**Moscow’s Indian Ocean Strategy**

**The increase in interest has resulted in the growing military presence of other superpowers in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).**

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The Tsars of Russia consis­tently sought warm water ports in the southern regions to exert control over global trade and attain strategic suprem­acy. The Soviet Union, with its dominant naval pres­ence in the Indian Ocean, also possessed ample naval infrastructure and a significant fleet in these waters for a long period. Ethiopia and South Yemen provided access to warm water ports in the west, while Kam Rahn Bay in the east was also made ac­cessible. This was done to fulfil Rus­sia’s longstanding goal of gaining convenient control over warm wa­ter territories. Under President Pu­tin’s rule, Russia has reemerged as a significant player in the geopolitical and strategic affairs of the Indian Ocean; Moscow recognises the sig­nificance of forming alliances in the intricate and multi-faceted global power structure to bolster its econ­omy and geopolitical standing.

The Indian Ocean is a region of significant economic importance and is considered a crucial com­ponent of the broader Indo-Pacif­ic geopolitical framework. Russia aims to establish a presence in this region for various purposes, in­cluding gaining access to markets and trade routes, safeguarding in­terests in historical and present territories, and upholding norms such as the freedom of navigation and over-flight exercises. The in­crease in interest has resulted in the growing military presence of other superpowers in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Consequent­ly, Russia is attempting to broaden the range of partners it has in IOR. Military exercises serve to high­light the political and diplomatic unity between countries and also indicate the recognition of Russia as a military ally.

[Israel raids main Gaza hospital as Rafah concerns grow](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2024/israel-raids-main-gaza-hospital-as-rafah-concerns-grow)

The Andaman Sea naval exer­cises between Russia and Myan­mar in November last year were dubbed “the first Russian-Myan­mar naval exercise in modern history.” The drill included the participation of two anti-subma­rine vessels, namely the Admiral Tributs and Admiral Panteleyev, from the Russian Pacific Fleet and a frigate and a corvette from Myan­mar’s navy. The Russian warships arrived at Bangladesh’s Chittagong Port in the Bay of Bengal days after the drill, which is seen as a signif­icant development in Russia-Ban­gladesh ties. This indicates that Russia’s actions suggest a desire to preserve the impression of being a prominent global power in IOR.

Moscow and Delhi also conduct­ed collaborative naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal from time to time. The purpose of these exercis­es is to collectively address global challenges and safeguard the secu­rity of civilian shipping in the Asia Pacific area. Alongside, the Russian Navy has been actively participat­ing in the international maritime exercises AMAN, which Pakistan is hosting in the Arabian Sea. Paki­stani assets, the Alamgir and Aslat, participated in joint naval exercises with the Russian Federation Navy, Admiral Grigorovich, and Dmitriy Rogachov in the North Arabian Sea during the Arabian Monsoon ex­ercises, which encompassed Anti-Surface, Anti-Air Warfare, Maneu­vering, and Communication drills.

[In rare move, North Korea holds out olive branch to Japan for 'new future'](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2024/in-rare-move-north-korea-holds-out-olive-branch-to-japan-for-new-future)

In addition to its joint operations with countries bordering the Indi­an Ocean, Russia has also priori­tized conducting bilateral exercises with Iran and China in the West­ern Indian Ocean. In January 2022, naval vessels from Iran, Russia, and China engaged in a collabora­tive military exercise in the Indian Ocean. Russia has also inked bilat­eral naval and defence agreements with Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mo­zambique, and the Central African Republics since 2017. While Egypt, the Central African Republic, Mad­agascar, Mozambique, and Sudan have let the Russian Air Force use their airspace, Madagascar, Mo­zambique, and Sudan have granted the Russian Navy port access.

These exercises also help in mak­ing a chance for the sale of Russian military equipment in the future. Russia has been the oldest mili­tary supplier to most South Asian countries. Military supplies also remain its most important source of income besides energy trade. Due to the Ukraine crisis, the Rus­sian military industry might not be in a position to sell equipment in the present times. However, Mos­cow will not want to lose ground in South Asia, one of the fastest-grow­ing regions for arms imports.

[Industrial sector emerges as cornerstone of Pakistan's economic recovery journey](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2024/industrial-sector-emerges-as-cornerstone-of-pakistan-s-economic-recovery-journey)

Although Moscow has not re­leased any exclusive official docu­ment outlining its regional policy for the Indian Ocean, an analysis of key doctrinal papers offers some insights. Russia has focused on certain areas inside and around the Indian Ocean, such as South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. It has not mentioned the Indian Ocean as a whole in either its 2015 National Security Strategy or Its foreign policy vision for 2023.

To some extent, The 2015 Mar­itime Doctrine, which lists the In­dian Ocean as one of six region­al priority regions in the maritime domain (together with the Atlantic, Arctic, Pacific, Caspian, and Antarc­tic), provides its regional strategy. Strengthening positive connections with IOR states, stepping up Rus­sia’s commercial and other marine operations in the region, and ensur­ing maritime security through a for­ward naval presence are among the goals enumerated in the document.

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As Russia positions itself as a formidable alternative power, the United States and other states with similar goals must exert greater effort to advance sustainable eco­nomic growth, safeguard interna­tional regulations and standards, and maintain peace and security in the region. Russian forward na­val presence in the Indian Ocean would be intended to monitor US naval activities in the region, much as it did during the Cold War. Re­garding China, Moscow will en­ergetically advance its agenda through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the BRICS while subtly challenging Beijing. Ulti­mately, the Indian Ocean provides a connection to the Antarctic, an­other region that is becoming in­creasingly significant for Moscow.

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