

“The Great Wall of Andaman and Nicobar Islands – US INDOPACOM gateway to IOR”

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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT The relations between India and US in the future can influence the affairs in the Indian Ocean region of the US INDOPACOM. Whilst influencing maritime affairs in the Indian Ocean region, the US has the opportunity to step up its relations with a non-aligned India, by collaborating with India in developing the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar islands (ANI) can become the lynchpin in the Indo-US relations as it provides an avenue for the USA to gain credibility in its affairs with the countries in the region. The ANI, in addition, also provides the US INDOPACOM a strategic heft in the western approaches to the Indo-pacific region which may be the next 'core area' of China. China's dependence on energy sources form the Gulf make it vulnerable in the IOR, which can be correctly capitalized by countries in the region to counter balance China's overtures in the South China Sea, with the US' expertise and technological capability. The future of the INDOPACOM, especially in the IOR, rests along these islands.					
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“Peace, Stability, and Freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean are inseparable from the Peace, Stability, and Freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean”

- Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan¹, 2012

Introduction

The US Defence Secretary Mattis announced renaming the US Pacific command as US INDO PACOM on May 30, 2018². The change of name marked a historic inflection point where geopolitical power competition between open and oppressive visions was evident in the Indo-Pacific region³. Secy Mattis also mentioned the renaming was in recognition of the increased connectivity between Indian and the Pacific oceans. The willingness and commitment of free nations in the region to work together for a ‘free and open’ Indo-Pacific have contributed to the region being largely peaceful for more than 70 years⁴. A ‘free and open’ Indo-Pacific is also vital for the US economy’s future throughout the 21st century. In tandem, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) emphasizes that US INDOPACOM is focused in regaining its competitive military advantage in the region to ensure a ‘free and open’ Indo-Pacific over the short and long term⁵. To achieve both objectives, the USA seeks allies and partners in the region with shared values and principles, rising over the foundations of a vibrant democracy and common observation of the ‘rules based international order’. India, a regional power in the IOR, has long been a potential partner for enhancing mutual interests in the region. Washington has, on

¹ Richard Javad Heydarian, “Shinzo Abe strikes back”, *The National Interest*, (December 24, 2018), accessed May 02, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/shinzo-abe-strikes-back-39447>

² @INDOPACOM, USINDOPACOM twitter handle (30 May 18), accessed May 05, 2019.

³ Tara Copp, “INDOPACOM, it is: US Pacific Command gets renamed”, *Military Times* (May 30 2018), accessed April 29, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/05/30/indo-pacom-it-is-pacific-command-gets-renamed/>

⁴ Adm Philip Davidson, Commander, US Indo-Pacific Command. Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee on US INDOPACOM posture (February 12, 2019), accessed Apr 25, 2019, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_02-12-19.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

numerous occasions, stated its intentions to further its cooperation with India, the largest democracy in the world, to reach mutually inclusive goals. As India struggles to break free from its self-imposed shackles of non-alignment in the seventy years since independence, the US has leveraged all possible avenues to enhance mutual cooperation with India. Such inclination of the US' policy has been well articulated in the US National Defence Authorisation Act 2019 (US NDAA), that the US government must take all steps to enhance military cooperation with India⁶. How can the US achieve such an aim over the short and long term? Over the 70 long years since India's independence, there exists a 'blind spot' in the US - India military cooperation. If this 'blind spot' can be correctly capitalized upon, US INDOPACOM may find multifarious dividends in the short and long term. This 'blind spot' encompasses a critical military requirement of India and an established capability exclusive to the US military. It also occupies a geographical position central to the entire Indo - Pacific region, which shall prove to be the lynchpin of military affairs in the region. The 'blind spot' is the Andaman and Nicobar Islands - *the forgotten Indian islands*, in the Bay of Bengal, which overlooks the western entrance to the Malacca Straits (see fig). As India overcomes its maritime myopia and sheds its moorings of post-colonial non -alignment principles, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) present a credible opportunity for the US' capabilities and intentions to dovetail with India's military requirements. The strategic importance of these islands is indispensable in influencing the maritime affairs in the western region/IOR of the US INDOPACOM. Therefore, in order to establish the operational capability of US INDOPACOM in the Indian Ocean region, the USA and India must collaborate to build and strengthen military capability in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI).

⁶ Sen. Joe Wilson, Bill : 'United States - India enhanced cooperation act of 2019', H. Res.2123, 116th Cong., US Congress, (April 08, 2019), accessed April 25, 2019, [www.GovTrack.us](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr2123), (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr2123>)



Indo – US Partnership in the INDOPACOM

A peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific is the harbinger of future unhindered growth of the world's economy in general and the US' economy in particular. While understanding its relevance the following merit attention. First, the US conducted more than \$1.8 trillion in two-way goods trade with Indo-Pacific nations in 2017 and more than \$1.3 trillion by the third

quarter of 2018⁷. Second, in 2017, U.S. foreign direct investment in the region reached \$940 billion – more than doubling since 2007⁸. Third, the Indo-Pacific is home to half of the 20 fastest growing economies and; the Indo-Pacific currently contains over a third of global GDP and 60% of the global GDP growth⁹. Fourth, by 2030, 65% of the world's middle class will reside in the Indo-Pacific, representing an unrivaled amount of purchasing power¹⁰. These factors establish the indisputable significance of a 'free and open' Indo-Pacific region to the world's economy and provide a base to shape thoughts to improve its regional security.

The largest contributors of the 'free and open' Indo-Pacific have been the countries in the region. While the existing order is being threatened by extraterritorial claims by China¹¹, it is important for the US INDOPACOM to recognize its assets and liabilities in region and partner with a constellation of like-minded nations to strengthen the US' vision. India, as one of the like-minded nations, has become the US' major defense partner within the past decade¹². Such a gradual transition has come through an era where India has established itself as a non-aligned

⁷ Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) report, *US-APEC trade facts*, Office of the US Trade representative, accessed Apr 23, 2019, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/japan-korea-apec/apec/us-apec-trade-facts>.

⁸ US Department of State report, *Diplomacy in Action*, accessed May 05, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/11/287433.htm>.

⁹ The World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects - Regional Outlooks- East Asia and Pacific*, World Bank Data, accessed May 01, 2019, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects>.

¹⁰ International Monetary Fund(IMF), *Regional Economic Outlook : Asia Pacific*, accessed Apr 30, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/APAC/Issues/2018/10/05/areo1012>.

¹¹ Council on Foreign relations, *China's Maritime Disputes*, accessed Mar 15, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/interactives/chinas-maritime-disputes#!/chinas-maritime-disputes?cid=otr-marketing_use-china_sea_InfoGuide.

¹² US Embassy and Consulates in India Press release, *US - India Major defence partnership*, accessed May 01, 2019 <https://in.usembassy.gov/u-s-india-major-defense-partnership-highlighted-at-defexpo-2018>.

nation since the beginning of Cold war¹³. With diverging influence from Russia and the USA, India has always played a middle path to maintain cordial relations with both superpowers for more than half a century. The tensions between Russian and American influence on India was even felt during the recent US sanctions under the ‘2017 Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act’ (CAATSA) over India for purchasing Russian S 400 missiles¹⁴. Notwithstanding these predicaments, India rose in stature and credibility to be included in the US’ tier 1 list of major defense partners¹⁵. Over the years, the USA has correctly identified its major defense partner in India, to enhance its regional military cooperation.

The Indo - US strategic partnership continues to grow at a monumental pace. Notably, on 08 Apr 19, a bill was passed in the House of the Representatives which is later slated to become the “United States - India enhanced cooperation act of 2019¹⁶”. This pending bill states the policy of the United States to continue to enhance defense and security cooperation with India in order to advance United States interests in South Asia and greater Indo-Asia-Pacific regions¹⁷. The recently concluded Communication, Compatibility, and Security Agreement (COMCASA) with India is the first of its kind, which allows Indian military to procure US cryptologic

¹³ Rajen Harshe, “India's Non-Alignment: An Attempt at Conceptual Reconstruction”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, JSTOR , Vol 25, No7 (February 17 - 24, 1990): pp 399 - 405, accessed Apr 15, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4395968?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

¹⁴ Vikas Pandey, “S 400 : India missile defence purchase in US - Russia crosshairs”, *BBC News*, Oct 05, 2018, accessed May 01, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-45757556>.

¹⁵ Ankit Panda, “Strategic Trade Authorisation - A major philip for India’s ‘Major Defence Partner’ status with the US”, *The Diplomat, Asia - Defence* (August 01, 2018), accessed May 02, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/strategic-trade-authorization-a-filip-for-indias-major-defense-partner-status-with-the-us/>.

¹⁶ Sen. Joe Wilson, Bill : ‘United States - India enhanced cooperation act of 2019’, H. Res.2123, 116th Cong., US Congress, (April 08, 2019), accessed April 25, 2019, www.GovTrack.us, (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr2123>).

¹⁷ Ibid.

equipment¹⁸. India had also operationalized the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, which enables US Navy to replenish supplies from Indian Navy logistics platforms¹⁹. An all-time high in defense sales is evident with India operating US origin platforms such as P8s, C130Js, C-17s, AH-64s, CH-47s, and M-777 howitzers²⁰. The sale of MH-60Rs (Navy multi-role helicopters) to a tune of USD 2.1 billion in Apr 2019 also stands testimony to the unprecedented growing military partnership between India and the US.

However, looking through a strategic prism, such operational level partnership may not translate into a much needed strategic level cooperation with potential ally/partner in the Indopacific as elucidated in the US National Security Strategy 2018. This scenario encourages a search for a common ground which can dovetail mutual needs and capabilities between Indian and the USA. Such a common ground exists and has been comfortably forgotten, partly due to India's timidity and largely due to strategic myopia in comprehending the strategic relevance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI). The islands' strategic significance in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) has been underplayed by India's policy of 'Masterly inactivity and benign neglect'. While contemplating on the actions to advance the strategic relationship, the United States - India enhanced cooperation bill clearly articulates that the United States should seek to enhance the capabilities of the United States and India to address emerging common threats, increase

¹⁸ News Desk team, "India and the US sign the landmark COMOCASA agreement", *Geospatial World* (Sep 10, 2018), accessed Apr 29, 2019, <https://www.geospatialworld.net/news/india-and-the-us-signed-a-landmark-comcasa-agreement/>.

¹⁹ Government of India, "India and the United States Sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)" *Public Information Bureau*, Govt of India, Ministry of Defense (Aug 30, 2016), accessed April 24, 2019, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/mbErel.aspx?relid=149322>.

²⁰ Jim Garamone, "US Officials seek to boost arms sales in India", *US DoD News*, (September 6, 2018), accessed April 29, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1621762/us-officials-seek-to-boost-arms-sales-to-india/>.

security cooperation, and expand joint military exercises²¹. To enhance mutual capabilities to meet the rising challenges in the Indo - Asia - Pacific regions, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) provide the apt avenue to boost such military understanding.

Strategic Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) lies in its proximity to the Straits of Malacca. The ANI consist of Northern and southern group of islands (NGI & SGI) separated by the ten-degree channel (latitude 10 deg N). With 90 % trade by value and 70 % trade by volume²², the Malacca Strait is the most significant ocean highway in the world catering for energy requirements of China and South East Asian countries. The southernmost habitable islands in the SGI lie 110 nm from the island of Sabang²³, Indonesia, across the entry/exit of Malacca Straits. In military perspective, the SGI can be used as an access denial asset with naval bases or in itself as a land-based anti-ship missile base which could practically seal the entry and exit of the world's busiest and expensive choke point. With credible information on traffic, marine radar and automatic information system (AIS) selective targeting of the merchant marine and naval platforms is feasible considering the range of conventional missiles. The proximity of these islands to the straits of Malacca poses an existential threat to the Chinese energy supply lines, 80 % of which flows from the Gulf through these straits²⁴. With the

²¹ Indrees Ali and Sanjeev Miglani, "India US signal military communication pact, plan more exercises" *Reuters - World News*, (September 6, 2018), accessed April 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/news/archive/worldNews>.

²² Marcus Hand, "EXCLUSIVE: Malacca Straits VLCC traffic doubles in a decade as shipping traffic hits all time high in 2017", *Sea Trade Maritime News* (19 Feb 2018), accessed April 27, 2019, <http://www.seatrade-maritime.com/news/asia/exclusive-malacca-straits-vlcc-traffic-doubles-in-a-decade-as-shipping-traffic-hits-all-time-high-in-2017.html>.

²³ Google Maps application, accessed May 02, 2019

²⁴ Chen, S. "China's Self-Extrication from the "Malacca Dilemma" and its Implications" *International Journal of China Studies*, Vol 1:1, pp.2, (Aug 2010), accessed April 29, 2019,

US Military's Pacific chain in place²⁵, a military capability build up in ANI will pose an inescapable critical vulnerability to China. In the run-up to war, China's energy flow through Malacca will be open to interdiction. The ANI, if developed with Indo-US military collaboration, shall pose a deeper threat to China's *Malacca dilemma*²⁶ and make it more relevant.

China's '*Malacca Dilemma*' emanates from its dependence on the Malacca Straits for its energy inflow²⁷. Multiple possible alternatives also exist, which wisely China has persistently strived to establish and exploit (see map). First, the proposed Kra canal²⁸ (across Thailand, Kra isthmus) ; Second - the oil pipeline from the west coast of Myanmar to south mainland China²⁹; Third - transportation overland through Thailand³⁰ ; Fourth - the under construction pipeline from Pakistan³¹ port of Gwadar to west mainland China; and fifth - Dawei³² port in south Myanmar for a pipeline to mainland China. If observed closely, four out of the five alternatives lie within the geographic reach of the ANI and naval platforms (sea and air) based on these islands. A formidable naval presence in these islands shall keep all these alternate routes leading to mainland China in check and can affect sustainable and enduring sea denial capability. This stands as a stronger premise to build the ANI through US - India collaboration to keep China in a strategic stronghold. The fifth option of energy flow through Gwadar, Pakistan is the only option

<https://www.um.edu.my/research-and-community/information-for-researchers/centers-of-research/institute-of-china-studies/publication/international-journal-of-china-studies-ijcs>.

²⁵ Ben Kesling "U.S. Military Refocuses on Pacific to Counter Chinese Ambitions" *The Wall Street Journal* (April 03, 2019), accessed April 25, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-military-refocuses-on-pacific-to-counter-chinese-ambitions-11554292920>.

²⁶ B.A Hamza "Alleviating China's Malacca Dilemma", *Institute for Security and Development policy* (March 13, 2017), accessed May 05, 2019, <http://isdpc.eu/alleviating-chinas-malacca-dilemma/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

out of ANI's reach and can be countered through other means of national power. Hence, the Chinese '*Malacca dilemma*' could be exacerbated by making ANI capable of maritime interdiction and staging military platforms. It may be safely assumed that such predicament on China's part has influenced its submarine deployments off the Andaman group of islands on multiple occasions³³. The US INDOPACOM and India, however, gain indisputable military advantage through such military capability enhancement in the ANI.

The military boost to ANI through Indo- US collaborative effort will provide advantages to both US INDOPACOM and India. The US INDOPACOM faces tough gray zone military standoff against China in the South China Sea (SCS) dispute and associated FONOPS off Taiwan Strait. Even if China may gain strategic footholds in the SCS in the near future, its vital access route remains through the Malacca. Therefore, China has its vulnerabilities in the Indian ocean. According to Sithara Fernando³⁴, China's most important maritime concerns are oceanic trade transit points for western China, the sea lanes connecting the Straits of Hormuz and the Straits of Malacca which carry its energy imports. China's trade, investment, energy, territory and territorial seas are intimately linked to the Indian Ocean. It therefore strategically looks to the Indian Ocean to avoid further entanglement in the western Pacific and avoid hostile maritime theatre dominated by the US³⁵. The potential US influenced military posture in the western

³³ Thomson, "With Chinese Submarines Spotted Near Andamans, India Turns To US", *Reuters* - NDTV India News (May 01, 2016), accessed May 05, 2019, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/wary-of-chinas-indian-ocean-activities-us-india-discuss-anti-submarine-warfare-1401595>.

³⁴ Sithara Fernando, "China's Maritime relations with South East Asia : From confrontation to cooperation - Part One", *Future Directions International* (Nov 24, 2010), accessed May 02, 2019, <http://futuresdirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/1290577738-FDI%20Strategic%20Analysis%20Paper%20-%2024%20November%202010.pdf>

³⁵ Sithara Fernando, "China's Maritime relations with South East Asia : From confrontation to cooperation - Part One", *Future Directions International* (Nov 24, 2010), accessed May 02, 2019, <http://futuresdirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/1290577738-FDI%20Strategic%20Analysis%20Paper%20-%2024%20November%202010.pdf>

approaches to Malacca may force China to the negotiating table even in gray zone operations. Additionally, India can have a counteroffensive strategy through ANI to balance its disadvantages in the land borders shared with China in the north and Pakistan in the West.

The ANI provides an apt opportunity for joint power projection in the Indian Ocean region. With already established airstrips in some of these islands and suitable beaching grounds, the ANI provides a perfect nodal center for Human assistance and Disaster relief operations (HADR) operations. Considering the geographical proximity to the countries in the region, non-stop UAV operations can be planned to obtain all time Maritime domain awareness. If the ante can be stepped further, these islands can be used to stage Indian and US nuclear weapons to provide an umbrella against Chinese aggressive posture towards countries in the region. A warship is known to be the symbol of a nation's diplomatic tool. With ANI at such geographical advantage, it can be leveraged as an 'unsinkable carrier' to project Indo - US joint diplomacy through soft and hard power projection across the seas.

Indo – US Partnership through ANI

The ANI provides a perfect opportunity to dovetail India's needs and the US' capability. India does not have any major offshore military base and continues to maintain a relatively small joint military force in the ANI³⁶. The US is rich in experience of establishing and maintaining military bases in both US non-mainland territories and overseas foreign locations. While establishing a credible military presence as this paper proposes, India can learn from US' expertise in operating bases like the Pearl Harbour (Hawaii), Guam, Midway Atoll and Diego Garcia. Considering the geography of the ANI, the islands can be best suited for staging submarine operations for maritime interdiction, sea denial and sea control operations. To date,

³⁶ Press release on Andaman and Nicobar islands, *Press Information Bureau*, Ministry of Defence, India, (Jan 18, 2019), accessed May 02, 2020, <http://www.pib.nic.in/>.

submarines do not operate from ANI due to lack of submarine specific maintenance facilities³⁷. However, owing to their volcanic origins, the ANI has sufficient depths to safely operate nuclear submarines (SSNs and SSBNs). India will surely look forward to building its submarine staging facilities in the ANI, to operate their indigenously built Arihant class of nuclear submarines³⁸. The Indo-US partnership is at this cusp of strategic growth which is based on capability development and not merely capability sale.

Traditionally, India has looked up to the Soviets and now Russia to build up long term capability³⁹. This includes India's nuclear submarine programme, leasing of nuclear submarines to build training capability, India's cruise missile programme named "BRAHMOS" and development of India's present aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya. Objectively, the US, at present, has a valid opportunity to be a credible partner in India's growth in the region. Even if India fails to shed its non - alignment mantle, it is poised to build a long-lasting partnership with the US to serve mutual interests and mutual national security threats. Such enhanced partnership is also evidenced from the 2015 Indo - US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) which enables pursuance of joint development of four Pathfinder projects and cooperation on the aircraft carrier and jet engine technologies⁴⁰. The shift in India's preference to US hardware is also evidenced from the construction of the latest India's frigates with US private companies' technical support. The US made LM2500 engines are a mainstay in the CODOG (Combination

³⁷ Indian Navy official Website, accessed May 01, 2019, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/commands>.

³⁸ "Submarine open data", *Naval technology* (online magazine), accessed May 01, 2019, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/arihant-class/>.

³⁹ Franz-Stephan Gary "India Russia Defence Cooperation" *The Diplomat Online* (Apr 30, 2019), accessed May 02, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/tag/india-russia-defense-cooperation/>.

⁴⁰ US DoD Fact sheet : "US-India Defence relationship", US Department of Defence, (<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/US-IND-Fact-Sheet.pdf>)

of Diesel and Gas) propulsion of the latest Indian frigates and destroyers and preferred with demonstrative peak performance⁴¹.

The Indo - US military partnership extends beyond the realms of the conventional battlespace. The Malacca straits continue to be a hotbed of piracy⁴². The ANI provides a suitable location to operate drones and UAVs to maintain continuous Maritime Domain Awareness and staging bases of anti-piracy operations. The rise of VEOs⁴³ in south Asia is a common security concern for both India and the US. The recent growth of ISIS militants in south Asia and the danger they pose was evident from the recent attacks in Sri Lanka during Easter day Sunday suicide bombings⁴⁴. An untethered ANI may provide safe haven to such extremist elements and pose a threat to all in the region. The US- India combined efforts to root terrorism from the region is possible through ANI by raising regional cooperative engagement with unfettered access to each other's information through a regional information and intelligence fusion center (RIIFC) with representatives from all partners in the region. The scope of ANI in providing succor to regional peace and security initiative is vast. Thus, an Indo - US partnership would accelerate the progress which shall eventually make the US INDOPACOM relevant to the rising challenges in the region.

⁴¹ GE Marine solutions, India “*GE to Supply LM2500 Gas Turbine Auxiliary Equipment for Indian Navy's P17A Frigates*” (Feb 20, 2019), accessed May 02, 2019, <https://www.gemarinesolutions.com/content/ge-supply-lm2500-gas-turbine-auxiliary-equipment-indian-navy%E2%80%99s-p17a-frigates>.

⁴² Lim Min Zang, “More piracy, robbery cases in Malacca and Singapore straits in 2017, as in rest of Asia”, *The Straits Times* (January 16, 2018), accessed May 02, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-piracy-robbery-cases-in-malacca-and-singapore-straits-in-2017-as-in-rest-of-asia>.

⁴³ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Paradox of Progress” *Global Trends* - ODNI (Current), accessed May 05, 2019, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/the-next-five-years/south-asia>,

⁴⁴ News articles on Sri Lanka bombings - Al Jazeera, (May 02, 2019), accessed May 05, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/events/sri-lanka-bombings.html>.

Conclusion

The 'Look East' policy of India channels its strategic priority towards countries in south and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, China slowly but steadily within the garb of 'gray zone' statecraft shifts its core area 'westwards'. India is surely and swiftly shifting from its policy of 'Masterly *Inactivity and Benign Neglect*' to a policy of '*Proactive development*' with a forward strategic policy in mind⁴⁵. The inflection point in the power competition in the region has arrived which calls for a vibrant INDOPACOM with participation from countries with similar value systems, security challenges and concerns. The US and India being global and regional powers respectively, need to play a proactive role in strengthening the 'rule based world order' in the region to sustain world growth. While India leads the non-aligned countries in the region, its security imperatives make it vulnerable to rising challenges in the region. Concurrently, the US has rededicated its Pacific command as INDOPACOM to reinstate its priorities in the region whilst the tumultuous power competition of the world takes shape. While China's rise is no longer guaranteed to be peaceful, there exists an urgent need for the counties relevant to this part of the world to join together to ensure harmony, peace and subvert any attempts by a self-assertive China to topple the delicate peace and global economy. While avenues exist for regional, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, India and the US being the leading powers in the region must collaborate effort to improve the military capability of the Andaman and Nicobar islands. While enhancing the military foothold of US INDOPACOM, the effort should be aimed to deter China from further predatory activities in the South China Sea by projecting alternative vulnerability in the western Malacca to its energy sources. Such a military enhancement also gives adequate control over the entire Bay of Bengal with suitable naval force and long-range air

⁴⁵ Sanat Kaul, "Andaman and Nicobar islands - India's untapped Strategic Assets", Institute for Defence studies and Analyses, New Delhi, (Aug 2000) , pp 3.

force assets⁴⁶. The present case is far from the potential of the ANI. While, such effort shall increase the military capability of India, to counter its terrestrial disadvantages with China, it shall provide equal leverage to the US in projecting power in the entire IOR, Andaman Sea and exercise the option of sea denial if the need arises.

⁴⁶ Late K.M Pannikar, India's Ambassador to China (Pre and Post-Communist regime), "India's Policy towards China", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Indian Political Science Association, April-June 1968), pp.143-150, accessed May 02, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41854262>.

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