

# GREAT POWER RIVALRY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN RIM: STRATEGIC DIMENSION AND POWER DISPUTES IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Guilherme Thudium<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

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This article offers an examination of the main trends pointing to the intensification of interstate power disputes in the Indian Ocean Region (ROI), a space of growing interest in the strategic concert of the 21 st century. In this perspective, we will seek to analyze the strategic importance of this space, as well as the existing regional dynamics of security, competition, and regional integration. The central hypothesis suggests that the growing relevance acquired by the region in the global scenario has given rise to a "clash of powers", with the United States, India, and China as the main actors involved. The research also sought to contextualize the increased interest in the region with official guidelines recently adopted by relatively new actors such as Germany.

**Keywords:** Great Power Rivalry; Regional Integration; Indian Ocean.

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate. Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil. E-mail: guilherme.thudium@ufrgs.br / Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2939-7238>

## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

The present paper seeks to study the Indian Ocean Region from the perspective of international security and regional integration, especially the new power disputes arising in the Indian Ocean maritime space, as well as the collective security and governance of this area in the post-Cold War period. We intend, as a general objective of the article, to analyze the strategic importance and the dynamics of power dispute in the Indian Ocean Region, for it has as central hypothesis that the growing relevance acquired by the region in the global scenario gave rise to a “clash of powers”<sup>3</sup>, being the United States, India, and China the main actors involved. Germany will also be highlighted in this research as a new *player*, due to the renewed guidelines of peaceful insertion and global governance recently adopted by the country for the region (DEUTSCHLAND, 2020). Its capabilities, however, are inferior to the other aforementioned powers.<sup>4</sup>

Whether as a result of the gradual shift in the global center of power towards the Indo-Pacific, migratory movements using maritime routes, the need to protect the environment, piracy and drug trafficking, issues such as maritime policy, strategy, and collective security, the southern seas will play an increasingly important role in debates on international politics, security, and integration. Today, the Indian Ocean lies at the heart of the main lines of global communication, assuming crucial importance in the new global geopolitics. The strategic importance and, especially, the power struggles between great powers (Great Power Rivalry) in the Indian Ocean Region, however, represent a bibliographic gap in specialized Brazilian academia.

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, a great power is one that holds three determining security capabilities: strategic second-strike capability (nuclear deterrence); command of space; and impregnability against conventional attacks (CEPIK, 2013; IISS, 2021). Of the powers present in the Indian Ocean Region, only the United States and China possess these three capabilities, and India is an emerging power aspiring to this category. In this sense, for Anthony Cordtsman and Abdullah Toukan (2015), the fundamental test of power in the Indian Ocean Region rests on the balance between air and sea: whether a state has sufficient sea and air power to effectively threaten maritime and air movements beyond its own perimeter range.

<sup>4</sup> Germany in this sense can best be understood as a regional power that acts in a leading position in the institutional concert of the EU, a supranational institution with the contours of a great power.

The structure of this study has three parts. In the first part, we present a review of the South Asian security complex, since regional security dynamics have acquired growing importance in the study of post-Cold War international politics. In this sense, the theoretical framework chosen is the one offered by the Copenhagen School, notably the work of Buzan and Wæver (2003), which, it is argued, still proves to be relevant for the current dynamics in South Asia, a central region for the analysis of the Indian Ocean .

In a second moment, it offers an overview of the current regional dynamics, addressing some of the main trends that point towards the resurgence of power disputes between regional and extra-regional actors in the Indian Ocean Region. The third section, finally, will seek to analyze the main multilateral institutions for strategic articulation and coordination in the Indian Ocean, namely, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). This last section will also analyze the importance of common articulations of monitoring and power projection in the Indian Ocean among the countries of the Geopolitical South.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. THE SOUTH ASIAN REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX (RSC): CONTINUITY OR TRANSFORMATION?

South Asia is the most populous region on the planet, with approximately 1.8 billion inhabitants divided into eight states – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The region comprises a territory that represents only 11.5% of the Asian continent and 3.4% of the planet's land surface; and the British Indian Ocean Territory, which comprises more than 1,000 islands of the Chagos archipelago.

The Copenhagen School of International Relations, through the Regional Security Complexes Theory (RSCT), offers a still relevant approach to the security dynamics and power struggles in the region, which can also be applied to its strategic maritime surroundings. The theory was initially designed by Barry Buzan in the first edition of *People, States, and Fear* (1983) and applied in depth to South Asia; this region, along with Southeast Asia and the Middle East, being the primary empirical

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<sup>5</sup> The term “Geopolitical South” refers to countries and movements associated with South-South Cooperation.

focus of the RSCT. Later, in *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Buzan and Wæver (2003) sought to expand the theory and its applicability, applying it to other regions in the face of post-Cold War transformations.

Buzan and Wæver (2003) work with four levels of analysis: domestic, regional, inter-regional, and global. The authors' argument for the region since 1991 is that the security dynamics, especially at the domestic, regional, and global levels, show strong signs of continuity when compared to the Cold War pattern. At the time, South Asia already had relative regional autonomy and was not fundamentally altered by the global dynamics of competition between the two prevailing superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union. However, there are signs that point to a structural transformation of the South Asian regional complex. The inter-regional level has acquired great importance in relation to the others, due to a dual transformation still in course: (i) internal, caused by the weakening of the bipolar dynamics and the Indian primacy in the region; (ii) and external, as a consequence of the intensified rivalry between India and China (BUZAN & WÆVER, 2003).

The rationale behind the internal transformation comes from Pakistan's decline and its inability to establish itself as a power pole able to rival India, despite its nuclear capabilities. Thus, the region's post-Cold War pattern favors the emergence of a unipolar hegemony, centered on Indian primacy (RIBEIRO, 2015). The external transformation process, on the other hand, is based on Sino-Indian relations and the increased tensions between the two countries, which have long transcended the India-Pakistan dynamic.

Based on the number of great powers and the distribution of power within RSCs, Buzan and Wæver (2003) classify them into three main categories: centralized, great power, and standard. South Asia falls under the classification of a standard-type RSC, as well as the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, Southern, Central and West Africa, and South America, and the absence of a great power at the global level characterizes it, although there may be regional powers.

According to Buzan & Wæver (2003, p. 119), "until President [Bill] Clinton's visit in March 2000, the United States seemed to classify India along with Brazil as a regional power located in an area of marginal interest". However, the prospect of economic growth and military capabilities raised by the authors was confirmed, and today both the

United States and China are confronted by India's new regional and global stand. This is due to the fact that the country is transcending its historical confinement to South Asia as it establishes itself as a major continental power and acquires greater prominence in whole of the Asia (BUZAN & WÆVER, 2003), an understanding shared by Brewster (2014) and Ribeiro (2019). It is also noteworthy that India is the only country in the Asian subcontinent with truly global aspirations (RIBEIRO, 2019).

One of the indicators of the growth of Indian power is in the role that the country has been playing in the dynamics of the Indian Ocean. The country is a main player in the scope of organizations and initiatives that involve the security and governance of the Indian Ocean, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which we will analyze later on.<sup>6</sup>

An influential interpretation for the structure of international security in the post-Cold War era is the idea that the international system was divided into "two worlds": a zone of peace and a zone of conflict – an approach that has its origins in the work of Karl Deutsch, Robert Keohane, and Joseph Nye (BUZAN & WÆVER, 2003). In this model, South Asia would be in the conflict zone, "where the traditional rules of power politics of international relations still prevail" (BUZAN & WÆVER, 2003, p. 125). The Indian Ocean Region, therefore, is still a region marked by fragmentation, internal conflicts, and external rivalries (VISENTINI, 2012).

According to Buzan and Wæver's theory (2003), the post-Cold War distribution of power would comprise a 4+1 structure, with four great powers – China, Russia, the European Union and Japan – and one superpower – the United States. For the purposes of the structural analysis, however, we chose an updated perspective that assumes the international system to be tripolar only, with great asymmetries of forces and nuclear power in favor of the United States, still the only superpower, compared to two other great powers. One of them is in descent (Russia), but assertively reemerging in the Eurasian space, and the other is on the rise (China) (CEPIK, 2013).

### 3. REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND POWER STRUGGLES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

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<sup>6</sup> See Section 3.2.

In *World Politics since 1945*, Peter Calvocoressi succinctly introduces the dynamics that have driven the rise of maritime politics and strategy since the 20th century:

The sea entered international politics, economy, and strategy in the twentieth century due to technical inventions. In addition to the invention of military weapons with ranges exceeding the traditional three-mile sovereign limit, the century saw the arrival of the submarine, the ability to extract oil and other minerals from the seabed [...]. Attempts to create an international authority with generally accepted rules were obstructed by many factors, including a division between states with and states without the technology and money to exploit the riches and opportunities of the seas. The former wanted the freedom to do what they were capable of doing, while the rest wanted broader controls and a share in the profits (CALVOCORESSI, 2009, p. 799).

The reintroduction of Asia into international affairs caused the first major break in the bipolar margin after the Cold War (CALVOCORESSI, 2009). From a strategic point of view, South Asia encompasses not only the more than five million square kilometers of territorial extension of the Asian subcontinent, but also its maritime surroundings. The Indian Ocean, the planet's third largest oceanic division, lies at the core of the main lines of communication, assuming crucial importance in the new global geopolitics of the post-Cold War era. The geography of the Indian Ocean encompasses maritime points of crucial strategic importance, such as the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Bengal, the Java Sea, and the South China Sea.

On the importance of the Indian Ocean in the 21st century, as well as the local and regional disputes driven by the economic outbreak of China and India especially, Robert Kaplan discerns:

Already the world's most prominent interstate trade and energy corridor, the Indian Ocean will become increasingly important in the future. Global energy demand is expected to increase by 45% between 2006 and 2030, with nearly half of this demand growth coming from India and China. China's demand for crude oil doubled between 1995 and 2005 and will double again over the next 15 years or so. By 2030, China is expected to import 8.1 million barrels of oil a day, half the planned production of Saudi Arabia. More than 85% of the oil and petroleum products bound for China cross the Indian Ocean and pass through the Strait of Malacca. [...] As the competition between India and China suggests, the Indian Ocean will be the epicenter of global disputes in the 21st century. The old Cold War frontiers are rapidly crumbling, and Asia is becoming a more integrated unit (KAPLAN, 2009, p. 20).

The countries within South Asia share energy dependencies that make the shipping routes and energy resources in the Indian Ocean essential to their development projects. With the rapid growth of the Asian continent as a whole, new economic relations are emerging, especially with the Middle East, Africa, and South America – in addition to the existing ones with Europe and the United States – because of the increased need to import resources, especially from China and India. Due to exponential economic growth, recent projections indicate that, by 2030, India should become the third largest energy consumer in the world, surpassing Japan and Russia.

As a result, the Indian Ocean is becoming more relevant than the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as a maritime corridor: it carries half of the world's container ships, one-third of the world's mass cargo traffic, and two-thirds of oil tankers (IORA, 2017).

There is also a trend towards the resumption of the old Cape of Good Hope route, with an exponential increase in tanker traffic over the past decade. The route, although more time-consuming, is also a security

guarantee against attacks by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden. Moreover, the Suez Canal is increasingly overloaded, as modern vessels are getting bigger and heavier, as observed in the case of the 224,000-ton Taiwanese container ship *Ever Given*, which ran aground in the canal on March 23, 2021, and caused a multi-million-dollar financial crisis (DEFESANET, 2021).

The oceanic southern hemisphere, thus, is becoming a strategic space in terms of development. In this framework, therefore, the Indian Ocean is becoming increasingly important. India and China aspire to project power into this important maritime space to maintain their development; while the United States and other actors, such as Germany and other member countries of the European Union, Russia, Japan and Australia, as well as smaller naval powers such as Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea, have been expanding their naval presence and military capabilities in various strategic positions in the Indian Ocean.

Historically, the Indian Ocean witnessed the emergence of one of the first complex long distance commercial networks in which a series of important Diasporas emerged throughout the region, such as in Hadhramaut<sup>7</sup>, India, and China (CAMPBELL, 2003). In the period of European colonial expansions, the Indian Ocean became the bastion of the British Empire's global hegemony. This control of maritime routes deepened with the construction of the Suez Canal (1867) and the establishment of military bases at entry and exit points of the Indian Ocean, especially Singapore (Strait of Malacca) and the Gulf of Aden (RIBEIRO; OTAVIO, 2017). Its hegemony in the Indian Ocean remained until the Second World War.

The successor of British hegemony was the United States. During the Cold War, the modern colonial empires and the constant realignments of the bipolar conflict ended up weakening the traditional economic unit of the region (CAMPBELL, 2003). From the 1970s onwards, the Indian Ocean became the stage for naval competition between the superpowers (RIBEIRO; OTAVIO, 2017). In the 21st century, however, the security dynamic in the Indian Ocean is more complex and more dangerous than in any previous period (KAPLAN, 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> The historical Hadhramaut region is located south of the Arabian Peninsula, on the shores of the Gulf of Aden, and corresponds today to the eastern territorial extent of mainly Yemen as well as part of Oman.



Although piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean are current issues with global implications requiring constant attention, the contest for power and influence in the region – Great Power Rivalry – has the potential to become a more far-reaching security threat, as European analysts from the Clingendael Institute have previously argued (VAN DER PUTTEN; WETZLING; KAMERLING, 2014).

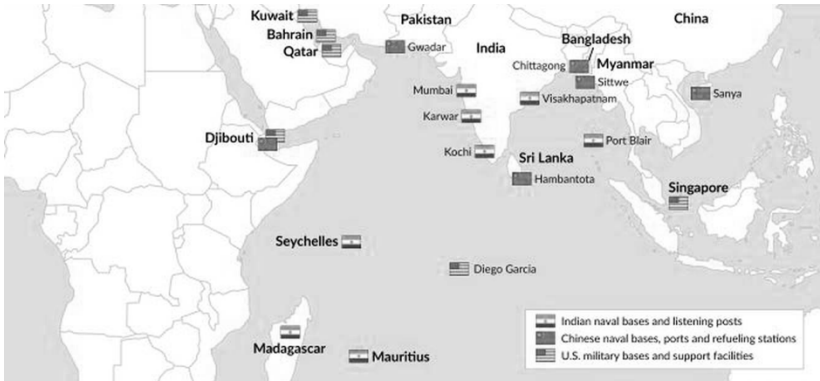
Approximately 50% of the Indian Ocean Region lies within a radius of up to a thousand nautical miles of India, granting South Asia's leading power a central role in the maritime dynamics of the Indian Ocean (KUMAR, 2014). In the post-Cold War era, India has matched its past military and diplomatic capabilities to its present economic expansion and openness and relies on its demographic weight. India's recent naval expansion seeks to assert its control in the face of growing disputed projection over its strategic maritime surroundings.

The modernization of India's armed forces, therefore, accompanies the "[...] increasing focus on Indian Ocean security" (IISS, 2021, p. 259), and is not restricted to the Navy alone. In 2020, the Indian Air Force commissioned its first squadron of Russian multipurpose fighters Sukhoi Su-30MKI, armed with supersonic cruise missiles, exclusively to "monitor" the Indian Ocean region (BEDI, 2020, online).

Although India is currently the most influential power in the Indian Ocean, the United States should remain the largest military power for the coming decades. Beyond power projection, Washington also has economic interests in the region. The country is, and will continue to be, the largest oil consumer on the planet. Consequently, it is crucial for the United States' foreign and security policy to ensure the constant and uninterrupted importation of hydrocarbons, since its domestic production is not sufficient to meet demand.

A large part of the US military operation is concentrated on the Diego Garcia atoll, the largest island of the Chagos archipelago, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory. This is one of the country's largest military bases abroad, opened in 1966. In addition to ensuring the projection and security of Washington's interests in the Indian Ocean, the base is also used for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**FIGURE 1: Power Dispute in the Indian Ocean**



Source: CARAFANO (2017).

In 1995, the U.S. Fifth Fleet, the division responsible for naval forces in the northwest Indian Ocean quadrant, was reactivated after 48 years of inactivity – joining the large Seventh Fleet, based in the western Pacific Ocean quadrant, in monitoring the region. The United States, however, does not have a comprehensive strategy for South Asia and the Indian Ocean that goes beyond containing China and maintaining its hegemonic and economic interests with targeted policies for the region. For Cohen (2013, p. 185), the U.S. government has long failed to see the region as a whole, and the post-Cold War transformations demand an organizational reassessment of how Washington should deal with India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, especially since “this region, including the Indian Ocean, is too important to be treated in a segmented manner, with uncoordinated policies.”

Chinese and Indian growth in the region mainly counterbalances the U.S. maritime presence in the Indian Ocean. Beijing’s energy needs are no less significant than Washington’s, underscoring China’s interest in the strategic South Asian environment. Recent disputes between the United States and China in Sri Lanka to ensure the flow of energy resources from the Persian Gulf (MENDIS, 2012) are a testament of the current “clash of powers” dynamic in the Indian Ocean region.

India’s current naval expansion, however, seeks to reaffirm its control also in the face of growing Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean, especially due to the strategic partnership maintained by China with Pakistan – which is illustrated by Chinese direct foreign investments in

the country's infrastructure, such as the Gwadar Port, the end point of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (FIALHO, 2020). Since 2004, the Indian Maritime Doctrine provides for the conduct of naval and security exercises with its partners in the Indian Ocean (INDIA, 2015).

For Robert Kaplan (2011), while India seeks to expand its influence horizontally, from east to west up to the borders of the Victorian-era British Indies, parallel to the Indian space, China seeks to expand its influence vertically, that is, south of the warm waters of the Indian Ocean Region. The Chinese are developing two infrastructure megaprojects in the region with the intention of creating logistical corridors linking its hinterland to the Indian Ocean. These projects relate to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strategy. The main motivations for the construction of such corridors are: ensuring energy security, development and increasing economic interdependence with South Asia (RIBEIRO, 2015).

Since the turn of the century, the Indian Navy has used the term "String of Pearls"<sup>8</sup> for Chinese investments in port infrastructure with potential military use in the Indian Ocean region – a still abstract perspective. It is questionable, whether China would have sufficient capacity to protect such military assets in a war scenario. So far, only Pakistan has authorized the eventual use of Gwadar Port as a Chinese naval base.

As seen in the theoretical framework offered by Buzan and Wæver (2003), South Asia classifies as a standard type Regional Security Complex. The region, however, is also part of a regional super complex, which involves East Asian sub complexes.

This is because inter-regional relations are marked by the overflow of great power interests, as seen in the Indian Ocean today. In this way, power struggles in the Indian Ocean reflect the unification of regional security dynamics. The political-strategic relevance of the Indian Ocean to South Asia and the maritime security of this geopolitical space, therefore, are defined by the ability to influence land events, considering contemporary military capabilities, and to provide control over the seas, an extremely important factor given the growing dependence on international trade by sea. Nevertheless, with the emergence of new power disputes, there is a growing process of reassertion of the sovereignty of

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<sup>8</sup> The "String of Pearls" would consist of the ports of Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Chittagong (Bangladesh) and Kyaukpyu (Myanmar).

regional countries, especially in South Asia, over their territorial waters in order to contain the militarization by extra-regional powers.

### 3.1 A NEW PLAYER IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: GERMANY'S GROWING ROLE AND NEW GUIDELINES FOR THE REGION

In November 2020, the German Ministry of Defense announced that a *Deutsche Marine* warship would patrol Indian waters starting in 2021 as part of a plan to manage Chinese influence in the region. The military initiative was announced shortly after Germany unveiled its new Indo-Pacific Policy Guidelines in September of the same year, which predicts that simmering conflicts in the region will have global repercussions if they escalate (DEUTSCHLAND, 2020)

At a conference organized by the think tank Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer – who has already been tipped as a possible successor to Angela Merkel – reaffirmed her country's desire to play a more active role in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific as a whole, albeit in a measured way (REJ, 2020), as is traditional in German diplomatic rhetoric.

The minister positioned the German strategic challenge in triangular terms, situating it alongside the growing rivalry between China and the United States, the two main external powers in the South Asian Indian region, and noting that Germany simultaneously maintains a strong economic relationship with China while enjoying a “values-based” partnership with the United States (REJ, 2020, online).

The room for maneuver for a hybrid foreign and security policy, however, that encompasses both Chinese and U.S. interests, has been shrinking in recent years.

The German focus on the Indian Ocean represents an extension of its commercial and strategic interests, which entail the need to diversify supply chains. For India, the main regional power, there is a clear convergence of interests, especially with regard to the multilateral containment of China. In this sense, Germany's approach to the region is mainly based on strengthening international norms and rules, such as the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The new German guidelines for the Indo-Pacific also recognize the importance of regional bodies and strategic cooperation. It sets as one of the priorities the expansion of cooperation with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in the areas of maritime safety and trade as well as disaster risk management, with a view to promoting the competence and capacity building of this organization. Germany has been acting as a partner (*dialogue partner*) of IORA since 2015, and the document provides that “in the future, the Federal Government intends to more fully exploit the vast potential of IORA as an institutional framework for increased cooperation and crisis prevention.” (DEUTSCHLAND, 2020, p. 26).

The guidelines also prioritize a closer partnership vis-à-vis the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with the aim of diversifying Germany’s international relations in Asia. In the words of Peter Schoof, German Ambassador to Indonesia, “the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are the most developed regional organizations in the world” today (ORTH, 2020, online).

#### **4. INTEGRATION AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION IN THE REGIONAL INDIAN OCEAN**

The political scientist Fred Halliday projected, at the end of 20th century, the importance of the analysis of the dynamics of competition, cooperation, and integration involving international organizations and institutions, as well as the global governance of “public goods” such as the oceans in a post-Cold War reality:

The concept of ‘global governance’ has gained currency in recent years and, shorn of unrealistic aspirations, can be seen as having several components: the strengthening of existing global and regional institutions, the evolution of law and norms prevailing to international behavior, the protection and promotion of international ‘public goods’, be these the environment, space, minerals, or the high seas (HALLIDAY, 1994, p. 227).

With the democratic deficit suffered by the most important global governance institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, the actions of regional and extra-regional multilateral cooperation bodies tend to assume leading positions on the international stage. In the case of the Indian Ocean, the lack of a comprehensive multilateral agreement on maritime security makes the dynamics of force projection and clash of powers highly problematic (VAN DER PUTTEN; WETZLING; KAMERLING, 2014).

Likewise, piracy and international drug trafficking in the region and the latent need to protect the environment and promote sustainable development demand joint efforts since they represent problems with global implications. In addition to its strategic importance for international trade, the Indian Ocean has its own abundant sources of energy resources, such as gas and oil deposits. In this perspective, there is growing concern over environmental protection within the context of sustainable development due to accidents involving oil and chemical spills, as well as other naval procedures that are harmful to marine life.

The absence of a comprehensive agreement to manage the region finds partial compensation in the emergence of two international bodies in the post-Cold War period: the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Among other local cooperation initiatives, the Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD) also stands out as a forum linked to IORA and IONS that provides dialogue between government and civil society representatives. Besides IONS and IORA, India also participated in the creation of the Indian Ocean Five (IO-5), which brings together Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka. The IO-5 works on sharing intelligence and situational awareness through joint radars and sensors installed in the member countries.

In addition to the aforementioned initiatives, in 2017 the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a forum composed of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, was reactivated after a decade of idleness. Only in March 2021 did the leaders of the four states officially meet for the first time, 14 years after its founding. Its reactivation relates to the concern of the four countries with the growth of disputes and rivalries in the region, but its regional impact is still incipient.

India figures as the main protagonist in the scope of multilateral cooperation in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi aims to demonstrate that it is not seeking an exclusive sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean,

while directing the multilateral agenda to meet its interests; Beijing, in turn, is one of the main critics of Indian positions in the region (RIBEIRO; OTAVIO, 2017).

Multilateral integration and cooperation also have historical political impediments among the countries of the region, particularly in the problematic relationship between India and Pakistan. In South Asia and the Indian Ocean, India and Pakistan share the same chokepoints, the same overseas ethnic interests (especially in the Persian Gulf region), and the same concerns about piracy and smuggling, yet they find it difficult to cooperate directly and effectively (COHEN, 2013).

In any case, for Acharya (2012), these strategic regional cooperation coalitions, which mostly bring together middle and regional powers from the former Third World, constitute a response that aims to reduce the scope of interference by stronger powers in their regions through regulatory mechanisms and standards of non-intervention, as well as proposals for zones of peace and neutrality. This the case for the idea of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace<sup>9</sup> – which is, paradoxically, located in a region that represents a zone of conflict (South Asia), according to the ‘two worlds’ interpretation of the international system presented before.

It is a space that illustrates the Geopolitical South of the planet, with the projection of several countries of the former Third World, some of them now considered “emerging powers”. Furthermore, although the United States has a strong presence in the region, unlike the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the Indian Ocean, today, does not have a superpower (KAPLAN, 2011). For Robert Kaplan (2011), it is in this geographical area that we can best glimpse the idea of a post-American world, as already explored by Fareed Zakaria (2011) – or, for Oliver Stuenkel (2016), a post-Western world.

It is argued, however, that the presence of international institutions and bodies to articulate and coordinate the Indian Ocean encourages dialogue and cooperation between the different actors, as well as projects the systematic multilateral insertion of regional and extra-regional middle powers, but does not extinguish the possibility of conflicts.

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9 The idea of the Indian Ocean being a zone of peace is not new. In November 1986, then premier of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, drew the attention of the United Nations to the need to reduce the risks of war in the region, convening a conference to constitute a “zone of peace” in the Indian Ocean (COHEN, 2013).

#### 4.1 INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (IONS)

The most relevant forum for action is IONS, an Indian initiative that brings together the naval chiefs of a large number of countries in the Indian Ocean Region (CORDNER, 2011). IONS is an organization that seeks to increase maritime cooperation between the navies of the region's coastal states, providing a forum for the discussion of relevant maritime issues. It also seeks to generate a flow of information among naval professionals that aims for common understanding and cooperative solutions (IONS, 2017). Its inauguration occurred in February 2008, in New Delhi, India, under the theme "Contemporary Transnational Challenges: International Maritime Connections". The Chief of the Indian Navy (*Chief of the Naval Staff* - CNS) was appointed President of IONS. On that occasion, a Charter was mutually agreed and ratified by the heads of the navies that compose the organization (IONS, 2017).

According to the initiative's official documents, IONS has four main objectives:

- (i) To promote a shared understanding of the maritime issues facing Indian Ocean countries and the formulation of a common set of strategies aimed at improving regional maritime security;
- (ii) Strengthen the capacity of all Indian Ocean shore states to meet current and anticipated maritime security and stability challenges;
- (iii) Establish and promote a variety of transnational, maritime and cooperative mechanisms aimed at mitigating maritime security concerns in the Indian Ocean;
- (iv) Develop interoperability in terms of doctrines, procedures, systems, and organizational and logistical processes in order to promote the development of regional naval capabilities for rapid and effective humanitarian assistance and disaster relief throughout the Indian Ocean region (IONS, 2017, online).



The forum is comprised by thirty-five different seas, geographically grouped among four sub-regions: the South Asian coasts (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka); the South West Asian coasts (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Yemen); East African coasts (Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, and Tanzania); and Australian and South-East Asian coasts (Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor-Leste).

#### **4.2 INDIAN-OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)**

IORA is an international organization comprising 21 Member States bounded by the Indian Seas. It is the only international organization covering the entire Indian Ocean. The organization has its origins in the Indian Ocean Initiative of 1995 and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) of 1997.

In March 1995, the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, today the headquarters of the organization, convened a meeting to discuss the improvement of economic cooperation among the countries of the Indian Ocean coast. Representatives of governments, universities, and businesses from Australia, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Oman, Singapore, and South Africa attended the meeting (IORA, 2017). In a joint statement, participants said they had agreed on “principles of open regionalism and inclusion of members, with the aim of promoting trade cooperation, whose activities will focus on trade facilitation, investment promotion, and economic cooperation” (IORA, 2017, online). Therefore, four main components stand out as pillars for regional cooperation under IOR-ARC/IORA: (i) trade liberalization; (ii) trade and investment facilitation; (iii) economic and technical cooperation; and (iv) trade and investment dialogue (GUPTA, 2010).

IORA had its formal launch at the first Ministerial Meeting in Mauritius in March 1997, following a meeting in September 1996 that finalized the Charter for the establishment of the organization and expanded membership to include Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Tanzania, Madagascar, and Mozambique. The ministerial meeting formally adopted the IORA Charter and determined the administrative and procedural framework within which the organization would develop.

The organization has working groups structured in a tripartite system combining government, academic and private sectors (IORA, 2017). IORA, however, is primarily aimed at economic rather than security cooperation and has problems at the organizational level (VAN DER PUTTEN; WETZLING; KAMERLING, 2014).

### 4.3 STRATEGIC COOPERATION IN THE GEOPOLITICAL SOUTH: IN SEARCH OF JOINT ARTICULATIONS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN<sup>10</sup>

Developing countries and leaders of the Geopolitical South, such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, have, since 2003, through the IBSA Forum, been the protagonists of a remarkable and dynamic political and diplomatic concertation based on South-South cooperation and the strengthening of multilateral institutions and procedures in the Indian Ocean (KUMAR, 2009). The IBSAMAR, naval cooperation exercises between the navies of the three countries held in 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018, consolidated the importance of this type of maritime collaboration. It showed potential to act together with the Indian Ocean maritime cooperation institutions, such as IONS, of which India and South Africa are also members, and IORA.

A large part of IBSA's geopolitical and geostrategic relevance translates into the latent potential of influence over the maritime hemispherical south. This potential could be materialized through the capabilities of IBSAMAR, but it depends on greater investment in the armed forces of these countries, a process already initiated mainly in India, and the coordination and implementation of the institution's political agenda (PEREIRA; CLOSS, 2014).

IBSAMAR represents the consolidation of the southern geopolitics of South-South cooperation, translated by IBSA: a grouping capable of forging instruments that articulate the relations between its own regional spaces. Along these lines, Francis Kornegay (2008) argues that IBSAMAR showed the potential to create a multilateral maritime structure for southern security that also encompasses IONS, IORA, SADC<sup>11</sup>, and

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<sup>10</sup> In this section, I thank Vice Admiral André Luiz Silva Lima de Santana Mendes, then-Director of the Naval War College (EGN), for the contributions offered during an interview conducted in September 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Southern African Development Community.

ZOPACAS<sup>12</sup>. IBSA also comprises action plans that foresee “joint training for participation in peacekeeping operations, cooperation in combating illegal arms and narcotics trafficking, maritime transit of toxic chemicals and radioactive waste in the Indian and Atlantic oceans” (CEPIK, 2009, p. 118).

The countries of the Geopolitical South, therefore, must articulate themselves in order to develop and improve the mechanisms of monitoring and projection in this space of growing interest in the strategic concert of the 21st century. Such an initiative, focused on the security and governance of the seas and the growing importance of maritime defense for the strategic foreign policy plans of these countries, has the long-term potential to transform the Indian Ocean into an area of permanent influence.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article sought to provide an overview of the regional dynamics and power disputes in the Indian Ocean Region, as well as to point out the characteristics of the main existing bodies for naval cooperation and regional governance. The southern oceanic hemisphere is becoming a strategic space in terms of development and regional integration, albeit incipient. The Indian Ocean Region, in this sense, emerges as one of the most important theatres in the world and tends to become an increasingly relevant stage, given the economic and geopolitical rise of the regional and extra-regional powers involved.

The United States will remain the largest military power in the Indian Ocean for the coming decades, but its maritime presence is being challenged by the intensification of Indian and Chinese power projection in the region, illustrating the existing “clash of powers”. The intensifying patterns of competition can be observed from different perspectives: (i) in the military modernization and maritime exercises pursued by India (2015); (ii) in the reactivation of the United States Fifth Fleet, which has joined the Seventh Fleet in Indian Ocean operations; (iii) in the proliferation of naval bases and observation points by the United States, China, and India (Figure 1); (iv) in ostensible Chinese investments in port infrastructure in the region; (v) in recent disputes between the United States and China in smaller countries in the region, such as Sri Lanka, to ensure the flow of

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<sup>12</sup> Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic.

energy resources from the Persian Gulf, as explored by Mendis (2012); (vi) in the reactivation of dialogue forums, such as the QUAD; and (vii) in the renewed interest of extra-regional actors, exemplified here by the case of Germany, with the multiplication of new guidelines and documents that prioritize the Indian Ocean Region alongside the Pacific.

The long-term trend points to the rise of India as a new power pole of the international system, which would qualitatively change its relations with the external environment and transform the characteristics of the South Asian regional security complex. The RSC is already witnessing the overflow of interests and disputes between regional powers of the Asian super complex and extra-regional powers, as explored in the chosen theoretical approach.

At the regional level, however, even if India increases its primacy, the Indian Ocean Region is likely to remain fragmented. The Chinese presence is positive from the aspect of increasing economic interdependence between the countries. However, it is in China's interest for India to keep busy with its immediate neighborhood, preventing a power competition between the two major countries in Asia. As for integration, the historical absence of comprehensive multilateral cooperation finds partial compensation in the emergence of two international bodies in the post-Cold War period: the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian-Ocean Rim Association (IORA), initiatives led by India.

Although the possibility of conflict cannot be ruled out, China and India, in the short and medium term, will compete more through influence than military power, while the United States Navy seeks to promote cooperation with other allied navies to protect the maritime commons on which it is dependent, serving as a counterweight to the power projected by Beijing and New Delhi. The Indian Ocean has also been a source of new discoveries, with abundant energy resources such as gas and oil deposits. In this sense, there is also growing concern with the protection of the environment in this space, since the issues at sea generate terrestrial and atmospheric consequences.

The regional powers of the Indian Ocean Region see the reaffirmation of sovereignty over their territorial waters as essentially necessary, as well as the maintenance of navigational security and the blocking of any initiative to militarize this maritime space by extra-regional powers. However, the cooperation achieved so far has not been sufficient to avoid increased tensions and the prevention of militarized

disputes. In this way, we understand that it is pertinent for the countries of the Geopolitical South to develop long-term joint articulations focused on monitoring and projection in this space of growing interest in the strategic concert of the 21st century.

# CHOQUE DE POTÊNCIAS E INTEGRAÇÃO REGIONAL NA REGIÃO DO OCEANO ÍNDICO: DIMENSÃO ESTRATÉGICA E DISPUTA DE PODER NO PÓS-GUERRA FRIA

## RESUMO

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Este artigo oferece um exame das principais tendências que apontam para a intensificação das disputas de poder interestatal na Região do Oceano Índico (ROI), espaço de crescente interesse no concerto estratégico do século XXI. Neste prisma, buscar-se-á fazer uma análise da importância estratégica deste espaço, bem como das dinâmicas regionais de segurança, competição e integração regional existentes. A hipótese central sugere que a crescente relevância adquirida pela região no cenário global deu origem a um “choque de potências”, sendo Estados Unidos, Índia e China os principais atores envolvidos. A pesquisa também buscou contextualizar o interesse aumentado pela região com diretrizes oficiais adotadas recentemente por atores relativamente novos, como é o caso da Alemanha.

**Palavras-chave:** Choque de Potências; Integração Regional; Oceano Índico.

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