

China's Maritime Strategy and Its Strategic Implications for India In The Indo-Pacific

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Abstract. China's evolving maritime policy has changed the geostrategic environment of the Indo-Pacific and has put pressure on India to adjust its maritime security strategy. There has been increasing academic focus on the China-India maritime competition, but there has been scant exploration of their strategic interplay in an integrated analytical framework. The study thus uses Lykke's Means-Ways-Ends paradigm to analyse China's Maritime Strategy and its implications for India's Maritime Security Strategy in the Indo-Pacific. A qualitative research design is employed, with the use of documentary and content analysis of government policy documents, defence white papers, naval doctrines and relevant academic literature. The results show that China's maritime grand strategy is coherent, as it combines naval might, economic statecraft, technological innovation and diplomatic engagement to achieve its regional influence and long-term strategic goals. India has responded with a calibrated balancing approach through navy modernisation, strategic autonomy and enhanced regional cooperation under the Indian Maritime Security approach 2015, SAGAR, the Act East Policy and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The study suggests that the maritime competition between China and India is a multifaceted strategic balancing rather than a frontal clash. It also reinforces the Means-Ways-Ends paradigm as an appropriate analytical framework to explain the relationship between country capabilities, operational tactics and political aims in the growing Indo-Pacific maritime order.

Keywords China; India; Indo-Pacific; maritime strategy; means-ways-ends

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the defining geopolitical and maritime arena of the twenty-first century, where economic dynamism converges with strategic rivalry. In this vast maritime continuum from the eastern coast of Africa to the western Pacific, China's maritime strategy has invoked a regional power competition. Since the late 1990s, Beijing's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) modernisation, maritime infrastructure expansion, and institutional activism have redefined how regional powers, particularly India to conceptualise maritime security and its strategy. This study examines how China's evolving maritime posture embodied in the PLAN, port diplomacy, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reshapes India's strategic calculus in the Indo-Pacific. Relating the means-ways-ends framework (Lykke, 1989), it analyses China's maritime strategy through its instruments of power ("means"), operational approaches ("ways"), and political objectives ("ends"), associating theories with empirical evidence to explain India's rejoinder and efforts for equilibrium.

China's maritime consciousness evolved from a continental mindset to a seaward orientation after Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s. The National Defence White Papers (1998–2020) show this shift from "offshore defence" to "far-seas protection," marking the PLAN's transformation from coastal defence to global projection (SCIO, 2019). Under President Xi Jinping, the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) from Gwadar and Hambantota to Kyaukpyu and Djibouti symbolises China's dual-use infrastructure linking commercial and naval networks (Kaplan, 2010; Holmes & Yoshihara, 2011). The construction of overseas ports,

acquisitions of port terminals, and engaging in naval escort mission underscores Beijing's pursuit of maritime dominance (Zhao, 2018). These developments regulate maritime power within China's broader national revitalization strategy.

Similarly, India's maritime trade of 68 percentage from 95 percent of its overall trade dependent on seaborne routes (Ministry of Shipping India, 2019) which lead to the growing concern of strategic vulnerability. PLAN assertiveness in the SCS and expansion to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), flanking its military civil fusion projects, intensifies structural level pressures on India's maritime realm (Brewster, 2014; Khurana, 2016). In response, India formulates a new strategy of *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015)* that identifies maritime security as pivotal to national power, security and regional stability (Indian Navy, 2015). Theoretically, these dynamics align with neo-realist and classical-realist perspectives linking state behaviour to systemic power distribution (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). This analogy entails that sea power influences both territorial control and regional normative compliance (Kaplan (2010). Mahan (1890) and Corbett (1911) viewed maritime power as essential to national greatness, an idea internalised in China's *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), which point maritime security as the "strategic pivot of China's future development" (Nan Li, 2014).

China's expansion presents India with dual challenges. Strategically, the "String of Pearls" (Pehrson, 2006) constrains India's manoeuvrability across the IOR; politically, it drives diversification through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and logistics accords with the United States, Japan, Australia, and France (Pant & Joshi, 2020). These initiatives align with India's transition from continental defence to oceanic engagement under the Act East Policy (AEP) and the SAGAR vision announced by Prime Minister Modi in 2015. China's BRI maritime projects which exceed US\$200 billion intended to govern Indo-Pacific regional sea borne logistics (OECD, 2022), while India's outreach through the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and leadership in the IOR through Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) demonstrate strategic adaptation by both powers (Scott, 2019). Integrating all these dynamics through the means-ways-ends framework, the study intends to explain how China's pursuit of maritime primacy catalyses India's strategic recalibration in the evolving Indo-Pacific order.

Strategic Theory

Strategic theory connects political objectives and national power means to attain them. Lykke (1989) presents a means-ways-ends paradigm that describes strategy as the alignment of resources (means), operational procedures (ways), and desired objectives (ends) in order to ensure coherence between intent and execution. It is based on classical realism, with its view of war as the instrumental use of engagements for political goal (Clausewitz, 1832), revised by Lykke (1989) to emphasise the balance of ends, ways and means moderated by risk. Such a balance is crucial in the maritime environment, where an effective strategy will need to integrate naval, economic, and diplomatic tools in a vast array of sectors (Mahan, 1890; Corbett, 1911; Till, 2013). This logic is translated in China's maritime strategy: its aims, regional hegemony and secure energy routes which govern its ways of naval modernisation, port expansion and maritime diplomacy, sustained by means of economic power, shipbuilding and technology. This triadic coherence is entrenched in China's Military Strategy (SCIO, 2015) and the Science of Military Strategy (2013) which connect "maritime rights protection" to national rejuvenation.

Means: The Instruments of China's Maritime Power

China means equals building the PLAN's capabilities, its industrial capacity, and its economic instruments. The PLAN currently has more than 370 combat vessels, exceeding the U.S. Navy (U.S. Department of Defence, 2023). The PLAN's capabilities range from Type-055 destroyers and aircraft carriers to nuclear submarines, supported by a huge shipbuilding complex (Cole, 2016). China has developed dual-use ports under the BRI namely Gwadar, Hambantota, Kyaukpyu and Djibouti generating nodes for trade and military use (Ohashi, 2018; Zhao, 2018). Economic tools such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) Shipping Group are also expanding to reach global supply chains

(Chatzky & McBride, 2020). Innovation in unmanned systems, BeiDou navigation Satellite System (BDS), and cyber capabilities are strengthening MDA (Erickson, 2019). This is to maintain China's long-term presence in the Indo-Pacific.

Ways: The Operational and Diplomatic Pathways

China's ways combine operational reach and diplomatic sway. This doctrine transition from "offshore defence" to "far-seas protection" (SCIO, 2019) has allowed for persistent deployments from the Gulf of Aden to the IOR. PLAN is used to normalise blue water operations through anti-piracy patrols, carrier task groups and humanitarian missions (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2011). Diplomatically, it promotes "win-win cooperation" via maritime partnerships, the China-ASEAN maritime Cooperation Fund and the MSR Forums (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). At the same time, it undertakes coercive measures in the SCS through maritime militia, coast guard incursions, and artificial islands to establish control (CFR, 2021). They mix soft and strong balancing measures to expand influence without outright conflict.

Ends: The Political and Strategic Objectives

China's maritime ends include the protection of sea lines of communication, the assertion of sovereignty, and regional pre-eminence. Energy channels are protected to sustain its export based economy, while control of the SCS is couched as a sovereign priority. China's aims go beyond material security to shaping regional norms and institutions, positioning itself as a rule-making power in line with Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" of national rejuvenation and maritime superpower status by mid-century (Xi, 2017). But the desire for normative and strategic leadership presents security problems for neighbours, especially India, whose maritime interests are increasingly converging with China's expanding sphere of influence.

Table 1. China's maritime strategy = ends + ways + means

Ends	Ways (how)	Means (with what)
Consolidate sovereignty claims; deter external intervention; secure SLOCs; project global influence	Layered presence; "salami slicing" and administrative control; maritime law enforcement leading; naval reserve; far-seas escorts and port diplomacy	PLAN (carriers, SSNs/SSKs, large destroyers, amphibious); CCG; PAFMM; dual-use ports/BRI; space-cyber-ISR; ocean survey fleet; legal/administrative tools (Coast Guard Law, Sansha City)

Source: SCIO (2015; 2019), Erickson (2019), Holmes and Yoshihara (2011), and Yoshihara and Holmes (2018)

India's Counter-Alignment of Means, Ways, and Ends

India's strategic response is a comprehensive alignment of means, ways and ends. Its means comprise naval modernisation, expanded coastal surveillance, and logistics agreements with key partners such as the United States (LEMOA 2016), France (2018), and Japan (2020). The ways are reflected in mission-based deployments (MBDs), multilateral exercises such as Malabar and MILAN, and diplomatic mechanisms including the IPOI and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) (Brewster, 2018; Pant & Joshi, 2020). The ends are articulated through the SAGAR vision; "Security and Growth for All in the Region", which emphasises freedom of navigation and a rules-based maritime order (Modi, 2015). India's maritime posture balances deterrence and cooperation, recognising that Indo-Pacific stability depends on managing China's ambitions through collective regional strategies. Using the means ways ends lens, India and China both align resources and objectives to gain advantage without confrontation, framing the analysis that follows.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research design that uses documentary and content analysis, this study explores China's maritime strategy and its implications for India in the Indo-Pacific. The approach lends itself to interpretations

of strategic aim, doctrinal change, and geopolitical implications through textual and policy based evidence. This paper examines the impact of China's maritime means, operational ways and strategic aims on India's maritime posture by employing primary and secondary sources. This shift from offshore defence to far seas protection is shown in important Chinese publications, such as China's Military Strategy (2015), China's National Defence in the New Era (SCIO, 2019) and the Science of Military Strategy (Academy of Military Sciences, 2013), embedding maritime power in national rejuvenation (Nan Li, 2014). Xi Jinping's statements on the BRI and the MSR further demonstrate the coming together of economic connectivity and strategic ambition. Indian sources such as the Indian Maritime Doctrine (2004), India's Maritime Military Strategy (2007) and IMSS 2015 demonstrate India's transition from an IOR-centric to an Indo-Pacific-centric perspective with an emphasis on partnerships (Indian Navy, 2015). Ministry of Defence Reports (2019–2023) and AEP papers provide further policy grounding. The theoretical depth is augmented by secondary literature from Brewster (2014), Khurana (2007), Pant and Joshi (2020), Medcalf (2020), and Holmes and Yoshihara (2018), together with statistics from CFR, the ASEAN Secretariat, IMF, and OECD. The study employs Lykke's (1989) means-ways-ends framework to relate capabilities to strategic conduct, providing an integrated knowledge of maritime strategy in the shifting security environment of the Indo-Pacific.

The Findings

This paper shows how China's growing maritime policy has changed the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific, and is the major external factor driving India's adaptations to its maritime security. Qualitative analysis of official Chinese and Indian policy documents, naval doctrines, strategic white papers and contemporary scholarly literature yields three principal findings. The results here directly answer the purpose of studying China's maritime strategy and its strategic implications for India's maritime security strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

The first finding shows that China's maritime policy is not a loose collection of uncoordinated military or economic activities, but a unified grand strategy with a consistent political aim (ends), operational approach (ways), and national capability (means). Analysis reveals that Beijing has been able to link navy modernisation, economic statecraft, diplomatic engagement and technology advance to attain long-term maritime dominance in the Indo-Pacific (SCIO, 2015; SCIO, 2019; Lykke, 1989). China's continued growth of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) backed by one of the world's largest shipbuilding industries, forms the military basis for further maritime activities beyond its local coastal seas (U.S. Department of Defence, 2023; Cole, 2016). Simultaneously, China has managed to develop a wide range of commercial and logistic networks in strategic locations such as Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) (Ohashi, 2018; Zhao, 2018; Rolland, 2017). While these facilities are officially designated as commercial infrastructure, the findings indicate that they greatly expand China's strategic reach by improving marine logistics, naval access, and regional influence (Brewster, 2014; Pehrson, 2006).

The analysis also reveals that China's maritime strategy is not only focused on naval buildup but also includes technological innovation such as satellite-based maritime domain awareness, BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), cyber capabilities, unmanned systems and civil-military fusion (Erickson, 2019; Chatzky & McBride, 2020). Together, these capabilities enhance China's ability to defend important SLOCs, protect overseas economic interests, and project maritime power throughout the Indo-Pacific (SCIO, 2019; Li, 2014). Thus, China's maritime strategy is the outcome of a holistic strategic architecture whereby military, economic, diplomatic and technological instruments work in concert to achieve long-term geopolitical objectives.

The second findings shows that there has been a paradigm shift in India's maritime security strategy due to China's increasing maritime influence. Rather of formal military alliances or open conflict, India has opted for a path of strategic autonomy, cooperative security and calibrated balancing (Indian Navy, 2015; Pant & Joshi, 2020). The analysis indicates that India's Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS 2015) is a comprehensive response to China's expanding maritime footprint, along with the Security

and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision and the Act East Policy (AEP) (Indian Navy, 2015; Modi, 2015). These strategic initiatives have been complemented with navy modernisation, greater marine domain awareness, mission-based deployments and stronger maritime alliances across the Indo-Pacific (Brewster, 2018; Sakhuja, 2019).

The findings further suggest that India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), logistics-sharing agreements and maritime information-sharing mechanisms are indicative of a conscious strategy to strengthen regional partnerships while retaining independent strategic decision-making (Pant & Joshi, 2020; Scott, 2019). India has not abandoned its long held strategic autonomy but recalibrated its maritime posture through a mix of deterrence, diplomacy and global engagement. This balancing strategy enables India to offset China's expanding influence without the need for formal alliance arrangements (Metcalf, 2020; Brewster, 2018).

The third finding is that the Indo-Pacific has become a vibrant field of strategic competition where influence is more and more defined by the combination of military capacity, economic connectivity, technological innovation and diplomatic engagement than by naval power alone (Metcalf, 2020; Scott, 2019). The analysis demonstrates India's interactive strategic reaction to China's maritime development leading to a developing pattern of competitive balancing rather than direct military confrontation. In response to China's expanding naval presence, overseas infrastructure investments, artificial island construction, and growing maritime diplomacy, India has enhanced regional cooperation, improved its maritime surveillance capabilities, and built deeper defence ties with like-minded states in the Indo-Pacific (Brewster, 2018; Yoshihara & Holmes, 2018; SCIO, 2019).

Findings also suggest that technology competition has become an increasingly essential factor of maritime rivalry. China's investment in artificial intelligence, autonomous maritime systems, satellite surveillance and civil-military integration has accelerated India's technological modernisation through efforts such as greater maritime domain awareness, White Shipping Agreements, the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and greater cooperation with strategic partners on emerging defence technologies (Erickson, 2019; Sakhuja, 2019; Pant & Joshi, 2020). Taken together, these trends suggest that the essence of modern Indo-Pacific competition is one of constant strategic adjustment rather than outright military conflict. Both China and India increasingly deploy integrated national power including military assets, economic instruments, diplomatic endeavours and technical innovation to secure the national interests while managing regional rivalry (Brewster, 2018; Metcalf, 2020; Pant & Joshi, 2020).

The results, overall, support three major conclusions. First, China's maritime policy is a coherent and integrated grand plan, that is, it successfully aligns national capabilities, operational techniques and strategic objectives through the means-ways-ends construct (Lykke, 1989; SCIO, 2015; SCIO, 2019). Second, India's maritime response indicates a pragmatic policy of strategic balancing based on maritime modernisation, regional relationships and strategic autonomy rather than formal alliance dependence (Indian Navy, 2015; Pant & Joshi, 2020; Metcalf, 2020). Third, the Indo-Pacific has become a maritime geopolitical construct of competitive balancing, technological competition, and multidimensional strategic interaction, where influence is exercised increasingly through the coordinated use of military, economic, diplomatic, and technological power (Scott, 2019; Metcalf, 2020; Brewster, 2018). These findings offer an empirical basis for the Discussion section below, which critically reads the findings through Lykke's means-ways-ends framework and contrasts them with the broader literature on maritime strategy, strategic balance and Indo-Pacific security.

Discussion

China's Maritime Strategy: An Integrated Construct of Means, Ways, and Ends

China's maritime policy is a consistent mix of strategic aims, operational procedures and national capacities in accordance with the means-ways-ends paradigm of Lykke (1989). Rather than incremental naval modernisation or economic expansion, Beijing has intentionally mixed military, diplomatic, technological and economic weapons to ensure long-term maritime influence throughout the Indo-Pacific. This strategic development indicates that China's maritime expansion is not simply a series of ad hoc policy initiatives but

part and parcel of a broader grand strategy. This interpretation is compatible with Lykke's (1989) argument that successful strategy requires the balanced alignment of political objectives (ends), operational techniques (ways) and national resources (means). This strategic logic is put into practice through the expanding People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) of China, the dual-use infrastructure development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the promotion of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) (SCIO, 2015; SCIO, 2019). This study, unlike those that focus only on China's growing navy, shows that China's maritime policy is effective because it integrates military capability, economic statecraft, diplomatic engagement and technology innovation simultaneously.

This strategic evolution adds greater support to classical naval theory. Mahan (1890) argues that control of the sea is the foundation of national wealth and power. Mahanian sea power ideas of overseas logistics infrastructure, protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and continued growth of the Chinese navy are a modern implementation. Corbett (1911) also stressed that maritime strategy needed to combine naval operations with political goals and commercial interests. This larger understanding is reflected in China's current maritime stance, in which economic progress is linked to geopolitical clout through the combination of its commercial connectedness through the BRI with strategic presence in overseas maritime infrastructure. The current research also lends credence to the notion of Holmes and Yoshihara (2011) that China's maritime strategy is an application of classical sea power ideas to twenty-first century geopolitical conditions. China's growing navy deployments, foreign port access, anti-piracy operations and institutional maritime diplomacy are obvious evidence of their reading of China's shift from coastal defence to continuous blue-water operations. Erickson (2019) concurs that civil-military fusion, marine militia and technical innovation have become key tools of China's maritime supremacy. This study builds on these insights by showing that these diverse instruments do not operate independently but within a coherent strategic architecture driven by well-defined political aims.

The evidence is consistent with the neo-realist claim that states are always trying to better their relative capacities in an anarchic international system (Waltz 1979). China's maritime expansion is an attempt to minimise its strategic vulnerability and enhance its relative position in the regional balance of power. Consistent with Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realism, China's quest for maritime supremacy through naval modernisation, strategic port development and growing regional influence is indicative of the attitude of a developing power aiming to maximise its strategic position. Similarly, Posen (2003) argues that control over vital marine regions strengthens a state's ability to project power beyond its local territorial bounds. Empirical evidence of China's increasing network of dual-use infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific strongly supports this argument. Overall, the study indicates that China's maritime strategy cannot be reduced to naval modernisation or economic expansion. Instead, it is a complex blend of military might, economic connection, technical innovation and diplomatic engagement working inside a cohesive means methods objectives design that aims to recalibrate the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific.

India's Strategic Balancing and Maritime Recalibration

India's marine response is one of calibrated balancing rather than reliance on formal alliances. As China's maritime footprint has expanded, New Delhi has broadened its maritime security doctrine from the conventional Indian Ocean focus to a wider Indo-Pacific perspective. "India has not given up strategic autonomy, but has enhanced regional partnerships while retaining independent foreign policy decision making. This interpretation is consistent with Pant and Joshi's (2020) argument that India's current maritime strategy is a manifestation of pragmatic balancing against China's growing regional footprint. Likewise, Brewster (2018) contends that India is increasingly relying on marine ties, logistics agreements and naval cooperation to counter China's growing strategic footprint without official military alliances. The current study supports such views by showing that India's balancing strategy includes military modernisation, maritime diplomacy, technology collaboration and multilateral participation under a unified strategic framework.

India's maritime recalibration also corresponds strongly with Medcalf's (2020) conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific as an integrated strategic system in which maritime security is increasingly dependent on

cooperative security arrangements rather than unilateral force projection. India's adoption of IMSS 2015, SAGAR, the Act East Policy, mission-based deployments and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative collectively reflect an adaptive maritime policy to sustain regional stability and offset China's growing influence. Khurana (2007; 2016) contends that India's maritime policy is increasingly defined by the understanding that the Indian and Pacific Oceans constitute a single strategic continuum. The present analysis adds another empirical dimension to this view by suggesting that India's maritime priorities have shifted from a largely Indian Ocean focus to a more comprehensive Indo-Pacific construct incorporating naval modernisation, maritime domain awareness, logistics interoperability and multilateral diplomacy.

Neo-realism explains the strategic behaviour of India that shows balancing instead of bandwagoning. As Waltz (1979) points out, nations faced with increasing power asymmetries tend to rebalance themselves through internal and external balancing processes. India's naval modernisation, White Shipping Agreements, Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), logistics agreements and growing defence cooperation with the United States, Japan, Australia and France together constitute both forms of balancing while maintaining strategic autonomy. India's strategy exemplifies what may be called flexible multi-alignment, as opposed to classical realism's traditional alliance politics. The approach allows India to bolster its deterrent while retaining its long-standing independence in foreign policy. Therefore, India's maritime recalibration is a nuanced strategic adaptation to China's rising maritime influence rather than a wholesale rejection of its previous strategic tenets.

Conclusion

China's emerging maritime strategy has fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific by integrating military capacity, economic statecraft, technology innovation and diplomatic engagement into a unified means-ways-ends design. China's naval modernisation, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and the expansion of dual-use maritime infrastructure are not isolated initiatives but a concerted grand strategy to secure sea lines of communication, enhance regional influence and further long-term geopolitical interests. The study indicates that China's maritime behaviour is a practical implementation of Lykke's (1989) strategic framework, in which national capabilities (means), operational techniques (ways) and political aims (ends) are purposefully coordinated to maximise the strategic advantage in the Indo-Pacific.

The study also finds that China's growing maritime footprint has been the main driver of India's maritime strategic recalibration. In response, India has pursued a calibrated balancing policy that blends strategic autonomy with increased maritime cooperation, naval upgrading and multilateral participation rather than through formal alliance dependence. India's adaptive response to a more competitive maritime environment is reflected in the implementation of the Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS 2015), the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision, the Act East Policy (AEP), and participation in initiatives that include the QUAD, Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and maritime information-sharing arrangements. Collectively, these actions enhance India's maritime deterrence while protecting its time-honoured strategic autonomy.

Theoretically, this study makes a contribution to the Strategic Studies literature by establishing that Lykke's (1989) means-ways-ends paradigm is a useful analytical lens through which to analyse modern maritime competition in the Indo-Pacific. Previous studies often examined China's maritime expansion or India's strategic response in isolation. This study combines both perspectives into a single strategic framework to explain how military capability, economic tools, technological innovation and diplomatic engagement interact to generate competitive maritime balancing. The study consequently extends the application of the means-ways-ends construct beyond traditional military planning to account for larger patterns of strategic engagement in the contemporary maritime sector.

The analysis further shows that the Indo-Pacific has transformed from a geographical idea to a dynamic maritime geostrategic construct characterised by continuous strategic adaptation, technology rivalry and multidimensional balancing. Rather of confronting each other militarily, China and India are employing

integrated national power, including naval capacity, economic ties, diplomatic engagements and technical development, to protect their national interests and shape the new regional order. Such a trend implies that the future contest for the seas will be dictated not just by naval superiority but by the effective coordination of various weapons of national power.

From a policy viewpoint, the findings underscore the necessity of establishing strategic alliances, maritime domain awareness, technical innovation and cooperative maritime governance to ensure regional stability. China and India are on separate strategic trajectories but both increasingly realise that sustained maritime influence depends on the successful convergence of strategic aims, operational tactics and national capabilities. The future maritime order of the Indo-Pacific will ultimately depend not just on the accrual of military strength but on the strategic ability of regional governments to balance rivalry with collaboration, while sustaining a stable, open and rules-based marine environment.

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