

China's String Of Pearls: Security Implications For India

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Abstract

China is emerging the great power of 21st century Ports and pipelines become veins and capillaries for the survival of great nations. China since 1990s has encapsulated an Idea under which it persuaded the South Asian Nations Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan to allow its ports used by China for military purposes or to allow construct naval bases. This process of persuasion is popularly known as Chinese strategy of String of Pearls. The String of Pearls is a network of installations the aim of which is to prove its power in Indian Ocean, the backyard of India. The String of Pearls extends from the coast of mainland China to the port of Sudan. It is said by Ms Cristina Lin who is an energy security consultant and former director for China affairs in policy planning at US department of defence said dragon will become a great sea power in 21st century, and that it may challenge the predominance of United States in the Indian ocean and could threaten India in their very own Bay of Bengal. India considers it as a security threat responding it by upgrading its naval power and is involving great powers like US and France by signing a strategic pact to thwart Beijing, s expansion into India's traditional sphere of influence. The research paper will analyse the political strategies related to String of Pearls and objective of this Chinese Foreign policy. The paper will also explore the security concerns that it poses for the regional powers particularly India. It will also analyse the security implications that the India have Vis-a-Vis encirclement and its impact on Indian security. Both descriptive and analytical method will be used.

Keywords: String of pearls, China, Indian Ocean, Strategic, Middle East, Security,

Introduction

The term String of Pearls is geo political concept was first used in an internal US department of Defense report, "Energy Futures in Asia" (Hamilton, 2004). It is about potential Chinese intention extended from the Coast of mainland China through the littorals of South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on the littorals of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. This installations of China in the region runs through several major maritime Choke points such as Strait of Mandeb, Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, and Lombok strait as well as other strategic maritime centers in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Somalia. The plan of this String is seen by Indians in particular as a threat to its national security encircling India as a whole. (Maninder., 2019) India need to be aware of the motives behind China's agenda. China is driven by the String of Pearls strategy by a variety of goals, mostly economic, but also strategic, social, and political. In order to achieve its aim of economic dominance, China will create new markets for its products and labour force in coastal South Asia and westward. It will also achieve its strategic objectives in the Indian Ocean, such as creating a route that would enable it to secure enough oil from West Asia.

China is the biggest energy source importer, overtaking the US in oil consumption. By involving its labour force in the construction of ports, projects, buildings, and roads, China will also be effective in influencing the social structure of the areas around the String of Pearls. The region has lowest beneficial effects of this Chinese agenda rather will be more exploited. The dreams of these nations for social stability, economic growth, and modernized infrastructure are erroneous instead, these developments will be beneficial for China in every way, including helping the country achieve social stability for itself by creating employment opportunities for its citizens, particularly those in underdeveloped rural areas. India has limited access to this tactic from China, which seeks to eliminate India as a rival.

India historically considered Indian Ocean its exclusive sphere of influence and China's move towards it worried India and considers it as aggressive act aiming at the encirclement and containment of India. India is fearful of China if it blocked the sea lanes, trade routes in the Indian Ocean. The fear of India cannot be ignored at a point when China is strengthening its relations with India's traditional enemy Pakistan. China is trying to minimize the Indian power by maximizing its security threat. India needs proper policy planning and policy execution of its foreign policy so that India can acquire the leverage in the regions of importance for its National interests. [Vines: 2012]

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Motivation beyond String of Pearls

You Ji a Chinese origin expert on the people's liberation army navy says "China's current strategy is to make its presence felt through building a credible naval strength". (Ji, 2016) The China is largest growing economy dependent upon energy sources imported through sea lines, it is necessary for China to feed its energy demand, it has no alternative way to show its maritime strength to great powers other than the overseas transportation of energy though will continue to remain foreseeable future. China imports 77% of its oil imports from West Asia and Africa which it transports from Indian Ocean Region besides this China is also aware that the regions of Indian Ocean are rich in minerals, such as copper, aluminium and Uranium and other raw materials, worried about the security of its consignments in the Indian Ocean, China has constantly been pursuing a campaign of increasing its friendly influence in the region and bitterness in the relationship with the surrounding nation can threaten the energy demand and lead energy shutdown if the event of military logjam took place with India. (Khurana, 2008)

Looking from realistic perspective the Chinese action in Indian Ocean is rational. It needs to do it for securing energy needs. According to 2008 census China needs 8 million barrels per day. According to forecasters that between 2010-2020 China oil imports will increase by 150%. (Bedford, 2009)

The motivations that the China have in its new strategies is particularly increase its economic success which is largely dependent upon oil sources as China consumption is largest in the world and appetite for the same is growing in the largest populated country. (Chaoqing Yuan, 2010) Over the years the China's relative dependence has increased to absolute dependence on oil sources and for this they are searching for short ways to reach the countries where they can secure their energy demand. (Jason, 2009) By establishing ports and naval bases in various strategic locations, China is reassuring its enemies that its rise is peaceful, which is reflected in its economic expansion. Oil is transported through ships, which are used for carrying and a favourite method to rely on as it provides affordable service in a short amount of time. Through this policy, China thought it was necessary to link all of the adjacent ports to the mainland as well as build ports there.

The US, Japan, and India are the three major actors in the region, and China's next objective, in addition to its String of Pearls policy, is to reduce rivalry amongst them. Great countries have traditionally used other players in the target areas for their own national interests, such as when Britain first began to emerge and set up colonies on continents where other nations were also interested in doing business. This was done in an effort to thwart their progress. Apparently there are similarities between Chinese and European growth.

Some of the characteristics that China is adopting in its rise are similar to those that the US used when it first began to assert itself as the biggest power in the world. Simply put, China is behaving what one would anticipate of a growing global Power. India is China's key regional rival since both countries are the most populous and have the highest demand for consumption. India is also concerned about China's growing relations to the neighbouring countries in the Indian

Ocean region. China's decision to link the province of Qinghai with Tibet and permit the deployment of a large number of troops from the Chinese interior to the roof of India poses a danger to the nation.

Oil consumption is increasing at rapid pace. It is said that by 2030 India would import as much as 91% of its oil. (Times, 2019) For this reason, China is restricting India's access by surrounding it and persuading other South Asian nations to choose China as a means of boosting their economy. China does not want India to gain clout over energy-rich nations. In addition, it denies India access to these ports, which would allow them to meet at a same location. China does not want India to be an equal to its position of dominance in Asia. To defeat this rival in the area China employs a variety of strategies, including the routine outbidding of Indian firms for oil and gas concessions by numerous state-sponsored Chinese firms by paying inflated prices for resources. This tactic helps China undermine India's ability to forge friendly ties with the host states. The other strategy that China most frequently employs to obstruct India is the use of its veto power. The political tool China uses to outperform its rival and win over countries where it has national interests. Both the big and regional powers are concerned about this Chinese agenda.

Another aim that the pearls strategy have is to access new markets for the Chinese products, from labour as commodity to capital commodity. China is engaging its own work forces example is Myanmar in which China revamped the road and creates 40,000 job opportunities for Chinese job seekers; there are other examples of job factories for China in the various ports. The estimates shows that the port in Sri Lanka Hambantota port worth US\$ 360 million is constructed by two Chinese companies with the help of EXIM China bank which provides 85% of fund while rest by Sri Lanka. (Moramudali, 2020) Due to its need for secure energy extraction methods, China also sought to regulate supply networks and value chains. China is aware of the unrest in the host nations. By sending peacekeeping soldiers to combat their instability, is an attempt to aid them in order to acquire influence over oil resources. China is supporting Sudan, whose oil it purchases from and to whom it exports low-cost goods, by using its right to veto in international forums.

Last but not least, China's motivation for the String of Pearls is social development and political stability within its own nation, particularly given that China has the largest population and has been ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for most of its past. The CCP seeks continuity and stability in their government and does everything possible to benefit their citizens. As it is believed that China is leading the Asian century, the String of Pearls may also allow China to infuse Chinese culture and commerce in host nations. String of Pearls raises the issue of whether China's expanding influence is consistent with Beijing's declared aim of "peaceful development" or whether China would eventually launch a play for world dominance. China gives off the idea that it wants to play a more significant role in world affairs, which worries its neighbours, notably India, who see it as a danger.

String of Pearls Strategy

As was said above, China has been pursuing a policy that India and other countries in the Indian Ocean region see as a threat. The ocean is becoming very significant in today's worldwide activities. Due to the Ocean's many chokepoints and vital waterways, it is crucial for development of both the countries developed and developing. Indian Ocean covers 20% of total water on earth. The area of Ocean is 68.55 million square kilometre. The Ocean has many important points in its circle like, Andaman Sea, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Flores Sea, Great Australian Bight, Gulf of Aden, Java Sea, Persian Gulf, Savu Sea, Strait of Malacca, Timor Sea, Mozambique Channel and other important waterways. (Jamshed, 2015) Some Island Nations of Ocean are Madagascar, Seychelles, Reunion Island, Maldives, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka.

The USA has turned its attention to the Indian Ocean in an effort to stop China's progress, and China, the growing power of the twenty-first century, is strengthening its position there. China is using a variety of strategies to obtain a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean area by bolstering its maritime strength, which serves two purposes: first, to enhance marine security, and second, to shorten the lengthy distance required to secure energy in the Indian Ocean and West Asia.. For the construction of infrastructure in the region, China is investing currency in it to establish good relations with these nations and to get access to natural resources. This construction is interpreted by various players in different ways. From realistic perspective the construction is threat it will promote competition and rivalry among nations in which every nation want to get more interest at the cost of others while from liberalistic perspective the Chinese construction will be more beneficial for host countries it will create opportunity for them to boost their market and by this way their relations become cooperative. In a changing international order China is also involving itself towards global rules of governance, China's profile has challenged to what has been there before which was established by great powers of time.

The region of South Asia as a whole is becoming important for China in this regard, it is employing a combination of hard tactics, political patronage, and an ever-widening list of economic dependents to gain a foothold in South Asia, progressing relatively unchecked in this quest. (Mukherjee, 2018) Even though India has been a historic naval force in the area, it is unable to compete with China in South Asia's naval might. As part of the String of Pearls plan, some supporters believe that China has secured a secret treaty access that would allow the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) to utilise these ports for naval operations across the area. The tactic has placed the two Asian giants in a difficult security situation as their ties are being hampered by territorial issues in the northern region of India. The topic of Indian security is the subject

of a lively discussion in Indian media. India is uncertain about China's potential intentions in the Indian Ocean region; in addition to developing ports, it is also providing enormous amounts of armaments and other supplies.

China's increasing maritime understanding with Pakistan and other regions triggers suspicion of India. This stems from three factors, China's support to Pakistan, the Maritime Silk Road and China Pakistan economic corridor which has military consequences. (Baruah, 2019) in order to develop durable maritime capacity India is heading towards Pacific to cooperate with likeminded countries like US, France and Japan (Brewster, 2018) In order to satisfy its energy demands, China has developed a String, and as part of this String, China is financing several firms to construct ports in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, , and the Maldives.

Myanmar

In 2006 it was planned by China to build an oil pipeline of 1200 km from Sittwe to Kunming in China's Yunnan province the amount that required constructing it was funded by China. China has many ventures in the Myanmar the two are crucial, the gas pipeline from Myanmar's west Arakan state to Yunnan province using Sittwe port as a sea gateway.

The reports produced through various sources since 1992 shows that China have military presence in various naval bases of Myanmar , China was ready to modernize Myanmar's naval facilities in return for the permission to use Coco Islands. China undertook building a deep sea port Kyaukphu, road construction from Kunming to Sittwe for which a feasibility study was done in 2005 and is also funding the road construction from Rangoon to Akyab. From 2013, Chinese oil tankers from the Middle East and Africa will be able to cross the Bay of Bengal to dock at Myanmar's Sittwe and Kyaukphu ports from where their Cargo will be transported through pipelines to Yunnan. The transport time of fuel that bypasses the Malacca strait in this way will be cut by a week. As per the Indian analysis Chinese presence may allow it to interdict regional SLOCs. On this account, Myanmar is emerging as the single largest threat to Indian Strategic interests in South East Asia. China is consistently assisting Myanmar to build a naval facilities so that they can be used by China for its own purpose and create a leverage in the region the example is Coco Island in which naval jetty project was launched in 2002. There is a controversy between China and India over the use of it which is used by China to spy on India's naval base at Port Blair in Andaman Islands, monitor commercial traffic through the Malacca strait or monitor Indian missile tests. China and Myanmar have entered into a multi-billion dollar deal in 2018 to construct a deep sea port on Myanmar's western coast posing a fresh challenge to India's maritime security. Under the deal, the new port will be built by Chinese state-run conglomerate CITIC Group in Kyauk Phyu. The project will be known as Kyauk Phyu special economic zone (SEZ) deep sea port project. When the Kyauk phu port will be completed China will reach to India, s Key Sphere of influence the Bay of Bengal. The Myanmar port can be seen as part of China's bid to encircle India with strategic military and naval assets across South and Southeast Asia. (Jacob, 2018)

Recognizing the growing Chinese influence PM Modi has reached out to Myanmar for increased cooperation during ASEAN and East Asia Summits, through these plat forums PM Modi got success of developing India- Myanmar- Thailand trilateral; highway and Kaladan transport project as part of Modi's Act East Policy.

Sri Lanka

Another port which comes under Chinese String of Pearls" is a port at Sri Lanka called Hambantota port. The port is operated by government of Sri Lanka.

According to 2007 agreement development of Hambantota included

- Developing a container port
- Developing a bunkering system.
- Establishing an oil refinery
- Sitting up an airport and other facilities

The location of the port is close to the sea lanes of India. It is believed by some analysts that Sri Lanka comes in the String of Pearls for the use of PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy). India is highly apprehensive of Chinese, which aims to encircle India with the promise of no false intentions. The port can give China advantage at the time of conflict to the already disputed relations. Sri Lanka is near neighbour of India, any construction by China is worried for India (Samaranayake, 2011) The China is positioning itself by keeping high naval bases at the place which is not good news for India creates security concern for India as it will give China an additional advantage in South Asia Sea lanes by making it commercial asset for China, such access that China enjoyed under Rajapaksa got changed Since the Sirisena has come to power, who declared that he want equal relations with both China and India which is green signal for India, this prompted Indian Prime minister Modi to make a historical visit to Sri lanka the first by an Indian Head of Government in over 25 years. In the meeting PM sensitized the Sri Lanka of its security concerns. (Abhor, 2015)

Bangladesh

Over the years the relationship between two China and Bangladesh has become more cooperative. This cooperation provides Bangladesh with a sense of security against India with which it has decades old border disputes, and the port in Bangladesh is very important strategically which is said by Zhao Gan chang as "developing a port is very important part

of China's cooperation with Bangladesh and China is aware of its strategic significance". According to a Booz Allen Hamilton report, "Energy futures In Asia" prepared for the US defence secretary in early 2005, China had been building a container port facility at Chittagong port in Bangladesh and seeking much more extensive naval and commercial access". The port of Chittagong is the busiest port in the coastline of Bay of Bengal, According to Lloyd's , it ranked as the 71st busiest port in the world in 2017.(Hussain, 2016) Chittagong has been a proud acquisition for China. It has also helped Bangladesh to develop its economy by getting loans and trade benefits in exchange for considerable Chinese control over its largest port. The port has increased the Chinese influence rapidly that has worried India for long. The port is in proximity with India thus makes it strategically important and also will help China to achieve military and strategic inroads into the Indian Ocean to secure its oil route. The visit of Narendra Modi helped India to get relaxation from the threat as border disputes were solved. India also gained access to the Chittagong port now for its merchant vessels, a move that will help India to show its presence there. India is now becoming more concerned of Sonadia which is a deep sea facility developing by China in the coast of Bangladesh, India needs to engage Dhaka to ensure its security in its backyard. (Hussain: 2016)

Maldives:

According to 1999 report the Maldives has given China a Marao Island for transportation, the port is used by China for security purposes in the Indian Ocean. China is building the observatory port which is a part of the northern most tip of the archipelago nation. The Island is worryingly not only close to the northern sea line of communication running between India's Minicoy Islands but also to India's South and South West coast. According the first post analysis that China is investing heavily in infrastructural projects in the Maldives and already owns them. China is showing its presence in the Maldivian Islands in a same way it has shown in South China Sea. It is said that Maldives observatory is an integral part of Beijing, s String of Pearls" which is encircling India, along with Gawdar port in Pakistan and other ports as described above. According to defence analyst Major Gaurav Arya, "The Joint Ocean Observation Station in the Maldives is clearly dual purpose. The last thing China Wants to do is study ocean currents. This station allows them to peek into our South and South Western coast. The dragon is wagging its tail." Mohan Guruswamy argued in the Deccan Chronicle is, India is in dilemma whether to deal with the Issue and how to deal.(Vivek 2007)

Pakistan

The Gawdar port located in the Pakistani province Baluchistan has gained strategic focus in present international order. The port is considered to be a link between the one belt one road and Maritime Silk Road projects. It is about 120 kilometres southwest of Turbat, 170 kilometres to the east of Chabahar port in Iran's Sistan and is in close proximity to Indian Waters and the western state of Gujarat thus a strategic vantage point to monitor Indian activities. The plan of the port is old but was not realised until 2007 when the construction was started. It has become operational in 2016 during the prime ministerial ship of Nawaz Sharif. China is highly dependent upon energy resources it is trying hard to reduce its dependence on those routes which pass through disputed areas like Strait of Malacca, and South China Sea thus developing an alternative route through Gwadar port which will provide China an alternative and Shorter route for import of energy sources from Middle East hence reduce shipping costs and transit times. The Gawdar port can bring economic boom for not only China but for Pakistan. Pakistan is expecting economic advantages from it by generating employment and large amount of revenues will be collected which will develop Pakistan, s military power hence creates military pressure to India. Pakistan has become major recipient of Chinese aid. China Pakistan friendship is considered all weather friendship based on common enmity of India. Gwadar is considered a real pearl for China which benefits China from two sides ,one milks oil and other strategic hold on India as much of India's Oil passes through it. (Soloman, 2009)

Security implications for India

The Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region cannot be considered threatening in every sense rather need to be seen from the multiple prisms the Indian narrative believes that it is an attempt to encircle India while Chinese view it as an interest of economic engagement and ensuring safety of their maritime trade, especially oil, as the Indian Ocean is the conduit for Sea Lanes of Communications(SLOCS) extending from East to West thus to consider it as a security threat for India is a debatable Issue. To consider it more threatening to Indian security than other nations, it will be seen as the Indian traditional sphere of influence has changed in favour of China as the countries of South Asia are going more close to China recently. Chinese incursion in Indian Ocean Region has tremendous purpose ranging from economic, diplomatic to military balancing. In many occasions China has conducted its military operations in the maritime neighbours without prior notification. In November 2004, a Chinese Han-class SSN intruded well into Japan's territorial waters. If China will use the ports and bases for gathering intelligence outputs in Indian maritime zones it is bound to have grave rampications for Indian security.

The increasing development of nodes in the Indian Ocean has become more descrinible in recent times. China is not happy with the Indian move towards the West the adversaries of China if India continued its stance towards west, China may change its strategy in the Ocean towards India that China calls Punishment strategy. India on the other side have disputes with its neighbours which are used by China for the exploration of energy security thus threatening to India. India imports 70% of its energy through Sea lanes thus it also needs free access to IOR to ensure its economic development any influence

of the Country with whom has fought War and has border disputes is naturalistic threat. Chinese too much dependence on Indian Ocean for accomplishment of its security, commercial, economic, geo political and strategic needs is changing the balance of power and prompts India to counter the Chinese interests for securing its own. India was considering its monopoly on Indian Ocean historically because of the name but now after Cold War ended many accesses were opened, India also liberalised its economy enlarged its economic, political and security sphere of influence in Indian Ocean and beyond. India become nuclear power to nuclear deterrent the security scenario changed in the Asian region both China and India are growing economies with nuclear weapons thus security dilemma in terms of both hard power and soft power have to be there, besides this China is moving towards India's major adversary Pakistan by making rail, road and water ways ,China Pakistan Economic Corridor(CPEC) and Gawdar port to reach a common destiny which is threatening Indian security of doing trade and transmitting energy supplies and can harm India more in time of conflict.

According to Brewster, there is no doubt that such ports, developed by China and located in countries which have not always shared amicable relations with India, could be used during a military contingency.(Brewster, 2018) If China is trying to assure its purpose of economic engagement of the countries through the construction of ports on the one side, at a same time it has not been able to give a belief of the same due to lack of transparency in its diplomacy where it is not resolving long standing border disputes in the northern side of India and is proliferating nuclear weaponry by supplying it to Pakistan. This creates unpredictability regarding any Chinese action whether it is for offensive purpose or defensive purpose. This encirclement from both north –West –South to India can hardly be interpreted by Chinese narrative. To counter this threat India has many options to go for which is correctly said by Admiral Arun Prakash, former Indian Chief of Naval Staff, that 'India's options are stark: boost military muscle and stand upon its own: or strike alliances with willing partner.' (Atalas, 2015) If India have to challenge it has not in the way which provokes China to take actions which are determinant to Chinese actions. India on the one side have to increase its naval power , military power and on the other needs to engage China positively which will also help India to develop its economy along with China which is rapidly growing economy of 21st century both need to create a mutual interdependence. China is India's largest trading partner with annual trade exceeding US\$70 billion, and understanding between the two will help them to avoid competition and remove the rivalry. This is possible when the both countries will be under compatible leadership. US has promised India under Bush administration that it will help India to emerge as a major world power in 21st century which is disliked by China as it is the aspirant of great power and is progressing leaps and bounds to fulfil its dream.

Conclusion

China wants its rise to power to have an impact on all areas, including politics and economics, since the Indian Ocean region is crucial to its development and has become a key area of interest for China. To boost its economy, it is building ports and pipelines across the Ocean. The Indian Ocean is very important to China in the current global order, and gaining control over it will help it support its expanding economy. Despite the fact that China wants to protect its borders because they serve its strategic interests and geopolitics and will help it become a major power, it is widely criticised for its incursion there. In addition to being a regional power and potential big power, India also has strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, making the ocean important for it. From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, there has been a shift. There is no information on the importance of China's plans to develop roads or how China would utilise them. Due to its suspicion of India and the US's maritime supremacy, China may have military strategic interests. If China is successful in its diplomatic efforts of persuasion, it will have detrimental security repercussions for India as well as other South Asian and South East Asian countries. India must likewise react to China more favourably if both nations are to be able to thrive economically, since animosity would harm Asia's rise. India and China are dependent on sea lanes for securing their energy consumption so they need to develop a friendly atmosphere to ensure it. No doubt that String of Pearls strategy of China creates Security dilemma and its strengthening and all weather friendship with Pakistan threatens the very existence of India. What India needs in reaction are to engage China in multilateral arrangements to ensure that the choke points in the Indian Ocean region remain open and free.

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