**U.S. lawmakers to introduce legislation to formalise strategy for Indian Ocean Region]**

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Foreign Affairs Committee will introduce legislation on Tuesday requiring the U.S. administration to present a formal and “cohesive” Indian Ocean strategy across key departments.

The Indian Ocean Region Strategic Review Act, sponsored by Joaquin Castro (Democrat, Texas) and Darrell Issa (Republican, California), is based on a recommendation of the Bipartisan U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a body set up in 2000 to review and report on the U.S.-China relationship.

The Commission’s November 2022 report had recommended that the U.S. administration submit an Indian Ocean Region (IOR) strategy that would include plans to develop U.S. economic interests in the region, defend freedom of navigation, support regional partners, and promote cooperation with Japan, Australia, India, the U.K., and France, among others.

Mr. Castro supported the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy, his spokesperson told The Hindu, but felt it was too heavily focused on the Pacific Ocean and wanted the State Department to increase its prioritisation of the Indian Ocean Region.

The proposed Act would require coordination across three key departments — State, Defence, and the U.S International Agency for International Development (USAID) — in synthesising and executing a strategy for the IOR. The strategy will require the U.S. to strengthen diplomatic ties in the region such as via its participation in regional organisations.

The U.S. Secretary of State will be required to, within 180 days of the Act becoming law, submit a “multi-year strategy and implementation plan” for U.S. “engagement and posture” in the region, according to the text seen by The Hindu.

The Act will require the U.S. to “build upon existing agreements with strategic partners like India to foster military communication and intelligence sharing”, according to a spokesperson for Mr. Castro.

There is also a freedom of navigation clause in the legislation and a mandate to protect international shipping lanes. The text of the legislation says the report to Congress must provide details of efforts to improve cooperation between Quad countries (the U.S., India, Australia, and Japan).

The legislation will also require the administration to work closely with island nations, India, Japan, Australia, and others to foster commercial exchanges and economic development.

The Bill mandates that the U.S. government enhance the capacity of regional governments and NGOs to respond to and mitigate environmental disasters.

“Congressman Castro is optimistic that the legislation could be included in future legislative packages focused on competition with China along with other bipartisan priorities,” a spokesperson for Mr. Castro said.