

How China's 'String of Pearls Project' would affect India's security?

RAKESH

Ph.D. Research Scholar, SINGHANIA UNIVERSITY (RAJASTHAN)
SUPERVISOR – DR. RAJBIR SINGH

Abstract

China's efforts to build 'nodes' of influence in the Indian Ocean Region have been increasingly discernible in recent years. This endeavour, many argue, is driven by Beijing's military-strategic ends. However, such an argument remains a speculation, backed by frail and somewhat disjointed evidence. At least in the public domain, it may be too early to marshal tangible evidence to prove or dismiss the hypothesis. An assessment is nonetheless crucial because notwithstanding China's legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean, its naval presence in these waters would bear strongly upon the security calculi of India in particular and those of other major powers. From the study of available information, this paper attempts to derive China's objectives in the Indian Ocean, its approach and the attendant security ramifications for India.

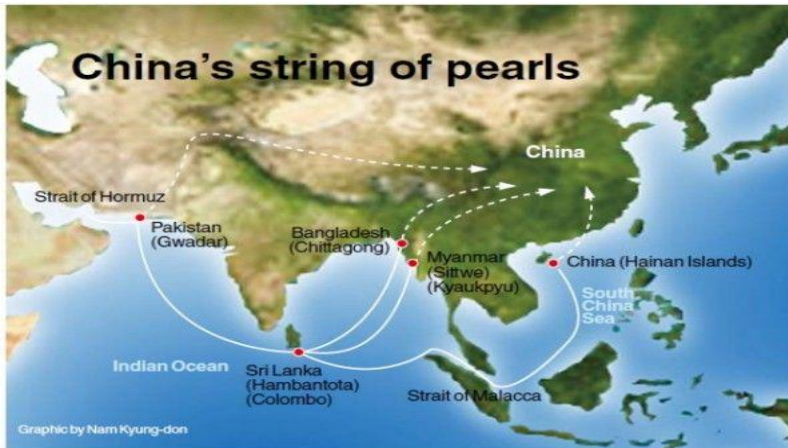
Key words: - China, India, Security, Indian Ocean, Military, Strategic.

Introduction

The String of Pearls is a "theory" (extra stress on this word) which, in the present context, refers to China encircling India in the Indian Ocean, commercially and militarily. On July 12, 2017, Chinese troops have sailed for setting up country's first ever overseas military base in Djibouti (Africa). This Chinese step shows that China is trying to trap India through different base around its neighbouring countries. China is creating a ring around India which is named "String of Pearls" by the media.

"The String of Pearls" is a geopolitical theory related to potential Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean region. It refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its sea lines of communication, which extend from the Chinese mainland to Sudan Port.

String of Pearls include a facility in Gwadar and a port in Karachi (both in Pakistan); Construction of new facility at Colombo and construction of new port Hambantota (both in Sri Lanka); container facility in Chittagong (Bangladesh); and ports in Myanmar.



The term (String of Pearls) has never been used by official Chinese government sources, but it is often used in Indian media.

On July 12, 2017, Chinese troops have sailed for Djibouti for deployment to the country's first overseas military base. Djibouti naval base has fuelled worries in India that it's part of China's strategy to encircle the Indian subcontinent ('the string of pearls') with the help of military alliances and assets in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka,".



Now let's see the pearls of this string one by one

Asian Naval Base

China is backing port projects in countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar to ring India through its Naval bases.

Pakistan: China made a naval base in Gwadar, Pakistan, as the part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, Gwadar. This port will help China to tackle India from west side during any war like situation. China selling fighter jets, submarine and nuclear assistance also to Pakistan so that it can give strong reply of Indian attack.

Sri Lanka: China has planned to take over Sri Lanka Hambantota port in Sri Lanka to firm up

its naval operations in Indian Ocean. Besides Hambantota port; China also providing technical and financial assistance to this country so that it can allow its territory to be used against India at the time of requirement.

Bangladesh: China made its presence in this country as well by setting up its naval base at Chittagong Port. Currently Bangladesh announced to purchase two submarines from China for its own protection.

Myanmar: China is increasing its military and economic relations with this Indian neighbour to use its territory against India.

Maldives: This country is situated in the India Ocean near the Lakshdweep island of India. China established its army base in this country also. So that it can take up firmly with India in the Indian Ocean.



Seychelles: Another small island country with presence in the Indian Ocean allowed China to set up its naval base just because of some monetary assistance from China. This country can also be crucial for the naval fight between India and China.

Is India in the position to boycott Chinese products?

Africa Naval Base: China has set up a first ever abroad naval base in Djibouti. China started building the base in February 2016 in Djibouti, home to only around 800,000 people.

Djibouti is Arabian Sea at right hand of India. Djibouti is located in the Horn of Africa at the entrance to the Red Sea on the route to Suez Canal.

Half of China's oil imports sail through the Mandeb Strait off Djibouti, which connects the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. China says it will use Djibouti base to support anti-piracy, UN peacekeeping and humanitarian relief missions.

France, USA and Japan are among several other countries which already have their military base in Djibouti. USA has Camp Lemonnier (USA's only permanent base in Africa) in Djibouti which is few kilometer away from China's new base.

China is paying \$20 million a year as a rent for Djibouti base. Chinese banks are major funders of at least 14 projects in Djibouti, valued at \$14.4bn.

Origins

In 2005, the U.S. consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton came up with the "string of pearls" hypothesis, which posits that China will try to expand its naval presence by building civilian

maritime infrastructure along the Indian Ocean periphery. China's rapid economic development over the course of the last quarter century has been heavily dependent on foreign sources of energy, and it is likely that foreign sources of energy will prove even more critical to the continued growth of the Chinese economy. The sea lines of communication that link the Chinese mainland with ports throughout the Middle East and coasts of Africa, have become a major source of conflict with respect to China's future energy security. China is the world's second largest oil consumer and the largest oil importer. Oil consumption is expected to grow in China by 5.8% annually until 2015. Oil imported from the Gulf States and Africa comprises 70% of total Chinese oil imports, and remains China's most critical source of energy apart from domestic coal production. In order to meet future demand, China has signed a number of long term contracts to develop Iranian oil fields and to build a pipeline, refinery, and port in Sudan for oil export. The oversea transport of oil from existing production areas will continue to remain the primary mode of energy importation for the foreseeable future. Efforts to secure new supply lines in Central Asia have proven difficult, with poor infrastructure, political instability, logistical challenges, and corruption hampering energy development there. Energy security also sits at the core of China's anti-piracy efforts, which figure into its larger maritime objectives. The expansion of Chinese naval patrols off the Coast of Somalia, and China's decision to join multi-nation defense patrols in 2010, indicate China's greater assertiveness in the policing of shipping corridors

India's counter String of Pearls

String of pearls is simply a geopolitical strategy of China to contain India in Indian ocean region. China is developing or will develop military and commercial establishment in the countries of Indian ocean region. For example, China has already a presence in Kyaukpyu port of Myanmar. Chittagong port in Bangladesh is being developed by china who is also pressuring Bangladesh to have its naval presence there. Hambantota port, which was recently handed over by Sri Lanka to China in return of debt, for around 99 years of lease) will have Chinese commercial presence from now on. The reason why china is using this strategy against India is that china thinks India as its biggest rival in Asia. China import more than 80% of its oil from West Asia, most of this oil trade is in Indian ocean routes. Strait of Malacca, gulf of Aden and gulf of Oman are choke points of oil trade. Being an expansionist since history, and to protect its economic interest china is asserting itself in the Indian ocean region. After Vietnam, Singapore and other countries in Southeast Asia, India is now also steadily stepping up military ties with Indonesia with an eye firmly on China. India and Indonesia have now decided to hold their first-ever joint air combat exercise as well as deepen maritime security cooperation.

Defence sources say India also offered to train sailors from Indonesia in the complex art of submarine operations during the recent visit of defence secretary G Mohan Kumar to the country. Vietnamese sailors, incidentally, are already being trained in "comprehensive underwater combat operations" in the Indian Navy's submarine school INS Satavahana in Visakhapatnam. A similar programme to train the Vietnamese fighter pilots on Indian Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jets is set to begin this year, as was earlier reported by TOI. Much like the expansion of its military training, technology-sharing, joint exercises, visits and exchange of experts with Vietnam, India is now poised to crank up defence ties with Indonesia. Apart

from exploring opportunities for collaboration in the defence production sector, the two countries will also upgrade their joint Army exercise called Garuda Shakti, the fourth edition of which was held at Magelang in Indonesia March 2016. The two navies have also been conducting coordinated patrols on their respective sides of the international maritime boundary line (IMBL) twice a year since 2002, with the aim to keep this vital part of the Indian Ocean region safe and secure for commercial shipping and international trade. As for Singapore, India has also renewed its air force training agreement with the city state for another five years. With land and airspace being a scarce commodity in Singapore, it has been utilising Indian military facilities to train its own small but high-tech armed forces under special agreements signed in 2007 and 2008. India, for instance, provides facilities to Singapore for exercises of mechanised forces at Babina and artillery at Deolali ranges as well as for fighters at the Kalaikunda airbase in West Bengal. The two countries also regularly hold the Simbex naval wargames, which have graduated from being purely anti-submarine warfare exercises to complex ones involving multiple facets of operations at sea.

How india should counter string of pearls?

1. Increase strategic presence in the strait of Malacca. For that, India has to engage with Malaysia and Singapore. Recently, Singapore has allowed India to access its Changi Naval Base and to use naval facilities. (This has irked china a lot. In 1971 india-pakistan war, India threatened to block China's trade from strait of Malacca if it comes to support Pakistan)
2. Through Act East Policy, enhance relations with south east Asian countries so that they do not fall in the trap of China. Inviting all heads of State of ASEAN countries in this Republic day is a good step forward.
3. Similarly, revamp relations with losing neighbors. Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri lanka and Myanmar. Indian has to give them more Line of Credit /loans (for eg. India has vowed to give \$5 billion Line of credit to Bangladesh when Sheikh Hasina visited India), so that china could not take their advantage. Dig the burried historical and cultural relationship. A good step in this regard is that, India through its Kaladan Multimodal connectivity project in Myanmar, which also passes through Sittwe port, can counter Chinese presence. Also, sri Lanka has offered India to operate an airport just near the Hamantota port, where China has presence. (Sri Lanka has learned from its mistake of taking huge loans from China (6.3% interest rate), while India is offering loans at less than 1%, that's why Sri Lanka offered India to operate Mattala Rajapaksha Port, near Hambantota)
4. In terms of naval power (blue navy) India still has to do a lot. Recently, Mission Based Deployment was announced by Indian Navy, for round the clock operation by naval ships in Indian ocean region. More number of ships, Corvette, offshore patrolling vehicle, submarines need to be manufactured, and India is on the way for it.
5. Annoy china by investing in South China Sea for oil and gas. This has already happened. Vietnam has offered India to invest for the same.

6. How we can forget West Asia. While china has announced to built military establishments in Djibouti, India has to engage deeply with Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Eritrea. In countering port of Gwadar in Pakistan, India has operationalized port of Chabahar in Iran (80km away from Gwadar), with recently sending a consignment of wheat to Afghanistan via this port. Recently, India has got access to strategic Duqm port of Oman for military and logistics services, this means that India can now keep its eyes on Chinese activities at Gwadar port of Pakistan, because this port is in proximity to to both Gwadar and Chabahar port.
7. All above, collectively, more or less parts of the **Indian Iron Curtain strategy**, which is an answer to Chinese string of pearls.
8. Revive SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), but due to rivalry with Pakistan, especially after Uri attack, the organization is not functioning regularly. Pakistan is always an impediment in regional initiatives of India. So, India has already found an alternative to SAARC, for regional Cooperation i.e BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation). Apart from BIMSTEC, connectivity initiative like BBIN (Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal) can avoid any chinese footprints in the south Asian region.
9. India needs to have a proactive approach in Indian ocean region. Developing the Assumption Island (Seychelles) and Agalega island of Mauritius are some good initiatives.

Conclusion

The 'string of pearls' is the name given to China's strategic investments in South and Southeast Asia, which, when plotted on a map, look awfully like a string of pearls encircling India. Pakistan is critical to this strategy, both because of its size and its location. Drezner is right to suggest that without the Sino-Pakistani link, the string of pearls theory doesn't hold. But China's status as a Pakistani ally long predates the war in Afghanistan, or China's rise as a major power. China and Pakistan established ties in the late 1940s, being among the first countries to recognize one another's governments. The alliance deepened in the 1960s. China's territorial dispute with India gave it common cause with Pakistan. The Sino-Soviet split prompted India's abandonment of its non-aligned position in a 1971 treaty with the USSR, with China and Pakistan paired up in opposition. China's arms sales to the Pakistani military and various defense cooperation agreements date from this period. Today, China is still a major supplier to the Pakistani Air Force, even if other divisions of the military enjoy closer cooperation with the United States. Arguing that there's no Sino-Pakistani military link ignores this history; it would be more accurate to say that a longstanding Cold War-era link is under pressure in a post-Cold War world, as Pakistan has become more entangled with the U.S. In short, there is a case to be made that the Sino-Pakistani relationship - and with it the 'string of pearls' strategy - is weakening. That may be due to wariness about Pakistani instability or concerns about links between Pakistani militant groups and recent terrorist activity in China. It may be a sign that China is holding back until the U.S. presence in Pakistan is dialed down. It may reflect a judgment that the overall strategic goal of containing India is less urgent, given India's own blundering when it comes

to asserting itself in the region. But you'd have to ignore a lot of economic evidence to suggest that the strategy was never there at all.

References

1. Kotani, Tetsuo. "Why China Wants South China Sea.", "The Diplomat", 18 July 2011
2. Paal, Douglas H. "Beware the South China Sea.", "The Diplomat", 15 July 2011
3. Sulong, Rini Suryati. 2012. "The Kra Canal and Southeast Asian Relations.", "Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs", Hamburg, 31 (4): 110-125
4. Joseph, Josy. "Delhi entangled in the Dragon's String of Pearls.", "DNA", New Delhi, 11 May 2009.
5. Eshel, David. "String of Pearls' is Securing China's Sea Lanes." *Defense Update*, 20 December 2010.
6. Raza, Syed Irfan. "China given contract to operate Gwadar port.", "Dawn", 19 February 2013.
7. Sibal, Kanwal (24 February 2014). "China's maritime 'silk road' proposals are not as peaceful as they seem". *www.dailymail.co.uk*. The Daily Mail. Retrieved 25 February 2014.
8. Prakash, Vishnu. "India seeks to deepen economic ties with Myanmar.", "The Times of India", New Delhi, 14 October 2011. Retrieved on 4 May 2013.
9. Singh, Teshu (15 October 2013). "China and ASEAN: Revisiting the Maritime Silk Road". *www.ipcs.org*. The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. Retrieved 16 October 2013.
10. David Brewster. *"Beyond the String of Pearls: Is there really a Security Dilemma in the Indian Ocean?". Retrieved 11 August 2014*
11. 'India, US need to partner to balance China in Indian Ocean', "The Economic Times", Washington, 2 September 2010. Retrieved on 4 May 2013.
12. Pehrson, Christopher J. String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral., "Carlisle Papers in Security Strategy", July 2006.