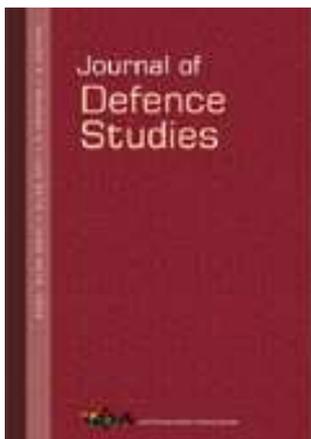


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# Emerging Contours of Maritime Security Architecture under the Belt and Road Initiative

*Abhay Kumar Singh\**

*The revival of the centuries-old ‘Silk Road at Sea’ into a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is an integral part of China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Chinese White Paper on its vision for enhancing maritime cooperation broadly confirms this perception, since it considers maritime security assurance as the lynchpin of MSR initiatives. As its trade and overseas economic interests have been constantly growing, Beijing’s strategic concern about protection of these interests has magnified. This article argues that through the assurance of maritime security under a cooperative framework as an ‘international public good’, China, via the expansion of its maritime influence in the IOR, aims to play a proactive role in shaping the maritime strategic environment.*

## INTRODUCTION

The ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR), later rechristened ‘Belt and Road Initiative’<sup>1</sup> (BRI), is one of the core priorities of Chinese President Xi Jinping in realising his ‘China Dream’.<sup>2</sup> The twin elements of BRI—21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) at Sea and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)—are connectivity projects spanning more than 60 countries with little precedent in modern history, and cumulative anticipated investments ranging from US\$ 4-8 trillion. The magnificence

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\* The author is a Research Fellow at IDSA. This paper is a deeper analysis of the arguments highlighted by the author in his IDSA Issue Brief ‘Unpacking China’s White Paper on Maritime Cooperation under BRI’, published by IDSA. The author acknowledges relevant suggestions by JDS reviewers for this article.



of the BRI, in financial, economic and geographic terms, has generated intense debate about transformational geopolitical imperatives inherent in this initiative. China has unleashed a massive advertorial campaign to promote the BRI as 'the clarion call of win-win cooperation'. BRI aims to foster closer economic partnership with country along the route and promotes sustainable growth of the world economy.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding the constant reiteration from China about the centrality of the economic dimension in the BRI, commentators and observers have consistently focused on its sublime geostrategic design.<sup>4</sup> The geostrategic essence of BRI was aptly described by former Indian Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, as a conceptual application of precepts advocated by Mackinder, Mahan and Sun Tzu. Saran argues that the 'Belt', designed to secure Eurasia indicates the influence of Mackinder; the 'Road' which straddles the oceans, enabling maritime ascendancy, is indispensable in pursuit of Mahanian hegemony. The intertwining of harmony and hierarchy in the BRI concept echoes Sun Tzu.<sup>5</sup>

As an export-oriented economy, maritime trade remains critical to China's economic growth. Therefore, the maritime domain in general and security of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC), in particular, has become increasingly become a centerpiece of China's grand strategy. Sea lane protection and the protection of overseas interests and Chinese citizens figures prominently in the Chinese Defence White Paper of 2015 as a key strategic mission for the Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).<sup>6</sup> The White Paper titled 'Vision towards Enhancing Maritime Cooperation in Building a Peaceful and Prosperous 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)', considers maritime security assurance as the lynchpin of China's MSR initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

Divided into three parts, this article argues that through the assurance of maritime security under a cooperative framework as an 'international public good', China aims to play a proactive role in shaping the maritime strategic environment via the expansion of its maritime influence in the IOR. An ambitious expansion of the PLAN and a clear plan for expansion of its marine corps are a few significant markers of Beijing's envisaged strategic aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

The first part of the article provides an over view of progressive evolution of Chinese maritime strategy. China initially perceived its ocean frontiers as a protective moat and remained focussed on securing its immediate maritime periphery. With growing dependence on maritime trade for its rapid economic development, ensuring the

security of expanding sea lanes became a key strategic imperative for China. Somalian piracy provided the strategic context for a permanent deployment of the PLAN in the Indian Ocean which, in essence, points towards the normative classical dictum of 'flag following trade'.

It must be noted here that Chinese efforts to ensure protection to their expanding maritime interest in the Indian Ocean predate the extant MSR initiative. The geography of the Indian Ocean and the challenges of limited access thorough choke points has been a constant source of strategic insecurity, which has been expressed as 'Malacca Dilemma'. The tyranny of distance in oceanic routes has made the consideration of bases and the establishment of a cooperative network for support of deployed forces a strategic necessity. This is the focus of the second part of the article, which takes a closer look at this 'Great Game' in the Indian Ocean.

The third part provides a brief overview of the MSR followed by an examination of the White Paper on China's 'Vision for Maritime Cooperation under MSR'. It argues that beyond the euphemistic embellishment about the collaborative approach for re-invigorating the regional and global maritime economies, the underlying strategic imperatives of ensuring security of China's expanding maritime interests remain unambiguous.

#### PLAN IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: FLAG FOLLOWS TRADE

On 26 December 2008, PLAN made its first operational foray into the Indian Ocean with a naval task force comprising of comprising two guided-missile destroyers *Wuhan* and *Haikou* along with a logistics support ship *Weishanhu* for protection of Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the piracy-infested the Gulf of Aden.<sup>9</sup> Since 2008, the PLAN has dispatched 30 escort task forces, involving more than 90 vessels and 22,000 soldiers, to carry out escort missions at the Gulf of Aden and in waters off the Somali coast.<sup>10</sup> Piracy in the Gulf of Aden provided a context for the constant presence of PLAN in the Indian Ocean; this has now become permanent with China's first military support base overseas in Djibouti which was inaugurated on 1 August 2017.<sup>11</sup>

The deployment of PLAN ships in the Indian Ocean illustrates the classical maritime dictum elucidated by Alfred Thayer Mahan, referring to the 'Flag following Trade' on a watery globe to ensure national security and prosperity. It has been argued that China's development of maritime—especially naval—capabilities is partly inspired by the

Chinese understanding of Mahan's classic works.<sup>12</sup> Mahan's arguments about sea power and its influence were mainly founded on the proposition that 'travel and traffic by water have always been easier and cheaper than by land'. From this premise, and through a series of historical studies, Mahan deduced two influential conclusions. First, the maritime economy—namely, production, shipping, and colonies—was the key to national prosperity. Second, the possession of naval supremacy was essential to the protection of national interests related to production, shipping, and colonies.<sup>13</sup> Mahan had postulated that that trade, and the economic power it generates, creates the resources for military and naval strength which, in turn, protects trade for further enhancing national prosperity.<sup>14</sup>

China's economic growth has been fuelled by its burgeoning oil imports. After turning into a net oil importer in 1980, China is currently the largest importer of crude oil and sources in the world; more than 80 per cent of its oil imports move through Indian Ocean SLOCs. The SLOCs connecting China to the Middle East and Africa have assumed a similarly vital role as a major 'center of gravity' for Chinese economic development<sup>15</sup> and a key source of insecurity which has been often expressed as the 'Malacca Dilemma'.<sup>16</sup> The resultant shift in naval-mission focus from consolidating control of China's maritime periphery to pursuing SLOC security represents a major reconceptualisation of Chinese national security and its maritime strategy. Beijing's maritime strategy has progressively evolved in the response to its growing maritime concerns. Its naval strategy has progressively evolved from a 'near-coast defence' strategy prior to the mid-1980s to a 'near-seas active defence' after the mid-1980s, and then to the advancement of a 'far-seas operations' strategy by the mid-2000s.<sup>17</sup>

Geographically, China remains a large continental power; therefore, initially, its maritime strategic orientation remained focussed on its immediate maritime periphery or marginal seas, an imperative noted by Nicholas Spykman even before World War II.<sup>18</sup> This imperative initially transformed China's maritime strategy from 'near coast defence' to 'marginal sea control', which is termed as 'offshore defence' or, translated more literally, as 'near seas active defence' in the late 1970s.<sup>19</sup> Admiral Liu Huaqing, a key architect of Chinese naval modernisation and Commander of PLAN from 1982 to 1988, had defined 'near seas active defence' operating areas as covering: 'The first island-chain; the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea, and sea

areas adjacent to the outer rims of this island-chain, and those of the north Pacific.<sup>20</sup>

‘Near Seas, active defence’ was first conceptualised by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 and was actively debated and evaluated during the 1980s. Formally unveiled in 1993, the policy mandated the PLAN to develop the capability to operate proficiently both within its near seas and along strategic approaches to China which included the Western Pacific. Operationalisation of the near seas active defence strategy has been a key factor driving PLAN modernisation efforts since the mid-1990s.<sup>21</sup>

The scope of PLAN operating areas got enlarged in 2004 when then President Hu Jintao outlined his ‘New Historic Missions’ regarding China’s growing global strategic interests and directed the PLA to guarantee the rule of the Party, safeguard national economic development and territorial sovereignty, defend China’s expanding national interests, and uphold world peace.<sup>22</sup> Because China’s economic interests are global in scope, new historic missions provide the PLAN with official guidance to expand its operations well beyond the immediate Chinese periphery.<sup>23</sup>

China’s navy has gradually expanded the area of its operations since President Hu announced the new historic missions in 2004. China’s 2006, 2008, and 2010 Defense White Papers highlighted PLAN moves to expand its operating range.<sup>24</sup> The 2013 Defense White Paper—titled ‘The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces’—went further and stated that the PLAN was ‘developing blue-water capabilities of conducting mobile operations, carrying out international cooperation, and countering non-traditional security threats, and enhancing its capabilities of strategic deterrence and counterattack.’<sup>25</sup> The expansion of PLAN’s operational range and capabilities has enabled it to gradually begin fulfilling its newly identified responsibility to protect Chinese national interests. This move towards more frequent blue water operations has also pushed the PLAN to develop capabilities that are prerequisites for implementation of a new maritime strategy that can defend China’s interests in the far seas.

Far Seas defence involves an extension of PLAN combat capabilities into the far seas. It is consistent with PLAN stated goals and training requirements but not formally incorporated into China’s current maritime strategy. It includes stationing PLAN assets along strategic SLOCs, at strategic choke points, and along approaches to China in the far seas.<sup>26</sup> Far Seas defence enables China to rapidly respond to diverse

challenges or threats originating in the far seas, to protect its economic interests in or transiting through the far seas, and to dissuade potential adversaries operating in the far seas from intervening in contingencies involving China.<sup>27</sup> This imperative was also highlighted in the 2013 edition of *The Science of Military Strategy* which had noted that there are more than 30 key SLOCs linking China to over 1,200 ports in 150 countries and that these SLOCs are vital 'lifelines' for the China's economy and social development.<sup>28</sup> The Chinese Defense White Paper 2015 argued that the realisation of Chinese maritime ambitions would be critically dependent on 'strategic support' from a capable and mission oriented PLAN. The document defined PLAN's mission as developing a modern maritime military force structure; safeguarding sovereignty and maritime rights and interests; protecting the security of strategic SLOCs, and participating in international maritime cooperation. It argued that China's strategic perimeter have expanded to include an 'outer layer' of 'far seas protection' much beyond the active defence of the near seas. This added 'open seas protection' component requires that the PLAN 'develop capabilities that can safeguard the security of expanding Chinese interests overseas.'<sup>29</sup>

#### GREAT GAME IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: 'STRING OF PEARLS' AND 21ST CENTURY MSR

Framed by the continental land masses of Africa, Asia, Australia, and Antarctica, the Indian Ocean is the world's third largest ocean, and bears resemblance to a gigantic water basin. Maritime access to the region is possible only through certain 'choke points' or strategic waterways: the Cape of Good Hope and the Red Sea on the western side; and the funnel-like Straits of Malacca, leading to the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos, opening out to the South China Sea. The maritime geography of the region creates an arterial form of shipping which concentrates on critical choke points, which, in turn, increase their susceptibility to disruption. The Indian Ocean has been an arena for jostling among major powers for hundreds of years over the control of key strategic waterways that facilitate transit across it and the few routes connecting the ocean with the Eurasian hinterland.

Since China's opening and economic reform, foreign markets and foreign trade have become a critical components of its economic growth. In 2015, China exports amounted to US\$ 2.37 trillion while imports amounted to US\$ 1.27 trillion, which were approximately 240

and 183 times that of 1978 figures.<sup>30</sup> China's trade freight volume has consistently grown at the rate of 15 per cent since the year 2000. In 2016, the country's main coastal ports handled a volume of goods of around 8.1 billion metric tonnes, which is around 95 per cent of its external trade by volume. Commodity wise, the proportion of seaborne trade comprises of crude oil (94 per cent), food imports (92 per cent), coal imports (91 per cent), iron ore imports (98 per cent), traditional large products (86 per cent), and machinery and electrical products (73 per cent).<sup>31</sup> More than one third of the global shipping capacity is involved solely in ferrying cargo to and from the Chinese coast. More than 50 per cent of China's trade volume moves along the South China Sea–Indian Ocean–Mediterranean Sea SLOC, having points of origin or destination in Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Africa and Europe.

Given these volumes, the potential disruption of its long maritime lifeline is the main source of insecurity for China, one which remains at the core of its 'Malacca Dilemma'. The need to protect shipments of oil and other vital raw materials is a key driver behind the Beijing's intensive aerial and naval modernisation programmes.<sup>32</sup> Chinese experts lament that the country's overseas supply chains remain vulnerable to strategic threats from adversarial powers due to lack of adequate naval resources capable of exercising strategic control of its expanding sea lanes.<sup>33</sup>

China's strategic approach in securing its vital trade lifeline was highlighted in a 2004 report titled *Energy Futures in Asia*, which was produced by defence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton for then US Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. According to *The Washington Times*, the report noted: 'China is building strategic relationships along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in ways that suggest defensive and offensive positioning to protect China's energy interests, but also to serve broad security objectives.'<sup>34</sup> Noting the emerging Chinese strategy of creating support bases at key locations along sea lanes in the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific along with diplomatic ties stretching from the Middle East to southern China, the Booz Allen Hamilton report stated that China is adopting a 'string of pearls' strategy to defend its extended line of communication at sea. The report further implied that this 'string of pearls' could be a wider design for strategic containment of India's expanding maritime footprint.

It is pertinent to mention here that 'String of Pearls' theory was neither professed nor articulated by Chinese experts. This theory, in essence, was a Mahanian interpretation by American experts about Chinese

investment in maritime ports facilities on strategic locations along its key SLOCs in the Indian Ocean. Mahan, an American strategist, was a strong advocate of the connection between naval power and great power status, who emphasised the need for navies to ensure access to a chain of logistics stations in order to project power at long distances. Espousing China's peaceful rise approach, Beijing denies the implied realpolitik interpretation of its maritime outreach. Chinese officials have argued that China's rise is different from that of the West and does not require buffering by military power.<sup>35</sup>

China had been reluctant to open overseas military bases due to its policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries and its self-image of a non-threatening power. However, the imperatives of SLOC protection and logistics support to far sea deployed naval assets compelled a reconsideration in the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>36</sup> Highlighting the imperatives of protecting its overseas interests, Shen Dingli opined that the issue of an overseas base need not be considered taboo: 'Setting up overseas military bases is not an idea we have to shun.'<sup>37</sup> The question of whether the PLAN would need bases along the Indian Ocean littoral has been an issue of continuous debate in China. In a lengthy essay, published in July 2014, Liu Cigui, Director of the State Oceanic Administration, argued: 'Sea lane security is critical to sustaining the stable development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, while port facilities are the foundation of sea lane security. China must, therefore, help to establish "Sea Posts" that can support and resupply the ships traveling (and securing) the sea lanes.' Liu goes on to state that 'such "Sea Posts" could be newly built, either by individual countries or with the help of China, or that China could lease existing facilities.'<sup>38</sup>

With the commissioning of a euphemistically termed 'army support base' in Djibouti, the extant debate about overseas bases or places seems to be over.<sup>39</sup> There could be more such facilities in the offing. At his yearly news conference held on 8 March 2018 on the side-lines of China's annual meeting of Parliament, China's foreign minister Wang Yi, when asked about future Chinese intent after Djibouti, stated: 'We are willing to, in accordance with objective needs, responding to the wishes of host nations and in regions where China's interests are concentrated, try out the construction of some infrastructure facilities and support facilities; I believe that this is not only fair and reasonable but also accords with international practice.'<sup>40</sup>

According to the United States' Department of Defense 2017 annual report, China set to expand its access to foreign ports to pre-position the necessary logistics support to regularise and sustain deployments in the 'far seas', waters as distant as the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. China most likely will seek to establish additional military bases in countries with which it has a longstanding friendly relationship and similar strategic interests, such as Pakistan, and in which there is a precedent for hosting foreign militaries.<sup>41</sup> In addition, PLAN presence in the Indian Ocean has been growing, albeit gradually. The continuous deployment of the PLAN in the Gulf of Aden since 2008 was aimed, first, at protecting Chinese shipping interests against piracy; it also contributed to the development of a Chinese blue navy in charge of protecting broader economic interests overseas.<sup>42</sup>

Enhancing power-projection capability, acquiring far seas experience, and improving China's image have been an intrinsic part of the objectives pursued by the PLAN in the Gulf of Aden, along with protection of Chinese vital interests in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) and East Africa. Since 2013, there have been at least six deployments by Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean.<sup>43</sup> Chinese conventional and nuclear-propelled submarines have been sighted in Karachi and Gwadar in Pakistan and Colombo in Sri Lanka. Ostensibly, China has defended the deployment of submarines as part of its Gulf of Aden anti-piracy patrols.<sup>44</sup> In a bid to bolster its geo-economic leverage, China has been buying up the development and operational rights to a chain of ports that stretch from the southern realms of Asia to the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and even South America.<sup>45</sup> Numerous commercial port facilities in the northern Indian Ocean, including at Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota and Colombo (Sri Lanka), Kyaukpyu (Myanmar), Lamu (Kenya) and Bagamoyo (Tanzania), and several others (such as Sonadia in Bangladesh) are being constructed and expanded by Chinese companies.<sup>46</sup>

Since its articulation in 2004, there has been much speculation and debate surrounding the validity, extent and potential intentions behind the 'String of Pearls' concept. Even today, experts have divergent views on this issue. One line of arguments indicates that the evidence concerning China's 'String of Pearls' strategy remains ambiguous.<sup>47</sup> According to a Chinese analyst, given the distances separating any Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean, these ports would look more like 'sitting ducks' than a string of pearls.<sup>48</sup> A report by the US Institute for National Strategic

Studies concludes that although China has a significant need for military basing facilities in the Indian Ocean region, it is unlikely to construct dedicated military facilities there for the purpose of supporting major combat operations.<sup>49</sup> China may instead focus on arrangements for contingent and limited access to critical infrastructure in countries where it has friendly and stable relationships. However, it has also been argued that ‘even though China hasn’t built bases in the Indian Ocean yet, doesn’t mean it won’t in the future. The [PLAN] is probably cultivating operational methods—including logistical methods—to do just that should the word come down from political authorities on high.’<sup>50</sup>

The MSR and its geopolitical dimension are also being interpreted as a reincarnation of the much bandied ‘String of Pearls’ concept.<sup>51</sup> Brahma Chellany argues that ‘stripped of its rhetoric, the Maritime Silk Road initiative—just like the “string of pearls” project—is designed to make China the hub of a new order in Asia and the Indian Ocean region. And just as the “string of pearls” focused on the great trade arteries, the initiative targets key littoral states that sit astride major access routes or are located near choke points.’<sup>52</sup> Indian naval experts have argued that the geographical similarity between the supposed ‘String of Pearls’ and MSR is also hard to miss. The string joining these new ‘pearls’ bears an unmistakable similarity to that propagated by Booz Allen Hamilton in 2004.<sup>53</sup>

A remarkably different narrative has been propounded by China. Beijing argues that Chinese companies are creating maritime infrastructure as global public goods for the economic benefit of all countries in the region and beyond. China’s pronouncements on MSR initiative aim at reframing and de-securing concerns and debates about its geostrategic interest in the Indian Ocean. China claims to be building an economic and not a military pathway across the Indian Ocean. The MSR is essentially an attempt to ‘re-brand’ China’s existing maritime infrastructure interests and future plans in the Indian Ocean within the umbrella of a single coherent plan.<sup>54</sup> However, it does not mean that maritime security concerns have been discounted. The ambitious roll out of the MSR and resultant large investments by Chinese companies indicate that China’s maritime security imperative will continue to expand. Chinese experts have recommended that China should take an overall approach to ‘reducing risks through cooperation, and ensure security through deterrence.’<sup>55</sup>

#### LYNCHPIN OF 21ST CENTURY MSR: MARITIME SECURITY ASSURANCE

Initially China's MSR, rather imaginatively, related to the ancient maritime silk route which originated in Fuzhou and then went to Southeast Asia through the South China Sea and then, via the Malacca Strait, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean, on to Europe. Chinese experts argue that much before arrival of European traders in Asian waters, the ancient MSR had witnessed vibrant commerce and people-to-people connectivity in Asian waters. It was through these waters that China exported its silk, ceramics and good will to distant regions along the East China Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.<sup>56</sup> While the primary final destination of China's contemporary MSR is Europe, via the Suez Canal and Mediterranean, it will also branch out to various Eastern African countries such as Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Tanzania on the east African coast. It has also been argued that the focus of the modern iteration of the MSR is to support and facilitate booming trade growth between Asia and Africa.<sup>57</sup>

The original vision of MSR, based on the broad trading pattern of the ancient maritime Silk Road, has progressively evolved. The MSR has amalgamated multiple distinct transportation corridors which predates the announcement of the BRI. These include the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); the Trans-Asia Railways, connecting China–Bangkok–Laos and Kunming–Vietnam–Cambodia; the China-India-Bangladesh-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor; the Mekong River Development initiative; and the multilateral Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation Program.<sup>58</sup> In April 2015, China issued a new map to indicate the addition of a Pacific route in the extended version of MSR.<sup>59</sup> Beijing's invitation, in 2018, to Latin America and Caribbean countries to join the MSR highlights the ever-expanding scope of BRI architecture.<sup>60</sup>

China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) released a framework of cooperation on jointly building Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) on 28 March 2017.<sup>61</sup> A comprehensive architecture and policy framework of the MSR was released on 20 June 2017, through a document titled 'The Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative' which included a 'blue economic passage' through Arctic to Europe.<sup>63</sup> The vision document was the first official confirmation about Beijing's ambitions to develop the

Arctic passage along Russia's Northern Sea Route as a 'blue economic passage'.<sup>63</sup>

The White Paper on 'Maritime Cooperation under BRI' speaks of three oceanic passages: the originally envisaged China–Indian Ocean–Africa–Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic Passage; the blue economic passage of China–Oceania–South Pacific passage, moving southward from the South China Sea into the Pacific Ocean; and a future blue economic passage to Europe via the Arctic Ocean. Thus, the 21st century MSR has a much larger oceanic canvas than originally envisaged.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the creation of physical infrastructure, that is, ports and roads, the MSR initiative considers development of soft infrastructure of regulatory norms as its integral element. Unimpeded trade and financial integration being the key principle, 'MSR countries will need to coordinate their policy which would entail improvement or modification of existing free trade agreements in order to reduce trade barriers, negotiation of aid accords for projects and bilateral investment treaties in order create the right ecosystem for infrastructure deals, construction initiatives.'<sup>65</sup> In addition to the above, a liberal market sector for foreign investment and agreements that allow greater cargo, passenger flights, and the establishment or bolstering of financial institutions would be necessary for realising full potential for MSR.<sup>66</sup>

The document—'Vision towards Enhancing Maritime Cooperation in Building a Peaceful and Prosperous 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)', released in June 2017—identifies maritime security as a 'key assurance for developing the blue economy' and aims to promote 'the concept of common maritime security'. In order to enhance capacities for minimising risks and safeguarding maritime security, the document prescribes strengthening of cooperation in maritime public services, marine management, maritime search and rescue, marine disaster prevention and mitigation and maritime law enforcement. The document identifies four key areas of maritime security cooperation:<sup>67</sup>

1. *Cooperation on maritime navigation security*: China will shoulder its due international obligations, participate in bilateral and multilateral maritime navigation security and crisis-control mechanisms, and work with all parties to combat non-traditional security issues such as crimes on the sea.
2. *Conducting joint maritime search and rescue missions*: Under the frameworks of international conventions, China will shoulder its due international obligations, and strengthen information

exchange and collaboration in joint search and rescue missions with countries along the Road. Countries are encouraged to expand cooperation in exchange visits, information sharing, personnel training and joint drills in order to enhance capacities in dealing with emergencies at sea including major disasters and security threats to tourists.

3. *Jointly enhancing capabilities to prevent and mitigate marine disasters:* Proposal to jointly setting up marine disaster warning systems in the South China Sea, the Bengal Sea, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and suggest jointly developing marine disaster warning products for transportation, escort, disaster prevention, and mitigation.
4. *Strengthening cooperation in maritime law enforcement:* Dialogue with countries along the Road will be intensified and differences managed. Maritime law enforcement will be boosted under bilateral and multilateral frameworks. Cooperative mechanisms for joint maritime law enforcement, fishery law enforcement, and anti-terrorism and anti-violence on the sea will be developed and improved. Liaison networks for maritime law enforcement will be established and emergency plans developed through collective efforts. Exchanges and cooperation among the maritime law enforcement agencies of countries along the Road will be promoted, and necessary assistance provided for training.

It has been argued that the Belt and Road initiatives are primarily driven by broad geostrategic aims<sup>68</sup> and that China is using economic power in pursuit of geopolitical objectives through these initiatives.<sup>69</sup> The broad contours of maritime security cooperation in the Silk Road vision largely confirms to these realistic assessments and indicate China's willingness to use its maritime power for the protection of its expanding maritime interests and sea lanes, albeit in the extant case, under the guise of enhancing maritime cooperation on non-traditional issues. The focus on cooperation on fishery and maritime law enforcement seems to reinforce earlier assessments about the Chinese Coast Guard following in the wake of the PLAN and Chinese Distant Water Fishing (DWF) fleet in the region.<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Beyond the semantic embroidery of collaborative development of the Blue Economy, China's vision document on maritime security

cooperation under BRI contains an even more expanded 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which now expands beyond the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea to include the Pacific and the Arctic oceans. However, at the core of the vision lies an elaborate framework of a cooperative maritime security architecture for protection of sea lanes of the MSR. Through the assurance of maritime security under cooperative framework as an 'international public good', Beijing aims to solve the vexing strategic challenge of security of its expanded sea lanes. China's expanding maritime influence in the IOR certainly poses a challenge to prevailing regional maritime security mechanisms (namely, IORA, IONS, and BIMSTEC) in general, and to India in particular. The extant vision envisages the promotion of the Chinese Baideu navigation system. A network of ocean observation systems along with the creation of a liaison network for maritime security further accentuates this strategic concern.

#### NOTES

1. 'One Belt One Road', has brought about numerous misinterpretations, as the partners tend to focus too much on the word 'one'. The perception of a single road as a limited offer can drive the regional partners into competition mode, therefore, the stressing of the numeral 'one' is to be avoided. Also, the word 'initiative' has been admitted into the official acronym in order to stress the openness of the strategy, and to avoid criticisms over a 'China-centered institution building'. See Wade Shepard, 'Beijing To The World: Don't Call The Belt And Road Initiative OBOR', *Forbes*, available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2017/08/01/beijing-to-the-world-please-stop-saying-obor/>, accessed 11 September 2017. See also Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 'BRI Instead of OBOR—China Edits the English Name of Its Most Ambitious International Project', available at <http://liia.lv/en/analysis/bri-instead-of-obor-china-edits-the-english-name-of-its-most-ambitious-international-project-532>, accessed 11 September 2017.
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