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# **CHINA'S STRING OF PEARLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA**

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## **Abstract**

China's String of Pearls strategy denotes its expanding network of military and commercial infrastructures across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), consisting of port development, naval access points, and deepening diplomatic engagements in states like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Maldives. This gradual expansion carries major geopolitical and security implications for India, as it not only challenges New Delhi's sphere of influence in the region but also raises apprehensions of strategic encirclement. As part of this strategy, China has made significant investments in Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port and Pakistan's Gwadar Port, while also developing Myanmar's Sittwe Port. Although Bangladesh has not officially acknowledged Chinese involvement in the Payra Port project, Sri Lanka's interest in developing Chittagong holds strategic relevance for India. China has also enhanced its presence in the Maldives, financed multiple infrastructure projects in Nepal, and maintained growing ties with Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Additionally, the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir violates India's territorial sovereignty, intensifying regional tensions. China's economic, technical, and military assistance to South Asian countries further strengthens its strategic foothold in the region.

This research paper examines China's String of Pearls initiative as a means of encircling India and evaluates its implications for national security. The study adopts an analytical research approach to assess how this strategy negatively affects India's geopolitical environment and regional strategic balance.

Key words - Strategic Encirclement, Maritime Security, South Asia, World Power, Nations, Cheque Book Diplomacy

## Introduction

The concept of the String of Pearls first emerged in 2004 when American strategists described China's growing network of commercial and military footholds across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This network consists of logistical hubs, ports, and diplomatic engagements stretching from mainland China to Port Sudan in the Horn of Africa. These routes pass through critical maritime choke points—Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, Lombok Strait, among others—forming a strategic corridor for Chinese trade and energy transportation. Closely linked with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the policy is seen as a long-term effort to secure Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and enhance Beijing's maritime presence. For India, however, the expansion of Chinese facilities around its maritime periphery raises concerns related to security, surveillance, and strategic encirclement.

## Understanding the Strategy

Coined by U.S. policy analysts, the term String of Pearls refers to China's systematic efforts to build dual-use (civil-commercial/military) infrastructure across South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Key components include:

### **Gwadar Port – Pakistan**

A major deep-water port in Balochistan offering China direct access to the Arabian Sea, bypassing the Malacca Strait. Gwadar forms a crucial link in China's energy transport route under CPEC, boosting Beijing's geopolitical leverage while increasing India-China rivalry in the Indian Ocean.

### **Hambantota Port – Sri Lanka**

Located along Sri Lanka's southern coast, Hambantota was leased to China for 99 years, symbolizing concerns over debt dependency and potential military use. Its location gives China access to a vital shipping route, reinforcing strategic influence in the region.

### **Kyaukpyu Port – Myanmar**

Situated in Rakhine State, Kyaukpyu connects to pipelines transporting oil and gas to China's Yunnan province. The port ensures China's presence in the Bay of Bengal, reducing reliance on the Malacca Strait — a major vulnerability point.

### **Chittagong – Bangladesh**

Bangladesh's largest port, developed with Chinese assistance, strengthens Beijing's economic footprint in South Asia. While not openly militarized, it enhances China's access to the Bay of Bengal and reduces India's exclusive influence in the neighbourhood.

### **Maldives & Seychelles**

Island nations witnessing increasing Chinese funding in ports, infrastructure, and maritime projects. Their location along key sea lanes provides potential logistical hubs for Chinese naval deployment if required.

## **India's Strategic Counter Moves**

To counter expanding Chinese influence, India has formulated policies across diplomacy, defence, maritime strategy, and economic outreach.

### **1. Diplomacy and Multilateral Engagement**

India is actively strengthening ties with neighbours to prevent over-dependence on China. New Delhi is revitalizing its role in:

**BIMSTEC, SAARC, IORA, ASEAN**

**QUAD cooperation (India–US–Japan–Australia)** for Indo-Pacific security Advocacy for **UNCLOS-based maritime rules** Offering alternative **financial and developmental partnerships** to counter Chinese debt-based projects

### **2. Necklace of Diamonds Strategy**

India's counter-encirclement approach includes securing strategic locations surrounding China: Chabahar (Iran) – alternative to Gwadar Sabang (Indonesia) – near Malacca Strait Duqm (Oman) – naval logistics base

Agaléga (Mauritius) & Assumption (Seychelles) – Western IOR presence Andaman & Nicobar + Lakshadweep – critical monitoring posts

India is deepening defence cooperation with Vietnam, Indonesia, France, Philippines, and other Indo-Pacific nations while enhancing QUAD-based naval drills like Malabar.

### **3. Strengthening Regional Partnerships**

India is expanding trade, infrastructure funding, defence cooperation, joint patrols, intelligence sharing and capacity building with Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Indian Ocean

nations to reduce Chinese influence and maintain balance.

### 3. Naval Modernisation

India is developing a **blue-water navy** capable of operating across the Indian Ocean and beyond:

Aircraft carriers **INS Vikrant & Vikramaditya**

Expansion of **Arihant nuclear submarines** and **Kalvari-class submarines** Deployment of **P-8I Poseidon aircraft** and surveillance satellites Advanced ASW systems & unmanned underwater vehicles

Forward bases to monitor Chinese movements near choke points

### Impact on India

**Strategic Encirclement Risk** – Chinese dual-use ports around India reduce strategic space and naval dominance.

**Erosion of Neighbourhood Influence** – Beijing’s economic outreach weakens India’s traditional leadership in South Asia.

**Naval Competition** – India must reconfigure maritime strategy due to increasing PLA Navy presence.

**Geopolitical Tensions** – Infrastructure buildup heightens mistrust and regional rivalry.

**Energy Vulnerability** – China’s presence near vital sea routes threatens India’s import-dependent energy security.

### Conclusion

China’s String of Pearls represents more than commercial port development—it is a calculated attempt to secure maritime dominance and shape regional balance. For India, it signals the need for sustained maritime modernisation, stronger neighbourhood diplomacy, and deeper Indo-Pacific alliances. Through its Necklace of Diamonds, naval preparedness, and multilateral engagements, India is attempting to counter encirclement and maintain a free, open and secure Indian Ocean.

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