

Review of: "Project Mausam: India's Cultural Strategy for the Indian Ocean"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Project Mausam, comparing it to China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). Although the two initiatives differ greatly in intent and character, the authors successfully highlight various dimensions of each while offering prescriptive insights on the way forward.

While Project Mausam is a culturally aligned policy offering a peaceful and inclusive approach, it faces several challenges. Slow participation from partner countries due to logistical and political difficulties, combined with a lack of strategic communication, has hindered its progress. Additionally, the project's reliance on cultural diplomacy alone may not be sufficient to compete with China's MSRI, a key element of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. The MSRI serves as part of Beijing's broader strategy to create a Sino-centric world order by expanding the People's Republic of China's (PRC) sphere of influence. This strategy is cleverly executed by fostering closer economic integration with countries along China's periphery and beyond, thereby aligning these countries' interests with the PRC's.

Through the MSRI and its various subsets, China enables its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to export surplus production while simultaneously creating investment opportunities for its large reserve of savings. Beijing's strategic financing and predatory lending for infrastructure projects in participating countries are designed to foster dependency, paving the way for potential debt traps that the PRC can leverage to pursue its geopolitical objectives. This economic strategy, which creates imbalances and debt traps in India's extended maritime neighborhood, is a severe cause for concern.

In this context, the authors effectively critique India's current strategic approach, emphasizing the need for New Delhi to complement its cultural efforts with stronger economic and political strategies. While the article acknowledges the value of Project Mausam in promoting India's historical ties, it stresses that the initiative must be aligned with a broader strategic vision to successfully counter China's regional influence. In conclusion, the article calls for India to combine cultural diplomacy with more robust economic and political measures. Overall, the article broadens our understanding of Indian Ocean geopolitics by offering a more nuanced perspective on the region's cultural and geopolitical dynamics. It provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay of international relations, economics, and diplomacy in this strategically vital maritime space.