

MS THESIS

**INDIAN MARITIME COOPERATION WITH USA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN**



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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD
(2025)**

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Submitted By

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Registration No: 132-FSS/MSPS/F21

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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Relations**
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International Islamic University Islamabad

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

DECLARATION

I, **Zill e Huma**, do hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation are original and have not been presented in any other institution. Further, I also declare that any secondary information used in this dissertation has been duly acknowledged.

ZILL E HUMA

DEDICATION

*I DEDICATE THIS THESIS TO MY
BELOVED FAMILY MEMBERS; ESPECIALLY
TO MY PARENTS THIS DREAM HAS COME
TRUE AS A RESULT OF THEIR SUPPORT
AND PRAYERS.*

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Abstract

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is one of the most critical maritime zones, carrying the majority of global trade and energy flows. It has become an arena of strategic competition, where India and the United States have developed an increasingly close maritime–military partnership. This thesis investigates how Indo–US naval cooperation in the IOR affects the regional balance of power and Pakistan’s security. The research uses qualitative methods and is guided by Neorealism and the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). It examines defence agreements such as LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), and BECA (2020), which give India access to advanced technologies, real-time intelligence, and operational interoperability with U.S. forces. The study also analyses naval exercises like Malabar, RIMPAC, and MILAN, which consolidate India’s Indo-Pacific role and erode Pakistan’s deterrent posture. Findings show that Pakistan faces rising strategic pressure and declining maritime space. Its response has been close cooperation with China through CPEC, Gwadar Port, and joint naval exercises. While this provides short-term balance, it creates long-term dependency and limits strategic autonomy. The thesis argues that Pakistan should not rely only on China. A sustainable response requires asymmetric naval investments, diversified regional partnerships, and proactive maritime diplomacy.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has significant strategic importance as it connects all important sea routes that handle approximately fifty per cent of the global container and about eighty per cent of global maritime oil; therefore, it is crucial to global economic stability (Cordner, 2010). India and the United States have had a Cold War relationship, with India being an even partially aligned nation during this period and thus not belonging to the Western fold (Kaplan, 2010). However, after 1991, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the liberalisation of the Indian economy created change, and America and India found new ways to come closer. This transformation could be seen in the maritime domain, particularly with actors with common apprehensions towards China's aggressive behaviour (Mishra, 2018).

India has attempted to safeguard its naval interests by achieving its naval expansion program, which has enhanced the number of warships, aircraft carriers, and submarines it has (; Scott, 2013). India procured state-of-the-art systems with American assistance and built increased compatibility with the US Navy under foundational arrangements like LEMOA (2016) and COMCASA (2018) (Saeed &Javaid, 2020). These deals provide mutual operational access to military amenities and improve India's possession of real-time intelligence. It can be seen as a transition towards integrated strategic collaboration from the previous' marital' relationship. This partnership also intends to curb the rise of China's influence in the IOR, primarily via the BRI projects and other investments in the region like Gwadar Port in Pakistan (Farooq et al., 2018).

1.1.1 Global Competition in Maritime Power

The role of IOR is highly strategic from the geostrategic perspective. As a critical transit zone, it connects Asia, Africa and Europe, and some of the most important choke points include the Malacca Strait and Bab el-Mandeb Strait for supply chain Standards. The existing sea lines of communications are also important for the United States and are directly interested in protecting freedom of navigation. As part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the US has identified India as a key partner, given its geographical dominance in the IOR and its aspirations to be a “net security provider” in the region (US Department of Defense, 2020).

India’s navy modernisation is governed by India’s Maritime Security Strategy, implemented in 2015. India also has the ambition of creating a blue water navy. The strategy is geared towards the protection of the CEZ and vital sea lanes (Mishra, 2018). Some of the naval exercises, such as MALABAR with the United States, Japan and Australia, represent India’s growing responsibility under the Quad approach meant to discourage China’s aggressive moves in the IPI region (Hussain 2020).

1.1.2 Impact on Regional Stability and Pakistan’s Security

Thus, on the one hand, the nuclear cooperation between India and the United States increases regional security from the viewpoint of both countries; on the other hand, it provokes serious problems for Pakistan. With new improvements in Indian naval forces in possession of technologies from the United States, the imbalance between Indian and Pakistani maritime forces is obvious. For instance, India is building nuclear-powered submarines and sea-based ballistic missile systems that have the potential to counter Pakistan’s second warhead release capability, which is considered an important part of the second-strike capability of nuclear deterrence

(Khalid, 2019). Secondly, deals such as BECA (2020), which will allow detailed sharing of geospatial intelligence, give India better maritime security capabilities, putting more pressure on Pakistan's naval movement (Farooq et al., 2018).

This shifting balance has increased Pakistan's dependence on its stabilising strategic ally, China, as a check on the Indo-US equation. The CPEC and China's new Maritime Silk Road in the Arabian Sea covering Pakistan are strategic assurances that Pakistan will place itself in the IOR region. However, such developments work towards decentralising the region, increasing the region's insecurity and, generally, the South Asia region (Arshad, 2022). The prospects of this cooperation are not limited to South Asian countries. With the IOR emerging as a new hotspot of a great power rivalry, the smaller countries in the region are pressured to choose the side either in the U.S.-India or the China-Pakistan camps. For this reason, it is equally important to examine the dynamic characteristics of Indo-US maritime relations to draw an intricate nexus between Indo-US cooperation, Pakistan's overall security, and regional stability (Saeed &Javaid, 2020).

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The emerging strategic cooperation in the maritime sphere between India and the USA profoundly changes the geopolitical equation of South Asia and the broader region of the Indian Ocean. Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a critical transit zone as it handles 80% of the maritime oil trade and 50% of global container traffic; hence, advocating for energy security in the IOR is important for the global economy (Cordner, 2010). India is a vital partner for the US in the IPECS as it has one of the world's fastest-growing navy aspirations and geographic locations (Kaplan, 2010). Agreements such as LEMOA and BECA enhance India's operational and intelligence

capabilities, solidifying its position as a “net security provider” in the region (Saeed &Javaid, 2020). This partnership ensures the safety of chief connectivity corridors but alters Pakistan’s geographical landscape and margins (Farooq et al., 2018).

Modernisation of the Indian navy equipped with state-of-the-art technologies like P-8I Poseid and nuclear submarines poses a threat to Pakistan’s Maritime security. Such developments enhance India’s observational skills, putting pressure on Pakistan for asset protection along the coastlines and strategic channels for commerce (Khalid, 2019). This increasing asymmetry led Pakistan to become increasingly dependent on China, which is indicated by naval manoeuvres and where Gwadar Port was under the CPEC (Hussain, 2020). It generates Pakistan’s dependency, erodes its strategic independence, intensifies conflict, and destabilises South Asia. The existing literature on Indo-US maritime cooperation mainly addresses Indian emergence and Chinese responses, though Pakistan’s stance is omitted. Therefore, this research aims to make a novel yet important intervention into the literature by analysing how this partnership affects Pakistan’s maritime security and regional positioning.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The emergent maritime cooperation between India and the US has reshaped the strategic environment of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This partnership, strengthened through defence agreements, intelligence sharing, and joint naval exercises, has expanded India’s maritime power projection and significantly altered the regional balance. What is already known is that this cooperation has enhanced India’s naval capabilities, granting it greater surveillance, operational reach, and influence across vital sea lanes. What is still less understood, however, is the specific manner in which this cooperation affects Pakistan’s maritime security and strategic

autonomy. While the broader Indo-Pacific dynamics are frequently discussed in existing scholarship, Pakistan's position as a directly affected neighbour often receives limited analytical attention. The gap lies in explaining how Pakistan experiences new vulnerabilities, both in terms of deterrence and in its role within South Asia's evolving security complex.

To address this gap, the present study examines the concrete impact of Indo-US maritime collaboration on Pakistan's naval posture, regional standing, and long-term security calculations. It focuses on how this cooperation creates asymmetries, intensifies Pakistan's dependence on external alliances, and narrows its strategic space in the IOR. This investigation is necessary because understanding these implications is crucial for Pakistan's national security planning. Without a systematic analysis, Pakistan risks strategic marginalisation and inadequate policy responses. Therefore, the study identifies Indo-US maritime cooperation as a central driver of change in South Asia's security order and evaluates its consequences for Pakistan's ability to safeguard sovereignty, maintain deterrence, and pursue sustainable maritime security.

1.4 Aim of the Study

This research aims to assess Indo-US maritime cooperation and its implications for the South Asian region, with special consideration to the modernisation of the Indian navy, geopolitical/security challenges to Pakistan, and their strategic correlates. It aims to contribute to discussing how these forces will shape the region's stability and power balance.

1.4.1 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the scope and nature of Indo-US maritime cooperation, including key agreements and initiatives.

- ii. To analyse the modernisation of India's navy facilitated by US technological and strategic support.
- iii. To evaluate this partnership's geopolitical and security implications, particularly for Pakistan's maritime security and strategic autonomy.
- iv. To explore Pakistan's strategic responses and policy options in countering the challenges the Indo-US partnership poses.

1.4.2 Research Questions

Main Research Question:

- i. What are the key components of Indo-US maritime cooperation, and how does it affect Pakistan's maritime security and overall strategic positioning?

Secondary Research Questions:

- i. How have Indo-US defence agreements and naval initiatives evolved over time?
- ii. In what ways has the United States contributed to India's naval modernisation, and what broader strategic objectives does this serve?
- iii. What measures and strategies can Pakistan adopt to mitigate the security challenges arising from Indo-US maritime cooperation?

1.4.3 Research Hypothesis

H1: Indo-US maritime cooperation significantly enhances India's naval capabilities and strategic influence in the Indian Ocean Region, thereby undermining Pakistan's maritime deterrence and strategic autonomy.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Neorealism

Neorealism explains state behaviour from the structure of the international system. The system is anarchic. No authority guarantees security; states must rely on self-help (Waltz, 1979). Under anarchy, relative gains matter more than absolute gains because today's partner can be tomorrow's rival (Waltz, 1979). I adopt offensive realism. Mearsheimer argues that great powers try to maximise power to secure regional dominance and to prevent others from doing the same (Mearsheimer, 2001). Uncertainty about others' future intentions reinforces this push for capabilities and advantageous alignments (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Alliances under Anarchy

Neorealism does not treat alliances as altruism. They are instruments of self-help. Walt's balance-of-threat theory shows that states align against the most dangerous actor, defined by capabilities, proximity, offensive power and perceived intent (Walt, 1987). Snyder adds that alliance politics sits under the same structural pressures, creating risks of entrapment and abandonment that must be managed (Snyder, 1997). Jervis links these choices to the security dilemma: when offence and defence are hard to distinguish, one state's defensive buildup reduces another's security and triggers spirals (Jervis, 1978).

Systemic drivers of Indo–US cooperation

Indo–US maritime cooperation follows this logic. Both states read China's blue-water expansion and access points in the IOR as a long-term challenge. India seeks to deny a rival's local dominance. The United States seeks to share burdens with

a capable regional partner to balance a peer competitor. Under offensive realism, the two converge on a practical bargain: institutionalised access, data, and interoperability that aggregate capabilities and compress reaction time for any adversary (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Institutions that translate structure into capability

Three “foundational agreements” operationalise this: LEMOA (2016) enables reciprocal logistics access, which affects endurance, tempo and radius of naval operations (Press Information Bureau, 2016). COMCASA (2018) provides secure and encrypted communications, allowing Indian units to integrate with U.S. and allied C2 networks (Ministry of External Affairs, 2018). BECA (2020) unlocks high-grade geospatial intelligence for precise navigation and targeting (Press Information Bureau, 2020). U.S. policy describes these as pillars of a long-term security partnership in the maritime domain (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Offensive realism expects exactly this: institutions used not to transcend power politics but to enhance it by lowering transaction costs for cooperation that shifts the distribution of capabilities (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001).

Material effects: platforms, reach, and survivability

The capability shifts are visible. India operates 12 P-8I long-range patrol aircraft for ISR and anti-submarine warfare (Naval News, 2022). It contracted 24 MH-60R multi-mission helicopters in 2020; in 2024 the United States cleared a further support package of about US\$1.17 billion, reinforcing ASW and over-the-horizon targeting (Reuters, 2024b). In 2024, the U.S. approved the sale of 31 MQ-9B HALE drones, adding persistent maritime domain awareness and precision strike options (Reuters, 2024a). These platforms reach full value when networked through

COMCASA/Beca-enabled C4ISR. At the high end, INS Vikrant was commissioned in September 2022, and dual-carrier operations with Vikramaditya were demonstrated during MILAN 2024, a signal of sustained air cover and distributed sea control (Press Information Bureau, 2022; Press Information Bureau, 2024a). Strategic survivability also improved as INS Arighat (SSBN-02) was commissioned in August 2024, strengthening the sea-based leg of deterrence (Press Information Bureau, 2024b). In neorealist terms, these moves increase India's relative power and narrow an opponent's decision space (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Pakistan's security dilemma and action–reaction dynamics

For Pakistan, these changes compress warning time and complicate naval survivability. Expanded Indian ISR and ASW coverage reduces the opacity on which smaller maritime forces often rely. The predictable response is compensatory procurement and alliance deepening. Pakistan inducted Type-054A/P (Tughril-class) frigates in 2022–2023 for area air defence and ASW, Babur-class (MILGEM) corvettes in 2023 for littoral warfare, and progressed on Hangor-class (S-26) submarines from 2024 for under-sea deterrence (Naval News, 2023; EDR Magazine, 2023; AP News, 2025). The pattern is classic security dilemma behaviour (Jervis, 1978): measures to secure one side drive counter-measures by the other, raising costs and risks for both.

Neorealism explains why cooperation deepens and why maritime capabilities matter: anarchy, uncertainty, and relative gains push India and the United States to aggregate power and push Pakistan to counter-balance. Yet limits exist. First, neorealism privileges material shifts and can under-specify how signals, dual-carrier demonstrations or exclusive exercise formats, shape perceptions of exclusion and threat beyond the order of battle. Second, alliance theory warns about entrapment and

abandonment risks (Snyder, 1997). Managing these risks will condition India's room for manoeuvre and Pakistan's hedging choices. Third, the model treats institutions as instruments; it may underplay their feedback effects on doctrine, learning, and standardisation. These caveats do not weaken the core insight. They show why the analysis must later pair neorealism with a regional lens: the distribution of capabilities explains the direction of change, while regional security dynamics explain its form and intensity.

1.5.2 Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

RSCT explains why most security dynamics are concentrated at the regional level, where proximity, history, and cross-border externalities bind states into a patterned interaction (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). The key claim is simple. Threats travel most intensely among neighbours; therefore, security becomes “clustered” in regions. RSCT keeps the structural insight of anarchy from neorealism, but shifts the analytic focus: it asks how regional structures, historical enmities, and external penetration by great powers shape behaviour (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). It also adds a constructivist strand, amity/enmity patterns, because identities and narratives influence how material capabilities are interpreted.

South Asia as a security complex

South Asia is a textbook security complex. India and Pakistan have a long, crisis-prone rivalry with repeated militarised disputes and nuclear signalling. The rivalry is rooted in partition, territorial claims, and state-building choices that institutionalised mutual suspicion (Ganguly, 2016; Paul, 2014). RSCT helps to show why maritime developments do not stay “offshore.” Moves at sea feed back into the core rivalry because decision-makers interpret naval upgrades through the lens of the

broader India–Pakistan competition. Thus, maritime cooperation between India and a great power will rarely be seen by Pakistan as neutral. It will be absorbed into the regional threat grammar.

External penetration and the new maritime architecture

A central RSCT mechanism is external penetration, when a great power enters a regional complex and alters its balance and rules of the game (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). The United States has done this in the Indian Ocean Region by institutionalising cooperation with India. The foundational agreements (LEMOA 2016; COMCASA 2018; BECA 2020) are not only bilateral instruments; they are region-shaping because they integrate India into U.S. C2 networks, logistics chains, and geospatial intelligence flows (Pant &Bommakanti, 2019). Regularised exercises, MALABAR with Japan and Australia, Indian participation in RIMPAC, and India-led MILAN where the U.S. now participates—normalise an Indo-U.S. operational community at sea (Rej, 2019). The IFC-IOR set up in 2018 adds an information-sharing hub that links regional maritime domain awareness to India-centred networks (Press Information Bureau, 2018; Indian Navy, n.d). In RSCT terms, these moves re-wire the South Asian complex by embedding external power in India’s maritime posture.

Amity/enmity and the social construction of threat

RSCT’s constructivist strand is vital here. India’s amity with the United States is reproduced through repeated exercises, liaison arrangements, and technology pathways, which create shared procedures and habits of cooperation (Rej, 2019). Pakistan experiences the same processes as symbolic exclusion. The message is not only that India is stronger; it is that the regional order is being written with India, not

with Pakistan. This social meaning intensifies threat perception beyond the material order of battle. At the same time, Pakistan's amity with China deepens, through CPEC, naval procurement (Type-054A/P frigates; Hangor submarines), and regular drills, fixing the region into opposing blocs (Small, 2020). RSCT predicts such bloc consolidation when amity/enmity lines align with external penetration.

Regional security dilemma and Pakistan's maritime position

RSCT also explains why Indo-U.S. maritime cooperation produces a sharper regional security dilemma for Pakistan than platform counts alone would suggest. BECA-enabled geospatial products and COMCASA-enabled secure links allow India's P-8I, MH-60R and, prospectively, MQ-9B to operate as a networked maritime surveillance and ASW complex. In material terms, this compresses Pakistan's warning time at sea and raises the detection risk for submarines. In social terms, the same changes signal hierarchy: India is the region's security manager with U.S. backing. Pakistan's reaction—deeper reliance on Chinese under-sea and surface combatants, restores some denial capacity but entrenches polarisation (Small, 2020; Pant &Bommakanti, 2019). RSCT, therefore, links systemic balancing to regional escalation pathways: external support to one side raises insecurity for the other and hardens alliance choices.

What RSCT adds—and its limits

Compared to neorealism alone, RSCT adds three payoffs for this thesis. First, it captures how external power (the U.S.) changes regional security by re-wiring daily practices (IFC-IOR, exercise routines) and not only by adding tonnage (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). Second, it shows why meaning matters: dual-carrier demonstrations or exclusive QUAD formats send signals that shape Pakistan's choices

even when the material gap is modest. Third, it explains Pakistan's path-dependence: once amity/enmity lines solidify, switching alignment becomes costly, so Islamabad doubles down on asymmetric and China-linked options. RSCT also has limits. It can underestimate how global competition constrains regional autonomy; South Asia today is tightly coupled to U.S.–China rivalry. It may also blur agency by treating complexes as structural facts. For this reason, the next subsection integrates RSCT with neorealism: the systemic distribution of capabilities explains why Indo–U.S. cooperation grows; RSCT explains how that cooperation reshapes South Asia's security complex and intensifies Pakistan's maritime insecurity.

1.5.3 Integrating Neorealism and RSCT

Neorealism and RSCT operate at different levels, but together they provide a fuller understanding of Indo–US maritime cooperation. Neorealism works at the systemic level, where anarchy, relative gains, and balance-of-power logic push India and the United States toward alignment to counter China (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). RSCT shifts the analysis to the regional level, where the India–Pakistan rivalry, patterns of amity and enmity, and U.S. penetration into South Asia explain how this systemic cooperation plays out locally (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). By combining them, the thesis avoids the narrowness of either approach in isolation.

Neorealism explains why the United States and India deepen maritime cooperation. Both perceive China's assertive naval presence, from Gwadar to Djibouti, as a systemic threat. Foundational agreements like LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA, as well as the transfer of P-8I patrol aircraft and MQ-9B drones, fit the offensive realist claim that powers seek to aggregate relative capability to shape the balance (Pant &Bommakanti, 2019). RSCT then explains how this systemic choice

transforms the South Asian security complex. When India integrates with U.S. networks and exercises like MALABAR, Pakistan perceives exclusion and marginalisation. This intensifies the regional security dilemma, driving Pakistan to rely further on China through CPEC and naval procurement (Small, 2020).

The security dilemma appears in both theories but in different ways. For neorealists, it is rooted in uncertainty under anarchy (Jervis, 1978). Indian acquisition of U.S. platforms strengthens its ISR and ASW capabilities, which from Pakistan's perspective threaten survivability at sea. For RSCT, the dilemma is reinforced socially: exclusion from exercises and U.S.–India amity are interpreted in Islamabad as evidence of strategic isolation. Thus, Pakistan's counter-alignments with China are not only material balancing but also socially constructed responses to perceived enmity (Paul, 2014). The combination of structural and social factors explains why the arms race is both persistent and escalating.

Using both theories highlights their complementarity. Neorealism shows the drivers of cooperation at the systemic level: anarchy, uncertainty, and the need to balance China. RSCT shows the regional consequences: how that cooperation is absorbed into the enduring India–Pakistan rivalry and produces escalating maritime insecurity. Neither theory alone is sufficient. Neorealism underplays regional identities, while RSCT risks overemphasising regional autonomy from global competition. Together, they offer a stronger framework: Indo–US cooperation is a rational response to systemic pressures, but its destabilising impact on Pakistan emerges through the regional security complex.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This work contributes academically by contextualising South Asia's evolving security architecture. Most of the existing literature is about the Indo-Pacific strategy

and efforts to modernise India's naval modernisation but neglects the Pakistani perspective on Indo-US maritime collaboration. This research examines how this partnership affects Pakistan's maritime security and strategic autonomy, providing a more nuanced view than usually considered in excellent power competition thinking. The study also utilises theoretical frameworks, including Neorealism and Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), to contextualise the dynamics of Indo-US cooperation and its ramifications for regional stability that otherwise pose theoretical applications for South Asia's security environment.

The findings of this research are of critical relevance to policymakers in Pakistan. Indo-US collaboration has created immediate and long-term security challenges for Pakistan due to the strategic and naval imbalance it has brought to the country. The insights from this study have actionable implications for developing counter strategies that should include strengthening maritime partnership with China and improving Pakistan's naval capacities. More importantly, the research also argues for the need for active involvement in regional security dialogue to turn the tide against the risk of further exclusion. In empirical evidence and theoretical analysis, these policy recommendations are grounded and valuable to Pakistan's national security planners.

Indo-US maritime collaboration has wider consequences for South Asia. With this study, the lessons learned from the Indian Ocean Region are relevant for the other regions where great power competition occurs. For instance, states with small sizes in contested regions, including the South China Sea or the Eastern Mediterranean, can learn from the experiences of how such small states could balance strategic alignment while claiming the right to sovereignty in the face of a vast geopolitical rivalry.

Therefore, this research is important to the global discourse on maritime security and power realignments in a multipolar world.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Study Design

This research adopts qualitative, exploratory, and analytical design. A qualitative approach is suitable because the study deals with international relations and security issues where meaning, interpretation, and strategic perception are more important than numerical measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study does not aim to test hypotheses with statistical models, but rather to understand how Indo-US maritime cooperation is constructed, interpreted, and responded to within the South Asian context. The exploratory character of the design is justified by the limited academic work on Indo-US maritime cooperation from a Pakistani perspective. Exploratory research is recommended where knowledge is incomplete, and the aim is to build new insights (Stebbins, 2001). The study therefore seeks to fill a gap in scholarship by systematically examining how Indian naval modernisation and U.S. support affect Pakistan's strategic autonomy.

The analytical dimension of the design ensures that the research does not only describe developments but also interprets them using theory. Silverman (2013) notes that qualitative analysis must go beyond narrative description to locate patterns, contradictions, and causal claims. This study therefore links empirical findings about agreements, platforms, and alignments to theoretical lenses of neorealism and RSCT, generating structured insights into regional security dynamics. Primary data is excluded because of the sensitive nature of naval strategy and security cooperation. Access to policymakers or classified military information is not possible, and interviews with officials could not produce reliable data in such a securitised domain.

For this reason, the study relies on secondary sources that are both authoritative and publicly accessible. This is an accepted practice in security studies, where official policy documents, strategic reports, and academic analyses provide the most credible foundation (George & Bennett, 2005).

1.7.2 Data Collection

The study is based entirely on secondary data sources. This includes:

Official documents such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). These texts are analysed because they embody the legal and strategic commitments of the Indo-US partnership.

Government and policy reports from the U.S. Department of Defense and India's Ministry of External Affairs. These sources are authoritative in showing the stated objectives and directions of cooperation.

Academic literature in peer-reviewed journals and books that contextualises Indo-US collaboration in broader theories of international relations and regional security.

Think tank publications (e.g., Carnegie Endowment, Stimson Center, RAND), which provide up-to-date and policy-relevant assessments of naval modernisation and strategic alignments.

Bryman (2016) notes that secondary data can be a strong basis for research if sources are credible, relevant, and systematically analysed. In this study, secondary data is not treated passively but subjected to structured interpretation. This ensures that the analysis reflects both official narratives and independent critiques. The

decision to rely on secondary sources also ensures triangulation, since different types of documents (official, academic, policy reports) can be compared to check consistency and expose gaps (Flick, 2014). This strengthens validity, even without primary data collection.

1.7.3 Data Analysis

The study applies two complementary qualitative techniques: content analysis and comparative analysis. Content analysis is applied to official agreements and policy texts. Schreier (2012) defines content analysis as a method for systematically coding and interpreting meaning in documents. By focusing on the language of cooperation (e.g., “interoperability,” “logistics support,” “geospatial sharing”), the study identifies the main themes of strategic alignment, power projection, and alliance building. This method is qualitative because the aim is not to count words but to interpret the underlying strategic implications (Silverman, 2013).

Comparative analysis is used to contrast Indian and Pakistani naval capabilities. This includes examining India’s acquisition of U.S. systems such as the P-8I Poseidon and MQ-9B drones, against Pakistan’s reliance on Chinese platforms like the Type-054A/P frigates and Hangor-class submarines. While the data include numbers (e.g., how many ships or aircraft are procured), the method remains qualitative because the focus is on the strategic meaning of these capabilities rather than statistical measurement. As Bryman (2016) emphasises, comparison in qualitative research highlights differences in processes, outcomes, and implications, not just quantities. In this study, the asymmetry between Indian and Pakistani maritime forces is interpreted through theories of neorealism and RSCT to show how material differences fuel security dilemmas and regional polarisation.

Findings from both content and comparative analysis are then interpreted within the theoretical framework. Neorealism highlights the structural drivers of alliance-building and power maximisation, while RSCT explains how these developments reshape the South Asian regional security complex. This theoretical integration ensures that empirical material is not presented in isolation but embedded in a coherent analytical framework.

The chosen methodology—qualitative, exploratory, and analytical—fits the study’s goals and the nature of available data. By relying on credible secondary sources, and applying structured content and comparative analysis, the study generates original insights into Indo-US maritime cooperation and its implications for Pakistan. This approach is consistent with established methodological guidance for international relations research, where qualitative interpretation of authoritative documents is often the only feasible way to study sensitive security questions.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Every research project faces boundaries, and it is important to acknowledge them at the outset. This study is based solely on secondary data sources, including official agreements, government reports, think tank assessments, and academic analyses. Primary data, such as interviews with policymakers or naval officers, was not collected. This was due to the sensitivity of maritime security issues and the restricted access to officials in both India and Pakistan. The absence of primary data may limit first-hand perspectives but does not undermine the validity of findings, since secondary materials are authoritative and policy-shaping.

Second, while the study analyses comparative military capabilities, it does so qualitatively. Numerical data on platforms and systems are used for contextual

illustration, but the focus remains on the strategic meaning of these assets. This choice may limit detailed technical assessment but ensures that the analysis is aligned with the theoretical framework. Finally, the scope is geographically focused on South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. Wider global factors, such as NATO's maritime role or the Indo-Pacific strategies of Japan and Australia, are considered only in relation to their impact on South Asia.

1.9 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is divided into five main chapters. Chapter One introduces the study by situating Indo-US maritime cooperation in the wider context of global competition and regional stability. It develops the rationale, problem statement, research aim, objectives, and questions. The chapter also outlines the theoretical framework, drawing on neorealism and Regional Security Complex Theory, and explains the qualitative methodology employed.

Chapter Two analyses the evolution and key components of Indo-US maritime collaboration. It discusses foundational defence agreements (LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA), joint exercises such as MALABAR, MILAN, and RIMPAC, and the growth of intelligence sharing, technology transfer, and interoperability.

Chapter Three examines the United States' contribution to India's naval modernisation. It reviews hardware acquisitions, training and exercises, and enhanced ISR capacity. The chapter also connects these developments to U.S. strategic objectives, including power projection, securing trade routes, and balancing China.

Chapter Four assesses the strategic fallout for Pakistan. It studies the erosion of deterrence and autonomy, Pakistan's adaptive strategies, its reliance on China, and

the limits of indigenous capacity. It also reappraises neorealism and RSCT in light of the findings.

Chapter Five concludes the study, summarising key insights, policy implications, recommendations for Pakistan, limitations, and directions for future research.

1.10 Conclusion

Indo-US maritime cooperation is important to studying its profound implications for Pakistan and the security dynamics of South Asia. With the US increasingly strengthening India's naval capabilities, the regional power imbalance risks challenging Pakistan's maritime security and broader strategic autonomy. This growing asymmetry indicates that strategic responses must be developed to negate possible threats. Pakistan has to increase its naval capacity, deepen its ties with regional allies, and join multilateral security frameworks. Stability and Pak security must overcome these challenges in the changed Indian Ocean power structure.

CHAPTER 2

KEY COMPONENTS OF INDO-US MARITIME COLLABORATION AND THEIR EVOLUTION

2.1 Introduction

Indo-US maritime cooperation has developed from tentative interactions during the Cold War into a structured partnership that now shapes the Indian Ocean Region's security architecture. This chapter examines the foundational elements of that cooperation and traces how they have evolved over time. It highlights the defence agreements that institutionalise access, logistics, and intelligence sharing, and reviews joint naval exercises that have expanded in scale, complexity, and strategic meaning. The discussion also considers how technology transfers and interoperability initiatives have enabled India to integrate with U.S. systems, enhancing both capability and confidence in regional operations. By studying these components, the chapter explains how cooperation has moved from symbolic gestures to substantive alignment. This historical and structural overview provides the necessary context for later chapters, which assess how U.S. support to India's naval modernisation alters South Asia's balance of power and impacts Pakistan's maritime security.

2.2 Indo-US Maritime Collaboration

Indo-US military relations have changed drastically, since the end of the cold-war and more so, after India opened its economy in 1991. During the cold war, nonaligned stance of India and its friendship to the Soviet Union often ranasmuch against the US strategic interests. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition of India to the market economy gave opening to the cities of New Delhi and Washington (Kaushik, 2021).

India and the United States have strategic interests with regard to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Importantly, IOR is a major route of global trade and flows through the pipes of more than 75 percent of the maritime trade and half of the oil delivery to the ocean every day (Kaushik, 2021). In the case of India, which has a huge coastline, such security of sea lines as of economic and energy security is important. Akin to its significance to the United States, the IOR is an area that the latter has been aware of as the foundation to sustaining world trade routes and regional stability (Samaranayake, 2024), which is paramount to its economic interests and geopolitical power.

Based on the neorealist point of view, the Indo-US partnership can be regarded as a balance role to counter the Chinese are increasing warships in the Indo-Pacific. However, Waltz (1979) points out that the neorealism implies that international system is anarchic, which enables the states to collaborate to achieve power balance and create coalitions against possible adversaries. The cooperation between India and the US can counterbalance maritime aggression of China and discourage unilateral activities to sustain stability and harmony in the region.

The existence of the Indo-US alignment makes a significant impact on the IOR security dynamics and may be interpreted through the prism of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) application. Regional security of RSCT means there is no network in regional security of the neighbouring countries and the security of one state impacts on the security of another in the region (Buzan&Waeber, 2003). Among the galloping list of issues on top of mind, Bilateral relations between India and the US, does not only touch bilateral relations but resonates further in the regional security complex which borders the strategic calculus of Pakistan, China and other IOR states. In this way, these countries induce them to consider their security

situations not as it was before and integrate such adaptation in alliances and the then defence strategy so that it is aligned to the emerging power balance.

2.3 Foundational Defense Agreements and Military Frameworks

2.3.1 The Evolution of Indo-US Defense Agreements

What originally manifested into a scepticism form of defence relationship between India and the United States during the cold war era has ever since transformed towards a dynamic state of a strategic defence relationship in the modern era. This development has also led them to respect the other in terms of its awareness of the mutual security concerns and the resultant emerging geopolitical dynamism in the Indo-Pacific region.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, India began a course of economic liberalisation. The United States reacted, by rethinking its strategic position towards New Delhi and, consequently, began collaborating with the military of New Delhi at a higher degree. At this time, we can see the emergence of the army-to-army cooperation in 1991 which was sort of a deep root in the future defence cooperations (Friedberg, 2020).

In 2005, a New Framework on Indo-US defence relations was signed, and that was a turning point in Indo-US defence relationship. This broadly agreed strategic agenda prioritized defence affairs in the area of maritime security, nonproliferation, and counterterrorism (Akella& Jain, 2021). According to the USIndia Civil Nuclear Agreement, civilian nuclear energy-related cooperation and the development of a broader commitment within defence collaboration occurred that was contrary to the past limits of nonproliferation (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

Basic Defense Treaties

In the next decade, defence relations were institutionalised with a series of underlying treaties. Acting on a similar idea, support to the armed forces in either of the two countries can be provided at the instances of such mutual logistical foundation enabled by the signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016 and, as a consequence, enhanced the operational synergy (CNA, 2016). In 2016, integrations were made called the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which aimed to introduce a tool of secure communication and interchange of information among the military of both the US and India and improve the interoperability between the US and the Indian military (CNA, 2016). On 2020, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) was signed. It gave India a chance to exchange geospatial intelligence and reference the most advanced navigational information, and that is why their missile systems became far more precise (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

These phenomena are regarded through a neorealist prism as strategic in nature depending on the essence of an anarchic international system in which states seek to bolster their security and power. America has been a great supporter of India in terms of its military strength which has strengthened the balance of power in the region. Such an alliance also serves to weaken the Chinese engagement in the Indo-Pacific, after the US strategic imperative of institutionalising stability in the region and excluding the acquisition of hegemonic authority (Friedberg, 2020).

2.3.2 Key Defense Agreements: LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA

Several fundamental foundational agreements including- the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility

and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) are written which have poured more concrete into solidifying defence relations between India and the US. These pacts have enhanced the Indian capability, interoperability with the US forces and intelligence collection. This cooperation is not merely bilateral cooperation; the cooperation has many implications on the state of security in the region, and it is especially true in the world of South Asia (Malik, 2023).

Such open access to each nation's military bases is allowed for refuelling, replenishment, or support in logistics through the signed accord LEMOA in 2016. It does not obligate either party to offer such support, but it does streamline procedures for cooperative military operations (Pant, 2020). This agreement promotes operational flexibility for the Indian and US armed forces, especially in preparation for, during, and after joint military exercises, missions of civil defence, and regional security operations (US Department of State, 2022). In particular, establishing LEMOA is important to India, as it provides access to the US bases in important areas in IOR, such as Diego Garcia and Guam (Misra, 2021).

COMCASA is a signed agreement in 2018 that facilitates the secure exchange of sensitive military communications and real-time intelligence between Indian and US armed forces (Narayanan, 2021). COMCASA enables India to access the most advanced encrypted communication systems as joint operations coordination is made easier and interoperability is increased between India and US, NATO and other allied forces (Verma, 2021). Specifically, for anti-submarine warfare, aerial surveillance, and cyber warfare, this agreement is significant for India to monitor Chinese naval movements more effectively (Kaplan, 2012).

BECA was finalised in 2020 and enables India to share geospatial intelligence and satellite data for its precision strike capabilities and overall broader strategic awareness (Pant, 2020). BECA, which gives India access to high-resolution geospatial maps, satellite imagery and topographical data, strengthens the missile guidance systems and naval navigation, giving India a strategic edge in border security and maritime operations (Singh, 2021). Particularly, the agreement is important given India's need to monitor Chinese and Pakistani military movements in the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean (Malik, 2023).

Impact on Regional Security

These agreements have formalised their nature to transform South Asia's security architecture such that they have compelled their regional actors, especially Pakistan and China, to rework their defence strategies (Kumar & Hora, 2022). From the RSCT perspective, these agreements increase India's strategic autonomy by decreasing its nonalignment policies and aligning them with US military doctrines (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). In response, Pakistan has strengthened its military ties with China through joint naval exercises, intelligence-sharing agreements and faster procurement of Chinese submarines and missile systems (Khan, 2023).

BECA and COMCASA give India greater freedom to operate in US intelligence networks, reducing Pakistan's ability to work with strategic ambiguity (Verma, 2021). Second, this military imbalance is growing. It further adds to regional tensions, especially in the Indian Ocean, in which India's better leverage of US bases assumed under LEMAO gives India a better power projection (Misra, 2021). For his part, China accelerated its naval 'expansion' in the Indian Ocean by deploying submarines and infrastructure projects in Pakistan ports Gwadar and Hambantota, indicating the rise of great power competition in South Asia (Kaplan, 2012).

2.3.3 The Indo-Pacific and Quad Framework

In this regard, shoring up the unity of the Asia-Pacific regional geopolitical space has recently become an important issue amid geopolitical shifts in the Asia-Pacific region and the resurrection of multilateral mechanisms for addressing emerging security issues. In 2015, the United States began emphasising “Indo-Pacific” over the traditional “Asia-Pacific” in its strategic discourse, reflecting the growing recognition of the interconnectedness between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This linguistic shift marked India’s role in regional security dynamics and was meant to promote an inclusive approach beyond East Asia (White House, 2015). In 2018, there were more formal signs of strategic realignment as the rename of the U.S. Pacific Command to the US Indo-Pacific Command further reinforced the reality of the shift to a more connected region with a unified way of ensuring security (US Indo-Pacific Command, 2023).

At the same time, in 2017, the outdated Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) was reanimated. This coalition’s initial creation in 2007 was dormant and now resurrected, involving the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. It was revived from shared concerns about China’s assertive maritime activities and a desire to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. Quad is intended to promote cooperation in such issues as maritime security, infrastructure development, and disaster relief, among other strategic endeavours of like-minded democracies (Erickson & Collins, 2019).

Neorealism’s Security Alliances

A neorealist reading of the Quad’s formation and subsequent resurgence can explain it as a strategic response to balance threats. In this new context, the Quad can

be considered a maritime containment strategy to uphold Japan's role in the region, which is inevitably being 'contained' by expanding China's influence. This collaboration among these four democracies presents a unified front to deter unilateral actions to maintain the balance of power (Brewster, 2022). In response, China and Pakistan have tightened their military and economic ties, the most visible being the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This initiative is a strategic countermeasure that gives China vital access to the Arabian Sea and helps accumulate Pakistan's economic infrastructure. Sino-Pakistani relations are a perfect example of the ways regional actors adapt their strategies in response to the new security environment that alliances such as the Quad (Khan, 2023).

2.4 Joint Military Exercises and Strategic Maritime Initiatives

2.4.1 Malabar Naval Exercises and Indo-US Defense Interoperability

Indo-US defence interoperability has been enhanced through the Malabar Naval Exercises. The Malabar exercise was initially meant to be a bilateral but has since become a multilateral security initiative in line with India's strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific. In light of this, it is important to recognise that this evolution conforms to neorealist conceptualisation, where states increase their defence ties due to regional power imbalances, such as China's increasing naval influence in the region (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The first Malabar exercise was in 1992 when India and the United States carried out the drill in a bilateral naval exercise. 1998, after India had conducted its nuclear tests, it was temporarily suspended but resumed in 2002, when maritime partnerships began (Pant & Rao, 2021). Malabar became a trilateral security arrangement between the naval chiefs of the three countries (Japan, the United States,

and India) in 2015 when Japan joined for its permanency (Brewster, 2022). Australia joined in 2020; this time, the Quad's defence cooperation exercise further expanded (Grossman, 2021). Including all Quad members was a response to China's growing maritime assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific (Singh, 2021).

Key Objectives

The Indo-Pacific has become an extraordinarily complex and strategically important naval exercise, including advanced maritime warfare training among its components (Misra, 2021).

It deals extensively with submarine detection and tracking. On the US side, they have deployed P-8 Poseidon aircraft; on the Indian side, they have added to their ASW capabilities by acquiring MH-60R Seahawk helicopters under Indo-US defence agreements (Scott, 2020).

Malabar is a carrier strike group operation involving aircraft carrier battle group manoeuvres, high-end naval combat simulations. The 2020 edition saw the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group operating alongside India's INS Vikramaditya, enhancing India's power projection capabilities (Kaplan, 2012).

Real-time Intelligence Sharing and Maritime Surveillance: Data shared among the Quad members has improved the Regional Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). India has gained access to very secure US military communication technology under COMCASA, and these systems have further integrated Indian naval operations with those of allied forces.

From a neorealist perspective of offensive balancing, Malabar can be defined as a strategy where states come together to increase the strength of their armament to

counter threats (Waltz, 1979). Consequently, the Malabar expansion includes all Quad members and is part of a broader strategy of containing China's naval assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific (Mearsheimer, 2010).

Capacity of Malabar for India to Improve Maritime Deterrence against China:
India maintains that the Malabar held by its forces is a force multiplier that allows it to reduce China's growing presence of submarines in the Indian Ocean (Pant, 2020).

It further strengthens Power Projection Capabilities, as India can operate seamlessly with US and allied naval forces (Scott, 2020), enhancing Indo-Pacific security architectures.

In Malabar exercises, naval alliances and regional security architecture have evolved from a bilateral Indo-US initiative to a multilateral strategic framework. Deeper Indo-Pacific maritime security cooperation underlies this continuation, in which India's increased role as a key strategic partner of the US in maritime deterrence strategies is exhibited.

2.4.2 MILAN, RIMPAC, and India's Growing Naval Presence

India's participation in such multilateral naval exercises as MILAN and RIMPAC is attributable to India's desire for maritime security, naval interoperability and global power projection. They reinforce India's role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture as the leading player in its bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation. From a Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) perspective, such exercises reshape the South Asian security framework, increasing India's alignment with Western-led security alliances while isolating Pakistan and pushing it further into China's sphere of influence (Buzan&Wæver, 2003).

Launched in 1995 among India's South Asian navies, MILAN has grown from a South Asian naval get-together into an entire multisector naval exercise. The 2022 MILAN exercise in Visakhapatnam consisted of participation from more than 40+ navies, the US, France, Australia, Japan, and Indonesia (Indian Navy, 2022). As with other naval developments in India, MILAN represents the scale and complexity of India's efforts to improve maritime domain awareness (MDA), joint operations training and interoperability in bluewater operations (Mishra, 2023).

India has reason to play MILAN in its naval diplomacy due to its advantage in strategic dialogues between countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Indo-Pacific region in anti-submarine warfare and simulated maritime threat response operations. As Quad nations and European allies increasingly participate in MILAN, India has become a naval security provider in the Indo-Pacific that counters China's growing presence (Chaudhury, 2022).

RIMPAC: India's Integration into U.S.-Led Naval Frameworks

Hosted jointly by the United States Pacific Fleet and the governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) is a biennial maritime exercise in which Australia, the Republic of Korea, Canada, New Zealand and the United States participate, with other partner nations invited as guests, and lasts over 6 weeks. Except for the United States in 2014 and India's participation in 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022, India has consistently engaged in the subsequent editions, be it Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and has primarily been involved in deepening security partnerships with the United States and its allies (Grossman, 2021).

As part of participation in RIMPAC 2022, India brought out the INS Satpura, one of the country's Shivalik class stealth frigates, along with its P-8i Poseidon maritime reconnaissance aircraft to up its involvement in joint anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and carrier strike group coordination (Shukla, 2022). India's participation in RIMPAC indicates the country's interest in conducting high-end naval warfare operations and creating strong strategic ties with other Indo-Pacific partners like the US, Japan, Australia and the Philippines (Kaplan, 2012).

RIMPAC has also aided in modernising India's naval tactics, which continue to be moulded along Western military doctrines, the Western mode of advanced joint operation planning, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. The Indo-Pacific security framework also indicates in which way India is deepening its participation in U.S.-led naval exercises (Brewster, 2022).

Impact on Pakistan: Strategic Isolation and RSCT Perspective

The strategic challenges posed by India's participation in the global maritime security frameworks for Pakistan are significant. Pakistan's exclusion from MILAN, RIMPAC, and other Western-led naval exercises deepens the country's isolation in the region's maritime defence collaboration. According to the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), the greater-than-ever integration of India into US-led defence structures also necessitates Pakistan to step up their defence ties with China, specifically through joint naval exercises as well as defence alliances (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). Lack of Exposure to Advanced Joint Maritime Ops, Intelligence Sharing, and Technology;

Transfers: India, unlike Pakistan, has not been invited to major Indo-Pacific maritime exercises and consequently has not been exposed to advanced joint maritime

operations and the admixture of technology, such as intelligence and technological sharing with allied powers (Khan, 2023).

Pakistan's increasingly deepening dependence on China: In this regard, China and Pakistan have conducted joint maritime drills, including the 'Sea Guardians' series, and received Chinese Type 054A frigates, and China's BeiDou navigation system has been integrated by Pakistan for its military operations (Kumar & Hora, 2022).

Implications for Indo-Pacific Security: more intense India-United States interactions and commensurate India contribution to the Indo-Asia Pacific security framework, coupled with enhanced Indo-Pakistan maritime confrontations and associated naval imbalance and intersystemic India-Pakistan-China trilateral strategic competition (Singh, 2021).

India's involvement in MILAN and RIMPAC demonstrates the evolution of its place in global naval security, while Pakistan's non-identification in the same frameworks speeds up its strategic repositioning towards China. Indian deepening of security order ties, vis-à-vis those with the US and Quad members, is parallel to Pakistan's naval cooperation with China and Turkey (Pant, 2023).

2.4.3 Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiatives

Strategic initiatives are pivotal in India's maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. These efforts are key to developing maritime domain awareness (MDA) capabilities and creating the Information Fusion Centre—Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR). These measures enhance India's surveillance and monitoring strengths, making it a key maritime security player; they embody the country's growing interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is effectively understanding any maritime-related activity that might impact security, safety, economy or the environment. In order to improve upon MDA, in December 2018, India had set up the Information Fusion Centre—Indian Ocean Region (IFC—IOR). The IFC-IOR is a facility that combines to provide a maritime information hub that is a collaborative site for partner nations to share maritime data on a real-time basis for maritime safety and security (Indian Navy, 2018). The IFC-IOR has acquired wide national and international connections. In 2023, it formed partnerships with more than 50 partner countries and maritime centres worldwide. Liaison officers from the United States, Japan, France, and Australia are also stationed at the centre to ensure the flow of information between the two and to monitor maritime activities in a coordinated manner (Indian Navy, 2023).

Credit goes to integrating the IFC-IOR with the interface of the US Indo-Pacific Command’s intelligence-sharing network, dramatically improving the IFC-IOR’s capabilities. This partnership synthesises millions of maritime data to improve maritime situational awareness and support a coordinated response to maritime incidents. Such collaboration also demonstrates a shared resolve to preserve the Indo-Pacific as a free and open region, counter illicit activity, and protect sea lines of communication (US Indo-Pacific Command, 2023).

From a neorealist perspective, enhancing India’s MDA through initiatives like the IFC-IOR is a strategic response to the perceived threat of China’s expanding naval presence in the Indian Ocean. According to Waltz (1979), neorealism construes that states in an anarchic international system will resort to self-help mechanisms to

maintain their security. India has viewed China's increasing maritime activities, such as port development and naval patrol in the Indian Ocean, as potential security challenges to its region (Brewster, 2018). India strives to effectively monitor and counterbalance China's influence by building up MDA and stronger international maritime cooperation. In this regard, IFC IOR acts as a force multiplier, enabling India to have a comprehensive surveillance apparatus over the Indian Ocean. Maintaining its strategic posture not only deters adversarial capabilities but also affirms India as a net provider of security in the region to promote neighbouring stability and order (Pant, 2020).

2.5 Intelligence Sharing, Technology Transfers, and Naval Interoperability

2.5.1 Indo-US Intelligence Sharing and Maritime Surveillance

Intelligence sharing and maritime surveillance partnerships between India and the US have progressed significantly in defence partnerships. This is also supported by the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which would help to integrate India into the US's intelligence framework. The more this is done, the more the capital from acquiring advanced surveillance platforms is invested in this, for example, the P-8I Poseidon and MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones. In response, China has implemented counter-strategies, including expanding the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) submarine fleet in the Indian Ocean and conducting joint naval exercises with Pakistan. From an RSCT perspective, these developments have profound implications for Indo-Pakistani dynamics, particularly concerning Pakistan's strategic apprehensions regarding India's augmented surveillance capabilities.

Moreover, COMCASA is a 2018 bilateral military pact that allows India access to advanced defence systems and real-time operational intelligence from the US. This pact enables the installation of secure communication equipment on the Indian defence platforms, ensuring seamless interoperability between Indian and US armed forces. A practical implication of COMCASA is that if a US warship or aircraft detects a Chinese submarine in the Indian Ocean, it can relay this information to Indian forces in real time (India Times Staff, 2018). India's ability to acquire this capability significantly improves its attention to its maritime domain awareness and strategic preparedness.

India inducted a number of advanced surveillance assets to take advantage of the interoperability enabled by COMCASA. Arguably, the most important role of the P-8I Poseidon has been its participation in anti-submarine warfare operations and intelligence gathering. On the other hand, P-8I aircraft were actively used during heightened tensions against China in 2020, to the extent that the aircraft engaged in intelligence gathering along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (Pant, 2020). In 2024 India further augmented its surveillance capabilities by signing a deal to purchase 31 MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones from the United States for around \$3.99 billion (Reuters, 2024). These high-altitude, long-endurance uncrewed aerial vehicles feature ultra-advanced sensors capable of conducting sizeable maritime surveillance activities. With the integration of these drones, India is expected to be able to monitor naval activities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as a means of strategy in real-time intelligence and reconnaissance missions.

China has taken measures to affirm its presence there to respond to the strengthened Indo-U.S. maritime cooperation in the IOR. One noteworthy strategy the PLAN pursued was expanding its submarine fleet. In addition to China's growing

number of nuclear-powered submarines, it has been constructing further submarine piers at shipyards around the country, including the Yalong Naval Base (Department of Defence, 2023). The expansion is purported to beef up China's power projection capabilities and secure its regional maritime interests. Furthermore, China has raised its naval ties with Pakistan through joint exercises, such as the Sea Guardian series. The complex manoeuvres, anti-surface, anti-air and anti-submarine drills included in November 2023's Sea Guardian-3 maritime exercise in the northern Arabian Sea were held in the exercise (Global Times, 2025). These exercises aim to promote interoperability of the Chinese and Pakistani navies, countering Indo-U.S. maritime cooperation.

RSCT and Indo-Pakistan Dynamics

From the standpoint of RSCT, Indo-US intelligence sharing and maritime surveillance capabilities have solid implications for regional security dynamics, particularly regarding Pakistan. Pakistan perceives India's beefed-up surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities as a direct threat to its strategic interests. Such platforms like the P-8I Poseidon and the MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones are certainly acquired by India to track Pakistani naval movements more effectively, thus weakening Pakistan's strategic deterrence. Therefore, P, Pakistan has responded by developing its strategic partnership with China by engaging in joint naval exercises and acquiring advanced military hardware to counter India's rapidly expanding capabilities. The trilateral relationship of India, Pakistan, and China is an example of security interdependence intrinsic to a regional security complex where one state's security policy affects the security dynamics of the neighbouring states.

2.5.2 US-India Defense Technology Transfers

The United States and India have deepened their defence collaboration, particularly in advanced naval technologies and joint ventures in maritime cyber warfare and electronic intelligence. This partnership has also substantially enhanced India's maritime capabilities, which has impacted the strategic balance in the South Asian region.

This is a pivotal aspect of this collaboration as India buys MH-60R Seahawk helicopters. India signed a contract to buy 24 MH-60R helicopters from the United States in February 2020 to replace its ageing Sea King helicopter fleet. These multi-mission helicopters are used for anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (ASW), and search and rescue (SAR) operations, which significantly ease the burden of the working of the Indian Navy and its overall dominance at sea (US. Defence Security Cooperation Agency, 2024). India has also co-developed the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile system with Russia, in addition to the acquisition of the MH-60R. Made off formidable deterrent against surface threats is the BrahMos missile, a high-speed and precision weapon. Integrating this weapon into the Indian Navy's arsenal provides a strategic advantage in maritime engagements (Economic Times, 2025).

The US and India have also proceeded beyond hardware acquisitions into joint ventures in maritime cyber warfare and electronic intelligence matters. The initiatives are intended to establish robust cyber defence mechanisms and improve electronic warfare to counter sophisticated maritime threats. The collaborative efforts include exchanging cyber threat intelligence, conducting joint training programmes, and developing high-end electronic surveillance. Such cooperation maintains the

resilience of critical maritime infrastructure and protects maritime sea lines of communication (Waxman, 2022).

Implications for Pakistan

The growing depth of Indo-US defence ties has direct and profound implications for Pakistan's maritime security. At the most basic level, the widening technological and capability gap between the Indian and Pakistani navies threatens to create an asymmetry that Pakistan will struggle to address. India's induction of U.S.-supplied MH-60R multi-role helicopters, the deployment of BrahMos missile systems, and integration into U.S. intelligence-sharing networks through COMCASA and BECA enhance its ability to dominate surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, and long-range strike operations. These developments reduce Pakistan's warning time, constrain its naval manoeuvrability, and weaken the credibility of its deterrent posture (Waxman, 2022).

Pakistan has attempted to counterbalance this gap through acquisitions such as Type-054A/P frigates from China and the locally produced Babur-class corvettes, but these measures remain limited in scope. Unlike India, Pakistan lacks access to advanced Western technologies and suffers from budgetary and structural constraints that slow the pace of naval modernisation (Defense News, 2023). With mounting economic pressures and recurring fiscal crises, Islamabad cannot realistically compete with India's acquisition trajectory, especially in high-cost areas like electronic warfare, cyber operations, and network-centric naval capabilities.

This imbalance risks producing a strategic dilemma. Neorealist logic suggests that when one state gains a decisive advantage, the other will seek external alignments to restore balance. Pakistan has already deepened cooperation with China, particularly

through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and naval collaboration, but this dependence also creates vulnerabilities by reducing strategic autonomy. From a Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) perspective, Pakistan’s inability to independently match India reinforces its structural dependence within the South Asian security complex, where external actors largely dictate the balance of power.

The implications are not only military but also political. India’s growing interoperability with the United States signals its role as a preferred partner in regional security, while Pakistan risks marginalisation. This shift erodes Islamabad’s diplomatic leverage and narrows its options for engagement with other powers. In the long run, the technological imbalance may harden a two-tiered regional order in which India is viewed as a maritime security provider and Pakistan as a reactive, dependent actor. Such a perception not only undermines Pakistan’s strategic standing but also exacerbates the security dilemma, locking the region into cycles of competition with limited space for confidence-building or cooperation.

2.6 Conclusion

Indo-US maritime partnership has evolved to such an extent that it has dramatically changed the strategic face of the Indo-Pacific region. From basic defence agreements to high-tech transfers and joint military exercises, the alliance between the two countries is deepening and is progressing further with this collaboration. Thus, the partnership began with key agreements, including the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), a foundation for mutual logistical support and access to military bases. In 2018, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) would allow secure communication interoperability between the two nations’ armed forces. However, in 2020, the Basic

Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) was signed to improve geospatial intelligence sharing. Taking these agreements operational, joint naval exercises such as Malabar were now extended, which showed Japan and Australia shared responsibility towards regional security.

A neorealist interpretation of the Indo-US maritime partnership is as strategic manipulation to balance the power dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. According to neorealism, states are allied with deterring individuals from attaining regional hegemony and protecting themselves from threats. The shared concern between India and the US is that China has risen assertively in the region. The objective of the cooperation between the two nations in enhancing military cooperation, intelligence sharing and joint operational capabilities is to achieve deterrence of potential aggression and maintain a balance of power in favour of stability and national interests (Bukhari, 2015).

Applying the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), India's deepening military integration with the US. Has reconfigured South Asia's security architecture. The RSCT implies that regional security economic questions are interlinked among neighbouring states. Pakistan views the Indo-US partnership as a straight threat to its strategic interests, and thus, the security dilemmas with Pakistan have increased due to the Indo-US partnership. Concerns surrounding regional tensions are evolving, and as a result, Pakistan has been taking counterbalancing measures, which impacts South Asia's overall security complex.

The Indo-US maritime cooperation is witnessing a growing phenomenon that challenges Pakistan. Given the widening gap between the traditional maritime capabilities of Pakistan and her immediate rivals, it may be necessary for her to re-

think and develop her naval strategy by strengthening the bilateral military and strategic relationship with China, in return enabling Pakistan access to the latest technologies and counterbalance the Indo-US alliance. Furthermore, it could prevent the disadvantages of conventional conflicts by investing in cost-efficient unconventional warfare tactics, including submarine warfare, anti-ship missiles, and cyberspace, and deterring potential risks. Such strategic adjustments are necessary for Pakistan to keep up a credible deterrence posture and guarantee the safety of its maritime interests in the context of the emerging regional security environment.

CHAPTER 3

THE US CONTRIBUTION TO INDIA'S NAVAL MODERNIZATION AND BROADER STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the role of the United States in facilitating India's naval modernisation and the broader strategic objectives that underpin this partnership. While India has long aspired to develop blue-water capabilities, it is in the last two decades—particularly after the 2005 New Framework for the U.S.–India Defense Relationship—that Washington's support has become central. The chapter explores how U.S. defence agreements, arms transfers, and technology-sharing arrangements have transformed India's maritime capabilities. It also considers how these developments align with American strategic interests in countering China's rise and promoting India as a key security partner in the Indo-Pacific. Finally, the chapter applies the theoretical frameworks of neorealism and Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to evaluate how U.S.–India naval cooperation reshapes the regional balance of power, and how these shifts affect Pakistan and China.

3.2 India's Naval Transformation and Strategic Reorientation

In the last ten years, India has transformed itself into an ambitious and ambitious blue water navy that is capable of projecting powers in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Indo-Pacific. Of greater importance to this shift is wider strategic reorientation of India towards its security policy based upon the evolving geopolitical needs, growth in maritime economic ambitions, and more of necessity to challenge the increasingly aggressive naval behavior by China (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2019). Actually, in the earlier times, the job of the Indian Navy was more defensive in nature,

serving India borders at the near-shore regions. The Indian approach towards modernisation, however, has been driven by the desire to build vast air carrier capabilities, nuclear submarines and long-range maritime attack capabilities since the early 2000s (Tellis, 2021).

Such modernisation is predetermined by the US-India alignment in defence dating back to the post-2000s. The next thing was the structure of the New Framework of the US-India Defense Relationship (2005), and certain multilateral defence agreements, such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding between the US and India (LEMOA) (2016), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) with India (2018) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) between US and India (2020) (Pant & Bommakanti, 2021). The deals were positive because they enhanced interoperability, intelligence exchange and access to local current developments in American warships such as the P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircrafts and the MH-60R helicopters. Thus, the Indian navy has evolved and become a force of high technology deployment with real-time, submarine warfare, and network centricities in its maritime operations (Kumar, 2021).

In the perspective of Neorealism, the move by the US to facilitate the modernisation of the Indian navy can be viewed as strategic counter to the Chinese expansionism in the sea. The neorealism theory claims that states aim at forming alliances to gain and balance power in an anarchic international world (Mearsheimer, 2001). The presence of the People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the IOR has risen extensively, in which China has built a naval base in Djibouti, spread its military presence with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and stationed highly sophisticated nuclear submarines along some of the most consequential maritime chokepoints

(Singh, 2020). The US, in its interest in India as a maritime balance, has encouraged India to turn its naval ambitions into reality so that a power balance is ensured in the Indo-Pacific (Kristensen&Korda, 2022).

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) further explains the regional security interdependencies resulting from India's naval expansion. RSCT posits that regional security is shaped by interactions between neighbouring states (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). As India strengthens its naval posture with US backing, Pakistan and China must recalibrate their maritime defence strategies. Pakistan, perceiving an asymmetric naval threat, has deepened its maritime collaboration with China, including acquiring Type 054A/P frigates, S-20 submarines, and advanced anti-ship missile systems under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework (Khan, 2023). Similarly, China's counterstrategy includes expanding Gwadar naval base and increasing submarine deployments and joint naval drills with Pakistan (CNA, 2016). The continued development of India's maritime security architecture reflects the increasing maritime rivalry in South Asia and instils strategic realignments within the region space by key players.

The naval expansion, therefore, is not just about modernisation but is a broader geopolitical realignment in India. Supported by the United States, India is reinventing South Asia's security ecology and serving as a maritime power in the Indo-Pacific to demonstrate Indo-US strategic partnership. This will continue to influence regional security equations in the Indo-Pacific for China and beyond, requiring adaptability by China and Pakistan, among other stakeholders.

3.3 US Contributions to India's Naval Modernization

3.3.1 Advanced Military Hardware and Technology Transfers

India and the United States are deeply engaged in military cooperation, accelerating technology transfer and joint defence initiatives and enhancing India's maritime capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. The overall strategic framework against China's expanding naval footprint in the region essentially hinges on this collaboration.

The acquisition of the P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft has provided India with a significant boost to its Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and maritime surveillance capacity. Produced by Boeing, the aircraft combines long-range sensors, sonobuoys, and torpedo-launching systems, which together enable continuous monitoring of underwater activity across wide stretches of the Indian Ocean. This capability is particularly directed at tracking Chinese submarine movements, which have increased steadily over the past decade. By extending its ability to safeguard sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and maintain real-time maritime domain awareness, India is not only protecting vital trade routes but also reinforcing its position as a net security provider in the region (Mukherjee, 2020).

Alongside this, the induction of MH-60R Seahawk helicopters has further consolidated India's anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare profile. These helicopters are fitted with advanced dipping sonars, Hellfire missiles, and lightweight torpedoes, giving Indian naval forces greater operational flexibility and quicker response against undersea threats. In strategic terms, their deployment is a timely counter to China's growing submarine presence in the IOR, which many analysts view as an attempt to encircle India's maritime space. More importantly, the

procurement highlights the strengthening of US-India defence technology-sharing arrangements, particularly after Washington conferred the Major Defense Partner (MDP) status on India in 2016 (Joshi, 2019). This reflects not only operational cooperation but also a broader strategic convergence, where maritime platforms such as the P-8I and Seahawk helicopters symbolise India's closer alignment with the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

A significant milestone in Indo-US defence collaboration is the joint development of an Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) for India's future aircraft carriers. EMALS, developed by General Atomics, enhances aircraft sortie rates and operational flexibility, aligning with India's ambition to develop a Blue Water Navy (Krishnan, 2021). Moreover, the commissioning of INS Vikrant (2022) under the US strategic framework signals a significant step in India's carrier strike group capability, supporting interoperability with US Navy Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs) in the Indo-Pacific (Mehta, 2022).

As theorised by Mearsheimer (2001), Neorealism posits that states pursue power maximisation in an anarchic international system. The US-India military technology transfers exemplify offshore balancing, where Washington strengthens India's naval fleet as a counterweight to China. Given Beijing's rapid naval expansion, the US seeks to enhance India's sea denial and deterrence capabilities in the Indo-Pacific (Pant, 2020). This alignment reflects India's hedging strategy, where New Delhi balances cooperation with Washington while maintaining strategic autonomy (Brewster, 2021). The strengthening of India's maritime forces through advanced military hardware and technology transfers underscores a realist convergence of interests between the US and India, reinforcing regional security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific security complex (Buzan&Wæver, 2003).

3.3.2 Joint Naval Exercises and Training

India's increasing participation in joint naval exercises with the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies reflects a strategic commitment to enhancing maritime deterrence, interoperability, and regional stability. The Malabar and RIMPAC exercises are crucial in improving India's operational readiness while reinforcing US-led security architectures in the Indo-Pacific. The Malabar naval exercise, initially a bilateral India-US manoeuvre in 1992, has since evolved into a multilateral Quad exercise, incorporating Japan (2015) and Australia (2020) (Rajagopalan, 2022). The exercise focuses on anti-submarine warfare (ASW), aircraft carrier operations, and combat simulations aimed at countering the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)'s maritime expansion (Rajagopalan, 2020).

A central feature of Malabar is the integration of advanced ASW drills using P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and MH-60R Seahawk helicopters, which enhance India's ability to track and neutralise undersea threats (Singh, 2020). The US Navy's carrier strike group (CSG) involvement further reinforces India's ability to coordinate multi-domain naval operations, strengthening its deterrence posture (Brookings Institution, 2020).

India's involvement in RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific Exercise) underscores its growing status as a key Indo-Pacific maritime player. RIMPAC, the world's largest multinational naval drill, integrates forces from NATO, ASEAN, and Pacific allies (Sridharan, 2021). India's participation in RIMPAC 2022 included fleet integration, amphibious operations, and multinational surface warfare drills, significantly enhancing its interoperability with US-led coalitions (Chatterjee, 2020). India's inclusion in high-intensity combat scenarios during RIMPAC aligns with its naval expansion under the Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MCPP). The exercise also

allows India to test next-generation naval platforms, including INS Sahyadri and indigenous stealth frigates, in joint operations (Verma, 2023).

From an RSCT perspective, India's naval ties reshape Indo-Pacific security (Subramanian, 2020). India works with the US, Japan, and Australia to expand reach. These partnerships make India appear as a regional security provider. Pakistan is increasingly marginalised within Indo-Pacific security arrangements (Raghavan, 2021). India's role in Quad-led exercises challenges China's naval assertiveness (Subramanian, 2020). Participation in Malabar and RIMPAC boosts India's interoperability with US allies. Such cooperation strengthens strategic autonomy while aligning with US Indo-Pacific goals (Joshi, 2019). RSCT shows how security interdependence forces regional actors into cooperation networks. Pakistan struggles to influence these networks or counter their effects.

3.3.3 Intelligence Sharing and Maritime Surveillance Capabilities

India has deepened intelligence-sharing with the United States through COMCASA (2018). This agreement allows encrypted systems and real-time intelligence exchange. India's role in the Indo-Pacific Information Fusion Centre has expanded. IFC-IOR improves maritime domain awareness through multinational data and surveillance. These developments strengthen India's capacity to secure sea lanes of communication. Pakistan's naval secrecy is undermined by enhanced Indian surveillance capabilities. Loss of secrecy weakens Pakistan's deterrence credibility in the Arabian Sea. China also responds with countermeasures in the Indian Ocean. This creates a competitive cycle that increases risks of escalation. For smaller states, RSCT suggests few avenues to remain neutral.

The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), signed between India and the US in 2018, enables secure, real-time classified intelligence exchange. This agreement integrates India into the US military's encrypted communications networks, allowing seamless access to satellite reconnaissance, intelligence feeds, and secure maritime communications (Lalwani & Byrne, 2019). Through COMCASA, the Indian Navy receives direct intelligence inputs from US platforms, including ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) assets such as P-8I Poseidon aircraft and MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones (Tellis, 2021). This capability enhances India's ability to detect and track Chinese and Pakistani naval assets, improving its undersea surveillance and maritime deterrence posture (Hussain, 2021).

Indo-Pacific Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR): Enhancing Real-Time Surveillance

The establishment of the Indo-Pacific Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR) in 2018, based in Gurugram, India, reflects India's growing leadership in multilateral intelligence-sharing. In coordination with US Naval Intelligence Processing Systems, the IFC-IOR provides real-time maritime threat analysis and vessel tracking across the Indian Ocean (Mohan, 2022).

Key IFC-IOR capabilities include:

Live monitoring of Chinese PLAN warships and submarines in the Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean.

Data-sharing with US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) to improve joint operational awareness.

Integration of commercial and military satellite imagery to track suspicious movements, especially Chinese submarine deployments (Khanna, 2021).

This enhanced intelligence fusion mechanism strengthens India's ability to preemptively counter Chinese naval incursions while bolstering its ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) capabilities through automated data analytics and AI-driven surveillance technologies (Joshi, 2019).

India's expanding surveillance superiority significantly compromises Pakistan's naval secrecy. With real-time tracking capabilities via COMCASA and IFC-IOR, India can intercept Pakistani naval movements, particularly submarine operations (Ganguly, 2020). This further reduces Pakistan's ability to conduct covert maritime manoeuvres, weakening its strategic deterrence in the Arabian Sea (Ahmed, 2023). In response, China has intensified its undersea presence in the Indian Ocean, deploying nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) and conventional diesel-electric submarines (SSKs) to counterbalance India's expanding ISR network (Kaplan, 2020). The PLAN's submarine operations in Gwadar and Hambantota indicate an attempt to monitor and disrupt India's surveillance dominance, reflecting China's strategic recalibration in the IOR (Roy, 2020).

India's growing intelligence-sharing framework with the US, backed by advanced surveillance infrastructure, strengthens its maritime power projection. However, this also escalates China's countermeasures, reinforcing the strategic Indo-Pacific security dilemma (Krishnan, 2021).

3.4 Broader Strategic Objectives of Indo-US Naval Collaboration

3.4.1 Power Projection in the Indo-Pacific

India power projection concept in Indo-Pacific is influenced by the existence of geopolitical competition, expansion in the navy and strategic interactions with the United States and its partners. This indicates a balancing strategy of a Neorealist

proportionality, which implies the reinforcement of military and strategic forces of states to respond to potential enemies. With China extending its naval and economic ties via the Belt and road program (BRI) and maritime silk road (MSR) the development of blue-water forces by India correlates with the maintenance of regional stability by the US-led coalition.

As neorealism goes, states desire to gain relational power to guarantee survival in an anarchic world, which is ruthless (Waltz, 1979). India represents a strategic asset of the US in Indo-Pacific, as they consider it the counterweight to China and invest in its naval presence and strategic deterrence potential (Karackattu, 2019). The increasing relations in Indo-US military links such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) enhance operation interoperability (Roche, 2020). These blue-water naval ambitions of India may be traced to its Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) program, specifically the commissioning of the first in its form, INS Vikrant (2022), and the proposed third carrier (IAC-2) (Mehta, 2020). The progress strengthens carrier strike group capacities of India and lets it extend power projection out of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) into the South China Sea and Western Pacific.

As a strategic counterweight to the Chinese ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, there are the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) (India, the US, Japan and Australia). The importance given to the maritime security, freedom of navigation and regional deterrence in the Quad system reassures India in becoming the maritime powerhouse in the region (Rajagopalan, 2020). Through combined naval drills (Malabar, Tiger Triumph) and an increase in defence technology sharing, the countries of the Quad enhance their presence in the region of the Indo-Pacific (Ranganathan, 2020).

Dual-use military facilities raised with the BRI and MSR investments of China into Gwadar, Hambantota, and Djibouti, have led to the growing Indian and US presence in the region in terms of the development of naval capabilities (Kumar, 2023). The Indian oceanic colony Diego Garcia is also being used as a hub to support US-led regional security infrastructures, and the same applies to Changi (Singapore) (Roy, 2020). With India still in a maritime build-up, its drift towards US-led Indo-Pacific strategies would define regional security trends that would enhance the India-China contest as well as the long-term strategic interests of Washington in the Indo-Pacific.

3.4.2 Economic and Trade Security in the Indian Ocean

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a strategic sea trade route through which 80 percent of all world oil trade and 60 percent of commercial vessels traverse its choke points (Gopal, 2021). With the US trying to offer protection over the international waterways trade routes, the growing presence of the Indian Navy is essential towards the stability of the region. Simultaneously, Pakistan at annual multilateral dialogue, East Asia Summit, with China and Turkey, is also enhancing its maritime power in response to the Indo-US maritime relations.

The U.S. strategic goals in the IOR revolve around enforcing global supply chain security, discouraging piracy and accessibility of free navigation through major transit measures (Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and Strait of Malacca) (Davis, 2022). Since it is now an emerging power in the naval space, India enjoys the status of a maritime security enforcer in the region, primarily due to its logistics agreements with the US, Japan, and Australia (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). The increase of the Indian naval presence in the IOR in bases on Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Seychelles

(Assumption Island), and Oman (Duqm Port), will enhance its maritime surveillance and tactical trade route protection (Raghavan, 2021). The relationship between the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and India is also acknowledged as a net security provider, and this is particularly boosted by India through its inclusion in the RIMPAC, Malabar, and Milan as India provides security against naval aggression by China and Pakistan (Karthik, 2023).

Both the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea are being identified as areas of increasing contention on the sea, and it is in the South China Sea where China is asserting its control by building artificial islands and sending in the navy (Chokepoint Security Review, 2020). Taking into account that more than 40% of Indian trade travels through Malacca, New Delhi has also attempted to strengthen its naval presence in the area by fairing its cooperation with Indo-Pacific navies and QUAD partners (Iyer, 2020).

Pakistan's Counterstrategy

As India expands its maritime dominance, Pakistan actively diversifies its naval alliances to mitigate its strategic vulnerabilities. Key elements of Pakistan's counterstrategy include:

Strengthening Naval Collaboration with China and Turkey:

Acquisition of Type 054A/P frigates and S26 submarines from China.

Deepening defence ties with Turkey, including the purchase of MILGEM-class corvettes (Yusuf, 2023).

Upgrading Gwadar as a Strategic Naval Base:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) positions Gwadar as a key military and trade hub.

China's potential deployment of PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) assets in Gwadar raises concerns about a permanent Chinese naval presence in the IOR (Qureshi, 2023).

India's growing maritime strategic divide in the Indian Ocean lies in the maturity of its present response as a 'net security provider', which is paired with Pakistan's rising response in Pakistan, which is joining with further China-Turkey cooperation. This evolving security landscape is shaping great-power competition and the future of global trade security, so it is precisely when the IOR becomes central to it.

3.4.3 Strategic Containment of China and Its Impact on South Asia

Recent American efforts to contain China's influence in the Indo-Pacific have made the strategic landscape of South Asia poised for a significant change. This strategy rests centrally on strengthening India's naval capabilities to check Beijing's maritime ambitions. That has significant implications for Pakistan's strategic positioning in regional security. India has become an important ally in the United States' strategic balancing in the Indo-Pacific. As a result, Washington has enjoyed enhanced defence collaborations with New Delhi in this perspective. Moreover, talks have been held on India's possible acquisition of advanced defence systems, such as the F-35 stealth fighter jets, as part of a more extensive program to update India's military hardware and resist Chinese aggressiveness in the region (Associated Press, 2025).

Experts emphasise that strengthening India's naval forces is a strategic move to counter China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean. By enhancing India's maritime capabilities, the United States aims to establish a formidable barrier against potential Chinese dominance in these critical sea lanes (USNI News, 2025). From a Neorealist standpoint, China's response to the U.S.-India partnership has been to expand its strategic footprint across the Indian Ocean. This includes the development of military and dual-use facilities in key locations:

Gwadar, Pakistan:

China has invested heavily in the Gwadar port, which serves commercial and potential military purposes. This port enhances China's access to the Arabian Sea and provides a strategic vantage point near the Strait of Hormuz (The Guardian Staff, 2021).

China's military base in Djibouti is its first overseas military base (CNA, 2017), allowing the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to project power and safeguard maritime routes in the Horn of Africa.

China has taken control of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka in the direct interest of military use and its strategic location along crucial shipping routes (Asia Times, 2024).

These developments indicate how the strategic competition between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific is intensifying and, for both nations, how they are expanding their influence and securing their interests.

Using the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), India has redrawn the security contours of the region by reinvigorating its work with the United States.

Besides enhancing India's strategic capabilities, this partnership isolates Pakistan from traditional maritime alliances. In response, Pakistan has been eager to further integrate into Beijing's strategic framework by seeking to beef up its ties with China. These also include cooperation on developing port infrastructure and naval cooperation to counterbalance the Indo-U.S. alliance. However, this realignment can even raise the risk of China slanting Pakistan further and making it more dependent than before on China, diminishing its strategic autonomy. The US strategy to contain China by thwarting its naval power in the Indian Ocean region is transforming the security environment of South Asia. However, this war brings new alliances and rivalries among the three, with significant implications for future regional stability and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

3.5 Conclusion

The strategic alignment has led to the United States and India disagreeing to a large degree when it comes to the modernisation process of the Indian navy. It has enhanced the Indian Navy maritime capability by engaging in transfer of technology, common exercise and intelligence interchange agreements. The US has helped India buy super sophisticated P-8I Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft, MH-60R Seahawks helicopters and a technology to have aircraft carriers. Moreover, COMCASA and BECA have also made intelligence-sharing in real-time possible and have enabled India to monitor the Chinese and Pakistani naval exercises. The multilateral Malabar and RIMPAC exercise has seen India brought on board in the greater Indo-Pacific maritime security network by the US. Neorealistic consideration of the arrival of naval powers: The material support depends on US to counteract the growth of China influence over the Indo-Pacific region through its naval forces. With China bringing its forces to the Indian Ocean, the US has attempted to bolster the

deterrence capacity of India by establishing military bases in Djibouti, Gwadar, as well as Hambantota. Enhancing India in terms of sea-denial and maritime observation systems, Washington makes sure that Chinese maritime expansion is under much more considerable restrictions, which strengthens a regional balance of power.

Using RSCT, the further establishment of the American-Indian maritime link changes the security relationship of South Asia, further promoting the active competition in the Indian Ocean between India, China, and Pakistan. The entry of India into the US-led Indo-Pacific systems side-lines Pakistan, which is becoming overly reliant on China in the modernisation of the unica and strategic defense responses (Singh, 2020). This reorder increases the level of tensions in the IOR, and it strengthens the geopolitical fault lines. For Pakistan, the Indo-US alliance presents both challenges and strategic imperatives. To counterbalance India's naval advantage, Pakistan must adopt asymmetric maritime strategies, focusing on submarine warfare, missile capabilities, and hybrid naval tactics. Expanding naval collaboration with China, including joint PLAN-Pakistani Navy patrols and port access agreements, will be crucial for maintaining regional strategic parity. As great-power competition intensifies, South Asia's maritime security order will remain fluid, shaped by evolving alliances and escalating naval rivalries.

CHAPTER 4

STRATEGIC FALLOUT AND PAKISTAN'S MARITIME REALIGNMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE INDO-US NAVAL AXIS

4.1 Introduction

The expansion of Indo-US maritime cooperation has created significant consequences for Pakistan's naval security and regional position. While earlier chapters have shown how India benefits from U.S. technology, training, and interoperability, the logical outcome of this shift is a widening gap between the Indian and Pakistani navies. For Pakistan, the challenge is not only material but also strategic: the credibility of its deterrence, the resilience of its maritime autonomy, and its ability to operate independently in the Indian Ocean are all increasingly in question. This chapter examines the strategic fallout of Indo-US cooperation through Pakistan's lens. It explores how advanced surveillance, intelligence sharing, and network-centric operations undermine Pakistan's deterrent posture. It then evaluates Pakistan's adaptive responses, ranging from asymmetric naval doctrines and reliance on China to attempts at indigenous capability development. Finally, the chapter reappraises the theoretical frameworks of neorealism and RSCT in light of these findings, showing how Pakistan's constrained choices illustrate structural dependency within South Asia's security complex. By doing so, the chapter connects U.S.-India cooperation to the broader transformation of Pakistan's maritime strategy and its future role in regional security.

4.2 Erosion of Pakistan's Deterrence and Strategic Autonomy

The consolidation of India-U.S. maritime cooperation has decisively shifted the balance of naval power in South Asia, with direct consequences for Pakistan's

deterrence and autonomy. The three foundational agreements, LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), and BECA (2020), have enabled India to access U.S. logistical facilities, secure communications, and advanced geospatial data (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). These arrangements, combined with U.S.-supplied hardware, have expanded India's naval reach and surveillance capacity, undermining Pakistan's ability to operate freely in the Indian Ocean. India's acquisitions demonstrate the scope of this transformation. The Indian Navy now fields 12 Boeing P-8I Poseidon aircraft, capable of monitoring 1.2 million square miles of ocean in a single mission (Naval News, 2022). The induction of 24 Sikorsky MH-60R helicopters has bolstered anti-submarine warfare (ASW), with six aircraft delivered by early 2024 and a \$1.17 billion sustainment package cleared by the U.S. later that year (Reuters, 2024b). In addition, India has contracted 31 MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones, each with an endurance of over 30 hours and sensor packages enabling deep-sea reconnaissance (Reuters, 2024a). These systems, integrated via COMCASA and BECA, provide India with real-time situational awareness and strike options far beyond Pakistan's capabilities.

For Pakistan, the challenge is not only technological inferiority but also strategic marginalisation. Its absence from multilateral naval initiatives such as MALABAR and RIMPAC, and from information-sharing hubs like the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), isolates it from regional maritime security architectures (Press Information Bureau, 2018). While India is embedded as a central U.S. partner in Indo-Pacific security, Pakistan's exclusion reinforces perceptions of irrelevance and reduces diplomatic manoeuvrability. Pakistan has pursued modernisation but remains constrained. Four Type 054A/P frigates were delivered from China between 2021 and 2023, improving surface fleet capacity but

lacking the integrated surveillance networks available to India (Naval News, 2023). More significant is the Hangor-class submarine program, under which eight boats are planned with Chinese cooperation. The first was launched in April 2024, the second in March 2025, and the third in August 2025, with four to be built in Pakistan under technology transfer agreements (Naval News, 2025; Dawn, 2025). These submarines aim to restore undersea deterrence, yet delays, cost overruns, and reliance on Chinese systems highlight Pakistan's limited autonomy.

Financial constraints aggravate this imbalance. Pakistan's defence budget for 2024–25 stood at PKR 2.12 trillion (\$7.6 billion), compared to India's allocation of INR 6.2 trillion (\$74 billion) (SIPRI, 2024). This disparity restricts Pakistan's ability to acquire high-cost assets in ASW, cyber, and electronic warfare, while India continues expanding both its fleet and indigenous production. India currently operates over 130 warships and plans to field 175–200 by 2035, with 54 under construction as of 2024 (Janes, 2024). By contrast, Pakistan's fleet remains below 50 major combatants, with limited indigenous shipbuilding capacity. From a neorealist perspective, Pakistan's tilt toward China is a rational response in an anarchic system where weaker states seek alliances to balance stronger rivals (Waltz, 1979). However, dependence on Chinese platforms, over 80% of Pakistan's arms imports between 2020 and 2024 originated from China (SIPRI, 2024), creates vulnerabilities. In crisis scenarios, Pakistan's ability to act independently may be compromised by Beijing's strategic calculations.

RSCT highlights the structural implications of U.S. penetration into South Asia. By elevating India as a maritime hub, external intervention has reshaped the regional security complex, embedding asymmetry into its fabric (Buzan&Wæver, 2003). Pakistan is not only militarily outpaced but also structurally sidelined, trapped

in a dependent relationship with China and excluded from wider Indo-Pacific security governance. Indo–U.S. cooperation has undermined Pakistan’s deterrence on three levels: materially, by widening the capability gap; diplomatically, by isolating Pakistan from multilateral forums; and structurally, by forcing reliance on China. These trends weaken Islamabad’s strategic autonomy and raise questions about its ability to safeguard maritime interests in a rapidly shifting security order.

4.3 The Erosion of Pakistan’s Maritime Deterrence and Strategic Autonomy

4.3.1 Intelligence Superiority and Surveillance Asymmetry

The encroachment of India into the US systems of intelligence-sharing and surveillance has also induced an extreme asymmetry in the maritime awareness that sharply degrades the ability of Pakistan to maintain a naval response posture. In 2018, India signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) that allowed the country to access real-time encrypted intelligence and geospatial data on US platforms, the maritime domain awareness of which improved dramatically (Brewster, 2021: 7). This advancement is operationalised by the fact that India is introducing P-8I Poseidons and MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones that are equipped with the most advanced synthetic aperture radar, electro-optic sensors, and signal intelligence (SIGINT), that can monitor surface vessels and submarines with great precision (Rehman, 2021).

These monitoring capacities are also institutionalised by India taking charge of the Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) that involves collaborative sharing of information with partner countries including US, Japan, Australia, and France (Pant, 2020). India joining these information ecosystems has made it much harder to make a submarine infiltration like that done by Pakistan,

especially its second-strike submarines which come as the traditional fulcrum to its nuclear deterrence policy. The fact that the Pakistani Navy has had a low access of satellite reconnaissance and electronic warfare platforms puts it at a significant disadvantage when considering the fact that stealth and unpredictability are key strategic assets in the event it comes to pass.

A helpful means of evaluating this development is the theory of Regional Security Complex (RSCT). According to Buzan and Wæver (2003: 46), the intervention of third powers into a given region can influence security chains and alterations of threats. This has also seriously altered the maritime balance in this case and has structurally tilted it in India through the US support thus converting Pakistan into a strategically weak player in the region. Leakage of the operational secrecy not only undermine the deterrent effect but also empower Indian power projection emboldened the strategic instability in South Asia.

4.3.2 Disruption of the Regional Maritime Balance

The US has also provided strategic assistance to India that has upset the balance of naval power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) since it is largely led by an increasingly large maritime presence by India as it shifts deeper into the Indian Ocean. The ability of the Indian navy to conduct its naval operations regularly outside of Indian waters, due to the deployment forward, coupled with increased access to logistics facilities through the agreements, such as LEMOA, now enables India to greatly extend its operations into chokepoints, including the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait (Scott, 2020: 142). The transformation has expanded the Indian Navy operational ability and has at the same time restricted the ability of Pakistan to manoeuvre at sea in areas of conflict like the Arabian Sea.

India is also strengthening its regional influence through its involvement in multilateral efforts of its security, including sexual cooperation with Pacific incumbencies through Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), Malabar naval drills, and the Multilateral Strategic Partnerships through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), among others. Such alignments have also effectively sidelined Pakistan whose naval diplomacy is also only bilateral, mainly with China and Turkey (Mohan, 2021). On the contrary, India has been integrated into the network of maritime relationships, among others, the ability to interoperate with the US Indo-Pacific Command, and use of forward bases at Djibouti and Diego Garcia (Chaturvedi, 2023).

Relatively poorly equipped Pakistan naval forces are unable to address this balance of developments. The blue-water capability of the Pakistan Navy is only limited, which limits its presence to its western coast, whereas the strategic positions of India are in favour of power projection. This gap has become especially noticeable since India has procured aircraft carriers, long-range maritime patrol capabilities, and is becoming part of US-devised surveillance systems (Lalwani and Byrne, 2019).

According to the neorealist, such imbalance is an indication of the unequal distribution of power in an anarchic region and the thirst of the states to attain pre-eminence by improving their capabilities. The fact that Pakistan has been excluded in the governance structures that exist in the seas also goes in tandem with the premise of RSCT that external influence, in this case, the involvement of the United States in the region can redirect the security complexes of a region and disregard those who are not aligned.

4.3.3 Strategic Isolation and Regional Exclusion

Other than technological difference and imbalance (in operation), Pakistan is achieving strategic isolation at sea due to its inability to be part of multilateral naval cooperative groups and security consultations. By being part of the security structures in the region, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), Malabar exercises, MILAN, and RIMPAC, India has made its place in the Indo-Pacific maritime governance institutionalised. On the other hand, Pakistan has consistently been left out of these structures, restricting it to high-profile discussions, standardisation procedures in the naval branch, and combined operational education (Tellis, 2021).

Malabar group is a naval war game between India and the US that initially was a bilateral war game, but now with the inclusion of Japan and Australia being countries on the same side to counter-act the Chinese influence on the Indo-Pacific. The exercises provide the participants with chances of mastering anti-submarine warfare, the workings of carrier strike group, and maritime domain awareness. Non-participation by Pakistan is not taken symbolically; it is additionally a reflection of lower levels of diplomatic marginalisation and poor regional leverage. In a similar vein, Pakistan has never been invited to the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) despite this being an important IOR state in the littoral region. Now, Pakistan is not part of critical maritime security networks as the centre shares real-time information among more than 20 partner countries (Ho, 2022).

Although Pakistan is conducting naval drills with China (Sea Guardians series) and Turkey, the latter are bilateral and not very large-scale in any way. Its lack of participation in wider maritime coalitions decreases the chance to influence the

norms, multilateral agendas or establish a deterrence credibility through its alliances. Such marginalization, as per Regional Security Complex Theory, redefines the essence of threat perceptions as well as regional power relations in support and further strengthening of the idea of Indian centrality and Pakistan at its fringe (Buzan and Wfourteenlee, 2003).

This relegation also limits the national influence of Pakistan in various international platforms such as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) where Indian leadership may be non-contested. Because of increased representative relations with India, the regional influence of Pakistan is being diminished as well, reducing its freedom of autonomy and strategic input at sea.

4.3.4 Strategic Isolation and Regional Exclusion

Perhaps, the most considerable implication of Indo-US maritime cooperation has been the strategic exclusion of Pakistan in the regional and international maritime governance systems. Since India is enhancing its strategic partnership with the United States and Indo-Pacific countries, Pakistan remains an outcast in major naval platforms and multilateral exercises. As an example, India is now a frequent member of the Malabar drills that have risen to include Japan and Australia in addition to taking a bilateral US-India format and making the naval aspect of the Quad institutionalised (Grossman, 2021). These drills emphasise on combined carrier operations, anti-submarine warfare, and readiness at high-sea and these are fields where Pakistan is still lacking.

Additionally, India has already participated in Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) which is the largest multilateral naval exercise in the world organized by the US Pacific Fleet. RIMBAC has been geographically relevant since the late 2010s;

however since 2012 Pakistan has not been invited to RIMPAC indicating a deteriorating political and strategic rift between Islamabad and the larger Indo Pacific security structure (Ehtisham and Khan, 2020). On the same note, India has now become a principal member of the Information Fusion Centre- Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) stationed in Gurugram which is a facilitating centre of maritime domain awareness among like-minded partners. The fact that Pakistan is not a member of IFC-IOR means that it cannot get access to information on shared threats and its implication that can help in influencing maritime decisions made at the regional level.

The particular omissions are not only tokenistic, but they physically undermine the abilities of Pakistan to participate in naval diplomacy, establish multilateral confidence, or influence maritime norms. The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) says that such external realignments have the capacity to provoke lasting exclusion of weaker players in the region security platforms (Buzan and Waefer, 2003). This is the case of Pakistan that has been immensely marginalised, which has further strengthened its bilateral relationship with China, thus limiting its scope of action within the changing Indo-Pacific.

4.4 Pakistan's Strategic Adaptation: Doctrinal and Alliance-Based Realignment

4.4.1 Maritime Doctrinal Shift to Asymmetric Warfare

In response to India's naval expansion and its strategic integration with the United States, Pakistan has increasingly relied on asymmetric warfare as a compensatory doctrine. Lacking the fiscal and technological capacity to match India's force projection capabilities or surveillance superiority, the Pakistan Navy has focused on enhancing its undersea and coastal denial capabilities. The centrepiece of this

strategy is the emphasis on submarine warfare—particularly the development of second-strike platforms to sustain its deterrence posture (Khan, 2022). Pakistan operates Agosta 90B-class submarines, three of which are equipped with Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology that allows for extended submerged endurance. These submarines are being upgraded to carry nuclear-capable Babur-III cruise missiles, aimed at maintaining a credible second-strike capability against Indian first-strike scenarios (Siddiqa, 2021). In addition, Pakistan is acquiring eight Type-039B Yuan-class submarines from China by 2028, four of which are expected to be built at Karachi Shipyard—a move that expands both its deterrent reach and domestic industrial base (Bhattacharya, 2021).

Pakistan is also developing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities through the deployment of shore-based cruise missile systems, such as the Zarb missile, to secure its littoral waters. These strategies reflect a cost-effective effort to deter stronger adversaries by raising the operational risks of maritime confrontation. From a neorealist perspective, this approach aligns with the logic of "denial-based deterrence" where weaker states adopt offset strategies rather than direct power parity (Waltz, 1979). However, while tactically rational, these asymmetric capabilities are reactive and limited in scope. They do little to address Pakistan's exclusion from multilateral governance structures or its strategic over-reliance on a single partner—issues that require a broader policy shift.

4.4.2 Institutionalizing the Sino-Pak Naval Axis

As Indo-US maritime cooperation intensifies, Pakistan has responded by deepening its naval partnership with China—a move that increasingly defines the strategic axis of its maritime posture. The foundation of this relationship is both

operational and strategic: it includes joint exercises, hardware transfers, and a shared interest in countering Indian maritime influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). One of the most visible signs of this axis is the regularity and complexity of the Sea Guardians bilateral naval exercises, launched in 2020. These drills, held in the North Arabian Sea, have included advanced surface combat operations, anti-submarine warfare simulations, and coordinated patrol tactics (Global Times, 2023). The joint exercises signal an effort to enhance interoperability between the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the Pakistan Navy (PN), aimed at building a coordinated maritime deterrent against Indian and allied naval forces.

China is supplying Pakistan with eight Yuan-class submarines by 2024 (Bhattacharya, 2021). These Type-039B submarines feature air-independent propulsion for extended underwater endurance. Four Type-054A/P guided missile frigates have also been delivered. They carry advanced radars and vertical-launch systems for modern naval warfare. Together, these acquisitions boost Pakistan's blue-water reach and electronic warfare capacity. The technology reduces some of India's traditional maritime advantages in the IOR. Yet, this gain remains uneven, as India's fleet size is far larger.

However, Pakistan's reliance on Chinese financing and doctrine raises concerns. The dependency threatens Islamabad's strategic autonomy in naval decision-making. Unlike India, Pakistan lacks a multi-aligned posture with other powers. India balances ties with the US, Russia, and Indo-Pacific partners. Pakistan's approach risks creating a bilateral dependency difficult to reverse. Critics argue this weakens flexibility during a possible US–China confrontation (Tellis, 2021). It may also reduce Pakistan's bargaining power in regional disputes.

From an RSCT perspective, the partnership reflects South Asia's polarised security order. Structural external interventions accelerate the division of regional naval alignments. China–Pakistan cooperation entrenches bloc politics rather than promoting flexible security options. Such entrenchment could destabilise the IOR by hardening opposing naval blocks. For Pakistan, alignment provides short-term capability but long-term strategic vulnerability. RSCT suggests dependence reshapes weaker states into clients of stronger powers.

4.4.3 Maritime Engagement Beyond China: Diversification and Pragmatism

While China is Pakistan's key partner in naval modernization and strategy. Yet, over-reliance on a single power creates major vulnerabilities. These risks include operational gaps and diplomatic inflexibility during regional crises. To counter this, analysts call for pragmatic, multi-vector naval engagement. Diversification offers Pakistan both regional influence and greater operational flexibility. One example is Pakistan's growing maritime cooperation with Turkey. Islamabad signed an agreement with STM Defence Technologies in 2018. The deal covers co-production of MILGEM-class corvettes tailored to Pakistan's needs (Kucuk, 2020). These multi-role ships support surveillance and anti-submarine operations in the Arabian Sea. Their low radar cross-section design also enhances survivability in contested waters. Equipped with advanced command-and-control systems, the corvettes provide significant technological autonomy.

Critically, Turkish cooperation reduces Pakistan's heavy dependence on Chinese platforms. It reflects an effort to diversify both suppliers and doctrines. This move also aligns with Turkey's rise as a defence exporter. Still, capacity limits may

restrict the scale of Turkish naval assistance. Unlike China, Turkey cannot fully underwrite Pakistan's naval expansion. Thus, diversification strengthens resilience but cannot substitute for large-scale support. From a strategic standpoint, Turkey–Pakistan defence ties extend beyond procurement. They signal a shared alignment among mid-tier powers in maritime security. RSCT suggests such ties can soften rigid bloc politics in South Asia. By engaging multiple partners, Pakistan seeks to regain lost strategic autonomy. Yet, without wider European or Gulf partnerships, its diversification remains partial.

Moreover, there is a latent opportunity for Pakistan to expand naval cooperation with Iran, particularly in the context of anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Oman and maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital chokepoint for Pakistan's energy imports. Though diplomatically sensitive, limited operational coordination with Iran could serve Pakistan's interest in widening its maritime footprint in the western IOR without directly provoking India or its US allies (Raza, 2022).

Another avenue is engagement with Southeast Asian navies, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, through observer participation in ASEAN-led maritime forums such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) or the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS). These platforms offer non-aligned naval dialogue opportunities that could help Pakistan improve situational awareness and maritime confidence-building without becoming entangled in great-power rivalries. This diversification aligns with neorealist strategic logic, where weaker states seek to maximise security through multiple alignments rather than overdependence. It also offers Pakistan a route back into the broader maritime governance ecosystem, mitigating the strategic isolation discussed earlier. However, such realignments

require long-term diplomatic investment and a recalibration of Pakistan's maritime diplomacy beyond reactive, threat-based responses.

4.5 Indigenous Naval Development and Capacity Enhancement

Pakistan's maritime strategy continues to face a structural weakness. The core limitation lies in its underdeveloped indigenous naval capacity. This weakness undermines self-reliance and reduces long-term strategic flexibility. Despite new procurements from China and Turkey, dependence on foreign suppliers persists. The Pakistan Navy still relies on imported systems for combat, surveillance, and logistics. Such reliance creates wartime vulnerabilities and undermines doctrinal independence. Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works (KSEW) remains the main domestic hub. Despite several upgrades, KSEW lacks advanced technological capacity (Ahmed, 2023). It cannot independently design modern frigates, submarines, or electronic warfare platforms. The ongoing Yuan-class submarine programme illustrates these limitations. Although four submarines are assembled locally, most components remain imported. Propulsion units, sonar suites, and missile launchers are foreign sourced. This structural dependence creates long-term risks for operational readiness.

India's path highlights this asymmetry. Programmes such as the nuclear submarine INS Arihant and the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant reflect decades of investment. These platforms represent more than firepower. They showcase institutional learning, technological transfer, and industrial maturity. India's long-term policy reflects a strategic decision to internalise naval power. Pakistan's limited capacity contrasts sharply with this model, deepening the regional imbalance. Another major gap is research and development. Pakistan's Defence Science and Technology Organization (DESTO) remains land-focused. Maritime innovation receives minimal

attention. Capabilities such as unmanned underwater vehicles, cyber-electronic warfare, and naval artificial intelligence are absent. In the twenty-first century, information dominance defines maritime power. Without indigenous research, Pakistan risks permanent disadvantage in surveillance and electronic warfare. This is destabilising in the Indian Ocean, where technological asymmetry shapes deterrence.

Dependency on external suppliers also creates strategic constraints. In wartime, supply chains for spares or munitions may be interrupted. Reliance on a single ally, particularly China, raises additional risks. Overdependence undermines strategic autonomy and reduces diplomatic flexibility. In contrast, India maintains multi-alignment while pursuing indigenous development. Pakistan risks being locked into dependency loops that reduce bargaining power. To address these challenges, Pakistan must adopt a dual-track strategy. First, it should strengthen domestic naval capacity. This requires long-term investments in naval research institutions, university-industry collaboration, and private-sector incentives. Local partnerships can gradually reduce dependence on foreign systems. Second, Pakistan must diversify its external partnerships. Turkey already provides examples through MILGEM collaboration and technology transfer (Kucuk, 2020). South Korea and Indonesia also offer mid-level technologies suitable for cooperative R&D. Joint projects would expand operational flexibility while avoiding over-reliance on China.

From a theoretical perspective, neorealism stresses self-help in an anarchic system. States cannot rely on external guarantees for survival. By failing to build indigenous capacity, Pakistan weakens its deterrence credibility. Dependency theory also explains the structural imbalance. Reliance on external powers reinforces dependence and limits autonomous growth. For Pakistan, breaking this cycle is a strategic imperative. Ultimately, imported submarines and frigates provide short-term

power. Yet without the ability to maintain, upgrade, and secure them, their value diminishes. True naval strength comes from self-reliance and innovation. Developing indigenous capacity is therefore essential. It not only enhances deterrence but also restores Pakistan's regional influence. In the Indo-Pacific balance, naval self-reliance is not an industrial ambition. It is the foundation of sovereignty, credibility, and strategic resilience.

4.6 Theoretical Reappraisal: Pakistan in the Shadow of Structural Transformation

The preceding sections have mapped the operational and institutional weaknesses of Pakistan's maritime strategy. Yet these weaknesses must not be read only as tactical missteps. They are rooted in structural forces that constrain Pakistan's agency within an evolving Indo-Pacific order. This section reappraises Pakistan's maritime insecurity through the dual theoretical lenses of Neorealism and RSCT. It argues that Pakistan's strategic marginalisation is the outcome of structural transformation: a shifting distribution of power, institutional exclusion, and asymmetric access to technology.

4.6.1 Neorealism and the Distribution of Maritime Power

Neorealism, as advanced by Waltz (1979), holds that the international system is anarchic, and security depends on the relative distribution of material capabilities. From this perspective, Pakistan's maritime decline is not primarily the result of misaligned policies but of relative capability asymmetry vis-à-vis India. India's economy is nearly ten times larger than Pakistan's (World Bank, 2023), enabling greater defence spending and sustained naval modernisation. Its indigenous shipbuilding programmes, INS Arihant and INS Vikrant, symbolise a mature internal

balancing strategy. By contrast, Pakistan remains reliant on Chinese or Turkish imports, which reflects a pattern of external balancing that lacks sustainability (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Neorealist theory also highlights the importance of alliances as balancing mechanisms. India's deepening convergence with the United States demonstrates how systemic pressures can reorder regional balances. The Indo-US defence agreements, COMCASA, BECA, and LEMOA, integrate India into the US-led intelligence and logistics grid (Pant and Rej, 2018). This materially shifts the naval balance by giving India real-time surveillance, geospatial intelligence, and secure communication networks. In neorealist terms, Pakistan is experiencing the effect of a shifting polarity within the South Asian sub-system.

Pakistan's reliance on China is theoretically consistent with balancing logic. Yet it reveals two weaknesses. First, it is largely reactive—a response to Indian alignments rather than an autonomous strategy. Second, it risks deepening dependency asymmetries, since China's strategic priorities in the Indian Ocean may not always align with Pakistan's narrower security needs (Tellis, 2021). Neorealism would suggest that without internal balancing through indigenous capability, Pakistan's reliance on external alliances will cement rather than resolve vulnerability.

4.6.2 RSCT and the Politics of Exclusion

While neorealism explains material asymmetries, it underplays the role of institutions and external interventions. Here, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) offers sharper insights. Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that regional security complexes are shaped by local rivalries but often transformed by external powers. When great powers intervene, they restructure regional institutions and norms, often

excluding weaker states. This dynamic is evident in the Indo-Pacific architecture. The United States' Indo-Pacific strategy positions India as a maritime "anchor" against China.

This has led to Pakistan's exclusion from emerging intelligence-sharing institutions such as the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), and multilateral naval arrangements such as the Malabar exercises and the Quad's maritime dialogue (Grossman, 2020). Importantly, exclusion does not occur through overt confrontation but through selective inclusion, which structurally sidelines Pakistan. RSCT thus explains why Pakistan's traditional reliance on bilateral alignments (with China, Turkey, or Saudi Arabia) fails to counteract marginalisation. Regional order is increasingly institutionalised through US-India-led frameworks. These reshape the South Asian security complex into a broader Indo-Pacific complex, where Pakistan has no formal seat.

4.6.3 Strategic Deterrence Under Pressure

Pakistan's traditional maritime deterrence rests on opacity and second-strike credibility. However, India's access to advanced surveillance networks undermines both. COMCASA enables encrypted communications with US platforms, while BECA provides geospatial data for precision targeting. Together with P-8I maritime patrol aircraft and MQ-9B drones, India gains a near-real-time picture of naval movements (Scott, 2021). In deterrence theory, uncertainty is often stabilising (Schelling, 1966). Yet India's technological advantage erodes Pakistan's ability to maintain ambiguity. This weakens the credibility of second-strike assets, including air-independent propulsion (AIP) submarines sourced from China. In neorealist terms, Pakistan faces a deterrence deficit. In RSCT terms, this deficit is institutionalised

through multilateral frameworks that give India privileged access to external intelligence ecosystems.

4.6.4 Dependency and the Erosion of Autonomy

Pakistan's reliance on China highlights a broader theme identified in dependency theory (Prebisch, 1950; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). External procurement without indigenous innovation reinforces structural dependency. China's supply of Yuan-class submarines and Type-054A/P frigates provides tactical capability, but without technology transfer, these remain "borrowed" capabilities. Dependency has two consequences. First, it constrains Pakistan's diplomatic manoeuvrability. Over-reliance on Beijing may limit Islamabad's ability to diversify partnerships with ASEAN or Western actors. Second, it erodes long-term strategic autonomy. In times of US-China confrontation, Pakistan risks being absorbed into Beijing's orbit, reducing its ability to shape regional order independently (Small, 2015).

4.6.5 Reappraising Pakistan's Strategic Options

Both neorealism and RSCT highlight that Pakistan's maritime insecurity is structurally embedded. Waltz (1979) shows that survival in an anarchic system depends on internal balancing. Pakistan has instead relied on external procurement, creating long-term vulnerabilities (Ahmed, 2023). To recalibrate, Pakistan must invest in domestic naval development. Priorities include cyber-electronic warfare, AI-enabled platforms, and unmanned systems (Cordesman, 2020). Without such investment, Pakistan risks permanent dependency on China. Public-private partnerships are one way to overcome this gap. Scholars argue that defence-industrial growth depends on integrating private-sector innovation into military ecosystems

(Hartley, 2011). Turkey's cooperation on MILGEM corvettes already shows the potential of technology transfer and co-production (Kucuk, 2020). South Korea could serve a similar "technology-bridge," providing mid-level innovation without geopolitical entrapment (Chun, 2019). Such selective alignments reduce dependency while enhancing industrial learning.

Diversification is equally important. RSCT stresses that exclusion often occurs through institutional restructuring (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). Pakistan has allowed its maritime diplomacy to remain narrow, centred almost exclusively on China. In contrast, limited partnerships with ASEAN and Gulf states would broaden its security footprint (Pant, 2022). Expanding Pakistan's role in the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition could embed maritime cooperation within Islamic defence networks (Siddiqa, 2017). EU-led initiatives like CRIMARIO-II also provide capacity-building in maritime domain awareness and could counter Pakistan's institutional isolation (European Union, 2021).

Institutional engagement forms the third pathway. Pakistan is excluded from key networks like the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and the Malabar exercises. Lobbying for observer status in these forums would at least normalise its presence. Functional roles in counter-piracy, humanitarian missions, and climate disaster relief could also strengthen Pakistan's legitimacy as a regional maritime actor (Bateman, 2020). Neorealism suggests that without such measures, Pakistan's marginality will deepen as India consolidates dominance with US and EU backing (Tellis, 2021).

4.6.6 Structural Transformation and Pakistan's Marginality

The theoretical reappraisal underscores that Pakistan's maritime insecurity is not resource-based alone. It is the outcome of structural transformations within the South Asian security complex. Neorealism highlights how India's material rise, backed by external alignments, has shifted the balance of power (Waltz, 1979; Pant, 2022). RSCT further shows how institutional mechanisms, like the Quad and IFC-IOR, systematically exclude Pakistan from regional decision-making (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). Dependency theory adds another dimension. Pakistan's reliance on Chinese arms, financing, and military doctrine risks entrenching asymmetric dependency (Prebisch, 1950; Siddiq, 2017).

Unlike India, which pursues multi-alignment, Pakistan has locked itself into a bilateral dependency with China. This exposes it to strategic vulnerabilities in the event of US–China confrontation (Tellis, 2021). Unless Islamabad recalibrates, its marginality will worsen. Internal balancing through indigenous capacity-building, diversified partnerships beyond China, and institutional engagement are critical. Otherwise, the Indo-Pacific order will continue consolidating without Pakistan's participation. If left unaddressed, Pakistan risks drifting into strategic irrelevance, reduced to a passive object in a security architecture shaped by others (Cordesman, 2020).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Pakistan's maritime insecurity is not merely a reflection of episodic miscalculations or resource shortfalls but is the outcome of deeper structural transformations in the South Asian security complex. India's integration into U.S.-led maritime and intelligence-sharing frameworks—

through COMCASA, BECA, and cooperation in platforms such as the P-8I and MQ-9B—has tilted the balance of naval power decisively in New Delhi’s favour. This transformation has created a multi-dimensional operational asymmetry in the IOR, exposing Pakistan’s submarine fleet, eroding the opacity of its second-strike capabilities, and thereby weakening the credibility of its deterrence posture. Equally significant has been Pakistan’s institutional exclusion from emerging regional maritime governance regimes. Exercises such as Malabar, RIMPAC, and the institutionalisation of the Information Fusion Centre–IOR illustrate how Pakistan’s marginality has become embedded within the very architecture of Indo-Pacific maritime cooperation. This exclusion is not accidental but reflects deliberate structural realignments, whereby external powers, particularly the United States, have elevated India as a security provider and strategic anchor, leaving Pakistan increasingly peripheral.

The chapter has further shown that Pakistan’s adaptive strategies, ranging from asymmetric doctrines and reliance on China, to diversification efforts with Turkey and Iran, and incremental steps toward indigenous naval capacity—remain fragmented, under-resourced, and structurally constrained. They provide short-term tactical relief but fail to challenge the wider imbalance in power projection, institutional legitimacy, and technological innovation. In this sense, Pakistan’s adaptation strategy reflects what dependency theorists describe as a “reactive posture” rather than proactive structural transformation. From a theoretical standpoint, neorealism underscores how Pakistan’s predicament is fundamentally tied to material disparities and its delayed internal balancing, while Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) demonstrates how extra-regional actors have reshaped South Asia’s maritime order to institutionalise Pakistan’s marginality. When placed in tandem,

these frameworks reveal that Pakistan's naval crisis is neither temporary nor reversible through ad hoc measures; it is embedded in a systemic redistribution of power and authority within the Indo-Pacific order.

This reappraisal highlights three critical implications. First, unless Pakistan invests in indigenous capability and maritime R&D, its deterrence posture will remain hostage to external suppliers and vulnerable to disruption. Second, over-reliance on a single partner, namely China, risks reproducing structural dependency rather than generating strategic autonomy. Third, without institutional engagement, through confidence-building measures, observer roles, or multilateral maritime collaborations, Pakistan will remain excluded from norm-setting mechanisms that define regional security governance.

Pakistan's maritime security dilemma is not a transient imbalance but a symptom of its deeper marginalisation in an evolving Indo-Pacific architecture. The consolidation of U.S.–India maritime convergence, coupled with Pakistan's limited adaptive strategies, suggests that unless Islamabad recalibrates its doctrine, broadens its alignments, and embraces meaningful self-reliance, it will risk permanent strategic irrelevance. The stakes are not merely operational—they concern Pakistan's long-term autonomy, its role in shaping the regional order, and its capacity to resist being reduced to a passive object in a security architecture increasingly designed by others.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Chapter Overview and Objective

This chapter concludes the thesis by consolidating the findings and advancing recommendations. The research examined how the Indo-US naval partnership has restructured South Asia's maritime order and reduced Pakistan's strategic autonomy. The analysis combined empirical evidence with international relations theory, producing insights that are both scholarly and policy-relevant. Chapter 2 established the historical and theoretical foundations. It showed how neorealism explains Pakistan's struggle with material asymmetries, and how Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) accounts for external interventions that deepen exclusion. Chapter 3 analysed India's expanding naval capacity, shaped by sustained U.S. support. The chapter demonstrated that intelligence-sharing agreements, logistics cooperation, and joint exercises have entrenched Indian naval superiority. Chapter 4 then evaluated the impact on Pakistan. It revealed three outcomes: erosion of deterrence credibility, institutional isolation from maritime forums, and weak domestic capacity to balance the shift.

This concluding chapter performs several functions. It first synthesises the main findings across chapters, highlighting the interplay between theory and evidence. It then considers the strategic implications for Pakistan's long-term security and doctrine. Next, it advances recommendations for policy, grounded in both neorealist and RSCT insights. Finally, it reflects on the limitations of the research and outlines possible directions for further study. The chapter therefore bridges academic theory and practical strategy. Its aim is not only to explain Pakistan's marginalisation

but also to identify feasible steps for restoring limited influence in a changing Indo-Pacific order.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Objective 1: Scope and Nature of Indo-US Maritime Cooperation

The findings demonstrate that Indo-US maritime cooperation has evolved from limited Cold War exchanges to a comprehensive strategic partnership in the Indian Ocean. Early cooperation was ad hoc, focused on intelligence sharing during crises. Since 2005, however, the relationship has been institutionalised through a series of foundational defence agreements. LEMOA (2016) enabled reciprocal logistics support, enhancing India's operational reach across the Indo-Pacific. COMCASA (2018) gave India access to secure U.S. communication networks, while BECA (2020) provided geospatial intelligence crucial for targeting and surveillance. Together, these agreements have transformed India's navy into an increasingly interoperable partner of U.S. forces. Joint exercises, particularly the Malabar series, have expanded in scale and sophistication, now involving carrier battle groups, anti-submarine drills, and cyber-security components. The United States has also promoted India's inclusion in multilateral forums like the Quad and IFC-IOR, embedding it within a wider Indo-Pacific security network. From a structural perspective, this cooperation illustrates how regional power hierarchies are shaped not only by material capabilities but also by institutional alignments that exclude rivals. Pakistan has been consistently sidelined, limiting its ability to influence regional norms.

Objective 2: Modernisation of India's Navy through U.S. Support

The research shows that U.S. support has accelerated the modernisation of India's navy, creating a technological and operational gap with Pakistan. Through defence trade and intelligence-sharing, India has gained access to advanced systems such as P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, MH-60R helicopters, and MQ-9B drones. These assets enhance long-range surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, and networked targeting. U.S. satellite data and geospatial intelligence further integrate India into global maritime awareness systems. India has also benefitted indirectly through joint R&D projects and access to U.S. military-industrial networks. These technologies strengthen India's deterrent posture against both Pakistan and China, allowing it to project power far beyond the Arabian Sea. By contrast, Pakistan's naval modernisation remains dependent on limited Chinese support and small-scale indigenous shipbuilding. The disparity highlights what neorealism predicts: states aligning with superior powers can leapfrog capability gaps, while rivals face structural disadvantage. India's ability to operate in concert with U.S. and allied navies marks a qualitative shift in South Asia's maritime balance.

Objective 3: Implications for Pakistan's Maritime Security and Strategic Autonomy

The partnership's most profound consequence has been Pakistan's growing maritime insecurity. India's enhanced surveillance capacity erodes the opacity of Pakistan's submarine-based second-strike capability. Deterrence theory emphasises that survivability depends on stealth; once transparency dominates, coercion risks multiply. Pakistan thus faces greater vulnerability to pre-emptive or counterforce strategies. Institutionally, Pakistan has been excluded from critical exercises and forums. The Malabar exercises, RIMPAC, and IFC-IOR have become venues where norms and protocols are standardised, without Pakistani input. This institutional exclusion compounds its operational disadvantage by relegating it to the periphery of

Indo-Pacific governance. RSCT explains this marginalisation as a product of external interventions that restructure regional complexes to favour stronger states. Dependency theory further reveals that Pakistan's reliance on Chinese support narrows its autonomy. Overdependence reduces bargaining leverage and risks entangling Pakistan in wider Sino-American competition. The cumulative effect is a constrained strategic space, where Pakistan reacts defensively rather than shaping outcomes.

Objective 4: Pakistan's Strategic Responses and Policy Options

Pakistan has attempted several responses to counterbalance Indo-US cooperation, though these remain fragmented and under-resourced. Doctrinally, it has emphasised asymmetric warfare, relying on submarines, missile systems, and coastal defence to offset Indian superiority. Partnerships with secondary powers, particularly Turkey, have produced agreements such as the MILGEM-class corvette programme. These vessels strengthen surface capabilities and introduce more diversified supply chains. Engagements with Iran and Gulf states remain exploratory but signal intent to broaden cooperation. Pakistan has also invested modestly in indigenous production, such as shipbuilding at Karachi Shipyard, though progress is slow. Despite these efforts, Pakistan lacks a coherent doctrine that integrates military, diplomatic, and institutional dimensions into a unified maritime strategy. The research suggests three viable policy options. First, internal balancing through sustained investment in indigenous capabilities, particularly cyber-electronic warfare and AI-enabled surveillance. Second, diversified alignments with ASEAN, Gulf states, and European maritime initiatives to reduce reliance on China. Third, institutional engagement through humanitarian and counter-piracy missions to gain legitimacy in multilateral

forums. Without such measures, Pakistan risks structural exclusion and long-term irrelevance in Indo-Pacific security.

Integrative Assessment

Overall, the thesis finds that Indo-US maritime cooperation has structurally reshaped South Asia's security order. India has emerged as both a military partner and a normative actor within the Indo-Pacific, while Pakistan remains strategically marginalised. Neorealism explains this as a product of material disparities and delayed internal balancing. RSCT shows how institutional architectures exclude weaker states, reinforcing asymmetry. Dependency theory warns against Pakistan's over-reliance on China, which reduces autonomy rather than enhancing it. These theoretical insights converge on one conclusion: Pakistan's maritime insecurity is not a short-term tactical setback but a long-term structural condition. To overcome it, Islamabad must rethink its doctrine, broaden partnerships, and reclaim space in regional institutions.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

The strategic shifts explored in this thesis reaffirm the utility of structural theories in explaining Pakistan's maritime predicament, yet they also expose important blind spots when these theories are applied to South Asia's evolving security order. From a neorealist perspective, Pakistan's declining maritime leverage illustrates the enduring logic of material imbalance. India's naval modernisation—backed by U.S. technology, logistics, and intelligence, has not only widened the capability gap but entrenched it in ways that make catch-up prohibitively costly. Neorealism correctly predicts that weaker states rely on asymmetric strategies, external alignments, or limited denial capabilities when facing a superior coalition. Pakistan's heavy dependence on asymmetric deterrence (submarines, missile systems) and its reliance on Chinese support confirm this structural constraint. The case underscores Waltz's claim that survival requires internal balancing; yet Pakistan's

delayed and fragmented approach shows how resource scarcity and domestic instability can blunt this imperative. In this sense, neorealism explains the what of Pakistan's decline, but less so the how and why of its marginalisation.

This is where RSCT offers deeper explanatory power. The Indo-US partnership has not only shifted the distribution of material capabilities; it has also reshaped the architecture of maritime governance. India's integration into platforms such as Malabar, IFC-IOR, and the Quad illustrates how institutional embeddedness multiplies strategic influence. Pakistan's exclusion from these networks demonstrates that marginalisation is not only a function of weaker fleets or smaller budgets, but also of being denied access to rule-making, interoperability, and normative legitimacy. RSCT thus highlights that Pakistan's strategic challenge is multidimensional: it is losing both the military contest and the institutional contest simultaneously.

The interplay between these theories reveals that Pakistan confronts a dual-layered crisis: material underperformance and normative exclusion. The former limits its operational resilience; the latter erodes its voice in shaping regional order. Classical deterrence theory, rooted in opacity and survivability, becomes insufficient in a context where transparency is enforced through institutionalised surveillance regimes and exclusion from multilateral naval frameworks. Deterrence credibility is no longer determined solely by hardware and doctrine but also by access to shared intelligence, interoperability networks, and recognition as a legitimate maritime stakeholder.

This case therefore exposes a limitation in neorealism: its state-centric, materialist lens struggles to capture how institutional exclusion can entrench asymmetry independently of raw power. Similarly, RSCT is stretched in accounting

for how global powers like the United States intervene to recalibrate regional security complexes to favour chosen allies, effectively “re-scripting” the boundaries of the complex itself. The Indo-US case shows that South Asia’s maritime security complex has been partially subsumed into the broader Indo-Pacific architecture, thereby altering its dynamics in ways neither theory predicts in isolation.

Theoretically, the findings suggest that a hybrid approach is essential. Neorealism explains the gravitational pull of power disparities, while RSCT captures how institutional architecture amplifies these disparities by distributing legitimacy and voice unevenly. Together, they reveal that Pakistan is no longer simply a weaker actor in a bilateral contest but a marginalised state within an exclusionary regional order. This order privileges states that align with great-power coalitions and sidelines those that fail to embed themselves diplomatically and institutionally. Pakistan’s experience demonstrates that structural theories must be expanded to incorporate institutional and normative dimensions if they are to explain twenty-first century security orders. For Pakistan, this implies that survival cannot be secured through military balancing alone. It requires cultivating an institutional maritime identity, diversifying alignments beyond China, and leveraging regional regimes not merely as platforms for defence but as arenas where legitimacy and strategic relevance are negotiated.

5.4 Strategic and Policy Recommendations for Pakistan

Pakistan’s maritime trajectory will be shaped not only by external pressures but by its capacity to strategically adapt within an exclusionary Indo-Pacific order. The research findings highlight that Pakistan faces a dual challenge: material inferiority vis-à-vis India, and institutional marginalisation from emerging regional

frameworks. Addressing both dimensions requires policies that combine neorealist balancing strategies with RSCT-informed institutional reintegration. The following recommendations provide a multidimensional roadmap.

5.4.1 Recalibrate Maritime Doctrine

Pakistan must formally articulate a comprehensive maritime doctrine to guide naval strategy beyond ad hoc responses. Neorealism underscores the importance of credible deterrence in an asymmetric environment, while RSCT highlights the risks of exclusion from institutional frameworks. The doctrine should therefore:

Prioritise undersea warfare as the backbone of second-strike survivability, ensuring opacity against India's ISR capabilities.

Integrate electronic, cyber, and space-enabled assets into maritime operations to counter India's reliance on U.S. satellite and surveillance networks.

Institutionalise asymmetric approaches—swarm tactics, autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), and coastal sea denial—rather than treating them as stop-gap measures.

Embed jointness with air and land forces to maximise Pakistan's limited naval assets.

A clearly articulated doctrine would reduce ambiguity, provide operational coherence, and signal Pakistan's strategic seriousness to both adversaries and partners.

5.4.2 Invest in Indigenous Capability Development

The findings show Pakistan's dependency on external suppliers creates long-term vulnerability. Structural realism suggests survival requires internal balancing, yet this has been delayed. To redress this, Pakistan should:

Establish a National Maritime Innovation Fund to finance R&D in stealth propulsion, secure communication, and unmanned systems.

Expand public-private partnerships linking defence industries with universities and startups, incentivising innovation in dual-use technologies.

Upgrade Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works into a regional hub for indigenous shipbuilding and retrofitting.

Develop policies for talent retention in defence engineering to stem brain drain and build a skilled technological base.

This internal balancing would not eliminate asymmetry with India, but it would gradually reduce strategic dependence and enhance self-reliance.

5.4.3 Diversify Strategic Naval Partnerships

Pakistan's near-exclusive reliance on China risks strategic overdependence and limited diplomatic flexibility. The thesis findings suggest the need for diversified partnerships to counter exclusion. Recommended steps include:

Deepen naval cooperation with Turkey, Indonesia, and Gulf states, focusing on training exchanges, submarine technology, and logistics access.

Seek observer or partner status in forums such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).

Expand interoperability through joint HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) missions with ASEAN and African navies, avoiding direct confrontation with India but enhancing visibility.

Diversification creates diplomatic leverage and aligns with RSCT logic by embedding Pakistan within alternative institutional nodes.

5.4.4 Reclaim Space in Maritime Governance

Pakistan's exclusion from Malabar and other U.S.-led frameworks has reinforced marginalisation. Yet, RSCT suggests that participation in norm-setting forums can restore strategic relevance even without parity in hard power. Practical steps include:

Proactively engage in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), leading initiatives on anti-piracy, blue economy governance, and environmental security.

Position Pakistan as a capacity-building provider for smaller littoral states by offering training, scholarships, and patrol vessel support.

Use neutral security issues, HADR, piracy suppression, climate resilience, as diplomatic entry points that avoid great-power contestation but project Pakistan as a responsible stakeholder.

Such engagement would partially mitigate institutional exclusion and allow Pakistan to shape regional narratives.

5.4.5 Build Strategic Messaging and Soft Maritime Power

Perceptions matter as much as capabilities in twenty-first-century security. Pakistan's absence from the Indo-Pacific narrative has amplified India's status as a "maritime norm entrepreneur." To counter this:

Develop a strategic maritime narrative centred on Pakistan's contributions to regional trade security, disaster response, and counter-piracy.

Publish annual maritime white papers outlining Pakistan's role in the blue economy and cooperative security.

Expand naval diplomacy through port calls, think-tank dialogues, and media campaigns in the Indian Ocean littoral and archipelagic states.

Leverage CPEC's maritime dimension (Gwadar) to present Pakistan as a logistics hub linking the Indian Ocean to Central Asia.

By aligning soft power with maritime policy, Pakistan can project itself as more than a reactive state—enhancing legitimacy even within exclusionary frameworks.

These recommendations acknowledge Pakistan's structural constraints but build on areas of comparative advantage. Neorealism underscores the urgency of capability-building and doctrinal clarity; RSCT highlights the value of institutional reintegration and norm entrepreneurship. Taken together, the strategy shifts Pakistan from a reactive containment posture to a proactive maritime identity. This transformation will not immediately close the capability gap with India, but it can restore Pakistan's credibility, autonomy, and relevance in a fragmented Indo-Pacific order.

5.5 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

While This study gives a broad strategic analysis of Indo-US maritime cooperation, but it has limits. The main constraint is the reliance on open-source material. Access to classified data on deployments, surveillance systems, and nuclear postures was not possible. As a result, the operational picture remains incomplete and based on inference. Another limitation is the pace of change in the Indo-Pacific. Alignments shift quickly, shaped by technology and great-power rivalry. Assumptions

made today may not hold in five years. This reduces the predictive certainty of the findings.

Future research should address these gaps. First, cyber-maritime risks deserve deeper study, especially Pakistan's exposure to spoofing, jamming, and AI-driven warfare. Second, the role of autonomous systems in undersea operations should be explored, as these will shape detection, swarming, and deterrence. Third, the impact of Chinese basing in the Western Indian Ocean on Pakistan's autonomy needs sustained assessment. Fourth, longitudinal studies could track Pakistan's naval diplomacy in forums such as IORA and IONS over the next decade. Finally, research on CPEC maritime security could test Pakistan's capacity to manage hybrid threats to sea-lanes and ports. These areas would provide both policy relevance and theoretical refinement. They would also extend the debate on how Pakistan can adapt in a rapidly evolving maritime order.

5.6 Final Reflection and Closing Remarks

This thesis has demonstrated that Pakistan's maritime security is no longer a peripheral policy concern but a strategic imperative in a rapidly shifting Indo-Pacific landscape. The Indian Ocean is now a contested arena where alliances, surveillance networks, and governance regimes increasingly determine influence. Within this order, Indo-US cooperation has accelerated India's naval rise, deepened its institutional embeddedness, and widened the power imbalance vis-à-vis Pakistan. The analysis confirms that passive adaptation and reactive balancing are insufficient for Pakistan. Neorealism explains how material inferiority erodes deterrence credibility, while the Regional Security Complex Theory highlights Pakistan's institutional

marginalisation. Together, these dynamics point to a dual-layered crisis—loss of operational parity and loss of normative voice.

The way forward lies in a proactive, multidimensional maritime vision. Pakistan must recalibrate its doctrine towards credible asymmetric deterrence, invest in indigenous shipbuilding and naval technologies, diversify partnerships beyond China, and reclaim diplomatic space in multilateral forums. Equally important is the cultivation of a maritime identity, through strategic communication, blue economy cooperation, and naval diplomacy, that frames Pakistan as a responsible stakeholder in regional stability. This research affirms that Pakistan's strategic future at sea will not be secured by hardware alone, but by the integration of doctrine, technology, diplomacy, and identity. To remain relevant in the Indo-Pacific order, Pakistan must transition from a reactive naval posture to a resilient, inclusive, and self-aware maritime strategy. Only then can it preserve autonomy, enhance credibility, and contribute constructively to the evolving security architecture of the Indian Ocean.

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