

Will the new US strategy weaken China's influence in Africa?

The US and China's engagement in Africa are often framed in terms of zero-sum competition over influence and infrastructure investment in the continent. Increasingly, African countries are being reduced to pawns in the geopolitical chessboard and mere battlegrounds for resurgent great power competition—what has been termed the “New Scramble for Africa”. Despite stipulating their desire to not be used as pawns in proxy rivalries, it is becoming difficult for African leaders to remain quiet and not pick sides. The divergent voting patterns and reticence on part of some African countries to outrightly condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine reflected this dilemma. Gradually, the task of balancing and maintaining their relationship with both the West and the East is becoming difficult for African countries.

Amidst these uncertainties, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken kicked off a three-nation African tour in Johannesburg from 7–12 August, paying visits to three countries; South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. The highlight of the visit was the unveiling of a new “US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan

For a detailed report see: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/will-the-new-us-strategy-weaken-chinas-influence-in-africa/>

Africa”. The strategy “represents a reframing of Africa's importance to US national security interests,” and attempts to downplay perceptions of the continent as an area of its great-power rivalry with China. In many ways, the new strategy marks a breakaway from the Trump administration's “Prosper Africa” policy, which was explicitly focused on countering Beijing's growing influence on the continent.

When talking about Africa, the new strategy strikes the right notes. It acknowledges the centrality of the continent to US national interests and its indispensable role in providing global public goods and solving common developmental challenges. This is a notable departure from viewing the continent as a source of threats to a part of the solution, keeping in mind the significant transformations undergoing in the continent's socio-economic, political, and security landscape.

The US has also sent a signal to its close partners like India, Japan, and France of its willingness to collaborate in the Western Indian Ocean to promote maritime security and ensure safer African waters.

Sri Lanka will not be part of any Indian Ocean turf war: President Ranil Wickremesinghe

Sri Lanka will not take part in any “big power rivalry” in the Indian Ocean and it is unfortunate that his country has been made the “punching bag” for Hambantota, President Ranil Wickremesinghe has said, weeks after India and China clashed over the docking of a high-tech Chinese ship at the country's southern port. Sri Lanka certainly does not want the problems of the Pacific coming to the Indian Ocean, he said while speaking on the crisis-hit country's position on the geopolitical stage.

“We don't participate in a military alliance, and we certainly do not want the problems of the Pacific coming to the Indian Ocean. We don't want this to be an area of conflict and an area of war. Sri Lanka will not take part in any big power rivalry,” said Wickremesinghe on Wednesday while addressing the graduation ceremony of the National Defense College.

His remarks came weeks after the Chinese embassy and the Indian High Commission here clashed verbally over the docking of the Chinese ship ‘Yuan Wang 5’ at Sri Lanka's southern Hambantota port for replenishment. Wickremesinghe said that the “geopolitics of the Indian Ocean has unfortunately made Sri Lanka the punching bag for Hambantota.”

“It is not a military port. Though ours is a commercial port it shows our strategic importance that many people come to conclusions which are unwarranted,” Wickremesinghe said, in his second public comment on the issue in recent weeks.

For a detailed report see: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/sri-lanka-will-not-be-part-of-any-indian-ocean-turf-war-president-wickremesinghe/articleshow/94222949.cms>

On August 30, President Wickremesinghe appealed to all political parties to join an all-party government to tackle the island nation's worst-ever economic crisis and prevent “strong economies” from using it as a “tool of interference.”

“We can no longer be a nation dependent on loan assistance. We can also no longer be used as a tool of interference by other countries with strong economies,” Wickremesinghe said without naming any country. In his address on Wednesday, Wickremesinghe also said that Sri Lanka would stay out of any big power rivalry, adding that the country must ensure the rivalry does not lead to conflict in the Indian Ocean.

“That is one thing we cannot afford,” News First, an online portal, quoted Wickremesinghe as saying. Sri Lanka granted the port access to the Chinese vessel from August 16 to 22. There were apprehensions in New Delhi about the possibility of the Chinese vessel's tracking systems attempting to snoop on Indian defence installations while being on its way to the Sri Lankan port. India last month hit back at China for alleging that it was “interfering” in Sri Lanka's internal affairs, firmly telling Beijing that what Colombo needs now was “support, not unwanted pressure or unnecessary controversies” to serve another country's agenda.

In his address, Wickremesinghe also said that “if we lose a good security system, our future will be destroyed and the world situation and geopolitics will turn very badly.”



India launches new aircraft carrier

India commissioned its first home-built aircraft carrier Friday as it seeks to counter regional rival China's much larger and growing fleet, and expand its own indigenous shipbuilding capabilities.

The INS Vikrant, whose name is a Sanskrit word for "powerful" or "courageous," is India's second operational aircraft carrier, joining the Soviet-era INS Vikramaditya that it purchased from Russia in 2004 to defend the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal.

The new 262-meter (860-foot) carrier, designed by the Indian navy and built at the Cochin shipyard in southern India, was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as part of the country's commemoration of 75 years of independence from British rule.

The carrier is the largest warship to be built in the country, and can carry a crew of around 1,600 and operate a fleet of 30 aircraft, including fighter jets and helicopters, the navy said.

More than 75% of India's new aircraft carrier's components are indigenously procured, with half a dozen major industrial firms and over 100 smaller businesses providing equipment and machinery, according

For a detailed report see: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-technology-china-india-c5338e37f07a7e610436f20e191e2ed9>

Iran, Russia, China to conduct joint naval exercises in Indian Ocean

Iran will participate in naval military drills with China, Russia, and a number of other countries in the northern areas of the Indian Ocean, Navy Commander Shahram Irani said yesterday.

It is hoped the drills will reinforce security and enhance combat capabilities, Irani said in an interview with Defapress. The senior military official did not specify which countries will participate in the manoeuvres, nor the number type of ships that will be used.

As Iran's tensions with Israel continue to escalate, Tehran is conducting military manoeuvres at

For a detailed report see: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220923-russia-iran-and-china-to-hold-joint-navy-exercises-in-indian-ocean/>

China carves path to Indian Ocean with Myanmar rail network

BANGKOK/YANGON -- When the West cut off aid to Myanmar after the military took control in 2021, China rushed to fill the vacuum under its Belt and Road infrastructure-building initiative. But growing concern over China's so-called debt trap diplomacy threatens the of progress of a jewel of the initiative, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor.

Part of the project appears to be full-steam ahead after a rail network section that connects western China to Myanmar begun operating in recent months. For Beijing, the development is seen as crucial because it has the potential to open up a vital route to the Indian Ocean.

In June, freight trucks carrying 60 containers' worth of electronics, auto parts and other goods arrived

For more <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/China-carves-path-to-Indian-Ocean-with-Myanmar-rail-network>

to the Defense Ministry.

A delay of six years caused a six-fold price overrun to 200 billion rupees (\$2.5 billion) at present, according to defense experts.

The 47,400-ton warship will be fully operational by the end of 2023 after first undergoing landing trials with India's Russian-made MiG-29K fighter aircraft.

India plans to equip the carrier with more than two dozen new fighters, with the Rafale-M from France's Dassault and the F/A-18 Block III Super Hornet built by Boeing currently being considered.

Until then it will rely on the Russian aircraft borrowed from India's only other carrier, said Rahul Bedi, a defense expert.

In recent years, China has expanded its presence into the Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific and beyond.

In August, it sailed a navy vessel to a Chinese-built port in Sri Lanka despite security concerns from New Delhi about such a port call right off India's own coast. Beijing called the ship a research vessel, but it was widely believed to be a dual-use spy vessel that India feared could be used to surveil the region.

frequent intervals, either alone or jointly with other countries. Iran, Russia and China will hold joint naval exercises in the northern Indian Ocean "this autumn", Iranian semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

Mehr quoted Iranian Chief of Staff, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, as saying that other countries, including Oman and Pakistan, will join the drill, without giving further details.

The northern Indian Ocean extends to the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, and is a major waterway for oil exports to world markets.

in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city. The freight had originally left Chongqing, China, on a train in late May before being placed on trucks in the Yunnan Province city of Lincang and taken over the border in Myanmar's Shan State.

The new route was made possible by a railway link between the western Chinese cities of Lincang and Dali, which began operating in December 2020. It will "shorten the transportation distance and time" and optimize international shipments from inland China to the Middle East and Europe, China's Communist Party-affiliated Global Times reported.

In a separate shipping trial in August 2021, cargo was first transported by sea from Singapore to Yangon, by truck to Lincang, then finally by train to Chengdu.



HISTORY - ARCHIVES

Exploring the Indian Ocean as a rich archive of history – above and below the water line

Traders formed part of vast commercial networks that crisscrossed the Indian Ocean arena and beyond, from East Africa to Indonesia, the Middle East and China. These trade networks stretched back thousands of years, powered by the monsoon winds. Reversing direction in different seasons, these winds have long shaped the rhythm of life around the ocean, bringing rain to farmers, filling the sails of dhows and enabling trade between different ecological zones.

The monsoon wind pattern makes the Indian Ocean relatively easy to cross both ways. In the Atlantic, by contrast, winds blow in one direction all year round. That’s why the Indian Ocean is the world’s oldest long-distance trans-oceanic trading arena, and is sometimes known as the cradle of globalisation. This cosmopolitan world has long fascinated scholars and has become a vibrant domain of research. Yet this work has had little to say about the sea itself. Its focus is on human movement with the ocean as a passive backdrop. In the age of rising sea levels and climate change, it’s important to learn more about the sea from a material and ecological point of view.

Given the long millennia of trade and exchange, one key concern of Indian Ocean studies has been a focus on cultural interaction. Cities on the shores have sustained deep forms of material, intellectual and cultural exchange, so that the denizens of these ports had more in common with each other than with their fellows inland.

This early cosmopolitan world has famously

been explored in Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land*, which traces the travels of Abram bin Yiju, a 12th century Jewish Tunisian merchant based in Cairo and later in Mangalore, India. The book contrasts the rigidity of borders in the 1980s with the relative ease of movement in the late medieval Indian Ocean.

The Swahili coast provides another famed example of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism. Stretching a thousand miles from Somalia to Mozambique, Swahili society arose from centuries of interaction between Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Centred on coastal city states like Kilwa, Zanzibar and Lamu, Swahili trade networks reached far inland to present day Zimbabwe and outward to Persia, India and China. After reaching their height from the 12th to the 15th centuries, these city states were eventually undone by the Portuguese, who arrived from the early 16th century, seeking to establish a monopoly of the spice trade.

Central to these histories of mobility and exchange in the Indian Ocean has been the spread of Islam across land and sea from the 7th century CE. By the 14th century, mercantile networks around the Indian Ocean were almost entirely in the hands of Muslim traders.

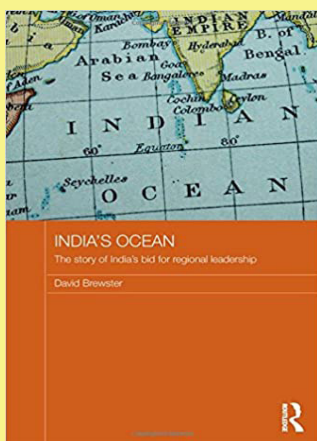
In their wake came scholars, theologians, pilgrims, clerks, legal pundits and Sufi divines. Together, these groups created a shared economic, spiritual and legal frameworks. Sufism, a mystical form of Islam is an important strand in the Indian Ocean histories, as is the centrifugal power of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

For a detailed report see: <https://theconversation.com/exploring-the-indian-ocean-as-a-rich-archive-of-history-above-and-below-the-water-line-133817>

BOOK REVIEW

India’s Ocean: The Story of India’s Bid for Regional Leadership

- David Brewster



This book assesses India’s role as a major power in the Indian Ocean. Many see the Indian Ocean as naturally falling within India’s sphere of influence but, as this book demonstrates, India has a long way to go before it could achieve regional

dominance. The book outlines the development of Indian thinking on its role in the Indian Ocean and examines India’s strategic relationships in the region, including with maritime South Asia, the Indian Ocean islands, East Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Australia. The book then discusses India’s ambivalent relationship with the United States and explores its attitude towards China’s growing power in the Indian Ocean. It concludes by discussing the region’s evolving strategic order – does India have what it takes to become the leading power in the region?

<https://www.routledge.com/Indias-Ocean-The-Story-of-Indias-Bid-for-Regional-Leadership/Brewster/p/book/9781138183070>

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