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## CHINA'S NAVAL STRATEGY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: REASONS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The security of the Indian Ocean is now no longer the domain of colonial states or superpowers, but involves multiple state and non-state actors. As a giant economy in the international system and a powerful rising state in Asia, China today seeks to follow the strategy of maintaining dominance at sea in order to secure its national interests. In order to extend its dominant power in Asia and to ensure the protection of its national security interests, China has paid its attention over the Indian Ocean since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The importance of the Indian Ocean is not derived only from an intrinsic value perspective and from its resources. Yet, the Ocean stands primarily as a significant highway to the world powers external to the Indian Ocean Region. Due to the geo economic vitality of the Indian Ocean, many leading economic giants in the present international system have started asserting their power and influence over it. China too has legitimate interest and concern over the protection of Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and the maritime choke points in the Indian Ocean. Through the String of Pearls strategy, China maintains close cooperation with the region's littoral states that extend from maritime dimension towards political influence. While establishing maritime/naval relations with these states, China too has paid its attention to further invest in infrastructure development and soft power projection in the region's littoral states. However, China's presence in the Indian Ocean has posed challenges to the international order. India feels encircled and her traditional regional hegemony threatened. The United States of America and Japan jointly launch maritime cooperation with India to counterbalance China's influential role in the Indian Ocean Region as a soft balancing strategy. Meanwhile, the increasing non-traditional security threats in the region like maritime piracy, terrorism and environmental hazards show scope for the other extra regional giants to cooperate with China. Within that context, this research would analyze China's new trends in the Indian Ocean Region, the reasons behind China's policy and the impact it has created in the region and the international system.

**Keywords:** National interests, Geo economic vitality, String of pearls strategy, Soft balancing strategy