

New Delhi's US-Backed "Chinese Containment" Strategy in the Afro-Indian Ocean

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India's American-backed anti-Chinese "containment" strategy seeks to have New Delhi establish control over crucial nodes along the Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC) in the Afro-Indian Ocean, but the country's plans are being thwarted by China's ingenuity in crafting asymmetrical workarounds to these future chokepoints.

Background Dynamics

Make no mistake about it, there's a [New Cold War raging between China and India](#) all across "[Greater South Asia](#)", which has recently reached a fever pitch during the Amero-Indian "deep state" [Hybrid War on the Maldives](#) and attendant risk that New Delhi might militarily intervene in the externally provoked crisis and [prompt an even tenser strategic standoff](#) with China. The dynamics of the [21st-century geopolitics of the Multipolar World Order](#) are such that India has been 'flipped' by the US against China in the New Cold War just as China was turned against the USSR in the Old Cold War, with Washington masterfully exploiting preexisting conflicts between both pairs of Great Powers in order to indefinitely divide and rule the Eastern Hemisphere to its hegemonic benefit.

Decades ago the US set China up against the USSR and pitted the two communist countries against one another in an internecine ideological struggle for the "hearts and minds" of the "Global South", but this time it's seeking to embroil India and China in an epic battle over [competitive connectivity](#) in the same transcontinental Afro-Asian space. Whereas China's One Belt One Road global vision of Silk Road connectivity focuses on hard infrastructure projects, the joint Indo-Japanese "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" (also known as the "Freedom Corridor") aims to develop its soft component in skills training, healthcare, education, and other fields, ideally representing the perfect complementarity if both sides would coordinate their efforts for win-win dividends but likely devolving into a "zero-sum" campaign for influence against one another.

Tightening The Noose

This isn't by China's choice, but India's, which has been egged on by the US to take a more active military role in its southern ocean so as to diminish Beijing's freedom of navigation in the body of water through which the vast majority of its trade traverses, which is an ironic role for the so-called "world's largest democracy" to take against the country that the Mainstream Media regularly paints as doing the exact same thing in the South China Sea. The US keenly recognizes that the Afro-Indian Ocean is China's strategic weak point and that it must devise a grand 'solution' to counter the fact that Beijing has broken out of its Malacca Strait "containment" zone after the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) (CPEC)

endowed it with unhindered overland access to this region.

Before explaining the geostrategic nature of the Amero-Indian “Chinese Containment” strategy, the reader must first recognize that the game-changing LEMOA deal that the two parties signed in summer 2016 allowed for the former “non-aligned” South Asian state to enter into an unprecedented military-strategic partnership with the unipolar hegemon, one which crucially permits the two sides to use one another’s military facilities on a case-by-case basis. In practice, this means that the Indian Armed Forces can utilize the centrally located Diego Garcia base just as their American counterparts are now at liberty to do the same with any of India’s bases on the subcontinent. In addition, both parties can also pivotally place their military units in one another’s facilities in Africa, which will be argued is an important development that shouldn’t be overlooked.

The Afro-Indian Ocean

Prior to exploring how this strategy is rapidly evolving in the region, it’s necessary to explain what’s meant by the neologism of the “Afro-Indian Ocean”. As was explained in a [previous article](#) touching upon this terminology, the “Indian Ocean” is a misnomer because the “Indus River” that it and “India” are named after is actually called the “Sindhu” by its Pakistani natives, therefore invalidating the British imperial-era concept behind these two entities’ modern-day names. It’s much more geo-historically accurate in a socio-cultural sense to divide this body of water between its African and “Indian” halves owing to the fact that the first-mentioned African western portion has centuries-long ties to the Mideast because of the Arab slave trade while the bulk of the subcontinent experienced even longer relations with its Southeast Asian part because of their shared Hindu-Buddhist legacy.

It wasn’t until the British colonial period that India and the rest of the subcontinent entered into extended and meaningful interactions with Africa, so it’s misleading for the modern-day country of India to lay claim to this entire body of water when it doesn’t have the historical basis for doing so in its western half. It’ll also be seen later on in the analysis that the distinction between this ocean’s African and Indian portions has a strategic significance in drawing attention to the different conditions in each competitive space, which correspondingly allows the two Great Power camps to more efficiently devise better plans for deepening their influence in them amidst these New Cold War conditions. So as to assist the reader in better understanding the broad geographic scope of what this entails, here’s a map of the Afro-Indian Ocean divided into its three theaters of competition:



- * Green: African Ocean
- * Red: Central Ocean
- * Blue: Indian Ocean

Now here’s what the map looks like when illustrating China and India’s strategic infrastructure projects in the Afro-Indian Ocean, whether of a military or economic (airport, maritime port) nature:



Beginning with the African Ocean, these are the highlighted projects:

China:

- * Djiboutian military base ([Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway](#))
- * Lamu Port, Kenya ([LAPSSSET](#))
- * Bagamoyo, Tanzania ([Central Corridor](#))
- * Gwadar Port, Pakistan (CPEC)

India:

- * Assumption Island [naval and air base](#), Seychelles
- * Madagascan [radar and listening post](#)
- * Agalega [air and port facilities](#), Mauritius
- * Duqm [naval base](#), Oman
- * Chabahar [port](#), Iran

As for the Central Ocean, the relevant infrastructure is:

China:

- * Malé [air and port facilities](#), Maldives
- * Hambantota [port](#), Sri Lanka

India:

- * Diego Garcia naval and air base, British Indian Ocean Territory (via LEMOA with the US)
- * Trincomalee [port](#), Sri Lanka

And lastly, the facilities in the newly defined “Indian Ocean” are:

China:

- * Kyaukphyu port, [Myanmar](#)

India:

- * Andaman and Nicobar Islands naval base (potentially supported by [Japan](#))
- * Singapore [naval base](#)

The Three Theaters Of “Containment”

The primary difference between China and India’s Afro-Indian projects is that Beijing’s are suspected of having a potential “dual-use” capability in the future while many of New Delhi’s openly flaunt their military motivations. In addition, China’s have been in the works for years, but India’s are a relatively recent development mostly clinched in the past two years that “coincidentally” followed its LEMOA deal with the US. It’s plain to see that Washington is directing New Delhi’s Afro-Indian strategy with the purpose of turning it into a naval (“Atlanticist”) power in order to “contain” China’s continental (“Eurasianist”) power. Furthermore, each theater of Afro-Indian competition carries with it its own unique battlespace qualities:

African Ocean:

This region stretches from the Mideast all the way down to East Africa and sees China

limited to mainland infrastructure while India balances its strategic deployments with insular ones in the Seychelles and Mauritius. The Chabahar-Gwadar nexus might be “too close to comfort” for some, but even in the event that neither Great Power deploys military forces thereat first, India’s new rights to dock its naval units in Oman’s Duqm port could signal a “game-changer” that compels China to follow suit in Gwadar like the Mainstream Media has been falsely imagining that it already has. Under such a scenario, India is unlikely to receive corresponding privileges in Chabahar, but it’s probably for this expected reason why New Delhi proactively “pivoted” to Duqm instead.

The strategic significance of this Omani port lays not only in its dual maritime-mainline connectivity potential as part of a [prospective GCC Silk Road project](#) and/or a connector between East Africa-Mideast-Central Asia (the latter two per the [Ashgabat Agreement](#) that India recently acceded to), but also in its possible disruptiveness in the event that hostilities break out between India and Pakistan and/or China. It’s with this in mind that Oman’s decision to allow the Indian Navy to dock at Duqm should be seen as an unprecedented move by the monarchy because it defies the state’s traditional “neutrality” and could theoretically make it a target of Islamabad and/or Beijing if either of these two allies (or in that case, probably both) go to war with New Delhi.

Duqm is also significant because it sits between Gwadar and Djibouti, thus interfering with Pakistan’s [ASGA Sea Lines Of Communication](#) between CPEC and its African counterpart of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Silk Road, as well as [Port Sudan and the Sahelian-Saharan Silk Road](#). In addition, Indian forces in Duqm could also create complications for any [speculative Pakistani-Chinese base in South Yemen’s Aden](#) in the event of war, thus bestowing this sleepy desert town with untold and disproportionate influence in the larger scheme of things, though provided that New Delhi fully actualizes its strategic potential (up to and including the consideration of allowing its American ally to use this facility as well). Moving beyond Duqm, India’s presence in the Seychelles-Madagascar-Mauritius triangle can allow it and the US (via LEMOA) to exert influence on China’s East African Silk Road ports in Kenya and Tanzania.

Central Ocean:

This part of the Afro-Indian Ocean has become a major battleground lately due to the Amero-Indian “deep state” Hybrid War on the Maldives that’s predicated on removing or “containing” Chinese influence in this strategic archipelago. Concurrent with this, India has been trying to make inroads in Sri Lanka after [contributing](#) to the 2015 “electoral coup” against Chinese-friendly former President Rajapaksa, though it and its American ally were in for a surprise when the ousted leader’s political party [swept the local polls](#) earlier this week in a stunning show of his people’s dissatisfaction with the Indian-leaning authorities that replaced him.

Events in these two countries are pivotal because of their geostrategic consequences in the context of the Chinese-Indian New Cold War, as the retention or growth of Beijing’s influence would secure its SLOC and thus deepen the New Silk Road’s presence across this central belt of the Afro-Indian oceanic waterway while the victory of Indian proxy forces would powerfully counteract this to New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington’s decisive advantage. As the political situations continue to simultaneously simmer along the Maldivian-Sri Lankan northern axis of this region, the joint Indo-American outpost of Diego Garcia continues to monitor events and casts an ever- ominous shadow over both of them.

Indian Ocean:

The eastern part of this body of water, now more accurately described as the real “Indian Ocean” in the framework of this analysis, has China importantly securing a dual mainland-maritime facility in Myanmar’s Rakhine State in the northeastern reaches of the Bay of Bengal. As for India, its newfound naval access in the Strait of Malacca via its agreement with Singapore and prospective joint patrols with Japan in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands could see New Delhi link up these eastern bases with its Sri Lankan port in the west and possibly future presence in Bangladesh in the north to turn the Bay of Bengal into an “[Indian Lake](#)”. If “successful”, then this would replicate the strategic “containment” conditions of the South China Sea that the People’s Republic initially sought to avoid when it commenced CMEC, though the “upside” would be that CPEC would become all the more important as a result.

Counteracting The Naval “Containment” Doctrine

For as seemingly dire as the strategic situation may be for China when it comes to the Amero-Indian naval “containment” doctrine against it, there still exist several realistic options for how it can counteract this emerging network of threats:

Win-Win Deal-Making With Oman And The Seychelles:

There’s no reason that anyone should assume that India’s developing military presences in these two strategically positioned countries is exclusive to its naval forces, as China’s “CPEC Diplomacy” could conceivably see it use win-win deal-making to “buy” its way into their port facilities as well following the pattern that it perfected in what had previously been New Delhi’s Maldivian and Sri Lankan underlings less than a decade ago. Although it would of course be preferable to China and its Pakistani ally that India didn’t have an expanding military footprint in either of these states, the “damage” that it could potentially do to the New Silk Road might be mitigated if they wisely sought to emulate the Djiboutian example in diversifying their military partnerships to the maximum and “balancing” between multiple “patrons”.

Leverage Military-Strategic Partnerships With Multipolar Third Parties:

Just like India has teamed up with the US, Japan, and soon even [France](#) (which has a few strategic outposts in the Afro-Indian Ocean), so too can China and Pakistan do the same with their multipolar military-strategic partners of Russia and Turkey in this space as well. Moscow hasn’t yet returned to having permanent basing rights in this region, but that doesn’t mean that Islamabad can’t invite it to receive such a privilege in Gwadar, something that Russia might accept under the plausibly deniable and ostensible basis that it’s not “military-oriented” against any third state-level party (i.e. the US) but is conditioned on protecting its [forthcoming Iranian-Pakistani pipeline](#) from any regional threats (i.e. Daesh/Al Shabaab/Baloch pirates, etc.). As for Turkey, it already has a [land base in Mogadishu](#) and could try to expand this into a naval one sometime in the future too.

The prevailing concept is that the introduction of third parties partnered with China and Pakistan could deter any unilateral or multilateral interference by India and its unipolar allies against the New Silk Road’s SLOC, relying on a classic “Balance of Power” paradigm to retain stability in this increasingly tense region. Both Russia and Turkey have been “spreading their wings” as of late and could be very interested in participating in this

framework, especially if it develops a convenient apolitical non-military cover in order to deflect any accusations that this meant to counteract anyone else. By leveraging their military-strategic partnerships with these two states, China and Pakistan can secure CPEC and ensure that the [Zipper of Eurasia](#) truly does become the [Convergence of Civilizations](#) without being offset by the Amero-Indian axis' Omani-Seychellois naval nexus under the worst zero-sum scenario there.

Break The Bay Of Bengal Blockade:

Although still a far-off eventuality, India is visibly laying the groundwork for sealing off the Bay of Bengal and neutralizing China's CMEC via its hoped-for quadrilateral coordination between Singapore, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands base, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, so China must do all that it can to break through this de-facto blockade scenario.

To that end, supporting the Maldivian and Myanmar government in the face of [Hybrid War](#) threats is imperative, as is encouraging Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to "flip" away from India and deepen their "balanced" relations with China. Per the latter recommendation, Rajapaksa might prospectively win the upcoming elections if his comeback trend remains consistent, while the possibility of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party doing the same after what may have recently been the [politicized jailing](#) of its leader on "corruption" charges is much less probable.

Nevertheless, China needs to make it a national security priority that it doesn't "lose" either of those two states because the consequences could be disastrous in that they'd form the crucial corners of the Amero-Indian "containment" network aimed at making the Bay of Bengal into an "Indian Lake". This scenario would lead to unprecedented pressure being placed upon CMEC, thereby rendering it strategically inviable, and could also threaten [the ASEAN Silk Road](#) as well.

Concluding Thoughts

The global center of strategic gravity is shifting eastward from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific, with the Afro-Indian Ocean sitting smack dab in the center of this worldwide paradigm shift and accordingly becoming the ultimate pivot space. It's not by accident that the US manipulated India into allying with it and sparking a New Cold War with China because this competitive state of affairs provides the perfect pretext for Washington to use New Delhi as its "cat's paw" for "containing China" and expanding the Pentagon's "[Lead From Behind](#)" Great Power proxy network into this irreplaceably significant body of water through which most of Beijing's trade traverses.

The rapidly growing constellation of Indian bases that have sprouted up here in the past year and a half since New Delhi sealed its game-changing military-strategic partnership with the US through the summer 2016 LEMOA deal strongly suggests that American planners are orchestrating India's all-around expansion into this ocean, but China can utilize creative solutions in leveraging its multipolar Silk Road partnerships to proactively counteract this latent threat before it becomes uncontrollable. Nevertheless, it's unclear which of these two 'camps' will come out on top in the geopolitically expansive competition for influence in the Afro-Indian space, but what's undoubtedly certain is that this intense dynamic of strategic rivalry will define the coming decades of the 21st century.

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