

South Asia's Naval Shift: Regional Cooperation and Challenges
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This research explores the significant influence of South Asia on the politics of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and analyzes the extensive implications for the region resulting from the policy changes in India and Pakistan. The long-standing source of conflict, the Kashmir issue remained a bone of contention between the two states. Historically involved in border conflicts, both are now making concerted efforts to enhance their naval capabilities through unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral engagements. This strategic adjustment has surpassed past difficulties, resulting in new interactions in the Indian Ocean Region. The research also explores the potential ways of cooperation between the two states and region as whole, and the challenges that can be faced in the way of regional cooperation or development. The escalating tensions in the region are further intensified by the mistrust and nuclearization of the region. This study rigorously analyzes the potential of regional organizations for cooperation and sustainable development, and the future course of Indo-Pak bilateral relations.

1. Introduction

South Asia also known as the subcontinent has a historical identity of being British colony holds significance as a crucial region for the past British naval expeditions. The region also holds the importance of being a trade hub and transit route for the smooth flow of goods from Britain to its colonies in South East Asia or other colonial areas and vice versa (Jackson, 1973). Britishers at that time had understand the importance of this transit route and planned for a long colonial era and global influence but the evolved global geopolitics after the two world wars in twentieth century had changed prospects of the subcontinent region (Rahman et al., 2018).

Whilst talking about the region of South Asia the two names that comes in every mind are Pakistan and India, the only nuclear armed states in the region. The region of South Asia had gained importance since the region had been nuclearized with these two nuclear armed states (Totty, 2000). Geopolitically, the South Asia region is crucial within the extensive Indian Ocean Region (IOR), possessing strategic importance and exerting a significant influence on the security dynamics of the region. India and Pakistan have undergone a significant change in their strategic and policy orientations in recent years, which has had a profound impact on the broader region (Arjun, 2020).

The Indian Ocean Region is the backbone of global economy and trade where the Northern Indian Ocean connecting the important Atlantic Ocean through Mediterranean and Eastern Indian Ocean connecting the vast Pacific Ocean. Strait of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz serves as the two ends of the spinal cord of global trade and economy while other SLOCs serves as the ribs of global trade and economy. Geographically, Pakistan is located on the mouth of critical Strait of Hormuz and India with its Andaman Nicobar command is present near Strait of Malacca. The two straits are the most important Sea Lanes of Communications and plays a remarkable role in global trade and economy. (Saleem, 2023) Talking only the oil trade, Strait of Hormuz is the route of around 21 million barrels of oil per day of all the oil of gulf countries to rest of the world (Dunn & Barden, 2023). Strait of Malacca is the route of around 16 million barrels of oil per day mainly coming from Persian Gulf to China, South Korea, Japan and other economies (Villar & Hamilton, 2017).

Throughout history, the Indo-Pak rivalry has been marked by territorial conflicts, particularly the enduring dispute over Kashmir and occasional clashes along the border. This rivalry had impacted the development of South Asian region as whole. Nevertheless, there has been a noticeable change as both countries move their strategic considerations from an emphasis on land to a focus on maritime affairs.

The importance of this change resides in the shifted emphasis on national interests, as both nations are actively striving to strengthen their naval capabilities. Pakistan on one hand is striving to secure its maritime boundaries and interests in the region while India is striving to exert influence over the Indian Ocean Region through militarization and increasing naval fleets aggressively. The shift of these conflicts from being focused on land to being focused on water highlights the changing goals and strategies of India and Pakistan.

This study thoroughly investigates the consequences of this fundamental change in the broader geopolitical context of the Indian Ocean. The dynamic policies of India and Pakistan have the capacity to redefine the power dynamics in the IOR, bringing up novel ways of cooperation and development along with the intricacies and obstacles. Being the important nations in terms of strategic location, geopolitical significance and containing nuclear capabilities the two countries India and Pakistan have the major role to play for security, development and prosperity of the region and it can only be brought by promoting bilateral cooperation and regional integration in South Asia by all means. By analyzing this shift and the significance of the region, the study intends to provide a more nuanced perspective for Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

2. Literature Review

The Kashmir conflict and cross-border skirmishes between India and Pakistan have had substantial ramifications for the progress of the South Asia region. The prolonged conflict has resulted in numerous military conflicts and frequent clashes along the border, intensifying tensions between the two countries possessing nuclear weapons. The conflicts have caused a diversion of resources, impeding social and economic growth and limiting progress in both countries and the broader South Asian region.

The research of Ahmed and Chakma (2012) has indicated that the ongoing state of violence has had a negative impact on regional stability and cooperation, hindering progress towards regional integration and economic growth. While Ahanger (2019) mentioned that the escalated military spending and security apprehensions arising from the Kashmir conflict have redirected resources that could have been allocated towards education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, thus impeding socio-economic development in the region.

Furthermore, Ahmed and Hussain (2014) reviewed that the unpredictable and unstable character of the relationship between India and Pakistan, mostly caused by the Kashmir dispute, has discouraged foreign investment and impacted cross-border trade and cooperation efforts, thereby constraining the economic prospects of the region. (Sitaraman, 2015) highlighted these continuous conflicts stimulating the development of arms races, resulting in the increased militarization of the region and exacerbating already delicate relations.

The unilateral efforts of India and Pakistan to develop their naval capabilities have had a profound impact on the maritime dynamics in South Asia. Jalil (2018) and Samaranayake (2020) studied India as an emerging regional force implementing a strong naval modernization initiative with the goal of improving its ability to operate in deep waters and establish dominance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This encompasses the induction of aircraft carriers, submarines, and sophisticated surface boats, as well as the establishment of naval bases and infrastructure to facilitate prolonged maritime operations.

Likewise, Khan (2018) in the first ever published maritime doctrine of Pakistan explained Pakistan's priority of enhancing its naval capabilities to protect its maritime interests and discourage any sort of threat, mainly from India. Pakistan's maritime strategy prioritizes the establishment of a reliable naval defense mechanism, with a specific emphasis on

enhancing submarine warfare capabilities and ensuring comprehensive knowledge of the maritime domain.

Saghir and Ejaz (2020) talked about the significant investments made by the both countries in naval technology and global partnerships to enhance their naval capabilities and tackle developing security issues in the maritime sphere. Nevertheless, this unilateral naval expansion efforts of both India and Pakistan have generated apprehensions regarding the possibility of an arms race in the region and increased tensions on waters. This emphasizes the necessity of implementing measures to build trust and establish cooperative frameworks for maritime security. These actions are crucial for fostering stability and reducing the likelihood of conflict escalation.

The scholarly viewpoints on regional cooperation and difficulties emphasize the significant influence of the Kashmir conflict and cross-border clashes between India and Pakistan for the development of South Asia. Ahmed and Chakma (2012) emphasized the negative impact of these disputes on regional stability and cooperation, which has obstructed efforts to achieve integration and economic growth. Ahanger (2019) highlighted the reallocation of resources away from social and economic progress as a result of increased military expenditures and security considerations. Ahmed and Hussain (2014) and Sitaraman (2015) examined the negative impact of an unstable relationship on foreign investment and cross-border trade, which limits economic opportunities. Jalil (2018) and Samaranyake (2020) examined India's endeavors to modernize its naval capabilities, whereas Khan (2018) delved into Pakistan's emphasis on bolstering its naval defense. Saghir and Ejaz (2020) emphasized the possibility of an arms race and heightened tensions, underscoring the importance of collaborative frameworks for maritime security to promote stability and deter the development of conflicts.

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research is qualitative research methodology examining scholarly works, books, policy papers, and official announcements obtained from documents of regional and international organisations. This research seeks to analyse the maritime and nuclear doctrines of India and Pakistan in order to analyze the possibility of regional cooperation in the wake of a paradigm shift to naval strategies in South Asia. The study aims to reveal the inherent difficulties and potential advantages that arise as these nations negotiate the intricate realms of maritime security and nuclear deterrence, by conducting a thorough analysis of these materials. The research seeks to gain a detailed understanding of the factors influencing the strategic landscape of the South Asia region and the broader IOR.

4. South Asia's Naval Shift

4.1 Unilateral Efforts

India's naval modernization include unilateral initiatives aimed at enhancing its maritime capabilities to establish supremacy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Key elements encompass the introduction of sophisticated naval resources like as aircraft carriers, submarines, and surface warships outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment. In addition, India is prioritizing the expansion of its maritime infrastructure, which involves the development of

naval bases and ports to facilitate and sustain prolonged naval activities. (BERLIN, 2004) The objective of these endeavors is to strengthen India's capacity to exert influence and protect its maritime interests, while promoting peace and security in the region. India's efforts to modernize its navy demonstrate its desire to play a bigger role in the maritime sector, in line with its strategic goals of securing naval superiority and safeguarding its maritime trade routes and exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

Pakistan is unilaterally working to modernize its navy in order to strengthen its ability to protect its maritime interests and discourage any threats, especially from India. The nation has placed an extraordinary importance on the development of a reliable naval defense, with a particular focus on enhancing submarine warfare capabilities and awareness of the maritime domain. Pakistan has made significant investments in procuring contemporary frigates, surface vessels, and naval assets in order to enhance its maritime defense capabilities. In addition, there has been a focus on developing infrastructure to support and facilitate longer maritime operations. Pakistan's unilateral actions demonstrate its dedication to upholding maritime security and sovereignty in the northern Indian Ocean, as well as its preparedness to tackle rising security issues in the maritime sector. (Ansari, 2023; Khan, 2010)

4.2 Bilateral Engagements

India's bilateral endeavors to modernize its navy in cooperation with the United States have played a crucial role in improving its maritime capabilities. The defense cooperation between India and the United States, mainly in the naval sector, has experienced significant expansion through joint military drills, transfer of advanced technologies, and strategic discussions. Notable actions involve the endorsement of defense agreements like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which promote the capacity to work together effectively and exchange maritime intelligence. (Saeed & Javaid, 2020) Moreover, India's procurement of sophisticated naval assets like the P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and its involvement in the construction of aircraft carriers highlights the extent of cooperation. The endeavors exemplify a calculated alliance with the objective of advancing maritime security, guaranteeing unhindered passage, and addressing shared maritime obstacles in the Indo-Pacific area.

Pakistan's endeavors to modernize its naval capabilities have resulted in substantial cooperation with countries like China; a crucial strategic ally, Turkey and Romania. Pakistan has bolstered its maritime capabilities by procuring modern navy technology, warships, and equipment from these countries through multiple agreements and cooperations. (Shahzad & Gillani, 2022) Prominent endeavors encompass the procurement of naval vessels, submarines, and missile systems, alongside collaborative drills and instructional initiatives targeted at enhancing capabilities and fostering compatibility. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has also permitted the construction of infrastructure and the expansion of ports, including the Gwadar Port. This has strengthened Pakistan's maritime capabilities and enhanced its strategic location in the Indian Ocean. This bilateral partnership signifies an intensification of defense and commercial relations between Pakistan and China, which enhances regional stability and security in the maritime domain.

The mutual endeavors of India's naval modernization in cooperation with the United States and Pakistan's naval modernization in partnership with China, Turkey and Romania have had a substantial impact on the regional dynamics in South Asia and beyond. The strategic alliance between India and the United States has led to significant cooperation in the maritime sector, encompassing joint military drills, technology sharing, and defense pacts such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). These partnerships have strengthened India's naval capacities, improving its ability to monitor maritime activities, engage in anti-submarine warfare, and power projection.

Conversely, Pakistan's efforts to modernize its navy in cooperation with China have strengthened its maritime alliance with Beijing. This has resulted in the procurement of sophisticated naval assets such as submarines, frigates, and other naval platforms, as well as the exchange of technology and joint ventures. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has enhanced maritime cooperation between China and Pakistan, particularly through the establishment of Gwadar Port as a crucial hub in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The regional dynamics have been significantly impacted by these bilateral initiatives aimed at modernizing naval capabilities. Primarily, they have facilitated the process of making the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) more militarized, hence giving rise to apprehensions regarding an escalation in military buildup and heightened tensions among the states situated along its shores. Furthermore, they have exerted a significant impact on the ability to project power and the positioning of naval forces, so determining how security is seen and strategic alliances are formed in the region. Finally, they have consequences for maritime trade and energy flows, which could have an impact on global economy and energy stability. India's navy modernization efforts, in cooperation with the United States, and Pakistan's initiatives, in cooperation with China, have had significant consequences for regional dynamics. These efforts have led to changes in power balances and security dynamics in the Indian Ocean Region.

4.3 Multilateral Initiatives

India actively engages in naval modernization through its participation in various regional forums and organizations, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), India-France-US trilateral agreement (INFRUS), and initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). India engages in collaborative efforts with regional and global partners in various forums to tackle difficulties related to maritime security, improve compatibility across different systems, and foster peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). India participates in discussions and cooperation with littoral and non-littoral states through IORA and IONS to promote maritime security, facilitate trade, and ensure sustainable development. (Chaudhury, 2018)

Furthermore, India's involvement in QUAD highlights its dedication to strategic alliances and shared security in the Indo-Pacific region. (Jash, 2021; Malhotra, 2023) INFRUS is a trilateral agreement between India, France and United States, aiming to tackle shared security challenges and developing India's second strike capability by providing French

nuclear submarines to India. The agreement will destabilize the power dynamics of South Asia and will pose serious threats on the IOR also. (Masood, 2022)

In addition, India's partnership with ASEAN (Brewster, 2013) and African countries (Nantulya, 2024; Kidwai, 2023) seeks to bolster maritime security capacities, counteract piracy, and augment awareness of maritime domains through collaborative drills, initiatives to develop capabilities, and systems for sharing information. India's aggressive stance towards navy modernization and dedication to fostering a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region are evident in these international endeavors.

Pakistan also engages actively in regional forums and organizations, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), to enhance its naval modernization efforts. These projects seek to improve maritime connectivity, stimulate economic growth, and bolster Pakistan's geopolitical position in the region. Pakistan participates in cooperative initiatives with global institutions including the United Nations and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to tackle issues related to maritime security, such as piracy, smuggling, and terrorism. (Farooq & Qazi, 2023) Besides it, Pakistan has also shown its commitment for a safer and open region to all by contributing in combined task forces in the northern Indian Ocean against maritime terrorism, and piracy. Pakistan aims to enhance its naval capabilities, promote regional cooperation, and contribute to the maintenance of maritime security and stability in the Indian Ocean region by actively engaging in international forums and initiatives. (Shahzad & Gillani, 2022) In addition, Pakistan engages in cooperation with other nations and forums to ensure maritime security. One such example is the AMAAN Exercises, where naval forces from different countries participate in joint training exercises to improve interoperability and fighting capabilities. (Askari & Iqbal, 2023)

4.4 Cooperation and Challenges

4.4.1 Potential for Cooperation

India, Pakistan and the region as whole have considerable diplomatic room to grow together. Natural disasters, pirates, and threats to maritime security are among the maritime issues that the region face. Cooperation in these areas can lead to the development of confidence-building strategies and mutual trust, which in turn can lead to greater regional cooperation. Furthermore, cooperative projects for connectivity and maritime trade might open up economic doors for the region in general and both countries in specific thus fostering stability and prosperity in the region. Additionally, addressing common environmental concerns through cooperation on marine pollution prevention, marine conservation, and sustainable fishing methods can show a dedication to environmental care.

Additionally, maritime cooperation can promote a feeling of shared identity and destiny by facilitating academic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people engagements between India and Pakistan. Through prioritizing discussion, diplomacy, and actions aimed at fostering confidence, both nations can effectively reduce tensions and create a favorable atmosphere for peaceful cohabitation and mutual prosperity within the South Asian region. This diplomatic potential highlights how crucial it is to acknowledge the maritime realm as a

forum for cooperation and communication, providing chances to forge new connections and settle regional disputes.

Multilateral platforms for regional cooperation between Pakistan and India are essential for maintaining stability and promoting cooperation. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an important platform but due to India's stubbornness the platform cannot be utilized for regional development and cooperation. India perceives IORA as a means to promote its strategic goals and bolster its maritime capabilities. Pakistan's inclusion in the organization might potentially weaken India's influence. IORA offers a forum for discussion and cooperation on matters pertaining to the sea, such as trade, environmental preservation, and maritime security. India and Pakistan can demonstrate a willingness to engage in multilateral cooperation by participating in IORA meetings and initiatives, notwithstanding their ongoing tensions (Farid, 2023).

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is another vehicle that, in spite of its difficulties, offers a platform for discussion and cooperation on a range of topics, including maritime security. The platform can provide India, Pakistan and other littoral states of SAARC organization to cooperatively tackle shared maritime challenges, and can also bring fruitful developmental outcomes for the landlocked countries of SAARC like Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal.

Furthermore, programs like the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) encourage communication and cooperation among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, giving Pakistan and India the chance to participate in multilateral initiatives aimed at enhancing maritime security and cooperation.

Through these multilateral forums, India and Pakistan can resolve bilateral issues and collaborate to address common maritime challenges, promoting regional prosperity and stability in the dynamic South Asian strategic environment.

4.4.2 Challenges to Regional Integration

The profound mistrust and historical disputes between India and Pakistan present major obstacles to regional integration in South Asia's changing strategic landscape. One of the main sources of tension is the long-standing Kashmir dispute, which dates back to British India's 1947 split. Both countries claim the territory, and they occasionally engage in armed conflicts. The persistent state of mistrust and animosity stemming from this unresolved territorial dispute impedes attempts at regional cooperation and economic integration. Furthermore, a narrative of fear and zero-sum rivalry has been created by previous conflicts and border skirmishes, which exacerbates mistrust and hinders cooperative attempts. Building confidence and advancing regional integration are made more difficult by the changing strategic environment, which is placing an increasing emphasis on naval assets and maritime affairs. In this regard, steering the complexity of the shifting strategic landscape and establishing long-lasting peace and stability in South Asia depend on resolving past grievances and promoting mutual cooperation (Mamchii, 2023).

The region's attempts to promote peace and development are hampered by political and economic barriers that preclude cooperation and exacerbate conflicts. Economic cooperation

and integration are hampered by trade restrictions and the restricted cross-border trade between India and Pakistan. Unresolved territorial disputes, especially those pertaining to Kashmir, historical grudges, and political tensions exacerbate mistrust and hatred between the two countries, hampering diplomatic attempts at cooperation and reconciliation. Military rivalry and arms races also heighten regional instability and drain resources away from socioeconomic growth, which in turn intensifies security issues (Liaqat & Abbasi, 2023).

Moreover, the strategic rivalry in the maritime sphere introduces an additional degree of intricacy, as both nations aim to demonstrate their naval prowess and sway in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which may result in challenges related to maritime security and elevated strains (Khan, 2016).

Overcoming political and economic barriers is crucial in this changing strategic environment to further regional integration, build mutual trust, and tackle shared issues. In South Asia, reducing tensions and advancing common interests require cooperation frameworks, diplomatic discourse, and efforts to foster confidence.

4.5 Nuclearization of the Indian Ocean Region

4.5.1 Escalating Tensions

The impact of nuclear capabilities on regional security has been strongly influenced by the changing strategic environment in South Asia. The presence of nuclear weapons in the possession of India and Pakistan has brought about a novel aspect to the security dynamics within the region, specifically concerning the maritime realm. The maritime domain presents distinct obstacles and prospects for nuclear deterrence, wherein naval forces assume a pivotal role in molding strategic perspectives and calculations.

The threat of a possible conflict escalation has increased as a result of India and Pakistan's introduction of nuclear weapons into the maritime domain. Because of their stealth and capacity for covert operations, nuclear-armed submarines in particular complicate crisis management and response plans (Jalil, 2018).

Concerns over nuclear security and stability are further heightened by the possibility of unintentional or inadvertent use that comes with having nuclear weapons at sea. The existence of nuclear weapons may quickly increase tensions in the case of a maritime conflict or crisis, with disastrous results for the region and beyond (Ullah, 2021).

The international community has expressed their opinions and worries on the nuclearization of India and Pakistan in the context of South Asia's changing strategic environment. While some countries expressed concerns about the possibility of nuclear war and its escalation in the region and beyond, others stress how crucial nuclear deterrence is to preserving peace and averting catastrophic hostilities. (Rehman, 2012) The possibility of nuclear terrorism or proliferation, increased tensions that could spark an arms race, and the danger of unintentional or intentional use of nuclear weapons are the main causes for concern. The international community also stresses the importance of diplomatic initiatives, dialogue, and confidence-building measures in order to lower the risk of nuclear war and advance regional security. The implications of nuclear capabilities for maritime security and stability in the Indian Ocean region are gaining more attention in the context of an evolving strategic

environment. In order to address common concerns and reduce the risks connected with nuclearization, cooperative actions and international frameworks are encouraged, assuring peace and security in South Asia and beyond.

4.5.2 Analysis of Nuclear Strategies

India's "No First Use" (NFU) policy, which outlines its nuclear doctrine, emphasizes a retaliatory posture by promising not to use nuclear weapons first in any combat situation. In order to prevent possible enemies from launching a nuclear attack, this strategy is supported by the ideas of assured retribution and credible minimum deterrence. Additionally, with the development of its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) program, India's nuclear posture has changed to include a sea-based deterrent, boosting survivability in the maritime domain and offering a second-strike capability.

Similar to this, Pakistan's nuclear policy is based on the idea of "Full Spectrum Deterrence," which includes a variety of measures to thwart and counter nuclear threats over the entire spectrum of hostilities. Pakistan, in contrast to India, has not made clear what its first-use policy is, leaving room for response options in the event of perceived threats. In order to challenge India's conventional military dominance and strengthen its credibility as a deterrent, Pakistan is developing tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) and short-range delivery systems as part of its evolving nuclear posture.

Both nations are integrating their nuclear doctrines into their naval tactics in the context of the maritime realm. India's SSBNs contribute to the strategic stability of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by offering a reliable sea-based deterrent. In the meantime, Pakistan's emphasis on creating a sea-based deterrent is a reflection of its attempts to safeguard its maritime interests and retain strategic parity with India.

The nuclear doctrines of India and Pakistan, taken along with the dynamic strategic landscape of South Asia, highlight the intricate nature of deterrence, escalation dynamics, and the interdependence of maritime and land security requirements. The incorporation of nuclear strategies into maritime affairs adds a new level of complexity to the calculations of regional security, requiring communication, measures to foster confidence, and cooperative initiatives to manage nuclear risks and advance stability in the maritime domain as both nations continue to enhance their naval capabilities.

The nuclear policies of Pakistan and India have significant ramifications for the Indian Ocean in the context of South Asia's changing strategic landscape. Both nations have nuclear weapons and have declared their intentions to use them, as well as the conditions under which they would do so. In keeping with its no-first-use policy, India's doctrine places a strong emphasis on a credible minimum deterrent posture and prioritizes a punitive reaction to nuclear aggression. Pakistan's doctrine, on the other hand, lowers the barrier for nuclear use by placing more emphasis on the development of tactical nuclear weapons to counter perceived conventional military threats from India. Concerns for nuclear escalation in the event of a maritime confrontation are raised by this asymmetry in nuclear postures and the close proximity to their maritime interests in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the significance of controlling nuclear risks and advancing maritime stability through confidence-building

measures, crisis communication systems, and regional cooperation initiatives in the Indian Ocean region is highlighted by the changing strategic environment, which is characterized by growing naval capabilities and maritime competition.

4.6. Regional Organizations for Cooperation and Sustainable Development

4.6.1 Role of SAARC and other regional bodies

Regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are essential in advancing sustainable development and regional cooperation. Members of SAARC can address shared challenges, promote economic integration, and deepen mutual understanding on this forum. Even with its drawbacks, SAARC encourages discussion and cooperation on a range of topics that are becoming more and more relevant to maritime affairs, such as trade, energy, and environmental sustainability.

Given the growing importance of maritime trade and connectivity for economic growth, South Asian nations' strategic aims are in line with SAARC's emphasis on regional connectivity and economic cooperation. Other regional organizations that offer opportunities for cooperation on disaster management, sustainable development, and maritime security include the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

These regional organizations give South Asian nations the chance to work together on issues of common concern and to further interests in the maritime sector, including resource management, maritime trade, and security cooperation. South Asian countries can navigate the changing strategic environment and promote cooperation for sustainable development and security in the region by utilizing the platforms offered by SAARC and other regional organizations.

4.6.2 Opportunities for Cooperation

There are ample prospects of regional cooperation for South Asia in SAARC concerning trade, infrastructural development, and environmental sustainability. Firstly, the focus on maritime affairs creates opportunities to build ports, shipping lanes, and maritime infrastructure, all of which will improve trade connections. Economic integration can be facilitated and cross-border trade facilitated by regional cooperation in trade facilitation measures and regulatory harmonization.

Secondly, joint investments and cooperation are possible in the construction of energy corridors, industrial zones, and transportation networks, which can promote regional economic growth and development. One example of such a project is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) of huge Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Finally, the focus on maritime issues highlights how critical environmental sustainability is to the Indian Ocean region. The long-term viability of marine ecosystems can be supported and environmental degradation can be mitigated by cooperative efforts in pollution control, sustainable fisheries management, and marine conservation.

Considering all these, South Asian nations have the chance to promote regional cooperation in trade, infrastructure development, and environmental sustainability by utilizing

the changing strategic focus on maritime affairs, which will result in shared prosperity and stability in the region.

4.6.3 Challenges to effective cooperation within regional organizations

Within South Asia attempts at cooperation are hampered by historical mistrust and unsolved territorial disputes, such as the strife in Kashmir between India and Pakistan, which also serve to maintain an environment of suspicion and competitiveness. In regional organizations, reaching an agreement and making decisions are made more difficult by member nations' differing national interests and agendas. These discrepancies could be the result of different security considerations, different goals for the economy, or alignment with other countries.

The efficacy of regional organizations in tackling intricate maritime issues like maritime terrorism, illicit fishing, and piracy is restricted by their limited resources and institutional capabilities. Furthermore, the geopolitical rivalry and power dynamics among significant regional actors, such as China, India, and Pakistan, exacerbate the difficulties in establishing genuine cooperation within regional forums. In order to overcome these obstacles, South Asian countries must maintain diplomatic efforts, take steps to boost confidence, and be dedicated to promoting trust and cooperation as they navigate the region's changing maritime strategic environment.

4.7 Future Course of Indo-Pak Bilateral Relations:

4.7.1 Diplomatic Initiatives

In the dynamic strategic landscape of the region diplomatic endeavors aimed at fostering confidence-boosting measures and settling unresolved matters between India and Pakistan are imperative for advancing stability and cooperation. The term "confidence-building measures" (CBMs) refers to a range of diplomatic initiatives designed to lower tensions, increase trust, and stop crises from getting worse. These endeavors could involve hotlines, dialogue channels, and frequent diplomatic visits to promote openness and communication between the two countries.

Furthermore, persistent diplomatic efforts focused at resolving past grievances and identifying win-win solutions are necessary to resolve unresolved issues, including the war in Kashmir. Track II diplomacy, third-party mediation, and bilateral discussions centered on demilitarization, confidence-building measures, and dispute resolution procedures are examples of diplomatic endeavors.

Diplomatic initiatives may also cover cooperative maritime security, joint patrols, and confidence-building measures in the maritime domain in the light of the changing strategic environment with an increasing emphasis on maritime affairs. These programs are designed to stop maritime calamities, improve communication between naval forces, and encourage cooperation in the fight against common maritime issues like piracy, smuggling, and maritime terrorism. Stability, trust, and cooperation between India and Pakistan are contingent upon diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving outstanding concerns and fostering confidence-building measures. In order to advance wealth and peace in the region, such initiatives are essential.

4.7.2 Economic Cooperation

India and Pakistan have the potential to engage in major trade and investment within the SAARC, given the changing geopolitical environment of the region. Both nations understand the potential advantages of strengthening economic cooperation despite past animosities, especially in areas like trade, investment, and infrastructure development but the burden of history and domestic politics plus the politics of elites had hampered the ways of cooperation. In addition to providing opportunities for collaborative projects and development initiatives that might enhance regional wealth, SAARC will act as a forum for promoting communication and cooperation. Given their substantial populations and varied economies, India and Pakistan within SAARC can offer significant trade and investment opportunities. Increasing bilateral investment and trade can benefit both countries, promote economic development, and open up employment prospects. Joint initiatives in the fields of energy cooperation, transportation networks, and infrastructure development can also strengthen connection within the region, promoting trade and deeper economic integration.

Moreover, establishing a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) under the banner of SAARC will act as a potential catalyst for real regional cooperation. It will not only removes the trade barriers but also develop regional connectivity infrastructure and flow of goods, people and capital. It do have the potential to resolve territorial conflicts and open the doors of region for region.

But there are obstacles in the way of taking use of these opportunities, like bureaucratic roadblocks, security worries, and political difficulties. It will need political will, steps to instill trust, and a dedication to communication and cooperation to overcome these obstacles. Despite the challenges, India and Pakistan have a chance to reassess their relationship and give priority to economic cooperation within the SAARC due to the changing geopolitical environment and the growing awareness of the significance of maritime affairs. Both nations can support regional peace, prosperity, and integration in the Indian Ocean region by utilizing the potential for cooperative projects and development initiatives.

5. Conclusion

South Asia, a region of great historical importance, holds a crucial position in world trade and economy, being home to Pakistan and India, the only two nuclear-armed powers in the region. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) plays a crucial role in world trade, as it hosts important sea routes such as the Straits of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz, which is crucial in driving international trade. Throughout the years, the Indo-Pak rivalry, influenced mostly by territorial conflicts such as Kashmir, has transitioned its emphasis from land-based policies and interests to maritime affairs, underscoring a strategic paradigm shift. This change highlights the changing objectives and strategies of both nations, emphasising the increasing significance of maritime security and naval capabilities.

The prolonged Kashmir conflict and sporadic cross-border clashes between India and Pakistan have greatly impacted regional development in South Asia. These wars have not only caused military confrontations and increased tensions, but they have also redirected resources, obstructing social and economic progress and obstructing regional integration initiatives. The enduringly tense relationship between India and Pakistan, intensified by the Kashmir conflict, serves as a barrier to foreign investment and cross-border trade, impeding the economic

prospects of the region. Moreover, the persistent arms race, driven by continuing conflicts, intensifies regional tensions, making it more challenging to achieve peace and cooperation.

The unilateral, bilateral and multilateral initiatives of India and Pakistan to upgrade their naval forces showcase their dedication to protecting maritime interests and improving defence capabilities. Additionally, their collaborative interactions with significant allies like the United States and China signify strategic alignments aimed at strengthening maritime security and influence. Furthermore, collaborative efforts can be pursued through international initiatives such as SAARC, IORA, and IONS, which provide opportunities to address common concerns and foster sustainable growth in the maritime sector. Although nuclearization and historical tensions present difficulties and challenges, there are numerous opportunities for cooperation in trade, infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, and diplomatic efforts. These opportunities can lead to regional stability, prosperity, and peace in South Asia and beyond in the Indian Ocean Region.

5.1 Recommendations

1. Being the important countries of South Asian Region and being the sole nuclear powers in the region the utmost responsibility comes on shoulders of the two countries that requires serious attention towards regional cooperation.
2. Placing aside the past animosities both nations have to come forward for regional development of South Asia and to secure the broader IOR.
3. SAARC countries should have to play the role of enhancing cooperation and bringing a way out to border clashes and territorial conflicts between the two countries.
4. SAARC should have to play the most role for the security and development of Indian Ocean Region thus needs a rigorous plan by having discussions not only on premiere level, ministerial level but also between entrepreneurs and academia of the SAARC members.
5. The South Asian countries should have to exert influence on the IOR collectively as a region and secure the interests of South Asian countries as well as to promote the prosperity of IOR countries.
6. The South Asian countries should have to stop the interference of extra regional powers to maximum utilization of maritime resources for the regional development.
7. The region needs to be demilitarized especially denuclearized for a longer peace as trade and militarization or nuclearization cannot be the passengers of same ride.

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