

## **China's Malacca Dilemma: Power Politics in Indian Ocean**

**Qudsia Akram**

*Department of International Relations, Kinnaird College for Women,*

*Lahore*

**Correspondence:** [qudsia1akram@hotmail.com](mailto:qudsia1akram@hotmail.com)

**Munaza Fareed**

*M. Phil Scholar, Kinnaird College for Women,*

*Lahore*

### **ABSTRACT**

With the opening of doors for the world, China has shivered the world state actors and also those that are inactive prior to China's open door policy. China's initiated reforms have adverse effects on the relations with neighboring states and other regional states. China's reliance over energy resources has put China under security threat of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs). For this purpose, China introduced geopolitical strategy String of Pearls Strategy. This paper is based on descriptive analysis to analyze true intensions of China behind String of Pearls Strategy. Which highlights China's intensions is not to establish military ground but purely mercantile and not to threaten India. China's economic growth is highly dependent upon oil shipments and energy transit routes. Malacca dilemma is referred to String of Pearls Strategy to secure important choke points of Indian Ocean and to make diplomatic relations with the key countries of Indian Ocean littoral states that are Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. In future, there are assumptions about Sino-Indian alliance formation if China becomes successful to implement String of Pearls Strategy. Power struggle between India and China will be continue in future in which US will be a key factor to maintain her status-quo.

**Keywords:** *China, Indian Ocean, Strategy, Power Politics, Major Powers*

### **Introduction**

Napoleon Bonaparte famously said that "still China is sleeping wait till when she awakes she will shiver the world". Under the leadership of Den Xiaoping in 1980s by introducing 'open door' reforms, china get up not form centuries of inactivity with international world but also shake the world with unprecedented economic growth and growing international influence as well. Woke up of China ultimately had an effect on relations with neighboring states and other regional powers. On the other hand China rise also challenge the security of states on geopolitical discourse. The development of so-called 'String of Pearls' strategy is one of the security challenges that threaten serious implications to regional security.

China is heavily reliant on energy sources that run her sustainable growth. China has to ensure the availability and sustenance of energy sources and for this purpose China wants to ensure the safety of the energy passages as China is a big energy importer of Middle East and Pacific Ocean. Maritime trading has become very important factor for modern Chinese economy that is the reason China wants to provide safety to Sea Lanes. In 2003 President Hu Jin Tao coined the term "Malacca Dilemma" which describes the problems and prospects of critical Sea routes in the Malacca Strait. You Ji a Political Scientist from China said that

security of Sea Lanes Of Communication (SLOC) is conventional as well as non-conventional security challenge and also a military challenge as well. Focusing on Malacca, Hu Jin Tao said that “few powers have full access on sea and tried to control navigation through this strait.” Malacca strait is very significant energy route for 80% Chinese energy. China wants to expand its economy and for this purpose China has much more focus on maritime supremacy because it is the way through which China can pursue economic and maritime goals. Sea lanes are independent routes for trade and shipments that remains open according to International Law. It is the necessity of China to secure the SLOCs by making strong military alliances, enhanced maritime presence, deeper cooperation with her neighbors and Indian Ocean nations and it is alarming for neighboring countries particularly China’s regional rival India and balancing Power United States. As per highlighted in an American report in 2005, China is inching towards regional harmony that ultimately challenge the US primacy in the Indian Ocean region.

The significance of trade and shipping today has gained tremendous importance for the overall international trade. In this regard, Indian Ocean and its highly strategic Sea Lanes of Communication are no exception. As Indian Ocean SLOCs stand out as important chokepoints for transferring world’s energy demands, both China and India which are rapidly growing economies seek to maintain their influence in the very same to ensure a safe passage to their energy conduits. Therefore, in this regard China and India are constantly involved in increasing their naval capacities and upgrading their navies so that they may be able to project power on the high seas. As both the states are rapidly modernizing their navies, there’s a possibility of a future confrontation which may further make the region security sensitive. USA is a main actor who wants to bypass China in order to secure her interests and position in the region.

This paper pursue string of pearls strategy that was primarily for commercial purposes and to ensure energy security but not for to threaten India or to challenge USA. It is the matter of fact that all countries depend upon sea channels for trade and also want to ensure stability and safety of sea lanes. China will follow her stance of ‘Peaceful rise’ until her maritime interests are safe. Evidence for this can be seen in the chapter of Sino-Indian rivalry, China’s intentions are non-confrontational but China still wants to manage mistrust situations with India. The military bases in the name of pearls are highly considerable threat for India. As far as Indian Ocean is concerned, it covers 20% of the world water. Indian Ocean is significant for its most important Choke points and Sea Lines of Communications. Important choke points of Indian Ocean are Hormuz Strait, Malacca Strait, Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, The Sunda and Lombok Strait, Mozambique Channel, the Ten Degree and Six Degree Channels. In these energy routes Strait of Malacca is most important for China. Indian Ocean is very significant for energy resources and oil sea routes.

String of pearls strategy is the development of ports that was considered more critical in the past but not now because of advance technology. The reaction of pearls also supports China’s commercial intensions. This paper aims to postulate implication of String of Pearls strategy as well as its impacts on Indian Ocean nation relation and on their reactions about pearls.

## China's Malacca Dilemma: Power Politics in Indian Ocean

There are following questions that are going to be answer under this paper:

1. If string of pearls strategy exists then what are true intentions of China behind this strategy?
2. How will China get benefit from bases established within the countries and how India and US reacted upon these developments of China?

China's short term intensions have potential to lead into long term tensions. If China is considered a rational actor in international community, only energy security is the matters that will force China to use aggressive behavior in case of blocking of SLOCs that may cause an international conflict. It is important to understand the circumstance of String of Pearls strategy under which China is trying to increase her maritime security.

Various scholars have provided their insight about China's Malacca Dilemma and Power Politics in Indian Ocean. Marshall (2001) defined well about string of pearls in a research thesis 'The String of Pearls: Chinese Maritime presence in the Indian Ocean and its effect on Indian Naval Doctrine' and according to him it is a term that postulates the idea of China's effort of naval bases development in South Asian Littoral states in order to get maritime power in Indian Ocean. This activity of China is primarily economic in nature, but not military one. So to counter this policy India has employed Blue water navy. It is also an effort of India to reestablish status quo in the Indian Ocean. Christopher J. Pehrson (2006) in his effective book "String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral" describes motives behind China's strategy of String of Pearls is the China is encountering US maritime power across Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) that connects China towards Middle East and Africa. The strategy defines China's rising geopolitical influence with the establishment of ports and airfields, developing diplomatic relations with Littoral states-members to String of Pearls Strategy and the modernization of military to secure Malacca Strait.

Kerry Lynn Nankivel (2012) has given his views on Sea power with the special case of China rise. According to him China's rise can be considered special for three reasons. Firstly, china is having wide regional impact. Secondly China's rise, unlike the rise of other regional player is most accessible example that is based on maritime strategies. Thirdly, through this maritime based national strategies china is going to promote re-evaluation particularly about modern sea power. He has mentioned China's Sea power as a commercial sea power and as a military sea power. The increase in sea power of China is pre-eminent for modern Asia-Pacific because when Hu Jin Tao in 2013 used the term Malacca Dilemma it connected Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean in china's security strategy. The proliferation of submarine deployments in Ocean will promote heterogeneous increase of geo-strategic uncertainty.

In June 2014 Harsh V. Pant commented in 'The Growing Complexities of Sino-Indian ties', according to him global political environment is going to be transformed politically fro west to east, he named it as Asian Century. The future of Asian region is highly dependent upon two regional giants i.e. India and China. These states have cold ties from old days so their bilateral relationship matters a

lot and similarly their political potential has implications for USA. India's ties with China are competitive and United States.

Srikanth Kondapalli (2014) tells, with the new leader of China, their priorities were economic ties with India and also other developmental interests. Then in the same time Chinese leadership also proposed recent projects like Maritime Silk Rout, indicates Chinese preparations to enter in the Indian Ocean. While talking about joint relations, China and India have marked 2014 as a year of Friendly Exchange. In this year unprecedented number of visits took place at political, diplomatic, economic and military level.

### **1. Importance of Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**

Indian Ocean is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest ocean in the world after Pacific and Atlantic Ocean. Indian Ocean covers seven sub regions that includes Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, Gulf States, Arabian Peninsula, South Asia, South East Asia, Australia and the India Ocean Islands and meets with 33 countries. The significance of Indian Ocean increased due to six choke points in which Strait of Malacca is most important that is located between Indonesia and Malaysia, Strait of Hormuz that lies in between Iran and Oman, Mozambique Channel and Bab el Mandeb that connects to Djibouti and Yemen (World oil transit choke points, March 2007) Strategic thinker

Alfred Thayer Mahan had proposed that the future of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be decided on the waters of Indian Ocean(Mahan, 1890) his words are:

“Who so ever controls the Indian Ocean will definitely rule over Asia. This ocean is a key to connect seven seas and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the destiny of the world will be decided on the water of Indian Ocean”(Sufyan, 2017).

This importance of Indian Ocean is more significant for Asian states particularly for India, China, USA and other Indian Ocean states and Australia and South Africa as well that are larger economies and navies. The Indian Ocean Region has abundant resources and one of the main routes to supply energy sources. This is the reason this ocean is more important for Indian Ocean states especially for two emerging economies of the region (Malik, 2011).

#### **1.2. Maritime Security Issues**

Mohan Malik in his book ‘China and India: Great Power Rivals’ states that Current geostrategic, economic, energy and demographic trends indicates that Indian Ocean could be emerge as most important center for 21<sup>st</sup> century just like Atlantic and Pacific Ocean has played a role in 20<sup>th</sup> century (Malik, 2011). Maritime security includes traditional and nontraditional security threats. In traditional issues protection of SLOCs and broadband connections lies on seabed of Indian Ocean that connects Europe, Asia and United States that security of safe passage for trading and shipping, protection of choke points from piracy, ports and shipping lanes form pirate attackers, monitoring of trade and drug trafficking are now the concern of Indian Ocean states. Nontraditional issues include pollution, global warming, natural disasters, migration, and depletion of fisheries. Lack of regional cooperation and institutions is the reason of maritime security issues (Parmar, 2013).

### **1.3. Triangular Relationship in the Indian Ocean**

In 1848, Henry John Temple delivered a speech and said that, “we have no eternal allies, and we have no continuous enemies. Our interests are endless and permanent that is why it is our duty to follow those interests” (ALI, 2013). This speech reaffirms the strategy of other major powers those were already involved in cooperation, alliance formation and comprising of forces against each other. Sino-Indian-US triangular relationship is the birth of Post-Cold war scenario that is of great importance in the Indian Ocean Region and it also shaped new world order based on strategic interests. India views China's intentions are particular for encirclement and containment of India similarly China perceive same intentions from America for herself.

If history is observed external powers have tried to create mistrust and rivalries between two old civilized states India and China. Cold war scenario has strong implications on relations of India and China. The Sino-India-US relationship have characterized by vagueness, in other words these three states have much more to gain benefit from each other on one side and also have fear factor on the other. There will be a continuous effort for multilateral cooperation and shift for bilateral alignments based on their strategic interests in the IOR. In this triangle US is on pivot point and India is a swing state which could oscillate on either side.

International scholars like Kaplan, Mohan Malik and C. Raja Mohan and others predicted the amplification of continuing maritime rivalry between India and China in IOR is because of their relevance interests and contradictory goals. Malik argues that both of the states remain distrustful about each other's position and long term interests. Both of these compete their power and influence on each other's cost. If China's Navy is growing towards south then Indian navy moves towards east to the pacific region, than Malacca dilemma can create Hormuz Dilemma for India. (Malik, 2012). Ashley J Tellis (2012) considers for US Indian Ocean is global common while Alfred Mahan takes it as great highway. On the other hand India considers it as an Indian Ocean Society. These writers also commented about their general safety like piracy issues and crucial rules of roads. US have worldwide issues which affect the scenario of Indo-US partnership. As far as China and India is concerned both have practiced to live under suspicion in history and now both have common global goals (Tellis, 2012). According to Stuenkel (2013) that now their internal bilateral agreements and economic engagements will not indulge them into another war. Rasgotra (2014) commented that their shared interests should undergo in cooperation rather than into a rivalry. China's interest in the Indian Ocean will be helped by rebalancing predominance of US position in the region (Stuenkel, 2013).

### **1.4. Existence of String of Pearls Strategy**

String of Pearls Strategy is now more debated concept in this time period for strategic competition in IOR. The motivations for this strategy by China are military or economy because it is a planned idea. The term “String of Pearls” was coined by Booz Allen Hamilton in an American Defense report in 2005; report title was ‘Energy Future in Asia’. In this report China's intentions are described in which China has moves to establish naval bases, enhancement of diplomatic ties, accessing more energy sources and modernization of military. For this purpose, China has invested in commercial ports and made defense agreements with the

Indian Ocean States like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Maldives and Somalia. These countries are attracted by China's economic diplomacy. Here, it is important to note that China denies accepting such strategy but the development of ports show the existence of String of Pearls. This string of pearls has great value for China as China's shipping trade across Indian Ocean accounts for 80%. China will have access towards Persian Gulf from the way of Indian Ocean by avoiding Strait of Malacca and East China Sea. According to David Zweig et al China's energy security does not only depends on obtaining energy sources but also to get safety of energy sources while reaching at home is more important. That justifies the needs of China to safeguard energy routes (Juli A. MacDonald, 2004).

#### **1.4.1. Reasons for String of Pearls Strategy**

As China always denies for String of Pearls but it is the matter of fact that China has initiated this strategy for some reasons. Rational behind this strategy is as following:

##### **1.4.1.1. Energy Security**

Energy security is one of the main reasons to conduct ports development in order to secure the trade routes. Energy is a vital source of a nation that can be called as strategic commodity (Harshita, 2001). Energy commodities are essential for a country to supply energy sources. The abundance or lack of energy can enhance or break a country's progress. According to international Energy Agency (IEA), China is a top country in this century as a consumer of oil that is moving forward from USA. Focusing on Malacca, Hu Jin Tao said that "few powers have full approach to the Ocean and want to run navigation through this strait." Malacca strait is very significant energy route for 80% Chinese energy (Ji, september 18, 2007). As China's crude oil growth is very low than the growth of oil consumption, thus it results in shortage of energy supply and it increases the Chinese dependence on import oil. In order to import oil, China use sea routes that five passages pass from Strait of Malacca that generates dilemma of Chinese energy security that is Malacca Dilemma.

However, China's rapid growth and progress depends upon uninterrupted availability of energy. For this purpose China has to secure her pipelines and ports. This purpose of interest justifies china's intentions for String of Pearls strategy.

##### **1.4.1.2. Malacca Dilemma**

The Strait of Malacca is one of the most significant trade route for China and also it is a shortest shipping route between Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. Almost 25% of global trade passes through this narrowest sea passage. China has significant access on this strait as China contain fourth largest commercial ship and 80% of oil imports conduct through this strait (Lai, 2010).

China's naval strategist described well about energy value in his words; "Strait of Malacca is a blood to breathe and live a life itself." On the other side Strait of Malacca have threat from pirate attacks in which states and non state actors are included. China is well aware about this weak point of this strait and therefore china can be threatening by disrupting the supply on this strait by other states. Principle fear of China is blocking of Strait of Malacca. China want to defend these water lanes from piracy and it is not for China but for every state to have fear

## China's Malacca Dilemma: Power Politics in Indian Ocean

of pirate attacks that has dependence over Malacca Strait. But the naval build up through String of Pearls strategy is a factor of fear and threat for state rivals.

### **1.4.1.3. Access to New Markets**

With the strategy of String of Pearls China is hoping to have new Market access for economic growth. 'Pearls' will provide persistent presence to China for selling of goods. The other side of this side is to provide job opportunities for her citizens. For instance construction of roads in Myanmar has provided 400,000 jobs for Chinese labor. These pearls shall provide not only connection of sea routes but also boost up of business of Chinese construction companies (ART, 2011).

### **1.4.1.4. Social Stability**

Survival of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) depends on the ruling government in China to engage masses of state domestically. As China serves world's largest populations standing at approximately 1.3 billion, the political and social development within China is uneven. Therefore, this is another factor in making of String of pearls to stabilize the political situation within the state. Most of the area in China particularly province of Xinxiang remains under developed as compared to western china which is highly industrialized. Thus in order to maintain and avoid chaos several projects have initiated in Southern China under String of Pearls strategy. For instance construction of Gwadar port will link province Xinxiang through extending Karakoram highway. In this way China will develop Xinxiang province installing industries and manufacturing plants. Moreover, the Uzen oilfield and pipeline project in Kazakhstan which will connect Kazakhstan with Xinxiang shall also boost up development not only in Xinxiang but also province in Yunnan.

## **2. Power Politics and China's Indian Ocean Strategy**

The perceived challenge from String of Pearls Strategy can be evaluate from the reaction of states. The developments of China keep China's rival India and USA on their limits. In fact, Chinese ambassador to Pakistan Liu Jian said that nobody should worry about the developments of China and he also said that there is just speculation that the establishment of ports is for military use. Few Chinese officials like General Zhao Nanqi and DG Logistic PLA, delivered statements about Indian Ocean that "it is not acceptable that Indian Ocean is only linked to India's Ocean"(Rai, 2009).

### **3.1. Indian reaction**

According to Indian perspective, China follows policy of containment and encirclement. India considered Indian Ocean as her sphere of influence just as China considers China Sea. India considers Indian Ocean for regional power status. India has security concerns about the control of trade routes and shipping lanes because there is no direct control. That is why India has fear factor that china would block straits close to the proximity of Indian Territory such as Strait of Hormuz that is closer and vital shipping lane for India. Indian minister of external affairs Mr S.M Karishna commented that the government of India is well aware about Chinese increasing interests in the Indian Ocean that are not normal so India is monitoring Chinese intentions (Karishna, 2010). Arun Prakash described his concerns that India does not have such grand strategy and he is not alone. Indian

PM Dr. Manmohan Singh confesses about China's plotting for energy security and India is not satisfied. Due to lack of grand strategy making India is lagging behind India in a race of power struggle (Mingjiang, 2009).

It is the matter of fact India is not silent upon China's growing influence. For this purpose, India has increased her engagement in African Rim states by deploying naval facilities. The states particularly Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, Madagascar and coastal states Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, India has increased her relations with these states. Then construction of Chabahar port with the collaboration of Iran is a step to reduce reliance over Pakistan's economic corridor. The point where Chabahar port is located, it is the point that serves as a linkage towards landlocked Central Asian States and Afghanistan (Bedi, 2012). By using Diplomatic channels India persuade Sri Lankan government to restrict the construction of Hambantota port project. In 2011 India has also become world's top importer for military weapons as per according to Swedish research institute that is Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (Kumar, 2012). Purchasing of military weapons is a step of India to intimidate China.

## **2.2. Reaction of United States**

The project of String of Pearls was introduced by America first and China brought attention towards China's intensions. 'String of Pearls' was first seen in a document naming 'Energy Futures in Asia', proposed by an American think tank, whose name was Booz Allen Hamilton, the report was presented in US Secretary of Defence in 2005 (MacDonald, 2012). It is the matter of fact and US continues to monitor China's moves as aspired by India. This report was published under Bush administration within same year. Since then Washington has started to observe Indian Ocean on security front and also force India to focus on military security. In February 2011 Admiral Robert Willard, commander of US Pacific Command delivered a conference and said that US need to 'get China Right' it is the biggest challenge of 21<sup>st</sup> century. America will not lose hope and will continue efforts to maintain her status in the Indo-Pacific but now China seems as a biggest challenger of US continuing dominance. A report was prepared by Center of Strategic and Independent Studies (CSIS) in which some suggestions were offered in case of conflict with China such as: "installation of US aircraft carrier in Western Australia, increase the number of nuclear attack submarines at Guam, deployment of combat ships in South Korea, twining the size of amphibious force in Hawaii, up gradation of anti-missile defense in Japan and also to strengthen US ground forces as well (Yoshihara, 2011).

## **3. Evidences to Support China's Commercial Interests**

Rivals of China feel more threat in absence of evidence that China has commercial objectives in real sense. So China has numerous reasons to support her strategic interests.

### **4.1. War on Sea can harm China's interests**

The most important concern of China is to avoid war on sea routes because any kind of conflict can affect China's own will to use trade routes. One of biggest stake is to maintain world order. If position of China is observed, China is also in a vulnerable position in respect of Malacca Dilemma. As Malacca Strait is her lifeline for economic growth and oil shipments. In case of any conflict and



blockade, could harm China's economic growth. China actually wants to ensure her presence, no dominance in order to secure interests in the Indian Ocean and wants to portray her image as a responsible power. As a matter of fact, China can face stiff resistance from US as well as other states of the region that are also involved in the expansion of their navies. The United States has strengthened her military ties with the regional partners to pursue Asia-Pacific partnership. About China's advanced modernized Navy US Army War College has revealed a reality which was published in 2006, American supreme military capabilities and security cooperation are means to guarantee security of United States in String of Pearls region. US want to make strong military relationship in order to meet the challenge given by China as Beijing will make attempt to dominate in the region by using String of Pearls Strategy (Pehrson, 2006).

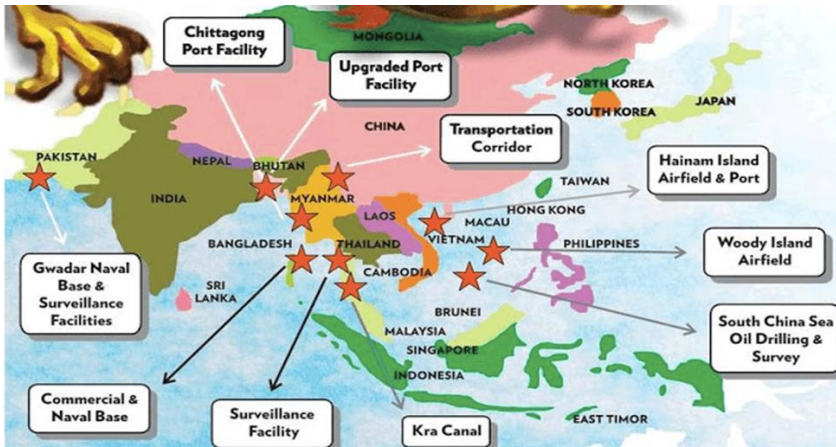
#### **4.2. Emerging Swing States**

In accordance to China's String of Pearls Strategy for the construction of ports in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean is a challenge to convince these states. These states considers as Swing Players because they are loyal to any other single power and these states will decide either they are ready to construct pearls (ports) or not. These swing states are important for China because these states don't lie to host states. Most of the pearls have military and economic relations with the China which makes them to align with one power against other. These states are part of Indo-Pacific "great game" and are oscillating between China, India and United states to gain more benefits (Townshen, 2011).

#### **4.3. Alternative Source for Bases**

As it is the fact that bases are beneficial for intelligences purpose, to project power as well as to use them for commercial use for the transportation of goods (Cord, September 2012). China does not need military bases particularly along South Asian Littoral states as China can conduct most of its intelligence collection activities and dissemination from her home by using cyber technologies, unmanned vehicles and open source intelligence. Due to such surveillance system military bases are not as such critical as they used to be. So China is pursuing places not bases that can be used for energy transportation. But on the other hand US setup of C4ISR i.e. Control, Command, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance; is a major challenge for China as China wants to secure her presence in the Indian Ocean. That is the reason of ports development to make sure a place for energy hub, resupply, refueling and maintenance of ships. China wants to use these ports as logistic operations (Mcdevitt, March 4, 2015).

## Map for China's facilities from String of Pearls



Source: <https://www.globalvillagespace.com> retrieved at 20 September 21, 2018

### Key countries of the String of Pearls Strategy

The establishment of ports project is stimulation for economic growth in the region as well as advancement of China's backward provinces in home. So, it's a project of benefiting both sides China and host states. The string of pearls strategy offers China to control supply lines to their destinations and also China will have access to open market that will not affect China's domestic economy. While taking String of Pearls as a commercial project it is important to note that what developments are those to be made in the pearls (countries) to understand the commercial nature of China's project. Relations with three key countries are explained that gives evidences to China's intentions that are commercial in nature.

- **Pakistan**

Geopolitically, Pakistan is a state that links Central Asia and West Asia. For China its geopolitical importance and historical rivalry with India that makes china to choose Pakistan as a partner to pose a constant challenge to eastern neighbor; India. So, any agreement or alliance with Pakistan seems to bestow a threat to India. If Size of population and economic growth is not comparable between India and China but Pakistan's military is a forceful machine in terms of non-conventional arms. China has big helping hand in strengthening of Pakistan's military in front of Indian nuclear program. Till 2013 Pakistan's nuclear arsenal consists on 90-110 nuclear warheads (Kerr, 2013).

Despite its significance Pakistan is mostly treated as pawn in a power play game by dominant powers. Pakistan's ruling class plays both sides for her benefit as a classic swing state. As far as String of Pearls Strategy in Pakistan is concerned it will serve Pakistan as energy corridor for China. Gwadar port is located 520km from Strait of Hormuz. This proposed pipeline project and also railroad will link Gwadar to Kashi in Western China that will provide shortest land route to the Indian Ocean, Middle East and Saudi Arabia. India has criticized this pipeline project because if this project would be implementing successfully then India would have reliance over Pakistan in the use of this corridor. In order overcome

## China's Malacca Dilemma: Power Politics in Indian Ocean

this reliance, by joining hands with Iran; construction of Chabahar port is planned by India. Gwadar will also provide a way to divert India's attention from China that China is seeking more access to energy resources. Kanwal Sibal, former Indian foreign secretary quoted about China: "It is a method of insanity to locate ports and staging points as China is doing. China is trying to make balance and undermine India's natural influence in these areas" (Kim, 2011).

Gwadar is one of deep sea port and China wants to use this as an important energy transport hub. This port will also be used as a permanent military base by China. Therefore, due to its dual benefits Gwadar port will not only facilitate China in term of harbor enabling refueling base station of oil tankers but also as a base to operate Chinese naval ships in the region.

Due to lack of awareness Baloch inhabitants claims that government is exploiting energy resources. Eastern route of CPEC is linked to Punjab and Punjab is already taking influential position in ever matter and in this regard western route of CPEC is certainly ignored by ruling elite. This situation created nationalist feeling among balochi people. It is the weakness of government that could not handle the problem but later in 2015 it was agreed to complete construction work on western side (Maini, August 2, 2016). But balochi people claim that it is just vast exploitation of natural resources by the government and therefore, tribal leader Amir Ahmed Suleman Daud makes an influential statement that; "China is interfering in our land so we do not have other choice to defend our land, it is only Punjabis and Army who has invited China but we have not invited them." So, the other concern is security of project because Balochi separatist groups have sabotaged the government installations, China thinks Pakistan could not provide safety to China. Due to failure of Pakistan's government China tried to complete this project by her own but now it seems China has diminished her interests in Gwadar Port (Atal, 2013).

The current status of Gwadar port is that Pakistan is going to construct Oil City at Gwadar under the project of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This mega oil city will import oil from Gulf and it would be stored at this city. It will be used for the transportation of oil through Gwadar Port to China. The distance will be reduced to seven days for the transportation (Haider, 2018). Now Saudi Arabia will join this multi billion project to turn the Gwadar Port in mega oil city. For this purpose, Pakistan has taken assurance from China to involve Saudi Arabia for this mega project (Arshad, 2018).

- **Myanmar**

Myanmar is located at Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia. Historically it is a contested region for India and China. It is a tactical 'Pearl' because it includes road and river route by connecting Kunming-Yangon, construction of port at Kyaukpyu as well as a corridor that connects Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar and known as Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (BCIM). It is important to note that construction of Kunming-Yangon route has been going on for about ten years ago on the Irrawaddy River but it was left in under construction because of installation of new port at Bhamo. The concern of Chinese penetration into Myanmar was due to Naypyidaw regime. According to a report, former president of Myanmar General Than Shwe did not want Chinese presence on Irrawaddy River (M.zin, 2010).

China has helped a lot to liberalize and democratize the regime of Myanmar after that Myanmar has aligned herself with western powers. But China does not want Myanmar to become an ally of US so, Myanmar's President Thein Sein has delivered a statement to delete the fear of China: "China has supported and favored for a long time period in the difficulties of Myanmar that we could never forget" (Blanchard, 2012).

- **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is situated in the east 20 miles away from India. It is located on the East-West shipping route that is used for transferring goods from Europe, Africa and Middle East in order to reach East Asia. That's why its commercial and strategic significance is enough though. China has granted amount of 360 million dollars for the construction of Hambantota port that will provide refueling facility, harbor facility and cargo terminals. The agreement of this port was signed on March 12, 2007. The construction of Hambantota port by China Harbor Engineering Company with the collaboration of Sino-hydro was first pearl in the IOR. It is situated at the southern end of Sri Lanka and strategically its location is busiest shipping lane of the region. This port serves as a backup port in case of fall of Gwadar port due to unrest in Baluchistan because locals of that Province have not good intentions for this project; they consider it as source exploitation in Pakistan (Patrick, 13 April 2017). Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa has confessed that India has never offered such assistance of this scale but India has contributed in the coal fired power plant construction in 2008 with the amount of 500 million US dollars. Indian companies have offered to establish technology Parks and investments in telecommunication. For Sri Lanka both India and China has helped Sri Lanka to meet the Challenge of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)(Kostecka, 2010).

## **5. Analysis**

The String of pearls has commercial intensions to boost up potential of South Asian littoral states that are ignored by other prosperous states. Heavy investment of China in these states will increase their economic graph. Pearls constructed by China will transformed into military bases that would have adverse effect on the security of Indian Ocean. India and US has reacted on the building of naval power by China. Both China and India have enhanced their military capabilities to counterbalance the security issue. Due to mistrust and misperception and miscalculation of power has turn them in arms race that can be seen in South Asia. Military alliances have made b them and these states has containment policies to balance power equation in the region. It is a zero-sum game in which if one takes more, other will lose. According to John J. Mearsheimer China's peaceful rise cannot be possible because their antagonistic behavior always creates security dilemma in the Indian Ocean Region. Their mistrust forces them to be more powerful in order to counter each other.

As China is building and developing ports in the neighboring states of India, India sees these developments as offensive in nature and mainly directed to be a challenge to her maritime security. Each pearl as indicated refers to the construction/development of ports in the countries like in Pakistan, Sri Lanka Bangladesh and Myanmar in order to secure safe passage for her energy sources. Building ports in these states allow china to maintain political nexus as well as her

## China's Malacca Dilemma: Power Politics in Indian Ocean

naval presence in these states. Some of the motivational factors which persuade china to execute her said 'string of pearls' strategy includes energy security (pirate attacks in the Indian ocean being the major issue), preserving the SLOCs, ensuring political and social development within china as well as assessing new markets for its abundant exports.

On the other side, in near future if String of Pearls Strategy goes successful then alliance between China and India would be a necessary part for the maintenance of peace in the region. It would be better to describe this alliance as Entente and will be successful alliance if Sea Lanes keep open for both states because India and China both have stakes in keeping peace in the region in order to use Sea Lanes. In 2012, Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid delivered that India should Accommodate with China. He said "we should accept the new existence of China in the areas of South Asia that have always been playground for India and other powers". Hence, the aspiration of India and China to attain a great power status has compelled them both to divert their attention from land power to sea power through which the safe harbor of their energy resources could be possible. Both India and China are expanding their very own influence in the region. Therefore, the strategic competition between both the states continues to remain persistent in the Indian Ocean Region.

China's intentions and position cannot be ignored that is why strategic alliance formation will also determine the direction of future relations. The atmosphere created by String of Pearls is more complex for Sino-Indian chapter in which US is playing key role to maintain status- quo. In accordance with evidences for China's commercial intension that are highlighted in this paper shows String of Pearls- construction of naval bases is a myth. China's needs to enhance maritime security and to secure trade routes enable her to make good relations with the states.

### **6. Recommendations**

- Both of the neighbors India and China should go for mutual cooperation to ensure peaceful co-existence as their priority in the Indian Ocean Region while paving ways for avoiding any armed conflict which could threaten the security of whole region.
- Strategic competition between India and China can be dangerous for sea war that's why there should be policies for their resolutions.
- India and China is good trade partner that's why strategic competition between them can affect their economic ties.
- India, China and USA need to kick out power struggle and should collaborate to promote peace, stability. They should work to make India Ocean Region a secure region for ever state instead focusing on to preserve their own interest in the region.
- In the IOR, there is a need of Balance of Power among the states otherwise their struggle to dominate each other will indulge them in a full fledged nuclear war. It is the duty of policy makers to make policies for the security of Sea Lanes of Communication and vulnerable choke points that are highly important for trade.

### References

- [1] ALI, M. I. (2013). The implications of China's 'String of Pearls Strategy' on relations with Indian Ocean nations. *Lord Palmerston*. London: Lingnan University Digital Commons @ Lingnan University.
- [2] ART, S. P. (2011). An Anatomy of China's 'String of Pearls' Strategy. *SCRIBD* , 27-28.
- [3] Atal, M. (2013, Feb 2). *China's String of Pearls, Real or Fake?* Retrieved Sep 14, 2018, from Forbes Magazine: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mahaatal/2013/02/02/chinas-string-of-pearls-real-or-fake/>
- [4] Bedi, R. (2012, July 5). *India begins use of Chabahar port in Iran despite international pressure*. Retrieved August 31, 2018, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9115192/India-begins-use-of-Chabahar-port-in-Iran-despite-international-pressure.html>
- [5] Blanchard, B. (2012, Sep 22). *Myanmar president says democracy won't change China friendship*. Retrieved Sep 14, 2018, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-myanmar/myanmar-president-says-democracy-wont-change-china-friendship-idUSBRE88L02P20120922>
- [6] Cord, M. E. (September 2012). "Does China Need A String of Pearls?". *Naval Postgraduate School* .
- [7] D. Harshita, D. R. (2001). *Energy Security*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
- [8] Hindu, T. (2014). In Indian Ocean Waters India, China Show Maritime Prowess. *The Hindu* .
- [9] Ji, Y. (September 18, 2007). Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma: China's Effort to Protect its Energy Supply. *Strategic Analysis* .
- [10] Juli A. MacDonald, A. D. (2004). *Energy Futures in Asia*. Washington D. C: Booz-Allen & Hamilton.
- [11] Karishna, S. (2010, September 1). *The Hindu*. Retrieved August 31, 2018 , from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article605780.ece>
- [12] Kerr, N. (2013). *Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues*. CRS Congressional Report for Congress.
- [13] Kim, S. P. (2011). An Anatomy of Chinas String of Pearls Strategy. *The Hikone Ronso* , 33-34.
- [14] Kostecka, D. (2010, November 19). *China Brief* . Retrieved September 14, 2018, from The James Town Foundation:

## China's Malacca Dilemma: Power Politics in Indian Ocean

<https://jamestown.org/program/hambantota-chittagong-and-the-maldives-unlikely-pearls-for-the-chinese-navy/>

- [15] Kumar, H. (2012). *Why has India become the world's top arms buyer*. New York Times.
- [16] Lai, H. (2010, July 5). *China builds bridges to fuel its engine room*. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from Financial Times:  
<https://www.ft.com/content/6e350266-879a-11df-9f37-00144feabdc0>
- [17] M.zin. (2010). 'China-Burma Relations: China's Risk, Burma's Dilemma. In *Burma Or Myanmar? The Struggle for National Identity* (p. 271). Singapore: World Scientific .
- [18] MacDonald, D. a. (2012, September). Does China Need A "String Of Pearls"? Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.
- [19] Mahan, A. T. (1890). *The influence oa Sea Power upon History: 1660-1763*.
- [20] Maini, T. S. (August 2, 2016). *Shahbaz Sharif's China Visit: Implications for CPEC*. The diplomat.
- [21] Malik, M. (2011). *China and India Great Power Rivals*. Lynne Reiner.
- [22] Malik, M. (2012). China and India Today: Diplomats Jostle, Militaries Prepare. *World Affairs* .
- [23] Mcdevitt, M. (March 4, 2015). The contibuton of Maritime Exercises to U.S South China Sea Policy . *Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College (SSI)* .
- [24] Mingjiang, L. (2009). Sino-Indian Energy Politics. *The Geopolitics of Energy in South Asia*. Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- [25] Mohan, C. R. (2013). *SAMUDRA MANTHAN: Sino Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press India.
- [26] Parmar, S. S. (2013). Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean. *Journal of Defence Studies* .
- [27] Patrick, A. (13 April 2017). China - Sri Lanka Strategic Hambantota Port Deal. *Ntional Maritime foundation* , 2-8.
- [28] Pehrson, C. J. (2006). *String of Pearls: Meeting the challenge of China's rising Power across the Asian littoral*. University of California, Berkeley: Strategic Studies Institute.
- [29] Rai, R. B. (2009). China's String of Pearls vs India's iron Curtain. *Strategic Analysis* .

- [30] Stuenkel, O. (2013). India and China are Not Destined to Clash. *The Diplomat* .
- [31] Sufyan, K. A. (2017, June 23). *Greater Indian Ocean: A Peaceful Geo-Political Pivot Or A Contentious Source Of Hedging*. Retrieved July 7, 2018, from Eurasia Review : <http://www.eurasiareview.com/23062011-greater-indian-ocean-a-peaceful-geo-political-pivot-or-a-contentious-source-of-hedging/>
- [32] Tellis, A. J. (2012). Indian Ocean and US Grand Strategy.
- [33] Townshen, A. S. (2011). Unraveling China’s “String of Pearls”. *Yale Center for the Study of Globalization* .
- [34] *World oil transit choke points*. (March 2007). Retrieved from [www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/Background.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Background.html)
- [35] Yoshihara, J. H. (2011). Is China Planning String of Pearls? *The Diplomat*.