POWER TRANSITION THEORY AS NAVAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN FROM 2017 TO 2023

by

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ABSTRACT

China, as a rising power in the global system, has been increasing its naval presence in the Indian Ocean and the establishment of the country's first-ever naval base in Djibouti further raised concerns from the dominant state in the international system, which is the United States of America. Moreover, the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean has fuelled the debate of an ongoing transfer of power between a rising China and the US. This study contends that the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean, which includes port calls, senior visits, establishing bases, and bilateral and multilateral exercises with Djibouti, India, and Pakistan, partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFRICOM	Africa Command
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
EU	European Union
HADR	Humanitarian and Disaster Relief
IPMDA	Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NPC	National People's Congress
PLA	People’s Liberation Army (People’s Republic of China)
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy (People’s Republic of China)
PLAN-PN	People’s Liberation Army Navy and Pakistan Navy
PTT	Power Transition Theory
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific Exercise
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
USINDOPACOM	US Indo-Pacific Command

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Identification of the research theme

The research theme is located within the field of diplomatic studies and diplomatic practice with specific emphasis on naval diplomatic practice involving the United States of America (US) and the People's Republic of China (China) in the Indian Ocean. The theoretical underpinning of the study is power transition theory (PTT) as it provides a lens for understanding how naval diplomatic practice in a particular region contributes to a transition of power involving both actors. The theoretical lens is supplemented with the following concepts: national power, instruments of national power and the practice of diplomacy with a specific emphasis on naval diplomatic practice.

PTT postulates that there are two actors: a rising power, for instance, China, and a dominant power, the US. In the 21st century, China has impressively asserted its position as an emerging power (Jalil, 2019: 41). It is only the US that has an economy that is larger than that of China. Also, the Asian country, like its counterparts, who are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, has developed nuclear capability in a move to bolster its national power (Jalil, 2019: 41). While on the rise, the country has decided to stick to its 1954[1] principles which are grounded in the ideas of "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence" (Xinhua, 2015).

In line with the above-mentioned principles, China, through its diplomatic practice, continues to reassure other states that it will not seek to impose its will on other countries by means of bullying, aggression, and oppression (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Following US President Donald Trump's visit to China in 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the US and met with President Trump (Consulate General of The People's Republic of China in Chicago, 2019). During the visit, President Xi mentioned that the two countries should never fall into a "trap of conflict and confrontation…China-US relations [should be] based on coordination, cooperation and stability" (Consulate General of The People's Republic of China in Chicago, 2019). President Trump responded by stating that he "Harbo[u]r[s] no hostility towards China and hope[s] bilateral relations will be even better. I value the good relations with President Xi Jinping and would like to strengthen cooperation with China" (Consulate General of The People's Republic of China in Chicago, 2019).

[1] The Constitution of the People's Republic of China was ratified during the inaugural session of the first National People's Congress (NPC) in 1954 (NPC, 2023).

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The above-mentioned message was reiterated in 2022 when President Xi met with US President Joe Biden in Bali. President Xi mentioned that China remains committed to a peaceful rise, stating that China does not intend to replace the current international order and doesn't seek to "displace the United States". (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). President Biden responded by stating that the competition between his country and China should not lead to conflict. (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

However, Dams & van der Putten (2015: 25) postulate that while China's peaceful-rise narrative may not pose the same threat to liberalism as communism did, because the Asian country accepts the coexistence of many ideologies in the international system, it still does not eliminate the risk of an armed conflict over the political and economic rules or norms of the current international system. This prediction is backed by Kennedy & Wang (2023), who highlight that many officials and political analysts agree that China and the US could "come to blows" over territories that are adjacent to China like Taiwan or in other parts of the world.

One can argue that confrontation between the two countries could be caused by what Lieberthal & Wang (2012: vi) identify as the "mutual distrust" between the rising China and the dominant state in the international system. In their argument, Lieberthal & Wang (2012: vi) additionally assert that the enduring distrust, particularly regarding the long-term intentions of the two powers, has persisted. This remains the case even though by 2012, Presidents Hu Jintao and Barack Obama had engaged in ten face-to-face meetings and over sixty bilateral talks involving government agencies from both sides had taken place. In 2017, this distrust was further fuelled by China's establishment of its first overseas naval base in Djibouti. The US, which also has troops stationed there, describes this establishment as part of China's projection of force (US Department of Defense, 2022).

In addition, Rogin (2018), claims that this naval base threatens the political and national security of the West. Chinese troops stationed there have been accused of acting in an irresponsible manner, by pointing lasers towards US military aircrafts in Djibouti, but China has denied this (Hill, 2019). Moreover, the two countries have no formal diplomatic arrangement in the region, where they can coordinate and defuse tensions (Vertin, 2020:8). This is despite the fact that there has been some contact between the defence attachés of both countries in the region (Vertin, 2020:8).

From the above-mentioned, it can be argued that while the US also encourages cooperation with the rising China, it is also concerned about the possibility of losing its status as a dominant state in the international system.

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That is because the country remain suspicious of China's true intentions. The Asian country's decision to set up its first-ever overseas naval base in Djibouti seems to have affirmed the concerns of the US. The US accusations against Chinese troops, which have been mentioned above, create an environment that can easily escalate to miscalculations that could lead to small scale armed clashes between the navies of the two powers in the region.

1.2. Formulation and demarcation of the research problem

China, which surpassed the US as Africa's largest trade partner in 2009, established its first naval base in the small African country of Djibouti in 2017 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). Djibouti is strategically located near the Bab al-Mandab Strait which connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean (United Nations, 2011). Beijing describes the base as a "logistics facility" (Blanchard, 2017) and says it is for peaceful purposes like escort missions, peacekeeping missions, military cooperation, and joint exercises. The establishment of the base is also seen as key to China's planned BRI (Nantulya, 2019), the initiative which China introduced in 2013, seeks to improve connectivity and cooperation between continents (Ruta, 2018).

Chase & Erickson (2009) state that for years China has been taking pride in the fact that it does not have any military bases on foreign territory. However, with the decision to set up a naval base in Djibouti, this has clearly changed and has further fuelled mistrust between the country and the US. Washington is suspicious about the country's intentions in the region. Furthermore, Vertin (2020: 9) notes that the US has largely restricted its troops from taking part in diplomatic interactions with the Chinese Navy stationed in Djibouti, stating that while they attended some multilateral events at the Chinese naval base, they have mainly declined invitations.

This study problematises naval diplomatic practices by the US and China in the Indian Ocean within the macro context of PTT, where a challenger seeks to change the international system. The research problem forms the foundation for the research question and sub-questions that follow in the next section.

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1.3. Contextual Overview

1.3.1. China's diplomatic practice and the role of the military

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has mostly concentrated on domestic security and social stability tasks since its founding in 1949 (Heath, 2018: 1). This has been consistent with the nation's five principles which are outlined in the preceding section. Moreover, China insists that it is not interested in military expansion, arms race, power politics, and aggression (China's Embassy in Zimbabwe, 2004). However, in the last 20 years the PLA has changed its focus and now looks far beyond Chinese borders to support the country's growing international economic and political interests (Heath, 2018: 1).

The above-mentioned change in focus by the PLA has been evidenced by its interaction with foreign militaries, including senior-level visits, military exercises, and port calls in the Indian Ocean (Saunders & Shyy, 2019: 208). Saunders & Shyy (2019: 215 - 221) further state that the Chinese Navy is the most involved unit of the PLA in exercises with foreign militaries. In 2008, China, for the first time in recent history deployed its navy far from its territorial waters to assist with tackling Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa (Kaufman, 2009:1; Navari 2016: 277), after three Chinese ships had been attacked (Branigan, 2008).

Since then, the Chinese Navy has remained present in the region to conduct counter-piracy operations and by July 2022 the Chinese Navy had escorted nearly 7,000 vessels, including foreign ones, through the troubled waters off Somalia (Zhou, 2022). According to the captain of the Type 052C destroyer *Changchun*, during these escort missions, the navy communicates "with foreign ships, and through the development of military cooperation, we carry out extensive international military and security cooperation" (Guo & Liu, 2022). The Chinese Navy also assisted in evacuating Chinese citizens from war-torn countries like Libya and Yemen and helped dispose of chemical weapons in Syria between 2013 and 2014 (United Nations, 2014; Allen, Saunders, & Chen *et al*., 2017: 2).

However, the advantages of the Chinese Navy's presence in the region do not end there as noted by Saunders & Shyy (2019: 216 - 217), who state that this has also provided it with opportunities to "conduct friendly visits to foreign ports". The visits to foreign ports normally last for up to four days. During these visits, the Chinese Navy would not only be welcomed by the Chinese diplomats and military attachés, but also by the government and the navy of the host country like Pakistan (Saunders & Shyy, 2019: 216 - 217).

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Moreover, to solidify the role of its navy and its position as a developing great power, China constructed its first naval station abroad in Djibouti in 2017 (Nantulya, 2017). The small nation, which is situated in the Horn of Africa, serves as a vital crossroads along important global maritime trade routes including the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean (Vertin, 2020:4). The base will allow the Chinese Navy to continue with escort missions, military cooperation, joint exercises, peacekeeping missions and provide humanitarian aid in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia (CGTN, 2017).

It can be argued that the actions of the Chinese military and its navy have so far been peaceful and not only aimed at protecting China's interest in the region but are also aimed at improving cooperation with other foreign forces, which are mentioned above. This naval diplomatic practice by China has not been limited to the Horn of Africa but also extended to and included the Indian Ocean.

Vertin (2020: 4- 9) states that the Chinese base in Djibouti is crucial in the sense that it will also allow its navy to carry out activities in the Indian Ocean and is part of China's broader strategy called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). There has also been a surge in Chinese naval diplomatic practice, including port calls, joint exercises, and senior exchanges with states across the Indo-Pacific (Vertin 2020: 6). China's navy has furthermore been conducting joint military exercises with Russia, Iran, and South Africa in the Indian Ocean (US Department of Defense, 2022; Bartlett, 2023). The most recent joint military exercise took place in Durban, South Africa, where the Chinese navy, the Russian navy and the South African navy embarked on a 10-day exercise in 2023 (Bartlett, 2023).

In addition to this, Li (2017: 495 - 494) further notes that most of the ports in the Indian Ocean that are open to the Chinese navy, provide supplies and services based on a business model. The ports include the "Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, the Sittwe port and Coco Islands of Myanmar, the Hamban-tota port of Sri Lanka, the Pakistani port of Gwadar, and Tanzania's Bagamoyo port" (Li, 2017: 495 - 494). This is supported by Nantulya (2019) who underscores that China's gains from the enhanced port access extend beyond economic interests. Nantulya points out that China's investments in ports have often been accompanied by naval deployments and the bolstering of military agreements in nations such as Djibouti, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

This naval diplomatic practice of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean reflects the actions of a global player and most importantly a rising sea power. It also demonstrates that the country's navy is willing to interact with a variety of countries and through actions like port calls and joint exercises it is able to build relations and reach agreements with other navies.

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However, it is not everyone who welcomes these activities by the Chinese Navy, especially in relation to the naval base in Djibouti and the Indian Ocean in general. Section 1.3.3 and Chapter 3 will expand on the concerns that have been triggered by China's presence in the region.

1.3.2 Us Naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean

According to Hussein & Haddad (2021), the US has over 750 military bases globally, located in 80 countries. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the naval bases located in Djibouti and the Island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The leasing of the Diogo Garcia naval base by the US from the UK in 1966, is described as one of the major milestones in terms of the US' presence in the region (Pillalamarri, 2015). Harris (2020: 79), mentions that the US first identified the base in the 1950s as the Cold War between the country and the Soviet Union intensified.

Before the acquisition of the base, the country's naval activities in the Indian Ocean were minimal (Pillalamarri, 2015). Another milestone of the country's navy in the region was the country's replacement of the Royal Navy in 1971 (Choudhury & Moorthy, 2018: 313). Chapter 3 of this study expands on the above-mentioned in relation to the leasing of the Island of Diogo Garcia base and the withdrawal of the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, in 2003, the US Navy in the Indian Ocean received another boost with the establishment of the base in Djibouti (US Department of State, 2022). This was part of the US "war on terror", which the country declared following the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001 (Whitlock, 2012). The base in Djibouti, which is known as Camp Lemonnier allows the US to utilise Djibout's port "facilities and airport" (US Department of State, 2022). Djibouti is important to the US, for its strategic position which has already been described and explained in this chapter.

Unlike their Chinese counterparts, the US Navy has decades of experience in naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean. For example, Schneller & Naval War College (2007: 47) write that "In 1974, the destroyer escort Capodanno (DE 1093) assisted three Kenyan patrol boats running low on fuel in high seas. Capodanno transferred fuel to the boats, took one under tow for a brief time when it suffered an engineering casualty, and escorted all three safely to Mombasa, Kenya's principal port".

While the above-mentioned example does not fall within the delimitation of this study, it helps demonstrate the experience that the US Navy has in the Indian Ocean and helps explain the country's current naval diplomatic practice in that region. The US Navy, through the Island of Diego Garcia and the Djibouti bases, has been able to improve its naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean.

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It has been carrying out escort missions, port calls, humanitarian missions, and joint exercises with countries like India. This includes Exercise Malabar, Exercise Milan, and Exercise Sangam (Indian Navy, 2023).

1.3.3 US – China mutual distrust in the Indian Ocean

Vertin (2020: 06) states that when the US learned of China's plans to establish the naval base in Djibouti, the country's diplomats tried to convince Djibouti's government not to give Beijing permission. Those attempts have however failed as the deal between the Asian country and the African country had already been signed (Vertin, 2020: 06). Content archived from 2017 to 2021 on the US Department of State website reveals the US government's perspective on China's establishment of a base. It suggests that the US sees China's use of economic leverage to coerce host countries into supporting military activities and to mask the true motives behind the setup of the base (US Department of State, 2021).

The US further views the presence of China's military in the region as a "long-term strategic concern for America" (Damon & Swails, 2019). The country has even accused the Chinese military of "interfering" with US flights by pointing lasers at them and seeking to restrict Djiboutian airspace over the base (US Department of Defense, 2022). However, these allegations had been dismissed by China (Hill, 2019).

Moreover, the US does not view the establishment of the base in isolation. In the document titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China", the country states that it believes the establishment of the military base in Djibouti is part of a broader plan for China's military to set up more military bases abroad, including in Equatorial Guinea (US Department of Defense, 2022). If China establishes a base in Equatorial Guinea, it will have access to the Atlantic Ocean (Tanchum, 2021). The US also states that China seeks to "project and sustain military power at great distance" (US Department of Defense, 2022).

On the Chinese side, the country's government normally avoids directly mentioning the US as an adversary or threat in the Indian Ocean (Storey, 2006). However, it is concerned that in future, major powers like the US might target is interests in the region, by blocking its key energy supplies. Chapter 4 expands on these Chinese concerns. However, Chinese scholars and analysts do identify the US and its Indian ally as a concern in the Indian Ocean, claiming the two countries seek to contain China's rise (Colley, 2020).

Damon & Swails (2019) note that while the suspicions have existed for years, the US and Chinese militaries had engaged in limited diplomacy. They write that in 2019 just before the US launched Exercise Cutlass Express, which is a military exercise, Chinese Navy officials in Djibouti invited US military officials on board a PLAN ship docked at the nearby harbour for discussions.

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Furthermore, US military officials, for the first time, welcomed PLA commander Liang Yang, to the opening ceremony of the exercise (Damon & Swails (2019).

One can argue that the attempts by the US diplomats to prevent China from establishing a military base in Djibouti can be viewed as actions that were aimed at stopping or slowing down China's rise as a sea power, particularly within the region. Furthermore, the concerns about the intentions of China are arguably justified, if not normal, especially since the country's navy is a new player in the region.

1.4. Research question and sub-questions

1.4.1. Research question

How can the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries?

1.4.2. Sub-questions:

- What are the assumptions underpinning PTT in relation to a possible peaceful power transition or conflict?
- Does China's naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean provide evidence of a wider power transition involving that country and the US?
- What concerns does the US have about China's naval diplomatic practices in the Indian Ocean and how has the US responded?

1.5. Research aim and objectives

1.5.1. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to establish whether the naval diplomatic practices of the US and China in the Indian Ocean provide evidence that supports the theory of a transition of power or not.

1.5.2. Objectives:

- To highlight the assumptions underpinning PTT in relation to a peaceful power transition or conflict.
- To determine whether China's naval diplomatic practices in the Indian Ocean provide evidence of a wider power transition involving that country and the US.

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- To highlight the concerns that the US has about China's naval diplomatic practices in the Indian Ocean.

1.6. Research Methodology

1.6.1 Research Approach

This research approach is descriptive (Neuman 1997: 20) in that it provides a picture of a specific situation involving the naval diplomatic practice of two navies, the US and China, involving three Indian Ocean countries: Djibouti, India, and Pakistan. According to Neuman (1997: 20), descriptive research poses 'how' and 'who' questions. For this research, the 'how' component of the research question focuses on PTT and naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean, while the 'who' are the US and Chinese navies.

1.6.2 Research Design

The research design is a literature review (Grant & Booth, 2009: 97) that begins with literature on what is already known about the PTT. This is followed by reviewing previous work on the concepts of national power, the military determinant, and the instruments of national power with an emphasis in naval diplomatic practice. Thereafter, the naval practices of the US and China involving three selected countries in the Indian Ocean, namely India, Djibouti, and Pakistan, are added to complete the review. The three countries were selected because of their strategic geographic positions, and diplomatic relations that they have with both China and the US.

1.6.3 Research Methods

The study uses publicly available primary and secondary sources to get different views and explanations for the establishment of the base. Neuman (2000: 395) states that primary sources are original and are not interpreted by anyone else. This will include statements from China's foreign ministry, including Xi Jinping's speech titled: *"*Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects". The white paper titled "China's National Defence in the New Era" is another primary source that will be crucial to this study. Documents from the US government and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, including the ones titled "The Elements of the China Challenge" and "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China", will also be analysed.
James (2018) warns that primary sources do not offer diverse views and may favour one point of view in their explanation. So, the use of secondary sources will help in bringing different standpoints.

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Secondary sources are best for uncovering historical information about a topic and broadening one's understanding of the topic. This exposes the researcher to others' perspectives, interpretations, and conclusions (Brilliant, 2019).

The secondary sources that the study uses include publicly available books, journals, news websites, and think-tank publications. This includes the work of scholars like Copeland (2001), Gilpin (1981), A.F.K. Organski (1968), and Tammen, Kugler & Lemke (2017), which focus on PTT and those that focus on the establishment of the military base in Djibouti like Downs, Becker & De Gategno (2017), Nantulya (2019), Mumuni, 2017), and Shinn (2017). While the study does not rely on the work of Bruce Russett, due to its quantitative nature, it acknowledges his contribution to PTT.

1.7. Data Analysis: Power Transition Theory

This study employs PTT as an analytical tool. Tammen, Kugler & Lemke (2017) note that the PTT is a dynamic and structural model for analysing significant changes in global power.

It is structural because global politics is composed of a "hierarchy of nations with varying degrees of cooperation and competition" (Tammen, Kugler & Lemke, 2017). The level of commitment among national elites to the current status quo, encompassing widespread adherence to international rules and norms, varies. This commitment determines a state's level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with its position in the global hierarchy, it is dynamic because countries grow at different rates which influences their national power (Tammen *et al*., 2017).

1.7.1 Limitations and delimitations

Limitation

This study is limited to making a necessary but insufficient contribution regarding the transition of power involving the US and China by singularly focusing on naval diplomatic practices in the Indian Ocean.

Delimitations

The temporal delimitation of the study is from 2017, when the Chinese established their naval base in Djibouti, until 2023. The spatial delimitation of the study is the Indian Ocean and is specifically restricted to the diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in Djibouti, India, and Pakistan. These countries were selected because of their strategic geographic positions and the diplomatic relations that they have with both China and the US.

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1.8. Research Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic, research aims and questions, research approach and literature overview.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This chapter focuses on the major assumptions of PTT, including the three stages that a state will go through during its growth path, the categories or the hierarchical of the international system, the determinants of national power, the military determinants of military power, the instruments of national power, seapower, naval diplomatic practice, and the diplomatic instrument of national power.

Chapter 3: A dominant US: Naval Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean

This chapter pays attention to the US as a dominant state and a sea power, the country's interests in the Indian Ocean, its naval diplomatic practice (including its relations with India). In addition to this it focuses on the country's naval strategy and diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean, its concerns over the presence of the Chinese Navy in the region and its response to China's establishment of a naval base.

Chapter 4. The rise of China as a potential challenger

This chapter focuses on China as the second largest economy, interests and first overseas base in Djibouti, military strategy in Djibouti and the Indian Ocean, its diplomatic practice and naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean. The chapter will also evaluate China's interests in the Indian Ocean and the country's concerns about the US naval actions in the region.

Chapter 5. Findings and conclusion

This chapter will provide the findings and conclusion of the study.

1.10. Conclusion

The chapter has provided the identification of the research theme, the literature overview, the research problem, the research methodology, and the structure of the research, it will now shift its attention to the key assumptions of PTT and the conceptual framework that will be employed in the focus on naval diplomacy, which will be used as the theoretical and analytical tool of the study to explain how events taking place in the Indian Ocean can partially account for a macro power transition taking place.

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CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, this study utilises the PTT as a theoretical framework to elucidate the role of naval diplomatic practice. The objective is to illustrate how this theory when applied to diplomatic activities, can help explain how the naval diplomatic practice of China and the US in the Indian Ocean account for a macro power transition.

This chapter aims to develop a framework of analysis that not only describes and explains the assumptions of the PTT and provides a supporting conceptual framework but that can also be applied to the case of the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it pays close attention to the assumptions of the PPT, the elements of national power, the military determinant of national power, the instruments of national power – particularly seapower, the diplomatic instrument of national power and, lastly, naval diplomacy and naval diplomatic practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2. Power Transition Theory

PTT, which was first proposed by Abramo Organski in 1958, emphasises shifts in power involving a rising power – a challenger – who confronts a dominant power – a hegemon – in the global order (Kim & Gates 2015: 219). PTT has two fundamental assumptions: that a state's national power is domestically derived and shaped and that the international system is shaped by a hegemon (Kim & Gates 2015: 220).

Furthermore, Organski (1958: 300 - 304) argues that there are three stages that a state will encounter during its growth path:

- The first stage is the "Stage of Potential Power".
- The second stage is the "Stage of Transitional Growth in Power", also known as a period of power transition.
- The final stage is the "Stage of Power Maturity".

It is during the second stage – the focus of this research – that Organski (1958: 300) contends three categories of states will emerge. The second stage is relevant to this study because it is during this stage that a country transitions from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial economy, which leads to growth in its power. The growth in power also boosts a state's ability to influence the behaviour of other countries.

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The categories referred to above are reinforced by ties between states that bind them into "competing international orders" (Organski 1958: 338). The first category consists of the leading and most powerful state together with other states that are "powerful and satisfied [with the international order]" (Organski 1958: 338). In this "hierarchically organised" system, the dominant state controls most of the resources within the system and has crafted rules that favour its close friends and serve their national aspirations (Kugler & Organski, 1998: 177).

The second category consists of other states that are "weak and satisfied [with the international order]" (Organski 1958: 338). Other great powers including the challenging state, which might not be satisfied with the status quo, fall under this category. They are followed by middle and lower powers (Tammen *et al.,* 2000: 6). The final category consists of states that are "weak and dissatisfied [with the international order]" (Organski 1958: 338). Basically, within this hierarchical international system, states are characterised by their levels of power as well as by their evaluations of the international status quo (Lemke, 2002: 27).

Organski (1958: 116) further argues that there are several determinants of power, including natural and social determinants such as natural resources, geography, economy, population, political structure, and morale (Organski 1958: 116). Although, for the purpose of this study, the researcher focuses on the military determinant that has been added by Gilpin (1981: 19), Jablonsky (2001: 91), and Nye (2011: 49).

Accordingly, shifts in these determinants, which develop at different rates, imply that states rise and fall in relation to one another. Differing development tempos are illustrated thus:

> As new nations industrialize, the old leader is challenged. A recently industrialized nation may be dissatisfied with the existing international order because it rose too late to receive a proportionate share of the benefits, and it may succeed in drawing to its side lesser nations who are also dissatisfied because they are exploited by the nations that dominate the existing international order (Organski 1958: 338).

While Organski does not single out the state's military capabilities as a specific determinant of national power, it will, however, be noted in the next and subsequent sections that various scholars have extended the concept of national power by including a military determinant. Instead, Organski reasons that the population determinant sets a limit to the size of a state's armed forces but adds that a large population is not in any way a guarantee of military strength (Organski 1958: 141-142, 436). Political structure and government decisions linked to the economy also have a direct impact on the size and shape of a state's armed forces as well as its capabilities (Organski 1958: 436) because wealth can be converted into military capabilities (Organski 1958: 58).

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He notes that while the military is a vital component of national power it is not guaranteed by “large armies with fleets of ships and planes”, because having resources that are not being utilised to influence other states is pointless (Organski 1958: 95). Organski (1958: 163) compares this to having a government without a clear vision of the desired behaviour from other states. He suggests that this weakens a country's power.

It can be argued that states grow at different rates over time because of the internal dynamics within a particular state, for example a change in a country’s economic situation which may lead to a change in its military strength. The power that is generated from within industrialization is then used to achieve state objectives or goals in the international system. In the process the rising state gains the ability to influence other states, at times at the expense of the dominant or declining state in the international system. States do not get the same benefits in the international system; the powerful and dominant state and its allies largely enjoy favourable rules and laws that help them achieve their objectives that serve their interests, whereas other states that are also benefiting from the system but are not as powerful, are satisfied with the status quo. However, a state that is emerging as a challenger may seek to change the status quo in the international system.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.3. The military determinant of national power

As stated within the theoretical framework, other scholars expand on the military determinant of power. Jablonsky (2001: 91) states that throughout history, military strength has been used to gauge the power of a country. Military power, adds Jablonsky (2001: 91), is not limited to personnel, equipment, and weaponry but includes leadership, morale, and discipline. If a country is defeated in a conflict situation it can lead to a decline or the end of its power, but victory for a country’s military force normally propels it to a new status of power (Jablonsky, 2001: 91).

Like Organski (1958: 58), Nye (2011:51-52) adds that an industrial economy contributes to boosting a country’s military power or “hard power”. This is supported by Gilpin (1981: 65), who notes that, generally, there is a relationship between a country’s economy and its military power and this is why rich states often invest more in their militaries and become more powerful.

However, Gilpin (1981: 52) notes that in the modern world military power is largely used as “deterrence” which has helped to prevent or avoid another major war. This includes the possession of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

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During peacetime, a country's army can also play a vital role in the creation of soft power through the practice of diplomacy like joint training and assistance programmes with other countries (Nye, 2004: 15).

2.4. Instruments of national power

National power is the capacity to "influence the behaviour of other actors in accordance with one's own objectives" (Jablonsky 2001: 87) and is applied by states using various instruments or tools. Nation (2010:143) argues that there are various ways to express the instruments of national power: "DIME" is an expression that encompasses diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments. "DIMEFIL" encompasses diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence and legal instruments while "MIDLIFE" involves military, intelligence, diplomacy, legal, information, financial and economic instruments (Nation, 2010: 143). Irrespective of the way national power is used, there are two commonalities, amongst others, which stand out and are noted for framing this study: the diplomatic and military instruments.

2.5. The diplomatic instrument of national power

The diplomatic instrument "uses a nation's international position combined with diplomacy to achieve national objectives" (Mastapeter, 2008: 223). Diplomacy, according to Spies (2019: 8), is a:

> Peaceful and continuous process of communication [that] involves international relations among states or other collectivities on the basis of intermediation, reciprocity, and formal representation.

From the above definition, non-state actors can also be involved in diplomacy, but for the purpose of this study, the researcher focuses on state-centric diplomacy, which Spies (2019a: 41) describes as the most important form of diplomacy under international law. Moreover, Spies (2019a: 24) argues that because misunderstandings are frequent between states, diplomacy is key in resolving disagreements or disputes through compromise and persuasion rather than using military power. This is because diplomacy relies on constant communication, which makes it a peaceful activity. This makes it a "process of arriving at agreements" (Organski, 1958: 343). However, Barston (2014: 1) argues that while diplomacy is associated with peaceful activities, it may be used during armed conflict to orchestrate violence, for example negotiating to use the airspace of one country to launch airstrikes on another country. But Barston (2014: 4) further acknowledges that the diplomatic instrument is key in reducing tension and providing clarification in the event of a potential conflict.

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The three elements in Spies' definition – intermediation, reciprocity, and formal representation, are briefly explained. Firstly, intermediation involves the use of representatives who conduct diplomacy on behalf of political principals and involve a broad spectrum of actors ranging from amongst others, political elites, government ministries and diplomats. Secondly, reciprocity involves "gestures that mirror each other in recognition of a mutual benefit" (Spies 2019: 36). Spies' explanation implies that reciprocity holds mutually advantageous outcomes, but it is pointed out that reciprocity may also imply other outcomes such as retribution, aggression, or retaliation. Finally, Spies (2019: 30) contends that formal representation has symbolic, formalistic, and substantive dimensions. Symbolic representation aims at sending implicit or explicit messages to signify stances or viewpoints on behalf of someone else. Formalistic representation involves actors who are officially acknowledged and accredited by sending and receiving states while substantive representation involves a range of technical activities that are conducted in the diplomatic milieu.

The diplomatic instrument of national power can be conducted in two ways. On the one hand, it involves the use of coercion, persuasion or reward and implies the use of hard power to advance the national interest. Barston (2013: 48) states that coercive diplomacy aims to compel changes in behaviour using threats, sanctions and withdrawal or denial of rewards. Threats may or may not involve a "ladder" or progressive escalation. In coercive diplomacy, force and pure violence does not automatically follow. The intention is rather to convey the possibility of pain or damage. Thus, an ultimatum may set time limits for unspecified action in the event of noncompliance. The threat is implicit and relies on ambiguity and uncertainty over subsequent events and expectations of the substantial costs of noncompliance. If threats are explicit, the assumption differs in that it relies more heavily on decision makers' rational assessment of the risks associated with noncompliance, given that specified consequences are set out.

On the other hand, diplomacy can be used co-optively to shape preferences of others by attraction and enticement, known as soft power (Nye, 2004:8). Nye (2004:5) adds that other states might find a country attractive because they admire its values and aspire to its level of prosperity. Because of the above-mentioned it is vital for a country to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions.

Nye (2004:8) suggests that if a state can formulate international laws that are consistent with its interests and values, its actions will most likely appear legitimate in the eyes of others. This means that if that state, particularly a dominant one, respects resolutions of bodies like the United Nations (UN) and international laws, it encourages other countries to do the same.

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Therefore, those other states are more likely to behave in similar ways. When powerful countries appear legitimate in the eyes of other states, they experience minor to no push back to their wishes. If other states find a country's culture and ideology attractive, they are likely to willingly follow it (Nye, 2004:8).

When it comes to the first way of using the diplomatic instrument of national power, which involves the use of coercion, persuasion or reward and implies the use of hard power, the military is often the principal actor, while in diplomatic practice the military is mostly benign. Barston (2013: 1) adds that states practise diplomacy using “correspondence, private talks, exchanges of view, lobbying, visits, threats and other related activities".

The diplomatic instrument, argues Barston (2013: 1-2), is concerned with handling short-term common issues in bilateral and multilateral relations. While there are different modes of diplomacy, Rozental & Buenrostro (2013: 2) identify bilateral diplomacy as the “basic building block for relations among states”. Bilateral diplomacy, add Rozental & Buenrostro (2013: 2), determines the time, the place or geography, and how a specific state-to-state relationship will become more relevant. The decision to establish diplomatic relations between states, and the opening of permanent diplomatic missions, “takes place by mutual consent,” (United Nations, 1961: 3).

Moreover, Rana (2007: 36) highlights that the identification of commonalities is crucial to relationship building, especially when it comes to bilateral diplomacy. He further postulates that this is more important in situations where “commonalities are not obvious”. Barston (2013: 33) adds that the clarification of positions between states is difficult and it may take some time before some positions are known. Soft power does however have its limitations, for example a country that is experiencing economic and military challenges is “likely to lose not only its hard-power resources but also some of its ability to shape the international agenda and some of its attractiveness” (Nye 2004:9).

From the above-mentioned power is more about how a state uses the resources at its disposal to influence the behaviour of other states. A state may choose to use its resources or national power in a peaceful way by building or strengthening relations with other states through engagements, or it can choose to use force. While the diplomatic instrument may be used in various ways including coercion, it is mostly a peaceful exercise and one that should be based on mutual respect. If states can identify common interests, they are likely to work together to achieve their objectives or dominate other states. The diplomatic instrument of national power is key in explaining the peacetime activities undertaken by the of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean.

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2.5. The military instrument of national power

As suggested by the preceding section, military power**,** which is also known as hard power, can help a state influence the international agenda and a decline in it reduces that ability. This section pays attention to the military instrument of power. Throughout history the military role has been the use or threat of force, for various reasons including to "defend, deter, compel or intervene" (Cottey & Forster 2004:5). States with hard power may decide to use it to establish empires or institutions that set the agenda in global politics (Nye, 2004:9).

Organski (1958: 99) postulates that the military instrument of power can be employed to punish another state to influence it to act in a manner that is desired by the punisher. However, this can also be used to send a message that any similar undesired action from the state that is being punished will not be tolerated. One of the ways that countries use this military instrument of power is by developing powerful navies. Crusher (2017: 2) argues that states build strong navies with the intention of gaining more power and to influence other states in the international system. Oyewole & Duyile (2021: 123) agree with Crusher by stating that states develop navies with the aim of influencing the behaviour of other states and thereby achieving their national interest and objectives. Oyewole & Duyile (2021: 123) further state that the importance of national power lies in the "political, economic, and strategic importance of sea utilisation", which is why it is crucial for a country to have a navy.

Moreover, Vreÿ & Blaine (2020) state that navies in the 21st century are still undoubtedly the main "instruments of military coercion operating on and from the sea". They further note that navies are expected to react to various political demands to go beyond engaging in conflict and navies make it possible to harness the economic benefits of the ocean by making them safe and secure for transporting and extracting resources (Vreÿ & Blaine 2020).

Glete (2004: 88) outlines four levels of strategic ambitions, which a navy as a military instrument of power, can be used. The first level is when a state takes full control of the sea by destroying an adversary's fleet or blockading and preventing it from interfering with operations or trade. The second strategic level is to deploy fleets to protect crucial economic sea lines of communication. A third strategic level is to deny an adversary state access to the sea, and the fourth strategic level is coastal defence, which aims to make operations difficult for the enemy state close to the coast. However, as mentioned by Vreÿ & Blaine (2020), navies in the 21st century are expected to go beyond fighting wars.

One can deduce that military power, particularly naval power, is a key element of national power as it helps states protect and promote their interests in geographic locations that they would otherwise not be able to or would find difficult to reach.

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Having a strong navy that operates far from a country's shores, showcases a country's power, and allows it to have more influence on other states that may feel threatened or may wish to also possess such power. This instrument of national power plays a fundamental role in analysing and explaining the actions of the US and China in the Indian Ocean, by providing a framework of how states with powerful navies behave at sea.

2.6. Defence diplomacy

In line with the above-mentioned, Cottey & Foster (2004:5) note that since the 1990s armies and defence ministries have taken on a "growing range of peacetime cooperative tasks". The engagements are not only directed to existing allies, but also extend to establishing new partners (Cottey & Foster 2004:5). Cottey & Foster (2004:5) further state that defence diplomacy involves a variety of activities that might in the past have been described as military cooperation or military assistance.

The key shift of the last decade of the 1990s, is that defence cooperation is now being used not only for the role of supporting the armed forces and security of allies, but also as a means of pursuing wider foreign and security policy goals. In contrast to their traditional use as a means of counterbalancing enemies, military cooperation and assistance are now being used to help build cooperative relationships with former or potential enemies. This process is referred to here as strategic engagement (Cottey & Foster 2004:5).

2.7. Naval diplomatic practice

Naval diplomatic practice is vested within the wider ambit of naval diplomacy which has been the pre-occupation of seafaring nations for centuries. du Plessis (2008: 93-94) defines naval diplomacy as "the use of seapower in a political rather than a military mode" or alternatively as the:

> employment of naval power directly in the service of foreign policy. Like all forms of diplomacy, it is intended to influence the thoughts and actions of foreign decision-makers (Dismukes & McConnell, 1979: xiii).

In its more modern form, naval diplomacy enjoyed prominence in the 1970s during the Cold War because of Western maritime strategic responses to Soviet naval expansion and its growing seapower (du Plessis 2008: 93). Heath's (2020: 3) definition of naval diplomacy sees naval diplomatic practice as the use of naval forces in peaceful ways that are not part of combat operations, to achieve state goals abroad.

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Navies are conspicuous practitioners of diplomacy and have various means and techniques at their disposal. Naval resources such as personnel, equipment and hardware are highly visible and can be used as agents during intermediation, reciprocity, and representation in symbolic, formalistic, and substantive settings. History is replete with many examples of naval diplomatic practice, one of which is provided by Jönsson (2016:84) in a noncoercive context:

> The Six-Day War of 1967 was the first time Soviet and US warships operated close to each other during a major international crisis. By circumscribing their moves in various ways – staying well clear of the battle zone, avoiding reinforcement of amphibious and other offensive forces, and not interrupting or shortening scheduled port calls – Washington and Moscow signalled their intentions to avoid military involvement.

The US blockade that was enforced during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis is likewise an example of naval diplomatic practice to symbolically demonstrate President John F. Kennedy's intent to prevent the Soviet Union from deploying missiles to Cuba without resorting to armed confrontation (Jönsson 2016:84).

Naval diplomatic practice can therefore be used in a noncoercive or coercive mode. In its noncoercive or cooperative mode, naval diplomatic practice entails activities such as goodwill visits and base access while in its coercive mode, it involves threats or the imposition of violent sanctions (du Plessis 2008:94). Noncoercive diplomatic practice is geostrategic in that it is intended to ensure access to "all types of bases and facilities … port visit privileges … and the use of offshore anchorages, within sovereign maritime limits" (Harkavy, 1982: 14). Coercive naval diplomatic practice involves what is termed 'gunboat diplomacy' which entails the use or threat of limited naval force, as an act of war, to secure advantage, or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or against foreign nationals within the territory or jurisdiction of their own state (Cable, 1981:39).

Naval diplomatic practice entails specific activities which are summarised as follows:

- Goodwill visits and port calls.
- Basing (port) access.
- Joint and combined (multinational) maritime exercises.
- High level meetings of senior naval personnel.
- Staff talks.
- Seminars and conferences.
- Deployment of specialist personnel such as naval attachés.
- Training and education programmes.
- Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.

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- Sales of naval equipment.

The above-mentioned activities help in creating a “generally favourable and military-specific image abroad and establishing a state’s ‘right’ in areas of interest, providing reassurance to allies and friendly nations, influencing behaviour of other governments or groups indulging in sea-borne crimes or other forms of strategically threatening maritime activities,” (Oyewole & Duyile, 2021: 123).

One can deduce that activities like meetings, port visits, joint exercises, and cooperation between navies of countries, are not only essential in cementing existing relations between states but are also key in maintaining peace and easing concerns amongst adversaries. Major powers rely on their seapower to influence other states. A country's maritime strength not only provide strategic advantages but also reshapes diplomatic practices. The active involvement of the navy in diplomatic activities, as outlined above, empowers a country to engage in non-traditional diplomatic methods. The above-mentioned capability allows a country to enhance relations with other countries without solely depending on traditional diplomats stationed in specific locations.

2.8. Seapower as an element of naval diplomatic practice

While there are various ways that a state can use its military power, including going to war, for the purpose of this study the focus is on states using this instrument of national power to become a sea power and being able to influence other states to achieve its interests. The reason for the above-mentioned is because the interest of this study is not what happens during armed conflict situations but what happens during peacetime, with particular attention paid to naval diplomatic practice.

Organski (1958: 163) posits that a country must be a great power before it becomes a great naval or sea power. Bull (1976) defines seapower as “military power that is brought to bear at sea: on the surface of the area, underneath it or in the air above it.” Wallerstein (1983:103) adds that powerful states are generally sea powers. Naval power will enable a country or coalition to implement its preferred strategy globally (Grey, 1994: 21).

Furthermore, Germond (2015: 45-65), opines that navies contribute to force projection and aircraft carriers, which represent one’s capability to intervene far beyond one’s territorial waters, have become a symbol of power because they are not cheap to operate and that limits the number of countries that can own one. Force projection may include the deployment of soldiers and key military equipment far from the country’s own territories, which may require things like helicopter carriers, landing helicopter docks, landing platform docks, landing ship tanks, and strategic sealift capabilities (Germond, 2015: 45-65).

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In addition, Till (2009: 21) argues that seapower can be seen as an input and/or an output. The input includes things like a country's navy, marine, coast guards, and the marine or civil-maritime industries (Till, 2009:21). When it comes to the output, Till (2009:21), mentions that it is the ability to influence the behaviour of countries based on the activities that a state does with its navy at or from the sea. The above-mentioned happens because having a strong navy can determine events both at sea and on land.

Moreover, the influence of seapower is closely related to dominating the global order (Germond, 2015:11). Germond (2015:16) also argues that political decisions and the economic context are among the major determinants of a country's seapower. He postulates that geography, at times, had little role to play in limiting a sea power. Seapower is what enables a country like the US to continue with its economic dominance, which in turn contributes to sustained US dominance on the world stage (Germond, 2015: 24).

Nohara (2017: 217) agrees with Germond's argument, by stating that world powers tend to associate their status in global politics with the strength of their navies. This then creates a culture of dominance at sea, which is envied by other countries, and they will copy this whenever they get an opportunity (Nohara, 2017: 217).

It can be argued that as per the PTT's assumptions, which suggest that a state's national power is domestically derived and shaped and that the international system is shaped by a dominant state, states that develop their national power will seek to use it to influence other states. The dominant state in the international system has largely set up the rules, which are mainly economically beneficial to it and its close allies. States may use various ways to influence other states including the use of hard power and soft power and this is done in pursuit of national interests or goals. This state uses its military power, particularly seapower, and the support of its friends to maintain that power.

Moreover, the military and diplomatic instruments of power play a key role on how a state relates with other states, for example, the navy of a powerful state has more resources, which allows it to play an active role in diplomatic activities including port visits, goodwill visits and joint military exercises. The frequent activities of the navy of a powerful country are enabled by the fact that it has more presence at sea and more often in waters that are far from its shores - basically making the country a sea power. Seapower does not only allow states to influence what happens at sea or below it but also what happens on land. The above-mentioned influence is because a powerful navy allows a country to bolster its diplomatic practice by frequently interacting with foreign navies, and to deploy troops and equipment faster in times of crisis or conflict.

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2.9. Conclusion

In summary, the aim of this chapter was to highlight some of the key assumptions of PTT and develop a conceptual framework that will support the theory in guiding the study. Two fundamental assumptions of the theory were highlighted: the first that a state's national power is domestically derived and shaped and the second that the international system is shaped by a hegemon or dominant state. The chapter outlined two instruments of power, namely the military and diplomatic instruments. The diplomatic instrument of national power can be conducted in two ways. On the one hand, it involves the use of coercion, persuasion, or reward, on the other hand, it implies the use of hard power to advance national interests. The chapter further explained how these instruments are used through seapower and naval diplomatic practice, to help the researcher explain the actions of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean. Both the theoretical framework and conceptual framework will help guide Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, in relation to how the US as the dominant state is using its national power in the Indian Ocean and how China as a challenger is responding to the US dominance in the region.

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CHAPTER 3: A DOMINANT US: NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

3.1. Introduction

This chapter builds on the two preceding chapters and explains the role of the US - as a dominant state or hegemon of the global system. As a dominant state in the international system, the country uses its power to influence other states. However, the focus of this chapter is not on the actions of the US globally, but on the Indian Ocean. The chapter seeks to explain how the country has been operating in the above-mentioned region, particularly its naval diplomacy and naval diplomatic practice.

This chapter is divided into five sections which are as follows: the US as a preeminent global power, the US naval interests in the Indian Ocean, the US naval strategy in the Indian Ocean, US naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean, and US concerns with China's presence in the Indian Ocean. As already mentioned, the chapter does not go beyond the Indian Ocean, and it pays special attention to naval diplomatic practices that have been taking place in the region between 2017 and 2023. The theoretical lens, which is PTT, together with the conceptual frameworks that support it, which are highlighted in Chapter 2, are applied to this chapter.

3.2. The US as the preeminent global power

As posited by the PTT in the preceding chapter, the international system has a dominant state or a hegemon and currently the US is that state. The country peacefully overtook Great Britain as the global power at the end of the nineteenth century (Tammen *et al*., 2000: 23). The peaceful transition is largely attributed to the fact that at parity - a stage where armed conflict is predicted in relation to the assumptions of the PTT - both countries were satisfied (Tammen *et al*., 2000: 23). Both countries were satisfied because the US' overtaking the UK was not a threat to the structure of the international system but instead it "reinforced existing rules" (Tammen *et al*., 2000: 23).

The US has been dominant in the global system in many ways including militarily, economically, politically, and culturally (Fukuyama, 2001). In correspondence with PTT, the US has managed to dominate the system by working with allies like the United Kingdom (UK), France, the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The preferences of the above-mentioned allies are "reflected in the architecture of the international economy and international diplomacy today", including institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Tammen *et al.,* 2017:57). However, for the purpose of this study the researcher focuses on the country's seapower and its naval diplomatic practice, particularly in the Indian Ocean.

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Choudhury & Moorthy (2018: 313) argue the US Navy presence in the Indian Ocean was bolstered by leasing Diego Garcia Island from the UK in 1966, but the major change came in 1971 after the Royal Navy withdrew from the area following the 'East of Suez' declaration. The withdrawal of the British troops that were "East of Suez", came as increasing economic problems, which had forced the British to devalue the pound in 1967 (Omar & Weng, 2023). The economic problems were caused by the fact that the UK experienced a balance of payments crisis, where it incurred a deficit by spending more through imports than it was earning from exports (Carter, 2020). These economic challenges were further fuelled by the US' decision to end the dollar's convertibility to gold, which led to the collapse of the Bretton Woods System (Ghizoni, 2013).

This meant, argues Omar & Weng (2023), that Britain could "no longer uphold its military commitment in Southeast Asia" (Omar & Weng, 2023). The declaration by Britain meant the US had to strike a deal with Bahrain to establish a naval base in that country (Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, 2022). In 1972, shortly after Britain withdrew its troops the US set up a permanent naval base in Bahrain. If the US did not stay in the region, it would have left a vacuum for the Soviet Union (Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, 2022).

The Diego Garcia base is one of two permanent US bases in the Indian Ocean and the other is in Djibouti (Baruah, 2022). The Diego Garcia base is oldest having been established in 1966 and has around 5,000 US and British troops (Pillalamarri, 2015). Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, which is strategically located near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, hosts over 5,000 military personnel (Clark, 2023). According to the US navy (2022), the Djibouti base, which was established in 2002 as part of the country's "war on terror" (Whitlock, 2012), is crucial for the U.S. military forces in providing support to ships, aircraft, and personnel to ensure security in Europe, Africa, and Southwest Asia.

The US Navy currently deploys seven fleets across the world (US Department of Defense, 2023) and has over a dozen permanent installations outside its territory (Masters, 2019). However, it is only the 5th Fleet that wholly focuses on the Indian Ocean, especially the Persian Gulf (Choudhury & Moorthy 2018: 313). The 5th Fleet's "area of operations encompasses nearly 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandab" (US Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs, 2023). Figure 1 shows the above-mentioned choke points in the Indian Ocean, including the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, which is near Djibouti, where the US base is located.

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Figure 1 : Indian Ocean's Choke Points

(Baruah, 2023)

According to Baruah (2021), these strategic points serve as vital connections linking crucial water passages, such as those in Southeast Asia and the western Pacific, to the Indian Ocean. Additionally, they connect the Persian Gulf to the broader Indian Ocean and facilitate a connection between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. If these choke points are blocked or unavailable, alternative routes are costly, long, or sometimes large ships and oil tankers are not able to pass through (Baruah, 2021).

3.3 US naval interests in the Indian Ocean

The above-mentioned choke points are strategic and key to the US; they therefore increase the importance of the Indian Ocean to the country. This was evidenced statement made by the US Deputy Secretary of State**,** Wendy Sherman, during the 2023 Indian Ocean Conference in Bangladesh, that:

> It is difficult to overstate the economic significance of this region. The Indian Ocean accounts for one-fifth of the world's ocean surface, and it connects people and economies around the globe. Its vast coastline includes some of the world's most important shipping lanes—from the Strait of Hormuz to the Malacca Strait. Eighty percent of the world's maritime oil shipments traverse Indian Ocean waters. Some of the planet's most vital fisheries are here, and they play a critical role in employing people in the region and feeding people around the world. So, it makes sense that all of us have an interest in a peaceful and prosperous future for the Indian Ocean region (US Department of State, 2023).

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Moreover, the US Institute for Peace (USIP) (2020) claims that Washington's main priority is ensuring that there is no war in the Indian Ocean, particularly between nuclear powers like China, India and Pakistan and preventing these countries from acquiring more nuclear weapons. USIP (2020:17) further notes that the Indian Ocean, because of its strategic importance, is key in determining the major changes in global politics. The area will be a major centre of gravity in global politics with critical relevance for the wider US-China competition, especially in the developing world and within Asia. About 24 percent of the world's population and 40 percent of Asia's population live in South Asia (USIP, 2020:17).

This section points out clearly that the US – the current dominant state in the world – has been present in the Indian Ocean for decades and the country has some interests in the region. Its navy, particularly the 5th Fleet operates in some of the strategic positions, like the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal, and Bab al-Mandab, which gives it power to also control movement in these choke points. It also demonstrates that the presence of the US adds a layer of complexity as there are existing tensions between the above-mentioned regional powers. However, it also brings in the balance of power, in a sense that China and Pakistan have cordial relations, and both have disputes with India.

3.4 US naval strategy in the Indian Ocean

The US in its national security strategy published in 2017, mentions that it aims to strengthen its partnership with India to "support its leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region" (The White House, 2017:50). The strategy declared that the Indo-Pacific, "stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States," and by doing this it excluded the entire western Indian Ocean, including Pakistan (Bergeron, Lorio & Payne, 2021). In a symbolic gesture, the US military renamed its Pacific Command to the US Indo-Pacific Command in 2018, emphasising India's growing significance to the Pentagon (Ali, 2018) in a region comprising 38 countries (USINDOPACOM, 2023). At the time, the then US Defence Secretary, Jim Mattis, stated that "[i]n recognition of the increasing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, today we rename the U.S. Pacific Command to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command" (Ali, 2018). Thereafter, as Figure 2 shows, the US did not produce any other annual national security strategies under the Trump administration annual national security strategies for 2018, 2019, 2020 (National Security Strategy Archive, 2023).

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Figure 2: US National Security Strategies produced since 2017

Year	Administration	National Security Strategy Report
2022	Joseph R. Biden	National Security Strategy
2021	Joseph R. Biden	RENEWING AMERICA'S ADVANTAGES Interim National Security Strategic Guidance
2020	Donald Trump	None Produced
2019	Donald Trump	None Produced
2018	Donald Trump	None Produced
2017	Donald Trump	National Security Strategy of the United States

(National Security Strategy Archive, 2023)

The interim national security strategy guidance published by the Biden administration in 2021 does not even mention the Indian Ocean, but like the one published under the Trump administration in 2017, it also emphasises that the US plans to strengthen ties with India (The White House, 2021: 10). It then broadly focuses on the broader Indo-Pacific region, without paying particular attention to India or the Indian Ocean. The 2022 national security strategy mentions the Indian Ocean just once, but also highlights that "India is… a Major Defense Partner, the United States and India will work together, bilaterally, and multilaterally, to support our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific" (The White House, 2022: 38). The multilateral platforms, referred to above, include the Quad, a strategic diplomatic partnership which includes Australia, India, Japan, and the US (Australian Government Defence, 2023).

From the above-mentioned, the US still needs to "prioritize the 'Indo' in 'Indo-Pacific'" as advised by Bergeron, Lorio, & Payne (2021). The above-mentioned implies that the country still needs a comprehensive strategy for the Indian Ocean. Bergeron, Lorio, & Payne (2021) further call on President Joe Biden to correct this, as they warn that it gives China more power because Beijing finds opportunities for economic and military advantages in areas like the Indian Ocean, which are neglected by Washington.

While the Biden administration's national security strategy still does not cover the Indian Ocean comprehensively, during the 2023 state visit to the US by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two leaders mentioned that the countries have built "strong military-to-military ties" and they aim to strengthen "maritime security cooperation" (The White House, 2023). According to the US Department of Defense (2023), the two militaries already have working groups on everything including "maritime security, and India is leading in those forums together with the U.S.".

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One can argue that the US is consistent in its actions and intentions to bolster ties with India as evidenced by all the national security strategies published since 2017, by both the Trump and Biden administrations. The above-mentioned means that the country's current strategy is to give India the leading role in the Indian Ocean, while the US will largely play a supporting role. In simple terms, the country has not developed a clear and detailed strategy for the Indian Ocean or if it exists, it has not been made public.

3.5 US naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean

As captured in the conceptual framework of this study, naval diplomatic activities include port access, joint and combined (multinational) maritime exercises, high-level meetings of senior naval personnel, and the sale of naval equipment. The US – as a preponderant state – has undertaken all the above-mentioned activities, including in the Indian Ocean where they relate to the country in its interactions with India and Djibouti. This section highlights some of the activities of the US Navy in the Indian Ocean between 2017 and 2023.

3.5.1 Joint military exercises

According to the Congressional Research Service (2023a), the US and India navies participated in the following exercises between 2019 and 2023, which are further explained below:

- Exercise Malabar
- Exercise Milan
- Exercise Sangam
- Cutlass Express
- La Perouse
- Sea Dragon
- Rim-of-the-Pacific

3.5.1.1 Exercise Malabar

Data from the Indian Navy shows that between 2017 and 2023 both the US Navy and Indian Navy participated in seven Malabar Exercises, despite the COVID-19 pandemic (Indian Navy, 2023). The countries, together with Japan and Australia, took turns in hosting the exercises. The exercises include equipment like warships, submarines, and aircraft, as well as marine commandos and special forces of the US, India, and Japan (Indian Navy, 2023).

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The most recent Malabar Exercise took place in 2023 and India joined the joint naval exercises near the coast of Australia. According to India's Ministry of Defence (2023) the country's navy was represented by "indigenously built Destroyer INS Kolkata, Frigate INS Sahyadri and P8I Maritime Patrol Aircraft," amongst other military equipment. The exercises were "complex and high intensity exercises in air, surface and undersea domains, weapon firings and cross deck helicopter operations" (India's Ministry of Defence, 2023).

Moreover, 2,000 personnel from all four countries took part in the Exercise and it included communication operations, cultural and sporting activities (Australian Government Defence, 2023). The US Navy described the Exercise as an opportunity to strengthen friendships, exchange cultures and to better strengthen understanding of the capabilities of all four navies (Australian Government Defence, 2023).

3.5.1.2 Exercise Milan

Furthermore, the US Navy participated in the Indian Navy-led biennial Exercise Milan for the first time in 2022 (America's Navy, 2022). The exercise focused on bolstering cooperation between navies of over 40 countries. It included high-end tactical training, replenishment-at-sea, and communications drills (America's Navy, 2022). The exercise also featured a conference and seminar on maritime security (Sharma, 2022). The International Maritime Seminar was themed 'Camaraderie – Cohesion – Collaboration' and focused on how the countries can better collaborate (India's Ministry of Defence, 2022). The ministry further states that the foreign troops also got a chance to participate in sports and conduct cultural visits to Agra and Bodh Gaya. The high-profile foreign delegates who attended the Exercise consisted of naval leadership, agency heads and ambassadors (India's Ministry of Defence, 2022).

3.5.1.3 Exercise Sangam

Furthermore, the US and India held bilateral exercises which include Exercise Sangam or what the US calls "Tarkash joint ground force counterterrorism exercises", which brings together special forces like the US Navy SEALs and the Indian Navy's Marine Commando Force (Congressional Research Service, 2023a). Exercise Sangam, which was first conducted in 1994, is an imperative military and diplomatic initiative between the two countries (New Delhi Television, 2022) and is reflective of the "trust and friendship" between the North American country and the Asian Country (New Delhi Television, 2022).

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3.5.1.4 Exercise Cutlass Express

Exercise Cutlass Express is the US Africa Command's (AFRICOM) largest naval training exercise in the Indian Ocean, which includes navies from East Africa, Europe, the West Indian Ocean, and North America (US Embassy Mauritius, 2023). Both India and Djibouti have participated in the multilateral exercise between 2017 and 2023. Data from the US Navy website shows that Djibouti participated in all the annual exercises that took place within the above-mentioned period except in 2020, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Africa Defense Forum, 2021). India only participated in the 2019, 2020 and 2021 iterations (America's Navy, 2023). The aims of the exercise included enhancing regional cooperation and promoting information sharing.

3.5.1.5 La Perouse

Moreover, in 2021 India joined Exercise La Perouse for the first time, which is an exercise led by the US ally, France. The US Navy was also represented at the Exercise La Perouse (India's Ministry of Defence, 2021). Kulshreshtha (2021) characterizes India's participation in this exercise as a strategic naval diplomacy move, signalling a shift in the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. Both India and the US also participated in the 2023 iteration of La Perouse, which was held in the Indian Ocean (Indian Navy, 2023). According to the French Embassy in India the exercise is aimed at strengthening cooperation in the Indo-Pacific with the navies of partner countries (France in India, 2023). The exercise includes information sharing, training on surface warfare and anti-air warfare, and cross deck landings (Indian Navy, 2023).

3.5.1.6 Exercise Sea Dragon

In 2021, 2022 and 2023, India also participated in the US-led Exercise Sea Dragon (America's Navy, 2023), which is an anti-submarine warfare theatre exercise (Congressional Research Service, 2023a). The exercise includes classroom training sessions that are aimed at helping the forces draft plans and engage on how to "incorporate tactics, capabilities and equipment for their respective nations into the exercise" (Lundquist, 2021). The Exercise aims to achieve high levels of synergy and coordination between the friendly navies, which is based on their shared values and commitment to an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific (Indian Military of Defence, 2023).

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3.5.1.7 Rim of the Pacific Exercise

America's Navy (2023) data shows that in addition to the above-mentioned exercises, in 2018, 2020 and 2022, India participated in the US-led biennial multilateral Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC). The exercise which the US Navy describes as the "world's largest international maritime exercise", had 26 countries participating in it in 2022 (Commander U.S. Pacific Fleet, 2022). Moreover, the exercise, which lasted more than six weeks in 2022, featured operations and training that were aimed at strengthening relations and "building trust among Navies of friendly foreign countries" (India's Ministry of Defense, 2022) and bolstering disaster or humanitarian relief and security at seas (Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2022). The operations and training involved information sharing, at-sea replenishment, drills and sinking exercises (Mahadzir, 2022).

3.5.2 Port Visits

The US Navy does not only involve India or join India in joint military exercises like those mentioned above but also conducts port visits to the Asian country. In 2022**,** the USS Frank Cable visited the Visakhapatnam port in India and hosted several discussions between the US and Indian Navy representatives. They focused on several issues including the ship's repairing, rearming, and resupplying capabilities (America's Navy, 2022). Government officials from the US Embassy in New Delhi were also invited onboard the ship. The crew members also participated in outreach events including playing sports with children and tree planting (America's Navy, 2022).

Moreover, the USS Frank Cable visit to India was followed by the visit of USS West Virginia, a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, to the Diego Garcia Island (Starr, 2022). In 2023, the USS Paul Hamilton, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, also visited the naval base in Diego Garcia (America's Navy, 2023). The above-mentioned port visits allow the US Navy to respond to security issues in the Indo-Pacific and strengthen alliances in the region (America's Navy, 2023).

Furthermore, the US Navy has also been conducting port visits to Djibouti. The USS Hershel "Woody" Williams was among the naval ships that visited the East African country in 2021 and 2022 (U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa Public Affairs, 2022). The 2022 visit included engagement opportunities with Djibouti's Navy and officials from the country's government. Discussions also focused on opportunities for female leaders through exercise and peacekeeping capability building (U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa Public Affairs, 2022) In addition, the USS Mount Whitney visited Djibouti in 2022, where a ship tour and reception was held for "U.S. and allied military leaders, foreign dignitaries and ambassadors".

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The delegates included representatives from Djibouti, and other US allies like France (America's Navy, 2022).

3.5.3 Senior visits

In 2018, the US Navy 7th Fleet, led by its Commander, Vice Admiral Phil Sawyer, visited New Delhi (US Embassy and Consulate in India, 2018). The US delegation was welcomed by a team led by India's Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Adm. G. Ashok Kumar (US Embassy and Consulate in India, 2018). The representatives renewed their commitment to "expanding exercises, exchanges and port visits" with the aim of benefiting the naval forces of both countries. The delegations specifically discussed expanding the Malabar Exercise, which was joined by Japan for the second time in June of the same year (US Embassy and Consulate in India, 2018).

In 2021, the US Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Mike Gilday met with the Indian Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh and other senior leaders from the Indian navy and government. The five-day visit was aimed at reaffirming the growing level of naval cooperation between the two countries (Hindustan Times, 2021). During the visit, Gilday specifically mentioned that "my discussions primarily focus on the Indian Ocean, a strategic waterway…not only for India and the region but also the globe. A million ships a year transit the Indian Ocean" (America's Navy, 2021).

In May 2023, a US delegation led by senior naval officers of the 5th Fleet also visited Mumbai 2023, and both navies mentioned that they remain committed to ensuring maritime security in the Indo-Pacific (Indian Navy, 2023). In September 2023, the US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin III, travelled to Djibouti. Austin met with senior Djiboutian officials to discuss ongoing military cooperation, regional security challenges, and opportunities for further collaboration (Indian Navy, 2023).

3.5.4. Sale of naval equipment

India has been purchasing major US equipment for decades and for the past 15 years (including 2017 - 2022) the equipment sold to India includes the maritime items that are captured in Figure 3 below (Congressional Research Service, 2023a).

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Figure 3: Naval Equipment Purchased by India from the US

(Indian Navy, 2020; Congressional Research Service, 2023a)

3.6. Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations

The US Navy has also assisted with HADR operations in the Indian Ocean. In 2017, the US Navy extended humanitarian assistance to Djibouti. Specifically, it assisted in conducting water testing at Caritas Djibouti, a mission dedicated to delivering humanitarian aid and education primarily to children in Djibouti who are homeless. The US Navy's Samantha Ward, stationed at the Camp Lemonnier Emergency Medical Facility, stated that "we are here to conduct ourselves as not only professionals in the field of public health and disease prevention, but we are also serving as ambassadors". In 2022, the US Navy donated recreational and medical supplies to Caritas Djibouti (Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, 2020).

In 2023, the US Navy contributed to the facilitation of "the departure of over 1,000 US citizens", after a civil war ensued in Sudan (Hansler, 2023). Ahead of the evacuations, the US deployed additional troops to the Camp Lemonnier base in Djibouti, to prepare for the non-combat missions (Kube, 2023). However, the number of these additional troops that were sent was not disclosed.

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Moreover, the country even deployed the USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6) – a high speed ship – to Port Sudan to help with the missions (Shelbourne, 2023).

This section demonstrates that the US Navy, despite the US not having a comprehensive naval strategy for the Indian Ocean, remains active in the region. Therefore, naval diplomatic practice remains a priority, particularly with India as Washington relies on it to take the lead in the region. The interactions with India are in line with the US national security strategies which, since 2017, seek to solidify relations with the country. What this means is that both the Trump and Biden administrations deliberately left out details on their approach to the Indian Ocean, as a way to get a good reception from India by allowing the country to lead in the region. This can be interpreted as soft power, which is mentioned in the conceptual framework of this study, in the sense that it uses the power of attraction. The United States' endeavours to enhance ties with India seem to be a deliberate strategy aimed at curtailing China's influence in the region.

3.7. US concerns over China's presence in the Indian Ocean

In correspondence with PTT, the US as the preeminent state appears to be concerned about China's rise in the Indian Ocean, as the country is concerned about China's establishment of a military base in Djibouti and the presence of its navy in the Indian Ocean (White, 2020). The reason for the US' concern is that Washington sees China's presence in the region as a security threat (Jacobs & Perlez, 2017). The US further believes that China wants to displace it in the Indian Ocean region and this concern was captured in the US national security strategy, which was published in 2017 (The White House, 2017: 25). The next chapter will provide a comprehensive exploration of China's undertakings in the region. It is also worth noting that in the 2017 annual report of the US Department of Defense, the Pentagon singled out Pakistan as one of the potential countries to host another Chinese naval base (US Department of Defense, 2017).

Moreover, the US in the document titled "The Elements of the China Challenge", which was published in 2020, the country claims that China is not only seeking "pre-eminence within the established world order" but also wants to "fundamentally revise [the] world order" as it has "hegemonic ambitions" (US Department of State, 2020). The document also states that China is building "a world-class military to rival and eventually surpass the U.S. military" (US Department of State, 2020). Heath (2020: 18) also makes a similar observation by stating that Chinese naval diplomatic actions support the country's broader goals and efforts designed to erode US influence, and these could harm American interests.

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Furthermore, the document specifically highlights China's establishment of the naval base in Djibouti and states that it extends China's military reach off Africa's coasts and the Indian Ocean (US Department of State, 2020). White (2020: 2) further states that under the Trump administration, the US-China relations were strained and this increased fears that the Indian Ocean will become a "theatre for destabilizing proxy competition between Washington and Beijing". The Pentagon's 2022 annual report states that China's base in Djibouti is just the beginning and Washington continues to be concerned that China could be planning to build more bases in the region and once again mentions Pakistan as one of the potential host countries (US Department of Defense 2022: 143-144).

According to Choudhury & Moorthy (2018: 314-315) China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean is what has made the US look to countries like India for cooperation in its naval diplomatic practice. India, like the US, is likewise worried about China's presence in the region and has also increased its efforts to bolster its navy (Choudhury & Moorthy 2018: 314-315). Miller & Harris (2023) note that India's spending on naval equipment increased by 42% in 2022. The country has furthermore improved its surveillance in a bid to counter China's presence. However, it is India's naval diplomatic practice that has played a key role in India's attempt to level the playing field (Miller & Harris, 2023). The importance of the naval diplomatic practice has been evidenced by India's participation in the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (Miller & Harris, 2023). In the near future, India is expected to continue to strengthen its naval cooperation and naval diplomatic practice with the US in the Indian Ocean (Miller & Harris, 2023).

One can argue that the above-mentioned indicates that as posited by PTT, a dominant state like the US seeks ways to contain the rise of a challenger. In this case, it has looked to another regional power in its attempt to show strength in the Indian Ocean. Both the US and India are concerned about China's presence in the Indian Ocean because they see the country as a security threat. India sees cooperation with the US as a way of balancing power in the region. Furthermore, the joint naval exercises and port calls between the two countries are also a show of force aimed at sending the message to China and its allies like Pakistan, that the US and India are ready to respond to its activities in the Indian Ocean.

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3.8. Conclusion

In summary, the US and its ally India are clearly concerned about China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, and this has made them look to each other for security. The US, as the dominant state in the international system, sees China's actions like the establishment of a naval base in Djibouti as part of a bigger ambition to create a new world order – one that will affect the interests of the US and its allies. Washington has employed naval diplomatic practice, including port visits and joint military exercises, as an instrument of power in response to China's rise in the Indian Ocean. The next chapter analyses China as a rising power, particularly focusing on the country's naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean.

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CHAPTER 4: THE RISE OF CHINA AS A POTENTIAL CHALLENGER

4.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the preceding chapters and expands on the role of China which, as a rising power or potential challenger in the global system, as mentioned in Chapter 3 is dominated by the US. As a theoretical lens, PTT and its supporting conceptual frameworks – as highlighted in Chapter 2, are applied to this chapter.

This chapter focuses on the activities of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean and aims to explain how China is potentially challenging the US dominance in the Indian Ocean. It does this by evaluating China's relations with countries like Djibouti and Pakistan. The chapter furthermore pays attention to China as a rising power, the country's interests in the Indian Ocean, its strategy and naval diplomatic practice in the region and the concerns that China has about the US presence in the region.

4.2. China's rising power

As already established in this study, China is a rising state and a potential challenger to the US dominance in the international system. In line with the PTT's assumption that industrialisation plays a key role in a country's national power, Lynch & Saunders (2020: 85) state that China had a 73% industrialisation rate in 2010 and a 76% rate in 2015. During its rise, the country continues to reassure the world that it will "never seek hegemony" and that its rise will remain peaceful (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

However, Li (2017: 482) posits that China's rise and "relative decline" in US influence will eventually diminish the US prolonged dominance in the Indian Ocean. This is because the US' power is slowly being eroded by its military interventions in the Middle East and other parts of the world (Li, 2017: 482). At the same time, China is becoming more assertive in global affairs, including in the Indian Ocean (Rajagopalan, 2021). The navy's aircraft carriers, advanced destroyers and frigates, replenishment vessels, and amphibious assault ships give it an increasing ability to operate further from China's coast, including in the Indian Ocean (Lynch & Saunders, 2020: 85).

According to the Congressional Research Service, which analysed the growth of the overall number of China's battleships, including those deployed in the Indian Ocean (2023b: 2):

> China's navy, sometime between 2015 and 2020 surpassed the US Navy in the numbers of battle force ships. The DOD [Department of Defense] states that China's navy "is the

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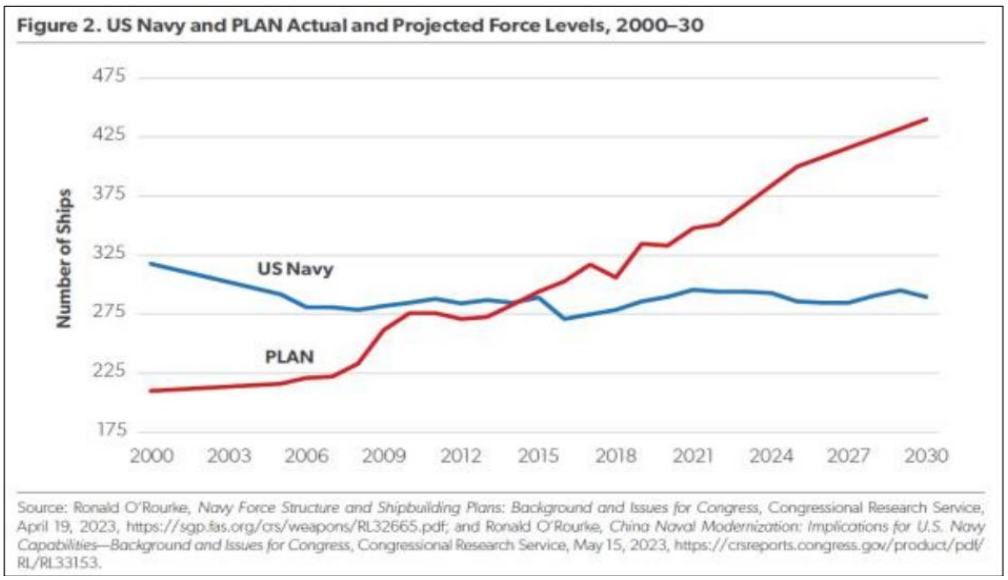
> largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 340 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, aircraft carriers, and fleet auxiliaries....This figure does not include approximately 85 patrol combatants and craft that carry anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM). The … overall battle force [of China's navy] is expected to grow to 400 ships by 2025 and 440 ships by 2030." The U.S. Navy, by comparison, included 290 battle force ships as of October 5, 2023, and the Navy's FY2024 budget submission projects that the Navy will include 290 battle force ships by the end of FY2030.

Figure 4 shows that between 2017 and 2023, China globally has continued to possess a larger number of combat ships than the US of which some have been deployed to the Indian Ocean (Congressional Research Service, 2023b: 12).

Figure 4: US Navy and PLAN Actual and Projected Force Levels



(Congressional Research Service, 2023b: 12)

The Congressional Research Service (2023b: 2) also notes the Chinese Navy is conducting a growing number of operations in more distant waters, including the broader waters of the Indian Ocean and waters around Europe. The modernisation and growth of the Chinese Navy also allows the country to be able to carry out naval diplomatic practices like port visits, joint naval exercises, and counter-piracy missions (Heath, 2020: 5-17). However, despite these developments, Austin (2023) states that the US Navy, alongside its allied navies, remains much more powerful compared to the Chinese Navy. Austin (2023) argues that the US remains powerful because it has "important types of major warships, which are suitable for maritime warfare. The count only shifts in China's favour for lighter and less heavily armed ships, such as frigates and coastal patrol vessels".

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4.3. China's interests in the Indian Ocean

The reason for the increased naval activities is that China needs a "safe, secure, and stable" environment in the Indian Ocean to enable smooth trade, particularly focusing on energy. Nine of China's top ten crude oil suppliers transit the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2023). For example, China's base in Djibouti is located near the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Gulf of Aden, where nearly 10% of the world's total seaborne-traded petroleum passes through. This includes more than six billion barrels of crude oil and refined petroleum per day (US Office of the Secretary of State, 2017:24).

Moreover, Li (2017: 484) notes that the Indian Ocean is China's main route out of the four major shipping routes, as it accounts for 40% of the country's overseas trade and 80% of its total imports. Therefore, as Li (2017: 484) argues, it makes sense for China to include the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait as an important section of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," which is an initiative that was first proposed by China's President Xi Jinping in 2013. According to Li (2017: 484), to ensure that the Maritime Silk Road is safe and clear, it is important for China to increase its presence in the Indian Ocean, guarantee the interconnectivity between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific while overcoming the "Malacca Dilemma," to promote a "safe and free" passage in the Indian Ocean. The "Malacca Dilemma" was coined by former Chinese President Hu Jintao, referring to the fact that India and the US have the power to control the strait (Sharma, 2020).

One can argue that because of the above-mentioned interests, China – like any other country – is justified in seeking to bolster security in the region. The country is heavily reliant on the region for its energy sources, and this does raise questions about what will happen in the event of a blockade by the country's adversaries mentioned in Chapter 3.

4.4. China's naval strategy in the Indian Ocean

China's 2019 White Paper, titled "China's National Defense in the New Era", vividly highlights that the military has a key role to play in protecting the country's interests abroad by stating that the military "builds far seas forces, develops overseas logistical facilities, and enhances capabilities in accomplishing diversified military tasks" (Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, 2019). The Indian Ocean is no exception, and as captured in the contextual overview, China established its first military base in Djibouti in 2017 and has since stationed about 2,000 troops there (Van Staden, 2022). The base is located near the US Camp Lemonnier base (Jacobs & Perlez, 2017).

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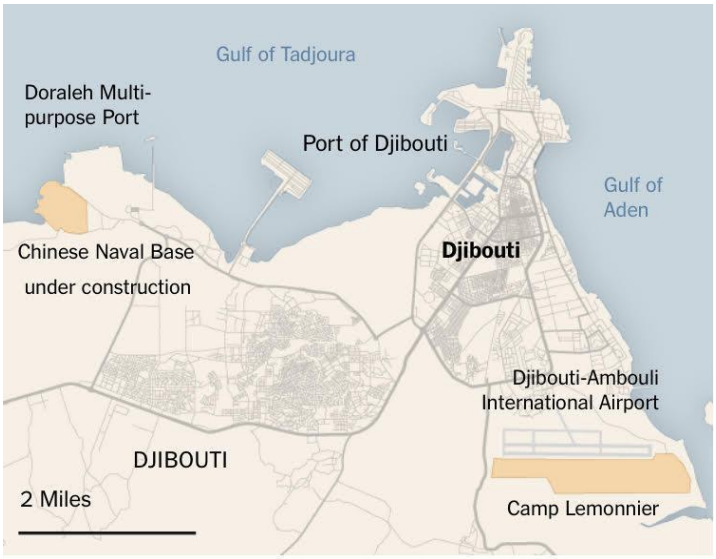
Figure 5: China's Naval Base in Djibouti



(Jacobs & Perlez, 2017)

Blanchard (2017) highlights that the base will mainly be used as a logistics facility particularly to resupply navy ships that are conducting peacekeeping and humanitarian missions particularly off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia. Yu & Liu (2019) note that the naval base is at a strategic location, because it is near the Bab al-Mandab strait, which is called the "throat of the sea" as it is a "lifeline for international oil shipping".

4.5. China's diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean

As highlighted in Chapter 3, it is widely speculated that China plans to build a naval base in Gwadar, Pakistan (Sutton, 2020). Figure 6 shows satellite of China's compound in Gwadar, which appear like China is constructing a military base in the area (Sutton 2020). Gwadar, which is located at the western end of Pakistan's coast, is expected to form part of China's BRI (Sutton, 2020). Once completed, the base will complement the one located in Djibouti by improving China's capabilities in the Indian Ocean and will strengthen China's presence in the region (Sutton, 2020).

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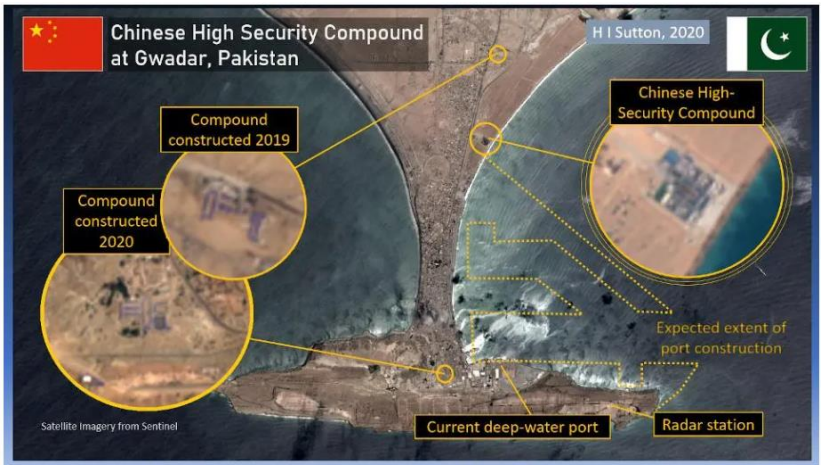
Figure 6: China's High Security Compound in Pakistan



(Sutton, 2020)

While USIP (2020:17) states that the US is in the region to ensure that there is no armed conflict between Pakistan and India, Maqsood (2021: 49) argues that the deepening Indo-US strategic partnership, compelled Pakistan to forge a strategic alliance with China to maintain a balance of power in the region. This further strained relations between the two neighbours as India's "territorial claims for the northern areas of Pakistan will be deterred by the Chinese presence. This will enhance Pakistan's security and boost its economy," (Maqsood 2021: 65). The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) also supports China's diplomatic efforts by engaging in military diplomacy (Lynch & Saunders, 2020: 85). As such, the PLAN diplomacy specifically emphasises senior-level visits, joint naval exercises, and naval port calls (Wuthnow & Baughman, 2023:6).

4.5.1 Joint Naval Exercises

In 2018, the PLAN conducted more than 60 bilateral and multilateral exercises with foreign militaries (Lynch & Saunders 2020: 88). In their study titled "Selective Engagements—Chinese Naval Diplomacy and U.S.-China Competition", Wuthnow & Baughman (2023:6) found that China's most frequent exercise partners between 2000 and 2019 included Pakistan with 17 joint naval exercises (Wuthnow & Baughman, 2023: 6). One of these is an annual joint exercise called "The Sea Guardians - 2" and the most recent one took place in 2022 at a military port in Shanghai.

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China's Ministry of Defence (2022) stated that:

> The Sea Guardians - 2 PLAN-PN [People's Liberation Army Navy and Pakistan Navy] joint maritime exercise aims to promote bilateral defense cooperation and enhance capabilities of the two militaries to jointly respond to maritime security threats, and to consolidate the traditional friendship between the two counties and two militaries and push forward development of the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic partnership of cooperation.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned exercise between China and Pakistan included "operation planning, professional expertise exchanges, cultural and sports competitions" (China's Ministry of Defence, 2022).

In 2023 the navies also participated in "Shaheen (Eagle) - X," a joint military exercise between the Chinese and Pakistani air forces (Xinhua, 2023). The navies' participation in this exercise demonstrates the PLAN's reforms, which are mentioned in section 4.5.3 of this chapter. This is particularly in relation to the new joint command structures of the PLA. The exercise was also aimed at improving "training and coordination" between the two militaries (Xinhua, 2023). Moreover, Zhang, Yan, Huang & Hou (2023) state that since China's establishment of the base in 2017, it has held over 10 joint exercises and drills with Djiboutian and other foreign troops in Djibouti.

4.5.2 Goodwill visits and Port Visits

Moreover, Wuthnow & Baughman (2023: 6) highlight that in terms of port visits within the period mentioned in the preceding section, China's preferred destinations for port calls and goodwill visits were Djibouti and Pakistan. Djibouti hosted 27 port visits and while Pakistan hosted 12 visits (Wuthnow & Baughman, 2023: 6). During one of these visits in 2017, three Chinese naval ships, Chang Chun, Jing Zhou & Chao Hu, arrived in Karachi for a good-will and training visit. The visiting PLAN's ships were welcomed by senior officials of the Pakistan Navy and the representative from the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan (The Express Tribune, 2017). The discussion focused on deepening relations and maritime security (The Express Tribune, 2017).

However, Cabestan (2022) notes that while the PLAN's anti-piracy unit conducts about ten port calls to Djibouti annually, it prefers not to draw attention to them. Cabestan's observation is supported by The Economist (2022), which reported that China's naval base at Djibouti only had its first port call in 2022 - almost five years since it was established. China did not publicise this visit by the supply ship Luomahu to Djibouti (The Economist, 2022).

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Wuthnow & Baughman (2023: 6) note that China's port and replenishment visits, lasting three to five days, normally do not allocate time for meetings or discussions. Additionally, they mention that "friendly visits," lasting two to four days, involve interactions with local officials, public tours of the Chines Navy vessels, and other activities like sports competitions.

Heath (2020) states that PLAN ships that conduct port visits not only provide the navy with opportunities to also “conduct training, build rapport with sailors in other navies", but also play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations. Heath (2020) further argues that the PLAN officials and the Chinese media classify such visits as cementing cordial relations with the host countries.

4.5.3 Senior Visits

Both China and Pakistan appear to be formalising military collaboration and senior-level meetings. In June 2022, they exchanged strategic assessments during the publicised meeting of the Pakistan-China Joint Military Cooperation Committee, which is the top body tasked with strengthening cooperation, led by General Bajwa and the vice-chair of China’s Central Military Commission, General Zhang Youxia (Lalwani, 2023: 13). Heath (2020: 13) mentions that senior-level engagements take place between the PLAN senior officers and their counterparts on Chinese soil or abroad. The visits, argues Heath (2020: 13), “allow senior leaders to build rapport” with foreign navies and are key in advancing China’s political agenda and cementing bilateral relations with countries like Pakistan and Djibouti.

Moreover, between 2017 and 2023 the Chinese naval base in Djibouti played a significant role in hosting more than 200 bilateral and multilateral exchange activities and hosted five multinational sports tournaments (Zhang, Yan, Huang & Hou, 2023). However, Wuthnow & Baughman (2023: 1) further note that following an increase in China’s “senior-leader exchanges, port visits, and exercises” throughout 2017, there was a decline in all three areas between 2018 and 2019 because of the PLAN’s reforms and the opening of the PLAN’s base in Djibouti. The reforms include modernising the navy in terms of developing equipment or hardware, joint command structures with other units of the PLA, and interagency operations (McCaslin & Erickson, 2019: 126). Wuthnow & Baughman (2023: 1) posit that the PLAN’s leaders had to priorities these reforms, which resulted in the deprioritization of activities like port visits. The above-mentioned drop in naval diplomatic practice is noted in Figure 7 below.

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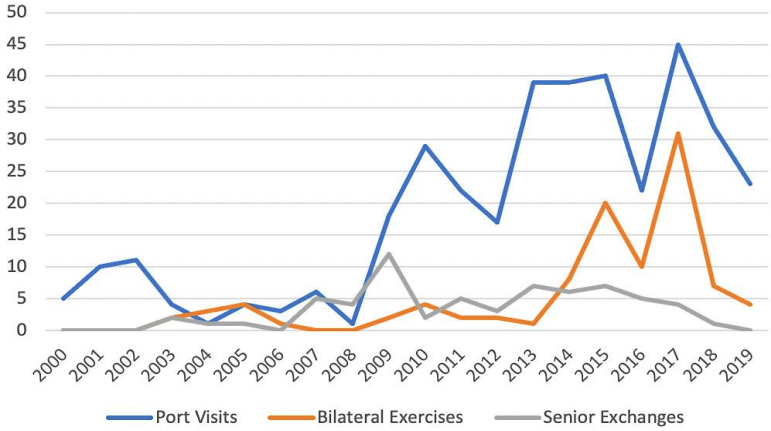
Figure 7: PLAN's Diplomatic Practice



(Wuthnow & Baughman 2023: 3)

4.5.4. China's Naval equipment sales to Pakistan

Apart from the above-mentioned visits and exercises, China, in 2017, also donated the Pakistan Navy two ships to safeguard the Gwadar port (Hindustan Times, 2017). Moreover, in terms of sales, Lalwani (2023: 10) states that the Pakistan Navy does not rely on a single source for its equipment like combat ships. While the country can manufacture its own ships, most of the ships and missile cells come from China. Figure 8 below provides data on the sources of Pakistan's combat ships and missile cells. China, in terms of providing naval ships to Pakistan, is far ahead of countries like the US.

Figure 7: China's Naval Equipment Sales to Pakistan

	Total ships (%)	Total displacement tonnage (%)	Combatant ships (%)	Combatant ship displacement (%)	Ship missile cells (%)	Naval aviation (%)
China	22	44	28	48	79	19
United States	2	5	3	10	0	19
France	15	11	14	18	4	22
Pakistan	17	9	14	2	5	0
UK	17	4	6	9	8	16
Other	28	27	36	13	5	24

(Lalwani, 2023: 10)

Lalwani (2023: 10) further predicts that Pakistan's dependence on China will increase as it seeks to modernise and since it is setting its eyes on the "goal of a 50-ship surface fleet, with 40 percent of that number being major surface combatants – (Pakistan) will rely heavily on Beijing".

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Reuters (2023) reports that in May 2023, China delivered two Type 054A frigates to the Pakistan Navy, completing a four-warship deal which was signed in 2018.

“Pakistan will potentially secure Chinese Type 054A/P frigates, destroyers, alongside its already deployed F-22 frigate for sea control. For anti-access/area denial (A2AD) missions, the navy plans to use Chinese Type 039A attack submarines with air-independent propulsion that carry both torpedoes and anti-ship cruise missiles. Pakistan was initially scheduled to receive four of these submarines by 2023 and to build four more by 2028” (Lalwani, 2023: 11).

Moreover, White (2020: 6) states that China is rapidly building its capabilities to carry out operations in the Indian Ocean and these missions include counter-piracy and humanitarian aid. White (2020: 6) also argues that these missions have legitimised China’s presence in the region and most of the PLAN’s key investments in capabilities and platforms support these initiatives. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, by July 2022 the Chinese Navy had escorted nearly 7,000 vessels, including foreign ones, through the troubled waters off Somalia (Zhou, 2022).

4.5.5. Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations

Moreover, the PLAN’s other non-combat missions in the Indian Ocean include delivering medical and humanitarian aid and providing medical care. In 2017, the Chinese hospital ship Peace Ark arrived in Djibouti and provided free medical services to the people of the east African country (Xinhua, 2017). The vessel, which has ‘“eight operation rooms, seven health care offices and 300 beds [including] 115 health care workers … on board, mostly from the Naval Medical University” (Xinhua, 2017), arrived days after China opened its naval base in Djibouti in August 2017.

Furthermore, the PLAN has also mounted its efforts in the protection of humanitarian aid from piracy off the coast of Somalia in the Indian Ocean. As already mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, by July 2022 the Chinese Navy had escorted nearly 7,000 vessels through the troubled waters off Somalia (Zhou, 2022). These escorts, which commenced in 2008, included foreign vessels or ships carrying cargo of the UN’s World Food Program (Yu & Liu, 2019). The PLAN has been involved in evacuation and rescue missions in the Indian Ocean. In 2023 the PLAN evacuated more than 1,300 Chinese citizens after conflict broke out in Sudan. During the above-mentioned mission, China also evacuated more than 200 foreign nationals including Pakistan citizens (China Daily, 2023).

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In reaction to the above-mentioned evacuation, the Pakistani Ambassador to China, Moin ul Haque, mentioned that:

> Our two countries have a long-standing tradition of sharing weal and woe (good and bad times). We are grateful to our Chinese friends for the evacuation of Pakistanis from Port Sudan. It's no wonder that this unique and special bond of friendship, iron brotherhood and 'all-weather strategic partnership' remains the pride of our two nations. This has added another chapter to our long history characterised by mutual support and assistance in times of distress (China Daily, 2023).

From the above, one can argue that between 2017 and 2023 China has shown that it is indeed a challenger to the US in the Indian Ocean, establishing a base in Djibouti and positioning its military far from its borders. As mentioned in the conceptual framework of the study, powerful navies do support diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a country's goals or objectives. This section has clearly demonstrated China's abilities, which include making port calls, conducting joint military exercises, and establishing a naval base far from its territorial waters.

4.6. China's concerns over the presence of the US Navy in the Indian Ocean

China's main concern about the role of major powers in the Indian Ocean is that they might disrupt its energy supply, especially due to the previously mentioned "Malacca Dilemma" (Li, 2017: 484). Although President Hu, in 2003, did not specifically mention the US and India, instead opting to refer to a "certain major power" (Storey, 2006), it is, according to Ramadhan (2015: 154) clear that the US and India operate in the area. Storey (2006) adds that according to the China Youth Daily newspaper "it is no exaggeration to say that whoever controls the Strait of Malacca will also have a stranglehold on the energy route of China".

Furthermore, Chinese scholars and analysts are concerned that the US and India in the Indian Ocean are collaborating to contain China's rise (Colley, 2020). This viewpoint is supported by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, which claims that Chinese strategists see the US Navy as China's main challenge in the Indian Ocean, and that this has prompted the PLAN to increase its presence in the region. Also, the US' claim that Chinese troops stationed at the Djibouti naval base pointed lasers at its planes in 2018, further showed distrust between the two countries in the region with China accusing the US of lying (Ali, Liangping & Wen, 2018).

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Lendon & McCarthy (2023) further state that over the years China has been accusing the US of using its military installations abroad, including the one in Djibouti, to undermine global security. According to Wuthnow & Baughman (2023: 19), the implications are that this mutual suspicion between the two countries has limited interaction between its militaries and will "reduce the opportunities for engagement". The above-mentioned has been the case in the past few years with US naval officers in Djibouti only attending a few multilateral events at the Chinese base, as the officers mainly turned down invitations from their Chinese counterparts (Vertin, 2020:9).

It can be argued that China's concerns over the US presence in the Indian Ocean are legitimate, as the country's energy supply might be threatened in the event of confrontation between the country and the US and/or its Indian ally. It only makes sense that the country will take steps to protect its interests in the region like any other country would. Furthermore, the mutual suspicion between China and the US has been preventing their two navies from interacting with each other. The mutual suspicion implies that naval diplomatic practice cannot be used effectively to build or repair relations between the dominant state and challenger in the Indian Ocean.

4.7 Conclusion

In summary, China has taken steps to protect its interests abroad by deploying its navy far from its territorial waters. The navy has so far been engaged in peaceful activities aimed at promoting China's diplomacy like port calls, joint military exercises, and escorting ships. While Djibouti is a strategic geographic location for China, Beijing appears to see Pakistan – which is a nuclear power and has disagreements with India – as a key partner in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's geographic location also appears to be the alternative that China needs in terms of creating an alternative trade route to the Malacca Strait. Also, China in line with its peaceful narrative – has been strategic in not clearly identifying the US or India as its rivals in the Indian Ocean but those two countries are indeed the country's key competitors.

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CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to establish whether the naval diplomatic practices of the US and China in the Indian Ocean provide evidence that supports the theory of a transition of power. Between 2017 and 2023, both the US – the dominant state in the international system – and China – the challenger – have been engaging in naval diplomatic practice, including port calls, goodwill visits and joint naval exercises with foreign navies, particularly Djibouti, India, and Pakistan.

This chapter provides a summary and the findings of the study.

5.2. Summary

Chapter 1 provided the identification of the research theme, the literature overview, the research problem, and questions. The main question being how can the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries? The sub-questions were respectively: 1) What are the assumptions underpinning PTT in relation to a possible peaceful power transition or conflict? 2) Does China's naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean provide evidence of a wider power transition involving that country and the US? 3) What concerns does the US have about China's naval diplomatic practices in the Indian Ocean and how has the US responded? The chapter provided the research methodology, and the structure of the research.

Chapter 2 paid attention to the key assumptions of PTT, namely that a state's national power is domestically derived and shaped and that the international system is shaped by a hegemon. The chapter also provided the conceptual framework with a focus on the elements of national power, the military determinant of national power, instruments of national power particularly seapower, the diplomatic instrument of national power and lastly naval diplomacy and naval diplomatic practice. Chapter 3 paid particular attention to the US as the dominant state, especially with reference to the Indian Ocean and explained how the country has been operating in the region, particularly its defence diplomacy and naval diplomatic practice. It also evaluated the US strategy and the country's concerns with China's presence in the region. Chapter 4 expanded on the role of China as a rising power or potential challenger in the global system. It paid attention to China as a rising power, the country's interests in the Indian Ocean, its strategy and naval diplomatic practice in the region, and the concerns it has about the US operating in the region.

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5.3. Key Findings and Evaluation

The study aimed to establish whether the naval diplomatic practices of the US and China in the Indian Ocean provide evidence that supports the theory of a transition of power and has made the following findings.

5.3.1 China is challenging the US' naval dominance in the Indian Ocean

China's establishment of its first-ever overseas base in Djibouti in 2017 (Nantulya, 2017), and the country's engagements with the navies of Djibouti and Pakistan through naval diplomatic practice, partially demonstrate that China is challenging the US dominance in the Indian Ocean. The activities that provide such evidence include port calls, senior visits, and joint military exercises and HADR. If China successfully establishes a military base in Pakistan, as speculated by Sutton (2020), it will match the US, which has two bases in the region, namely on Diego Garcia and in Djibouti (Baruah, 2022). The above-mentioned is in correspondence with the PTT's assumption that a rising power, which happens to be a challenger, confronts a dominant power in the global order (Kim & Gates 2015: 219). Therefore, the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries in the sense that China has significantly increased its presence in the region and is able to project power far from its territorial waters. China can be seen as a new player in the region and the concerns of India, and the US indicate that China is a major player with significant influence.

5.3.2 China does not appear to be seeking hegemony in the Indian Ocean

As highlighted in Chapter 3 of this study, the US is concerned that China's establishment of the naval base in Djibouti and naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean are part of efforts to "fundamentally revise world order" as it has "hegemonic ambitions" (US Department of State, 2020). This study cannot conclusively find whether the above-mentioned statements by the US are true or not, because so far China's actions in the Indian Ocean do not provide sufficient evidence to suggest that it seeks to revise the world order. However, the study finds that China's naval activities in the Indian Ocean are aimed at protecting its interests in the region. As highlighted in Chapter 3, nine of China's top ten crude oil suppliers transit the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2023). For example, China's base in Djibouti is located near the Bab-al-Mandeb Straits in the Gulf of Aden, where nearly 10 percent of the world's total seaborne-traded petroleum passes through.

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5.3.3. US and China distrust in the Indian Ocean

As highlighted in the introduction of this study, both the US and China have "mutual distrust" (Lieberthal & Wang 2012: vi). Furthermore, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this study show that the two countries have concerns about each other, with the US seeing China as a security threat, as it is believes that China seeks to displace it in the Indian Ocean region (The White House, 2017: 25). As mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, China is concerned that the US, in future, might disrupt its energy supply because of what China calls the "Malacca Dilemma" (Li 2017: 484). This distrust between the countries also makes it difficult to determine whether China is a satisfied or dissatisfied state. As established in Chapter 2, a satisfied challenger increases the chances of a peaceful power transition, as the rising power does not seek to change the international system. The study conclusively finds that distrust, if not addressed through diplomatic modes, including naval diplomatic practice, might lead to miscalculations in the Indian Ocean.

5.3.4 US seeks to contain China's rise in the Indian Ocean

The US, in its national security strategies published since 2017, identifies China as a security threat including in the Indian Ocean and has identified India - which is also concerned about China's rise in the region - as a key partner for both diplomatic and security cooperation. It is found that the above-mentioned is a direct response to China's presence in the region.

The above-mentioned findings can potentially be explored in future research on PPT as naval diplomatic practice. This can contribute to examining the changing international system, which is led by the US, by employing a similar theoretical and conceptual framework but directing the attention to different regions where both countries have a naval presence. This study further contributes to testing the PPT and its application in the 21st century.

5.4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to establish whether the naval diplomatic practices of the US and China in the Indian Ocean provide evidence that supports the theory of a transition of power, or not. The aim was achieved by using the PTT as a lens, assessing its assumptions and through developing a conceptual framework that focused on the national determinants of power, instruments of national power – particularly seapower, the diplomatic instruments of national power and lastly defence diplomacy and naval diplomatic practice.

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In line with the research problem highlighted in Chapter 1, this study posed the question: How can the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries? This main question was supported by three sub-questions which are 1) What are the assumptions underpinning PTT in relation to a possible peaceful power transition or conflict? 2) Does China's naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean provide evidence of a wider power transition involving that country and the US? 3) What concerns does the US have about China's naval diplomatic practices in the Indian Ocean and how has the US responded?

In relation to the main question, the study found that China is challenging the US in the Indian Ocean through the establishment of the military base in Djibouti and the increased naval diplomatic practice in the Indian Ocean. This implies that the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries. In relation to the first sub-question, the study confirms in Chapter 2 that a satisfied challenger increases the chances of a peaceful power transition, as the rising power does not seek to change the international system. However, the study does not make any findings on whether the rising China is satisfied or not satisfied. Regarding the third question, the study finds that the US sees China as a security threat and believes that China seeks to displace it in the Indian Ocean region. It also finds that there is distrust between the countries and that the US seeks to contain a rising China, by strengthening relations with India.

In conclusion, the naval diplomatic practices of the US and Chinese navies in the Indian Ocean, which include port calls, senior visits, establishing bases, joint and multilateral exercises, partially account for a macro transition of power involving both countries.

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