

# **Horn of Africa: India's Strategy to Counter China**

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## **Objective:**

The main objective of this article is to provide information about what India can do in the Horn of Africa region in the countries of Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, and Djibouti to counter China's growing presence so that it will be helpful for India and its regional stability in the IOR.

## **Introduction:**

Indian strategic outreach in the region of the Horn of Africa plays a significant role in India's position as a global actor. The Horn of Africa region comprising countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, and Djibouti is marked by its strategic location, political instability, and its security challenges. The main idea of India's strategy in the Horn of Africa is primarily to promote regional stability, terminate security challenges, and encourage cooperation in the diplomatic and security dimensions.

Historically, India and the Horn of Africa had maintained strong trade and cultural ties. With the change of time, the relations have extended to other dimensions like training programs, capacity building, infrastructure development, etc., The Horn of Africa abuts the sea lanes such as the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean, which makes it a strategic location as the countries from South Asia and Southeast Asia use the sea routes to the European nations for trade. The region encompasses many robust challenges like piracy, smuggling, terrorism, and other illegal activities. To counter these issues India is actively involved with countries through joint patrols, military exercises, promoting information sharing to ensure security, etc.

Besides, it also comprises peacekeeping initiatives. For instance, amid the recent crisis in Sudan, India sent its all-women peacekeeping contingent which played a crucial role in the United Nations Peacekeeping mission in the region. India's experience in peacekeeping operations will make it an ideal companion for countries seeking to resolve conflicts. India's strategy also includes diplomatic and defence cooperation in the region of the Horn of Africa.

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There are plenty of avenues for cooperation and coordination between the Horn of Africa and India. China's presence in this region as a strong partner to many of the countries possess a challenge not only to India but also to the rest of the world. The more influential Chinese presence has the potential to affect India's interests negatively.

### **India's and China's strategy towards the Horn of Africa:**

#### **1. Historical and Cultural Ties:**

##### **a. India:**

India has a rich history of cultural and trade connections with several African countries, including Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Dating back centuries, Indian merchants, particularly from the western coast, established trade links with East Africa, leading to the establishment of settlements along the Somali coast (High Commission of India, 2022). These connections resulted in cultural exchanges, intermarriages, and the presence of Indian communities in Djibouti. Indian traders and labourers also played a significant role in Kenya's development during the colonial period, contributing to its infrastructure, trade, and economy (High Commission of India, 2022, p. 58). Similarly, historical maritime trade routes facilitated cultural exchanges between India and the Red Sea region, including Eritrea and Ethiopia. Indian traders and merchants had a notable presence in these areas, influencing culture, trade, and the exchange of goods, ideas, and religious beliefs.

##### **b. China:**

China has a historical relationship with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, characterized by cultural exchanges and interactions. In Somalia, Chinese traders visited the region along the ancient maritime Silk Road, fostering cultural exchanges through trade and migration (Putman & Noor, 1993). China's engagement with Djibouti has grown in recent years, with cultural events and exhibitions promoting understanding and cooperation. China and Kenya have a long history of cultural ties, facilitated by the ancient maritime Silk Road, resulting in cultural interactions and influences (King, 2010). Similarly, China and Eritrea share historical and cultural ties, with Chinese traders visiting the Red Sea region through the maritime Silk Road, leading to cultural exchanges over the centuries (Amahazion, 2022). China and Ethiopia also have a long history of cultural ties, fostered by the ancient Silk Road, which contributed to trade, religion, and cultural practices (Shinn,

2014). These historical connections have facilitated a shared cultural heritage and mutual understanding between China and the mentioned African countries.

## **2. Economic Cooperation:**

### **a. India:**

India has established active economic cooperation with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. In the case of Somalia, India is an important trading partner, importing goods such as livestock, fish, and agricultural products. India has also provided technical assistance and capacity-building programs in sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and education (MEA, 2013). Similarly, India and Djibouti have focused on trade, investment, and development assistance, signing agreements to promote bilateral trade and explore collaborations in infrastructure, energy, and agriculture (MEA, 2022). India and Kenya have a strong economic relationship, with agreements in various sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, IT, healthcare, and infrastructure development. India has also invested in development projects in Kenya (MEA, 2019). India's economic cooperation with Eritrea involves trade in minerals, livestock, and agricultural products, with agreements in mining, infrastructure, and agriculture (MEA, 2021). Lastly, India and Ethiopia have engaged in trade, investment, and development projects, with bilateral trade growing steadily, particularly in commodities like oil seeds, pulses, and spices. Agreements have been signed to promote economic cooperation and explore collaborations in agriculture, manufacturing, and infrastructure (MEA, 2020).

### **b. China:**

China has strengthened economic cooperation with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia in recent years. In Somalia, China has invested in infrastructure projects and sectors like telecommunications, energy, and agriculture. Trade between China and Somalia has also grown significantly (Ndwaru, 2022). In Djibouti, China has made substantial investments in infrastructure through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including ports, railways, and free trade zones. Chinese companies have been active in sectors such as telecommunications, energy, and manufacturing. China is Djibouti's largest trading partner (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). China and Kenya have established robust economic cooperation, with China being a major trading partner and source of investment. Chinese companies have participated in infrastructure

projects and sectors like manufacturing, energy, telecommunications, and agriculture (Mulati, 2019). China and Eritrea have collaborated on maritime security initiatives, countering piracy through naval deployments, surveillance cooperation, capacity building, and information sharing. China and Ethiopia have also established significant economic cooperation, with China becoming a major trading partner and investor. Chinese companies have been involved in infrastructure projects and sectors such as manufacturing, energy, telecommunications, and agriculture (Chakrabarty, 2016).

The table 1 below gives information about the imports and exports of both India and China with the countries Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia in the year 2022 in USD.

And table 2 below gives information about the differences between the country's exports and imports.

Table: 1 - Exports and Imports of India and China in the Horn of Africa in 2022 in USD

| Countries | Exports of India | Imports of India | Exports of China | Imports of China |
|-----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Somalia   | \$913,323,714    | \$15,634,835     | \$1,046,643,447  | \$7,383,480      |
| Djibouti  | \$876,898,581    | \$38,846,579     | \$3,262,001,474  | \$96,734,429     |
| Kenya     | \$2,940,261,013  | \$122,808,803    | \$8,249,078,657  | \$269,339,985    |
| Eritrea   | \$17,683,275     | \$3,255          | \$148,268,138    | \$461,790,557    |
| Ethiopia  | \$611,327,555    | \$49,432,524     | \$2,216,943,776  | \$453,604,948    |

Table: 2 – Differences between the Exports and Imports of both countries in 2022 as compared to India in USD

| Countries | Difference b/w Exports of both countries | Difference b/w Imports of both countries |
|-----------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Somalia   | -\$133,319,733                           | +\$8,251,355                             |
| Djibouti  | -\$2,385,102,893                         | -\$57,887,850                            |
| Kenya     | -\$5,308,817,644                         | -\$146,531,182                           |

|          |                  |                |
|----------|------------------|----------------|
| Eritrea  | -\$130,584,863   | -\$461,787,302 |
| Ethiopia | -\$1,605,616,221 | -\$404,172,424 |

Edited by author, source: <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>

### **3. Maritime Security:**

#### **a. India:**

India has collaborated with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia on maritime security initiatives, primarily focused on countering piracy and ensuring safe shipping routes in the Indian Ocean region. In the case of Somalia, India has actively participated in anti-piracy operations, conducting naval patrols and escorting merchant vessels. Intelligence sharing and joint exercises have also taken place to combat piracy and maintain maritime security (Indian Navy, 2017). Similar collaborations on maritime security have been observed between India and Djibouti, including joint naval exercises and intelligence sharing to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (Indian Navy, 2021). India and Kenya have cooperated in countering piracy, ensuring maritime safety, and securing sea routes through joint naval exercises and information sharing (Indian Navy, 2019). India and Eritrea have worked together to address the threat of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, engaging in information sharing, capacity building, and coordinated patrols (Gurjar, 2020). Lastly, India has collaborated with Ethiopia on maritime security, recognizing its significance for Ethiopia's landlocked trade and connectivity. This cooperation includes anti-piracy operations, capacity building, and information sharing to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean region (MEA, 2017).

#### **b. China:**

China has collaborated with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia on maritime security initiatives, primarily focused on countering piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. China has deployed naval forces to participate in international anti-piracy operations and has engaged in capacity-building efforts. In Djibouti, China has established a military base to support its naval forces involved in anti-piracy operations. China and these African countries have also cooperated on maritime surveillance, information sharing, and joint patrols to enhance maritime security and combat transnational crimes in the region (Zezeza, 2014).

#### **4. Diplomatic influence:**

##### **a. India:**

India has maintained diplomatic relations with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. In the case of Somalia, diplomatic ties have been in place since its independence in 1960 (MEA, 2022, p. 97). Both countries have embassies and have exchanged high-level visits to strengthen bilateral relations. India has provided support in capacity building, infrastructure development, and institution building. Similar diplomatic relations were established with Djibouti in 1977 after its independence, with regular diplomatic engagements and cooperation on regional and international issues (MEA, 2022, p. 92). India and Kenya have maintained diplomatic relations since Kenya's independence in 1963, with embassies and high-level visits promoting stronger ties by having Joint Commission Meetings (JCM) (MEA, 2022, p. 113). India and Eritrea established diplomatic relations in 1993, and regular diplomatic engagements and cooperation have enhanced their relations (MEA, 2022, p. 94). Lastly, India and Ethiopia have had diplomatic relations since Ethiopia's independence in 1941, with embassies, high-level visits, and cooperation in multilateral forums and cultural exchanges deepening their bilateral relations (MEA, 2022, p. 112).

##### **b. China:**

China has established diplomatic relations with Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, engaging in regular diplomatic exchanges and maintaining diplomatic missions in their respective capitals. China has provided political support to these countries and actively participated in regional and international forums to promote dialogue and cooperation. The diplomatic relations between China and these African nations have contributed to strengthening bilateral ties and collaboration on various regional and global issues (Zezeza, 2014).

#### **5. Humanitarian Assistance:**

##### **a. India:**

India has been actively providing humanitarian assistance to Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia during times of crisis, natural disasters, and emergencies. In the case of Somalia, India has offered food aid, medical assistance, and relief supplies to alleviate suffering. Scholarships and training programs have also been

provided to enhance human resource development (High Commission of India, 2022). Similar support has been extended to Djibouti, including relief materials, medical aid, and assistance in disaster management, along with scholarships and training programs for capacity building. India has provided significant humanitarian assistance to Kenya, including relief materials, medical aid, and financial support. Scholarships and training programs have also been offered to promote human resource development. In Eritrea, India has provided food aid, medical assistance, and assistance in various development projects, along with scholarships and training programs for human resource development. Lastly, India has extended support to Ethiopia in times of crisis, natural disasters, and emergencies, offering relief materials, medical aid, and assistance in development projects. Scholarships and training programs have also been provided for capacity building (Mol, Singh, Chattu, Kaur, & Singh, 2021).

b. China:

China has provided humanitarian assistance to Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia during times of crisis, natural disasters, and development needs. Chinese aid includes financial support, donations of relief materials, and the dispatch of medical teams to provide healthcare services. China has also supported infrastructure development, capacity building, and projects in sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, and infrastructure in these countries. The assistance aims to alleviate suffering, promote development, and strengthen bilateral relations (Lucas, 2022).

**Differences between the approaches:**

From above it is seen that India and China have historical and cultural ties with the countries in the region, although India's connections can be traced back to ancient times. India focuses on economic cooperation in sectors like agriculture, infrastructure, education, and capacity building, implementing various development projects. China's economic cooperation is primarily driven by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), investing heavily in infrastructure development, and providing loans and grants. India actively participates in enhancing maritime security through joint naval exercises, training, and coordinated patrolling, while China has expanded its maritime presence with its military base in Djibouti and engaged in counter-piracy operations. India maintains a diplomatic presence emphasizing dialogue, cultural exchanges, and cooperation, seeking to strengthen its influence through global partnerships. China has been expanding its diplomatic footprint through increased

missions, development aid, and high-level visits, leveraging its growing economic influence and infrastructure projects. Both countries provide humanitarian assistance, including aid during natural disasters, scholarships, healthcare support, and supplies.

### **How India should be proactive to counter China:**

- A. Diplomatic Cooperation: Hold regular political-level dialogues, conduct the India-Africa Forum Summit every three years, initiate an Annual Strategic Dialogue with the African Union, encourage the AU to establish a diplomatic mission in Delhi, increase high-level visits, establish a Secretary for African affairs, and transfer ownership of the relationship with the African Development Bank to the Secretary. (Africa Expert Group, 2023, p. 64)
- B. Economic Relations: Ensure regular economic engagement through Joint Commission and Joint Trade Council meetings, hold Indian Heads of Mission accountable for project implementation, create a Delhi-based African Ambassadors' Group, facilitate knowledge transfer of India's biometric identification program (Aadhar) to African governments, explore opportunities under the AfCFTA, establish an Escrow mechanism with African countries, replicate the CII Exim Awards in Africa, establish the Africa Growth Fund, collaborate on technology in the mineral sector, and promote sustainable mining practices. (Africa Expert Group, 2023, p. 68)
- C. People-to-People Cooperation: Allocate more resources for African studies, establish a National Centre for African Studies, enhance existing faculties to provide contemporary coursework and cultural events, prioritize African agencies in shaping the relationship, establish regional Track-II mechanisms, consider opening educational institutes in Africa, establish a National Museum on Africa, create direct media linkages, establish a Network of India-Africa Think Tanks, encourage university partnerships, streamline visa processes for African students, and extend visas locally for postgraduate students. (Africa Expert Group, 2023, p. 76)
- D. Defence Cooperation: Increase the number of defence attaches, enhance dialogue at various levels, strengthen maritime collaboration, establish counter-terrorism dialogues, allocate more funds for defence cooperation, provide training and lines of credit, enhance peacekeeping training, promote cooperation in emerging technologies and cyber security, establish an India-Africa Security Advisers Group, address drug trafficking issues, and improve coordination among relevant ministries and agencies. (Africa Expert Group, 2023, p. 64)

## Conclusion:

In conclusion, China has made significant inroads in the Horn of Africa region through historical ties, economic cooperation, maritime security initiatives, diplomatic influence, and humanitarian assistance. Its presence poses challenges to India's interests in the region. However, India has its own historical and cultural connections, economic collaborations, and contributions to maritime security, diplomacy, and humanitarian assistance in the region. To counter China's advantage, India must be proactive in enhancing its relations with the Horn of Africa countries. The recommended measures, such as diplomatic cooperation, economic engagement, people-to-people cooperation, and defence cooperation, provide a comprehensive framework for India to strengthen its position. By holding regular dialogues, establishing dedicated centres and groups, increasing economic engagement, promoting cultural exchanges, and improving defence cooperation, India can counterbalance China's growing influence. India's advantage lies in its historical ties, shared cultural heritage, and commitment to regional stability. By leveraging these strengths and implementing the recommended measures, India can enhance its strategic outreach in the Horn of Africa, safeguard its interests, promote economic development, ensure maritime security, foster diplomatic ties, and provide humanitarian assistance. This proactive approach will enable India to establish itself as a key partner in the region and contribute to peace, stability, and progress in the Indian Ocean Region.

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