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CHINA'S STRATEGIC PRESENCE IN EAST AFRICAN PORTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY

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Abstract: *This paper examines how China's presence in the East African seaports has created a threat to the Indian Ocean's security. In particular, the research empirically analyses whether China's growing activities in the Western Indian Ocean along the East African coast have dismantled the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific. This paper aims to understand the responses of India and her allies in containing China's rise in the region. The paper has taken three East African ports, Dar es Salaam, Lamu, and Doraleh port of Djibouti, as a case study to examine how Chinese presence in these three ports could dismantle the security architecture of Indo-Pacific in the Western Indian Ocean region. The paper demonstrates that the present competition of power projection in the Indian Ocean is a power maximization strategy for the national security of each state. Using primary and secondary data available on China, India, and other states' policies and activities, the study finds that it is a policy failure of the Indo-Pacific, accelerating China's rise in the region. However, the Indo-Pacific partners are revamping their policies to check China's rise in the Indian Ocean region.*

Keywords: *African Sea Ports; China; Debt Trap; Indo-Pacific; Western Indian Ocean; India; US*

INTRODUCTION

Great power often makes its presence felt by keeping its foothold worldwide to protect its political, economic, and military power. Material capability building is essential for great powers to get recognition. In this context, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) China's growth as a major power could be seen through its strategic presence at crucial geopolitical locations. Territorial possession is the primary condition for international recognition (Abraham 2014) for any post-colonial state like China. After launching the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, China has focused on land and maritime connectivity (Panneerselvam 2017). Beijing has heavily participated in road, rail, and port construction activities worldwide and wants to achieve its Chinese Dream (Chai and Chai 2013). Chinese presence in various seaports worldwide is part of its plan to be a Great power (Degang 2018).

Ports are crucial to marine logistics and global shipping. From ancient times, ports have been a part of human civilization; they "are the gateway for goods and people to flow into cities and nations" (Tsinker 2004). In this regard, a port's geopolitics are equally significant. A foreign power may invest in a port that is not on its soil to protect its geopolitical interests. Overseas ports could also be used as bases or facilities in international politics. Chinese enterprises are active in most overseas ports, and many of them are in debt traps. The port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka has been taken for 99 years lease, Haifa port in Israel for 25 years, the Durban port in Australia for 99 years and Piraeus port for 99 years. The rising activities of Chinese firms have created the speculation that China wants

to be a sea power. So, the concept of port diplomacy has emerged in the academia and media (Degang 2018). The Port Law of the PRC approves the government and the enterprises to go outside and take part in China's port diplomacy. As a consequence, a security threat from China has been felt by India, the United States, Japan, Australia, and others (Degang 2018).

This paper has taken into consideration three East African ports, Lamu in Kenya, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and Doraleh in Djibouti, to analyze the issue of China's growing presence in East African ports and what implication it could have on the security of India and Western Indian Ocean. Africa, and primarily East Africa, is growing as a significant region in terms of politics and economics. The future of global politics could be unfolded in Africa. The continent has many of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and its total GDP currently stands at about $2.6 trillion. While the economy is growing, many of the states are going through political crises, which could have an impact on the security of the Indian Ocean. The paper will mostly look into India's policies as the region is close to India geographically. At the same time, the paper will look into other problems like the security of the Indian Ocean in the context of China's rise, the strategies taken by India and its allies to counter China in the Indian Ocean region, etc.

The paper offers three major arguments. First, China is trying to be a hegemon in the region by breaking the rule-based order of the region. Secondly, India, the US, and their allies are trying to counter China through various initiatives, though they need to revamp their policies. Lastly, in the anarchic international system, every state is following self-help strategies to protect itself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

China and Africa have a long history that dates back to the Roman Empire. Beijing's policy towards Africa has been heavily influenced by history (Raine 2009). The Afro-Asian solidarity and China's interactions with the majority of the newly established third-world nations following World War II marked the beginning of the contemporary era of engagement. Beijing's overseas connections deteriorated during the Cultural Revolution. However, economic reforms made China the center of manufacturing in 1978. Around the same period, it became aware of the need for foreign energy, minerals, and resources in addition to political stability (Eisenman and Kurlantzick 2006). As a result, China began to venture abroad and became involved in Africa as part of its Going Global Strategy. It came to light that Africa might meet China's resource needs.

According to Adamas Bodomo (2017), China's goal was to expand economic development and cooperate with Africa in opposition to the West. Beijing wanted to use massive investments to outweigh the unrest at home (Sautman and Yan 2009). One of the foremost experts on China-Africa relations, Deborah Brautigam (1998), claims that by 1995, China had more aid programs in place in more African nations than the United States. China began to give help in the 1970s. She made the case in her groundbreaking book The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa (2009) that whereas Western nations have failed to help impoverished Africans escape poverty for years, China has succeeded (mostly without outside assistance). China has trained the military forces of numerous African nations and participated in the UN peacekeeping mission. It has sold weapons and assisted in the launch of satellite missions to several African nations. In order to preserve peace and stability in the area, Beijing has also inked the China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security pact

with the African governments. Owing to its expanding involvement in the area, competing nations like Brazil, Russia, and India have also shown an interest in regional security (Alden and Barbar 2015).

Founded in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation aims to enhance investment, commercial, security, and diplomatic ties between China and African nations. The Sino-African connection was formally institutionalized (Taylor 2011). Since China is new to this field and has only begun working in ports in Eastern Africa, there is less research on Chinese activity in these ports than there is on China's engagement in the different developmental projects in Africa covered in length in the literature mentioned above. There is, therefore, less work available, which may have consequences for the security of the Indian Ocean.

This supports the two research hypotheses. The first hypothesis looks at how China's presence in the ports of East Africa will provide it an advantage over other foreign powers in the Indian Ocean area, such as India. The second hypothesis sought to determine whether China's coastal presence in East Africa is a component of its strategy as a superpower.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed analytical and deductive methods to conduct the research. Data were gathered, and analysis and interpretation were performed on that data. Next, a specific theory was utilized to test the general premise that China is poised to be a threat in the Indian Ocean region due to its increasing activities in the selected East African ports. The study examines the implications that the Chinese presence in the three ports of East Africa could have on Indian Ocean security.

The study has both independent and dependent variables. China's presence in East African ports is the independent variable. Any changes in the independent variable will have an impact on the Indian Ocean security.

The work is based both on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include government reports, speeches, legal and policy documents, and news reports of the People's Republic of China, Tanzania, Kenya, Djibouti, India, and the USA. Secondary sources include books, journals, periodicals, and internet sources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

John Mearsheimer's (2001) "offensive realism" works as the base of this study. According to offensive realism, great powers always seek ways to gain an advantage over their competitors, with hegemony as their ultimate objective. So, they make the most of their authority. They compete with one another for power for the following five reasons. The international system is, first and foremost, anarchic, and there is no central authority. Second, every great power has some offensive military capacity to obliterate an adversary or rival state. Thirdly, no state could be certain of another state's intentions in this system. Therefore, a warlike scenario exists all the time. Next, inevitably, states will always strive to survive under this circumstance.

Last but not least, great powers aim to behave strategically in this unsettling environment to survive since they are rational actors. Along with their behavior, they consider the actions of others and how they may affect their survival strategy. Being the hegemon in the system is the ideal strategy since it goes beyond power maximization. States may also band together to contain the adversary.

Nevertheless, the best strategy for surviving is self-help. The state will attempt to increase its authority whenever there is a chance. The theory implies that China's activities in overseas ports are part of its power maximization strategy. Along with this, China is building its capabilities, which reflect the self-help strategy. On the other side, Indo-Pacific and other initiatives by India, the US, and its allies reflect the bandwagon of states to counter the aspiring hegemon.

Alfred Mahan's "sea power" is also a part of the study's theoretical framework. Mahan (1898) emphasized the contribution of maritime power to international politics. He believed that sea travel was preferable to land travel and that it was crucial to have naval bases. As a result, the water serves as a major thoroughfare for human traffic. He also forecasted China's ascent and stated that the US should be concerned about China's power projection in the future. China's investment in various African seaports could be related to Mahan's idea. It is known that China wants to suppress the US naval power, thereby dominating the sea. At the same time, it has invested in various ports as part of its commercial activities. Beijing wants to create strategic strongpoints across the main maritime routes.

CHINA'S INTEREST IN EAST AFRICAN COAST

China's presence on the East African coast is not new, and for a longer time, it has participated in the development-related activities of various Sub-Saharan countries. The recently published Beijing Action Plan (2019-21) reflected its agreement on cooperation and exchange between seaports and emphasized assisting in developing them. It is well-known that China has taken part in the seaport reconstruction of various African countries for the last couple of years. Through these activities, China's growing presence could be felt in the Western Indian Ocean region. China's relationship with the East African states could be traced back to the expedition of "eunuch admiral" Zheng He from the Second Ming Emperor, who reached Malindi (East Africa) and Mogadishu (Somalia) around 1405 (Harkavy 2007).

China's investment in the infrastructure development projects of Africa started around the 1970s as part of the anti-colonial solidarity it shared with the African states. At the same time, China has always kept African countries by its side to get support against Taiwan and accept the One China Policy. Firstly, China is a development partner in Africa. Beijing is committed to the region's prosperity, and at the same time, China has invested in Africa for its economic needs. The African countries got interested in Chinese aid around the 1990s as there were fewer conditions than in the West.

Moreover, China is more concerned about development than the West's idea of human rights. They have been able to link business and aid in an innovative way (Brautigam 2009). Eastern Africa is rich in natural resources like petroleum, natural gas, copper, gold, and minerals like diamond and graphite. As the natural resources, the vast market, and the reliable partners of Africa are essential for China, they are part of China's global ambitions (Alden 2007). The Tazara railway link is an early example of Chinese infrastructure development. Kenya has created the Zhujiang economic zone to promote the Chinese development model (Sun 2018). China has invested in port construction, hydropower projects, and rail and road construction in most East African countries. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was also established in 2000 to promote diplomatic, trade, security, and investment relations between China and African countries.

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Energy is one of the major areas in which China wants a strong presence in the region (Alden 2007). Africa is the second largest region after West Asia to supply energy to China. In East Africa, China is present in Tanzania's natural gas sector, Ethiopia's natural gas, and Kenya's crude oil. China's presence in the oil sector of South Sudan and Sudan is an interesting case of how China has been able to survive there despite the violent civil war.

Despite this, there is criticism of promoting an anti-democratic agenda in Africa against China (Alden 2008). China has worked just for profit with the corrupt African regimes that were against democracy. China's financial investment, trade, and aid make it possible to extract raw materials from developing countries, which portrays China's behavior as an old colonizer (Balasubramanyam 2015). Despite the growing anti-China consensus in several countries, Chinese investment remains popular among East African countries, such as Kenya (Hakata and Cannon 2022). As its strength increases, it would be able to establish an Atlantic base easily. If China opens another naval base in the African continent, the Indo-Pacific region would become much more volatile and complex.

THE GROWING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

In the last two decades, China's interest in the Indian Ocean region has expanded significantly. Almost 80 percent of China's oil imports pass through the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca. Furthermore, 95 percent of China's trade with West Asia, Africa, and Europe transits through the Indian Ocean. According to Beijing, the United States and India exert control over the Indian Ocean region. In response to this perceived scenario and to safeguard China's interests in the Indian Ocean region, China has increased its activities since 2000. The Chinese Navy has undergone modernization, engaged in visits to various ports, and subsequently initiated investments in the region. China aims to limit the influence of the US and India in this area, leading to an expansion of its military presence and economic activities.

The Western Indian Ocean stretches from India's West Coast to Africa's Eastern Coast. The Western Indian Ocean region connects North America, Europe, and Asia. Major sea lines of communication are passing through the region. The Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea are important channels to move towards Europe. It is accompanying the Persian Gulf from where energy is passing. It shares the history of the Precolonial trade between the Indian subcontinent and the East African coast, including the Arab world (Bose 2006). As British power declined in the region and the Cold War started, the center of geopolitical interest was moved to the Persian Gulf. For a longer time, the Western Indian Ocean gained less significance in international politics (Bueger 2021). The region was taken seriously with the growth of maritime piracy around 2000. Eventually, the foreign military conducted an anti-piracy operation to protect the major sea lines of communication from the Somali pirates.

With the rise of India and China in world politics, the power of the center started to move from Euro-Atlantic to Asia. India and China have the same interest in Eastern Africa. China has a much stronger presence in East Africa than India. Though India shares close ties with all the states of East Africa (Pant 2016), China has beaten India in terms of activities and investment. So far, China has organized eight summits of FOCAC, the last being held in 2021 and the last India-Africa Forum summit in 2015. In Africa, India stays in the shadows of China (Naidu 2010). India has a vast diaspora in

the East African states. India has also participated in various infrastructure development projects. Nevertheless, in terms of economic investment, China is ahead of India (Tharoor 2013). Despite these issues, India is trying to compete with China in the new age scramble of Africa (Xavier 2015).

CHINA IN THE PORTS OF EAST AFRICA

After the introduction of the Maritime Silk Road in 2017 under the umbrella of the Belt and Road initiative, China has hugely invested in various parts of Africa. The Chinese firms have taken the lead in port reconstruction or building new port facilities. All over Sub-Saharan Africa, China is present in 46 ports. Both on the Atlantic coast and on the Indian Ocean coast, Chinese activities have increased significantly. The African ports played an important role in Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, which will give access to the region's trade and economic development and strengthen the PLA's foothold. Port reconstruction and building new ports are part of Africa's development initiative. Ninety percent of African trade is dependent on ports. Within the 46 ports of Sub-Saharan Africa, Chinese naval vessels have visited 6, according to a CSIS report. In most of these ports, China directly owns the port or invests through funding, and lastly, takes part in construction. In West Africa, the Tin-Can Island port of Nigeria is funded and operated by China Merchants Port. In Southern Africa, the Tamatave Deep Water Harbour in Madagascar is operated and financed by China.

Most East African ports are situated along major sea lines of communication and maritime checkpoints. Given the limited number of ports in the region, both coastal and landlocked states depend on them. Consequently, East African states have recognized the need to construct new ports capable of handling large cargo volumes. Chinese officials view foreign ports as strategic strongholds that should serve as strategic and economic assets. These ports should possess a strategic location, attract Chinese investments, and be utilized for economic, military, and diplomatic interactions. Through these activities, China has taken part in global governance (Degang 2018).

Lamu Port

Kenya is strategically located in the Indian Ocean region, bordered by landlocked South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda. South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia are currently experiencing political crises. Kenya's Lamu port is a crucial component of an ambitious transport corridor connecting Lamu (a small archipelago north of Mombasa in Kenya), South Sudan, and Ethiopia. The $25.5 billion LAPSSET (Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor) project encompasses the construction of a new port with 32 berths, new roads, a 1,500km railway line, and a pipeline. This comprehensive initiative is slated for completion by 2030, aligning with Kenya's "Vision Strategy 2023" (Jiaxin 2022). The LAPSSET project aligns with the Belt and Road Initiative under the "4-6-1" framework of China-Africa cooperation, consisting of 4 principles (equality, pragmatism, sincerity, and faithfulness), six projects (industry, finance, poverty reduction, ecological protection, humanistic exchange, and peace and security), and one platform (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation). The $449 million contract for the first three berths was awarded to China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC) in 2015, with construction commencing in October 2016. The port officially commenced operations in May 2021. CCCC has provided $478 million in financing and $689 million from the Kenyan government (Jiaxin 2022).

Port of Dar es Salaam

The Port of Dar es Salaam, located in Tanzania, is the fourth-largest port along the Indian Ocean coastline of the African continent. This port is a crucial gateway, providing facilities for landlocked countries such as Malawi, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda, all sharing borders with Tanzania. The strategic positioning of the port establishes vital connections with East and Central Africa, Europe, Australia, America, the Middle East, and East Asia.

As part of the Dar es Salaam port modernization project, various enhancements were undertaken, including the strengthening and deepening of berths 1-7 and the RORO terminal, dredging of the entrance channel, turning circle, and harbor basin, as well as the strengthening and deepening of berths 8-11. Additionally, the project involved the construction of a new terminal jet. The responsibility for the reconstruction and expansion was entrusted to China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC), a China Communication Construction Company subsidiary. In 2017, the Tanzanian government entered into a $154 million agreement with China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) to expand the port, with funding provided by the World Bank. The completion of the port was initially scheduled for 2020, and as of 2022, seven berths have been initiated.

In addition to the Dar es Salaam port, China has been involved in the Matwara port and the Bagamoyo port projects. However, the Bagamoyo port project was canceled by former President John Magufuli due to what he perceived to be "abusive and tricky" conditions imposed by Chinese promoters. These conditions included a request for a 33-year guarantee and a 99-year lease. The new President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, has since resumed the contract.

Concerns have been raised about the secrecy surrounding many of these deals with African leaders who may be susceptible to corruption (Kinyondo 2019). Growing apprehension is that such arrangements could potentially lead countries like Tanzania into a debt trap.

Doraleh Multipurpose Port

The Doraleh Multipurpose Port is located in Djibouti, strategically positioned at the confluence of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and is connected to the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway. It is situated along one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Landlocked Ethiopia relies on the ports of Djibouti for its maritime access.

The construction of the port, valued at $590 million, was jointly financed by Djibouti Port and China Merchants Holdings International (CMHI). One of the six berths is utilized by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as its first overseas naval base, an agreement that was reached in 2015. CMHI completed the project in 2017, and since then, the Chinese Navy has been active in the area, conducting its first exercise in 2017. In 2013, the government allocated 23% ownership to the Chinese company.

Djibouti hosts naval bases from the United States, France, Japan, Italy, and China. Situated on the Bab el Mandeb strait, China's presence has heightened concerns among the United States and its allies. In addition to the construction of the Doraleh port, China Merchants Holdings International (CMIH) is involved in various projects, including a major railroad to Addis Ababa, an underwater fiber-optic cable built by Huawei, an international airport, an international free trade zone, water and natural gas pipelines, and other infrastructure facilities (Kardon 2022). The China Merchants Group

has committed to financing and developing the old port of Djibouti, serving commercial and strategic purposes for China in the Horn of Africa.

Chinese officials state that the base will play a role in humanitarian relief, supporting Chinese peacekeeping efforts in Africa and participating in anti-piracy missions. China's involvement in port construction aligns with its development-focused approach to democracy, as it believes that through development, peace and prosperity can be achieved (Zhiqiang and Degang 2020).

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA AND INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a new geopolitical arena, driven by increased Chinese activities in the region. "Indo-Pacific" refers to the area between the Indian and Pacific oceans. The late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is credited with introducing "Indo-Pacific" as a strategic framework. In an August 2007 speech to the Indian Parliament titled "Confluence of Two Seas", Abe articulated his vision of a broader Asia, emphasizing the Pacific and Indian oceans as a dynamic union fostering liberty and prosperity. Subsequently, India, the United States, and Australia incorporated the concept of Indo-Pacific into their defense and security policies. The Indo-Pacific region spans from the Eastern Coast of Africa to the South China Sea.

For an extended period, the Indo-Pacific region was overlooked in the security architecture of the US strategy. Washington was heavily engaged in its Global War on Terror and invested significantly in defense in West Asia. Almost two decades after the withdrawal of the US army from that area, the US has shifted its focus to the Indo-Pacific. Following the Cold War, the United States emerged as the sole superpower and fostered the Liberal International Order to uphold peace, prosperity, and democracy. However, Chinese activities, which do not align with promoting democracy and go against the rule-based order, have posed serious challenges to the liberal international order (Ikenberry 2018). China has also accused the US-led liberal international order of impeding the development of developing countries and exacerbating the North-South divide.

Due to unlawful piracy and China's significant investment in various parts of Eastern Africa, the region faces significant security concerns. In response to China's substantial development in the area, Indo-Pacific members have incorporated Africa into the broader Indo-Pacific security architecture. China's assertive role and its indirect involvement in the domestic politics of various countries across the Indian Ocean, such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan, have also contributed to instability in South Asia. Reports of Chinese surveillance ships spying near the Indian coast have raised concerns in India. In 2019, the Chinese survey ship Shi Yan 1 was detected within India's exclusive economic zones near Port Blair.

Additionally, there were reports of Chinese Navy warships operating in the Indian Ocean region. Former Chief of Naval Staff of India, Arun Prakash (Prakash 2021), argues that Chinese activities will likely increase in the Indian Ocean, necessitating a strengthened security agenda for India.

China has also expanded its activities in the South China Sea (Lewis and Litai 2016), asserting major territorial claims through its nine-dash lines.

Beijing has also claimed an estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the region (Eurasian Times 2022). These claims have created major disputes with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Moreover, China has also objected

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to the Freedom of Navigation of other states like the US and India. China's aggressive move in the South China Sea is definitely a major security concern for the Indo-Pacific (Rubin 2022).

To foster an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, the United States, Japan, India, and Australia have established the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). China has labeled Quad as the Asian NATO, alleging that these countries aim to secure their maritime zones while curbing China's rise in the region (Hakata and Cannon 2022).

In September 2021, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States signed a new trilateral security partnership to equip Australia with conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines. The signatory states argue that this arrangement is necessary to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Simultaneously, the United States and its partners in the Indo-Pacific express their commitment to upholding international laws, human rights, and the freedom of navigation. Nevertheless, China has accused the Australia-UK-US partnership (AUKUS) of introducing nuclear power into the region.

In December 2022, the US organized the US-Africa Leaders' Summit to enhance engagement with Africa. While China has hosted eight FOCAC summits, the US has only hosted two, with the first in 2014. According to Washington's new Contain China Strategy, it will invest, align, and compete with China. In pursuing this strategy, it will align with its partners worldwide to compete with China.

India formed the Indian Ocean Rim Association, of which most of the East African states are members. The Indian Ocean Rim Association wants to create sustainable growth and development. Through this origination, India is committed to cutting off the Chinese influence from the region. Japan announced a free and Open Indo-Pacific from Kenya in the Western Indian Ocean region. The United States wants more military cooperation with India in the newly emerged Western Indian Ocean region. Australia is also seeking more regional agreements in the Western Indian Ocean region. East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean are essential for the growing need for energy security.

The government of India has taken China's presence in the three East African ports very seriously. As a result, India has started to build stronger relationships with Kenya, Tanzania, and Djibouti countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kenya in 2016 and signed defense, trade, and development agreements. Later, President Kenyatta visited in 2017 and discussed increasing defense and maritime security. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar officially visited Nairobi in 2021. He argued that both India and China are committed to the security and safety of the Indian Ocean.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Tanzania in 2016, followed by several high-level visits from both countries. India and Tanzania are cooperating in the area of hydrography. Indian naval survey ships have conducted hydrographic surveys in Tanzanian ports and prepared navigational charts. In 2019, India opened its resident mission in Djibouti. Colonel Moustapha Ali Handouleh, Defence Advisor to the President of Djibouti, visited Lucknow on a defense delegation to attend DEFEXPO 2020. An invitation was extended to Djibouti to participate in MILAN 2022, and the ambassador to India represented his country at MILAN. The Government of Djibouti has received four Government of India-supported Lines of Credit (LOCs) totaling US$50.39 million from EXIM Bank in four installments for the development of a cement plant at Ali Sabieh (Ministry of External Affairs, India 2022).

India has organized two Defence Ministers' Conclaves in 2019 and 2022 for African states. In both conclaves, India has committed to ensuring a secure maritime environment across the Indian

Ocean. East African countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and others participated in the second India Africa Field Training Exercise held in Pune in March 2023 alongside the first Africa Chief's Conclave. India has signed the Agreement on Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services with Japan, enabling the use of Japan's naval bases. Through these agreements, India can utilize Japan's naval base in Djibouti. India is committed to the peace and stability of the Indian Ocean through its Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

India's bilateral trade with Africa reached $89.5 billion in 2021-2022, compared to $56 billion the previous year (DW News 2022). Delhi has expressed its intent to reach a trade pact with Africa. India has emerged as one of the top five investors in Africa in recent years. In 2018, while addressing the Ugandan Parliament, Modi outlined the "Kampala Principles" for India's engagement with Africa, including the prime minister's vision for promoting economic growth and addressing challenges such as terrorism and climate change.

The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is a competitive initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by India and Japan to connect East Asia, South Asia, and Africa through economic cooperation, infrastructure construction, and people-to-people contact. In November 2017, Indian President Narendra Modi proposed the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor Initiative at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank. The project aims to connect East African states like Kenya, Tanzania, and others with Indian ports (Gateway House 2019).

In December 2022, India assumed the G20 presidency from Indonesia. This new achievement could be instrumental in revamping the relationship with Africa by transferring Indian innovations, thereby contributing to the peace and stability of Africa. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has requested other G20 members to consider the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the grouping. India has also signed a maritime cooperation agreement with ASEAN to promote openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, and respect for sovereignty and non-intervention across the Indo-Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

The Western Indian Ocean region is emerging as a new geopolitical area within the Indo-Pacific, with increasing Chinese activities. While most Indo-Pacific stakeholders have focused on countering China in the region, India could lead the agenda. New Delhi shares a deep bond not only with Kenya, Tanzania, and Djibouti but also with other states like Mauritius, Madagascar, and South Africa. India, along with the US, Australia, Japan, and other partners, should strive to formulate new policies for a free and open Indo-Pacific. India and its Western allies bear responsibility for the growth of China in the Indian Ocean due to their imprecise policies for an extended period.

Therefore, India and its allies are working under various security arrangements to check Chinese activities. States should pay close attention to ensuring that the ports along the East Coast of Africa do not fall under China's debt trap, and democracy should be maintained in the region. China should not violate the Law of the Sea, and an open sea should be a priority to maintain peace and stability. Although it is unpredictable what kind of order will emerge from the old one, it is essential to observe how India and its partners will strive to maintain peace and stability in international politics as well as in the Indo-Pacific. Finally, it is pertinent to agree that states will always compete to secure their position in the anarchic system.

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CRediT AUTHOR STATEMENT

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Pranav Bhaskar: Review and editing.

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