as the capability to use a force of fitting response in a given situation. Over the years, theorists have devoted considerable efforts to the refining and elaboration as to what benchmarks power. These definitions extend to characteristics pertaining to the realms of technology, economy, military and geography. Nowadays, the extension has been to the factors less noticeable previously such as the organization and way of politics formation, the morale, motivation, and foundations of the state. These studies were undertaken for the purpose of providing a “comprehensive definition of power,” that would be reliable enough for inter-state comparison of power factors. In the context of maritime power, the studies undertaken recognize around forty of such elements that substantiated the naval aptitude.

There are two features that may elucidate Maritime power today. The most relevant is related to the aspects of technology, which despite the unprecedented firepower and sophistication provides the limitation which is reflected by the fact that ships of even the most advanced nations are prone to be vulnerable at sea. They are not immune to probable opponents and to the weapons that are cheap, readily available, and widely diffused. Only considering the issue of equipment, the gap between a Super Power and a middle power nation has relatively narrowed down more than it had ever been. However, at all levels excluding the highest one, the combat openings have contracted.

Sea-power can economically be employed by a ‘single-minded’ state with some sophisticated weapons to deny the use of adjacent waters a distant adversary within the easy range of shore-based aircraft and artillery (Voyer et al. 2018). The Ottoman Empire resistance of the Dardanelles in 1915 is a peculiar example, dependent on few fortress guns and mines against the formidable British and French naval flotilla (Cable 1985, 52). Another prominent example would be that of UK which has the strongest naval fleet in the years prior to World War I. However, the U-boat capabilities of Germany during the course of war to some extent left no escape from the prospects of decisive defeat in the naval operations. The US, the sole superpower was demeaned in 1968 by the North Koreans in *USS Pueblo affair* and by the Iranians in the 1980 hostage crisis (Murray 2010).

There is no single answer to the question, “*Power to do what?*”. It was believed that the command of the sea provides the flowing of other rewards that would sustain naval susceptibility. Since then, the concept evolved from Mahan’s views to the times of Colbert and Holmes, with aggregate credentials and certain omissions. The use of fitting power was traditionally recognized to

permit the extension of national interests and power projection. This was the reason why Bismarck afforded to proclaim his intent of sending counterforce if the British fleet blockaded the coast of Pomerania in the “Schleswig-Holstein affair”. The “appropriate force” mechanism in such instances provided an edge against those who were exposed at the sea (Pflanze 1955).

Since then, the range of these weaknesses has been overcome by the advancing political organizations systems and the global communication infrastructures of coastal nations. The changes in what command of the sea can do are nevertheless less fundamental than the new obstacles to its creation. Previously the case was that sea fleets were considered benign from everything but a sturdier flotilla. The sea command, therefore allowed for an appropriate-sized force to achieve an aim, as an uninterrupted occupation of naval strength. Added to that, the sea strong capabilities were thought to bring in all the benefits affiliated with the command as the predestined reward of a sufficiently superior fleet. Mines, torpedoes, aircraft, submarines, and missiles have all changed the equation. Admiral Turner: “it is no longer conceivable, except in the most limited sense, to totally control the seas for one’s own use or to totally deny the enemy.” He added that US Navy at best could hope for a “realistic control in limited areas and for limited periods of time” (Nathan & Oliver 1979, 48).

From the present onwards, force is in use, over and under the sea to protect or deny a particular use of the sea. The best the US can do “in a limited area and for limited period of time” (Cable 1985, 156). It is imperative to postulate the use of sea power as a tool for containing dispute. For this purpose, there is need to measure the power in the maritime realm. There are several yardsticks for this purpose conforming to various preceding disputes. An interesting example is that of the British Royal Navy which despite superior capabilities had been overwhelmed to a significant extent by two rather subsidiary power countries. The first one is Albania, which in the year 1946 caused austere casualty damage to British destroyers (Thompson 2004). The following one is Iceland which efficaciously affirmed her prerogative of exclusive fishing rights with the help of gunboat. The two conflicts ended without the occurrence of war or continuing conflict. It is the fact that neither possessed naval power analogous to UK, yet each prevailed and able to make use of “appropriate force”. The conservative estimate of contemplating sea power relates to the counting of ships whereby via comparing and analyzing the scale and grandeur of mission’s operational capacities the capabilities are derived. A former US Secretary of Defense categorized this as the knack to fight “2 ½ or 1 ½ wars” (Cable 1994, 146).

## Defining Maritime Diplomacy (MD)

MD can facilitate behaviors ranging from cooperative ones such as port visits, philanthropic aid to coercive and persuasive placement of naval destroyers to extract political incentives. In the contemporary era, the activity is no longer confined only to the naval force where civilian vessels and non-state groups such as multi-nationals have a growingly important role to play. The section describes the evolution of maritime diplomacy and how it could prove to be a mechanism for bringing stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

The age of the ‘gunboat diplomacy’ which brings up images of European warships bombing and coercing states via act of naval intimidation is generally thought to be long gone in the age of unipolarity that is relinquishing towards more of multipolarity. Added to that, MD based on gunboats, may not be a historical undertaking of the imperial past, as the former Asian victims of colonization have the resources, economic might, and naval muscle deal with their former colonial rulers in the modern day interdependent and globalized era (Kaplan 2019). Several states had understood of the strategic utility of ‘gunboat diplomacy’. It allows for actors to use coercion in order to pursue state’s objectives at the same time having to avoid large-scale cost and conflict. In recent time, Iran had held Velayat naval exercises in January 2012, the USS George Washington carrier participated in what is known as “Invincible Spirit exercises” with Japan and other allies, as a deterrent to the North Korean sinking of a South Korean corvette (Avery & Taylor 2010).

MD is an important tool of statecraft for prevention of war, it signals to the adversary one’s policies and capabilities bringing into play the interplay of deterrence and compellence. An excellent measure which provides an outlet for tensions in the international system. The recurrence of maritime diplomacy can mitigate potential conflicts likely to occur, signaling to hostile states and solving disagreements through the threat of limited force. A predictive and preventive tool, used to avoid and deter conflict, and also to make a political point. Therefore, MD is critical in the emerging power equation developing in the IO.

## Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy

“Diplomacy is the efficient management of a state’s interests in international relations”, concurring to this definition maritime diplomacy is the use of maritime assets to manage relations between states (Holmes 2006). Port visits, combined trainings and naval exercises, humanitarian assistance

and disaster relief. This adds to the flexibility of naval forces is tantamount to the fact that they can operate in politically neutral international waters. In recent years, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities have added a soft-layered element resulting in the evolution of the term, “gunboat philanthropy” (Kimunguyi 2007).

Cooperative maritime diplomacy uses soft power elements which in the words of Joseph Nye, induces others to do what you want them to do. It is an attempt to support soft power making use of hard power naval assets. The regular port to port visits by naval forces are often intended to build diplomatic influence and reassure allies. Training and diplomatic exercises provide for capacity building and creation of knowledgeable navies, apart from reinforcing friendship with a degree of more compatibility. Bob Davidson of the Royal Canadian Navy has called this “maritime influence operations” and his sailors as “mini ambassadors, representing the country, its interests and values in every port of call”. This illustrates the underlying concept that contemporary navies have “potential far beyond the narrowness of gunboat diplomacy” (Prantl, 2021).

Geoffrey Till notes that naval forces have greater attributes and abilities than the other armed services, which provides for an expansive and flexible reach along with strategic mobility which unreachable to formations of infantry troops or to fighter aircrafts (Till 2007). Peace Ark, the first Chinese hospital ship was sent on a tour of Africa to administer nursing and medicinal facilities to the indigenous population. The vessel conveyed the notions of harmony, at the same time creating a positive image and soft power tenderness to strengthen partnership, along enhancing the PLN’s as a benign military force (Miere 2005, 8). The Zheng He, is an example of successful Chinese maritime diplomacy signaling country’s “Peaceful rise”.

## Persuasive Maritime Diplomacy

Naval platforms have long been used to further political purposes in times of peace. These forms however are not cooperative as they lack collaboration in the diplomatic effects. It is differentiated from cooperation by the lack of collaboration and from coercive diplomacy as it is not aimed to deter nor compel the other. They are intended to increase one’s recognition of national power and build prestige at the global stage. Added to that, interestingly persuasive MD is projected unlike the other types, not to rely on the terror and the fear element of the naval power but rather to persuade the other via peaceful means.

Naval vessels signal for the presence and capability without influencing the policy of the other. One example is the US Great White Fleet, an initiative of the former US President Theodore Roosevelt. They were aimed to travel to all the whole continents in the early years of the 20th century. The ships were painted white to show that the purpose of the global expedition was altogether peaceful. Nevertheless, the image that the US Navy had built with this voyage was instrumental in projecting its maritime might and power during the 1898 affair known as the Spanish-American War, which resulted in the occupation of Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. The main goal was America's rise to the top of the table of world powers. "Speak softly and carry a big stick" (Holmes 2008).

It is argued that Persuasive maritime diplomacy is less commonly practiced than the other two, as its effects are vague. A modern-day example is that of the Iranian Navy. In February 2011, it set out a modest fleet to transit via the Suez Canal, an initiative carried out for the first time since the Shah was ousted because of the Islamic Revolution. Although peaceful in nature, the voyage was a sign of the nation's support to its only Arab ally, Syria. In the words of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei: "The world should know that the presence of Iranian warships in the Suez Canal has taken place through the deep guidance of the Supreme Leader" (Seyfi & Hemati, 2020). At that time, the current Israeli VP Silvan Shalom commented that the Iranian flotilla intended to provoke other Persian Gulf states showing "who is the new leader in the Middle East, after the 'Arab Spring' fall out" (Boudreaux 2015).

## Coercive Maritime Diplomacy

Mostly, coercive maritime diplomacy resembles gunboat diplomacy. Defined and instrumentalized by events. An example is when North Korea attacked USS Pueblo, an intelligence gathering vessel 1968 with insignificant and containable force use. In James Cable words, "the threat or utility of limited naval force is gunboat diplomacy that is employed to have limited advantage or to minimize loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state" (Cable 1985, 14).

Gunboat Diplomacy (GB) was first seen in the 1970s. In the present era, non-state actors have assumed a greater role at the helm of global affairs despite US and its allies specifically waging a war against non-state actors. From among the non-state militant entities, Hezbollah and the former Tamil Tigers. The latter was one of the first contemporary times insurgent groups



to operate a navy. On the “Heroes’ Day celebrations” on 27 November 2005 where their modestly equipped naval ships exhibited their power projection at Kallapadu, Mullaithivu (Miere 2011). The idea was to demonstrate their competences and a force to be reckoned with to the government in Colombo. This approach to dissuade state violence by projecting power in the maritime sphere was an example of GB.

## Maritime Diplomacy and Pakistan

The geostrategic conjecture of Pakistan at the head of the Arabian Sea connecting the Persian Gulf naturally makes it a leading player in the region. Due to lack of maritime awareness and continental mindset only limited progress has been undertaken as far as a leadership role is concerned. Nonetheless, the country has the potential for it, which, if rightly tapped, can provide the required impetus. Furthermore, with the CPEC, it is likely that the situation would become more complex with increased maritime traffic which would require for a greater regional maritime security (Khan 2019).

The Pakistan Navy (PN) has established the RMSP with the objective of securing the country’s interests at sea and guarding Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from all kinds of traditional and non-traditional threats (Ali 2018). The maritime force continues to be a member to US led coalition CMF, in the CTF-150 that is assigned the patrolling role against illicit smuggling including narcotics and in the CTF-151 that exclusively deals with piracy. At the regional level, due to rapidly modernizing Indian navy, Pakistan is required to develop a “deterrent capacity”. For this purpose, the country has closed an acquisition arrangement with Romania, China, and Turkey in the recent past (Azmi 2019). Navy’s role and future plans, include indigenous construction and maintenance of sea platforms. For this purpose, the Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works (KS&EW) state-owned shipyard is being upgraded (Ansari 2020).

Naval power alone is not a sufficient criterion for a comprehensive maritime power, as the latter has multidimensional aspects. It is necessary that, apart from a naval fleet, emphasis is also placed on the improvement of the mercantile fleet in quantity and quality. Furthermore, similar projects like Gwadar in the long-run may also be made on the coast to increase internationally standardized ports and augment sea-based economy (Voyer et al. 2018). Pakistan is largely dependent on the sea for the smooth running of its economy. According to various surveys, around 94 percent of the nation’s total trade by volume and 86 percent by value is facilitated by the

sea. The freight alone that is the surcharge on the use of chartered shipping lines amounts to \$6 billion according to 2019 estimate (Alam et al. 2019). The SLOCs that move the imports and exports for Pakistan are potentially unstable including the Persian Gulf, the Far East, and Red Sea (Haider 2015). The over reliance on imports that are sea-based is greater in Pakistan's case than that of its traditional rival, India.

PN participation in global and regional maritime cooperative activities has been recognized by the international community and organizations at various times (Ali 2018). PN platforms, officials and warships are part of a Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) for over seventeen years. Senior PN officers have commanded the coalition on a rotational basis with other countries (CMF 2018). In quantifiable terms, over 100 PN platforms have provided service operation at CMF for upholding safety and security in the IO (Ansari 2020).

The *AMAN - Together for Peace* platform can be termed as one of the greatest endeavors of Pakistan is disseminating its discourse regarding the IO and other related maritime subject-matters. The sixth edition of the AMAN series took place in February 19, which had participation of forty-six nations from over the globe (Iqbal 2019). Apart from that representatives of the PN take part in almost related international and regional activities taken for the maintenance of order at sea. These include the Galle Dialogue, International Sea Power Symposium and other multinational exercises and disaster relief efforts (Bueger & Stockbruegeer 2016).

## The International Maritime Conference (IMC)

The IMC is held biennially jointly with the AMAN exercise organized by NIMA for a thought-process to contemplate on emerging strategic connotations of maritime geopolitics and analyze its impact of the region and Pakistan in particular (Afnan 2019). This enables academia and pundits to devise viable resolutions for enactment of common objectives of peaceful coexistence and sustainable economic progress (Ahmad 2019). At the end of each conference, a proceeding is formulated outlining the knowledge and perspectives of esteemed academicians invited from across the world. It was because of one of the IMC's deliberations that Dr. Christian Bueger proposed a leading role for the PN in Indian Ocean Security Architecture (Bueger 2017).

## The AMAN Exercise

The exercise was conceived to address the mutual securities of the contributing navies by providing a platform for information sharing and participatory action on issues as diverse as counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance and maritime security operations. It was first held in 2007, where 28 nations took interest in the multi-lateral exercise. Since then, it has been held biennially with only one exception in between providing naval partners to share their thought-process and gain from one another's experience (Hafiz 2017). From a national perspective, it serves as a stage to expand the nation's image in the region and in the globe in maritime strategy and security (Khattak 2020). It may be argued by critics that organizing the maritime exercise on hefty level is costly and logistically an intricate activity, for the host nation and participant navies. On the contrary, it is a significant training experience with state-of-the-art navies of the globe.

The members collectively participating under Pakistan's naval leadership have considerably been increasing from twenty-eight in the first edition of the exercise to more than forty during the last one held in 2019 (Afzal 2008). AMAN is appropriately organized to advance cooperation between the regional and extra-regional naval force having an interest in safety and stability of the IO. A diplomatic move undertaken to construct conducive for safety and security of the region from security threats particularly in the non-traditional domain to ensure sustainable long term regional development. The involvement of navies from across the continents also creates prospects for synergizing different components of naval capacities. In this way, AMAN can serve as a bridge between many regions (Malik 2018).

## Joint Maritime Information Coordination Centre (JMICC)

JMICC was developed by the PN and is presently based at the PNS Qasim, Karachi as an information sharing and inter-agency coordination platform for maritime happenings in the EEZ (Aleem 2017). The Centre also provides for network-aided environment for budding Maritime Common Operating Picture (MCOP) to enhance MDA for early identification of potential threat and to facilitate in coordinated response to counter illicit activities at sea (JMIO 2019). Maritime security has been accepted as critical to global stability where sea-based threats endanger economic and commercial interests. To curb these challenges, early detection and warning systems have been in place by leading maritime nations of the world, as a means to coordinate and exchange vital information for security in the regional and territorial waters (Bhatti 2014).

JMICC, as the nerve center of the PN in this regard has established key contacted with maritime data hubs and similar organizations such as

the Information Fusion Centre of Singapore and Virtual Regional Maritime Traffic Centre of Italy (Asghar 2016). JMICC has at national level made efforts to facilitate Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) in maintenance of good order at sea. In collaboration of Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) it has launched an android-based application “Assistance, Anytime, Anywhere at Sea” (AAAS) to facilitate maritime communities operating in territorial waters of Pakistan in case of any emergency. By the end of 2019 it has coordinated with authorities in 244 search and rescue missions, saving 1815 precious lives (Rashid 2019).

## Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP)

The PN instituted the RMSP in areas of troubled waters particularly in the Southern Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman and the Maldives choke points (Azmi 2019). These are vital for the stability and safety of the sea-lanes that are key to Pakistan’s national and economic interests. The conception of RMSP is to monitor via maritime platforms, these “hazard points” to maintain a vigorous security posture that allows for protection of national and international shipping while at the same time ensures for the free and uninterrupted access to the high seas. RMSP in this regard reflects Pakistan’s commitments as a responsible and leading state of the region when it comes to developing security architecture (Mustafa 2005).

The central objective is to ensure for stable maritime conditions in close proximity of the country’s geographical location. For this purpose, naval assets have been dedicated to cultivating regional ties with other like-minded states. For several years, the PN has contented for a “region-centric” framework for IO’s security. The country is of the opinion that preserving of IOR’s stability from an economic and diplomatic viewpoint is best conserved by region states and not through an Extended Regional Framework (ERF), involving the permanent presence of extra-regional powers. An account of the past has shown that an ERF driven cooperative frameworks, for instance CENTO and SEATO led to hesitations on part of regional stakeholders who ended up getting misgivings and suspicion over the arrangement.

For its turn, the RMSP is organized to “expand on region-led, region-own principle” and serve as cooperative maritime construct for security in the IO. The RMSP is in accordance with the UNSC and the UNCLOS. According to the UNSC Resolution 2316 (2016) it has given a mandate to UN states, “to act against piracy, armed robbery at sea off the Somalia”. Resolution 2216 (2015) likewise reinforces the RMSP vision to eliminate illicit weapons network. UNCLOS Article 100, backs the RMSP in these endeavors to defeat piracy (Aleem 2017).

## Conclusion

Alfred Mahan, the founder of sea power stated, “it is not just a nation’s power at sea but the power that is hailed from the sea,” meaning how a nation exploits the enormous advantages of the maritime space and the influence incurred via the tools of MD. Considering Pakistan this would require the development of naval power to counter blue-water hegemonic designs of state such as India. Such an endeavor would allow Pakistan to maintain an ability to play its part in various strategic developments and not be isolated from great power strategies in the Indian Ocean. The AMAN – *Together for Peace* is an excellent platform in this regard. It is noteworthy to mention that the last series of naval exercises under its aegis brought together forty-six participating nations from across the globe. It was a striking and proud moment for Pakistan in the international relations domain, as well as in its maritime diplomacy discourse as that the US, China and Russia, all three participated despite the on-going geopolitical rivalries.

For the long-term, policymakers in Pakistan evaluate that the country is at the geostrategic conjecture at the Arabian Sea connecting the Persian Gulf, and that it naturally makes it a leading player in the region. Moreover, with CPEC, it is likely that the situation would become more complex with increased maritime traffic which would require for a greater regional maritime patrolling. Furthermore, naval power alone is not sufficient criteria for a comprehensive MD, as the latter has multidimensional aspects. A strong and robust economy is urgent so that it can allow Pakistan to project a better maritime power posture. In that regard, special emphasis needs to be placed on mega-projects like CPEC and the Gwadar Port, the facilities on the coast need to be upgraded keeping in line with internationally standardized ports guidelines that would augment national economy.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Indian Ocean has gained prominence in the international geopolitical discourse. It is becoming a showground for major competition between the new and existing great powers. Maritime Diplomacy, in this regard, is a valuable instrument for averting conflict. The range of options available are from the cooperative ones to persuasive and coercive selection for the maritime forces. It is helpful not only to those utilizing it but also to academics who are trying to decipher the more extensive ramifications of the utilization of sea-based strategy. Mahan documented, the most powerful state of the maritime realm is generally also richest and economically prevalent most in the international order. The study uses qualitative methods to analyze the existing literature comprising of primary and secondary set of imperatives to provide structured insight that would be useful to policymakers and academics. The Pakistani perspective and interplay in the changing geopolitics is assessed in the region termed as “pivotal of the world”.

## **KEYWORDS**

Indian Ocean; Maritime Diplomacy; Cooperative Diplomacy; Maritime Strategy.

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