

# Sea Indian Ocean

Indian Ocean Strategic Studies – New York, USA



## Mission

*Indian Ocean is at the heart of international geo-politics. Some 80% of the world's maritime oil trade flows through three narrow passages of water, known as choke points, in the Indian Ocean. This includes the Strait of Hormuz—located between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman—which provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. Geo-Politically, the Indian Ocean is becoming a pivotal zone of strategic competition. It is also our belief that national security and human security issues as well as ecological and environmental concerns in the Indian Ocean region are linked to the state of individual, social, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, economic and collective rights of people in the region. This newsletter is therefore deeply committed to sharing ground realities, experiences, knowledge and global insights on peace, development and conflict resolution issues as well as the state of human rights and justice in the Indian Ocean region.*

## Surrounding the Ocean: PRC Influence in the Indian Ocean

### An Overview of the Indian Ocean

One of the biggest challenges to understanding the Indian Ocean today is the continental division of a maritime domain. Traditionally, the Indian Ocean is divided into subregions with dominant continental focus such as South Asia, Middle East, and Africa. The Indian Ocean, within the U.S. Department of State is viewed through the Bureaus of African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, and South and Central Asian Affairs. The maritime domain and its developments therein exist on the periphery of the geopolitical and strategic conversations within this construct. An accentuated challenge is categorizing island nations in the region into continental silos. For example, Sri Lanka is studied as part of South Asia and Seychelles as part of Africa, but South Asia and Africa would identify primary challenges significantly different than islands that are surrounded by the ocean on all four sides while sitting across key trading routes. A study of the maritime domain requires a maritime approach. My work through the Indian Ocean Initiative studies and assesses the Indian Ocean as one continuous theater and its implications on the Indo-Pacific.

The Indian Ocean is a critical trade route. It includes some of the world's most strategically important chokepoints, particularly energy shipping. For example, the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important chokepoints for oil transit, connects the Persian Gulf and the Middle East to Asia, Europe, and Africa via the Indian Ocean. The ocean is also home to Bab-el-Mandeb situated between the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, and the Suez Canal. It is a key transit route for goods

and energy between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, all via the Indian Ocean. Finally, the chokepoint that coined the phrase “Malacca Dilemma” is the strait of Malacca connecting Southeast and Northeast Asia to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe via the Indian Ocean.

China relies on a safe, secure, and stable Indian Ocean for trade, with a particular focus on energy. Nine of China's top ten crude oil suppliers transit the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean is also the primary theater of transit for China for engagements with Africa, Middle East, island nations, and littorals across the vast ocean. Going beyond, it is also the main trading route between China and Europe. China's interest in the Indian Ocean is therefore clear, at least on the economic side. As history will tell us, the flag follows trade. There is little doubt in the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean for China and this interest will only continue to grow.

### China in the Indian Ocean

China has growing interests in the Indian Ocean. Although Beijing is considered a new player in the region, China has had long-standing political and diplomatic ties with many littorals across the Indian Ocean. For example, China is the only nation with an embassy in each of the six islands in the Indian Ocean—Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros. None of the traditional players—the United States, the UK, India, or France have embassies on all six. China also does not have any standing territorial or sovereignty disputes in the Indian Ocean, whereas the U.S., the UK, and France have long-standing sovereignty disputes emerging from decolonization.

## ***Maritime Security & Geopolitics in Indian Ocean Region***

By linking the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Africa, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) serves as an important global trade and commercial hub. The Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb, and the Malacca Strait are just a few of the strategic choke points that are located there. The region faces a number of security risks, including piracy, terrorism, territorial disputes, and geopolitical tensions. In particular, off the coast of Somalia, where pirates have seized commercial ships and held crews hostage for ransom, piracy has been a significant problem in the area for a number of years. But in recent years, the number of piracy incidents has significantly decreased as a result of the efforts of international naval forces and increased security measures by shipping companies.

For a detailed report see: <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/03/25/maritime-security-geopolitics-in-indian-ocean-region/>

## ***Ethiopia at a Midair of Transition***

Ethiopia is in the process of transition and needs to be assisted to complete this process. The country has lost its traditional safe heaven ground but has not reached the so-called modern safe haven ground yet, hanging now in the middle. This stage is filled with sharp contrasts, confusions and conflicts. Many observers are perplexed with paradoxes with opinions divided among those who focus on the positive signs and prospects and those that focus on ruining and crumbling traditional livelihood. The existing historic social fault lines are exacerbated by sharply divided feelings of hope/ aspirations and despair/ frustration.

Indeed, in the last two decades, Ethiopia beamed contrasting images of a fast growing economy and sharply declining poverty on one hand, which is mainly based on official statistics, and mass civil unrest and widespread youth grievances, on the other hand, arising

from rising unemployment and cost of living. Such contrast prevails in different domains: booming construction (high rising buildings, express roads, modern real estate residential complexes, etc. – vs- growing land value driven displacement of low income groups, housing shortage, continuously rising housing rent); large scale investments (growing share companies, private banks, organized businesses, including cluster farming and farmers cooperatives –vs- growing informal businesses, street vendors, struggling small businesses, land fragmentation, no more viable small farming or pastoral life); transport sector (modern phone call based and meter charge taxi services –vs- struggling Lada taxis, tuk-tuks, mini-buses); labour market (few but rising millionaires –vs- high youth including educated unemployment); high economic growth –vs- high inflation and unemployment.

## ***India developing a naval base at Andamans chokes China in the region***

The strategically important archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANIs) situated at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to India's southeast remained a dormant landmass. That changed when China started making radical movements near the border areas. Fast forward to 2023 and New Delhi is in the advanced stage of building a naval base to counter its perennial foe.

Comprising 572 Islands stretching over an area of 450 nautical miles with a total of 24 ports, ANIs assume great significance in New Delhi's Indian Ocean Region (IOR) strategy. Additionally, it helps India counter China's 'String of Pearls' strategy due to its closeness to the 'Strait of Malacca' chokehold.

### ***Manning the Strait of Malacca chokehold***

The northernmost point of the island chain

is merely 22 nautical miles from Myanmar, while the southernmost point is only 90 nautical miles away from Indonesia. Nearly 70,000 out of the 1,20,000 ships sailing through the Indian Ocean pass through the 'Strait of Malacca' and the neighbouring Six Degrees channel located to the south of the ANIs.

This strait is the heartbeat of China's operation as 80 per cent of its oil supplies pass through the strait. Militarising the region appears a no-brainer - not because India wants a conflict but to assert an aura of superiority.

In case of an escalating conflict, New Delhi can simply alienate the region. Consequently, China's hydrocarbon supply from the Middle East may come to a screeching halt. Long story short, controlling ANIs essentially means controlling China's economy.

For a detailed report see: <https://www.wionews.com/opinions-blogs/explained-how-india-developing-a-naval-base-at-andamans-chokes-china-in-the-region-572362>



## Policy paper G7 Japan 2023

The G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US), and the High Representative of the European Union, underline our strong sense of unity as the world navigates grave threats to the international system, including Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine. We reaffirm our commitment to collective action to address global challenges, including climate change, pollution, loss of biodiversity, health, and food and energy security, and to uphold and reinforce the free and open international order based on the rule of law, respecting the United Nations (UN) Charter. We will continue to work with our partners to promote open, transparent, resilient, and sustainable societies that champion human rights, justice, and dignity, and address the needs of the most vulnerable. We reaffirm our intention to promote human security and continue building a global community that leaves no one behind. We call on all partners to join us in addressing these pressing global challenges and to work together to build a better, more prosperous, and more secure future.

### Promoting peace and security

#### 1. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

For a detailed report see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-japan-2023-foreign-ministers-communiqué/g7-japan-2023-foreign-ministers-communiqué-18-april-2023-karuizawa-nagano>

## 'New world order is taking shape': Azerbaijan President

A "new world order is taking shape" as he addressed the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group meeting in the capital, Baku, Anadolu News Agency reports.

"Now the world is witnessing the most serious East-West confrontation since the end of the Cold War, with repercussions for the remaining part of the world. As the second largest international institution after the UN, NAM should play a more visible and efficient role in the international arena and actively participate in reshaping the new world order," Aliyev said.

He said that the international security architecture that has existed for decades is currently undergoing radical changes, adding that multilateralism is at stake with "the erosion of international law norms and principles" further threatening international order.

For a detailed report see: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230302-new-world-order-is-taking-shape-azerbaijan-president/>

## The PEACE Cable in the Middle East and North Africa

As an ambitious and rapidly growing superpower, China has quickly distinguished itself in emerging technology. The country has long leveraged its ubiquitous tech sector for diplomatic and political advantage. China's technological outreach encompasses its international infrastructure mega-project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to reorient the global economy toward Beijing through infrastructure deals with over 60 countries. Perhaps the BRI's most consequential component will be the Digital Silk Road (DSR).

For a detailed report see: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/connecting-beijings-global-infrastructure-peace-cable-middle-east-and-north-africa>



We once again condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a serious violation of international law, including the UN Charter. Russia must withdraw all forces and equipment from Ukraine immediately and unconditionally. We recommit today to supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes and to providing sustained security, economic, and institutional support to help Ukraine defend itself, secure its free and democratic future, and deter future Russian aggression.

#### 2. Indo-Pacific

We reiterate the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is inclusive, prosperous, secure, based on the rule of law, and that protects shared principles including sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful resolution of disputes, fundamental freedoms and human rights. We reaffirm individual initiatives of the G7 members and welcome those of our partners to enhance their engagement with the region. We underscore our commitment to further strengthening our coordination among the G7 on the region, to working with regional partners, including ASEAN and its member states.

"More cases of violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity and intervention in the internal affairs of states are observed. The decisions of the leading international organisations are either not implemented or the selective approach and double standards are being applied," he said.

Aliyev said that the NAM must unite to eliminate the growing trend of neo-colonialism, adding that the organisation "strongly" supports the sovereignty of the Union of Comoros over the island of Mayotte, a French overseas department in the Indian Ocean, and that the NAM calls on Paris to "respect the rights of the New Caledonian people and other peoples in French overseas communities and territories."

Led by companies like Huawei, the DSR seeks to connect the global economy through emerging technologies that are set to revolutionize global networks, such as fiber-optic cables and 5G-supported communications. While these projects come to fruition, China's ambitions are becoming integral to the Middle East's economy. As a case in point, Beijing has found a way to assert itself and challenge the U.S. geopolitically through the expansion of next generation fiber-optic cables.

## HISTORY - ARCHIVES

### **Why Did Ming China Stop Sending out the Treasure Fleet?**

Between 1405 and 1433, Ming China sent out seven gigantic naval expeditions under the command of Zheng He the great eunuch admiral. These expeditions traveled along the Indian Ocean trade routes as far as Arabia and the coast of East Africa, but in 1433, the government suddenly called them off.

#### **What Prompted the End of the Treasure Fleet?**

In part, the sense of surprise and even bewilderment that the Ming government’s decision elicits in western observers arises from a misunderstanding about the original purpose of Zheng He’s voyages. Less than a century later, in 1497, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama traveled to some of the same places from the west; he also called in at the ports of East Africa, and then headed to India, the reverse of the Chinese itinerary. Da Gama went in search of adventure and trade, so many westerners assume that the same motives inspired Zheng He’s trips.

However, the Ming admiral and his treasure fleet were not engaged in a voyage of exploration, for one simple reason: the Chinese already knew about the ports and countries around the Indian Ocean. Indeed, both Zheng He’s father and grandfather used the honorific hajji, an indication that they had performed their ritual pilgrimage to Mecca, on the Arabian Peninsula. Zheng He was not sailing off into the unknown.

For a detailed report see: <https://www.thoughtco.com/why-did-the-treasure-fleet-stop-195223>

Likewise, the Ming admiral was not sailing out in search of trade. For one thing, in the fifteenth century, all the world coveted Chinese silks and porcelain; China had no need to seek out customers — China’s customers came to them. For another, in the Confucian world order, merchants were considered to be among the lowliest members of society. Confucius saw merchants and other middlemen as parasites, profiting on the work of the farmers and artisans who actually produced trade goods. An imperial fleet would not sully itself with such a lowly matter as trade.

If not trade or new horizons, then, what was Zheng He seeking? The seven voyages of the Treasure Fleet were meant to display Chinese might to all the kingdoms and trade ports of the Indian Ocean world and to bring back exotic toys and novelties for the emperor. In other words, Zheng He’s enormous junks were intended to shock and awe other Asian principalities into offering tribute to the Ming.

So then, why did the Ming halt these voyages in 1433, and either burn the great fleet in its moorings or allow it to rot (depending upon the source)?

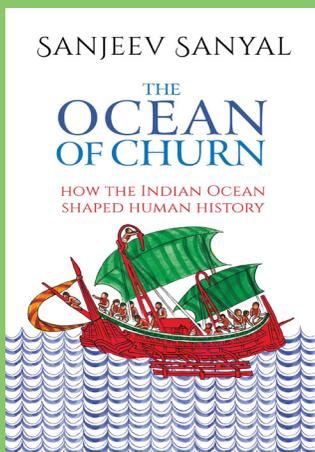
#### **Ming Reasoning**

There were three principal reasons for this decision. First, the Yongle Emperor who sponsored Zheng He’s first six voyages died in 1424.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **The Ocean of Churn: How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History**

- Sanjeev Sanyal



Much of human history has played itself out along the rim of the Indian Ocean. In a first-of-its-kind attempt, best-selling author Sanjeev Sanyal tells the history of this significant region, which stretches across East Africa, the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent to South East

Asia and Australia. He narrates a fascinating tale about the earliest human migrations out of Africa and the great cities of Angkor and Vijayanagar; medieval Arab empires and

Chinese treasure fleets ; the rivalries of European colonial powers and a new dawn. Sanjeev explores remote archaeological sites, ancient inscriptions, maritime trading networks and half-forgotten oral histories, to make exciting revelations. In his inimitable style, he draws upon existing and new evidence to challenge well-established claims about famous historical characters and the flow of history. Adventurers, merchants, explorers, monks, swashbuckling pirates, revolutionaries and warrior princesses populate this colourful and multifaceted narrative. The Ocean of Churn takes the reader on an amazing journey through medieval geopolitics and eyewitness accounts of long-lost cities to the latest genetic discoveries about human origins, bringing alive a region that has defined civilization from the very beginning.

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/31020419>

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