

Bay of Tensions: Myanmar's Unrest, Bangladesh's Struggles, and U.S. Naval Gambit in Indo-Pacific

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Abstract: This research provides a comprehensive examination of interconnected effects of Myanmar's and Bangladesh's internal crises on the strategic trajectories of India and China, as well as the implications of U.S. ambitions for a potential naval base on St. Martin's Island. Myanmar's ongoing unrest, characterized by severe internal conflict and a humanitarian crisis, coupled with Bangladesh's economic and social challenges stemming from an influx of refugees, creates a volatile environment that undermines regional stability. These domestic upheavals significantly shape the strategic calculations of major regional powers, particularly India and China, they compete for influence in the Indo-Pacific. This explores how these crises alter the regional balance of power, impacting India's strategic posture and its relations with both Bangladesh and Myanmar, while also considering China's interests. Furthermore, the U.S. ambition to establish a naval base on St. Martin's Island adds complex layer, raising critical questions about sovereignty and regional security. This critical development could further shift power dynamics and affect stability in the region. By analyzing recent geopolitical developments and strategic manoeuvres, the study aims to illuminate the intricate relationships among these factors, offering a nuanced understanding of how internal crises in Myanmar and Bangladesh intersect with the strategies of major powers.

Keywords: Myanmar's crisis, Bangladesh instability, India, China, U.S. naval base.

Subject classification: Political science

1. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region, a critical area for global trade and strategic interests,

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is increasingly affected by internal and external factors that challenge regional stability. Myanmar and Bangladesh, both facing significant internal crises, are situated at the crossroads of this strategic nexus. Myanmar's prolonged conflict and political upheaval, combined with Bangladesh's socio-economic and environmental strains, have significant ripple effects on neighboring countries and beyond. The Indo-Pacific region, a geopolitical fulcrum of the 21st century, is increasingly characterized by a complex web of strategic tensions and regional rivalries. At the heart of these dynamics lies the Bay of Bengal, a critical maritime zone that serves as a crossroads for both geopolitical manoeuvring and regional unrest. This research article delves into the intricate interplay between domestic strife within Myanmar, the economic and political challenges facing Bangladesh, and the strategic manoeuvres of the United States Navy as it asserts its influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Myanmar, a nation beset by decades of political instability and ongoing ethnic conflicts, has recently witnessed an escalation in civil unrest that threatens regional stability. The military coup of February 2021 marked a notable shift towards change in governance, plunging Myanmar into a state of civil war and humanitarian crisis. The subsequent violence and repression have led to widespread displacement and a humanitarian emergency that extends beyond Myanmar's borders. This turmoil not only destabilizes the country but also reverberates throughout the Bay of Bengal, affecting neighboring states and drawing international attention.

Bangladesh, located on the north-western shores of the Bay of Bengal, finds itself in a precarious position as it grapples with the implications of Myanmar's instability. The influx of refugees from Myanmar has exacerbated Bangladesh's economic and social pressures, strained its resources and challenged its capacity to provide for a growing population. Additionally, Bangladesh's geographic location makes it a pivotal player in regional maritime strategies and economic corridors, influencing its relations with major powers and its role in regional security dynamics.

At the same time, the United States, as a global superpower with significant strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific, has intensified its naval presence in the region. The U.S. Navy's strategic deployments and exercises are part of a broader effort to counterbalance China's growing influence and to uphold the principles of freedom of navigation and regional stability. This military posturing not only affects the geopolitical landscape of the Bay of Bengal but also influences the domestic and regional responses to the ongoing crises in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The convergence of these elements Myanmar's internal conflict, Bangladesh's regional role, and U.S. naval strategies forms a complex tapestry of geopolitical tensions in the Bay of Bengal. Understanding this interplay requires a multi-dimensional approach that considers historical contexts, current political developments, and strategic interests of regional and global actors. Adding to this complexity is the U.S.'s strategic manoeuvring with the proposed naval base on St. Martin's island. This paper argues that the internal crises in Myanmar and

Bangladesh are not merely regional issues but pivotal factors that reshape the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific. Specifically, it posits that these crises influence the geopolitical ambitions of India and China, compelling them to recalibrate their strategies in response to shifting power dynamics. The influx of refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh creates humanitarian and economic challenges that not only destabilize Bangladesh but also affect India's border security and regional relations.

Moreover, the potential establishment of a U.S. naval base on St. Martin's island introduces a new layer of complexity, as it raises concerns about sovereignty and regional security. This move could shift the balance of power, prompting both India and China to respond strategically to safeguard their interests.

Ultimately, the paper argues for a holistic understanding of these intertwined crises, emphasizing that any effective policy response must consider the implications for regional stability and the strategic calculations of major powers. By doing so, it advocates for a coordinated approach that seeks to mitigate tensions and foster cooperation among regional actors, highlighting the necessity of addressing underlying issues to achieve lasting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Internal crises in Myanmar and Bangladesh

2.1. Myanmar's crisis: Implications for regional stability

Myanmar's internal turmoil, following the military coup of 2021, has not only led to severe humanitarian crises but has also intensified regional geopolitical strains. The conflict has exacerbated cross-border tensions, with refugees and armed groups spilling over into neighboring countries. The crisis in Myanmar began with a military coup on 1 February, 2021, when the military, known as the Tatmadaw, seized control of the government, ousting the elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). This coup was the culmination of longstanding tensions between the military and civilian government, as well as deep-seated ethnic conflicts and issues related to governance and human rights. The military's actions triggered protests and a responses from them, leading to severe humanitarian crises. This situation has strained India's border security and humanitarian resources. Moreover, the unrest has disrupted trade routes that are vital for India's north-eastern states, leading to economic instability. To substantiate the claims about the impact of Myanmar's unrest on India and China, it's essential to provide specific evidence and examples.

Firstly the strain on India's border security and humanitarian resources, the influx of refugees from Myanmar into India, particularly in states like Mizoram and Manipur, has led to increased pressure on local resources and border security. Reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) indicate that the number of

refugees has surged significantly since the military coup in 2021, (Aung Ko Ko, Rhoads, E., Nan Tinilarwin, Win Bo Aung & Yoon Thiri Khaing, 2024) with local authorities struggling to provide adequate shelter, food, and medical care. For instance, the United Nations High Commissioner Refugee (UNHCR) noted a rise in cross-border movement, exacerbating existing humanitarian challenges in these north-eastern states (Cheesman, N., 2023).

On the disruption of trade routes, the ongoing conflict in Myanmar has hindered trade routes critical to India's north-eastern states, such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. According to a report by the Observer Research Foundation, increased violence has led to the closure of key trade links, directly affecting the flow of goods and disrupting economic activities in the region. (Connelly, A. & Loong, S., 2023) This has caused delays and increased costs for businesses relying on these routes for importing and exporting goods.

The threats to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the instability in Myanmar poses significant risks to China's BRI, particularly its infrastructure projects that aim to enhance connectivity between southwestern China and the Indian Ocean. The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), a flagship BRI project, has faced delays and security threats due to the conflict. For example, the Chinese state media has reported concerns about the safety of Chinese investments in Myanmar, including pipelines and roads, which are essential for maintaining supply routes to the Indian Ocean (Connelly, A. & Loong, S., 2023).

On the impact on regional trade networks, Myanmar's unrest disrupts its role as a critical transit point in regional trade networks. The country is presently experiencing political instability and conflicts that have led to supply chain disruptions. The February 2021 military takeover has had effects on the economic conditions of the country, which shares borders with countries that comprise roughly 40 percent of the global population (World Bank, 2023b). Conflict escalation and border trade disruptions in the second half of 2023 have added layers of complexities to the transport and logistics sector, already constrained by restrictive regulations, control, and security risks. This has triggered transport and logistics operating costs to rise and has resulted in significant supply chain disruptions. The economic impact is further evidenced by a decline in foreign direct investment in Myanmar, as businesses reassess risks associated with ongoing violence (World Bank, 2023b).

By integrating these specific examples and data points, the argument becomes more substantiated and clearly outlines the interconnected consequences of Myanmar's internal crises on regional powers like India and China. For China, this turmoil poses a threat to BRI infrastructure projects and their strategic interests, particularly affecting the connectivity between China's southwestern regions and the Indian Ocean. The ongoing conflict undermines Myanmar's role as a key transit point in regional trade networks (ICG, 2023).

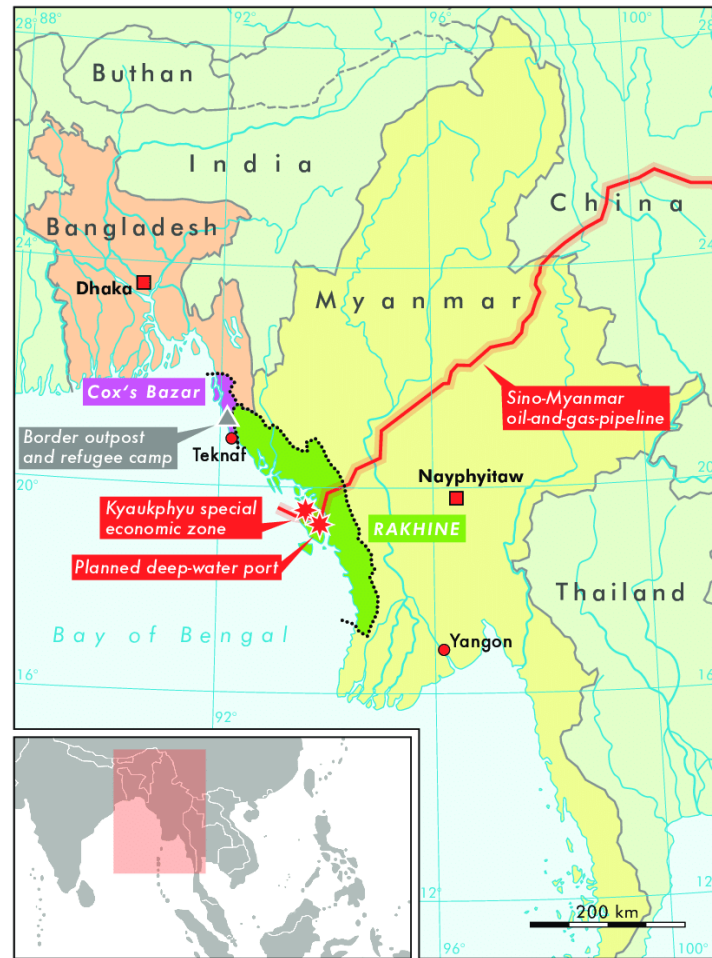
3. Myanmar's strategic importance to the U.S., India, and China

Myanmar's geopolitical significance is increasingly recognized in the broader context of the Indo-Pacific region, influenced by its strategic location, natural resources, and evolving domestic situation. For major global and regional powers like the United States, India, and China, Myanmar plays a critical role in their strategic calculations, each pursuing distinct interests that reflect their broader geopolitical objectives. That is why this article delves into the strategic importance of Myanmar from the perspectives of the U.S., India, and China, highlighting how each nation's approach to Myanmar is shaped by their unique strategic interests.

3.1. The United States: "Balancing power and promoting peace"

For the United States, Myanmar's strategic importance is largely tied to its broader Indo-Pacific strategy, which aims to counterbalance China's expanding influence and is said by it to promote regional stability and democratic values. Several key aspects illustrate Myanmar's significance for U.S. interests:

Adjusting regional power dynamics: Myanmar's strategic location, bridging South and Southeast Asia, provides China with a vital overland route to the Indian Ocean. The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) is a cornerstone of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), facilitating trade and energy flows between China and the Indian Ocean.



1. Map 1: Map of Myanmar

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Rakhine-state-in-Myanmar-the-refugees-camps-are-in-Coxs-Bazar-Bangladesh_fig1_338548226

The U.S perceives China's growing footprints in Myanmar as a potential threat to the power balance in the region. That assessment is supported by several key pieces of evidence, some of them are:

Strategic reports and documents: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy report outlines the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, explicitly mentioning the need to counter authoritarian influences, particularly from China. This document underscores the U.S. commitment to supporting what it calls democratic governance in Myanmar as a way to limit Chinese strategic encroachment.

Military and economic engagement: The U.S. has increased its diplomatic and military engagement in the region as a response to China's activities. Initiatives such as the ASEAN-US Special Summit in 2022 emphasized to maintaining peace,

security, and stability in the region, and to ensuring maritime security and safety, as well as freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the seas as described in the 1982 United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and unimpeded lawful maritime commerce as well as non-militarization and self-restraint in the conduct of activities (ASEAN-U.S. Special Summit, 2022). Additionally, the U.S. has provided humanitarian assistance and support to ethnic minority groups in Myanmar, further positioning itself as an alternative to Chinese influence.

Analyses by Experts and Thinktanks: Various thinktanks, such as the Brookings Institution and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), have published analyses discussing the implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Myanmar. These analyses often highlight how increased Chinese investment in infrastructure projects can undermine U.S. interests and regional stability.

Geopolitical Dynamics: Observations from geopolitical analysts emphasize that Myanmar's strategic location is critical for both the U.S. and China. The establishment of deep economic ties between China and Myanmar raises alarms for U.S. policymakers about potential military and economic leverage that could disrupt the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

These points collectively illustrate the U.S. perception of China's influence in Myanmar as a challenge to regional stability and its broader strategic interests in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. Engaging with Myanmar, the U.S. aims to counterbalance China's influence and preserve what it calls a free and open Indo-Pacific. The U.S. support for democratic and humanitarian initiatives in Myanmar cannot seem like a reluctant linkage to counter Chinese dominance.

Historical Context: The U.S. often expresses a long-standing commitment to promoting democracy and human rights globally. However, in Myanmar's case, this commitment is often intertwined with strategic interests. The author deems that perception that U.S. support is primarily aimed at curbing China's influence can overshadow the genuine humanitarian motives, making it appear more opportunistic than altruistic.

Limited Leverage: The U.S. has faced challenges in exerting meaningful influence in Myanmar, particularly given China's deep economic ties and strategic investments in the country. This reality can lead to a perception of reluctance, as U.S. initiatives may seem inadequate compared to China's extensive resources and political support.

Regional Reactions: U.S. actions in Myanmar are closely watched by neighboring countries and could be viewed as attempts to extend U.S. influence at the expense of China. This geopolitical framing can lead to scepticism about the U.S. intentions, suggesting that its initiatives are more about containing China than genuinely supporting Myanmar's democratic aspirations.

Bipartisan Concerns: There is a bipartisan recognition in U.S. policy circles of the need to address the challenge posed by China in the Indo-Pacific. This consensus often translates into support for initiatives in Myanmar that might not have the same fervour without the backdrop of strategic competition, leading to an impression that the linkage is primarily tactical.

Evolving Priorities: As U.S. foreign policy evolves, especially with shifting administrations, the focus on Myanmar may fluctuate between humanitarian concerns and strategic interests, reinforcing the idea of a reluctant linkage. When geopolitical dynamics change, the narrative around U.S. involvement can shift as well.

While the U.S. support for initiatives in Myanmar is framed within a humanitarian and democratic context, the underlying strategic motivations especially in relation to countering China can create an impression of reluctance or opportunism. This duality complicates the perception of U.S. actions in the region seeking to influence the country's trajectory and mitigate Chinese dominance.

Promoting Democratic Values and Human Rights: The U.S. sees it has an interest in promoting democracy and human rights in Myanmar, aligning with its broader foreign policy principles (U.S. Department of State, 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Myanmar). The military coup in February 2021, which ousted the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, has been met with strong condemnation from the U.S. The Biden administration imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar's military leaders and military-owned enterprises, reflecting what it said is its commitment to democratic governance and human rights. U.S. support for whom it calls pro-democracy activists and humanitarian aid to those affected by the conflict are examples of its efforts to influence Myanmar's political landscape.

Strategic Maritime Interests: Myanmar's access to the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea is strategically important for maritime security and freedom of navigation. The U.S. Navy's presence in the region, including its operations in the Bay of Bengal, underscores the importance of maintaining open sea lanes. Myanmar's strategic location along the key maritime route makes it a focal point in U.S. efforts to ensure that these critical waterways remain accessible and secure from potential adversarial control.

Geographical Importance: Myanmar is situated at the crossroads of Southeast Asia, bordered by the Bay of Bengal to the west and the Andaman Sea to the south. This positioning places it near vital maritime routes that facilitate trade between the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, making it critical for regional and global shipping.

Trade Routes: The Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, is crucial for trade between Asia, Europe, and beyond. Myanmar serves as a potential alternative route to this chokepoint. The development of infrastructure projects like the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) highlights how this region is pivotal for trade connectivity, underscoring the competition for influence over these routes.

U.S. Strategic Documents: The U.S. National Defence Strategy emphasizes the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in response to China's assertiveness in the region (U.S. Department of Defense. 2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States). This strategy often includes references to securing maritime routes, which implicitly acknowledges the significance of countries like Myanmar in this broader security framework.

Military Presence and Exercises: The U.S. conducts naval exercises and operations that it said are aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. They include: Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise - the world's largest international maritime exercise, held biennially in Hawaii, which includes participation from multiple nations and focuses on enhancing maritime security and interoperability (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. RIMPAC 2022. Indo-Pacific Command); Malabar Exercise - this trilateral naval exercise involves the U.S., India, and Japan, and is said to be aimed to enhance maritime cooperation and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific (U.S. Navy. Malabar 2021.); Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) - the U.S. regularly conducts FONOPs in the South China Sea to challenge excessive maritime claims and assert navigation rights (U.S. Department of Defense. Freedom of Navigation).

The proximity of these exercises to Myanmar reflects the recognition of its strategic location in relation to maritime security concerns. Reports from the U.S. Navy about operational manoeuvres in the region often highlight the importance of maintaining open waterways, which includes monitoring developments in Myanmar (Heritage Foundation 2024 Army's role in the Indo Pacific)

Regional Partnerships: The U.S. has engaged in diplomatic efforts with ASEAN nations, including Myanmar, to promote collective security measures. These partnerships often focus on ensuring maritime security, showcasing an acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of regional stability and the need for access to critical waterways.

China's Influence: China's growing investments in Myanmar, particularly through BRI projects, are viewed as efforts to secure strategic access to these maritime routes. This has prompted the U.S. to counterbalance these initiatives to maintain influence over China in the region.

3.2. India: Regional Security and Economic Opportunities

For India, Myanmar's strategic significance is intertwined with regional security concerns and economic opportunities. India's approach to Myanmar reflects its interest in maintaining stability in its north-eastern region and leveraging Myanmar's potential for economic and strategic advantages:

Regional Security and Stability: Myanmar's proximity to India's north-eastern states, such as Nagaland and Manipur, makes it a critical factor in India's regional security strategy. The ongoing insurgency and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar

have implications for India's security, particularly about the cross-border insurgent groups and refugee flows. India has been actively involved in efforts to address these security concerns through diplomatic engagement and development assistance. For example, India has provided humanitarian aid and infrastructure support to address the refugee crisis resulting from the Rohingya conflict, aiming to stabilize the region and prevent spill over effects into Indian territory. (Kumar, R., & Das, S. 2024).



Image 2: India and BIMSTEC

Source: <https://ilearncana.com/details/India-and-BIMSTEC/2190>

Economic and Trade Opportunities: Myanmar is an important partner for India's Act East Policy, which seeks to enhance economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia. Myanmar's strategic location offers India a gateway to the larger Southeast Asian market and the Indian Ocean. India has invested in various infrastructure projects in Myanmar, such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, which aims to connect the Indian state of Mizoram with the Bay of Bengal through Myanmar. This project not only facilitates trade but also strengthens India's economic footprint in the region.

Geopolitical Rivalry with China: India views Myanmar as a key player in its strategic rivalry with China. The competition for influence in Myanmar is part of a broader geopolitical contest between India and China. India's engagement with

Myanmar serves to counterbalance China's growing influence in the country and maintain a strategic foothold in Southeast Asia. By strengthening bilateral relations with Myanmar, India aims to reduce Chinese dominance while enhancing its own regional influence. This requires a nuanced analysis that goes beyond the simplistic narratives often found in newspapers. Here are some points to elaborate on the intricacies of the strategies employed by India and the U.S. in Myanmar, particularly in relation to China.

Historical Ties: India's relationship with Myanmar is rooted in historical and cultural connections. India's approach is often framed not only in countering China but also in fostering regional stability and supporting democratic aspirations, particularly in light of shared border concerns and the rise of insurgencies that could spill over into north-eastern India.

Economic Interests: While countering Chinese influence is a significant aspect, India is also focused on economic partnerships. For instance, projects of India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway aim to enhance connectivity and trade, reflecting India's interest in promoting its own economic interests and integrating Myanmar into its broader Look East Policy.

Security Concerns: India's engagement with Myanmar also stems from security considerations, such as managing cross-border insurgency and drug trafficking. This adds a layer of complexity to India's motives that goes beyond merely countering China, as regional stability is crucial for India's own national security.

Balancing Act: Both the U.S. and India are engaged in a balancing act, recognizing that outright confrontation with China could destabilize the region further. Their approaches often involve a mix of diplomatic engagement, economic support, and humanitarian aid, which aim to build resilience in Myanmar rather than simply opposing Chinese influence.

Regional Dynamics: The geopolitical landscape in Southeast Asia is influenced by various actors, including ASEAN countries and Japan. India's and the U.S.'s strategies must consider these regional dynamics, which complicates the narrative of a straightforward competition with China. Collaborative efforts within multilateral frameworks also play a significant role in shaping these relationships.

Myanmar as a country has its own interests and strategies in navigating relationships with both China and India, making the situation more intricate than a simple binary competition.

By examining these layers, we can gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind India's and the U.S.'s actions in Myanmar, moving beyond the oversimplified narrative of merely countering Chinese dominance.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Economic Corridor: Myanmar is a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, particularly through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). The CMEC aims to connect China's Yunnan Province with the Indian Ocean, enhancing trade routes and energy

supplies. This corridor is critical for China's economic ambitions, providing a direct access route to maritime trade and reducing dependence on the congested Malacca Strait. China's investments in Myanmar's infrastructure, including ports and pipelines, illustrate its strategic focus on securing economic and energy interests in the region (Li, Y. 2023).

Strategic Maritime Access: Myanmar's coastline along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea offers China a strategic outlet to the Indian Ocean. This access is vital for China's maritime strategy, allowing it to project power and influence in the Indian Ocean region. The development of the Kyaukpyu deep-water port part of the CMEC, is a significant example of China's efforts to secure a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean. This port is expected to enhance China's naval and trade capabilities, reinforcing its strategic presence in the region.

Kyaukpyu deep-water port is a significant infrastructure project in Myanmar, primarily driven by China's strategic and economic interests in the region.

The port has a strategic location: Kyaukpyu is located on the western coast of Myanmar, along the Bay of Bengal. Its geographical position provides a crucial access point for shipping routes to and from China, making it strategically important for facilitating trade between China and the Indian Ocean.

In relation to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the port is a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to enhance connectivity and trade across Asia and beyond. The project is part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), designed to link China's southwestern provinces to the Indian Ocean, thereby reducing dependency on the Strait of Malacca for shipping.

The investment and development of the Kyaukpyu port development began in earnest around 2015, with Chinese companies, particularly the China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC), heavily involved. The project aims to create a deep-water port capable of accommodating larger vessels, enhancing Myanmar's capacity to handle international shipping traffic.

The role of China in the Kyaukpyu port development, for financial investment, Beijing has invested significantly in the Kyaukpyu port, as part of a broader strategy to secure vital trade routes. The initial investment was around USD 1.3 billion, with further financial commitments expected for infrastructure development. This investment is seen as a means to bolster China's economic presence in Myanmar.

Infrastructure Development: In addition to the port itself, China is involved in developing accompanying infrastructure, such as roads and rail links, to facilitate the movement of goods between the port and China. This connectivity is crucial for enhancing trade efficiency and reducing transportation costs.

Strategic Influence: By investing in Kyaukpyu, China seeks to establish a foothold in Myanmar that allows it to exert influence over the region. This access to the Indian Ocean is critical for China's broader geopolitical strategy, particularly in

balancing its maritime routes against potential adversarial control.

Energy Security: The port is also linked to energy projects, including pipelines that transport oil and gas from the Bay of Bengal to China's Yunnan province. These pipelines are essential for China's energy security, providing an alternative route for energy imports that bypasses the contested South China Sea.

Regional Tensions: The involvement of China in the Kyaukpyu port has raised concerns among regional players, particularly India. India views this project as a potential threat to its own strategic interests in the Indian Ocean and has sought to enhance its relationships with Myanmar to counterbalance Chinese influence.

Kyaukpyu deep-water port serves as a critical node in China's efforts to enhance its economic and strategic footprint in Myanmar and the broader Indo-Pacific region. The project not only underscores China's ambition under the Belt and Road Initiative but also highlights the geopolitical complexities that arise as various nations vie for influence in a strategically vital area. As the port continues to develop, its implications for regional trade, security dynamics, and Myanmar's own political landscape will be significant.

Geopolitical Influence and Regional Rivalry: Myanmar's alignment with China provides Beijing with a strategic advantage in its competition with other major powers, particularly the United States and India. By fostering strong ties with Myanmar, China can counterbalance U.S. influence and regional initiatives. The close relationship between China and Myanmar, including military cooperation and diplomatic support, reflects China's broader strategy to expand its influence and secure strategic interests in Southeast Asia.

4. Bangladesh's crisis: Economic and strategic implications

Bangladesh, despite its relatively stable government, faces significant challenges that have broader regional repercussions. Economic difficulties exacerbated by political instability and the impact of climate change on its coastal areas contribute to a precarious situation. The economic strains in Bangladesh influence regional trade dynamics, particularly affecting the economic stability of India's north-eastern states. Additionally, Bangladesh's strategic location makes it a crucial player in regional geopolitics. Political instability or economic downturns in Bangladesh could shift regional power balances, affecting both India and China's strategic calculations. The potential for increased regional migration and resource strain further complicates the scenario (Chowdhury, M. 2023).

5. Strategic importance of Bangladesh to the U.S., India, and China

Bangladesh, located in South Asia, holds significant geopolitical and

strategic importance for the United States, India, and China. Its strategic position, burgeoning economy, and evolving regional role make it a key player in the broader geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. This article now explores the strategic importance of Bangladesh from the perspectives of these three major powers, providing examples to illustrate how each nation's interests align with Bangladesh's geopolitical significance.

5.1. The United States: Economic ties, strategic partnerships, and regional stability

For the United States, Bangladesh's strategic importance is multifaceted, encompassing economic partnerships, regional stability, and broader geopolitical strategies:

Economic Engagement and Trade: Bangladesh has emerged as a significant economic partner for the U.S., particularly through its garment industry, which is a major supplier of textiles and apparel. The United States is one of Bangladesh's largest export markets, with U.S. companies investing in various sectors, including textiles, energy, and infrastructure. The economic ties between the two countries are bolstered by trade agreements and investments that contribute to two economies. The trade agreements include the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and the Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs). Bangladesh benefits from the U.S. GSP, which allows duty-free entry for thousands of products. This program has significantly boosted Bangladesh's export sector, particularly in textiles. In 2021, Bangladesh's exports to the U.S. were valued at approximately USD 8.3 billion, demonstrating the importance of this trade arrangement. As for the Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), while not yet finalized, discussions around a potential BIT between the U.S. and Bangladesh indicate a commitment to enhance bilateral trade and investment. These treaties aim to protect U.S. investments in Bangladesh and encourage economic cooperation.

USAID Support:

Development Programs: USAID has been active in Bangladesh for decades, with programs addressing key areas such as health, education, and economic growth. For instance, the "Feed the Future" initiative has aimed to improve agricultural productivity and food security, directly benefiting millions of Bangladeshis. In 2020, USAID announced USD 5.5 million for agricultural resilience programs, illustrating the scale of its commitment.

Health Initiatives: USAID has funded programs to combat diseases and improve healthcare access. The "Accelerated Learning Program" has supported educational opportunities for marginalized children, highlighting the focus on sustainable development.

Investment in Infrastructure:

Energy Sector Investments: The U.S. has been involved in supporting Bangladesh's energy sector through various initiatives. In 2021, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) announced investments to promote renewable energy projects in Bangladesh, aiming to enhance energy security and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

Public-Private Partnerships:

The U.S. government encourages partnerships between American companies and Bangladeshi businesses. For example, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has facilitated dialogues and initiatives to promote trade and investment, fostering deeper economic ties.

Economic Growth Indicators:

The U.S. is one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners, with increasing trade volumes over the years. Reports from the U.S. Trade Representative highlight the growth of Bangladesh's exports, particularly in the garment sector, which relies heavily on U.S. markets (Congressional Research Service Report 2017).

Regional Stability and Counterterrorism:

Bangladesh's role in regional stability and counterterrorism efforts is of strategic importance to the U.S. The country's strategic location in South Asia, adjacent to the volatile regions of Myanmar and India, makes it a key partner in regional security. The U.S. has worked with Bangladesh on various security and counterterrorism initiatives, including joint military exercises and intelligence sharing. Examples includes Operation Northern Triangle: This joint exercise focuses on counterterrorism and security operations. It includes training and capacity building for the Bangladeshi military. The U.S. and Bangladesh have conducted several military exercises, such as Exercise Tiger Shark, which enhances maritime security and counterterrorism capabilities. Following incidents such as the 2016 Dhaka Attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery, the U.S. has increased intelligence-sharing efforts to enhance Bangladesh's counterterrorism measures. It has also organized workshops and training sessions for Bangladeshi law enforcement and military personnel to improve their counterterrorism strategies and capabilities (USDS 2016 U.S. Department of State, US Relations with Bangladesh).

The presence of extremist groups in the region and the potential for their cross-border activities make Bangladesh's stability crucial for regional security.



Image 3: Bangladesh BCIM security pact for regional stability

Source: Geopolitika.ru

Influence in South Asia and Indo-Pacific Strategy: Bangladesh's growing influence in South Asia aligns with U.S. interests in maintaining a stable and balanced regional order. The U.S. views Bangladesh as an important partner in countering Chinese influence and ensuring that the South Asian region remains open and accessible. The U.S. has supported Bangladesh's development and what it calls democratic processes as part of its broader strategy to promote stability and counterbalance regional powers.

5.2. India: Regional security, economic interests, and strategic partnership

For India, Bangladesh's strategic importance is closely linked to regional security, economic cooperation, and strategic alignment. The relationship between the two countries is shaped by historical ties, shared interests, and mutual benefits:

Regional Security and Counterterrorism: Bangladesh's security situation has direct implications for India, particularly in its north-eastern states. Insurgent groups and transnational terrorism have historically posed threats to India's security, and Bangladesh's cooperation in counterterrorism efforts is crucial. India has worked closely with Bangladesh to address these security challenges, including joint initiatives to combat insurgent activities and improve border security. For example, the two countries have engaged in coordinated efforts to tackle illegal border crossings and smuggling, enhancing regional security (Patel, A. 2023).

Economic Cooperation and Connectivity: Economic ties between India and Bangladesh have grown significantly, with both countries benefiting from enhanced trade and investment. India is one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners, and bilateral trade has seen substantial growth in recent years (Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. 2022 India-Bangladesh Bilateral Trade). Economic ties between India and Bangladesh have indeed strengthened significantly in recent years. As of 2021-2022, India was Bangladesh's second-largest trading partner,

with bilateral trade reaching approximately USD 10 billion, a marked increase from previous years. Notably, India's exports to Bangladesh were valued at about USD 8.6 billion, while imports from Bangladesh were around USD 1.5 billion. The two countries have undertaken various infrastructure projects to improve connectivity, such as the development of transport corridors and energy pipelines. The construction of the Maitree Express, a cross-border train service, exemplifies the increasing economic and infrastructural collaboration between the two nations. The Maitree Express, launched in April 2008, exemplifies the growing economic ties between India and Bangladesh, facilitating passenger movement and strengthening cultural and economic connections between the two countries. This cross-border train service connects Kolkata (India) to Dhaka (Bangladesh), symbolizing friendship and cooperation. Indian Railways and Bangladesh Railways play crucial roles in its operation, managing scheduling and coordination to ensure seamless travel. Significant investments were made to modernize and upgrade the railway infrastructure on both sides, supported by the Indian government to enhance connectivity. The Maitree Express not only eases travel for passengers but also facilitates trade by improving people-to-people connections, fostering bilateral trade and tourism. Its success has prompted discussions about expanding rail links and additional services under broader initiatives like the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement. Overall, the Maitree Express represents a significant step in India-Bangladesh relations, highlighting the importance of infrastructure collaboration for mutual economic growth.

Strategic Partnership and Regional Influence: India vies Bangladesh as a key partner in its regional strategy and its efforts to influence South Asia. India views Bangladesh as a key partner in its regional strategy due to several compelling factors. Geopolitically, Bangladesh's strategic location, sharing borders with India and the Bay of Bengal, is crucial for enhancing India's influence in South Asia. Historical ties further strengthen this partnership; India played a significant role in supporting Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, fostering a sense of shared identity and cultural connection. Economically, India has engaged in various initiatives, such as the bilateral trade agreements that have seen trade grow to over USD 10 billion in recent years, along with significant investments in infrastructure projects like the Maitree Express. Security cooperation is another critical aspect, with India and Bangladesh collaborating on issues such as counter-terrorism and border management, helping address concerns related to insurgency and illegal immigration. Moreover, as China expands its influence in South Asia through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, India seeks to strengthen its relationship with Bangladesh to counterbalance this presence. Finally, Bangladesh is seen as an essential partner in regional integration efforts, including the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the BBIN initiative, aimed at enhancing connectivity among South Asian nations. Collectively, these factors underscore India's strategic perception of Bangladesh as a vital ally in shaping the future of the region.

The strategic partnership between the two countries is reflected in their cooperation on various regional and global issues. India has supported Bangladesh in international forums and provided assistances in area such as disaster reliefs and economic development. India has actively supported Bangladesh in various international forums and provided crucial assistance in areas such as disaster relief and economic development. In the international forum United Nations, India has consistently advocated for Bangladesh, particularly climate change, recognizing the country's vulnerability to natural disasters. For instance, following Cyclone Amphan in 2020, India promptly sent relief materials, including food and medicines, to aid in recovery efforts, similar to its assistance during Cyclone Sidr in 2007. Economically, India has invested significantly in Bangladesh through a Line of Credit worth over USD 8 billion, funding infrastructure projects like the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway and renewable energy initiatives that enhance economic growth and connectivity. Additionally, India has provided training and technical assistance to Bangladeshi officials in sectors such as agriculture and information technology through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) initiative. The ongoing discussions around a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) further underscore India's commitment to strengthening economic ties and enhancing cooperation. Collectively, these efforts highlight India's dedication to supporting Bangladesh's development and reinforcing their deep bilateral relationship. By strengthening ties with Bangladesh, India aims to enhance its influence in South Asia and counterbalance Chinese presence in the region.

5.3. China: Economic investments, strategic access, and regional influence

For China, Bangladesh's strategic importance lies in economic investments, strategic access, and regional influence. China's engagement with Bangladesh is part of its broader strategy to expand its presence in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific:

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Economic Investments: Bangladesh is a key participant in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to enhance connectivity and trade across Asia and beyond. China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, including ports, roads, and power plants. The construction of the Payra Deep Sea Port and the Padma Bridge are notable examples of China's investments, which are intended to improve Bangladesh's infrastructure and facilitate trade. These projects not only enhance China's economic footprint in Bangladesh but also provide strategic access to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.



Image 4: Chinese Major Investments in Myanmar

Source: Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Government of Myanmar

Strategic Maritime Access and Trade Routes: Bangladesh's location along the Bay of Bengal offers China strategic maritime access and opportunities for trade. The development of ports and maritime infrastructure in Bangladesh aligns with China's goals of securing trade routes and enhancing its influence in the Indian Ocean region. By investing in Bangladesh's maritime infrastructure, China aims to improve its access to international shipping lanes and strengthen its presence in a strategically important area.

Regional Influence and Strategic Competition: China views Bangladesh as a critical component of its regional strategy, particularly in the context of its competition with India and the United States. By strengthening its ties with Bangladesh, China seeks to expand its influence in South Asia and counterbalance the presence of other major powers. China's economic and strategic investments in Bangladesh are part of its broader effort to assert its influence in the Indo-Pacific and challenge the dominance of other regional players.

6. Examples of strategic engagement

To illustrate the strategic importance of Bangladesh, let us consider the following examples of engagement by the U.S., India, and China:

6.1. U.S. engagement

The U.S. has supported Bangladesh's development through various programs and initiatives. For instance, USAID's programs in Bangladesh focus on improving healthcare, education, and economic development. The U.S. has also been involved in supporting Bangladesh's response to natural disasters, such as the Rohingya refugee crisis. This engagement reflects the U.S. commitment to promoting stability and development in Bangladesh while countering potential threats to regional security.

6.2. Indian engagement

India's investment in infrastructure projects in Bangladesh highlights the strategic importance of their relationship. The Maitree Express, a cross-border train service connecting India and Bangladesh, symbolizes the growing economic and cultural ties between the two countries. Additionally, India's assistance in managing the Rohingya refugee crisis and its collaboration with Bangladesh on counterterrorism efforts underscore the strategic partnership and mutual benefits of their relationship.

6.3. Chinese engagement

China's investment in the Payra Deep Sea Port and the Padma Bridge exemplifies its strategic focus on enhancing economic and maritime connectivity. These projects are integral to China's Belt and Road Initiative and demonstrate its commitment to expanding its influence in South Asia. The development of these infrastructure projects not only strengthens China's economic ties with Bangladesh but also provides it with strategic access to important trade routes.

7. US ambitions for a naval base on St. Martin's Island

7.1. Strategic implications for regional stability

The U.S. plans to establish a naval base on St. Martin's Island represent a significant strategic shift in the Indo-Pacific region. This move is intended to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Bay of Bengal and beyond. The base would provide the U.S. with strategic advantages, including enhanced surveillance capabilities and a stronger naval presence in a key maritime corridor (Ahmed, F. 2024). This development could lead to increased military activity and heightened tensions between the U.S. and China, impacting regional stability. China's reaction could involve bolstering its naval presence and increasing its strategic investments in the region, potentially leading to an arms race and further regional destabilization.

India's strategic position and interests in the Indo-Pacific region are significantly impacted by the U.S.'s ambitions to establish a naval base on St. Martin's Island. This development holds profound implications for India's approach to regional stability, strategic balance, and its broader geopolitical strategies. The strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific could be notably altered by the presence of a U.S. naval base on St. Martin's Island, which is situated in the Bay of Bengal, a crucial maritime region for India. This location is strategically vital as it lies along major trade routes essential for India's economic and security interests. The establishment of a U.S. naval base could enhance American naval capabilities and

influence in the region, creating a counterbalance to China's expanding presence.

For India, a major regional power, this shift necessitates careful navigation to maintain its influence and safeguard its maritime interests. The increased U.S. military presence could prompt India to reassess its strategic posture to ensure it can effectively manage the evolving security dynamics and maintain its regional influence.

The potential U.S. naval base could also influence the regional security environment by increasing military activities and naval operations in the Bay of Bengal.

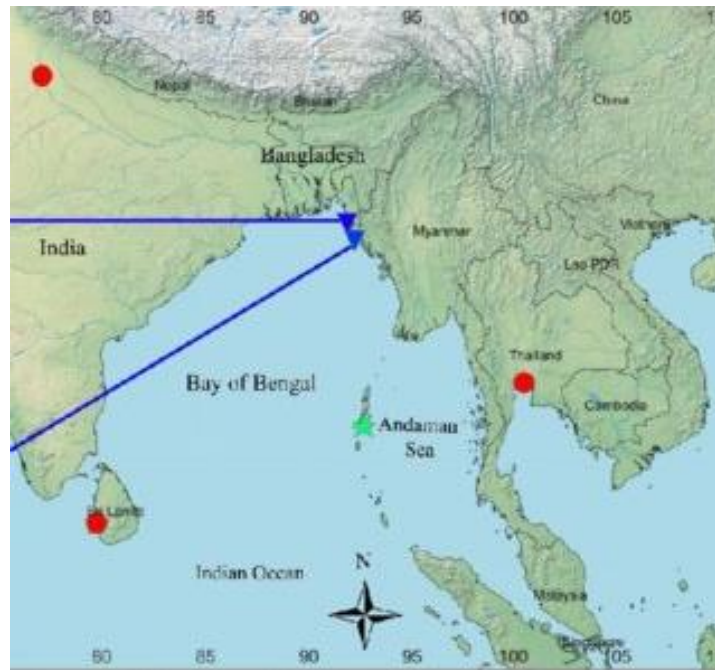


Image 5: Map of the Bay of Bengal

This heightened activity could affect India's security calculus, requiring it to enhance its own defence strategies. The presence of a U.S. naval base might lead to more pronounced naval engagements and could provoke a stronger military response from China, further complicating the security landscape. Consequently, India must be prepared to adjust its defence posture and strategic planning to address any emerging threats or shifts in regional security dynamics.

In addition to affecting security dynamics, the U.S. naval base could have implications for India's geopolitical alliances and partnerships. India has been strengthening its strategic ties with the U.S. through frameworks like the Quad, which includes Japan and Australia. The presence of a U.S. naval base could deepen strategic cooperation between India and the U.S., but it might also lead to tensions with other regional actors, such as China and Russia. India's diplomatic efforts will need to balance these complex relationships while striving to maintain regional stability (Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 2024).

The economic implications of the U.S. naval base are also significant. The Bay of Bengal is a critical trade route for India, especially for its north-eastern states. The establishment of a naval base could impact the security and accessibility of these trade routes. Increased naval traffic and military operations might disrupt commercial shipping and economic activities. India must therefore ensure that its economic interests are protected and that any potential disruptions to maritime trade are minimized.

In response to the U.S. naval ambitions, India might seek to enhance its strategic partnerships and strengthen its defence capabilities. This could involve increasing its own naval assets, participating in joint exercises with allies, and bolstering maritime security measures. By enhancing its defence posture, India can better address emerging threats and contribute to maintaining a stable regional order. Finally, India's diplomatic response to the U.S. naval base proposal will be crucial for regional stability. Engaging in dialogues with the U.S., China, and other regional stakeholders can help address concerns and find common ground.



Image 6: Satellite image of St. Martin's Island

Active participation in multilateral forums and regional security discussions will be vital for India to balance its interests, contribute to regional stability, and manage the complex interplay of strategic rivalries in the Indo-Pacific.

In summary, the U.S.'s ambitions for a naval base on St. Martin's Island have significant implications for India's strategic interests and regional stability. India's response will involve recalibrating its security strategies, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring the protection of its economic and geopolitical interests while contributing to a balanced and stable regional environment.

7.2. Sovereignty and regional reactions

The sovereignty of Bangladesh, which administers St. Martin's Island, is a

central issue. The establishment of a foreign military base could be perceived as undermining Bangladesh's sovereignty and lead to significant domestic and international backlash. Bangladesh's geopolitical strategy might be challenged by such a development, potentially leading to shifts in its foreign policy and security alignments. Regional countries might react differently to the U.S. naval base; while some may view it as a necessary counterbalance to China's influence, others may see it as exacerbating existing tensions. This could lead to realignments in regional alliances and an increase in military expenditures among neighboring states.

8. Analyzing the interconnected effects on India and China

8.1. Impact on India's economic and strategic interests

India's strategic interests are intricately linked to the stability of Myanmar and Bangladesh. The internal crises in these countries impact trade routes, border security, and regional economic stability. The instability in Myanmar disrupts critical supply chains and affects cross-border trade, which is vital for India's north-eastern states.

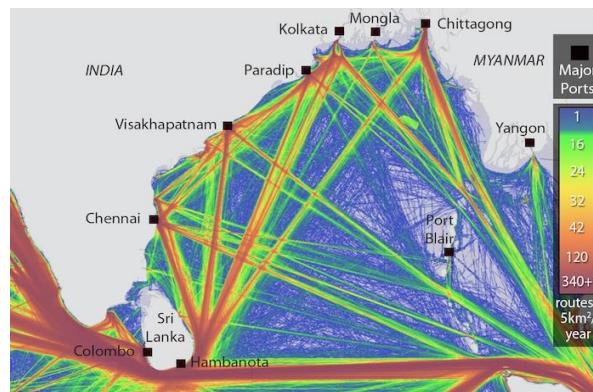


Image 7: Strategic Trade routes in Bay of Bengal

Source: Shipping density imagery, Maritime Traffic, <http://www.maritimetraffic.com/>

Additionally, India's strategic posture is influenced by the U.S. naval ambitions in the region. India must navigate a complex landscape of regional alliances and strategic partnerships while managing its own security concerns and economic interests. The presence of a U.S. naval base could complicate India's strategy of balancing relations with both the U.S. and China (Singh, A., & Sharma, V. 2024).

8.2. Impact on China's Belt and Road Initiative

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is deeply affected by the crises in

Myanmar and Bangladesh. The disruption of infrastructure projects and trade routes due to regional instability challenges the effectiveness and progress of the BRI. The U.S. naval base ambitions further complicate China's strategic calculations, as it perceives such developments as direct threats to its maritime strategies and regional influence. This could lead to intensified competition and strategic posturing in the region, impacting China's long-term plans for economic and geopolitical dominance. The combined effect of regional instability and external pressures necessitates a re-evaluation of China's strategies in the Indo-Pacific (Rahman, M. 2022).

The establishment of a U.S. naval base on St. Martin's Island introduces significant implications for China's strategic interests and its China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). The CMEC is a crucial component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), designed to enhance connectivity between China and the Indian Ocean through Myanmar. The potential U.S. naval presence in the Bay of Bengal could impact the CMEC in several ways (Wang, L. 2024).



Image 8: Map of China Myanmar Economic Corridor

Source: @Jamescrabtree, 17, January 2020 on X platform formerly known as Twitter

Firstly, the proximity of a U.S. naval base to Myanmar's strategic maritime routes directly challenges the CMEC's objectives. The CMEC aims to facilitate the smooth transit of goods and energy resources between China and the Indian Ocean, providing an alternative to the congested Strait of Malacca. The establishment of a U.S. naval base in the Bay of Bengal could lead to increased U.S. naval surveillance and control over critical sea lanes, potentially disrupting the flow of trade and energy resources. This disruption could affect China's economic and strategic interests by making the CMEC less secure and more vulnerable to external pressures.

Secondly, the U.S. naval base could influence the security environment around Myanmar, impacting China's investments and infrastructure projects. The CMEC involves significant infrastructure development, including pipelines, highways, and ports, which are crucial for China's economic and strategic

ambitions in the region. Increased U.S. military activity in the Bay of Bengal might heighten regional tensions and contribute to instability in Myanmar, undermining the security of Chinese investments and potentially delaying or disrupting CMEC projects. This could affect the overall effectiveness and progress of the CMEC, impacting China's broader Belt and Road goals (Zhang, H. 2023).

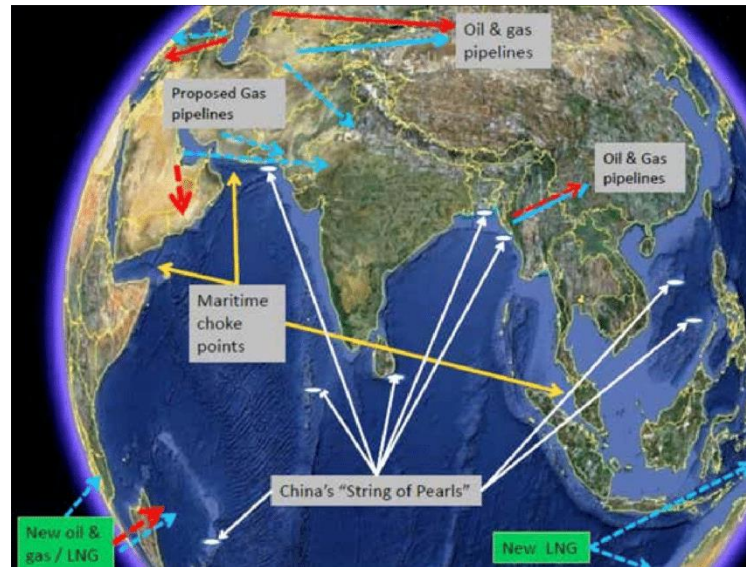


Image 9: Map of Regional maritime security Dynamics

Moreover, the U.S. presence could also lead to greater strategic competition in the region. China views the Indo-Pacific as a critical area of influence and has been expanding its naval and strategic presence in response to U.S. moves. The establishment of a U.S. naval base on St. Martin's Island could be perceived by China as a direct challenge to its regional influence and maritime strategies. In response, China might escalate its own military and strategic activities in the region, potentially leading to an arms race or increased military tensions. This strategic rivalry could complicate the operational environment for the CMEC and other BRI initiatives.

Additionally, the U.S. naval base could impact China's diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with Myanmar and other regional partners. China has been actively engaging with Myanmar through economic cooperation and development projects, aiming to bolster its regional influence and secure strategic access. The presence of a U.S. naval base could alter the geopolitical dynamics and influence Myanmar's foreign policy, potentially shifting Myanmar's alignment or increasing its reliance on other regional powers. This could challenge China's diplomatic and economic strategies in the region, affecting its ability to maintain strong bilateral relations with Myanmar.

Finally, the establishment of a U.S. naval base could lead to a more complex geopolitical environment, requiring China to adjust its strategies to navigate the new regional dynamics. This adjustment could involve increased investment in regional

security and diplomacy, as well as enhancing its own naval capabilities to counterbalance U.S. influence. China may also seek to strengthen its strategic partnerships with other regional players to mitigate the impact of the U.S. presence and safeguard its interests in the Indo-Pacific.

In summary, the U.S. ambitions to establish a naval base on St. Martin's Island have significant implications for China's China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. The potential disruptions to maritime trade routes, impacts on regional stability, increased strategic competition, and shifts in diplomatic dynamics could all affect the effectiveness and progress of the CMEC. China's response will likely involve a combination of strategic adjustments, enhanced regional engagement, and increased investments in security and diplomacy to navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape and protect its interests.

9. Proposed path to stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific

9.1. Diplomatic engagement and regional cooperation

To address the challenges posed by Myanmar's and Bangladesh's crises and the U.S. naval base ambitions, a comprehensive approach to diplomatic engagement and regional cooperation is essential. Encouraging dialogue among India, China, the U.S., and regional stakeholders can help mitigate tensions and address mutual concerns. Multilateral platforms, such as regional forums and diplomatic summits, can facilitate discussions on security, economic cooperation, and humanitarian issues. Collaborative efforts to manage and resolve conflicts, as well as to strengthen regional institutions, are crucial for maintaining stability and fostering trust among key players (Peace and Conflict Studies Journal (PCSJ) 2024).

9.2. Regional security framework

Establishing a regional security framework that includes all major stakeholders can help manage strategic rivalries and address security concerns. This framework could involve mechanisms for conflict resolution, joint security initiatives, and collaborative defence arrangements. By creating channels for communication and cooperation, regional powers can address potential flashpoints and reduce the likelihood of conflict. The development of a regional security architecture that balances the interests of all parties can contribute to a more stable and predictable security environment in the Indo-Pacific.

9.3. Economic cooperation initiatives

Promoting economic cooperation initiatives that focus on regional

development and stability is vital. Investments in infrastructure projects, trade agreements, and economic partnerships can help mitigate the impact of regional instability and foster economic growth. Collaborative efforts to enhance connectivity, support cross-border trade, and address shared economic challenges can contribute to a more stable regional environment. By prioritizing economic cooperation and mutual benefit, regional actors can reduce tensions and create opportunities for shared prosperity (Regional Development Review (RDR), 2024).

10. Humanitarian assistance and support

Providing humanitarian assistance and support to address the crises in Myanmar and Bangladesh is essential for regional stability. International organizations, neighboring countries, and regional partners should collaborate to offer aid and support to mitigate the humanitarian impact of these crises. Efforts to address refugee needs, support displaced populations, and promote regional development can help alleviate some of the pressures that contribute to instability. By prioritizing humanitarian concerns and fostering regional solidarity, stakeholders can contribute to a more stable and resilient Indo-Pacific region.

11. Conclusion

The internal crises in Myanmar and Bangladesh, combined with U.S. ambitions for a naval base on St. Martin's Island, present complex challenges to regional stability and growth. The interconnected nature of these issues requires a nuanced approach that balances strategic interests with the need for regional cooperation and stability. To effectively navigate the challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, a multifaceted approach that integrates diplomacy, security, economic cooperation, and humanitarian efforts is essential. The traditional views that emphasize either military presence or economic engagement, this strategy requires harmonizing diplomatic initiatives with security frameworks and economic partnerships. A crucial element is regional ownership in security arrangements; instead of imposing external solutions, regional nations, including India, China, and ASEAN countries, should lead the development of tailored strategies that respect local dynamics. Moreover, addressing humanitarian needs must be a central pillar of foreign policy. By prioritizing disaster relief and sustainable development initiatives, countries can build soft power and mutual trust. Economic cooperation should also extend beyond traditional trade agreements to include collaborative projects on technology transfer, sustainable development, and climate adaptation, enhancing resilience against economic shocks. Importantly, maintaining balance amid strategic rivalries does not necessitate choosing sides; instead, fostering multilateral dialogues can lead to de-escalation of tensions. Engaging China in

cooperative frameworks around shared interests, such as climate change, could promote regional stability. This argument is novel in its emphasis on integrating humanitarian efforts with security and economic strategies as a pathway to peace, challenging prevailing notions that prioritize power competition. By advocating for a cooperative and inclusive approach, this perspective offers a roadmap for addressing the complexities of the Indo-Pacific while promoting shared prosperity.

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