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**China's Relations with the
Indian Ocean Region:
Combining Realist and
Constructivist Perspectives**

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ICS Occasional Paper # 2

**China's Relations with the Indian Ocean Region:
Combining Realist and Constructivist Perspectives**

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Foreword

International Relations discourse today is replete with debates which clearly suggest that the India Ocean Region (IOR) will be the new pivot of the twenty first century geopolitics. There are several strands within this emerging discourse. One, the Indian Ocean as the locus of the traditional trade routes and its contemporary importance in terms of being the dominant route for the transport of hydro-carbon resources for a large number of states, especially China (the largest importer of energy through this route); two, its criticality in the rise of the non-traditional threats to security such as piracy and drug trafficking, to name the most significant; and three, its continuing significance as an arena of big power competition.

There is little doubt that the IOR will constitute the space where the dominant power of the world, the US will engage with the rest of Asia. The People's Republic of China, the second most important power after the US in the IOR has also regarded the IOR as the most important strategic space in the contemporary period. The nature of the presence and activities of both these powers is of utmost interest to India and any adverse activity directly impinges on Indian interests. While the alleged 'string of pearls' concept, wherein Indian strategists believe that China is attempting to encircle India by building bases in India's maritime vicinity, is beginning to lose some of its edge in recent times, its salience is still witnessed in some of the security/strategic debates in India.

It is therefore necessary to take a critical and objective look at China's presence and activities in the IOR. Sithara Fernando has embarked on a systematic and methodical analysis of China's relations with the IOR and sought to analyse these relations from the perspective of the dominant theoretical frameworks of international relations. In the process he identifies the Constructivist approach as being of great relevance in setting out a framework of cooperation for the Indian Ocean littoral, as they grapple with the complex challenges stemming from non-traditional threats to security. The intertwined interests and the need to evolve cooperative strategies in an era of economic globalization, emerge in sharp relief. Equally he projects the need to engage with China by binding it into a web of international legal obligations and agreements, as the most cost effective way to address some of the perceived challenges from a rising China.

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China's Relations with the Indian Ocean Region: Combining Realist and Constructivist Perspectives

Abstract: China is at present heavily dependent on Indian Ocean sea lanes for the import of energy and raw material needed to fuel its economic growth. With the increase of the Somali piracy threat to these sea lanes around 2008, China began regularly deploying a three-ship naval escort taskforce to the Gulf of Aden. Through activities surrounding this deployment China has significantly enhanced its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In terms of International Relations (IR) theory, while the realist perspective foresees a power struggle in the IOR involving the United States, China and India, the social constructivist view is hopeful that China can be socialized into thinking and acting cooperatively with regard to security in the IOR. Policymakers in India should take both these views into cognizance and chart a middle path in responding to the rise of China in the IOR.

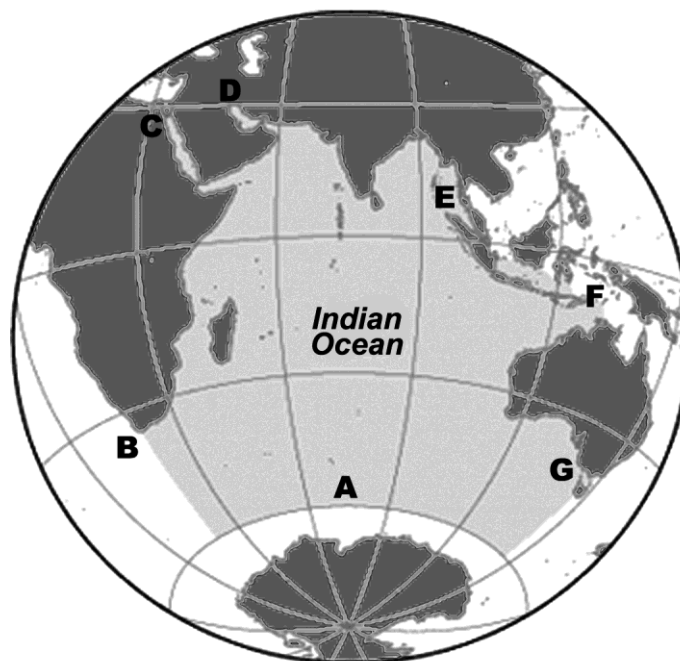
Keywords: China, energy security, Indian Ocean Region, IR theory, realism, social constructivism

Definitions of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) generally tend to include hinterland or land-locked states that are dependent on the Indian Ocean, in addition to the littoral and island states (Roy-Choudhury 1997: 117; Luke 2010: 2-4), and at least one definition has also included Britain and France by virtue of their territorial possessions in the Indian Ocean (Schofield 2007: 3, endnote 3). However, given the maritime focus of this paper it has mainly limited itself to the consideration of China's relations with the littoral and island states of the Indian Ocean. In addition, following the deliberations of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), the Track II forum of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), regarding a seamless approach to sea lane security from the Middle East through the Indian Ocean to East Asia (CSCAP 2008), it also considers, in passing, the South China Sea.

As a result of increased attention to maritime trade and naval power during the Song dynasty (960-1279) Chinese ships became a common sight in the Indian Ocean by the latter half of the 13th century and first half of the 14th century. The growth of Chinese maritime power in this period reached a peak with Zheng He's voyages from 1407-1433. However, by the end of the 15th century an inward looking continental focus emerged and China remained more or less a continental power till Adm. Liu Huaqing began articulating his vision for the expansion of Chinese maritime power in the mid-1980s. This vision aimed to make China a blue-water naval power

capable of projecting power in the high seas by 2050. The People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) expanding maritime strategic vision is also reflected in the concept of ‘far seas operations’ which emerged in the late 1990s, and in a speech given by President Hu Jintao to China’s Central Military Commission (CMC) in December 2004 which has come to be known as the ‘Historic Missions’ speech. As this paper will elaborate later, both the concept of ‘far seas operations’ and the ‘Historic Missions’ speech have implications for the IOR. Due to the self-image of the United States as guarantor of freedom of navigation globally, including in the IOR, China’s expanding maritime strategic vision has led to concerns in the US about the possibility of China mounting a challenge to this role. India will therefore, have to negotiate its way carefully in the context of both a powerful US presence and the emerging Chinese involvement in the region.

Map 1: Limits of the Indian Ocean



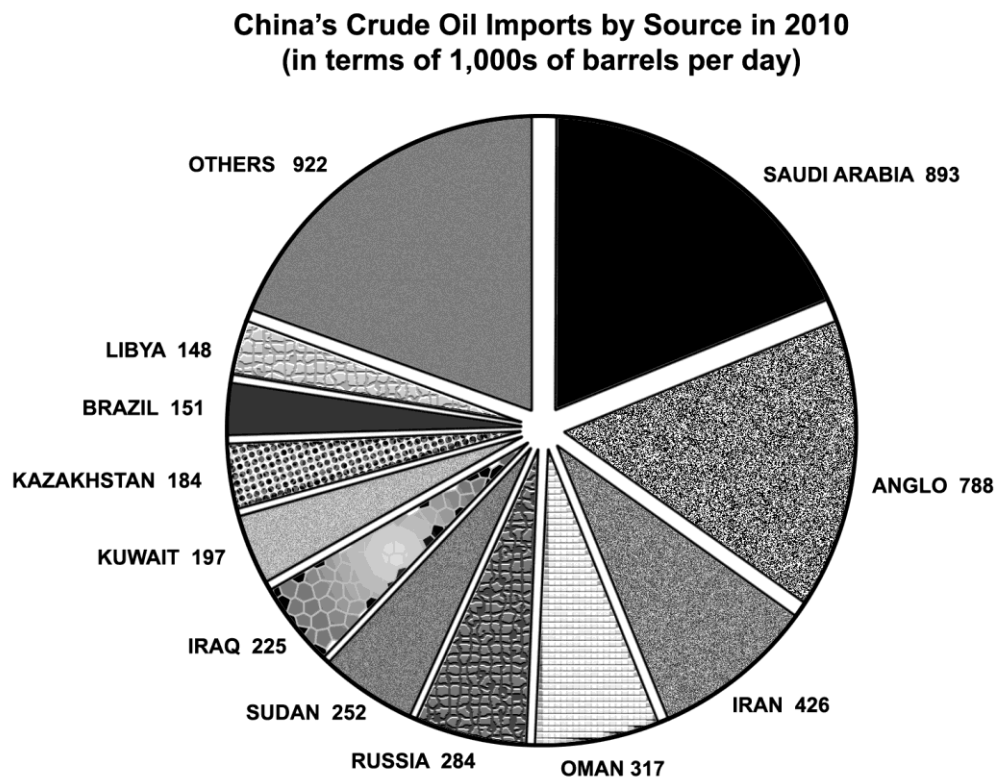
The Indian Ocean can be geographically delimited by the following points:

- A: latitude 60 degrees South (the northernmost limit of the Southern Ocean);
- B: Cape Agulhas (the southernmost point of the African continent);
- C: the Suez Canal;
- D: the northernmost reaches of the Persian Gulf;
- E: the Straits of Malacca;
- F: from the Singapore Strait to the eastern boundary of the Timor Sea (including the Java, Flores and Banda Seas that lie within the archipelagic waters of Indonesia); and
- G: the west coast of King Island, Tasmania (but not including the waters of Bass Strait)

Source: Luke 2010: 3.

The expanding maritime strategic vision of China was paralleled by the opening of the Chinese economy and China's emergence as a major trading power. However, the opening of the Chinese economy introduced new vulnerabilities. China became a net importer of oil in 1993. By 2002, 50 per cent of China's oil imports came from the Middle East/ West Asia (Hu 2004: 313). Much of this oil had to be transported back to China through the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait, which as China saw it, were controlled by foreign powers. This Chinese vulnerability was famously articulated by President Hu Jintao as the 'Malacca Strait dilemma' in a speech given to the CMC in December 2003. By 2010, approximately 68 per cent of China's crude oil imports came from the Middle East/West Asia and Africa (See Fig. 1) (cited in USEIA 2011).

Figure 1
China's Crude Oil Imports by Source in 2010
(in 1,000s of barrels per day)



Source: cited in USEIA 2011

With its growing trade with Africa, parts of Asia and Europe in general, and its imports of oil from the Middle East/West Asia and Africa, in particular, dependent on the security of sea lanes in the IOR, China had to respond in a timely manner when the problem of piracy off the Somali coast became acute in 2008. It dispatched its first naval escort taskforce to the Gulf of Aden in December 2008, and the eleventh taskforce is active at the time of writing. Through activities surrounding this deployment, which will be referred to during the course of this paper, China has significantly enhanced its involvement with the IOR.

With regard to how the world should respond to the rise of China, there is, in general, a vibrant debate between the optimists and the pessimists. The latter are concerned that with its increasing power China will become a threat to other countries. They argue that to reduce this danger the rest of the world should stand firm against China and contain its expansionist tendencies. Optimists, on the other hand, believe that a stronger China need not necessarily be a more aggressive China. They argue that to encourage cooperative behaviour on the part of China, it is important to engage it and integrate it into the international system. This policy debate also has theoretical implications within International Relations (IR) theory, with realists motivated by the logic of power politics supporting the pessimist view, and social constructivists motivated by the logic of socialization supporting the optimist view (Wang 2000: 71-73). This paper will try to show these two different strands of thinking has implications for how we should understand the rise of China in the IOR, and for how India should respond to this phenomenon. In order to do this, it will first examine the historical background of China's interaction with the IOR. Second, it will look at the PRC's expanding maritime strategic vision. Third, it will provide a broad factual overview of China's current involvement in the IOR. Fourth, it will lay out two perspectives on China and the IOR in terms of the IR theories of realism and social constructivism. Finally, it will reflect on the implications for India in terms of the realist view and the social constructivist view and attempt to chart a middle path for Indian policymakers to follow.

Historical Background

South Asian ports were important trans-shipment points for trade between China and markets in the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean since at least the first century BCE. Chinese silk yarn that reached South Asia was shipped to Rome through Barbarican (present day Bhanbhore, in Sindh) and Barygaza (present day Broach, in Gujarat); similarly, Roman merchandise such as coral and glass were shipped to China through South Asian ports. The transmission of Buddhist ideas to

China starting in the late second century CE enhanced the commercial links between the coastal regions of China and India. The transmission of Buddhist doctrines to China led to the development of an interdependent and reciprocal relationship between Buddhist monks and merchants travelling between India and China. Merchants regularly assisted the growing number of Buddhist monks travelling the overland and maritime routes to China, met the growing demand for ritual items, and actively financed monastic institutions and proselytizing activities. Buddhist monks and monasteries, in turn, fulfilled the spiritual needs of the itinerant merchants and helped introduce new items in the stream of commodities traded between India and China. For instance, the Buddhist teaching of *saptaratna* (*qibao* in Chinese, ‘seven jewels’ in English) created and sustained the demand for items such as pearls, lapis lazuli and coral exported from India (cited in Sen 2011: 43-44). This interdependent network of long-distance trade and the transmission of Buddhist doctrines facilitated the movement of monks, merchants and merchandise between the coastal towns of India and China (Sen 2011: 42-44).

Perhaps the best known of these Buddhist pilgrims is Fa Hsien, who left China overland for India in 399 CE and returned by sea via Sri Lanka in 413-14 CE. The account of his journey back to China is an enthralling one. From Sri Lanka,

he took passage on board a large merchant vessel, on which there were over two hundred souls, and astern of which there was a smaller vessel in tow in case of accidents at sea and the destruction of the big vessel. Catching a fair wind, they sailed eastwards for two days; then they encountered a heavy gale, and vessel sprang a leak...The gale blew for thirteen days and nights, when they arrived alongside of an island [somewhere in the Andamans], and then, at ebb-tide, they saw the place where the vessel leaked and forthwith stopped it up, after which they again proceeded on their way....[But again they encountered] cloudy and rainy weather [and the vessel] drifted at the mercy of the wind, without keeping any definite course...When the sky had cleared, they were able to tell east from west and again to proceed on their proper course.

They finally reached Java, but the subsequent voyage, on a large ship which carried 200 men and had provisions for fifty days, was also hazardous. They had gone northeast for a month when they met a ‘black wind’. Seventy days out from Java they felt that they should have been near Guangzhou, so they proceeded northwest and in twelve days at last got to Lau-shan, on the southeast of the Shantung Peninsula (Pearson 2003: 57-58).

While maritime trade between India and China existed in the first millennium CE, this trade was largely transported in ships of Persian/Arab, South and Southeast Asian origin. The main reason for the absence of Chinese ocean-going vessels in the Indian Ocean during this period could have been the relative lack of interest in maritime trade among the Chinese rulers and court

officials of that time. Until the eighth century the Chinese court appear to have been content with foreign luxuries available in the coastal regions. It was only during the Song dynasty (960-1279) that significant attention was given to the administration of maritime trade and policies were implemented to raise revenue from international commerce. The Song court also spent considerable resources to develop a naval fleet. Its decision to establish shipyards at various coastal towns including in present-day Hangzhou, Gungzhou and Mingzhou provided further impetus to the development of the Chinese shipbuilding industry. While these shipyards mostly produced vessels for the Song navy, they were also crucial in substantially enhancing the seaworthiness and the carrying capacity of Chinese ships by improving the designs of hulls, rudders and propulsion mechanisms. A Chinese vessel excavated from Quanzhou Bay, which may have sunk shortly after 1271, provides the first hard evidence for China's entry into the shipping sector of Indian Ocean trade. The 13 compartments of this sunken ship contained a cargo consisting mainly of import items, including spices (black pepper, frankincense and ambergris), sandalwood, tortoiseshells, glassware and textiles. While some of these goods may have been exported from the ports of Southeast Asia, others such as ambergris are thought to have originated from as far away as the eastern coast of Africa. There is also substantial textual evidence from the latter half of the 13th century and first half of the 14th century that testify to the growth of Chinese shipping in the Indian Ocean. The records of a Mongol diplomatic mission to southern India in 1281 indicate that this mission made its journey on a ship navigated by Chinese sailors. A decade later the first eyewitness account of Chinese vessels sailing between coastal China and southern Indian ports is provided by Marco Polo, who embarked from Quanzhou in 1292, on his journey across the Indian Ocean. These vessels, built with fir and pine wood, with nailed hulls, multiple masts and cabins, were capable of carrying a load of as much as 1,860 tons. Nearly half a century later the Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta reports seeing 13 Chinese ships anchored in the harbour at Calicut. Thus by middle of the 14th century Chinese vessels had become quite common along the sea lanes between India and China (Sen 2011: 48-54).

Building on these developments Chinese maritime power in this period reached its peak with Adm. Zheng He's seven expeditions from 1407-1433 during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Some of these expeditions ventured as far as the Indian Ocean and Africa. During these expeditions there were at least three naval engagements, including a Chinese naval attack on Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka) in 1411. As a result of these expeditions the Ming dynasty established several maritime 'vassal' and tribute paying states. These included Hormuz, Ceylon, Malacca, Java and Champa (present-day south Vietnam) (cited in Kondapalli 2000: 81). In all of

Zheng He's expeditions, China is said to have demonstrated a sense of realpolitik in manipulating South and Southeast Asian politics. He had launched an attack on Chen Zuyi, the ruler of Palembang (the capital of the present day South Sumatra province of Indonesia), in aid of his rival and China's ally Shi Jinqing. In Sri Lanka, he had interfered in the family feuds of the ruling Alagakkonaras. In his search for allies, he also took sides in the power struggles for the throne in Semudera (present-day northern Sumatra, Indonesia). Each of Zheng He's fleets comprised of 100-200 ships of which 40-60 were warships, carrying guns of small caliber, crude bombs and rockets, which therefore, cannot be considered as harmless trading ships. There had been bombardments or threats of bombardment against the ports of Al Hasa (Muscat, Oman) and Mogadishu, Somalia (Ray 2007: 246-247). This brief look at the historical background of China's relations with the Indian Ocean makes clear that China's interaction with this region consisted of both aggressive and benign elements. The former aspect included the use of force and realpolitik while the latter consisted of peaceful economic and cultural interaction.

By the end of the 15th century, however, an inward looking continental focus emerged in China which was further reinforced by the expansion of the European, Russian and Japanese empires. Although during the Qing and Nationalist eras substantial efforts were made to revive China's naval power, these were not successful in preventing the expansion of the other empires at China's expense (Kondapalli 2001: xvii-xix).

PRC's Expanding Maritime Strategic Vision

After the PRC was established in 1949, till the late 1970s, China's naval strategy was limited to coastal defence (*jinhai fangyu*) (Kondapalli 2001: 6). In the late 1970s and through the 1980s, a new recognition of the importance of maritime affairs began to emerge in China. A key turning-point in this regard was the Communist Party of China's (CPC) decision in 1978, to 'open-up' China's economy. As Ni Lexiong (2005: 1) has remarked,

when a nation embarks upon a process of shifting from an 'inward leaning economy' to an 'outward leaning economy', the arena of national security concerns begin to move to the oceans...in recent decades as the overseas trade sections in [China's] national economy have grown bigger and bigger, the question of a 'life line at sea' has become more and more important.

As You Ji (2008: 48) has put it, ‘the Chinese sense of ocean (*haiyang yishi*), which had been buried by the country’s continental mentality since the end of Zheng He’s voyages 600 years ago, has been greatly strengthened since the 1980s.’

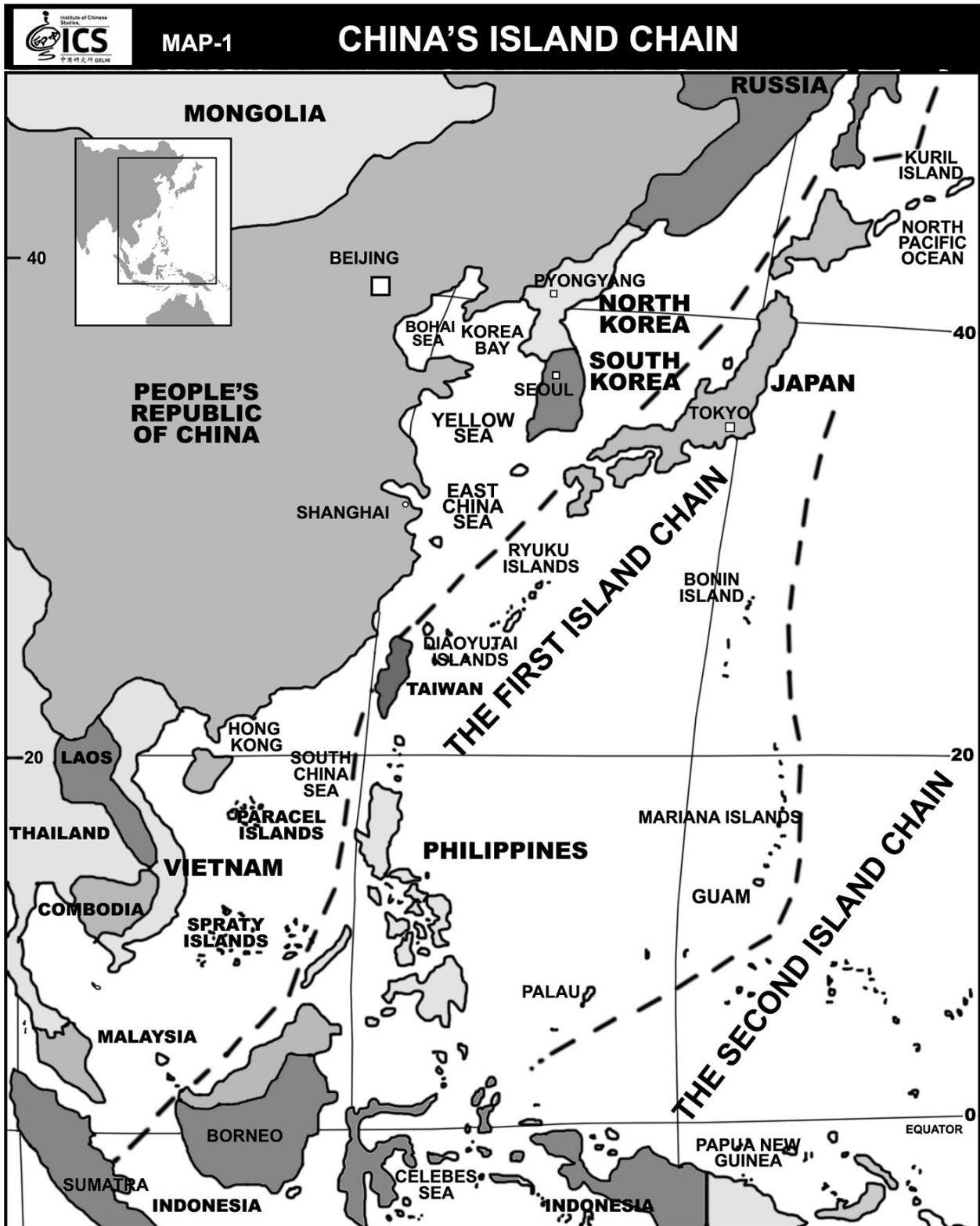
On 13 February 1987, Adm. Liu Huaqing and Commissar Li Yaowen co-signed a doctrine entitled ‘On the Question of Establishing the Naval Strategy’ (*Guanyu mingque haijun zhanlue de wenti*) and formally submitted it to the CMC for approval. This doctrine outlined a long-term development programme with ‘blue water’ (*lanhai*) capability and power projection in the high seas as its ultimate goal, and it continues to be influential in China’s naval development. It envisioned that by 2000, the People’s Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) would acquire ‘sea control’ capability within China’s adjacent waters (from Bohai Sea to Yellow Sea and some areas of the East China Sea), and a ‘sea denial’ capability within the ‘first island chain’ in the West Pacific between 2010-2020 (see Map 2). By 2050, it aimed to make the PLA-N a powerful regional navy with a global reach (You 2008: 47).

While Liu Huaqing’s strategy – also referred to as ‘near seas active defence’ (*jiji fangyu, jinhai zuozhan*) – continues to guide Chinese strategic thinking, two recent developments also offer insight on China’s expanding maritime strategic vision. These are the introduction of the concept of ‘far seas operations’, and a speech given by President Hu to the CMC in December 2004, titled ‘Historic Missions of the PLA in the New Period of the New Century’ (*Renqing xinshiji xin jieduan wojun lishi shiming*), referred to as Historic Missions in short.

Far Seas Operations

The concept of ‘far seas operations’ was introduced in the late 1990s which aimed to look beyond the ‘second island chain’. China’s third-generation leader Jiang Zemin had been the first civilian leader to endorse the new concept. He had stated that the PLA-N should ‘in the long run pay attention to enhancing the far-seas defence and operations capabilities (*yuanhai fangwei zuozhan nengli*).’ Subsequently, Hu Jintao, who succeeded Jiang as China’s fourth-generation leader in 2002, also emphasized the need for the PLA-N to ‘make the gradual transition to far-seas defence, enhancing the far-seas maneuvering operations capabilities (*yuanhai jidong zuozhan nengli*).’ The PLA-N’s definition of the ‘far seas’ covers a vast area that stretches from the northwest Pacific to the east Indian Ocean (Li 2009: 160).

Map 2: China's Island Chains



DIAOYUTAI (PRC), TIAOYUTAI (ROC), SENKAKU RETTO (JAPAN),

Source: cited in Xu Qi (2006: 57, translator's note 11).

To implement the concept of ‘far seas operations’ effectively the PLA-N must develop substantial capabilities to project power up to and beyond 1,000 nautical miles (nm) from China’s territorial waters. It has begun paying attention to specific issues related to ‘far seas operations’ such as tasking formation, battlefield preparation and sustainable logistics. With regard to tasking formation, a more recently developed concept is that of the ‘small battle group’, which entails organizing major naval surface and underwater combatants of different functions but of similar manoeuvring speed into a battle group. Such a group would be based on complementarity of functions such as: intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); command and control; anti-ship; air-defence; anti-submarine warfare (ASW); and electronic warfare. It will have the advantages of synchronized manoeuvre, easier coordination, and smaller profile and hence, better survivability, especially when operating in distant waters without the support of land-based intelligence and firepower. Given that in modern naval warfare, the precision of firepower is more important than its density, such a group can be quite lethal because it has a sufficient number of anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs). It can be versatile in fulfilling naval missions to achieve political objectives. Several such groups can be coordinated at the campaign level to deal with an opponent’s large-scale battle group, by posing a threat from multiple directions and making it difficult for the adversary to determine the operational intentions of these groups, as well as by having superiority in numbers (Li 2009: 160-161).

With regard to battlefield preparation and sustainable logistics, new naval sea and air platforms that the PLA-N is acquiring are generally larger ones that would allow longer-range operations. To facilitate these operations it is necessary to construct large-scale and multifunctional inshore infrastructure capable of command and communications; active defence; stationing and berthing; training, technological and technical support; material supply; and cultural entertainment. Hence, ‘navy cities’ that incorporate networks of central and satellite ports and airfields need to be built. In addition, offshore facilities can be expected to shift emphasis from defence to offence. This implies that forward bases on islands far away from home waters will need to be developed to accommodate facilities for ISR; for navigation and communications; for ocean geological, hydrological and meteorological observation and forecast; and for naval and air operations. Some of these facilities would have to be built in deep oceans or on the ocean floor. Since the new large naval platforms would consume large amounts of material, logistics become more important in sustaining naval operations in the far seas. Thus, at-sea supply-replenishing capabilities need to be

improved. Furthermore, materials such as fuel, munitions, equipment and technical maintenance may have to be pre-deployed in forward locations or floating logistics bases (Li 2009: 161).

The major driving force behind the propagation of the ‘far seas operations’ strategy is said to be the Navy Military Art Research Institute. They see the integration of the Chinese economy with the world economy as creating not just opportunities but also vulnerabilities. Major Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), ships and commodities including its oil imports, maritime territories and resources, the coastal region, and Chinese investments and people overseas are seen as being vulnerable. While this is so, the PLA-N’s current main operating area of the ‘near seas’ consisting of the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and the South China sea, which is partially blocked by the ‘first island chain’ is considered to be a highly restricted and constrained battle space. Therefore, ‘far seas operations’ are seen as a means of breaking out of this space and gaining initiative and momentum. The growth of the Chinese economy, which has expanded the country’s industrial base and infrastructure, resulted in the accumulation of large finances, and improved its technological base, is facilitating the development of the navy along the lines of the concept of ‘far seas operations’. The application of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) to China is also seen as favouring this concept because naval operations under informatized conditions require the deepening and widening of the operational space to improve survivability and initiative. While this concept has been rationalized in this way by Chinese naval researchers, its implementation would not have been possible without the endorsement and guidance of the top civilian and military leadership such as Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and former PLA-N commander Zhang Dingfa (Li 2009: 161-163).

Historic Missions

Through the ‘Historic Missions’ speech Hu Jintao provided the PLA with a new set of missions to fulfil. The essence of these new missions has been summarized into four separate subtasks by Hartnett (2009) in a testimony given to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission as follows:

1. To ensure military support for continued CPC rule in Beijing
2. To defend China’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security
3. To protect China’s expanding national interests
4. To ensure a peaceful global environment and promote mutual development

From these subtasks, this paper will focus on Hartnett's commentary on numbers three and four since they pertain to China's military and security activities abroad and are of most relevance for the IOR.

The third subtask directing the PLA to defend China's expanding national interests is based on the recognition that its national interests have evolved through more than two decades of rapid economic development, leading to a situation in which they can no longer be confined solely within its national territory. They are seen as having expanded into the maritime environment, space and the electromagnetic spectrum (EM). The maritime environment is perceived as crucial for China's continued economic growth due to its reliance upon sea-borne trade, overseas oil imports, and maritime resources such as fisheries, minerals and hydrocarbons. Beijing fears that it will not be able to safeguard these interests from encroachment by other more powerful nations. This expansion of China's national interests is reflected in an expansion of its security interests. Two methods are identified for protecting China's expanded security interests. The first is a transformation of the PLA's worldview on security and military strategy so as to reflect this expansion of security interests and to incorporate this expansion into operational planning, training and force modernization. The second is to strengthen the PLA's strategic capability. For maritime security, the PLA is exhorted to develop a powerful navy that is suited to defending China's expanded maritime interests.

The fourth subtask requiring the Chinese military to play a larger role in ensuring world peace and promoting mutual development is premised on the deep integration of the Chinese economy with the world economy. Hence, a direct relationship is discerned between China's economy and the world economy, so that a positive change in one affects the other positively, and a negative change in one affects the other negatively. In order to guard against negative changes, Beijing feels that it needs a strong military. One of the goals set for the PLA in order to achieve this fourth subtask is to construct a military that is capable of handling overseas non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, transnational crime and natural disasters. That is to say China wants to have military that is capable of conducting military operations other than war (MOOTW). The PLA is exhorted to actively participate in these types of operations, both at home and abroad. PLA-N participation in the counter-piracy operations off Somalia is seen as a clear example of PLA efforts to achieve this goal. Hartnett points out however, that not every international operation qualifies for PLA participation. According to a General Political Department document

of 2006, there are a number of conditions that need to be met. The operations should be led by the United Nations (UN), be multilateral in nature, involve an issue that affects the global good, and be non-traditional in nature (cited in Hartnett 2009: 4).

Hartnett (2009: 5-7) goes on to note that reflections of missions set by this speech can be found in several areas of PLA activities. One of these is the PLA's efforts to increase its operational range in order to safeguard China's expanding national interests. This goal is said to be present in China's 2006 and 2008 white papers on National Defence. According to Rear Adm. Yao Wenhui (cited in Hartnett 2009: 5), 'the PLA-N must gradually transform to an 'open ocean defence' navy and improve its distant ocean mobile operation capabilities.' Another is the PLA-N's participation in UN sanctioned anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia. This mission is seen as a perfect fit with the PLA efforts to fulfil subtasks three and four set by Hu's speech. Since Chinese ships have been attacked by Somali-based pirates it can be seen as fulfilling subtask three of safeguarding China's expanded national interests. Similarly, combating piracy off Somalia also falls squarely within the parameters of ensuring world peace and promoting mutual development set by subtask four, since these pirates have indiscriminately attacked international shipping and have endangered the global commons.

PRC's Current Involvement with the IOR

As indicated by Hu Jintao's concern over the 'Malacca Strait dilemma', China is increasingly aware of the importance of the Indian Ocean region in the protection of its SLOC. Not only are these sea lanes the arteries that carry China's energy and raw material imports, they also carry the rest of China's international trade with parts of Asia, Africa and Europe, which is extremely important to its export-dependent economy. Apart from the importance of the Indian Ocean to China as a transport surface, trade with the countries of the region itself has emerged as a substantial portion of China's overall international trade. In January 2000, China became a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim-Association Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), which is a body primarily focused on economic cooperation. In 2003, China-IOR-ARC trade volume exceeded US\$100 billion, accounting for 12 per cent of China's total international trade (Wang 2004). This section, drawing largely on the report of a workshop on China and the IOR conducted in May 2011, by Future Directions International (FDI), an Australian think-tank, will take a brief look at China's current involvement with the IOR by country and sub-region, excluding India which will be dealt with in a later section.

Australia

In late 2007, China became Australia's largest trade partner, and since then Australia has become China's seventh-largest trade partner (Australian Embassy, China 2012). China is interested in ensuring access to Australia's mineral and energy resources at favourable prices, in investing in agricultural and pastoral sectors in Australia, and in taking advantage of Australian educational opportunities (FDI 2011: 9). In 2011, Australian exports to China amounted to approximately A\$71.6 billion (US\$72.7 billion) accounting for 27.3 per cent of Australia's total exports. In the same year Australian imports from China amounted to approximately A\$42.1 billion (US\$42.8 billion) accounting for 18.6 per cent of Australia's total imports. The major Australian exports to China in that year were iron ores and concentrates, coal, crude petroleum, and wool and other animal hair. For the same year, the major Australian imports from China were telecommunication equipment and parts, computers, clothing, furniture, mattresses and cushions. In 2011, Australian investment in China amounted to approximately A\$17 billion (US\$17.3 billion), and Chinese investment in Australia amounted to approximately A\$19 billion (US\$19.4 billion) (DFAT, Australia 2012). In May 2012, the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Bob Carr visited Beijing and met with his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi. On this occasion the Chinese Foreign Minister had stated that China and Australia should maintain a spirit of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, improve strategic mutual trust and expand practical cooperation so as to promote their bilateral comprehensive cooperative relationship. He further stated that China welcomed Australian companies investing in China and hoped that the Australian government would provide a fair and transparent environment for Chinese companies to invest in Australia. The Australian Minister declared that his government attached great importance to its relations with China and was ready to work with it to strengthen high-level contacts and promote cooperation in economics and trade, adding that Chinese companies were welcome in Australia. The two ministers also exchanged views on international and regional issues of concern to both (Xinhua 2012a).

East Timor

China's interest in East Timor has to do with the latter's unrealized agricultural potential and sizeable oil and natural gas deposits. Beijing has built-up its involvement in this country through development aid, military links and construction projects (FDI 2011: 12). Given East Timor's oil and natural gas deposits China's involvement with this country is sure to increase in the future.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia surrounds China's SLOC through the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. In Indonesia, China has been active in infrastructure projects such as constructing bridges and coal-fired power plants (FDI 2011: 9-10). In 2005, China and Indonesia signed a joint declaration that designated their relationship as a 'strategic partnership'. In February 2012, Indonesian Defence Minister Purnomo Yusgiantoro was in Beijing, and met with Liang Guanglie, China's Defence Minister, and Guo Boxiong, Vice Chairman of China's CMC. During the talks, both sides expressed their intention of working together in promoting and safeguarding regional peace and security (MOND, PRC 2012a, 2012b). In December 2011, two ships from the ninth Chinese naval escort taskforce dispatched to the Gulf of Aden called at Singapore on their way back to China. Their stop-over was primarily for the purpose of replenishing fuel, water and other logistic supplies. During the stopover however, the Chinese task force also had discussions with the Singapore side on anti-piracy efforts and visited the Information Fusion Centre that is aimed at promoting collaboration and information sharing in maritime security. From the 280 commercial vessels escorted by the ninth Chinese task force during its mission in the Gulf of Aden 16 had been Singapore-registered (MOND, PRC 2011e). With regard to Thailand, China has expressed an interest in constructing a canal across the Isthmus of Kra into the Gulf of Thailand (FDI 2011: 13). Such a canal would provide China with yet another alternative to the Malacca Strait route.

Myanmar/Burma

China sees Myanmar as an energy source and as a means of bypassing the Strait of Malacca chokepoint. Port facilities and pipeline projects from Myanmar into south-western China are expected to enable it to escape its 'Malacca Dilemma' as well as aid in the development of its southwest China (FDI 2011: 12). However, these pipelines must pass through areas in Myanmar which are plagued by ethnic insurgencies. Therefore, their future may depend on how Myanmar's central government handles relations with these ethnic groups (Kaplan 2011: 217, 239). In August 2010, Myanmar had allowed two Chinese warships to dock at Thilawa port near Rangoon while returning from counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. In May 2011, it was reported that Myanmar's President Thein Sein was in Beijing discussing a plan to allow the Chinese navy to dock in Myanmar ports and get access to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean (Dasgupta 2011a). In November 2011, Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the PLA met with Myanmar's Commander of the Armed Forces Min Aung Hlaing in Beijing. During this meeting it was noted that the two militaries have been cooperating in areas such as high-level visits, personnel training, frontier defence and equipment (*People's Daily Online* 2011). In March 2012,

a nine-member delegation from Myanmar headed by Vice Adm. Nyan Tun, the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Navy, visited the Dalian Naval Academy of the PLA (MOND, PRC 2012e).

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has emerged as China's third-largest trade partner in South Asia and relies heavily on the latter to meet its defence requirements. (FDI 2011: 12). In December 2011, Gen. Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the PLA visited Dhaka and met with Gen. Muhammad Abdul Mubeen, Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff, and Lt. Gen. Wadud, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Bureau of the Prime Minister's Office. During this visit, Ma stated that the Chinese military is willing to work together with the Bangladeshi military in strengthening exchanges and cooperation at various levels and in various fields in order to contribute to the development of relations between the two countries as well as for maintaining regional peace and stability (MOND, PRC 2011c).

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's location astride the major East-West shipping artery in the Indian Ocean makes it a convenient stop-over point for oil and gas tankers. Some of the major projects that China has been involved in Sri Lanka in recent years are the Hambantota Port Development Project (US\$1 billion), Colombo-Katunayake Expressway (US\$248.2 million), and the National Performing Arts Theatre (US\$21.2 million) (FDI 2011: 11). Nihal Rodrigo, who was Sri Lanka's ambassador to China in the mid-2000s when the Hambantota project was under discussion between the two countries, recently revealed that China had asked Sri Lanka to allow it to station a PLA detachment at Hambantota to guard the construction site. However, Amb. Rodrigo had explained that there was no need for a Chinese military presence at the site (Rodrigo 2011). In 2009, China emerged as the single biggest lender to Sri Lanka, lending about US\$1.2 billion out of the US\$2.2 billion total foreign aid (*Daily Mirror* 2010). In December 2011, Gen. Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the PLA visited Sri Lanka for talks with the Sri Lankan president and military officials. During talks with the commander of the Sri Lankan army, Lt. Gen. Jagath Jayasuriya, both sides had exchanged views on a wide range of matters of interest, including a core training module that China could share with the Sri Lankan army (MOND, PRC 2011d). In March 2012, Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with the Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie in Beijing. During this meeting Liang said, among other things, that China hoped to work together with Sri Lanka in improving communication and cooperation between the two armies

(MOND, PRC 2012d). Sri Lanka is also reported to be courting the Chinese for oil prospecting in the Gulf of Mannar (Bhadrakumar 2012).

Maldives

Maldives' proximity to the major East-West shipping artery in the Indian Ocean is of importance to China. In 2001, there were reports that China was planning to lease the Maldivian island of Marao for 25 years, and that under cover of setting-up an observatory to monitor weather conditions throughout the year, the Chinese were planning on establishing a submarine base there. Given the fear that due to sea-level rises resulting from global warming the Maldives may be submerged by 2040, the reports claimed that Marao is one of the few islands that may survive, and that even if it were to be submerged it would still be a good location for a submarine base. By 2004, it was being reported that premature publicity had scuttled this project in 2001 and that the Chinese were attempting to revive it again (*Dhivehi Observer* 2005). However, these reports have been denied by both Chinese and Maldivian officials. Bilateral trade between the two countries stood at US\$64 million in 2010, an increase of 56 per cent from the previous year owing to an increase in the number of Chinese tourists coming to the Maldives. In May 2011, Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China (NPC) visited the Maldives. During this visit, Wu announced that China would open an embassy in the Maldives, double aid to the Maldives to US\$15.4 million, and offer 11 scholarships to Maldivian students in 2011 and 2013. The establishment of direct flights between China and the Maldives was also announced on this occasion. An economic and technical cooperation agreement was also signed by Wu and the then Maldivian President Mohammed Nasheed (Karambelkar 2011).

Pakistan

Pakistan is important to China as an energy corridor linking Western China with the Middle East/West Asia. Bilateral trade stood at US\$7 billion in 2010. At present, there are 60 Chinese companies operating in Pakistan on 122 projects employing around 11,000 Chinese business people, engineers technicians and workers (FDI 2011: 8). The Chinese navy has participated in multilateral naval exercises organized by Pakistan in April 2007 and March 2011 (Kondapalli 2007: 33; Agnihotri 2011: 57). China and Pakistan also held a joint anti-terrorism drill in Pakistan in November 2011 (Mu 2011). In December 2011, Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo visited Pakistan as the representative of President Hu Jintao (*People's Daily Online* 2011). Military collaboration between the two countries include personnel training, joint military exercises, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism efforts. Pakistan has benefited from Chinese

assistance in defence capabilities in the form of missiles and aircraft. Pakistan's short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, such as the Shaheen missile series, are believed to be modifications of Chinese imports. Chinese interceptor and advanced trainer aircraft as well as an Airborne Early Warning and Control radar system used to detect aircraft are a part of the Pakistani Air Force. Pakistan and China are also co-producing the JF-17 Thunder multi-role combat aircraft and the K-8 Karakorum light attack aircraft. They also signed a free trade agreement in 2008 and have worked together on a number of large-scale infrastructure projects in Pakistan such as highways, gold and copper mines, major electricity complexes and power plants including nuclear power projects (Afridi and Bajoria 2010). In May 2012, China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visited Islamabad and met with the Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and the Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar. During this visit the Chinese Foreign Minister said that China would continue to improve cooperation with Pakistan in the fields of energy, infrastructure, agriculture, information technology, defence and education. He further stated that the financial institutions of China would give the highest consideration to the extending of financial assistance to Pakistan in fields such as energy, infrastructure and communication (*Dawn* 2012). However, China's plans to use Pakistan as an energy corridor are hampered by troubled relations between the Pakistani province of Baluchistan where the proposed energy-hub Gwadar is located, and the central government in Islamabad. China is also worried about Islamist extremists using Pakistan as a gateway to China's Muslim majority province of Xinjiang (Kaplan 2011: 70-75; FDI 2011: 8).

Middle East/West Asia

The Middle East/West Asia has been crucial to China's increasing demand for energy with around half of China's oil imports coming from this sub-region. For Middle Eastern/West Asian nations China's growth has offered an alternative to Western markets. Reciprocal visits by high-ranking military officials have taken place with countries such as Bahrain and Egypt. China is keen to ensure stability around the Strait of Hormuz to maintain an uninterrupted flow of energy, as well as around the Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal so as to ensure a safe passage for Chinese exports to Europe. China's relations with Iran mainly encompass energy, infrastructure development and arms sales. China has aggressively sought to position itself as a key player in the Iranian energy market because Iran has the second-largest reserves of natural gas in the world. More than a hundred Chinese state companies operate in Iran, which has also become the largest importer of Chinese military hardware (FDI 2011: 8-9). China is also reported to have offered to mediate in a long-running dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) regarding sovereignty over the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa islands situated in the Persian Gulf

(Agnihotri 2011: 58). Chinese naval vessels involved in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden have resupplied at Oman and Yemen (MOND, PRC 2011b) and in November-December 2011, two ships from the ninth Chinese naval escort taskforce deployed to the Gulf of Aden paid goodwill visits to Kuwait and Oman (MOND, PRC 2011a).

Southwest Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean islands of Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles are important to China given their strategic location astride the sea lanes that pass through Mozambique Channel and the south-western Indian Ocean. Other attractions for China in these islands are fishery resources, energy (particularly in Madagascar which is believed to contain large untapped reserves of oil and natural gas), and mining. Projects funded by China such as the expansion of the international airport in Mauritius, and water-supply infrastructure and an anti-malarial campaign in Comoros have secured considerable goodwill for China in these islands (FDI 2011: 11; DeSilva-Ranasinghe 2011). In November 2011, China signed a contract with the International Seabed Authority under which the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA) will get exclusive rights to explore 10,000 square-km of seabed in the southwest Indian Ocean. Under this deal COMRA can explore polymetallic sulphide ore deposits in this area over the next 15 years (Krishnan 2011a). In December 2011, concerns were expressed in the Indian media that China was planning to set up a military base in Seychelles. These concerns were based on an invitation the Seychelles had extended to China ‘to set-up a military presence’ on the archipelago to aid in the anti-piracy effort following a visit by Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie in early December. It has to be noted, however, that in order to improve its capabilities to combat piracy Seychelles had sought assistance from India and the US as well (Dasgupta 2011b; Krishnan 2011b). In response, China’s Ministry of National Defence clarified that its naval forces engaged in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden may ‘seek supplies or recuperate’ in the Seychelles or in other countries as needed during escort missions. The ministry stated that this was in line with international practice, where naval fleets resupplied at the closest port of a nearby state during long-distance missions (MOND, PRC 2011b). According to Li Jie, a professor at China’s Naval Military Studies Research Institute, ‘as China will not send troops to protect the supply stop in the Seychelles, by no means can it be called an overseas military base’ (Li Xiaokun and Li Lianxing 2011).

Eastern and Southern Africa

Sudan has become China's third-largest trade partner in Africa and a crucially important source of oil. Nearly 70 per cent of oil produced in Sudan goes to China. Following the emergence of South Sudan as an independent country in 2011, China can be expected to be heavily involved in the new country's oil industry. It might be recalled that Chinese peacekeeping forces are also present in Sudan. Beijing has demonstrated an interest in mining projects in Djibouti and Chinese naval ships engaged in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden have resupplied there. Djibouti is important in the context of the international anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden and because French, US and Japanese forces use it as a base.

From Mozambique, China imports agricultural goods, fisheries, forest products and Mozambique imports from China manufactured goods and machinery. China is also investing in the services sector in that country (FDI 2011: 10-11; MOND, PRC 2011b). In June 2010, Wuhan Iron and Steel, one of China's largest steel producers, invested US\$200 million for an eight per cent share of Riversdale, a listed Australian company developing coalfields in Mozambique's Tete province. Wuhan agreed to commit an additional US\$800 million to the Zambeze coal reserve of Riversdale. Thus, China has invested in total a sum of US\$1 billion in Mozambican coal. As part of this deal Wuhan will purchase around 40 per cent of the coking coal produced from the Zambeze reserve and have the right to buy as much as 10 per cent of the production of the neighbouring Benga reserve. China has also begun playing a role in the development of transport corridors needed to move the coal from Tete to the ports of Beira and Nacala on the Indian Ocean. Also in June 2010, Riversdale signed a logistics partnership with the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), as part of which CCCC was to help Riversdale with the work needed to carry coal on barges along the Zambezi river (Lapper 2010). In May 2012, China and Mozambique pledged to boost military cooperation during Mozambican Defence Minister Filip Nyusi's visit to Beijing. During this visit the Mozambican Defence Minister met with Xu Caihou, Vice Chairman of China's CMC, and Liang Guanglie, China's Defence Minister and State Councilor. Nyusi sought China's cooperation in enhancing the capability of Mozambique's armed forces (*Xinhua* 2012b). Meanwhile, China is also South Africa's largest trade partner and has agreed to assist in the development of railways, power generation and transmission (including nuclear), construction, mining, insurance, agriculture, telecommunications, airports and housing (FDI 2011: 11).

Theoretical Perspectives on the PRC in the IOR

Realist View

Walgreen (2006: 57-58) has applied the realist thinking of Waltz (cited in Walgreen 2006: 57), Walt (cited in Walgreen 2006: 57), and Jervis (cited in Walgreen 2006: 57) to China's strategy in the IOR. Waltz has argued that states possessing great-power capabilities, as supported by their geographic and economic potential, will almost invariably choose to engage in power politics and balancing behaviour so as to increase their ability to manipulate the international system. According to Waltz, in a post-'Cold War' international system tending towards multipolarity, states will seek to balance against a hegemonic power. Walgreen goes on to argue that with Chinese power rising economically and militarily it is highly likely that its ability and willingness to challenge US hegemony will rise accordingly. Walt has qualified Waltz by introducing the notion of 'threat perception' and pointing out that 'states ally to balance against threats rather than against power alone.' As pointed out by Walt the main factors in forming a state's threat perception are geographic proximity, offensive capabilities and perceived intentions. According to Walgreen, each of these criteria can be found in the US-China equation. The presence of American military forces in Japan and South Korea and the presence of the US Seventh Fleet in the Western Pacific fulfils the first criterion in relation to China. Chinese concerns about the overwhelming superiority of both conventional and strategic US forces as compared to its own fulfils the second criterion. Chinese perceptions of the US support for Taiwan, alliance structure in the Asia-Pacific and force posture as being aimed at 'encircling' and 'containing' China and thus, hostile to China, fulfils the third criterion.

Jervis has introduced the notion of a 'security dilemma' by arguing that 'in international politics...one state's gain in security often inadvertently threatens others.' Jervis posits that states seeking a high degree of security are more likely to perceive threats, even if the source is unclear, and 'a state that is predisposed to see either a specific other state as an adversary or others in general, as a menace, will react more strongly and more quickly than a state that sees its environment as benign.' In Walgreen's view, the spiralling of hostilities posited by the 'security dilemma' also characterizes the China-US relationship. China views the provision of advanced defence capabilities by the US to Taiwan as a serious threat to Chinese security, and has augmented its own capabilities to deal with that threat, which has resulted in Washington and Taipei perceiving China's force modernization efforts as evidence of preparations for offensive

action against Taiwan. Another factor which has been motivating China's military modernization is the US alliance structure and military presence in the Asia-Pacific in general. Increasing Chinese capabilities have in turn motivated the US and its regional partners, especially Japan, to reinvigorate their strategic partnerships. Thus, for Walgreen, China is a revisionist power locked in a power struggle with the US aimed at dethroning the latter from its hegemonic position. However, China still has some way to go before gaining any sort of parity with the US. Therefore, it must continue to sustain its growth before it can mount a credible challenge to the US-led international order. Walgreen argues that in this process China will increasingly look to the IOR to fuel its growing strength, an effort which may well be at the expense of other regional and global powers. The contention that China will increasingly to focus on the IOR to is amply supported by the preceding overview of China's current relations with the region.

In this view, China's pursuit of cooperation with India while at the same time continuing to support Pakistan is seen as an almost Machiavellian ploy designed to minimize Indian opposition to China's rise in the IOR, while at the same seeking to balance India with Pakistan and contain India's own rise. China's support for the Gwadar project is understood as being aimed at checking India's ability to achieve a dominant maritime presence in the region, as well as to counter the US presence in the region. China is said to view US-India maritime cooperation with great apprehension. A potentially permanent Chinese naval presence in the IOR, apart from protecting China's energy and trade interests, is expected to compete with US and Indian power. China's close ties to Iran are interpreted in the light of the common opposition of both these countries to US dominance in the Strait of Hormuz and Southwest Asia. China's approach to its regional influence as well as its approach to security structuring in the region vis-à-vis the US is seen as being characterized by the 'zero-sum' mentality implicit in the 'security dilemma' (Walgreen 2006: 60, 61-63, 65-67).

The realist view is also borne out by the strategic discourse surrounding China's alleged 'string of pearls'. According to Pehrson (2006: 3-4, 8-9) the phrase 'string of pearls' was first used to describe China's emerging maritime strategy in a report entitled 'Energy Futures in Asia' by defence contractor Booze-Allen-Hamilton. This report was commissioned by the Office of Net Assessment of the US Department of Defense in 2005. The 'string of pearls' extended from the coast of mainland China, through the littorals of the South China Sea, the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean, to the littorals of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The specific pearls in the string consisted of: Hainan Island in south China, Woody Island in the Paracel archipelago,

Chittagong in Bangladesh, Sittwe in Myanmar, and Gwadar in Pakistan. Port and airfield construction projects, diplomatic ties and force modernization were said to form the essence of China's 'string of pearls'. It was thought that it could enable China to establish a 'forward presence' along the SLOC that connected it to the Middle East. However, Pehrson also pointed out that the 'string of pearls' may not have been an explicit strategy of China's central government, but rather a term applied by some in the US to describe a specific aspect of China's foreign policy. Pehrson argued that while China may not have the same perception of its policy as does the US, economic benefits of relations with China and the country's diplomatic rhetoric have been an enticement for countries to facilitating Beijing's strategic ambitions in the region. He also argued that in Asia, the US has been facilitating freedom of navigation on the high seas, and that the 'string of pearls' raised the question, of whether China would let the US continue fulfilling this role or whether it would attempt to assert its own primacy in the region.

Indian scholars and analysts were quick to pick-up on this theme. Arasakumar (2006: 61-62) pointed out that China's effort to gain a strategic foothold in India's neighbourhood in the Indian Ocean includes seeking naval and commercial facilities in Bangladesh, building naval bases and electronic intelligence gathering facilities at Great Coco Island off the coast of Myanmar, the funding of a canal across the Kra Isthmus, and the development of the strategically important port at Gwadar. According to him, India views this as 'encirclement', and it has been periodically expressing its concern to its smaller neighbours regarding their military security ties with China. Mohan (2006: 50) pointed out that the 'string of pearls' strategy made apparent the expansion of China's maritime profile in the Indian Ocean and Kondapalli (2007: 34) has argued that while the Chinese state is knocking on the 'continental doors' of India on its land borders, with its Great Western Development strategy of infrastructure development in Tibet, Xinjiang, Yunan and surrounding areas, the 'string of pearls' strategy is to gradually knock at India's 'maritime doors' in the IOR. The resonance that the American notion of China's 'string of pearls' has had in India points towards the security concerns that New Delhi has regarding China's increasing influence in the IOR, and to a commonality in American and Indian perceptions of this phenomenon.

Social Constructivist View

Johnston (2003) has applied social constructivist thinking to China's interaction with the ARF. Given the fact that the maritime cooperation working groups and study groups of the CSCAP, the Track II forum of the ARF, have generally tended to include the Indian Ocean in their

discussions, this analysis is of some relevance to this paper. For instance the April 2008 meeting of the CSCAP Study Group on Facilitating Maritime Cooperation in the Asia Pacific proposed a seamless approach to sea lane security from the Middle East through the Indian Ocean to East Asia (CSCAP 2008).

As pointed out by Johnston (2003: 109-127) social constructivists emphasize the link between particular normative structures at the international level, mostly in international institutions, and the incorporation of these norms in the behaviour by agents at the unit-level. Socialization is said to be the central ‘causal process’ for constructivists that links structures to agents and back again. Socialization is defined as ‘...a process by which social interaction leads novices to endorse expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting’. Here, China is considered to have been a relative newcomer to international institutions in the early 1990s. Socialization is said to involve the development of shared identification through which people become members in a society where the inter-subjective understandings of the society become ‘objective facticities’ that are taken for granted. For constructivists, states do not engage in *realpolitik*, that is to say power maximizing behaviour, all the time. They suggest that international institutions are often agents of counter-*realpolitik* socialization. The ARF, with the notion of cooperative/ common security as its ‘normative core’, is regarded as an institution that helped socialize China – a hard-core *realpolitik* actor prior to joining the ARF in 1994 – into cooperative ways of thinking through the late 1990s. The concept of cooperative/common security is said to embody the following principles: the non-legitimacy of military force for resolving disputes; security through reassurance rather than unilateral military superiority; non-provocative defence; and transparency.

Shi Chunlai, a former ambassador to India and an important member of China’s CSCAP committee at the time, is said to have been China’s first authoritative participant in ARF-related activities to have used the term ‘common security’. In a paper presented at an ARF sponsored workshop on preventive diplomacy in November 1996, Shi and co-author Xu Jian had noted that common security was central to the post-‘Cold War’ need for a ‘renewal’ of old security concepts. This renewal, they had argued, entailed abandoning ‘old’ concepts ‘based on the dangerous game of balance of power’ (cited in Johnston 2003: 127). In early 1997, ARF-involved Chinese analysts and officials in their ‘personal capacities’ had floated the concept of ‘mutual security’ at the first Canada-China Multilateral Training Seminar. They had defined ‘mutual security’ as meaning ‘for you to be secure, your neighbour had to be secure’ (Chu Shulong cited in Johnston 2003: 128), an analyst at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), had submitted a

paper to this seminar in which he had referred to multilateral security systems as an ‘encouraging development’, and had noted that mutual security, like common security, cooperative security, and comprehensive security, were traditionally unfamiliar concepts in China, but that these concepts were now ‘taking place in the minds of policymakers and scholars and in the actions of Chinese policies’. In November 1997, the Chinese paper presented to the ARF Inter-sessional Support Group (ISG) on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) had defined mutual security as an environment where the ‘security interests of one side should not undermine those of the other side....This kind of security is a win-win rather than zero-sum game’ (cited in Johnston 2003: 129).

Soon after, in December 1997, at the Third CSCAP North Pacific Meeting, Shi Chunlai developed the ‘new security concept’, linking it to ‘mutual security’, arguing that the concept was ‘not based on the cold war mentality featuring zero-sum game, but on mutual and equal security’, and that it meant ‘not creating winners and losers’ (cited in Johnston 2003: 129). Both the ‘new security concept’ and ‘mutual security’ had been endorsed by then Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen at the Private Sector’s Salute to ASEAN’s 30th Anniversary in December 1997. In December 1998, Zhang Yunling, a specialist in regional multilateralism from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) had submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) a report titled, ‘The Concept of Comprehensive Security and Some Theoretical Thoughts about China and Asia-Pacific Security’. This report had argued that military power and traditional territorial-based notions of national security had ceased to be the most important issues in China’s future security in the region. It stressed that China faced an increasing range of non-traditional security problems that could not be resolved through the building-up of national military power alone, and that China should focus more efforts at developing multilateral cooperative solutions to security problems (Johnston 2003: 129-130).

In response to concerns as to whether this discourse on ‘mutual security’ was deceptive and instrumental, Johnston (2003: 132) argues that Chinese bureaucrats from the Asia Department of the MOFA who were involved with the ARF may have developed a genuine normative commitment to multilateralism because it was ‘good’ for Chinese and regional security, even if their commitment was made somewhat uneasy by the conceivable opposition that ‘mutual security’ may have faced from other agencies within the Chinese policymaking process such as the PLA. These bureaucrats are said to have endorsed multilateralism, within limits imposed by the need to defend multilateralism from other agencies within the Chinese government, as being

compatible with Chinese security interests, and to have sought to tie China gradually and innocuously into regional security institutions so that China's leaders would be bound by these institutions in the long-run. They are said to have seen the ARF involvement as a means by which to educate their own government.

Johnston (2003: 139-140) argues that in the long-run, this type of discourse can constrain behaviour in at least three ways. First, for China's multilateralists, the discourse on mutual security and the rejection of *realpolitik* can put into starker relief China's behavioural violation of these principles, creating both subjective and inter-subjective pressure on them to push behaviour in the direction of conformity with the discourse. Second, this normative discourse can positively sanction behaviour that would otherwise have not been allowed or not seriously considered. The mutual security discourse legitimizes cooperative security arguments within the Chinese policymaking process, and allows proponents to defend cooperative policies in ways that would have been illegitimate had the discourse not existed. It can empower those who have genuinely internalized the norms embodied in the discourse within the policymaking process. Third, the discourse can even constrain the behaviour of those who use the logic and normative values comprising it instrumentally, by limiting the range of behavioural options that can be proposed or followed. It will make it difficult for pro-*realpolitik* actors to support unilateralist non-cooperative security strategies falling outside the range of behaviours acceptable within it.

This cooperative security discourse identified by Johnston (2003) can be shown to extend into the maritime domain and as persisting till recently. Hu Shisheng (2005: 353-356) writing in a CICIR publication titled 'Sea Lane Security and International Cooperation', notes that it is essential for China to work towards cooperation in order to play a more participatory role in the Indian Ocean. Hu argues that cooperation on non-traditional security threats and marine science and technology can provide platforms for maritime cooperation between China and countries of the IOR. He stresses that China needs to promote an environment conducive to coexistence in the IOR.

In April 2009, the PLA-N held a naval review in the Yellow Sea off Qingdao port to celebrate its 60th anniversary. The navies of 14 other nations were invited to this event. As a part of this event a symposium titled 'Harmonious Seas' was held, at which PLA-N commander Adm. Wu Shengli gave a keynote speech on the theme of peace and stability. At this symposium, President Hu Jintao conveyed to the foreign naval commanders China's interest in increased international

maritime security cooperation, and claimed that such cooperation would build ‘harmonious oceans and seas’ (Christoffersen 2009: 5). In February 2012, the PLA-N hosted the International Counter-Piracy and Escort Operation Symposium in Nanjing attended by representatives from 20 countries. Speaking at this symposium, Vice Adm. Ding Yiping, deputy commander of the PLA-N stated that ‘in this era of globalization, when ocean shipping is more closely related to our lives than ever before, jointly safeguarding navigation is in the best interests of all of us’. At the same event, PLA-N Captain Hu Weibiao stated that ‘it is difficult for any single navy or single organization to suppress piracy’ (Zhao 2012). On 14 March 2012, just before arriving in the Gulf of Aden, the PLA-N’s 11th anti-piracy naval escort taskforce held a ‘messenger-bottle-releasing’ ceremony to convey messages of peace and friendship to the world. The released messenger bottles had contained the following messages:

- One world, one dream. Let us live together under a sunny, caring, peaceful and tranquil blue sky
- A harmonious world and a harmonious ocean are the dreams of every Chinese soldier
- Let us seek more consensus and fewer differences, more understanding and fewer wars. China is willing to make joint efforts to safeguard world peace and stability

According to Xia Kewei, political commissar of the 11th naval escort task force, the purpose of this ceremony was to promote the concept of ‘building a harmonious ocean’ (MOND, PRC 2012f).

It needs to be pointed out here that at the 18th ARF in July 2011, in the midst of rising tensions in the South China Sea, the Foreign Ministers and representatives of ARF participants welcomed the finalization and adoption of the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) signed by China and the ASEAN countries in 2002. They stressed the importance of promoting a peaceful, friendly and harmonious environment in the South China Sea for maintaining and enhancing peace, stability, economic growth and prosperity in the region. They also called on all concerned parties to exercise self-restraint (ARF 2011).

Along lines similar to Johnston (2003), Christoffersen (2009: 1, 9-19) has argued that China has adapted to international maritime cooperation through learning and socialization from the bottom-up through operational coordination in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. China’s first deployment to the Gulf of Aden arrived on station in January 2009. While Chinese

forces operated independently of the UN-approved and US-led Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151) there was continuous dialogue at the tactical level. American and Chinese naval officers began communicating through unclassified emails in their Yahoo accounts. During the US-China Defence Policy Coordination Talks in February 2009, the head of the US delegation and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asia and Pacific Security Affairs, David Sedney, praised the PLA-N's contribution in the Gulf of Aden, stating that 'the work they've done has been highly professional, it's been highly effective, and it's been very well coordinated with the United States and other navies that are working there' (cited in Christoffersen 2009: 14). At the third meeting of the UN Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) in May 2009, China took the initiative to suggest that the CGPCS establish areas of responsibility for escort operations. By mid-2009, China was also participating in UN-approved Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings which aimed to coordinate the activities of the different naval forces engaged in anti-piracy operations off Somalia. The SHADE mechanism is considered to be an open and inclusive structure allowing for military coordination with varying degrees of autonomy. Then in November 2009, as a result of the hijacking of the Chinese ship *De Xin Hai* by Somali pirates and the inability of the Chinese to deal with the situation by themselves, US-China operational-level tactical cooperation is said to have evolved to something close to sharing of strategies. Also, as a result of the hijacking of *De Xin Hai*, China organized an international conference to better coordinate anti-piracy naval escorts in the Gulf of Aden. At this conference, China proposed that it be allowed to co-chair the SHADE meetings, possibly on the grounds of a greater contribution to anti-piracy operations in terms of the number of Chinese assets committed. The Chinese attempts to contribute to rule formation within the CGPCS and play a leadership role within SHADE can be regarded as empirical indicators of the Chinese acceptance of the logic of cooperative security.

Conclusion

It may be argued that China truly liberated itself from its inward looking continental focus since the late 15th century only with Adm. Liu Huaqing's articulation of an expansive maritime strategic vision for China in the mid-1980s. This vision aims to make China a powerful regional navy with a global reach by 2050. IR theories of realism and social constructivism discussed in this work offer a framework within which Indian policymakers can think about their response to the rise of China in the IOR which has come about at least partly as a result of Adm. Liu's vision.

Indian security concerns regarding the rise of China in the IOR are reflected in a number of recent events. In June 2010, India is reported to have blocked China's attempt to become co-chair of SHADE. India was said to be not in favour of the Chinese proposal for a break-up of the Gulf of Aden for patrol by individual countries because this would restrict India's own movements in the Indian Ocean and Indian officials had argued that this proposal was inconsistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Neptune Maritime Security 2010). With regard to Chinese seabed exploration in the southwest Indian Ocean, the contract for which was finalized between China and the International Seabed Authority in November 2011, it has been reported that the Indian Directorate of Naval Intelligence has expressed concern that this could have strategic implications for India's security (Krishnan 2011a). Then in December 2011, the offer made to China by Seychelles to set-up a 'military presence' in the archipelago to fight piracy ignited concerns in India that China was going to set-up a base in the Seychelles. Singh (2011) argued that a Chinese naval presence in the Seychelles would not be in India's interest, that it would pose a direct threat to India's western seaboard and that it would make it easier for Pakistan and China to collaborate against India in the western Indian Ocean. More recently in March 2012, it was pointed out that India was trying to prevent Sri Lanka from getting China involved in prospecting for oil in the Gulf of Mannar because that would bring the Chinese too close to India's coastline (Bhadrakumar 2012).

All of the above mentioned Indian concerns are easily understandable from the realist perspective which sees China purely as a power maximizing actor pursuing a duplicitous policy towards India. It would tend to regard the cooperative aspect of the China-India relationship in the maritime domain cynically. However, social constructivists, with their argument that a cooperative security discourse can constrain the behaviour of even those who use it instrumentally by making it normatively difficult for them to propose and pursue realpolitik courses of action, would take the substantial discussion of, and efforts toward, China-India maritime cooperation much more seriously.

Hu Shisheng (2005: 353, 355) writing on the ways to promote cooperation in Indian Ocean security gives a lot of emphasis to cooperation with India. He refers to the Agreement on Combating Piracy and Arms Smuggling concluded in 1996, joint search and rescue exercises conducted in 2003, and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Field Ocean Science and Technology signed between India's Department of Ocean Development and China's State Oceanic Administration in 2003. He notes that the joint exercise was based on a

consensus framework. The MoU on ocean science and technology had envisioned cooperation in the following areas: coastal management, seabed resources exploration and development of polar science and technology, ocean energy, exploration and development of the technology of hydrate gas, marine resources, marine resource evaluation, seaweed farming and processing, and hygienic maintenance of the oceans. It had mandated the setting-up of a Joint Committee with five members from each country to undertake the coordination and supervision of marine cooperation and to promote further collaboration in areas of mutual interest. Hu argued that this MoU promoted mutual benefit and trust between the two countries in the maritime field.

In February 2008, the Indian Navy initiated the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) as a forum for security cooperation in the IOR. The second IONS was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2010, and the third edition took place in South Africa in April 2012. The IONS Chairmanship and Secretariat rotates from host country to host country every two years. In April 2009, PLA-N officials had conveyed to the Indian Navy a request to be associated with IONS as an observer. At the time, when informed of this request, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had refused to accede to it (Samanta 2009). However, in an interview with the author in March 2012 Vice Adm. Pradeep Kaushiva (retd) expressed his personal view that China should be allowed to participate in IONS as an observer if it still wished to do so. According to him, the reasons for giving observer status to China are as follows:

- IONS should be inclusive
- Given the large volume of China's trade that passes through the Indian Ocean and the energy flows that fuel its industry, China can be said to have legitimate security concerns for her sea lanes in the IOR
- China's presence at the IONS, even as an observer, would enable them to hear at first hand the IONS countries' concerns relating to China
- In the name of its anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the PLA-N is operating across the Indian Ocean anyway

Adm Kaushiva explained that China's request would need to be processed by the IONS Secretariat for a decision through consensus by the IONS members. Even though the IONS Charter is yet to be ratified, China would need to abide by the Charter such as it is. He went on to stress that it is no great secret that many IONS countries have serious concerns about China's increasingly assertive conduct which already borders close to being aggressive. Therefore, in his view, China needed to

create the conditions for being welcomed into IONS by demonstrating her peaceful intentions through visible action (Kaushiva 2012). According to the IONS (2012) website maintained by the Indian government:

IONS is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral states of the IOR by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues and, in the process, endeavours to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.

Given the emphasis placed on ‘cooperation’, ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘common understanding’ in this statement, and the inspiration that IONS draws from ARF (Khuranna 2008), IONS can be thought of as providing an environment conducive to counter-realpolitik socialization. As such, engaging China through IONS provides an important opportunity to socialize China into cooperative security in the IOR.

In February 2012, China’s Defence Ministry announced that China, India and Japan would start coordinating their international naval escort activities in the Gulf of Aden. They will develop an integrated escort schedule on a quarterly basis. The schedule-making process will be led by a ‘reference country’ every quarter. The ‘reference country’ will propose a schedule and the other countries will formulate their own schedules accordingly. This type of coordination is expected to increase the efficiency of escort operations and improve the safeguarding of international navigation (MOND, PRC 2012c). According to Rear Adm. Monty Khanna, an Assistant Chief of Naval Staff in the Indian Navy, the convoys of China, India and Japan had earlier been bunched together in a short time span. The new mechanism would ensure that there was enough gap between the Chinese, Indian and Japanese convoys so that they could escort a greater number of ships in a day (Gokhale 2012). This new arrangement can be expected to lead to greater information sharing and ship visits, which could in turn result in higher ‘comfort levels’ developing among the naval forces involved, and facilitating also the socialization of China into maritime security cooperation through operational coordination.

In March 2012, the Indian MEA announced that China and India would establish a Dialogue Mechanism on Maritime Cooperation to strengthen policy coordination on maritime security and explore possibilities of maritime cooperation (MEA, India 2012). This announcement appears to have been the result of proposals made by the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi during his talks with the Indian Minister of External Affairs S. M. Krishna in New Delhi at the

beginning of March. It has been reported that the Chinese Foreign Minister's proposals on maritime cooperation involved joint operations to combat piracy and sharing technological knowledge on seabed research. The dialogue on the proposed mechanism is expected to be taken forward at a multi-ministerial meeting involving the ministries of Foreign Affairs/ External Affairs, Defence, Shipping and Oceanography (Dikshit 2012). The new mechanism could rejuvenate the process of China-India maritime cooperation initiated by the 1996 and 2003 agreements.

While as indicated by the social constructivist view this cooperative discourse and effort need to be taken seriously, when one considers the existing consensus on recent Chinese behaviour in the South China Sea, the scale shifts in favour of the realist view. In March 2011, two vessels of China's civilian maritime agency China Marine Surveillance (CMS) harassed the Philippine-chartered MV Veritas Voyager near Reed Bank (west of Palawan Island) in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Philippines. In May 2011, CMS vessels deliberately cut cables towing seismic survey equipment behind the PetroVietnam vessel Binh Minh 02 which was operating within Vietnam's EEZ. Also in May, Chinese ships unloaded construction materials at Amy Douglas Reef in the Philippines' EEZ, in a clear violation of the DOC, which calls on the parties not to 'inhabit' unoccupied geographical features. In June 2011, a specially equipped Chinese trawler severed the cables of another Vietnamese-chartered survey ship, Viking 2. During the fishing season of 2011 which usually spans from May to August China tightened enforcement of a fishing ban in the northern areas of the South China Sea detaining dozens of Vietnamese fishing boats. PLA-N and CMS vessels are also reported to have fired warning shots at Filipino and Vietnamese fishing boats (Storey 2011: 2-3). In July 2011, when the INS Airavat of the Indian Navy was sailing from the Vietnamese port of Nha Trang towards Hai Phong, it was contacted at a distance of 45 nautical miles (nm) from the Vietnamese coast on the open radio channel by a caller identifying himself as the Chinese Navy declaring that the Airavat was entering 'Chinese waters'. Since no ship or aircraft was visible, the INS Airavat had proceeded on its onward journey (MEA, India 2011).

These developments indicate that China may be pursuing unilateral gains to augment its own security at the expense of other countries. Therefore, Indian policymakers should pay some heed to the realist view in formulating their response to China's increasing involvement in the IOR. From the realist point of view the prudent course of action would be to hedge against an assertive China by cooperating with the US. However, New Delhi should also be wary of a

possible US strategy of using India to balance against China. For instance, Kaplan (2011: 292) seems to be advocating such a strategy as part of a broader US response to the rise of China in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific, and Michael Pillsbury has admitted that such a current of opinion exists in Washington (JINF 2010). In hedging against an assertive China by cooperating with the US, Indian policymakers should be careful not to compromise India's strategic autonomy and manoeuvrability. In terms of maintaining its strategic autonomy and manoeuvrability, cooperating simultaneously with both the US and China would be a better course of action. This is where social constructivism becomes relevant once again. It suggests that engaging China through IONS provides an important opportunity to socialize China into cooperative security in the IOR, and that the recently initiated coordination of Chinese, Indian and Japanese escort schedules in the Gulf of Aden may socialize China through operational coordination. Faced with the complex reality of a China that is pursuing its own interests aggressively while at the same time engaging in a cooperative security discourse and pursuing cooperative security activities, the response of Indian policymakers should be accordingly multifaceted.

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