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The Changing Balance of Power in the Indian Ocean: Implications for South Africa

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One of the key challenges facing the international community in the 21st Century is the shift of the global balance of power from West to East. The rise of the "Emerging Powers" of China and India, as well as the increasing importance of energy security globally, have converged to make the security of the sea lane of communication across the Indian Ocean crucial to the maintenance of international peace and security. South Africa as a littoral state to the Indian Ocean, sitting on a key trade route, namely the Cape of Good Hope sea lane, and with a viable navy, will be affected by these shifts as they take place, as will the rest of the Indian Ocean region's states. As a new balance of power emerges, states will need to decide whether it is in their national interests to align against the global superpower, the United States of America, or to bandwagon with them. However, this is not simply a choice between the established status quo power of the United States and the new emerging global powers of India and China. The choice is complicated by the emerging geopolitical competition between China and India as each struggle to assert their vision for the regional integration of the Indo-Pacific on the region. While neutrality is currently an option, should the regional tensions result in a conflict between India and China, that may be a luxury that states littoral to the Indian Ocean, such as South Africa, can ill afford.