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# Strategic Digest

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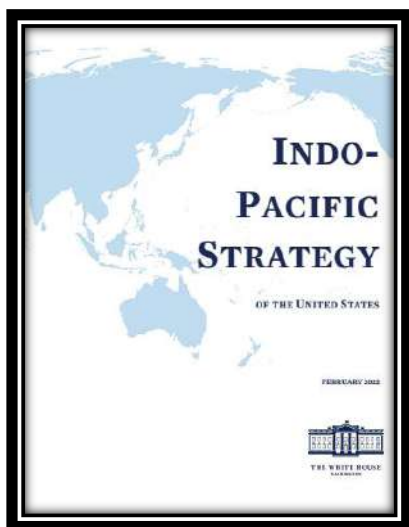
**Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States**

**Mauritius plants flag on disputed Chagos Islands**

**EU unveils € 150 billion investment plan for Africa**

## Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States

The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, released by the White House on 11 February 2022, reiterates that the United States is determined to strengthen its long-term position in and commitment to the Indo-Pacific. The first regional strategy of the Biden administration refers to the “mounting challenges” posed by the rise of China as a key driver of the “intensifying American focus” on the Indo-Pacific. It also reflects the continuing bipartisan consensus in Washington about the broader strategic relevance of the region for the US in general and rising concern with China’s unbridled aggressive behaviour in particular.



Noting that China, through “coercion and aggression,” is pursuing a sphere of influence in the region and is seeking “transform rules and norms that have benefitted the Indo-Pacific and the world”, the document calls for “unprecedented cooperation” with like-minded countries to achieve the strategy, saying collective efforts over the next decade will determine whether Beijing “succeeds in transforming the rules and norms that have benefitted the Indo-Pacific and the world.”

To tackle this and other challenges such as climate crisis and the pandemic, the strategy outlines five core US objectives in the region - advancing a “free and open Indo-Pacific”, building connections within and beyond the region, driving regional prosperity, bolstering Indo-Pacific security, building regional resilience to transnational threats.

The desired end state of the US strategy is “not to change the PRC” but to shape the strategic environment around China by building a balance of influences through “unprecedented cooperation” with like-minded countries. This represents a continuation of the Trump-era rejection of engagement as a tool to moderate Chinese behaviour and also cognition that the best the US can hope for right now is a defence of the regional status quo.

It also recognises that the US cannot do so on its own, and underlines the role of allies and partners. India has been recognised as “a like-minded partner and leader in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, active in and connected to Southeast Asia, a driving force of the Quad and other regional fora, and an engine for regional growth and development”. The United States also encourages Japan and South Korea, whose relationship is marred by historical and territorial disputes, to strengthen ties with one another.

The document describes advancing “a free and open Indo-Pacific that is more connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient” as the desired end state of the strategy which will be achieved through strengthening the US role in the region and building collective capacity with allies and partners and with regional

institutions. The core lines of effort towards implementation of this strategy include; modernized alliances; flexible partnerships, including an empowered ASEAN, a leading India, a strong and reliable Quad, and an engaged Europe; economic partnership; new U.S. defence, diplomatic, development, and foreign assistance resources; sustained focus on and commitment to the region at all levels of the U.S. government.

This strategy outlines President Biden's vision to more firmly anchor the United States in the Indo-Pacific and strengthen the region in the process. The strategy contends that the U.S. is entering a new geopolitical epoch that will "demand more of the United States in the Indo-Pacific than has been asked of us since the Second World War".

### **Mauritius plants flag on disputed Chagos Islands**

The Mauritian flag was raised for the first time on the Chagos Islands on 14 February, an Indian Ocean archipelago controlled by Britain but claimed by Mauritius. The ceremony, led by the Mauritian ambassador to the UN, took place on the atoll of Peros Banhos. A flag was also raised on Salomon, a separate atoll. Mauritian PM Pravind Jugnauth described it as a "historic moment", saying it was time for the UK to cede control.



Several Chagos islanders accompanied Mauritian officials on an expedition, led by the Mauritian ambassador to the UN that also involved a scientific survey of a nearby coral reef. It was the first time they had set foot there since Britain evicted about 2,000 residents in the 1960s and '70s so the US military could build an airbase on Diego Garcia, one of the islands.

Mauritius argues that how the islands (now constituted as British Indian Ocean Territory, or BIOT) were detached from Mauritius by Britain before independence was illegal. Mauritius has agitated for the return of the Chagos since the 1980s, and its efforts were buoyed in recent years. At present, Mauritius is contesting in the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea against the Maldives for delimitation of the maritime boundary between Mauritius and Maldives, on the basis that the Chagos archipelago was Mauritius's territory.

Three UN bodies have ruled that the archipelago - more than 5,000 miles away from the UK - is part of Britain's old empire and should be handed over to Mauritius. In May 2019, the UN General Assembly passed UN Resolution 73/295 endorsing an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice and demanding that the UK "withdraw its colonial administration from the Chagos

Archipelago unconditionally within a period of no more than six months”. India supported the position of Mauritius in the UNGA. The UK ignored the ICJ and the UN opinions, dismissing them as advisory, which prompted Mauritius to go to the international maritime court to press its claim. Britain’s claim to sovereignty over the islands in the Indian Ocean was comprehensively rejected by the United Nation’s special international maritime court in Hamburg.

In its symbolic efforts to claim sovereignty over Chagos, this expedition by the Mauritius government has displayed considerable restraint. Rather than choosing to sail a Mauritius Coast Guard vessel, it chose a chartered superyacht for the expedition. In addition, Mauritius notified Britain of its intention to survey the Chagos in December 2021.

The UK Foreign Office in its response insisted that “The UK has no doubt as to our sovereignty over British Indian Ocean Territory, which we have held continuously since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty over the territory and the UK does not recognise its claim”.

Notwithstanding the UK insistence, deft Mauritian diplomacy has put the spotlight on British intransigence and its international credibility.

### **EU unveils € 150 billion investment plan for Africa**

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a € 150 billion investment plan for Africa in Dakar on 10 February. Ahead of EU Africa Summit scheduled in Brussels on 17-18 February, Von der Leyen is on a two-country Africa trip to promote Europe's Global Gateway investment scheme, €300 billion worldwide connectivity strategy promulgated in December 2021. The EU President highlighted that the announcement of over €150 billion for the Africa-Europe program is the first regional plan under Global Gateway two months after the launch of the strategy. In Dakar, EU President announced €1bn in support of vaccines and €4.3bn for startups. In Morocco, she announced a €1.6bn green energy accord with the country. However, it is still unclear how the money will be invested.



The Global Gateway initiative seeks to invest €300 billion in public and private infrastructure schemes around the world by 2027. Seven years after the launch of the BRI, the Global Gateway is the EU's first major plan for infrastructure development worldwide. While Europe may never match China in

terms of investment quantity, the EU's main selling point is investment quality. From the outset, the narrative is focused on countering Chinese finance, which has been criticized for saddling governments with unsustainable debt, attempting to differentiate the EU as “forging links” rather than “creating dependencies.”

Competing with China on transport facilities, such as highways and airports, is just one aspect of the EU's Global Gateway multi-sectoral approach. The initiative aims to invest in next-generation infrastructures such as fibre optic cables, 5G networks, and green energy plants in the developing world, as well as investments in health, education, and research. Given the huge investment needs across the globe, the Global Gateway aims to mobilize a gargantuan €300 billion in infrastructure investments between 2021 and 2027. The funding for the initiatives has been envisaged by way of a combination of EU funds, member state investments and capital raised by European investment banks. In broad terms, fiscal commitment for the Global Gateway includes 135 billion euros will be coming from the existing ‘European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus’ (EFSD+), 145 billion euros will consist of “planned investment volumes by European financial and development finance institutions”, and an additional 18 billion euros will be made available in the form of grants from EU external assistance programmes.

Brussels wants to encourage Africa as a champion of the EU's rules-based, multilateral approach to world order, seeing the EU as a counterweight in the continent to other prominent world powers like China with the power politics they are perceived to offer. With the announcement of the first regional package for Africa as part of the Global Gateway investment initiative with 50% of the planned corpus, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen aims to proclaim the EU-27 to be the continent's “most reliable” global partner. The forthcoming EU-Africa summit plans to announce an Africa-Europe Alliance to build a common future, as closest partners and neighbours. According to the EU president, investments will be at the heart of the discussions during the forthcoming EU-Africa Summit.