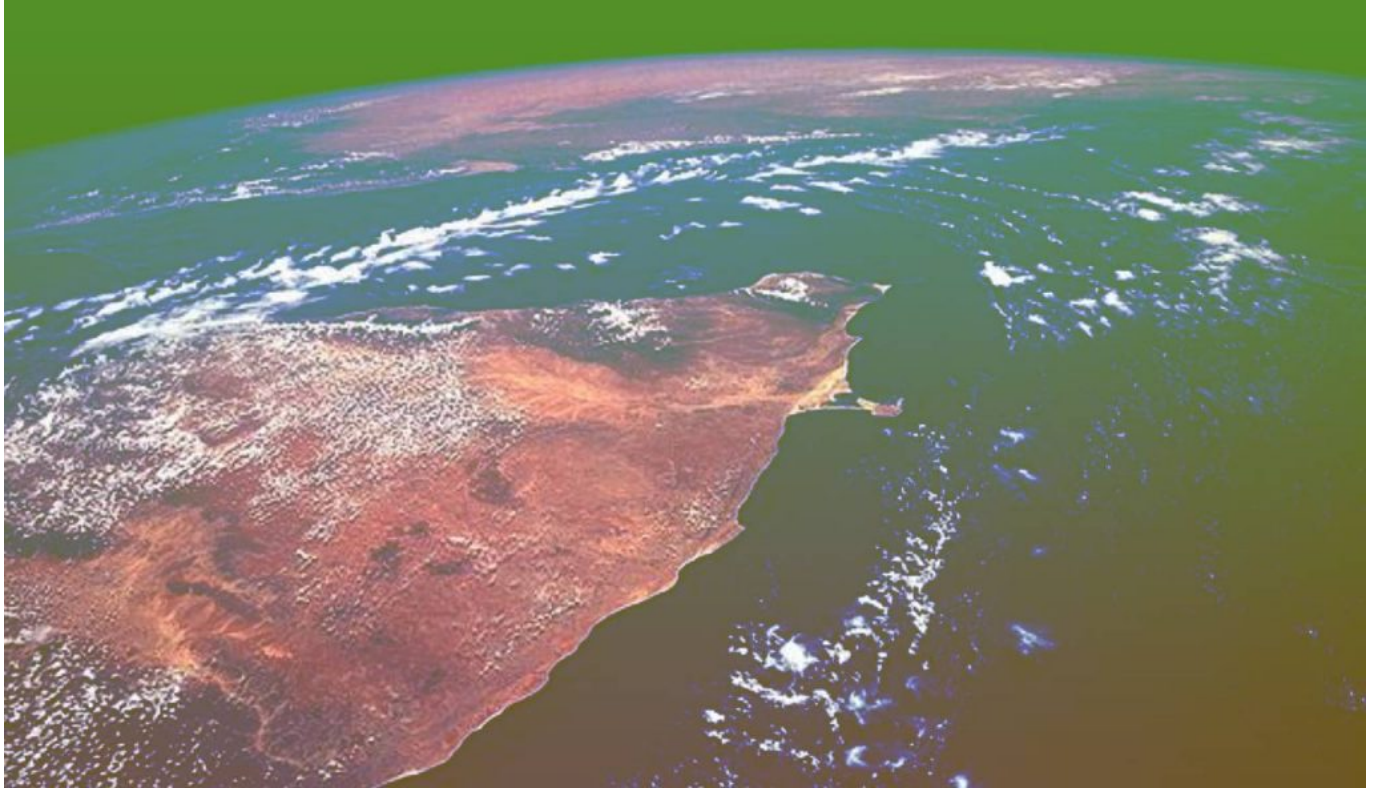


China's Interest in Horn of Africa

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Context - China recently held the first China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development Conference.

China has been investing across the African continent throughout the last decade. The conference held in Ethiopia witnessed the participation of foreign ministries from the following countries of the Horn: Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda.

Objectives of the Conference

- No doubt that China preys on small nations with debt-trapping the countries. It focuses on increasing the infrastructural investments in African countries and converting them to security assets.
- It asserted three objectives in Africa:
 1. Controlling the pandemic
 2. Implementing a Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) outcomes, and
 3. Upholding common interests while fighting hegemonic politics

About FOCAC

- The FOCAC promotes China's role in the infrastructural and societal development of the Horn.
- In the 2021 forum, the entire region of the Horn participated and four resolutions were adopted:
 1. Dakar Action Plan
 2. China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035
 3. Sino-African Declaration on Climate Change
 4. Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC
- HOA has benefited from China's vaccine diplomacy. Beijing has also initiated the "2035 vision for China-Africa cooperation"; it aims to transform the health sector, alleviate poverty, promote trade and investments, and expand digital innovation.
- The vision also focuses on green development, capacity building, improving people-to-people exchanges and facilitating peace and security in the continent.

China's Interest in HOA

China's interests are related to four major areas: infrastructural projects, financial assistance, natural resources and maritime interests.

- **Infrastructure**

- Looking at Chinese investments in infrastructure, one of its landmark projects was fully funding the \$200 million African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa.
- It has also made significant investments in railways; it is building the Addis-Djibouti railway line connecting the land-locked country with Eritrean ports in the Red Sea.
- China has also invested in the Mombasa-Nairobi rail link in Kenya, and has already delivered on railway projects in Sudan.
- It also has a viable military hardware market in Ethiopia and has built over 80 infrastructural projects in Somalia, including hospitals, roads, schools and stadiums.

- **Debts and 'Assistances'**

- With respect to financial assistance, Ethiopia is one of the top five African recipients of Chinese investments, and also has a debt of almost \$14 billion.
- China accounts for 67% of Kenya's bilateral debt. In 2022, China promised to provide \$15.7 million assistance to Eritrea.

- **Mineral explorations**

- The third major Chinese interest in Africa is the presence of natural resources — oil and coal. Beijing has invested \$400 million in Mombasa's oil terminal.
- China is also interested in minerals such as gold, iron-ore, precious stones, chemicals, oil and natural gas in Ethiopia.
- South Sudan, a source for petroleum products, has had continued Beijing investment in the industry since the latter's initial entry in 1995.

- **Maritime interest**

- China's first and only military base outside its mainland is in Djibouti.
- During his visit in early 2022, Wang hinted at China's willingness to develop Eritrea's coast which would connect to China's investments in land-locked Ethiopia.
- The US has speculated that China wishes to build another military base in Kenya and Tanzania, thereby increasing its military presence in the region.

- **HOA's Response**

- Africa has been keen on interacting with China. Despite the wariness surrounding China's projects in Africa, the governments have mostly been welcoming.
- When conflict broke out in Tigray in November 2020, Addis Ababa appreciated Beijing for respecting Ethiopia's sovereignty.
- In December 2021, Kenya defended Chinese projects in the country; President Uhuru Kenyatta maintained that the China-Africa partnership was mutually beneficial.
- Similarly, in May 2022, the East African Community (EAC) welcomed Chinese investors to work in East Africa for the prosperity of the people.

Importance of HOA

- In the last decade, the region lying between Suez Canal and the Seychelles has emerged as a new geopolitical hotspot.
- It has factors like impressive economic growth of regional countries, emergence of new security threats, and the ensuing major power rivalry driving the strategic trajectory of the region.
- The straits of Bab el-Mandeb, which lies at the heart of this region, connects the energy-rich Middle East to Europe and, along with the Suez Canal, is considered a jugular vein for global trade.

Indian Footprints in HOA

- India has been paying greater attention to the region but still lags behind China. India has bolstered defence cooperation with Oman and France (which holds territories in the Southwestern Indian Ocean).
- It has signed logistics support agreements with these countries to ensure greater naval access in the region.
- Reportedly, India was in talks with Japan to grant access to Indian naval vessels at the Japanese base in Djibouti.
- India has also sought to open a military base in the Seychelles and plans to further enhance its naval presence in the Western Indian Ocean.
- These efforts are directed to increase Indian leverage and limit Chinese influence in the region.

Way Forward

China's move towards peace in Africa indicates a shift in its principle of non-intervention. It is China's message that its presence in the continent has a larger objective and is not likely to be limited to the Horn of Africa. This includes an aim to project itself as a global leader and boost its international status. Further, the recent developments imply that China is focussing on a multifaceted growth in the continent for the long run.