

# **Maritime Security Cooperation in Indian Ocean Region: Challenges and Opportunities**

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## **Abstract**

The significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is very unique in itself as it is the region having numerous civilizations. The history of this region is as old as the human itself. IOR is the economic sea region and faces grave challenges which would be only tackled with fully cooperative mechanism under the collaboration of leadership of the regional states. This research investigates the core maritime security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and analyses how these challenges are handled by the regional cooperation infrastructure. The security challenges which this region confronted include piracy, human trafficking, smuggling, terrorism and the most important among all is environmental threat. To tackle the mentioned challenges, the regional cooperation organizations are putting efforts toward stability in the region for beneficial purposes. Due to diversity in the region, diverse opinions for policy-making in terms of cooperation are challenging. This diversity also highlights the future of this region as a cooperative economic region.

## **Keywords**

Maritime Security, Maritime Cooperation, Importance of IOR, Security Challenges, Maritime Opportunities and Future of the IOR.

## **1. Introduction**

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is the most complex ocean in the globe as compared to other oceanic regions. This Ocean has a vast significance

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for the whole world because of its resources. Indian Ocean is full of natural resources like fishery, gas, oil, and even precious metals. Unlike the other oceans it is not fully open-ended. The world uses straits and different choke points for purposes like trade. The major chokepoints are the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malaka, Strait of Lombok, Bab-el-Mandeb and Palk Strait (Fatima, 2016). IOR is considered as warm water because the temperature here remains perfect for the trade and exploration purposes whereas other oceans are mostly covered with the snow and their temperature is very cold comparatively. The climate of the region is an important factor for its significance among the international community and major powers. The world has an interest in this ocean because of its noteworthy resources.

The complexity of the region includes the geopolitics, littoral lands, resource management, technological advancement of states for exploration of the resources, instability in the balance of power and technology, nuclearization and military factor, race between India and China and the most important is the extra-regional powers' interests in geopolitics of this region. The global powers are actively engaged in its geopolitics and taking benefits from its resources. The aggressive attitude of the states has increased tensions and hegemonic behaviour in the IOR. The underdeveloped countries in this region are trying to overcome their grave challenges. Some states are under the international funds and are not able to influence any of the policy-making bodies. Different international cooperation regimes are working for peace and cooperation among neighbouring states in the region. Organizations like the Indian Ocean RIM Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) are working for the stability in the region. However, complexity remains due to the diverse policy-making mechanism and unbalanced power structure. For the trading purpose of resources in international market, Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC) are providing cooperative assistance to the states in the IOR.

This study will focus on the efficacy and challenges concerning the maritime cooperation level among the regional states in IOR. The study

will also tend to explain that cooperation is also required between the most influential countries in this region for instance India and China. Both countries are advancing their trade and technology as well for the exploration of resources. On the part of India, it is an emerging influential body in the region and gaining access to the resources. However, it cannot compete with other players due to its dependency on foreign aid and assistance (Brewster et al., 2013). Similarly, India is inefficacious to compete with China as well which is an emerging global economic power. China is far more influential in the IOR because of its grand strategy of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which connects various countries and is linked to Economic Trade Route. BRI boasts China's economy and its influence in the sea while giving an opportunity to the respective country to overcome its economic challenges (Bateman, 2016). For instance, China has an underdeveloped project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is also a significant part of the BRI. However, BRI is not that effective in terms of maritime security for two main reasons. Firstly, it is an economic driven strategy meant for only economic development and cooperation. Secondly, regional countries that are allies of the USA, particularly India, feel threatened by its expansion for which they are actively making propaganda against it. These reasons are preventing BRI's contributions, specifically in maritime security. Both India and China are the opponents in IOR which is amassing the resource race in the region due to which level of cooperation is decreasing and tensions and hostilities are increasing.

### **1.1 Objectives**

This study will also tend to explain the factor which is disturbing the balance of power and stability in IOR i.e., influence of the USA. The regional states particularly Australia and India are more allay towards the USA rather than China, which is a great concern for China (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008). It is one of the reasons that China feels threatened to cover the distance of more the 12000 km from Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean to Asia, Europe and beyond. For this reason, CPEC will be beneficial for China as it cuts down the distance of more than 12000 km to 2000 km approximately (Alam et al., 2019). Obama's Asia Pivotal Policy also contributed negatively in terms of stability in the IOR as it

was fabricated genuinely to contain China's rise while cooperating with other regional states as primary goal (Sultan, 2013). US Asia Pivotal Policy has negatively created an anti-China environment in IOR to help it in maintaining its economy and living the Pacific dream.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The core questions which would be addressed in this research are: importance of maritime security in the IOR and level of cooperation among the regional states, the core security challenges being faced by the regional states and the future of the Indian Ocean Region in terms of structural maritime cooperation. With this the hypothesis of this research is, "if an operative structure of maritime security cooperation in the region is established by the regional states then the future maritime security challenges of the Indian Ocean Region would be tackled in cooperative and diplomatic manners which will reduce the extra-regional influence."

## **1.3 Theoretical Perspective**

The theory of functionalism supports the arguments raised in the study. Theory of functionalism is associated with the work of David Mitrany, a British historian and political theorist, during and after Second World War (Diez et al., 2011). Functionalism allows countries to overcome the state of anarchy in international system while cooperating with one another. The classic functionalist approach to international order is mainly based on the assumption that states can build a peaceful world society through rational cooperation with one another in sectors of technology and economy. The anarchy and concept of supremacy can be eliminated by establishing regional cooperation which will bring balance of power, stability and reduce crisis escalation. An effective and cooperative economic road map for the IOR helps in better level of cooperation among the states so that the regional maritime security challenges should be handled in effective manners.

## **2. Status of Maritime Security in the IOR**

In recent decades, the IOR remained a subject of concern for almost the whole globe which is why the maritime security structure is complex.

Maritime security means the structure and governing body that aims at the freedom of seas, maintenance of better governance at sea, promoting commerce and facilitating the trade (Feldt, 2013). After the decolonization, this region got more importance as newly born states emerged as competitor and started to explore the IOR. The new states in Africa and Asia emerged for gaining access to the resources of the ocean for trade and economic development. However, due to weak cooperation structure and wrong policies, the tension among rival states increased that destabilized the region. It was the time of the cold war era when the tension and conflict rose in this region. With these tensions, diplomatically strong states of the region tried to arrange certain policies with the help of external powers. This collaboration made the IOR diminutively stable and cooperative. According to Potgieter (2012), “When the Cold War came to an end, the security balance in the region scattered.” With great confrontation, competition, hostility and turmoil, this region become less stable after Cold War. The weak structure of governments who share the shore of the Indian Ocean also instigated uncertain cooperation in the region. Eventually, it has also created the security dilemma for the IOR. The extra regional presence in the IOR is also characteristic in nature. The main focal point remained trade and energy security but several maritime security forces are taking assistance from other regional powers which have made an instable balance of power in IOR (Potgieter, 2012).

The maritime security is a vast concept and has wide scope of understanding. It covers different areas of interest including not only the sea but also part of the lands which affect governance of the ocean. New dimensions emerged with the passage of time; for instance advancement in technology also played a great role in changing maritime scope. Climate issues and natural conditions also have a certain significant impact on the maritime security of the IOR. The status of maritime security of IOR revolves around its unique geography, geopolitical, economic gravity and maritime significance. IOR remains the most important ocean in writing and research of the economists, defence analysts, resource managing experts and even climatic analysts of the world.

### **3. Maritime Security Challenges**

In IOR, there is diversity among the states. Each state has its own significance and cultural imperatives that make them unique in their policy-making and political-economic processes. Due to this diversity, the structure of maritime cooperation becomes complex. Estrange mentioned in his contribution, “the growing complexities and the rising geostrategic importance among regional and non-regional states needs responsive architecture of security cooperation” (Forbes, 2014).

Conflict among states in IOR is another factor that has created instability and insecurity in the region. These conflicts produce hurdles for the regional organizations in their efforts of the cooperation among states to bring stability in the region. Dowdy argued that with the plenitude of economic, military, religious and racial insecurities and threats, the Indian Ocean might be dubbed a kaleidoscope of crisis and not merely an 'arc' (Lehr, 2002).

As it is a broad concept, the maritime security of the IOR is being categorized in different areas. For the better understanding of challenges faced by IOR, different typologies of maritime security are discussed below.

#### **3.1 Traditional Security**

The traditional security in the Indian Ocean Region comes under the nature of conflicts between rivalry states. This region has a vast number of confrontations among various states. The expenditure of the military in this region is also of a great amount. The presence of belligerence among the states in the region encourages them to spend more on the defence sector. The element of the hostility is very high in the region that the states are expending more in its defence structures. Approximately one-third of IOR states have comparatively high and increasing expenditure on traditional military security (Brewster et al., 2013).

During colonization, most of the states in the region remained colonized under various empires, particularly Britain. So, the traditional security threat is present in this region for centuries. This is the reason that the rivalry between the states is of unique nature. For instance, during the cold war era, this region has played a great role for both the

USA and USSR. The states were divided into two, some supported communism and some became an ally of the US. However, at present, there is a race of influence between two parties. One is China and the other is the USA and India. China is advancing in physical presence in the ocean while India and the USA together containing the emergence of China. This race of influence in the IOR has disturbed the cooperation among the regional states which has created an environment of hostility in the ocean. However, the developing states are now boosting their economic activities and trade to develop their human resources. It will help in countering the upcoming maritime security challenges as economic cooperation is healthier than security cooperation for better stability in the region.

### **3.2 Strategic Stability Concern**

The concern of nuclearization was never easy to tackle or mitigate particularly when it comes to the nuclearization of seas. It is not easy to handle the escalation as states spend billions in its development. There is an instability paradox in IOR where India with the assistance of the USA is playing a mainstream role. Its enhanced capabilities and influence in the region is destabilizing its relation with its neighbours specifically China. The Indian Ocean becomes a 'nuclear ocean' as there is an active presence of nuclearized submarines. The increasing regional Uranium trade is also playing a massive role in the strategic security of the IOR (Lehr, 2002). Activities on the shores of the sea for instance, naval exercises or the test of any new technology including missile technology tests affect the stability of the region. It is one of the main concerns of global actors in the nuclear arena. It is the reason that the strategic setting of IOR has a wide range of nuclear politics as well. The major powers in this region have a great role in its strategic security concern. They are shaping the environment of cooperation in the region by their respective activities that are not inevitable.

### **3.3 Human Trafficking**

Smuggling via sea is the cheapest and easiest form of illegal transportation of migrants (Lehr, 2002). The security structure of IOR is not that much appreciated by the international community while human

trafficking and drug smuggling have made the security scenarios of IOR even worse. By the definition human trafficking may include the trade of humans for forced labour, sexual slavery or even for the terrorism. According to Rumley, “there is a considerable international illegal trade of human, which impacts not only upon immediate neighbours but also upon the security of the whole region” (Brewster et al., 2013).

This ocean is also used by terrorists in the post 9/11 era. The available literature mentioned that Al Qaeda is actively functioning in this region for terrorist activities (Cordner, 2010a). They are also involved in human trafficking for their vile objectives. IOR is surrounded by numerous poor states; therefore, human trafficking mafia pays the families a handsome amount of money and uses individuals for illegal purposes. The question of the prevention of this act is still present in the international scene. However, various cooperative security organizations are working in this process but due to the diversity in the region they find it hard to mitigate or counter it.

### **3.4 Economic Significance and Resources**

The economic significance of the IOR has played a great role in the economic and resource security of the region. The economy of any region is depended upon the resources allocated in the region. In IOR, there is a low level of human development and a high level of economic underdevelopment which has contributed to a significant level of political and economic instability (Brewster et al., 2013). The allocation of resources in the region is one of the most significant issues and the question of resource belongings remains present. Pandey (2014) produced in her paper that the international energy market is dependent on reliable transport as most of their energy lifelines are sea-based. The international sea is open for every capable state. The resource distribution in this region is not considered good because of the concentration of major powers. These developed and capable states have premium technology for the exploration of the resources. Thus, they explore more in the IOR. China plays a role in its capability, as it has networked ports with the collaboration of other regional states. India is playing on behalf of other international players including the USA that assumed China’s influence as a threat. As for India’s exploration of the



resources in the IOR, the concept of the 'resource race' is coined by Cordner and he mentioned that states are facing problems by one another in this race of the resource exploration. He pointed, "The competition for resources is increasing due to continued global growth and prosperity. Technological advances are enabling expanded marine activities such as energy development, resource extraction, and other commercial activity in the oceans including the sea bed" (Cordner, 2010b).

By resources it means all types of resources like fishery, minerals, metals, oil and gas. Even the freshwater is also considered as a vital resource in the IOR. In this context, the Indian Ocean is very rich in terms of natural resources whereas the ocean's shore sharing major states are still underdeveloped. According to the available literature, the reasons of this least development are the hostilities and conflicts in the region which are created by international monopolies and the wobbly governance of the states that did not allow its people to develop and progress. These concerns have great significance in the regional and extra-regional debates. To counter these challenges, there is a requirement of proper regional structure for cooperative development which will provide an opportunity to the regional states to overcome the mentioned problems.

### **3.5 Environment**

The temperature of the water in the IOR is considered perfect for the trade and resource exploration purposes compared to other oceans. With this the challenges of the environment are also very different from other oceans. According to the studies and research, the IOR is the locus of 70% of the world's natural disasters as demonstrated in the disastrous tsunami of 2004 and cyclones that regularly hit its East Coast. There are more than 150 collisions at sea on yearly basis due to poor visibility, non-serviceability of radars, hull failure, boiler explosions, and human errors (Pandey, 2014). It is an active region in the natural changes context as well. The challenges from climate change have a significant impact on the whole region as a certain increase in seawater level is also a grave threat to the regional countries. Global warming is causing hard challenges for the people who are living there. The factors that are causing global warming and climate change include nuclear waste from

the power plants, dirty water which is also dangerous for the marine life and fisheries and other gases created by plants during mining of the natural resources. The changing trajectory of climate change is dangerous for the future of the IOR and its people. Regional countries should take these threats seriously and should come up with solutions to prevent it from creating pollution in the region.

Cordner explained with an example of Africa and argued, “Africa is also very vulnerable and likely to be severely impacted by climate change. The risks include major food security distress resulting from reduced agricultural productivity, increased water stress, and increased risks to human health” (Cordner, 2010a). The impact of the rise in global warming can affect the existence of the life and resources in the coastal areas of the IOR because of the flooding and other natural disasters like cyclones and tsunami. It will also affect the economic growth of states and deeply disturb the industries and agriculture as well. In his research Cordner also mentioned some deeply impacted facts, “The annual number of people flooded in coastal populations is projected to increase from 13 million to 94 million. Almost 60 percent of the increase will occur in South Asia and about 20 percent in Southeast Asia.” Burns et al., (2012) very briefly explained the technical aspect of effects of the environmental challenges to the IOR that the environment is being a potential threat to the region and its impacts are worth noticing by the regional states as well as the extra-regional states (Burns et al., 2012).

These issues should not have to be considered as a ‘litany of woes’. These are a potential challenge for the IOR states (Brewster et al., 2013). By taking it on the front, the responsibility paradox is little difficult however states can cooperate together by shared responsibilities so that the burden of these challenges should be divided. By doing this, the policy for countering these potential challenges would become more effective with the coordination of regional states. These policies can provide a framework that can be implemented in a structural way. All these are possible only if the regional states show their will and interest of implementing it.

#### **4. Maritime Security Cooperation and Opportunities**

An overview sketch of security challenges of the IOR is mentioned above. There is an element of maritime security cooperation and opportunities in the IOR. In his study, Corder mentioned the work of Baldwin who suggested that security is fundamentally a ‘value-laden’ concept and asserted that two primary factors should be central to a general definition: “security for whom? and security for which value” (Corder, 2018). The common solution for countering all these security challenges is a cooperative body of the region. There are several regional and extra-regional cooperation organizations working in the IOR for the regional development and to counter the mentioned challenges. There are new types of challenges that need to be tackled with new and effective strategies. A proper framework is required for its implementation. New security governance is required by the collaboration of the regional states. States of the region should be connected with each other for the economic activities and the international security issues like terrorism and piracy. A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power added very attentively,

This strategy stresses an approach that integrates sea power with other elements of national power, as well as those of our friends and allies. It describes how sea power will be applied around the world to protect our way of life, as we join with other like-minded nations to protect and sustain the global, inter-connected system through which we prosper (Conway et al., 2008).

Regional states should take advantage of the regional diversity and create a beneficial policy for the cooperation in ocean. However, leadership of the region should not take this diversity into the wrong and inappropriate context. They often misuse this concept which affects the prosperity of the region and fails to counter the challenges together with cooperation.

This section investigates the concepts of maritime security cooperation in the region. Basically, the initiative of maritime security cooperation in the IOR was founded in Cold War era, the time when the whole world was under the tensions of different conflicts and ideological wars. After the creation of different institutions and structures for

cooperation, the regional states started to connect to the world outside the ocean. They also started economic activities with extra-regional states. At that time, the world started to create a hegemonic approach towards the IOR due to the profusion of resources. After 9/11, the whole dynamics of the regional security had changed and the extra-regional states started to make their strong grip to exploit more resources from the ocean. Upadhyaya added in his work that the emerging non-traditional challenges of the twenty-first century in the IOR not only threaten maritime security but also impose a moral and legitimate duty upon it to ensure the safety and security of the sea lanes in the region (Upadhyaya, 2014). Bateman explained that the basic hurdle for building maritime security cooperation in the IOR is that there is no agreement as to what is encompassed by maritime security and no agreed definition of maritime security exists (Bateman, 2016).

The formation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) was the beginning of the structural cooperation in the region. Wagner explained that 20 member states of IOR-ARC, out of a total of 51 littoral states of the Indian Ocean, represent a population of 1.96 billion people. The most important feature of the IOR-ARC is the political, cultural, and economic diversity of its members, which, compared to similar organizations, is pronounced to a much greater extent (Wagner, 2013). It was mainly based on the economic cooperation and balanced development of the regional states (Allen, 1999). It did contribute to the regional prosperity for the economic development of the regional states. However, when it comes to the post 9/11 scenario, it lacks a mechanism to tackle the extreme types of threats and challenges. After this, many other organizations take birth for the betterment and cooperation in the region. Cordner explained that the case for cooperative security in the IOR is driven primarily by extreme vulnerability to combine impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. The cooperative bodies should cooperate to mitigate the risks of security. IOR should follow the international risk-management standard which offers an internationally accepted framework, a systemized approach to deal with regional security for the stable cooperation (Cordner, 2011).

The arrangement of the cooperation in IOR is diverse in nature, as regional states are diverse in the policy-making and political activities. Every state has its own preferences and national interest which is a hurdle for the regional cooperation. As the region is too vast and diverse, therefore, its policy handling cannot be operated by the one state, it is nearly too impossible in reality. This is the reason that provision of the maritime security governance at the regional level is highly required (Bateman, 2016).

Extra-regional states have potent influence in IOR and playing its role as the cooperative body of the region which is not capable of doing it in a better way. The international bodies came in IOR with some serious interest like resource explorations, regional influence, and other significant economic purposes. They have created discrimination in the region for instance US influence on India to contain China. Regional states in IOR are not comfortable with the growing influence of India in the region assisted by the USA. It has created a resource race and instability in the region.

Bateman also highlight on the regional institution which is playing a role in terms of regional cooperation. For instance, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), in which Pakistan is also a member, which is a cooperative body in the region. The IONS has made a useful contribution to confidence-building and the exchange of views between regional navies (Bateman, 2016). It is considered important to note that in terms of the terrorism, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and other such organizations are playing their role but due to the South Asian rivalry, it came near to just nothing. However, it did provide India an up seat to handle the operations of the organization.

IOR needs to adopt the concept of regionalism in its cooperative structure for cooperation among the states in the development and prosperity of the region. The development of the regional cooperative arrangement should be on the top of the list as a very high priority (Cordner, 2011). Regionalism would be the best policy for the cooperative organizations to cover all the gaps in the regional

cooperation and coordination among the states to meet the challenges of maritime security. Rumley et al., (2012) pointed correctly,

Any potential security function that IOR-ARC might consider undertaking will probably take place in other forums. For example, some Ocean-based cooperation may be implemented that later develops into other organisations. IOR-ARC, in effect, will engage in little, if any, traditional or maritime security cooperation.

International regimes that are self-generated and based on negotiation are more likely to offer the greatest effectiveness and chances of success for the IOR, in terms of legitimization and regional cooperation (Cordner, 2011). Both regional and multi-regional cooperative bodies are present and functioning in the region, the states should be participating in the prosperity of the region with good faith. A proper structural and a formal cooperative body should be established for the appropriate policy-making and its implementation should be free from any rivalry and discrimination. There is a requirement of new strategies for the allocation of the resources in the IOR. Poor states should also be looked upon for prosperity and human resource development.

## **5. Future of Indian Ocean Region**

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) remained under various confrontations and disturbed governances. The future of this region is mostly obvious by many experts and scholars. The future of the IOR in terms of the cooperation is depends upon the constructiveness of past cooperative policies. To connect social and economic research with relevant scientific and technological approaches, a very good initiative was taken in 2011 which was the establishment of Indian Ocean Futures Institute (IOFI), however over time and lack of interest of the regional states it contributes insignificantly (Doyle & Seal, 2015). There are several futuristic steps taken by the regional regimes to promote the development of the region in various fields. A footprint of regional cooperation is seen in the regional organizations. Each organization has its significance and area of interest which, for example IOFI has area of working in the following fields, (Doyle & Seal, 2015).

- a. Human populations – identities, expectations and activities, interrelations, movements (migration, refugees), social justice, human rights, virtual connectivity, cultural expressions and practices, health, education, historical and cultural links.
- b. Social economics – human aspects and elements of economic systems, including consumption, commodification, planning, cultural resilience, ideologies of resistance and politics of environmental change.
- c. Natural resources and habitats– attitudes to energy, water, food, plants, animals, minerals, usage, security and conservation, traditional/indigenous knowledge.
- d. Communication – roles of media (traditional and new) in environmental, political, economic and social debates, communication of scientific and technological innovation and implications to the broader community, channels of communication between community and scientific cohorts.

Economic development is of great concern for future policies by the cooperative body. The future of the IOR depends on the integration of ideas of the poor as well as rich states. In August 2012, the UN Secretary-General launched The Oceans Compact – Healthy Oceans for Prosperity to reflect the requirement for greater international action to address the issues of declining ocean health and productivity, as well as weak oceans management (Bateman, 2016).

Future of the IOR is categorized at national, regional and international level. This would help to understand clearly where the region is standing in each aspect of the cooperation and prosperity. At national level, there should be arrangements to provide proper law enforcement in waters which would be responsible for the activities in water. At regional level, an inclusive Indian Ocean Maritime Security Regime (IOMSR) or such similar mechanism should be established which would be discussing the challenges at regional level with the collaboration of the regional states only (Bateman, 2016). At international level, the cooperation would be only in the cases of highlighted international concern like terrorism, smuggling, human trafficking and most importantly the nuclear proliferation. These are international issues and have to be countered at international level.

However, to bring small island states or poor states on the main stream for their affluence would be good initiative of the international system (Sweijts et al., 2010).

Various organizations are serving as an international organization rather than regional organization to improve the development and cooperation in the region with the collaboration of the other extra-regional states. For example IOR-ARC is also serving as an international organization, Wagner noted that, besides all the challenges, the IOR-ARC still has a vast potential to improve regional governance (Wagner, 2013). These organization can bring positive international attention towards the IOR so that economic activities should increase and underdeveloped regional states avail opportunity to grow.

Another future aspect also includes the expansion of influence of China and India. Mainly, China is the most influenced state in the Indian Ocean. The future approach of China is also to extend its trade and influence in the seas. We have an example of CPEC, currently the significant project of the region, which will cut down the trade route of China in to shortest route. After the completion of CPEC, China will be more influential not just in the region but also in the international scene. CPEC is also vital for Pakistan to develop its capability to engage in the international sea trade. The maritime ambitions of China are very obvious from its Belt and Road Initiative strategy as it want to go further on the deep ocean far from its boundary.

Some recommendations or proposed maritime cooperation initiative were highlighted by various scholars and experts which put light on the issue of cooperation among the states of IOR. The best proposed initiatives were highlighted by Cordner which included three steps. Firstly, the leadership of the regional states should cooperate for stability in the region and to avoid the tensions. The regional security cooperation is only promoted by the true political will of the leadership. Secondly, there should be maritime dialogue and analysis process which will only focuses on peace and prosperity of the region. It would be done with the help of scholars, officials, academicians and even the governments of the regional states. Lastly, the organizations should extend their membership and try their best to include other regional and extra-regional states for



the further progress in the stability of IOR. It will further increase the cooperation for example, navies, coast guards, maritime law enforcement organizations, ports and shipping security organizations (Cordner, 2010b). These initiatives are only possible when the leadership of the region try their best for the cooperation with good faith and without any discrimination.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Indian Ocean Region is very important region in the context of the economy and politics. The region is full of natural resources while trade of the world is mostly connected to this region. The international markets are fully involved in this region for trade of resources and the economic relations with the regional states. However, the resources are limited and the states aim to get all. This factor is causing problem in the region that regional and extra-regional states are exploiting resources without any balanced approach. The influence of the major powers in IOR since the cold war era is also the root problem to its peace and prosperity. The major powers have vested interest and have created hegemonic environment in the region by supporting discrimination. The best way to carry a balance economic development of the region is to put forward the non-discriminatory approach by which small island and poor states of the region take benefits and get their chance to develop and to contribute in regional development. The current threat scenario of the region is piracy, human trafficking, smuggling and the most important terrorism which is taking its strong feet. To tackle these threats, the regional states have to come up with little good diplomacy and political cooperation. All regional states should emanate on one table to solve these challenges and to put forward a cooperative policy for the betterment of the regional stability. The formation of some international alliance to tackle these problems would be a great initiative. The major choke points of IOR played a vast role in trade with other regions however the security measures should have to take into account to play a stable role in trade with the world. These choke points are the door for the world which connects with IOR.

The weak point of this ocean is that unlike other ocean it remained unable to create any maritime power structure which would be able to

work for the cooperative trade and relations among the states and provide a better opportunity for regional states in the matters of the trade and resource exploitation. The Indian Ocean is a unique part of the sea and it has a significant role in the resource race. Functional cooperation is required from the regional states to avoid further disintegrated approach toward the resources and to tackle the grave maritime threats. This is the only way in which the sea would be free from the tensions and conflicts.

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