

## Coming Conflicts with China: Water as Strategic Weapon

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**ABSTRACT:** This article argues that Sino-Indian territorial disputes which not only include the legacy border disputes but in present era water will emerge as an acute threat and as major part of the conflict, especially to the most populous regions of world. Growing economic interests, geo-political interests are rapidly increasing the nature of competition between both the nations which further tend to increase the nature of rivalry but with the changed form of weapons. Physical war has changed its form to water war. We will also indicate the events due to which resistance is increasing but agendas are hidden and ulterior motives are covered under the economic interests and policies of China.

The emerging trends in Sino-Indian relations are known to world but it is interesting that the types of disputes have changed with their sudden rise of as economic and military powers. With rapid growing populations, depleting sources, India and China both are struggling to support its commodity. So water scarcity will become a cause of conflict between Sino-India relations, whether it based on fresh water requirement for livelihood or the sources of water used for trade, security and energy needs. Both India and China are concerned with water oriented geo-political conditions. Water is becoming a serious challenge for Sino-India relations. So this article argues that how China using water as a political and strategic weapon from all sides.

To begin with, this article is divided into two parts based on the mechanism and medium of use. From utility point of view we can divide it as "Himalayan water strategy", and "Indian Ocean region water strategy". In the first part we will begin with the Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and its water resources and how this sovereignty can affect all its riparian countries including India which shares a common land border with china and Tibet too. We will also discuss the varying intentions of China behind this altering. Secondly China's growing interest in strategically important IOR and Pacific regions under umbrella of economic interests. These are utmost important SLOCs from trade point of view and natural resources. To find alternatives routes and deployment of force is under priority. Hence competitive as well as complementary friendship of both the countries will procreate new scenarios for rest of the world.

**KEYWORDS:** Water Scarcity, Tibet, Sea Exploration, Economic Interests, Security.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

"A recent World Bank report has presumed that by 2020 most of the major Indian cities will run dry".[1] Firstly, Tibet is source of water for nearly 10 countries and to 40 percent of the world. The 2906 km long Brahmaputra is one of Asia's largest River that traverse its first stretch of 1625 km at Tibet, the next 918 km in India and the remaining 363 km through Bangladesh before converging into the Bay of Bengal.[2] The major cause of coming conflict is the specially the surrounded region of Brahmaputra River which is Known as "South Tibet" by China and "Arunachal Pradesh" by India. India is still on McMahan Line agreement of 1914 but China rejects the notion. So China's absolute sovereignty over Tibet means sovereignty over river waters.

Secondly IOR strategy can be explained as it encompasses the region of Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean and is formally known as Asia-Pacific region. This region has its own importance due to economic and security affairs. Major world powers such as EU and its member states including smaller maritime powers are increasing their presence in the Indian Ocean. As we know US still dominates over security structure of the Indo-Pacific region due to its economic and strategic interests. China equally showing interest and US too cautious about China's growing interest. Hence it is considered that alternative route strategy helped to explore revolution for PLAN and China in Indian Ocean Region.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj explained while addressing the Fifth Round Table of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) "The Indo Pacific region, is increasingly seen as a connectivity pathway - much of the world's trade passes through these oceans, These waters must not only get better connected, but remain free from traditional and non-traditional threats, that impede free movement of people, goods and ideas," Indo pacific region now a day's become the most important region with major connecting

waterway trade routes and is home of major nuclear powers such as India, ASEAN countries, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Russia and America. There are many internal and external factors which we will study and find out the differences between prevailing conditions of both the countries.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The following paper has been written with the objective to analyze the strategies used by China on waters beneath economic interests. This paper is based on primary and secondary data collected from various sources online discussion platforms, newspapers, websites, journals and books etc. The findings were discussed according to the actual conditions of India. Chinas Maritime strategy of 21<sup>st</sup> century can be categorized into four directions:

- a. South china Sea,
- b. The East China Sea,
- c. Indian Ocean
- d. Indo-Pacific regions.

These are important Channel of recourse and trade suppliers for China as well as for world, but our study will focus on only two major parts comparative to Indian strategic point of view. China can use water as a strategic or Political tool at any time either through

**(A) Indo-China on Himalayan water strategy,**

**(B) Indian Ocean Region strategy.**

➤ Himalayan water strategy can be further explained under the circumstances as:

- 1) By reverting/ diversion projects.
- 2) Excessive flooding,
- 3) By reducing its flow with dam projects.
- 4) By polluting water/ by tunneling or reducing waste. (Siang river)

Others perceptions of India are supposed as:

- 1) Arunachal Pradesh region acts as buffer for India and providing strategic depth to India so to study China's intentions.
- 2) China as upper riparian state can misuse its position.
- 3) China's withholding of hydrological data i.e. India is unaware of the approaching floods. As a dam burst in May 2000 in Tibet triggered a flash flood in Arunachal Pradesh.

➤ Main stress points for Indian Ocean Region strategy are:

- 1) Strategic encirclement of Indian amid a change of balance of power.
- 2) To urbanise and develop its own infrastructure for rapid growing population.
- 3) Sovereignty over rich natural resources of IOR.
- 4) To set up other alternative economic zones and ways.

In the conclusion section we discuss the retrospect and prospects behind sovereignty over Tibet by China, its impacts on India and further the status of IOR with analysis.

## **III. METHODOLOGY OF THE PAPER**

The paper is prepared using both quantitative and qualitative methods which is basically based on primary and secondary sources. Through questionnaire analysis and a heuristic document search methods lots of journal articles, workshop and seminar papers were analyzed in this article. This article thus composed of various quantitative information and data. Through the questionnaire/ interviews we will try to focus on major issues and hurdles on the ways with the views of defense personals and civil personal and then compare the output to understand the awareness and complexity levels of relationship on water and security matters. Based on the findings, some broad observation and conclusions are made in this paper.

### **1. INDO-CHINA ON HIMALAYAN WATER STRATEGY**

Due to developing stage, urbanization, agriculture needs and rapid growth of economy, India and China are struggling with depleting water sources today and it is expected that water will become either political or strategic weapon.

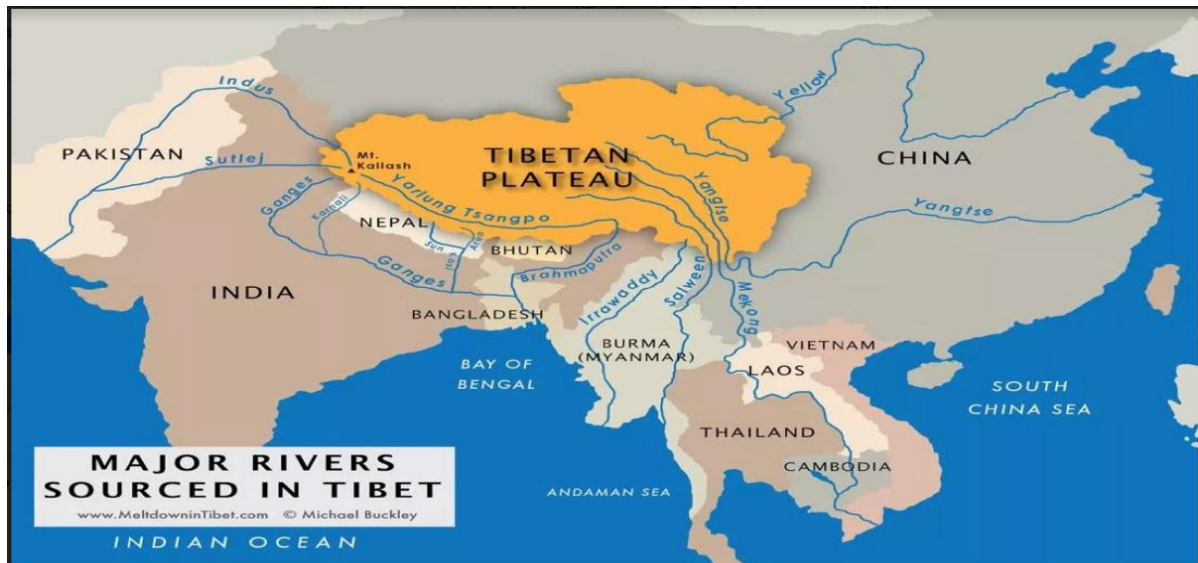


Figure1. Major Rivers Sourced in Tibet.

**1.1. Political status of Tibet: Retrospect of Suzerainty or Suppression?**

Since China’s invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1950, many questions are still in minds of people about political status of Tibet whether it is suppression or suzerainty? From the first known king of Tibet, who was Indian named Nya-tri Tsen-po, said to have the fifth son of the Indian king Prasenjit of Kosal through Buddhism and Sanskrit literature, with the introduction of Nagari and Bengali scripts, Tibet was then (A.D. 635) a powerful country and even China acknowledged her superiority. There was also no trace of Chinese political influence over Tibet during the reign of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tibet and China always remained bounded with “the religious link” of Buddhism ever after the overthrow of the Mongolian regime of Kablai Khan and his successors. After that the first king of Ming Dynasty, Chu Yuan-Chang (Ming T’ai-tsu), who brought the Mongolian regime to an end, he first time ever thought about complete sovereignty over Tibet. According to the Rockhill, in the histories of the Yuan and Ming dynasties do not provide a single reference of China ever having political relations with the temporal rulers of Tibet.[3]

Towards the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Tibetan priests’ religious influence over the Mongols and Chinese became the cause of the latter’s interference with Tibetan affairs including a death conspiracy of sixth Dalai Lama. In 1720, the Chinese emperor despatched army to Tibet and the result was “Chinese suzerainty over the whole Tibet including Bhutan” was insured. Supervision of Tibetan affairs through Chinese representative on demand of Tibet, establishment of office of two Chinese residents called Ambans with troops then led Tibet under Chinese control after assassination of both the resident Amban and the Tibetan King of that time , Gyurmed-Namgyal. Up to the spiritual and temporal authority was under Dalai Lama. Concluding remarks shoed that Chinese suzerainty was established in the later half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rivalry between China and Nepal made China’s position stronger in Tibet. Up to that time the Gurkhas had gained power in whole country. They attacked Tibet in 1788 and 1791 but Chinese army came to defend Tibet. China was now so conscious to hold Tibet controlled its foreign affairs. Another big step taken by Chinese was that the Resident now ‘ruled the Tibet on behalf of the Chinese Emperor.’[4] From the closing years of 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese lordship grew weaker and weaker. In the 1840 in the so called Opium war, Chinese government was hardly able to maintain its hold over Tibet. After taking advantage of this Tibetan Dalai lama became the real ruler nearly 1841 with Chinese Ambans positioned to foreign envoys. Invasion of Dogras of Kashmir in western Tibet was defeated by Tibetans and a treaty is signed in 1842, called “Tibetan Letter of Agreement, 1842” with no Chinese at background and foreground. But after 13 years Gurkhas again attached Tibet and again defeated then Chinese Emperor however remained under the treaty of 1856 between Tibet and Nepal called “Treaty between Nepal and Tibet, March 1856” with brotherhood declaration in front of Chinese Emperor. Now the time arrived when Tibetan began openly repudiating Chinese Sovereignty. In the last few decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century when British Government’s Indian officials was unable to obtain trade facilities in Tibet then they approached Chinese government and obtained passport. This confirmed the British belief of their recognition of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet. Hence a treaty was concluded in 1890 between ‘Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and ‘His Majesty the Emperor of China’ relating to Sikkim and Tibet secured for the fixation of boundary between both countries and water flows and was repudiated by the Lamas. So China also needs to adopt a fresh approach to the Tibetan situation. It is main question by Tibet itself over its political status that what kind of

suzerainty is being exercised over Tibet and how long did it last? But the main question is that is it suzerainty or suppression by China?

**1.2. India's recognition about Tibet as Chinese Territory: Mistake or Ignorance of coming conflict.**

As Sonam Topgyal, in *political treaties of Tibet (821 to 1951)* wrote about Tibet's description in context of China sovereignty is as: "Despite this tremendously open support to our struggle, the repeated proclamation, "Tibet is a part of China," by the Indian Government is not only unfortunate but highly undiplomatic too. Especially if one perceives it in the light of the fact that China has never conceded the same kind of concession regarding Sikkim, Arunachal or Kashmir. A country which has been saying that it is well prepared and always ready to face any threat should be adopting such an appeasing posture needs to take advantage of the changes taking place in the world politics.[5]

Another statement is given by on this issue by Mr. Kiren Rijiju, A BJP MP from Arunachal Pradesh and Minister of State for Home Affairs. He, who is native from Arunachal Pradesh openly argued in 2008 that India "India's recognition of China's Invasion of Tibet was a mistake and that India bears responsibility for Tibet's tragedy".

In a Question, "India mainly dependent on ground water and surface water coming from Tibet (China) and Brahmaputra (Tsang Po in China) river. China is planning to divert waters to North China. Does India have made a mistake by considering Tibet as the autonomous part of China?" asked for observation, to "Educationists Civilians" and "Defense Personnel" through a stratified sampling. We observed that nearly 50 percent of people are either agree and strongly agree.

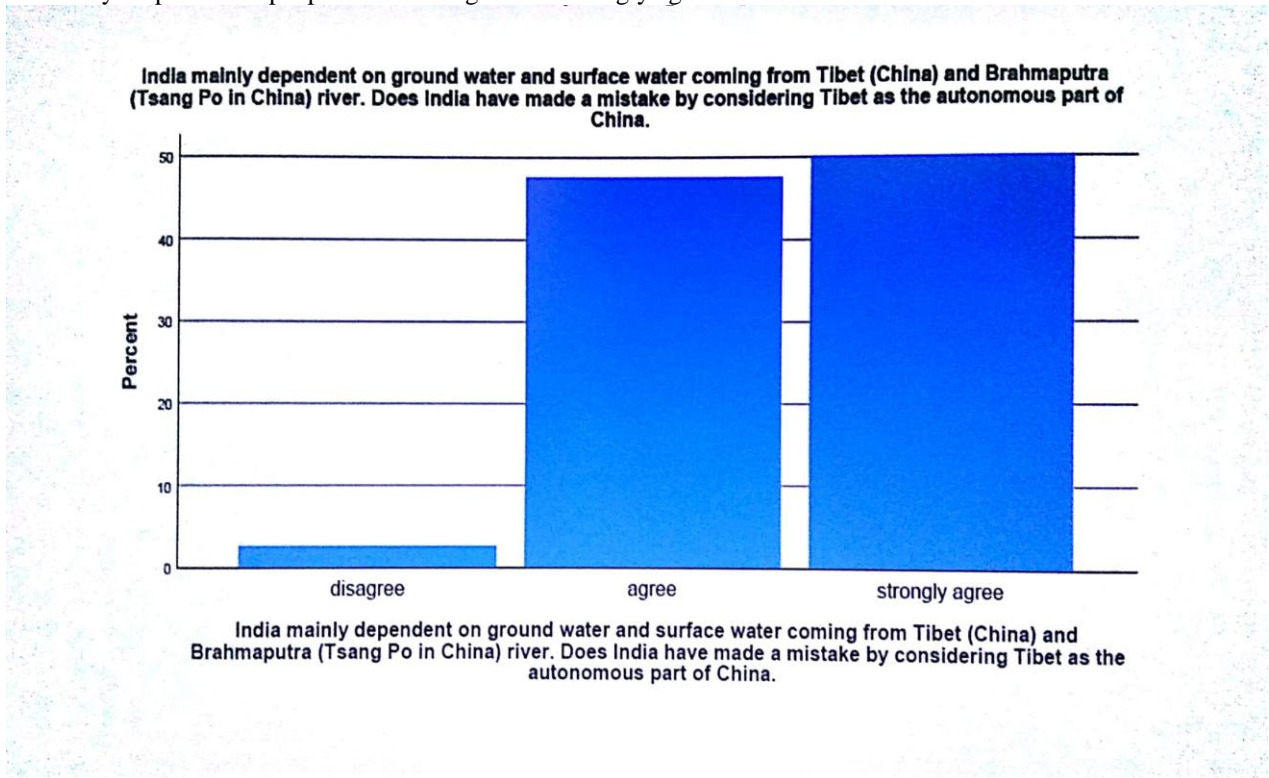


Figure2: Questionnaire 1

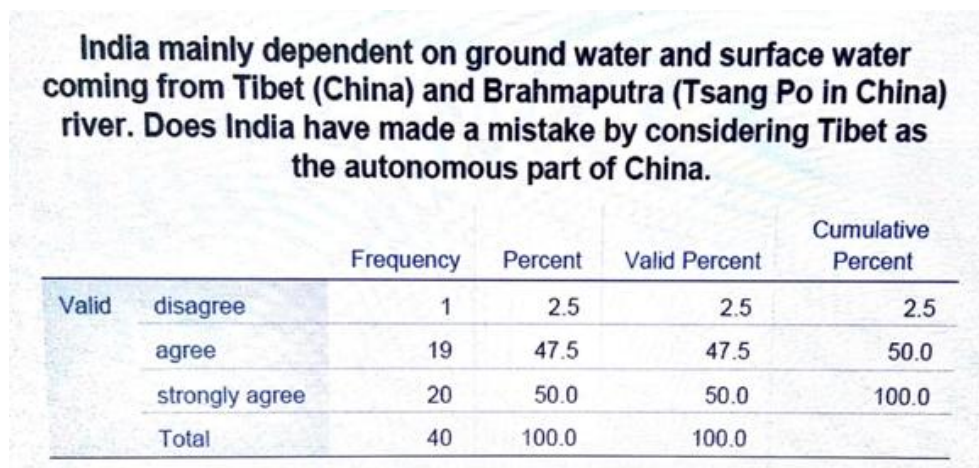


Figure3: compiled results from Question 1.

### 1.3. China's water strategy through Tibet and India's Concerns: Lack of Water treaty

Rivers which are originated from Tibet are Indus, Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo), Mahakali, Gandaki and Kosi. Tibet is known as "The water tower of Asia". Brahmaputra River accounts for highest or 29% of the total runs off the India's Rivers and about 44% of India's total hydro power potential. Brahmaputra River is playing a important role in irrigation, hydroelectricity generation and in developmental need of India, China and Bangladesh. India too had inter-state and intra state conflicts on water due to water scarcity. India having 55% of total water needs from ground water. India had recognized water security as an overriding national objective in the year 1987.[6]

Yarlung Tsangpo River, which becomes Brahmaputra River after it enters India, is the major source of water for Northern Eastern states of India. The news of China's 1000 km tunnel project to divert the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Southern Tibet to Taklimakan desert in Xinjiang led to immense deep concerns by India and Bangladesh. Major reason behind this concern is that Taklimakan desert has 90 percent that area, to which they want to develop for living and settlement, is not possible without water. There are many water treaties signed with other Indian neighbors like Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan but no one yet with China. If we detailed about the treaties of Tibet with outer world then we find that there is no such treaty.

These are treaties over the region with Tibet but there is no such treaty on water.

- The Sino-Tibetan Treaty of 821/823 A.D.
- Peace Treaty between Ladakh and Tibet at Tingmosgang (1684)
- Ladakhi Letter of Agreement, 1842
- Tibetan Letter of Agreement, 1842
- Agreement between Tibet and Kashmir (1852)
- Treaty between Nepal and Tibet, March 1856
- Agreement between the Chinese and Tibetans, 12 August 1912
- Agreement of the Chinese and Tibetans, 14 December 1912
- Proclamation Issued by H. H. the Dalai Lama XIII, on the Eight Day of the First Month of the Water-Ox Year (1913)
- Treaty of Friendship and Alliance
- Anglo-Tibetan Declaration of 3 July 1914
- Convention between Great Britain, China and Tibet, Simla 1914
- India-Tibet Frontier 1914: Exchange of Notes between the British and Tibetan Plenipotentiaries
- Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, 23 May 1951[5].

## 2. INDIAN OCEAN REGION: AS AN EMERGING GEO-POLITICAL THRUST

Chinas aspirations to become sea power are not new. Its desire to develop as "maritime civilization" is expressed implicitly. After having approximately 6500 islands, 18000 km coastline and 3 million square kilometers of territorial seas China lags behind in oceanic development. China tends to show its aspirations through iterations in meetings, maritime institutional reforms, by increasing national defense budget for naval development, maritime committees, and Maritime Bureaus directly under ministry of National Territory and Resources etc. In November 2012 in Chinese Communist Party's 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress, in annual National People's Congress meeting in March 2013, China reiterated its aspiration to become sea power. Many documentaries describing Sea aspirations are launched from time to time by china as: "Maritime Civilization"



(1998), “The Rise of Great Nations” (2006), “Towards the Sea” (December 2011). Losing sea battle to Japan in 1895 is China’s agony. All the major world powers like U.S., Russia are Sea Powers while China does not. Epochal chock point in the geography of IOR can be described briefly as:

- **The Suez Canal:** an artificial sea-level channel, which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.
- **The Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb:** It is strategic link between Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.
- **The Strait of Hormuz:** Is strait between the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf.
- **Mozambique Channel:** Arm of Indian Ocean located between Madagascar and Mozambique.
- **Strait of Malacca:** Narrow stretch between the Peninsula and Sumatra, Indonesia.
- **Strait of Sunda:** It connects Java Sea to Indian Ocean. It is an alternative to Malacca strait.
- **Strait of Lombok:** It connects Java Sea to Indian Ocean.

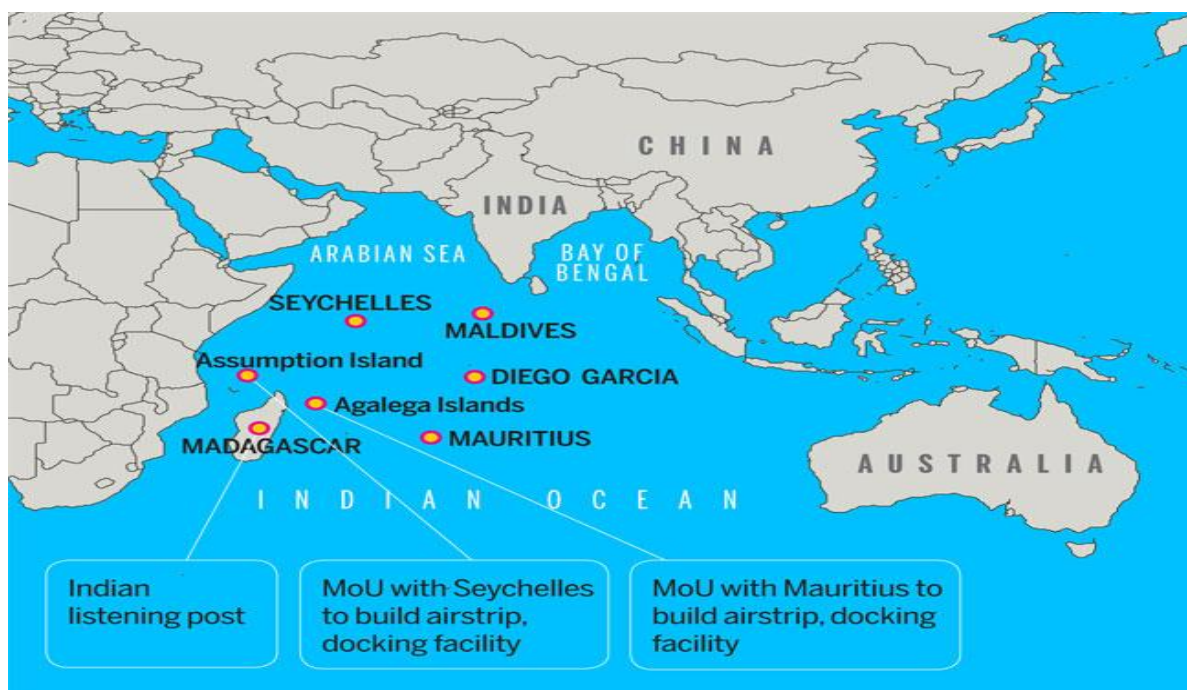


Figure3: Bases of Indian and china in IOR

### 2.1. Aggressive Maritime strategy of China: Doubt and Distrust factor

China being a part of East Asia is keen to build a strong Maritime strategy in present era. China’s “National Defense White Book” (2005) noted that China should build a strong and modernized navy to protect its maritime interests. In 2006, as an echo to the international discussion on China’s rise, another CCTV documentary, “The Rise of Great Nations”, featured the great powers in history and implied that they were all sea powers.[7]

Today, South Asia stands at the frontline of a major westward expansion of Chinese Interests and influence; one embodied by China’s ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR), New Maritime Silk Road initiatives. Designed to advance a web of interrelated Military, economic, diplomatic, and energy security-related initiatives and objectives, OBOR, and the growing Presence of the People’s Liberation army Navy (PLAN) in the Indian Ocean, have revived Indian fears about Chinese encirclement and a Neo-“String of Pearls.” [8] So the main stress is on to find an alternative route of Strait of Malacca and its dependence on vulnerable SLOC’s.

Also In a question “China and America are reiterating that Indian Ocean Region (IOR) does not belong to India, because of its name. So it has Diverted PLAN towards the deep Ocean Region only to fulfill her Economic interests in IOR?”, asked for observation, to “Educationists Civilians” and “Defense Personnel” through a stratified sampling, we observed that

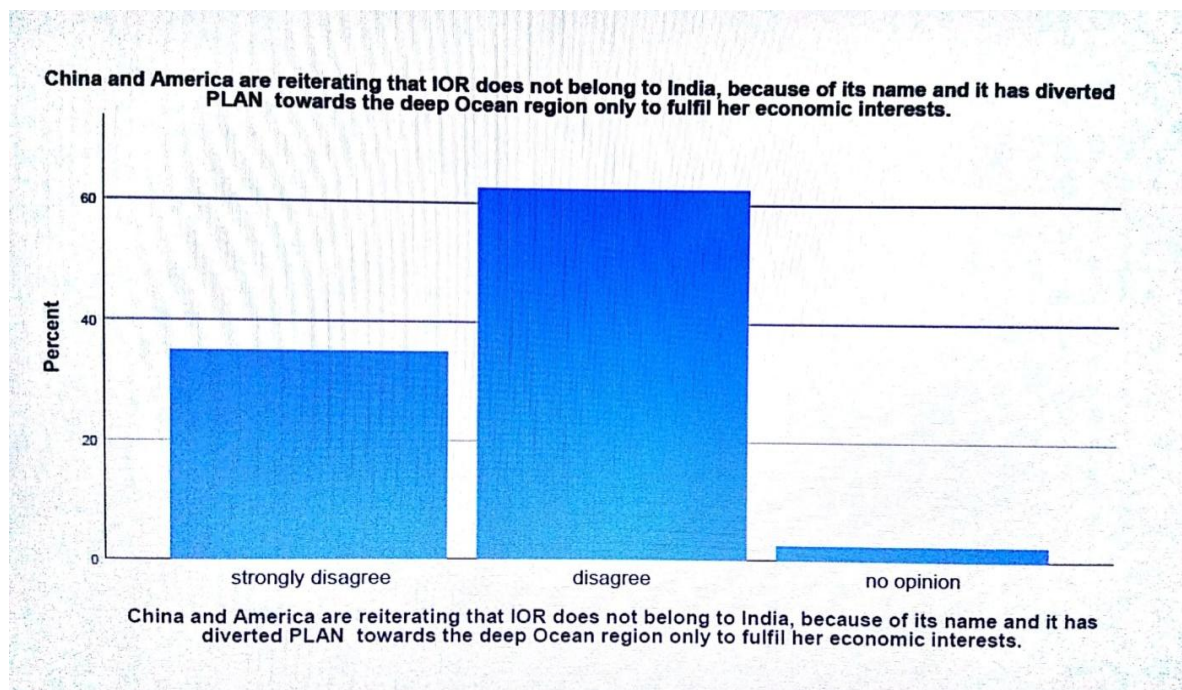


Figure 4: Survey Question 2

**China and America are reiterating that IOR does not belong to India, because of its name and it has diverted PLAN towards the deep Ocean region only to fulfil her economic interests.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	14	35.0	35.0	35.0
	disagree	25	62.5	62.5	97.5
	no opinion	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5: compiled answer from Question 2.

So China interests raised tensions especially between South Asian countries. New fault lines are being created on the issues of water due to expansion of their geographic interests. China’s OBOR plan is suspected as “Trojan Horse” by Indian analysts.

Professor Srikainth Kondapalli concludes: “when you put together all these jigsaw puzzles it becomes clear that Chinese focus in Indian Ocean is not just for trade. It is grand design for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” [9]

## 2.2. IOR and China: Deep Sea Activities and Bases

China’s growing naval presence is threat to many neighboring countries including India. China’s feeling of insecurity about Strait of Malacca and its major import through Indian Ocean is the main reason behind the OBOR initiative. Indian Ocean is world’s third largest water body. The bases in the IOR have been on rise since 2014. In July 2011, the ISA (International Seabed Authority) approved COMRA’s (China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association) application to explore South Western Indian Ocean

near Southeast of Madagascar. Apart from this China claims sovereignty of almost 90 percent of South China Sea.

Chinese analyst Shen Dingli says, China has every “right” to establish naval bases in the Indian Ocean. He further explained about the trade route blocking threat. China expanded its wings towards many countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka etc. China seeks these bases to develop a complete network on Sea and to avoid coming future conflicts. By granting huge concessional loans to coastal islands, providing infrastructure projects China is going on to compete with India in counting of bases. Indian Ocean region remains as center of attraction for Xi’s dream project OBOR.

Bases by China in IOR:

- Gwadar port (Pakistan) in 2015,
- Hambantota Port and Colombo Port (Sri Lanka)
- IHeaven project, Male (Maldives) (2009),
- Chongjin Port ( North Korea),
- Moresby Port ( Papua New Guinea),
- Sihanoukville Port (Cambodia),
- Koh Lanta Port (Thailand),
- Sittwe Port (Myanmar),
- Dhaka port (Bangladesh),
- Mahe port (Seychelles) (2010)
- Djibouti Port (Djibouti),
- Lagos Port (Nigeria),
- Mombasa Port (Kenya),
- Dar-es-Salaam Port (Tanzania),
- Luanda Port (Angola)
- Walvis Bay port (Namibia)

Apart from these ports next hit by both countries is Iranian port (Port of Chabahar). Since 2003 Iran was showing concerns with India, but Iran also welcomed Chinese and Pakistani investment besides India. Now India got rights competing China.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Presently Indian government is following the Policy of Former Indian UPA government by continue oppose of “One China” Policy of China. Hence in March 2015 a high profile tour of Indian Ocean islands Nations by PM Narendra Modi is also aimed at limiting China’s influence in IOR. Indo-US relations can set a balancing theory towards Indo-China threat theory.

Firstly, it cannot go on denying the historical truth that Tibet has always been a free and independent nation. Indo-China agreement to provide “hydro-electric” data is not only sufficient for the time but water treaty with lower riparian states is need of the hour. India should set up a treaty on water with its neighbors to avoid any future conflicts.

Secondly, China has set up basis in Indian Ocean region (IOR) closer to String of pearls or Indian coast with diplomacy of financial aid in construction of ports in the other neighboring states of India. Indo-Pacific region having 2/3 of Oceanic space, economic networks of 55 nations including majority of developing countries and nuclear powers in its range and China is the only power after US that could disturb the IOR environment. China’s extreme expostulation regarding disputed waters than disputed borders ramping up its aggressive maritime strategy, but China always claims to never seek hegemony.

Finally, Stress should be on solving distrust factor of maritime aspiration between both countries. As we know water could be used as strategic and political tool, so Indian policies makers should exactly measures all the initiatives deeply with prospects, so as to avoid any mistake which can spoil the balance of power equation between neighboring countries of India. Setting up of bases only due to competition factor for power in the IOR could disturb the peaceful Indian Ocean and tranquility of concerned nations. Diplomatic and political negotiations could manage the priorities regarding economic priorities of each country.

In the end, Encirclement of India by China starting Tibet, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and through IOR island states is creating suspicions for India’s so our Naval force infrastructure and technology should be equally competent with the opponent. Due to vast increasing population, global warming issues, resource crises, climate crises, power struggle, access to natural resources in IOR, territory issues, economic interests, both the countries should maintain the peace with mutual negotiations and should respect each other’s sovereignty.

Support and suggestion of other world powers on major issues could avoid any resistance in any interlinked crises and disasters.



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