

Indian Response to Chinese String of Pearls Doctrine



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Abstract *The paper explores the origin and analysis of the so-called Beijing's String of Pearl's doctrine that refers to the Strait of Malacca, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives, the Strait of Hormuz, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and IOR. The paper further elaborated on the Indian response to the Chinese String of Pearls Doctrine by countering through Indian Act East Policy, investing in the Iranian Chabahar port and by developing Indo-Pacific alliance with Japan and the USA. This piece of the paper concluded that the Chinese investment in all these ports, islands and chokepoints are a counter strategy to the Malacca Dilemma and to ensure the Beijing Sea lanes of Communication. The study found that the Chinese never used or declared a policy statement about the String of Pearl policy and originally it was coined by the U.S. consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton and got popularity with publication in Energy Futures in Asia.*

Introduction

The Sino-Indo relations can be comprehended as dynamic and complex, dividing between eras of tension and cooperation. PRC being the world's largest socialist country while India is the world's biggest democracy but despite this commonality, there are areas where they have diversity in their relations (Yuan, 2007). Both considered to be the emerging regional powers and also attractive economic markets but both Beijing and New Delhi have unresolved issues that are the main hurdles in the friendly relations. Despite its territorial disputes with China, India has found ways to cooperate with Beijing on matters of mutual interest. India is a founding member of AIB or BRICs Development Bank and New Development Bank, India's membership in SCO is likely to make means for expanded collaboration with China (Pitlo, 2015). BRI will promote China's links with Asia, Europe, and Africa through infrastructure and international trade that will lead to economic cooperation. On the other perception through BRI Beijing will hold its political, economic and strategic influence on these of Indian Ocean and global sea Lane's communications but the Chinese comprehended it that it has the strategy to secure its SLOM as the piracy incidents risen since 2003 (Pitlo, 2015).

Chinese BRI is a magnificent plan to connect Europe, East Africa, and Asia economically (Khan, 2017). Yet, Indian policy experts portray this initiative as geo-economic expansion, which appears as a geopolitical threat to India's national security and national interest because China has increase its activities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Garlick, 2017). India should examine the extent to which OBOR is a genuine threat to national security and national interest (Khalid H. U., 2018). If India seriously desires to increase its economic growth than they have no option better than BRI projects (Pitlo, 2015).

In the twenty-first century, the parallel rise of India and China is one of the most significant strategic developments. India is trying to maintain solidarity with developing countries and struggling for recognition

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as a great power (Shah, 2015). The western countries have eagerly welcomed the raise of India but China's accommodation of India's raise been partial and incongruous. The mutual distrust and doubts between China and India will continue to shape the trajectories of their future relationship (Pu, 2017).

Chinese project of BRI includes more than sixty countries, China has invited India to participate in the OBOR project but New Delhi has refused and argued that BRI is a unilateral and national initiative of China it has nothing to do with us. The second tiff of New Delhi was the CPEC project, which is part of the BRI project. India claims that the current CPEC route linking Xinjiang to Gawadar Port (Pakistan) is passed through Gilgit-Baltistan which is disputed territory and part of Kashmir. Indian's perceives that by joining the BRI project, it will strengthen Pakistan's occupation of that region.

Indian's strategy so far has been focused on isolating Pakistan on the issue of terrorism and adopting a hard-line policy internally in IOK (Indian Occupied Kashmir). This strategy of India is good domestic politics for BJP (Baharat Junta Party) but this strategy is not the need of India for its future. India with its millions of unemployed youth, extreme poverty and inflection cannot merrily ignore the economic headwinds that will change Asia (Aaron, 2017).

In the twenty-first century, the charter of the international structure of power is going to transform with the rise of China into great-power status. BRI is the vehicle that will hasten China's influence in the age of American distraction. China is trying to change the status quo of the US in Asia, which New Delhi wants to maintain. In Indian's perceptions, Beijing belief in Chinese superiority and Indian inferiority, which have restricted the constructive dialogues between the two neighbors. Indian policy experts claim that China has never accepted Indian primacy in South Asia, as it seems resolute to build its own dominance (Kaura, 2017).

For countering the Chinese dominance particularly in Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and ensuring its maritime security and national interest, India has conducted its maritime diplomacy at three levels; high-level bilateral visits to countries around the Indian Ocean; reviving the civilizational and cultural links with the initiative like 'Project Mausam'; and lastly, regional cooperative means (Padmaja, 2915).

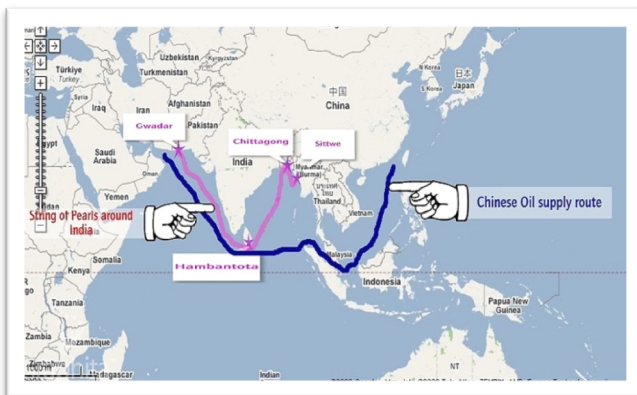
The String of Pearls

According to Indian, the string of pearls a geopolitical agenda that reflects the Chinese intentions in the IOR by connecting through a system of Chinese military and commercial activities around the Sea Lines of Communications that started from mainland China to the Port of Sudan in Africa. This covers the Sea lines important chokepoints including Strait of Mandeb, Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and the Lombok Strait. According to this theory, it also controls the maritime strategic centers of Pakistan, Sari Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives and Somalia that also provided a land route access to assist the Sea routs communications. This geopolitical term was first coined by the US Department of Defense in its report *Energy Future in Asia*, produced by Booz Allen in 2005 but has no official grounds in the Chinese public media or private think tank institutions. It is also a fact that this term was more propogated by the Indian media after the US published in the report in 2005. Beijing's sole purpose in all these ports is economic oriented not strategic and limited military operational activities are explained in terms of Sealine Communication security not building permanent bases like the other imperials powers of Britain or the USA (Brewster, 2016).

With rising China peacefully since it adopted the economic reforms and open-up policy, the world conceived Beijing as a threat to their interests in the regions around China and its allies. To protect its Sea lines of Communications from China to the Somalia port, Beijing has a legal rationale for developing port projects in the IOR as it is the center of international trade but many countries comprehend these projects are extremely securitized in strategic terms. With special concerns, Indian is on the top to believe in the US defense department report and chalk out policies in response to the so-called String of Pearls. While China many times declared that its sole purpose in the region is economic not for strategic but India still pursues a policy of fear and scarcity towards Beijing. With increased trade and dependency on sea routes, China faced the Malacca Dilemma in 2004 when piracy came to unavoidable positions. For that concerns China

decided to construct ports different chokepoints to monitor the pirates and make sure the safe flow of goods through the maritime routes (Brewster, 2016).

It is evident that China has a huge investment in the ports projects surrounded the Indian Ocean but it is not clear and has no validity that they came for dominating the region through their navy or developing any naval base like the UK and the US but all these theories and terms are based on the assumptions which have no real grounds and Chinese already negated these by saying that their objectives and policies are economic oriented not security or political. With the changing environment of international politics and the assertive behavior of India that ultimately altering the existing geostrategic position in the IOR, Beijing may seek to gradually develop a limited naval presence including Military Operations as anti-piracy and anti-terrorism (Brewster, 2016).



(<http://pkonweb.com>, 2017)

Indian Response to Chinese ‘String of Pearls’

Indian defense experts argue that “if India is able to improve its relations with its neighbor countries than China will be in the same situation as India and this will potentially break ‘String of Pearls’”. Apart from the ‘Look East Policy’ through which India has been trying to improve its relations with China’s Southern-Eastern neighbors like South Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan. India has been trying to improve its relations with its neighbor countries like Iran, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bengal, Myanmar, Vietnam, Australia and Fiji. The following are the Indian response to counter China’s ‘String of Pearls’.



(maps.southfront.org, 2017)

Access to Chabahar

On 23rd May 2016 India, Iran and Afghanistan have signed agreement to develop Iran’s southern port of Chabahar (Hughes, 2016). By investing in Iran port India will get access to Afghanistan and CARs by avoiding Pakistan using land and air space to links itself to these newly emerging resource-rich countries. Chabahar Port will



(www.deccanherald.com, 2017)

provide strategic access to the Middle East and will also give access to global markets; it will counter Beijing expanding influence in the Indian Ocean. Chabahar Port is designed to compete with (Pakistan's) Gawadar Port which is part of CPEC and being developed with Chinese assistance. India has made a bilateral deal with Iran, in which India has provided US 500 million dollars to develop Chabahar Port and related infrastructure. In response to Gawadar Port, New Delhi has begun dialogues with Tehran more than a decade ago for developing the Chabahar Port to counter the Beijing influence. Indian interests over Chabahar were faced by sanctions over Iran in the past. When the International community lift ban on Iran, India went ahead and signed MOU with Iran for developing the port. In the first stages, the US 85.2 million dollars was invested by India to upgrade multi-purpose cargo terminal and container terminal, further US 23 million dollars was given for operational activates. The strategic location of Chabahar Port will assist India to build up connectivity to the region (Dave, 2015).

Ties with the Maldives

India and Maldives have maintained strong ties historically. In 1976, Maldives and India have come up with agreement demarcating the marine boundary between the two countries. In 1988, India has assisted the Maldives by sending 1600 military forces for repelling a group of invading militants. India has supported the Maldivian government to build a stable, peaceful, and prosperous country. In 2006, Maldives and India have decided to "develop a privileged partnership" between the two countries. New Delhi has declared the Maldives as an important member and partner in the Indian Ocean Region. In October 2011, Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed said that "Maldives understands the



(www.bbc.com, 2017)

Indian concerns about the Chinese growing influence in the Indian Ocean Region; I assume that Maldives will never do anything that would threaten India's security interests", further said that "Maldives will always be India's friend and we believe that we cannot find a friend better than India" (Tanoli, 2016).

In April 2016, Maldives and India have patched up its ties and signed a crucial action plan on defense cooperation. According to Indian officials, the defense action plan is very significant for Maldives-India's dual relationship shared strategic and security interests. Narendra Modi said that the "defense action plan will strengthen our defense cooperation", further said that "the main elements of the defense action plan will be the development of ports, capacity building, continuous training, the supply of equipment and maritime surveillance". Indian warships and Dornier reconnaissance aircraft regularly assist Maldives in Maritime Patrol and surveillance. Due to Beijing's continuous efforts to enlarge its strategic footprints in Male, New Delhi has set up its own defense engagement with Male, as well as with other countries in the Indian Ocean.

Relations with Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is the nearest neighbor of India, the distance between India and Sri Lanka is only 30 nautical miles. India has deep historical and cultural bonds with Sri Lanka. In 1987, Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was signed for improving the bonds between the two countries. India has also settled Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka determined to perform peacekeeping. In 2009, India has started many rehabilitation schemes,

in Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka has cultural similarities as well. Majority of the people in Sri Lanka are Indian origin Tamils they are economically prosperous and well settled. Other Indian origin people in Sri Lanka are Memons, Pasis, Sindhis, Telugu, Gujaratis. Each year, cultural troops from both countries exchange visits (Singh, 2003).

India is the largest source of tourism for Sri Lanka and second-largest trading partner in SAARC. In recent years Sri Lanka has started favoring China and became part of Maritime Silk Road

(MTSR) initiative, China has built two ports in Sri Lanka, one in Hambantota and others in Colombo. Sri Lanka is finalizing a plan to lease 80 percent of the Hambantota port to China for 99 years. India-Sri Lanka ties have been improved with the change of the Rajapaksa government in 2015; he was pro-China and had signed agreements with the Chinese government which had made Indian government very upset. The new Sri Lankan government of Ranil Wickremasinghe is pro-India, he claimed that the Sri Lankan government will re-examine all the business deals with China and they have also refused the Chinese to dock submarines at the Colombo harbor (DeSilva-Ranasinghe, 2010).

In 2016, India and Sri Lanka have signed bilateral agreements for improving their relationship. India has focused on economic consideration to boost ties with Sri Lanka. Due to Chinese economic dominance in Sri Lanka, India is trying to focus on development of infrastructure megaprojects in eastern and Northern provinces, India is also planning to build Trincomalee Port in Sri Lanka to counter Chinese supported Hambantota Port (Berlin, 2006).

In May 2017, Modi visited Colombo (Sri Lanka) he said that "India will support Sri Lanka in its national building endeavors, India will be a friend and a partner that will deepen developmental cooperation and will bring positive change", he further said that "India believes in free trade, technology, investment and ideas across the borders will be the mutual benefit, India's rapid growth can bring profits for the entire region, particularly in Sri Lanka" (DeSilva-Ranasinghe, 2010). In November 2016, Indian Naval Chief Admiral visited Colombo (Sri Lanka); the visit was aimed at affiliating bilateral maritime security relations and increasingly assertive clones in the region.

Andaman and Nicobar (Indian Islands)

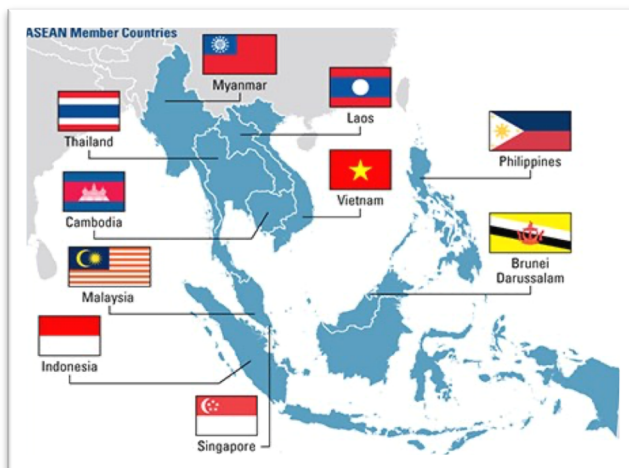
Andaman and Nicobar are Indian strategic islands which are closely located to Malacca Strait (world major trade route). The distance from Andaman and Nicobar to the Malay Peninsula is 450 kilometers, the distance from Andaman and Nicobar to Myanmar's Coco islands is 42 kilometers. These islands are farthest military outputs of India; they are 1200 kilometers away from the Indian coast. In these islands, India has installed Harpoon Block-2 Missiles, MK-54 lightweight torpedoes, rockets and depth charges, which can effectively act as a turn to counter China's strategic moves in the Indian Ocean region and ensure the security of sea lines converging towards the Strait of Malacca (Berlin, 2006). India has acquired eight Naval Poseidon-81 aircraft under a 2.1 billion dollars deal with the US in January 2009; these P-81 aircrafts are specially geared to gather intelligence and detect threats in the Indian Ocean Region, it can also neutralize enemy warships and submarines if required. India with its developing prominent position in controlling access to Strait of Malacca has made China anxious about its liability through the Malacca Strait into the Indian Ocean Region (Dutta, 2017).



(www.researchgate.net, 2017).

Bengal Chittagong and New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh in June 2015; Modi had signed 20 agreements and Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) on various issues with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. On the security front, a bilateral agreement has been signed by both leaders which will grant Indian cargo vessel use of the Chinese supported Chittagong Port and Mongolia Port. India has been trying to get direct access to Chittagong Port (Bangladesh) for nearly five years. This port will assist Indian exporters and industries to share millions of dollars by sending a direct shipment to Bangladesh. India will use Chittagong



(*iasshiksha.blog, 2017*).

Port as a passage hub to access other Southeast Asian destinations. This agreement will also assist the Bangladeshi government to get other revenues from India by using their ports; it will also make India cooperate with Bangladesh on the sensitive issue of water-sharing of “Teesta River”.

There is a famous perception in India on maritime encirclement by China in the Indian Ocean. The Chittagong Port has long been included in the list of points in Beijing’s “String of Pearls” strategy. For the Indians, getting access to Bangladeshi ports is a very significant act; it has eliminated the Indian fear about China’s influence in Bangladesh. In the perceptions of Indian observers, India has plucked a Chittagong pearl from China’s “String of Pearls” in the Indian Ocean. India has also got the contract of the deep seaport of ‘Payra’ which was earlier been given to China but was canceled by Bangladesh. Port of Payra is in the south-western region of Bangladesh and close to the Indian coastline. Bangladesh has also canceled a port that China has proposed to build at Sonadia on the southeastern side of Bangladesh, which could be another pearl for Beijing’s “String of Pearls” strategy. The cancellation of Sonadia Port by Bangladesh is clearly a strategic decision that was in favor of India and US (United States).

Links with Myanmar

India and Myanmar have cultural bonds, prosperous commerce, and mutuality of interests in regional affairs and process a number of vibrant Indian communities in Myanmar. India is the third-largest market for Myanmar’s exports and seventh-largest source of Myanmar’s imports. Bilateral trade between India and Myanmar increased from the US \$328 m in 1997-98 to the US \$ 2.052 billion in 2015-16 (Malik, 1994). Myanmar is vital to India’s Act East Policy particularly as India tries to balance out China’s massive presence in the country. Chinese initiative of Belt and Road has made \$10 billion dollars investment in Port Kyaukphyu, special economic zone and oil and gas pipeline which will pump crude oil through Myanmar to China (Malik, 1994).

Myanmar is strategically very important for India; it is the only country which shares both land and maritime border with India to connect with ASEAN countries. India is also building a highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand. India is engaged with Myanmar in several rivers and land-based projects. India has recently signed agreements on; exploration of natural gas, satellite-based sensing and promotion of Buddhist studies in Myanmar. India has bilateral cooperation agreements with Myanmar in IT (Information Technology), automobile, textiles, and agro-based industries (Malik, 1994).

India has shown interest in port Dawai (Myanmar), which is being developed by Thailand and Japan. In July 2017, India has assured that they will further strengthen military ties with Myanmar. India will supply arms to Myanmar and will conduct joint military exercises for ensuring security and stability. They will further upgrade the defense, economic and diplomatic relationship with Myanmar. India has already provided radar system, rocket launchers, rifles, 105mm light artillery guns, wargaming software, naval gunboats, sonar's and acoustic domes, providing military supplies to Myanmar is the part of India's strategy to counter Chinese inroads into the country. Fearful of sanctions from the US (United States) and the European Union, Myanmar wants to develop close relations with India for economic reasons (Lee, 2009).

Defense Cooperation with Vietnam

Vietnam and China have clashed over its territorial water and other issues that marked the two neighbors hostile to each other. Vietnamese are currently persecuted by Beijing's aggressive policies in the region of the South China Sea. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Vietnam in September 2016, to attend the G20 summit held in Hangzhou. Modi has signed 12 MOUs (Memorandum of understandings) and agreements ranging from health and defense to space. Modi has announced US 500 million dollar line of credit for Vietnam to facilitate deeper defense cooperation; further 5 million dollars were granted for setting up Software Park in the country (Brewster, 2009).

New Delhi has thoughts to provide a proposal to Vietnam on a battleship armed with BrahMos Missiles. India is supplying patrol boats under a credit line of US 100 million dollars to Vietnam. Vietnam has also granted permission to the Indian navy to anchor its warships at Nha Trang Port in southern Vietnam to keep an eye on the South China Sea (Khalid, 2015). The military ties between Vietnam and India aimed at jointly piling pressure on China. However, such bilateral relations will have only a limited influence on China (Brewster, 2009).

India and Australia Building Ties

India and Australia are two cooperative and friendly nations. Chinese naval activities in the Indo-Pacific area have worried both (India and Australia); they perceive Chinese activities as a threat to their security of navigation and maritime SLOC in the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Both nations have strengthened their maritime cooperation and conducting Joint Maritime Exercises 'I-e Maritime Exercise' on the eastern coast of India at Visakhapatnam, in response to China's naval ships and submarines in the Indian Ocean (Pant, 2017).

Australia and India are leading powers in the Indian Ocean region. Australia is looking forward to entering into a comprehensive relationship with India. Recently, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott have signed a civilian nuclear agreement. They have decided to seal a free trade and made India-Australia relationship one of their top priorities. To counter the Chinese domination in the Asian-Pacific Region, India and Australia are aligned closer to US (United States) grand strategy and the strategic arrangements such as 'quadrilateral initiatives', have also included Japan (Pant, 2017).

Indian Connections with Japan

China has a historically very transverse relationship with both Japan and India. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Japan for the first time on 30 August 2014, following the visit of Modi Japanese Prime Minister Shizo Abe visited India in December 2015. These bilateral visits upgraded India-Japan relationship to the level of "special strategic partnership". During these visits, Japan has announced to double FDI in India, signed a defense pact with India and also decided to upgrade and strengthen its defense cooperation to promote military equipment collaboration. In November 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unveiled Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) a vision to counter Chinese ambitions. Asia-Africa Economic Corridor (AAGC) is an initiative led by a partnership of Japan and India which aims to strengthen and integrate the economies of the south, east and Southeast Asia with Africa and Oceania. This initiative will open and free the Indo-Pacific region by rediscovering ancient sea-routes and will create a new sea

corridor. Japan and India have developed enhanced economic networks throughout Africa and Asia, with the partnership in AAGC (Asia-Africa Economic Corridor) (Jain, 2007).

After Modi's visit to Japan, Tokyo has decided to end up its long term ban on exports of weapons. New Delhi showed keen interest in importing 12 maritime advances, Shin Maya, US 2 Ambitious Aircraft, Japan showed a willingness to sell aircraft to India on 1.3 billion US dollars. These aircraft have short takeoff capability and are meant to be deployed in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Maritime cooperation is one of the key areas of India-Japan cooperation, Japan is currently participating in Malabar exercises with India and US (United States). Credible India-Japan security cooperation can also serve as a strategic counterweight to China (Jain, 2007).

Conclusion

China-India is the two major states of the mid-twentieth century who got independence from their imperial powers post-WWII. Being the most populous countries in the World both states were economically poor, politically unstable and militarily backward but it was their leadership commitment to emerging as a major power not only in the region but globally attractive actors of the international community. Despite the pioneer of the Non-Alignment Movement, they came up with a border clash in October 1962 that diverted their attention from development to security. During and post-Cold War both Beijing and New Delhi have found encircled in a competition that was always exploited by the regional and global powers including, Japan, USSR and the USA. The Cold War period also placed both the major powers of Asia in a divert position in terms of politics, economics, defense and social level but the Chinese got an edge in all these dimensions under the leadership of Deng when he took power in 1978 and adopted economic oriented policies by replacing political and strategic.

Beijing emerged as the second-largest economy after the US by keeping most of the Cold War economic powers bypassing, Germany, Japan EU and Russia. This made China one of the second largest hunters for more oil and gas to sustain its growth. Beijing has to adopt a more proactive policy towards the Middle East to meet the demands of its industrial revolution. Most of the Chinese Oil and gas import is coming through Sean Lanes of Communications passing through the Indian Ocean Region and Strait of Malacca which has been the victim of both piracy incidents and high traffic due to its narrow infrastructure and shallow nature of the strait. Additionally, these routes have also been encircled by the US, Indian and Japan as a rival to emerging China and posed a threat to their existence.

Chinese has always adopted muted and silent policies to any regional and global issues and development around them due to its teaching of the Deng's opening up and reforms program. To counter the US-Japan-Indian strategy by encircling China, Beijing adopted a more economic approach rather to political and strategic one by investing money and building ports and controlling chokepoint of the most significance of the strait of Malacca, Indian ocean, Arabian strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Aden to ensure its safe and uninterrupted trade with the World. The Indians comprehended it as their encircling politically and strategically and term it a String of pearls which was not basically an Indian origin term but it was first coined by Americans in 2004 and exported to India. The Indian media and some of the state's own think tanks copied it as it is and propagated the most threatening aspects of all these activities around the Indian Ocean.

Reportedly, New Delhi as a policy response to the so-called Beijing's String of Pearl's doctrine also adopted many moves including, reviewing its Look East policy as Act East policy, improving relations with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives. Indian also invested and finance to the building of Chabahar port of Iran to counter the Chinese presence in Gwadar port. So both China is and will be a competitor in this region for time to come due to its needs and demands of their huge economic volume and largest populous countries of the World.

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