

MARITIME SECURITY ISSUES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL PAPER 2:

- Physical Setting: Space relationship of India with neighbouring countries.
- Resources: Land, surface and ground water, energy, minerals, biotic and marine resources; Forest and wild life resources and their conservation; Energy crisis.
- Transport, Communication and Trade: Road, railway, waterway, airway and pipeline networks and their complementary roles in regional development; Growing importance of ports on national and foreign trade; Trade balance; Trade Policy; Export processing zones.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIAN OCEAN REGION:



- Indian Ocean is one of the world's busiest oceans. It enjoys a privileged location at the crossroads of global trade, connecting the major engines of the international economy in the Northern Atlantic and Asia-Pacific which means that he who controls the Indian Ocean controls the trade of major economies of the world.

- Indian Ocean region connects 3 continents (Africa, Asia and Australia) and 2 Oceans (Atlantic and Pacific) with each other. In other words, if the security of this region gets compromised, then economic activities on more than 50% of the globe will be stalled.
- Indian Ocean is the battleground for some of the key sea lanes in the world like- Malacca Strait and Strait of Hormuz.
- Majority of crude oil is imported from the gulf countries. The route of this oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz into the Arabian Sea and subsequently into the Indian Ocean. So, it is safe to say that majority of oil is transferred to their destination through Indian Ocean region which makes it the flash point of geopolitics as these oil vessels if obstructed will obstruct the growth engine of the country which it belongs to.
- The Ocean's vast drainage basin is important in its own right, home to some two billion people. This creates opportunities, especially given the high rates of economic growth around the Indian Ocean rim, including in India, Bangladesh, Southeast Asia, and Eastern and Southern Africa.
- The Indian Ocean is rich in natural resources. Forty per cent of the world's offshore oil production takes place in the Indian Ocean basin. This region is rich in Fishing and other Aquaculture activities. Mineral resources are equally important, with nodules containing nickel, cobalt, and iron, and massive sulfide deposits of manganese, copper, iron, zinc, silver, and gold present in sizable quantities on the sea bed. Indian Ocean coastal sediments are also important sources of titanium, zirconium, tin, zinc, and copper.
- The IOR plays a key role in strengthening India's Act East policy. This is because the latter shares concerns regarding a number of issues — such as enhancing regional connectivity, promoting economic cooperation, strengthening cultural ties, and developing strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels — with the nation's maritime policy as well.

SECURITY ISSUES IN THE REGION:

- The emergence of initiatives like String of Pearls is indicative of China's growing geopolitical influence to increase access to ports and airfields, expand and modernise military forces, and make stronger diplomatic relations with trading partners. Chinese companies have made investments in several ports like Gwadar, Hambantota, Colombo, etc.
- China has been feverishly engaged in modernising its navy and expanding its naval arm in the Indian Ocean to assert its influence over the IOR states, which is frequently antithetical to the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of India, the United States and Japan.
- The region is becoming both more militarised and more-nuclearised largely for concerns over energy security, extra-regional powers are seeking to maintain and extend their presence in the region, greatly complicating the overall regional strategic outlook.

- United States dominates the IOR strategically and militarily. Its principal concerns are maintaining the security of its oil supplies from the Middle East and countering terrorism and Muslim extremism. Potentially the United States has the leverage to act as a broker between India and China should their bilateral relationship deteriorate. Yet the future will almost certainly see a decline in American influence in the region as the United States struggles to maintain its defence presence in the face of a poorly performing economy, as well as its legitimacy among the peoples of the region, many of whom are Muslim.
- Terrorist attack against vulnerable points in the region, particularly offshore oil and gas installations and other mining infrastructure, non-traditional security threats, including the smuggling of people, arms and drugs, illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and maritime natural disasters.

FUTURE REQUIREMENTS AND ACTIONS NEEDED:

- In the face of the challenges to India's myriad security interests, it is not sufficient just to conduct joint naval exercises with various regional partners, including the United States. India must realise that its naval capabilities are much weaker than those of China. Thorough upgradation of the country's naval arm is required.
- India needs to further elevate, strengthen and deepen its security co-operation with regional partners such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius, as well as the United States, Japan and Australia, to protect its core security interests in the Indian Ocean.
- India needs to develop hard and soft power resources to ensure its maritime security and to be able to deal with any contingent situation that might arise from any future Sino-US conflict in the South China Sea. India must expand its strategic foothold in multilateral fora and organisations.
- Any quadripartite partnership of India, Japan, the United States and Australia should not be exclusively focussed on isolating China as some kind of pariah state. Rather, China must be engaged as a co-operative partner in the process of negotiations to resolve mutual differences in the spirit of protecting the global commons.
- if it is to meet the challenges – either real or perceived – posed by China to its maritime interests in the Indian Ocean Region, India will be required to develop a multipronged strategy of maintaining an active and agile presence in the IOR by integrating its army, air force and navy in fuller co-operation and co-ordination with the central and state governments.
- India will be required to undertake defence infrastructure projects in the Indian Ocean as an effective counterweight to China's much-hyped strategic encirclement of India through the so-called "string of pearls" doctrine.



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PREVIOUS YEAR UPSC OPTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- Bring out the geopolitical implications of Doklam dispute in the context of Indo-China relations. (2017)
- Describe the salient features of Sagar Mala Project and highlight its role in port-led development of coastal regions in India. (2017)
- Mention the space relationship of India with neighbouring countries. (2016).
- Explain the role of India in the geo-politics of South Asia. (2016)
- Discuss the implications of India's strategic location with reference to the Indian Ocean. (2014)
- Write a note on geopolitics of the Indian Ocean realm. (2013)