POLICY BRIEF

Navigating Great-Power Competition in the Bay of Bengal

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ABSTRACT

This brief outlines how Bangladesh can preserve strategic autonomy while engaging the major powers whose interests overlap in the Bay of Bengal.

KEYWORDS

Bay of Bengal, geopolitics, strategic autonomy, maritime security, foreign policy

FULL TEXT

The Bay of Bengal has become a focal point of great-power interest, from port development and connectivity corridors to naval cooperation and supply chain planning. For Bangladesh, the challenge is to benefit from this attention without being drawn into rival blocs.

The brief argues that strategic autonomy is best protected through transparency and balance in project selection: open procurement, clear debt-sustainability tests, and a consistent public rationale for each major partnership.

Three practical steps are recommended: publish a maritime strategy that sets national priorities, build regional cooperation with neighbours on maritime domain awareness, and diversify defence and infrastructure partners so that no single supplier becomes indispensable.

A calm, rules-based approach also strengthens Bangladesh's hand in multilateral forums, where small and middle powers gain influence by being predictable and well prepared.

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