

***India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean.* Edited by David Brewster. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018. Hardcover: 256pp.**

In 2017, China's People Liberation Army Navy (PLA-N) officially opened its first overseas military facility, a support base in Djibouti. Until fairly recently, Beijing had been insistent that it would not follow the path of the United States and other major powers in asserting its military presence internationally. But in the mid-2000s, concerns began to be raised about a so-called "string of pearls", a series of Chinese-built or -financed port facilities in the Indian Ocean that could potentially be used for both civilian and military purposes. While some of those fears were exaggerated, and remain so, they were not entirely without merit. In addition to Djibouti, the development of port infrastructure in Chinese-controlled enclaves and greater PLA-N activity across the Indian Ocean region have contributed to major security concerns about Beijing's intentions, not least in India's capital New Delhi.

To what degree is China's growing economic and military activity in the Indian Ocean region contributing to military competition with India? And in the event of greater Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean, what are the relative strengths and weaknesses of both rising military powers? In a new edited volume, Australian scholar David Brewster has assembled a stellar cast of experts from India, China and other countries to provide a multi-faceted approach to these two questions.

On the first count, the broad consensus is that competition between China and India in the Indian Ocean is certain to increase. For veteran China expert John Garver, China is an "autistic superpower" (p. 75) that is unable to understand the apprehensions of its neighbours, India and Japan in particular. Similarly, Jingdong Yuan acknowledges that China could do more to assuage India's legitimate security concerns, including by being more transparent about its naval activities. Brewster notes an asymmetry in Indian and Chinese perceptions of each other. This is evident in the two essays in the compilation on China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR), a critical element of its Belt and Road Initiative. Although Chinese expert Zhu Li offers a conventional Chinese government interpretation of the initiative as economically beneficial and dismisses Indian concerns, Indian scholar Jabin Jacob argues that the MSR is primarily motivated by strategic considerations and

Chinese domestic politics. Meanwhile, You Ji agrees that the military dimension to China's Indian Ocean is pronounced. He argues that China is conceiving of "global reach and deterrence"... with the Indian Ocean as a new potential battlefield" (p. 91). This has included the adoption of offensive military doctrines that also address potential two-front conflict scenarios involving India. His assessment is broadly shared by Indian analyst Srikanth Kondapalli, who highlights Chinese arms transfers and strategic infrastructure development in the Indian Ocean region. There is a foreshadowing of tragedy in these interwoven narratives.

On the second question — concerning the Sino-Indian military balance in the Indian Ocean — the authors broadly agree that, despite China's fast-growing capabilities, India still holds many advantages. Indian journalist Pramit Pal Chaudhuri describes a decisive shift in India's approach to the Indian Ocean region that has made it a priority for New Delhi, but argues convincingly that the implementation will often be found wanting and that India's actions will take time. Retired Indian navy admiral Raja Menon argues that China lacks necessary capabilities in surveillance, communications and logistics, as well as strike capabilities and tactical air cover, all of which will limit its potential power projection capabilities. You Ji partly agrees with Menon's assessments with respect to China's aircraft carriers as effective instruments of power projection in peacetime. Specifically, China's carrier-based aircraft and pilots suffer from some acute limitations, including night-flying experience, operational range and sophisticated munitions. Meanwhile, Darshana Baruah highlights India's maritime domain awareness in coastal regions, and its growing network of collaborative partnerships across the Indian Ocean. Abhijit Singh argues that while the Indian Navy's presence in the Western Pacific is still limited, it has increased its operational tempo in Southeast Asia. That includes regular port visits, coordinated patrols, and naval exercises, including with Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam. An important counterpoint is offered by Iskander Rehman, who warns that China boasts a significant qualitative and quantitative edge over India in conventional and nuclear submarines. At the same time, Rehman perceptively notes how the PLA-N is moving towards surface-based sea control even as the Indian Navy is gradually shifting the other way towards submarine-centric sea denial.

Overall, it is difficult to argue with Rory Medcalf's conclusion that China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean should generate

neither panic nor complacency on India's part. China is already active in the Indian Ocean littoral, and its growing capabilities and financial backing will — despite Li's insistence — contribute to the strategic competition with India, in what the latter perceives to be its near abroad. Yuan's recommendations for ways to mitigate that competition are likely to fall on deaf ears in Beijing for the reasons that Brewster, Garver and Jacob outline: information asymmetry, China's cognitive pathologies and domestic political imperatives. While Chaudhuri, Rehman and Singh rightly highlight some of India's shortcomings — including inadequate delivery, resource constraints and insufficient attention to its submarine fleet — Menon and Baruah also highlight some of India's inherent advantages, stemming in large part from its geographical position, size and diplomacy. Brewster's compilation consequently offers a holistic and timely set of perspectives on the emerging Sino-Indian naval competition in the Indian Ocean, albeit one that makes for sobering reading.

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