

# CHINA'S INDIAN OCEAN PLANS ARE DECIDEDLY ANTI-INDIA

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The Beijing state media has reported that China has begun constructing one of its advanced warships for export to Pakistan. One of China's most advanced guided missile frigates, the ship will be equipped with anti-ship, anti-submarine and air-defence capabilities. The China Daily report goes on to say that the ship will not just strengthen Pakistan Navy's capabilities but also help in maintaining the "balance of power" in the Indian Ocean region.

It is increasingly becoming clear that the frequency of Indian and Chinese navies brushing past each other in the Indian Ocean is set to rise. The contest over small atoll nations like Maldives and Seychelles is part of this bigger story. If China's presence in Gwadar was already a worry, advanced frigates like the one under construction can throw a spanner in Indian plans to block Pakistan's maritime supply routes in case of a conflict across the line of control (LoC). This also comes on the heels of a detailed report by The New York Times on the militarisation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The confidential CPEC plan involves, the Times revealed, cooperation on building military jets and other lethal weapons. Pakistan is also the only country that has been granted access to the military services of China's Beidou satellite navigation system. The revelations essentially unmasked China's real goals behind CPEC and, more broadly, its belt and road initiative (BRI).

China has always seen Pakistan as a balancer against India. Beijing has been generous with economic aid and military supplies (both conventional and nuclear) to Pakistan. Now as China's interest in the Indian Ocean is increasing, it sees Pakistani Navy as a helpful partner in tying down Indian resources in the Arabian sea — far away from the choke points in the eastern Indian Ocean region. India would do well to develop Andaman and Nicobar Islands as the strategic hub for its Indo-Pacific strategy. New Delhi has neglected the strategic potential of these islands for far too long. The domestic debates on balancing China often miss one crucial point: the latter has had no qualms in using Pakistan to balance India. The post-Wuhan rapprochement has not made China reconsider its support for Jaish-e-Mohammad in the United Nations. With no let up in Chinese hostility, the hesitation in India on balancing China is entirely unwarranted and should be jettisoned.

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