

Mastering Mains Answer Writing (Ep-5)

International Relations, GS Paper-II

Question

China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region is a cause of concern for India and regional stability. Discuss the implications and steps taken by India in this regard.

Command Word

'Discuss' requires a broadly covered and all encompassing answer highlighting positive and negative aspects of theme. Solutions and remedies can also be suggested.

Answer Structure

- **Introduction** – We will briefly outline China's initiatives in Indian Ocean Region.
- **Body of the Answer** – Will include the strategic concerns for India as a result of growing Chinese presence in IOR and policy responses by India to counter the issue.
- **Conclusion** – We will consolidate our answer.

Representative Answer

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is central to China's future security and growth as it endeavours to expand its worldwide interests.

- China has gradually increased its presence in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** as part of its collaborative efforts to control piracy and ensure free flow of seaborne traffic. However, in the guise of this, it has pursued the 'string of pearls' strategy and encircled India by developing dual-use ports in Myanmar (Kyaukpyu), Pakistan (Gwadar), Sri Lanka (Hambantota), Bangladesh (Chittagong) and Maldives (iHavan project).
- The Indian Ocean also finds place of prominence in both the components of the OBOR initiative, i.e. the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. The convergence of the SREB and the MSR is in the Indian Ocean, via the CPEC at Gwadar.

Body

Through the above policies, China is trying to establish its influence in the IOR - which is a cause of concern for India because of the following reasons.

Implications for India

- China's strategy of 'debt trap' or making Indian Ocean littoral nations financially dependent and extremely vulnerable to China's unhindered strategic control can harm India's bilateral relations with these countries and decrease India's strategic influence in the region.
- Gwadar Port can be used by China for the potential disruption of India's trade and energy supplies due to its proximity to the shipping lanes emanating from the Strait of Hormuz.
- Pakistan China Axis: Through Gwadar port China is pursuing its old strategy of using Pakistan to secure its interests in the region and control India strategic space.
- America's relative decline in Indo Pacific and the concurrent increase in China's forays into the Indian Ocean have left India concerned with the shifting maritime balance of power.
- China is already deploying intelligence gathering ships and utilising other marine craft like fishing fleets to gather intelligence about the IOR - historically viewed by India as its 'backyard'.

Responses by India to counter China's rise in IOR

- India is developing Chabahar Port in Iran (less than 100 kms from the Gwadar Port) to counter China-Pakistan axis in IOR and safeguard its interests.
- Through policies like 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East Policy' India is trying to improve relations with IOR littoral countries in order to maintain the balance of power in the IOR.

- India in partnership with Japan has planned for the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor as a response to China's BRI.
- Through 'Quad initiative' India, Japan, Australia and the US will cooperate economically, militarily and strategically for free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region - to contain China's rising footprint in the region.
- India is modernising its naval power and conducting regular joint exercises such as Malabar, Milan and AUSINDEX etc. to prepare for any security threats from China from the IOR.
- India's 'Project Mausam', formulated as an answer to China's Maritime Silk Road policy, aims to restore its ancient maritime routes and cultural links with the nations in East Africa, Arabian Peninsula and Indian Subcontinent.

Conclusion

Thus, India is trying to balance China's rise in IOR through multiple policy interventions - including both bilateral and multilateral regional alliances. India also favours a rule based maritime order and freedom of navigation in IOR to ensure regional stability.

