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## **GEOPOLITICS AND ITS IMPACT ON MARITIME SECURITY: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIAN OCEAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The geopolitics and maritime security concepts are two main interrelated approaches in the field of International relations. The Indian Ocean is the most geostrategic resource base which is couples with several maritime security threats. The main objective of this study is to examine the maritime security threats of Indian Ocean due to the geopolitical significance. The relevant data for the study was gathered using journal articles, reports, publications and other academic publications. The results and finding of the study illustrates that piracy, maritime terrorism, illicit trafficking, energy security and competition, maritime resource management and nuclear proliferation. Regional cooperation, maritime governance, information and intelligence sharing and soft power geopolitics can be concluded as the major policy options to minimize the maritime security threats.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Indian Ocean, Maritime Security, Geopolitics, Maritime Security Threats*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The study of international relations mainly focused on geographical location, natural resource base, history, economic needs and political structure of states. The geographical location of a state determines its relations and policy formulation between other states as well. The geographical environment of states perceives the influence of states. Besides geopolitics and maritime security are two related concepts which formulates the security regulations and characteristics in maritime domain. The geopolitical importance of a space or a territory totally depends upon the security mechanisms. With the strengthening of academic literature on geopolitics, the geopolitical and maritime importance of Indian Ocean became a debated discourse.

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term "Geopolitics" has been widely employed by scholars regarding the nature of states in geographical concerns. The study of geopolitics in International Relations turns the narrow interactions of states to link with power politics, policy, space and territory. It is the analysis of geographical influences on power relations among international relations and reflects the geo-political linkages. Simply geopolitics means the study of how geography impacts politics, demography and economics, especially with respect to developing

foreign policy and international conflicts. Rudolph Kjellen describe that "geopolitics is the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space". According to Karl Haushofer "Geopolitics is the new national science of the state, a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography". Charles B. Hagan explains that geopolitics is a contemporary rationalization of power politics.

The developments of concept of geopolitics have introduced an array of academic discourse regarding the interconnection between geopolitics and maritime security. Geographical factors closely direct the maritime security of any given territory of a state. States impacted by maritime security threats due to the geographical features and geopolitical influences. The policies of states have a significant amount of influence to tackle the maritime security by implementing required policies to overcome the geopolitical domains. The maritime security threats such as piracy, immigration, drug smuggling and human smuggling have transformed into a transnational level that the states cannot individually secure their territorial boundaries.

Maritime security has emerged as a controversial concept among the scholar of International Relations due to the emergence of

maritime based terrorist activities and piracy activities. The interstate maritime issues have also strengthened the importance of maritime security to deal with the interstate conflicts regarding the maritime resources in specific areas of oceans. Maritime security as a concept had its momentum during the Cold War with the tensions of superpower rivalry and geopolitical considerations such as sovereignty claims over maritime territories, the status of coastal waters and the control over maritime zones. Meanwhile maritime security closely associates with the economic wellbeing of a state where the majority of the economic valued goods and services are transported via sea routes. The concept of “Blue Economy” was proposed at the Rio + 20 World Summit in 2012 which aimed at securing maritime environment and managing maritime resources rather than only implementing sustainable management strategies.

Number of states has initiated several maritime security strategies to preserve their geopolitical dimensions. The best examples are the UK National Strategy for Maritime Security (NSMS), the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS), the EU Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea (Germond, 2015). The National Strategy for Maritime Security concentrates on both economic and national security, fisheries protection in territorial waters and security in sea lanes of energy transportation. The main objective of this strategy is to protect the maritime security interests of UK with no geographical limitations. The EU Maritime Security Strategy maintains its formulation on better maritime governance focusing on coastal guard and maritime governance capabilities. The main reason for such initiative is maritime areas in the periphery of Europe and beyond has a strategic value in geopolitical domain. The EU Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea focused on eliminating regional threats, illicit dumping of waste, piracy and armed robbery, human trafficking and narcotics.

The relationship between geopolitics and the maritime security is considered to be a dialectical process with its close connectivity. Geopolitical dimensions influence maritime security policies; measures, operations, procedures and geopolitics mainly design the maritime security orders. The intentions and purposes of states may perceive of the boundaries of other states in the external geopolitical dimension. However, Indian Ocean is considered to be the most geopolitically significant basin in the world. Maritime trade, energy supplying routes, sea

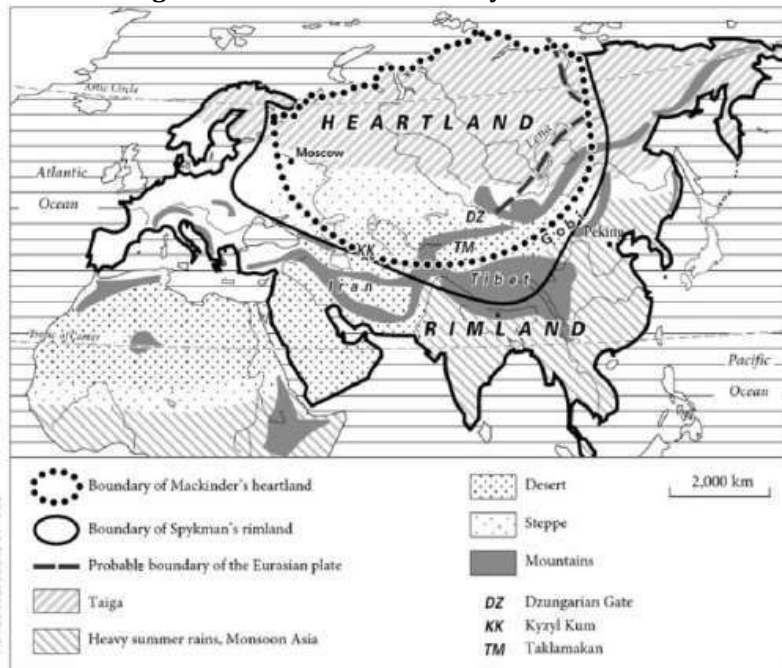
lane security intertwined with other traditional and nontraditional issues is coupled with the maritime security of Indian Ocean. The Indo-Pacific region is the significant maritime space with largest population, resources, developing economies, sea lanes and contested territorial space significant in a geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic sense. Indian Ocean is the pathway to most of the energy transferring routes to Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The geopolitical dimension in international relations has been heavily attracted by plenty of theoretical approaches. According to Friedrich Ratzel, states are always engaged in a struggle for space and the powerful states acquire large spaces than the less powerful states. He strengthened that the space is not just about the geographical space, it's about the expansion of states and growth. A.T. Mahan changed the perspectives of geopolitical theories by writing the publication of “Influence of Sea Power upon the History 1660 – 1783”. To Mahan Sea is considered to be the most influential space in geopolitics. He describes that all the states strongly focus on securing its sea lines and transferring routes to foster the desired interests. Furthermore he illustrates that the states which have coastal space utilize the sea and how the landlocked countries struggle to secure its borders with the neighboring countries. Rudolf Kjellen describes the relationship between geography and politics and coined the phrase “Geopolitik” as the science which illustrates state as a geographical organism. He described three main requirements a state must fulfill to become a world power; a state should be located within a large contiguous area, states must have interested cohesion in order to be powerful and possess the free of movement.

Sir Halford Mackinder brought a new ideology to the field of geopolitics with the concept of the pivot of the world politics. He categorize the earth landmass and the water bodies into three levels; the pivot area, inner crescent and outer crescent. The pivot area was a huge area which is near the Volga River in the West and Eastern Siberia associated with mountain streams and ice bounded Arctic in the North. It was a highly resourceful area with strategically secured.

**Figure 01: Mackinder's Theory of Heartland**



Source: (Chowdhury & Kafi, 2015)

Later he renamed the pivot area with the concept of “Theory of Heartland”. According to the heartland theory, the core of the global influence is lies on the heartland, which is a territory situated in Eurasia with its sheer size, wealth of resources and a high population. He further illustrates that the nation which govern the heartland area will command the world. Another scholar who is put forward his ideas on geopolitical theories, Spykman also accepted the concept of heartland. But he emphasized that the areas which is the inner crescent called by Mackinder is much more powerful than the

heartland. He clarifies his opinion on the basis of sea power. He believed that both the sea power and the land power is important in geopolitical structures. Therefore, to Spykman heartland is less important and convinced that that combination of land and sea power will control the essential power relations in the world. He renamed the inner crescent area as Rimland which contains access to sea and interior regions. He defines that “who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia and who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world”.

**Figure 02: The World of Spykman**



Source: (Bottelier, 2011)

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary data and it's a qualitative data analysis. The main objective of the study was to examine the strategic geopolitical importance of Indian Ocean and how it impacts on the security of the region. The relevant data has been gathered through journal articles, reports, publications and other academic publications.

#### 5. DATA ANALYSIS

Indian Ocean can be regarded as the most questioned sea basin while being most controversial issues related to maritime security. The countries situated in the Indian Ocean have a direct access to utilize the Indian Ocean for their energy transferring and other economic and commercial needs. Meanwhile the extra regional powers also have a huge concern on Indian Ocean. It includes the prominent geopolitical interests of extra regional powers like USA, China, Japan and European Union. This conflictual scenario of Indian Ocean characterized it as the most politically troubled and explosive Ocean of the world maritime affairs. Due to strategic geopolitical characteristics, Indian Ocean has coupled with many maritime security threats.

##### 5.1. Piracy

Maritime security concerns of Indian Ocean are highly dominated by the piracy attacks and the hijacking of vessels passing the chock points of Indian Ocean. Gulf of Aden, horn of Africa and Strait of Malacca presents a most debated transnational piracy attacked venues of Indian Ocean. By the end of 2011, 214 vessels had been attacked, 31 hijacked, while eight vessels remained under capture awaiting release and of payment of ransoms, 497 seafarers had been held captive, and 10 seafarers had died (Herbert-Burns, 2012). Somalia based pirates are highly sophisticated with their

weapons and motivated to attack commercial vessels and demand large ransoms in exchange of personals. After 2012, the hijacking of vessels has been limited with the presence of counter piracy coalitions and combined task forces. The best management process for combating piracy was obtaining the use of private security contractors on board.

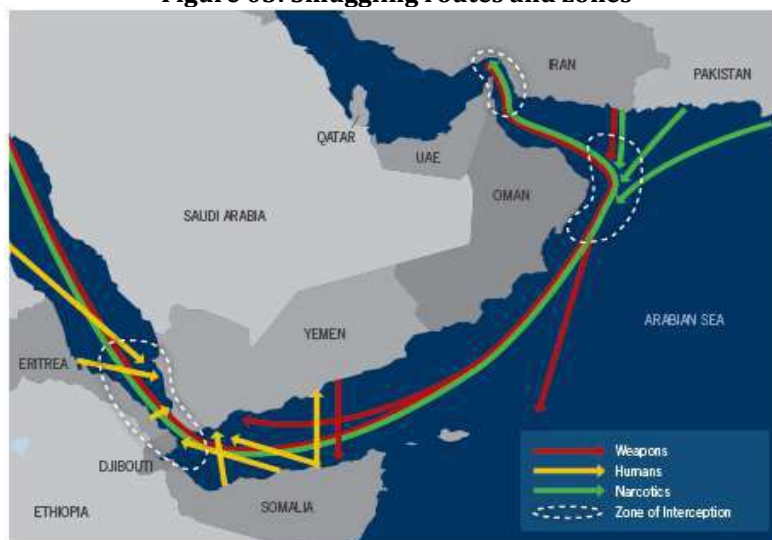
##### 5.2. Maritime terrorism

Maritime terrorism poses another potential threat to the security of Indian Ocean due to the geopolitical features. Even though there were a little amount of seaborne terrorist attacks reported, terrorist groups have a massive interest in continuing their attacks in strategically importance maritime chokepoints in Indian Ocean. Specially Al-Qaeda and LTTE terrorists had maritime terrorism intensions in Indian Ocean and there are many reported incidents where LTTE terrorists have attacked not only naval vessels but also the merchant vessels as well. Apart from that terrorists tried to attack the commercial harbors of Sri Lanka, Trincomalee and Galle. The main threat is the possibility of interaction of terrorist groups in Indian Ocean and conducting collective maritime terrorist attacks.

##### 5.3. Illicit Trafficking

The illicit trafficking of the Indian Ocean composed with illicit narcotics, weapons and people via numerous sea routes. Indian Ocean is also considered to be a transferring route of these three commodities in a high volume. It has become the greatest concern regarding the maritime security threats in Indian Ocean. Heroin, opiates, amphetamine type stimulants and cannabis are the most dominant drugs which transferring under the land and sea routes of Indian Ocean.

Figure 03: Smuggling routes and zones



Source: (Herbert-Burns, 2012)

The sea transference of narcotics is substantial and the Afghan heroin trafficking to Europe via the Arabian Sea. Sri Lanka serves as the transit point of narcotic trafficking in Indian Ocean where the flexible access to many of the sea and land routes to transport narcotics. The flows of greatest concern are the Afghan heroin/opiate trafficking to Europe via Iran/Pakistan/ United Arab Emirates and via the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Suez Canal shipping route (Herbert-Burns, 2012). The illicit transfer of weapons in the region is totally based on the demand and supply logic. Small weapons and the light weapons are the major components of illicit weapon transferring to insurgent groups in Asia as well as in Africa. The linkage of greatest concern is flows of small arms and light weapons from Iran to Yemen and onwards to the Eastern Mediterranean via the Suez Canal and between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. The flow of human trafficking is another controversial concern related to maritime security in Indian Ocean. There are two main maritime flows such as from the Southern Red Sea and Horn of Africa to the Southern Arabian Peninsula and from the Asian Subcontinent to the Eastern Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. Large number of refugee flows is illicitly trafficked with the associated dangers of loss of life in the sea and organized crimes. Recently Sri Lanka has been identified as a transit point of illicit human trafficking and majority of the foreigners use Sri Lanka as a destination to get on the boats to migrate easily. Illicit trafficking in Indian Ocean generalize key factors which motivates the process of trafficking of narcotics, weapons and humans, such as source countries, points of exports, transshipment nodes, means of transportation, sea transportation routes and destination countries.

#### **5.4. Energy security and competition**

Many geostrategic and security implications has been occurred regarding the energy security and competition among the states. Indian Ocean is the major transport route in transferring oil and gas from Middle East and Coal from Australia and Africa (Cordner, 2010). Energy concerns of the countries like United States, Japan, China and India has already motivated the tensions on Indian strategic environment. The energy rivalries are often common in Indian Ocean where the interplay between India and China, Japan perspectives on maintaining a crucial role in Indian Ocean, Russia's efforts to recapture Northeast Asia and US interests and power balancing in Indian Ocean with the help of India has influential effects on energy security in Indian Ocean. With the high demand of energy transferring the importance of strategic Indian Ocean will be increased gradually and the competition will be more drastic as well. On the other hand, the Chinese strategy of String of Pearls has already secured their

energy transferring routes and maritime domain. The Chinese influence over Indian Ocean is eventually balanced by India aligning to the United States and Japan. With India and other regional powers faced many challenges in gaining the access to energy routes and the security in chokepoints have become essential.

#### **5.5. Maritime Resource Management**

One of the significant non-tradition maritime security threat faced by Indian Ocean is the maritime resource management. Indian Ocean is regarded as a resourceful maritime base for ocean resources. The environmental degradation, resource exploitation, competition over maritime resources, global warming and rise of sea levels has badly affected the maritime resource management in Indian Ocean. The risks of those factors on human and environmental systems are immense. The enhanced marine activities on energy development, resource extraction and commercial activities have supported the competition for resources in Indian Ocean. Fisheries production and water resources are considered to be the other controversial factors which influence on maritime security resources.

#### **5.6. Nuclear Proliferation**

Even though Indian Ocean is regarded as a nuclear free zone, the involvement of states in utilizing nuclear weapons in Indian Ocean has become a severe maritime security threat. The diverse interests and the miscommunication among China, India and Pakistan has become a threat to through increasing their nuclear activities. The nuclear competition between India and Pakistan has created a maritime nuclear race. Pakistan is getting considerable assistance from China to safeguard its nuclear interests in Indian Ocean. Meanwhile the deployment of nuclear submarines by China can be regarded as a direct threat to maritime security in Indian Ocean.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

The strategic importance of Indian Ocean is notably expanding with the interests of powerful nations and with their strategic involvement. The great power attention on Indian Ocean has imposed several maritime security threats due to its geopolitical significance. The strategic competition among the powerful nations is gradually expanding the security threats in a considerable scale. The instability and insecurity in Indian Ocean plays a vital role in imposing maritime security threats. The interests of the states in acquiring maritime capabilities strengthening regional power projection and the future economic and population growth may further drive those challenges to be more influential. Therefore, effective policies should be implemented to safeguard the maritime security of Indian Ocean. Maritime governance is the main policy option which can be implemented through regional

cooperation. Enhanced cooperation among states and other regional organizations can structure land and sea areas with monitoring and proper investigations. Strong regulations should be initiated under the umbrella of maritime governance. The piracy and terrorist attacks on Indian Ocean can be limited using advanced information sharing and intelligence networks. To this end, the mistrust between the regional powers should be diminished. The maritime domain awareness can also strengthen the regional cooperation to share and support the regional activities. The usage of soft power geopolitics can solve the emerging issues of Indian Ocean in a larger percentage. Therefore new maritime strategies should be progressed to develop new encounters.

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