



Mains Practice Question

Q. 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. (250 words)

10 Dec, 2018 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Briefly introduce China's initiatives in Indian Ocean Region.
- Enumerate and analyse the strategic concerns for India as a result of growing China presence in IOR.
- List the policy responses by India to counter China's growing presence in IOR.

Introduction

- China entered Indian Ocean as part of its collaborative efforts to control piracy and deal with terrorism, which has increased as its dependence on oil imports from the Middle East and Africa has grown.
- It has increased its presence by developing ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, through CPEC at Gwadar, thereby decreasing India's strategic influence in these countries.
- India argues that China is trying to surround it with a network of dual-use port facilities in the Indian Ocean, as a 'string of pearls' strategy, thereby raising concern for India.

Body

- **China's strategy of 'debt trap'**: By financing large projects in form of ports including Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar and mega infrastructure in strategically located Maldives ; China is making these nations financially dependent and extremely vulnerable to China's unhindered strategic control over these ports.
- **Resolving Malacca dilemma**: Close to 80 percent of China's oil imports pass through the Strait of Malacca. After development of Gwadar port India will lose strategic advantage in Indian Ocean as India's geographical location was advantageous for India to counter China in Indian Ocean.
- **Pakistan China Axis**: Through Gwadar port China is pursuing its old strategy of using Pakistan to secure its interests in the region with renewed focus.
- **America's relative decline in Indo Pacific** and at the same time China's forays into the Indian Ocean have left India concerned with the shifting maritime balance of power.
- A flotilla of **Chinese warships**, carried out a high-seas training at east Indian Ocean, through such naval exercise China is trying to project itself in IOR. China's rising footprint in IOR through war

exercises is cause of concern for India.

- **Freedom of navigation for trade:** India is increasing its engagement in the South East Asia region through 'Act East policy' and Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN. However, China's presence in IOR can curtail freedom of navigation in the region hurting India economically.
- **Freedom of navigation for energy:** India depends on oil imports for its energy needs. Presence of China in Pakistan's Gwadar Port can give China strategic advantage in times of conflict giving it ability to choke India's energy supply.
- China's rising influence in IOR and South China Sea is threatening development of strategic partnership of India with countries in the region. China forced India to withdraw from Vietnam asserting its sovereignty in disputed South China Sea.

Responses by India to counter China's rise in IOR:

- **Chabahar Port :** India is developing Chabahar Port in this strategic location will allow India to counter China-Pakistan axis in IOR.
- **'Act East Policy' India :** Through 'Act East Policy' India has been trying to improve relations with ASEAN and countries like South Korea and Japan enhanced engagement with these countries will ensure India remains engaged in China's neighbourhood to maintain balance of power for regional stability and freedom of navigation in disputed SCS and IOR itself.
- **The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor :** India has in partnership with Japan has planned for The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor which is seen as a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor India- Japan seeks to counter China's rising footprint in IOR.
- **The Quad:** Through 'Quad initiative' India, Japan and the US will cooperate economically, militarily and strategically for free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large
- **Modernizing India's Naval Power:** India is modernising its naval power it has completed its Nuclear Triad by commissioning INS Arihant and has inducted INS Vikramaditya, in Navy in 2013 further it is indigenously building another aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

Conclusion

- Thus India is trying to balance China's rise in IOR through multiple policy interventions which include building bilateral and multiple regional alliances like 'Quad' and Asia-Africa Growth Corridor building, naval infrastructure and naval capacity. India favours that the regional disputes like SCS should be resolved in peaceful manner to ensure regional stability.
- India favour rule based maritime order and favours freedom of navigation in IOR as well as wider Indo-Pacific region.

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