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# **CHINA TAKES OVER THE OCEAN; CHINA TAKES OVER THE WORLD**

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# Introduction

*For whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.*

*~ Sir Walter Raleigh*

In recent years, China has emerged as a global power in the international arena. China is the second largest economy with a real GDP of 5.2%, the largest military force in the world,<sup>1</sup> the largest navy with a battle force of more than 370 ships and submarines,<sup>2</sup> three aircraft carriers, and more than 500 operational warheads.<sup>3</sup> As a revisionist state, China seeks to reshape the international rule order, posing a direct threat to the US' hegemony. China is pursuing exerting its influence on other nations by building infrastructure through projects such as Belt and Road initiative. This paper will analyse the impact of China's activities on countries' economic, military and political aspect, by taking into account the Chinese acquisition of ports and their investment in different oceans and neighbouring countries.

Through the Belt and Road initiative, China desires to expand its economic, military and political power. China has signed BRI cooperation agreements with more than 150 countries and 30 International organisations.<sup>4</sup> However, the BRI has raised security concerns for countries on economic, political, and military fronts. As China has been investing in and developing the ports of several nations. China will soon take control over trade as it has been investing in different oceans and near choke points to secure its trade. China has invested in a total 129 port projects outside the country. They have a majority share in 17 of these port projects, 14 of which can

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations & United Nations Development Programme. (2023b). China in numbers [Issue brief]. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/china\\_in\\_numbers\\_2023-final.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/china_in_numbers_2023-final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Statista. (2024, July 4). Largest armies in the world by active military personnel 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264443/the-worlds-largest-armies-based-on-active-force-level/>

<sup>3</sup> Helmy, D. (2024, February 14). The impact of the potential Chinese naval bases on the Atlantic Ocean. Modern Diplomacy. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/02/15/the-impact-of-the-potential-chinese-naval-bases-on-the-atlantic-ocean/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. (n.d.). DOD report details Chinese efforts to build military power. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3562442/dod-report-details-chinese-efforts-to-build-military-power/>

potentially be used by the naval force.<sup>5</sup> China has been strategically investing more in ports near chokepoints to secure its trade.

## Indian Ocean

Indian ocean is the third largest ocean which connects the East and the West via the Indian and Pacific oceans. Indian ocean is surrounded by Africa, Asia, and Australia. The Indian Ocean holds importance in the economic, defense, and security spheres. 80% of the maritime oil trade and 40% of the global trade is conducted through the Indian ocean.<sup>6</sup> There is also an increase in the militarisation of ports and the Indian ocean in recent times. The Indian Ocean is geopolitically advantageous due its richness in raw materials. China has developed 17 ports in the Indian ocean as it imports 80% of its oil through the Indian Ocean, where it could face challenges from India and US during a war.<sup>7</sup> Thus, China invested in Gwadar port (Pakistan), which is near the chokepoint of the strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. It can be used for both economic and military purposes, such as keeping a check on Indian power in the region while Pakistan can be a link to other Middle Eastern, African, and land-locked Central Asian countries, making them markets for China's products. Another example can be Djibouti Port and Bagamoyo Port (Tanzania), near Bab el - Mandeb chokepoint connecting the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea. It can influence trade between Asia, Europe, and Africa. The major reason to invest near these chokepoints, as stated by China, is to protect its trade from piracy and maritime terrorists as witnessed in the recent years. However, a negligible amount of Chinese vessels were attacked by the Houthis in the Red Sea. Moreover, to overcome its Malacca Dilemma, China has invested in ports like Kuantan port (Malaysia), Colombo and Hambantota ports (Sri Lanka). There are many such ports on different continents where China has invested. In the African continent, China has been investing in several projects such as the Damietta International container Terminal project port, Port Said and Ain Sokhna Port of Egypt, Lamu Port and Mombasa Port of Kenya, Sudan Port

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<sup>5</sup> China's Belt and Road Initiative turns 10. Here's what to know. (2024, September 10). World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/11/china-belt-road-initiative-trade-bri-silk-road/>

<sup>6</sup> Pti. (2024, July 25). China making inroads into key choke points in Indian Ocean: US Congresswoman. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-making-inroads-into-key-choke-points-in-indian-ocean-us-congresswoman/articleshow/112001536.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>7</sup> GatewayHouse. (2022a, August 8). China's ports in the Indian Ocean - Gateway House. Gateway House. <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/chinas-ports-in-the-indian-ocean-region/>

and Suakin Port of Sudan, and the Massawa New Sea Port in Eritrea. China has constructed several ports in Asia as well, such as the Ras El Khaimah Port, the CSP Terminal and Khalifa Port in UAE, Aden Bay and Moka container Terminal in Yemen, and the Qasr Berth Port in Iraq. In Australia, it has invested in the Darwin Port.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 1<sup>9</sup>

## Atlantic Ocean

The Atlantic Ocean is the second largest in the world. It has Europe and Africa to the east and North and South America to the west. China has developed many ports in the Atlantic Ocean, such as the Port of Antwerp (Belgium), Port of Lisbon and Sines (Portugal), and the Port of Casablanca (Morocco). The Chinese have major stakes in these ports, which can be used for military purposes. They can also counter the US' trade into Africa and Europe, containing the US situation. China has developed more ports in the region. For instance- the Puerto Cortes Port in Honduras, La Liberated Port in El Salvador, and the Kingston Freeport in Jamaica. China has been making its presence known in the west of the Atlantic Ocean, thus making it an emerging military and economic threat to the USA.

<sup>8</sup> Liu, Z. Z. (2024, August 26). Tracking China's control of overseas ports. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/tracker/china-overseas-ports>

<sup>9</sup> Armstrong, (2023). Green Finance and Development Center [Photograph]. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/chart/31053/chinese-belt-and-road-initiative-investment-and-construction-by-region/>

In the east of the Atlantic Ocean the Riga port in Latvia, the Hamburg Port Container in Germany, the Zeebrugge Container Terminal Port in Belgium, and the Rotterdam EUROMAX container in the Netherlands, amongst many others, have helped in expanding China's presence in Europe. Ports such as the Boke Mine port, the Conakry port, and the Morebaya Deepwater port in Guinea, Abidjan port in Ivory Coast, and the Boankra Inland port in Ghana, have deepened Sino-African relations.<sup>10</sup>

## Pacific Ocean

The Pacific Ocean is the largest ocean, with rare earth minerals critical for technology and green energy. Asia and Australia surround it to the west and North and South America to the east. Major chokepoints lie here, such as the Malacca Strait, Bering Strait and Taiwan Strait. China has invested in the San Antonio Port in Chile, the New San Juan de Marcona Port and the Chancay Port in Peru, the Posorha deepwater Port in Ecuador, the Balbona Port in Panama, the Los Angeles Port and the Seattle Port in the US, the Aiwo Port in Nauru, the Apia Port in Samoa, the Melbourne Port and the Newcastle Port in Australia, the Lae Port in Papua New Guinea, the Muara Port in Brunei, the Batangas Port and Manila Port in Philippines, the Korea Express Busan Container Terminal in South Korea, and the Zarubino Port in Russia.<sup>11</sup>

## Arctic Ocean

China has been investing in the Arctic Ocean with the help of Russia. Therefore, we may argue that China is applying the US' China containment policy, against the US itself. It has put both the US and the world under threat. China's employment of Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of "Sea Control" in its maritime policy is apparent as it uses a sea control strategy, superior to a sea denial strategy which uses more resources. Mahan's theory's influence has led to rapid naval modernization that has helped China its expansion in Arctic, the Indo-Pacific, the Philippine Sea as well as the South China Sea. China's strategic initiatives reflect the Mahan's six important factors

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

to become a maritime power: National character, geographical position, extent of territory, population, physical configuration and government. Thus, China adopting the Mahan theory which emphasizes the importance of strong navy.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

In the future, China can easily gain control over world trade. According to the IMF report of World Economic Outlook, world trade is expected to rise by 3.3% by 2025.<sup>13</sup> Countries with strained relations with China will suffer economic consequences, as China will have an advantage through influencing the decisions of countries in the international arena. Through its policies, it has made all African countries except Eswatini rescind their recognition of the Taiwanese government. China has also filled the vacuum created by Western countries by providing hardware (infrastructure) and software (loans) initiatives.

Thus, it poses a threat to the economic aspect of the nations. Any country's economy is its priority. To safeguard it, countries have been developing their military capability, as the security of any country is inextricably linked to its economy. Looking back into history, countries have developed militaries to protect their trade. Regarding the military, China can use the ports it invests in for its naval purposes. For instance- China can use the Chittagong port in Bangladesh and the Kyaukphyu port in Myanmar, against India during a war. China is also encroaching on the sovereignty of nations through its debt trap policy, thus impacting the political strength of nations.

China as a rising power is seen to compete with the USA in almost all fields ranging from defense and nuclear to economic. Thus, it can be assumed that China aims to be a superpower similar to the USA. Therefore, China has been following the path of the USA. It has first created internal stability in the economic, military, and societal domains. China has increased its per capita disposable income from 51,821 RMB and 21,691 RMB in urban and rural areas respectively, and

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<sup>12</sup> *Alfred Mahan's influence on China's naval doctrine.* (n.d.). Global Affairs and Strategic Studies.

<https://en.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/influencia-de-alfred-mahan-en-la-doctrina-naval-de-china>

<sup>13</sup> World Economic Outlook, April 2024: Steady but Slow: Resilience amid Divergence. (2024, April 16). IMF.

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2024/04/16/world-economic-outlook-april-2024?cid=bl-com-SM2024-WEOEA2024001>

made positive progress in human development, placing China high in the human development category of the HDI.<sup>14</sup> China has secured the 75th Position in 2022 and so on.<sup>15</sup> China is using policies like BRI to strengthen its influence and secure its trade, helping with external stability. Thus, China has emerged as a major player in the international system, creating threatening situations for the US.

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations & United Nations Development Programme. (2023b). China in numbers [Issue brief]. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/china\\_in\\_numbers\\_2023-final.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/china_in_numbers_2023-final.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> United Nations & United Nations Development Programme. (2023b). China in numbers [Issue brief]. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/china\\_in\\_numbers\\_2023-final.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/china_in_numbers_2023-final.pdf)



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