

David Brewster, (Ed.) (2018). *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 278.

China does not have a coastline on the Indian Ocean but the Indian Ocean has never been out of China's strategic thought. With China expanding its military footprints deep into the Indian Ocean territory has led to a game of power projections in the region and beyond. In response, the Indian Navy is reorienting its naval doctrine to counter such aggressive posturing in the region. By employing a plan for sustained presence in and around the wider Indian Ocean region both the Asian powers are showing their resolve to counter the naval dominance of each-other in the region. With the emergence of India and China as world's major economic power their military and maritime capabilities have seen a quantum jump bringing about a major shift in regional balance of power. Their growth in economy and power has resulted in competitive interest articulation by these two powers in the region. China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean is seen by strategists as a challenge to India's regional leadership and global power aspirations. Thus how India and China co-exist in this maritime space will decide the fate of the region and beyond. It is in this backdrop that this well researched volume edited by David Brewster containing essays by noted strategic analysts from across the globe have tried to bring forth the Chinese and Indian perspective about the naval strategies and counter-strategies that plays out in the Indian Ocean.

The book is an essential resource to study, analyse, explain, and disseminate all relevant information and developments related to competitive power games between the naval forces of India and China in the Indian Ocean Region. It explores the Sino-Indian engagement in the Indian Ocean maritime domain and in doing so addresses several underlying themes. Chapter 1-4 examines the ideational and perception issues of the two neighbours about their legitimate security roles in the Indian Ocean. This section explores the perception that drives these two nations' strategic behaviours against each other. Chapter 5-10 forms the second

theme of the book that deals with the strategic dimension of the naval forces of India and China in the Indian Ocean. It lists out the various aspects like maritime domain awareness, naval doctrines, comparison of naval power and capabilities, and maritime interests of India and China in the region. Further Chapter 11-13 focuses on economic dimensions of the Chinese presence in the region especially through its Maritime Silk Route strategy and its implications on the regional stability. It also looks into the response India and other nations devise in order to engage or counter China in wake of overlapping interests the region hold for every actor present in the Indian Ocean.

In the first chapter, David Brewster examines the aspects and dimensions of India and China as major powers and their respective roles in the Indian Ocean region. The Chapter views India as a resident power in the Indian Ocean, thus the presence of any extra-regional actor in the region as a challenge. Beijing, on the other hand, does not agree with the Indian perception and thus is trying to expand its sphere of influence in the region. Therefore, this contrasting perception about each other is leading to heightened tensions and increasing the naval competition between the two neighbours. In Chapter 2, 'Managing Maritime Competition between India and China' by Jingdong Yuan scans the China's expanding maritime presence in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) and also looks at the responses of India to such strategic posturing. He further argues that China should have a pragmatic view of India as a resident power in the region and thus make concrete efforts to ensure that these two emerging powers can manage their interests without bumping into one-another. Prमित Pal Chaudhuri in Chapter 3, 'The China Factor in Indian Ocean Policy of the Modi and Singh Governments', examines the different approaches of foreign policy makers under both Manmohan Singh's government and Narendra Modi's government. He considers China as an 'autistic power' whose terms of engagement has failed in the region. In Chapter 4, 'Limitations on China's Ability to Understand Indian Apprehensions about China's Rise as a Naval Power', leading

American expert on Sino-Indian relations, John Garver, focuses on “China’s strategic blind spots in understanding the world around it.” Chinese Professor You Ji, asserts in Chapter 5, ‘The Indian Ocean: A Grand Sino-Indian Game of ‘Go’ that China’s maritime strategy is about securing its interests especially around the critical sea lane of communications (SLOCs) around the Indian Ocean. Prof. You argues that China’s ‘frontier defence’ strategy is aimed at making China a two-ocean force and expand its navy’s combat reach in the Indian Ocean by acquiring blue water capabilities. Prof. You further goes on to reject the narrative that goes around building Indian Ocean as India’s Ocean. Professor Srikanth Kondapalli, one of India’s leading academic analysts on the PLA, examines in Chapter 6, ‘China’s Evolving Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean: An Indian Perspective’, the various dimension Chinese security presence in the IOR. He points out the “flag follows the trade” approach of Chinese strategist as a precursor to present policy of dominating the IOR maritime zone by expanding its sea power capabilities. Chinese aggressive posturing in the region is being seen as a threat to regional stability and thus India, USA, Japan and others are coming together to counter China in the region. In Chapter 7, ‘Scenarios for China’s Naval Deployment in the Indian Ocean and India’s Naval Response’, Raja Menon, gives us an insider view of a naval practitioner on the vulnerabilities that China faces in IOR. He argues that China is at a disadvantageous position in IOR due to the harsh geographical settings and thus giving India a strategic edge in terms of geography in the Indian Ocean thereby making Chinese technological advancement and naval power redundant. In Chapter 8, ‘The Subsurface Dimension of Sino-Indian Maritime Rivalry’, Iskander Rehman examines the capabilities and the nature of engagement Indian and Chinese navy has in the IOR. Chapter 9, ‘India’s Evolving Maritime Domain Awareness Strategy in the Indian Ocean’, by Darshana M. Baruah focuses on the maritime domain awareness as a key driver in maritime engagement in the region. Noted maritime expert, Abhijit Singh in Chapter 10, ‘India’s Naval Interests in the Pacific’, argues on

similar lines and calls out Chinese expansionist approach in the IOR by stationing naval platform in absence of any credible military threat around the SLOCs as an escalatory tactics to flare up threat perceptions in the region. Further in Chapter 11, 'The Maritime Silk Route and India: The Challenge of Overcoming Cognitive Divergence', Professor Zhu Li, calls India 'oversensitive' on China's economic outreach programs and policies like MSR and Belt and Road initiatives by looking at it from a security point of view rather than in economic terms. In Chapter 12, 'China's Evolving Strategy in the Indian Ocean Region: Risks in China's MSR Initiatives', Jabin T. Jacob, gives us a different perspective on MSR and other such initiatives. His pragmatic analysis brings out the political ramification of these initiatives on Chinese domestic politics. Australian Rory Medcalf, in Chapter 13, 'India and China: Terms of Engagement in the Western Indo-Pacific', examines the factors that are leading to expansion of Chinese naval footprint in the region and what is the strategic response of India to such aggressive power projection in its backyard.

These Chapters in this volume provide to be a valuable resource to study, analyse, and understand the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region. The book maps up the security dynamics of the Indian Ocean region and provides for a balance view from different perspectives. Thus this book readily fills in the gap left out in the Indian ocean maritime security studies and is a must read for every enthusiast interested in Indo-Pacific geopolitics.

Raghvendra Kumar
PhD Scholar
Department of African Studies
University of Delhi