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Global Maritime Chokepoints and Strategic Canals Control, Conflict, and the Future of Sea Power

Dr. Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari *
PhD Political Science (Strategic Studies), Islamia College University Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
bukharipalmist@gmail.com

Maaz Bin Waheed
MS Scholar International Relations Scholar, Comsats University Islamabad
beinghumanofthisera@gmail.com

Ehsanullah khan *
PhD Scholar, Disaster Management and Development Studies, University of Balochistan, Quetta
Khan19ff@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This is important research covering the strategic importance of maritime choke points and canals in the world and how they affect modern day sea power because of interdisciplinary interplay of power and struggle, and geopolitical rivalry. It also claims that narrow maritime passages, such as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal and Panama Canal are vulnerable physically due to concentrating a large portion of global trade and energy flows therein but are vulnerable to disruption due to their structural dependence. The study incorporates both a comparative case and qualitative-dominant mixed-methods methodology that involves integration of geo-spatial interpretation of data on dependency, strategic leverage and disruption risk using trade flows. The results show the underlying conflict of efficiency and resilience with the highly optimized maritime networks that increase the fragility of the system. The research paper finds that choke points will continue to be the focus of sea power in the future with the geopolitical competition, change in technology and changing security threats likely to increase rather than reduce their strategic

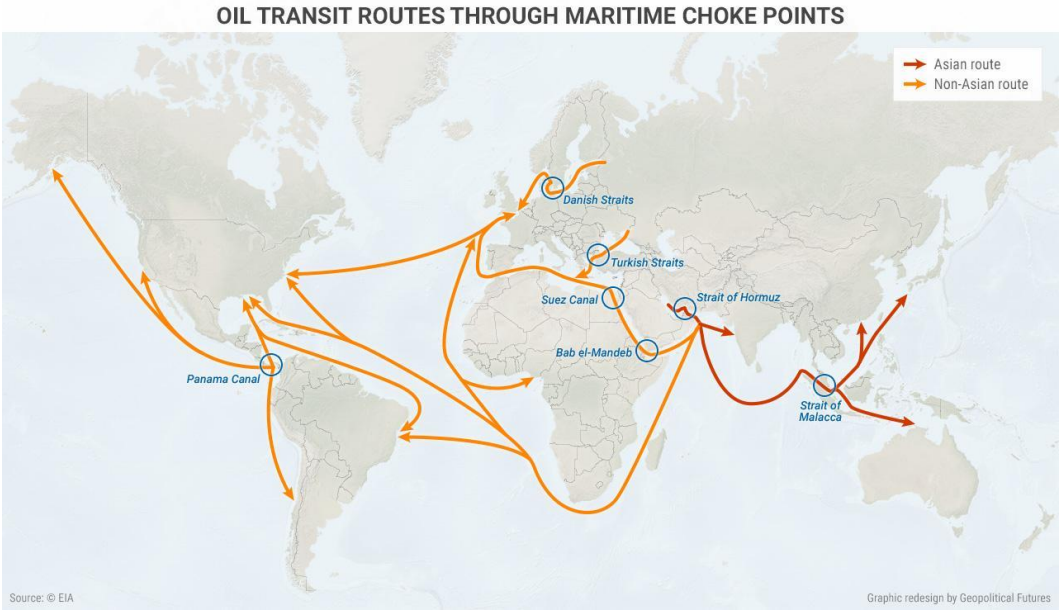
value.

Keywords: Maritime Chokepoints; Strategic Canals; Sea Power; Maritime Security; Geopolitics; Geoeconomics; Global Trade; Energy Security.

INTRODUCTION

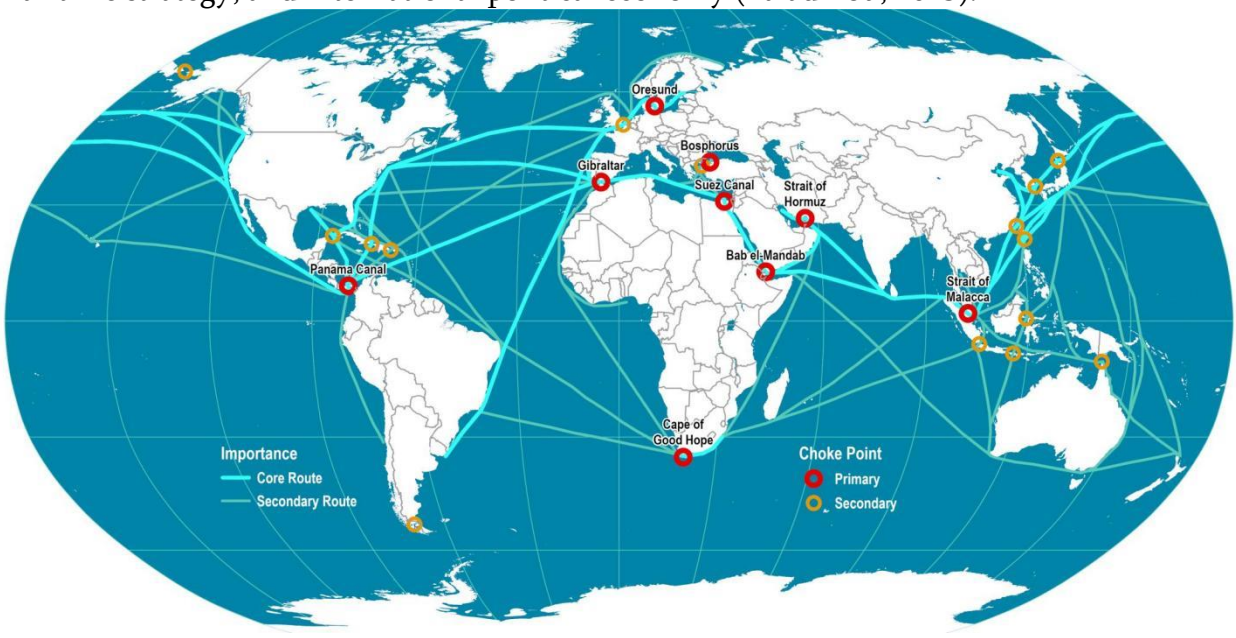
The seas of the world have been used traditionally as a source of international trade, strategic mobility, as well as geopolitical competition. Although the modern world economy is overwhelmed by air transport, land transport, and internet connectivity, the modern global economy is too reliant on sea-borne trading. Yet, this system is by no means a spatially open one, or evenly spaced. Rather it is structurally concentrated around a few, closely trafficked yet, highly sensitive, maritime passages, through which massive amounts of trade, hydrocarbons, and manufactured products must flow. These sea routes and root canals are thus not mere contours as geographic landmarks but ends up being keys where their economy, politics and structural vulnerability meet and hence are pivotal to world stability and establishment of sea power (Bukhari & Khan, 2025).

Key choke points, such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Bab el-Mandeb; as well as strategic canals such as the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal, drive a disproportionate volume of world shipping, mainly in energy shipments and containerized trade. Their restricted and limited geography forms both natural and artificial bottlenecks, were even localized disturbances, caused by geopolitical pressures, naval pressures, piracy, a malfunctioning infrastructural system or even unintended grounding can cause a ripple effect on the global supply chains. This means that such passages should not be viewed simply as tactical expediencies, but rather as strategic assets whose domination, avenues and safety directly determine the powers of states, and the durability of the global economic framework (Smailis, 2025).



These choke points have grown increasingly important on the strategic level alongside the changing dynamics of great-power competition and an unstable situation in the region. Large powers are increasingly considering access to and control over these routes as vital to national policy, which results in increased naval forces, investment in maritime infrastructure and alignments of major littoral areas in terms of strategy. Concurrently the environment in and about these corridors has become more intricate and multidimensional in terms of threats. Unorthodox threats, such as terrorism, piracy and cyber disruption, have manifested some weaknesses that are not limited to regular military structures. This dependence and insecurity speaking point brings to the fore one of the main paradoxes, namely it is those very choke points that make it possible to integrate the global economy but on the other hand, they are one of the most vulnerable points of the whole system (Mahamuud, 2025).

It is against this background that the current paper explores the role that the impact of sea power and control in maritime choke points and strategic canals have on modern international relationships and the world order. It explores how successfully these corridors can be used as leverages of geopolitical power, the type of emerging conflict and struggle that is evident around them and its implications on the future design of global security and trade. The analysis aims to give a more integrated and analytically rigorous description of how these essential maritime spaces remain the prerogative of cooperation, coercion and competition in the twenty-first century by entrenching the analysis in the diverse theoretical traditions of geopolitics, maritime strategy, and international political economy (Paladinou, 2025).



It is based on the idea that the conceptualization of maritime choke points as being tools of power rather than mere channels of trade in the highly interdependent global system draws inspiration in the study. It states that there are strategic nodes of the global system of trade and energy circulation like narrow maritime passages like the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal and Panama Canal, which

are indispensable yet at the same time are subjected to coercion, disruption, and geopolitical struggle. Control over choke points in this scenario does not just have a physical aspect, but also an influence in terms of access, surveillance, and the ability to influence the environment in which the maritime flows take place (Harfouche, 2025).

Epistemological fact, the research will implement a qualitative dominant bi-current mixed methodology through a combination of comparative analysis of cases with evidence of geo- spatial interpretation and trade flows to study trends of dependency, vulnerability as well as militarization through major maritime routes. As shown in the analysis, although choke points make the global system more connected and incur lower transport costs, they instill structural weaknesses in the international system. Cascading impacts on supply chains, in energy markets and security environments, can be introduced by disruptions, which may be conflict-based, might include piracy, hybrid threats, infrastructure failure, or unforeseen obstruction. Simultaneously, acute geo-economic rivalry between the large powers increasingly preconditions the intensification of the struggle to gain access to the sea and diversify routes, an increase in naval presence, and avoid over dependence on highly vulnerable routes (Hagen, 2026).

The paper concludes and suggests that in the future, maritime choke points and strategic canals will continue to be the focus of the future of sea power and the changing form of international order. As the globe grows more interconnected through trade, energy interdependence grows; geopolitics intensifies and dictates the governance, securitization, and resiliency of these critical passages and how they will either be stabilizing vessels of interdependent cooperation or flash papers of destabilizing conflict. To this end, the strategic significance of choke points is not fading but strengthening and becoming the center of the geopolitics of the sea in the twenty-first century (Uysal, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of the global maritime choke points and strategic canals are necessarily interdisciplinary, covering geopolitics, maritime economics, international security and transport studies. In all these areas, a single consistent pattern of analysis seems to be picturesquely evident that the world maritime system is structurally anchored to a few narrow passages on which flows of trade and energy inter dependent extremely. These bottlenecks are not simply geographical bottlenecks but point nodes which exist because of concomitant generation of efficiency and exposure. They simultaneously squeeze the space between and boost inter connectedness, but also amplify the risks, making global trade systems sensitive to disruption in any specific location. This two-sidedness effectiveness, and vulnerability is a key motif of modern literature (Duan and Baycar, 2025).

The theoretical concepts of this literature have a classical geopolitical background, especially the sea power and strategic geography theories. Those theorists of early maritime stressed the crucial part that playing with sea. The lines of communication with the sea were taken during projecting the national power. Modern thought uses the same rationale and proposes the choke points and strategic canals to be spatial concentration where the dynamics of sea power are most salient and practical. Possession or influence of routes to major world oil markets like Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal will allow states to influence the nature of trade flows, regional security conditions, and indirectly enforce geopolitical pressure. In these regards, choking points can serve as sites of operation whereby geography has been turned into strategic advantage (Agrawal, 2025).

One of the significant lines in the literature is concerned with the economic centrality of these sea routes as part of the world supply chains. This is a point that scholars have always pointed out to the factor of persistence of maritime transport in easing the transportation of hydrocarbons, raw materials and containerized homes. Their funneling through a few choke points creates systemic risk in that a failure in one of these places can instantly impact freight rates, insuring costs, delivery schedule and the commodity markets. It is further heightened by strategic canals like the Panama Canal and the Suez Canal, which put spatial connectivity, as well as efficiency in terms of time, in place. They are significant because they have the capacity to minimize transit distance and at the same time integrating the time sensitivity aspect of the modern supply chains (Pihos, 2025).

The other important literature is on the use of Vulnerability and risk as a way of looking at the chokepoints. The spectrum of threats given in this viewpoint covers a wide scope and includes conflict between states, instability in a region, piracy, terrorism, sabotage and causing obstruction through accidents. The political sensitivity, congestion and narrowness of these passages make them more prone to interference and the impact it has globally is escalated by the systemic significance of such incidences. The Bab el-Mandeb is often mentioned as one of the problematic cases, where the local tendencies in the conflict are crossed with the global needs in shipping operations and turned localized insecurity into an international economic and strategic challenge (Kraska, 2025).

The recent scholarship has added the security aspect with the choke points becoming the centre of great-power warfare and maritime policy. These passages are becoming more geopolitical spaces, rather than being merely viewed as vulnerable transit routes. Sustained naval presence, control of sea structures, foreign port building, technological monitoring and alliances are some of the ways of exerting influence by states. Notably, in this literature, the concept of maritime conflict is being undermined by showing that in most cases, choke point politics can play out beneath the level of open hostility. In its turn, it is ingrained in gray-zone operations, coercive signaling, and geo-economic gambit where influence is provided without involving a direct closure or direct military conflict (Nel & Blaine, 2026).

Simultaneously, researchers have expanded the analysis prism to adopt an anti-state-centered approach: by integrating the insights of business participants, cargo companies, insurance providers, and logistics schemes. In this perspective, choke points are centers of both geopolitical tension as well as the parameters of operational environments where predictability, efficiency and stability of routes are the most important. This literature provides insight into the conflict between geopolitical strategy and commercial rationality, presenting the ways in which disturbances by political or security considerations can have a direct impact in destabilizing the economic rationale of global shipping. As a result, we have the creation of maritime choke points as spaces of interaction between state power and the market, which are complex and sometimes contradictory (Lawale & Ahmad, 2025).

Although the current research has very proficient and varying results, there are still some gap holes. A major weakness is the lack of a thorough incorporation of theories with comparative analysis of empirical data. Most studies have been more inclined to be conceptual or technical modelling, leading to a divided comprehension about choke point dynamics. Moreover, although single choke points are thoroughly studied, comparative studies that investigate two or more choke points, both natural and artificial, in a coherent framework, are lacking. This restricts the possibility to generalize the results or find more general formations in the realm of the world maritime system. Also, other emerging drivers, like climate change, the development of Arctic Routes, digitalization of the maritime system, cyber vulnerability and the changing geographies of trade, have not been studied extensively, especially regarding how they will affect maritime power and strategic competition in the long-term (Ulrichsen & Krane, 2026).

Combined, the literature sees the global maritime chokepoints and the strategic canals as necessities that are an intrinsic part of the international system but that are unstable. They allow global trade and energy to flow and at the same time, they amass systemic risk posing a tension that remains the same between correctness and fragility. Based on this premise, the current paper aims at contributing to the body of literature by merging the aspects of control, dependency, and vulnerability in a single comparing framework. By so doing, it seeks to give a more consistent and analytically empowering insight into the understanding of the role of maritime

chokepoints to further develop the nature of sea power in an increasingly globalized/connected and competitive international system.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a qualitative-dominant mixed-methodology, based on a deductive framework, originally underpinned by geopolitics, maritime security and international political economy. It discusses the five major maritime routes Hormuz, Malacca, Suez, Panama and Bab el-Mandeb that it chooses based on their strategic significance, levels of trade and vulnerability to disruption. The research considers the patterns of dependency, vulnerability, and strategic leverage using only secondary data with the support of the geospatial and trade-flow indicators. It is an amalgamation of thematic and comparative methods where the analysis has produced recurring dynamics, which include coercion, militarization and risk of disruption, among various types of chokepoints. The quality of data has been achieved through data triangulation, and the limitations are the limited access to sensitive data, the dynamic nature of maritime and the need to analyze breadth and not depth.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This research is theoretically based on the intersection of classical geopolitics, maritime strategy, chokepoint theory and international political economy. Its main point of view is that it is not the place of geography to simply condition maritime power, but rather it actively structures and reproduces it. Spatial constraints in chokepoints of the ocean make global control, energy, and military resources into a narrow bottleneck and make them a key node of control, vulnerability, and strategic rivalry, like in the maritime chokepoints and strategic canals (Al-Rousan and Steinbuks, 2025). In turn, chokepoints are not some passive routes of transit but some specific places of power and manifestation of systemic vulnerability (Thakur, 2024).

One of the pillars of the framework is the notion of sea power as expounded by Alfred Thayer Mahan that advocates the strategic significance of dominating sea lines of communication (SLOCs) to project national power (Mahan, 1890). The modern context has taken this notion to be beyond conventional naval control and the ability to control, watch, and stop crucial shipping routes (The Defence Hub Journal, 2025). This view applies to chokepoints, and strategically important canals, where it ends up functioning as a main field of operation where sea power is exercised in the most immediate way. States that can have disproportionate control of access, security, or control over these corridors have disproportionate control overflows of trade, energy supply chains, and military mobility (World Review of International Political Economy, 2024).

It can be strengthened with the help of general geopolitical theory, especially the work by Mackinder (1904) and Spykman (1942/1944). Whereas the strategy of controlling central landmasses as espoused by Mackinder as his heartland theory centers analytical emphasis on central and landmass locations, the theory of Spykman on rimlands cedes analytical attention to the littoral and coastal areas where land meets with the sea. These regions form important contact points of power projection

and maritime chokepoints are intertwined in these disputed areas and form the crucible of regional power and international positioning (Fiveable, 2024).

The framework also includes choke point theory, which has theorized slender maritime bottlenecks as structural bottlenecks in the world systems of transport and energy. They are important in terms of concentration of flows that they maintain. However, although concentration offers the benefit of lowering distance and cost, which also contributes to structural vulnerability, any kind of disruption can result in disproportional systemic impact (Al-Rousan & Steinbuks, 2025). Based on this reasoning, the role of choke points like the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca can be seen as sources of pressure points in the global economy where regional instability can scale up to economic and strategic disasters (Hinrich Foundation, 2026).

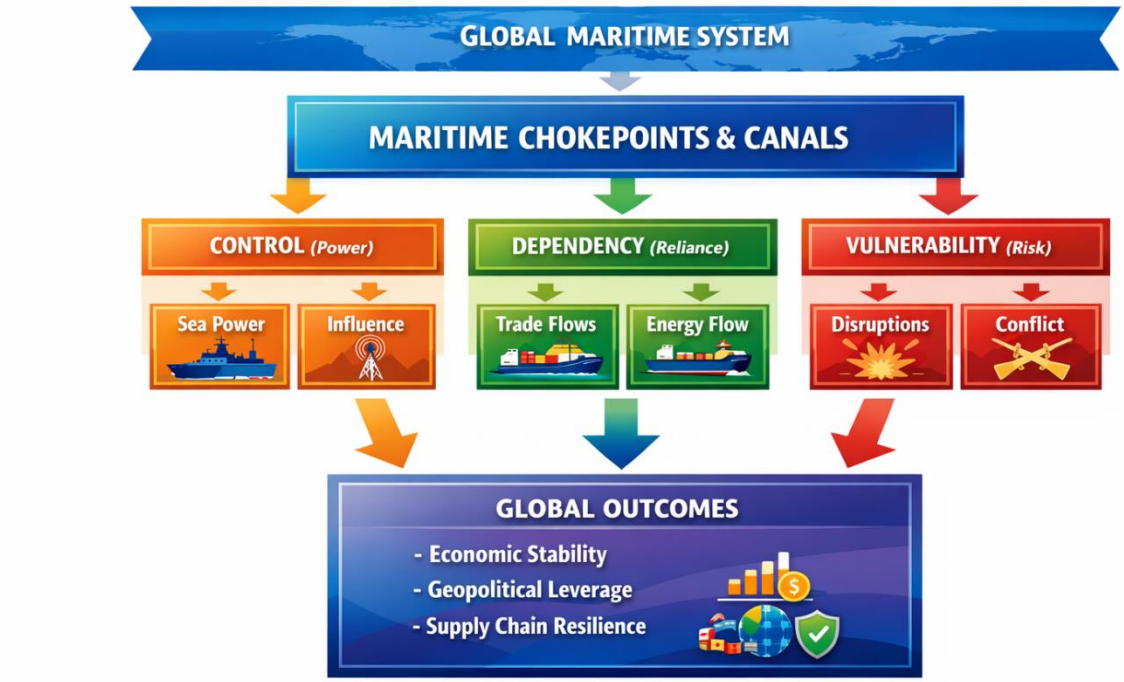
To capture the economic aspect, the framework relies on the idea of complicated interdependence focusing on the degree of interdependence and interconnectedness of the global trade and energy systems (Keohane and Nye, 1977). The disruption in such closely-knit networks is not geographically localized but spreads around the global chains of supply. Investigative canals like the Suez Canal or the Panama Canal are examples that include such an energetic process because an instantaneous impact of temporary blockages and/or destabilization produces long-range and widespread effects on the global markets (World Trade Center, 2024; Lessi, 2025). This point of view emphasizes that strategic significance of chokepoints cannot be narrowed down to military issues but a more fundamental emphasis on economic interdependence.

The framework also incorporates the learning of maritime security toward the consideration of the changing threat environment to choke point areas. Although the presence of interstate adversary and naval rivalry continues to be a critical issue, modern threats are turning into piracy, terrorism, cyber interference, and hybrid wars (UNODC, 2024). With these developments, it is evident that choke points are not natural geographical landmarks but are dynamic security landscapes as influenced by the state as well as the non-state entities. An example of the impact of the instability of a region on the global shipping flows, e.g., the Bab el-Mandeb, supports the notion of describing choke points as multidimensional risk settings (TOMS Journal, 2025).

Moreover, the framework also uses geo economic theory to explain the use of economic and infrastructural tools by states to realize strategic goals. Choke point control is no longer pursued exclusively by military means but rather more via indirect means such as control of ports and investments in infrastructures, spy instruments, control over the course of regulation and the creation of alternative routes (CeSCube, 2025). This is indicative of a more general shift in the character of power in which control over connectivity and accessibility may have as much of an effect as a territorial authority or a naval ascendancy.

The combination of these views is termed the framework as it conceptualizes the maritime choke points and several strategic canals in terms of three aspects and dimensions two of which are interdependent and the third is vulnerable with the

conceptual framework of maritime choke points and strategic canals. These dimensions relate to one another to define whether a choke point is relaxed funnel of worldwide exchange or is a key confrontation spot of worldwide politics (Al-Rousan & Steinbuks, 2025). This unified framework offers a consistent analytical platform to comprehend how sea chokes still undertake the dynamics of sea power, geopolitical rivalry and global economic steadiness.



Results/Findings

The results reveal that the international system has global maritime choke points and strategic canals that are some of the most significant structural characteristics. They both serve as the facilitators of international trade and the canal of energy flow and as the centers of geopolitical conflict. This analysis supports the fact that the commercial and energy flow of the world is concentrated in a few small maritime channels, which form a very efficient system of operations under normal conditions but shows acute stress conditions.

Among the most evident conclusions is that some choke points have an outstanding strategic positioning due to the energy transit concentration. The Strait of Hormuz stands out as the most vulnerable energy gateway in the world system, with any kind of disruption having its instantaneous effect on supply prospects, price fluctuations, and strategic cues. Comparatively, the Strait of Malacca is depicted to be a thick road of trade linking East Asian centres of production to the rest of the world. These results indicate that choking points are not necessarily all similar in their purpose. Instead, there are various pressure points, each having its own set of implications to energy security, continuity in commerce and strategic leverage.

The research also concludes that strategic canals not only create a global impact by comprehensively connecting the world but also create a concentration of vulnerability. Suez Canal and Panama Canal are demonstrated to reduce the time spent on the voyage, lowers the costs of operation and enhances the time efficiency of shipping networks. But the artificiality of this which makes them logistically viable makes them operationally vulnerable. Being narrow in nature, having a lot of traffic, and reliant on uninterrupted management make them particularly prone to blockage, technical failure, environmental stress and political instability. As the evidence shows the situation of disrupting either canal has direct rerouting pressures, additional freight burdens and multiplying delays throughout global supply chains.

The other significant discovery is related to the increasingly strategic competition of choke points. The discussion reveals that geographic closeness, naval capability or infrastructural leverage by states on major maritime routes can have significant leverage over the trade conditions in the vicinity. Notably, this leverage is indirect most of the time. States manipulate routes rather than by physically closing them, which can be achieved by continuous presence of navy, surveillance, connectivity of ports, maritime alliances and disruption risk indicators. This is indicative of a larger shift in the logic of sea power towards more fined tuned modes of geo-economic power and strategic power.

Another conclusion is that choke point insecurity is increasingly multidimensional. The Bab el-Mandeb, specifically, stands out as a risky area, where regional warfare, militant attacks, piracy, and poor governance collide with key international shipping routes. This shows that the vulnerability of choke points cannot be sufficiently interpreted by the traditional interstate rivalry only. Asymmetric threats by non-state actors have become part of the security landscape of critical sea routes, and choke point management is more complicated and uncertain.

The paper also concludes that states and large trading participants are investing in the diversification of routes and redundancy to lessen their reliance on the chokepoints that are vulnerable. These are in support of pipelines, port development, overland corridors and alternative maritime routes. But the analysis has shown that the extent of such diversification is still incomplete and is limited by geography, cost, infrastructure and uncertainty of political forces. This is causing the strategic centrality of key choke points to be displaced not being displaced, but being managed, hedged, and selectively supplemented.

In general, the results prove that maritime choke points and strategic canals are not inactive transport corridors: rather, they are dynamic geopolitical tools that define the relations of power in the world. They both reproduce globalization and reveal its frailties. The future of sea power will not be determined solely by the capacity in the naval sphere, but also the capacity of the states to gain access, to manage dependencies, and to avoid competition in these important maritime routes.

DISCUSSION

The geography of movement is narrowly organized to organize the world

maritime order. There are a handful of choke points and canals of strategic importance as they are invaluable arteries of global trade, energy flow and movement of armies, and therefore in the heart of economic order and geopolitical rivalry. What is important about them is not so much the amount of traffic that they carry, but rather the asymmetry of their consequence: disruption in one location can have far-reaching effects, depending on where the incident occurs. These ways are never to be viewed as geographic inertia but should be seen as instruments of control, coercion, and dependency that are in an ongoing negotiation (Bergeron, 2025).

Natural Choke points (Straits and Narrow seas).

Natural chokepoints Geographically formed slit passages which link significant bodies of water. Since they are part of the physical layout of the maritime world, there can be no full substitute for them without significant diversion, time and expense. They are especially important to long-term strategic planning, as well as to the historical logic of sea power competition, since they are permanent (Awan et al., 2025). The Strait of Hormuz is the most crucial energy-sharing of the international system in the Middle East. It is significant not just because of the amount of hydrocarbon transits that it enables, but also because it is near politically unstable littoral states and in insecure security spaces. It is a perennial case study of strategic leveraging by geographic concentration. The Bab el-Mandeb, but has quite another, yet equally fateful, position. It can be considered the southern entrance to the Suez Canal, connecting the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, thus constituting a multi-layered vulnerability where the unstable situation in one area can spill over to the Europe-Asia maritime axis (Lambert & Ahmed, 2025). One of the most prominent trade densities in the Indo-Pacific is probably the Strait of Malacca. It links the oceans of the Indians and pacific and assists in the conduction of a considerable amount of trading activities between East Asia, Middle East and Europe. It has strategic importance in the sense that it is a condensed manufacturing and energy galleway in the world. This meaning is further accentuated by the fact that the nearby Singapore Strait makes the area a more important transshipment and logistical hub. The Malacca route is not the only route, other paths exist such as the Sunda, Lombok and Makassar Straits which offer some rerouting options, but none of them are as dense, convenient, and strategically located as the Malacca route. This is an indication that not all things are substitutes in any actual strategic sense (Verma & Shahanas, 2025). The Strait of Gibraltar allows the Mediterranean and Atlantic to enter Europe and Eurasia and has an impact on transatlantic, European and North African maritime. Passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean is controlled by the Bosporus and the Dardanelles and continues to be the center of Turkish, Russian and European maritime reckoning. The Danish Straits system is the route to entry the Baltic and North Sea and the English Channel is one of the busiest and the most important strategic routes of the world. Such examples show that the Euro-Atlantic space chokepoints are not just significant by the volume of commerce that can be carried out on them, but also because they are the location where systems of alliances intersect, the formation of the naval position is created, and commercial density

thrives (Raazia & Munir, 2025). There are other routes that are also strategic in each circumstance. The Strait of Magellan is a less important route than it used to be in previous centuries yet is a regionally and historically important alternative. With the accessibility to the arctic changing as climate change advances, Bering Strait is becoming a more strategically important location, and the question of new sea routes, sovereignty and control of the sea is a subject of discussion. The Cape of Good Hope is not technically a chokepoint but is a possible rerouting option in case of a disruption of the Suez axis, although at a very high expense in terms of time and freight burden (Schortgen, 2025).

Strategic artificial Canals (Critical Marine Links)

Strategic canals are not equal to natural chokepoints since they are manmade structures that are created to squeeze time, shorten the distance of going through, and restructure geography of global trade. It is their artificial character, however, which predisposes them more especially to the mishaps of operations, and to sabotage, to political stagnation and interference of administration. Their strategic prowess can never stand alone, without their lack. The Suez Canal is an opening between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and one of the most important sea routes of the world economy. Its significance is that it ensures efficiency of the Europe/Asia trade because it eliminates the lengthy rerouting that is made around the African continent. But the shape in which it comes also makes it highly vulnerable to impediment and interference. Disrupted, the results are immediate and global: shipping is re-routed, insurance premiums are raised, supply chains slow down, and the logic of just-in-time trade in general is exposed to the risks of local failure (Papachristou, 2025). The Panama Canal is equally strategizing a similar role of connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean. It is unavoidable when it comes to intercontinental shipping especially in the trade between Americas and Asian-Pacific markets. It plays a role in determining the time frame of worldwide shipping chains by wasting a lot of distance and time. Not only is it a key infrastructure in commerce, but also in the movement of the navy and strategy, and is, therefore, a dual-use economic and military infrastructure (Khan et al., 2025). The other canals uphold the regional and strategic connectivity on smaller scales. The Kiel Canal is a route which allows rapid transit between the Baltic and the North Sea, both merchant and military. The Corinth Canal is not of great economic significance but has a symbolic connotation in the area. The Volga-Don Canal has a unique position in the Russian inland-maritime integration as it links up the Caspian and Black Sea systems. The Saint Lawrence Seaway provides Atlantic access to the deepest inland geography of the industrial North American geography and links inland production regions to the global markets. These examples prove that in the case when global-scale significance varies, canals are always a symbol of the connection between the planned effectiveness and plan exposure (Lambert, 2025).

Pipelines as "Virtual Chokepoints" (Strategic Bypass Routes).

The pipelines are virtual chokepoints as they are established to evade the risky maritime routes and at the same time, introduce new dependencies in themselves.

They have been provided as solutions to the chokepoint risk which is too one-dimensional. They do not eliminate vulnerability, but rather change maritime to land infrastructure, and thereby, change vulnerability (Mohamed Kotait & Ismail, 2025). The SUMED Pipeline offers a second way of circumventing the Suez Canal in transporting oil whereas the East-West Pipeline in Saudi Arabia will decrease the exposure to the Strait of Hormuz. Equally, the pipelines in China-Myanmar denote that the Beijing is engaged in the long-term in reducing its reliance on the Strait of Malacca. These projects are geoeconomically rational examples of redundancy: states do not have to leave the dependency on chokepoint entirely, which is often unfeasible, but protect themselves partially on the dangers of strategic concentration of maritime traffic (Soman & Balasubramanian, 2025).

Analytical Framework

Choke points can be of three types. Classification of maritime constraints into three categories that are related is one of the outstanding analyses that this research has made. The former are natural chokepoints, such as Hormuz and Malacca, which are permanent physical aspects of the world trade embedded in the physical geography of the world. The second one is artificial chokepoints, e.g., the Suez and Panama Canals, which are artificially created connections that make operations more efficient but highly vulnerable to operational and political manipulation. The third is strategic bypass routes, like pipelines and new Arctic options, which aim at getting less dependent on the classic chokepoints, but will create new geopolitical and infrastructural weak points (Rafiq et al., 2025). This categorization is significant as it does not fall into the classic trap of analysis and treating all chokepoints as similar. They are not. Others are energy chokepoints, others are trade-density chokepoints, others are temporal accelerators, others incomplete hedges against given dependency. With a more specific typology, greater strategic analysis can be performed.

Critical Insight: Fragility and Global Sea Power

The foremost lesson to emerge in the discussion is that the interconnection and vulnerability relationship is increasingly becoming the determinant of global maritime power. Artificially made canals, particularly, appear to be operationally feeble when compared to most natural chokepoints as they need all time organization, technical operation and political stability. The Suez blockage of 2021 demonstrated in a very graphic manner how a local incident can have a global impact in hours and reveal the potential vulnerability of the highly optimized maritime systems (Labh, 2025). The bigger implication is inevitable: in the future, the concept of sea power may not always be concerned with the owner of the largest navy. The issue of who can affect access, protect infrastructure and regulate disruption and the political-security environment in key maritime corridors is also questionable. The international maritime bottlenecks and geo-strategic canals are therefore not places of transit but could be instruments of power. They further organize trade, improve the competition and continue to shape the geography of strategy of the international order (Youvan, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed that global maritime chokepoints and strategic canals are some of the most influential structural factors that determine the modern international system. The concentration of a significant part of world maritime traffic and energy flow continues to be funneled through a limited number of natural straits, as well as through artificial canals, making these paths vital to the economic life of the world at the same time as a new and concentrated vulnerability is revealed to the world economy. This analysis indicates that Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and the Bab el-Mandeb are natural chokepoints that are important energy and trade routes where any source of geopolitical tensions can easily cause an economic panic. In the meantime, artificial canals such as the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal make the world more connected and cause acute vulnerability to the operations. The fact that they can shorten distances and accelerate transactions makes their disruption so important. The strategic importance of chokepoints thus is due to the existence of the two features: as a globalization facilitator, and as a source of systemic risk. The paper also reveals that the domination of choke points is being undertaken increasingly indirectly and in a multidimensional fashion. The contemporary sea power is not confined anymore to classical naval conflict. It has now included long-term surveillance, control over the waters, physical presence, web of alliances, control of routes, or the potential to indicate or disrupt. In this sense, the politics of chokepoints articulates a more widely grounded shift in the character of international competition, whereby circulation control can, in many cases, be a more strategically viable tool than actual control over space. Another inference is that the vulnerability in the global maritime system is not extraordinary. The moral of the trade narrowed down into a few channels is the exposure, which is natural and cannot be eliminated, but merely diminished. The strategic centrality of strategic chokepoints is permanent and cannot be removed by pipelines, alternative routes, and diversification strategies, but mitigates some of the forms of dependence. Instead, they produce novel levels of interdependence, infrastructural risk, and geopolitical calculation.

The paper builds upon the thesis that artificial canals tend to be operationally weaker than natural chokepoints because their operation completely relies on human management, engineering sustainability, and political integrity. Blockage, delay or accident incidents show how easily local disruptions can be turned into global supply-chain stress and the vulnerability inherent in highly streamlined systems of trade is revealed. Generally, the sea power architecture of maritime chokepoints and canals remains to be included in the global maritime chokepoints and strategic canals. They act as both crossings of the global economy and as possible sources of coercion, of contestation and disruption. As economic interdependence and geopolitical rivalry increase, they will not fall in the near future. The future of sea power will not be defined by solely the potential of naval power, but a larger capacity of the states to protect, control, and adjust to these strategic sea routes in a world of an even more competitive international order.

Recommendations

This analysis brings a few policies and strategic suggestions on how to deal with the increasing strategic weight, vulnerability and geopolitical sensitivity of global maritime chokepoints and strategic canals.

- Firstly, by the states that depend on maritime trade there should be primarily greater diversification of routes and supply chains. Systemic exposure can be avoided by over-dependence on a few chokepoints. Even though key routes like the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca cannot be completely avoided, by investing in overland routes, connectivity in the regions, multimodal logistics, and selective alternative maritime routes, the impact of crisis when it comes to disruptions is lowered.
- Second, there should be an increase in security of the strategic canals, particularly the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal by increasing the global cooperation. These rivers are too significant to be considered as national facilities. The intelligence sharing, maritime coordination system, technical contingency planning, and prompt crisis response systems ought to be multi-lateral if the long-term disruptions are to be countered.
- Third, the high-risk regions, especially the Bab el-Mandeb and other regions that tend to become unstable, need to be enhanced as far as maritime security is concerned. This necessitates that anti-piracy operations are coordinated, surveillance is improved, convoy support is provided when needed, and rapid response is provided to respond to terrorism, militant attacks, sabotage, and hybrid threats on the sea. The issue of security should be approached as a multi-layered concern of littoral governance, regional politics and interests in world trade in a concerted way.
- Fourth, resilient maritime infrastructure should be viewed as an issue of strategy and not as a technical issue. Computerized traffic-management systems, man-made canals, navigation system, dredging system, port interface and navigation system should be updated and emphasized. Past incidences of disruption have shown that maritime trade can never be as efficient as the strength of the infrastructure upon which it is based.
- Fifth, the states should be able to further develop selective strategic redundancy through pipelines, non-maritime energy corridors. But these virtual chokepoints are not idealized as solutions. They also need to be invested in parallel in protection, monitoring and political risk management as they just shift the vulnerability instead of eliminating it.
- Sixth, the international laws on freedom of navigation and guarantee of safe passage should be reinforced and enforced on a regular basis. In a geopolitical environment where geopolitical rivalry is on the rise, coercive behavior is preferable, which is legally ambiguous. The threat of unilateral interference should be reduced by having increased loyalty to the maritime law and the enforcement order that is predictable.
- Finally, long-term strategic planning must consider the issue of climate change,

the development of the Arctic routes, automation of shipping, cyber vulnerability, and evolving naval technologies. The following stage of the competition of chokepoints will not be limited to physical geography. It will involve the increasing amount of digital surveillance, infrastructure intelligence, cyber resilience, and the technological mediation of the flow of goods and energy.

Overall, diversification, resilience, legal governance, and collective security approach will have to be utilized to safeguard maritime chokepoints and strategic canals. The main issue is not whether chokepoints can be rendered irrelevant- they cannot. The question of whether states can control their reliance on them without letting these critical corridors become chronic sources of instability in an already contested maritime order is the real question.

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