



# Counterbalancing China's Influence: India's Strategic Response In The Indian Ocean

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**Abstract :** Necklace of Diamonds ” strategy, a phrase first used by India’s former foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh while speaking at a think tank in August 2011. India has been making a “Necklace of Diamonds” to counter the “String of Pearls” created by China. Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan, Asian countries and Somalia are a number of the countries where China is establishing maritime bases as a “String of Pearls” to boost its influence and military networks and commercial facilities along its sea lines of communication, posing significant geopolitical and strategic challenges for India. In response, India has developed a strategic counter known as the "Necklace of Diamonds." This paper explores the geopolitical dynamics of the "String of Pearls," India's "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy, and its implications for regional security and international relations. By examining the initiatives taken by India, this study highlights the effectiveness and there strategic countermeasure.

**Keywords:** India, China, Necklace of Diamonds, String of Pearls, geopolitical.

## Introduction

In 2004, United States- based political researchers exposed the hypothesis called ‘string of pearls’ to the world in a disclosure and As per the Indian security analysts chinese strategy is against India because if any country has the power to stand in front of China in the Indo-Pacific, then it is India. The "String of Pearls" refers to the strategic framework developed by China. China wants to be the leading super power in the world. That is why it is expanding the market, business, trade and its diplomatic influence in different countries. They have already taken Border and Road Initiatives (BRI) which is concerned with economic ties, trade expansion, market access, infrastructural development. The network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its sea lines of communication, which extend from the chinese mainland to port sudan in the horn of africa. The sea lines run through several major maritime choke points such as the strait of mandeb, the strait of malacca, the strait of hormuz, and the lombok strait as well as other strategic maritime centers in somalia and the littoral south asian countries of pakistan, sri lanka, bangladesh, and the maldives. China is not geographically part of the south asian region but it is growing its strong influence over the South asian region. China’s willingness to loan money to unreliable countries is part of its strategy through which it is influencing its power and dominance. a report found that many countries indebted to china are vulnerable , including 8 that

are at a high risk of being unable to pay , still China keeps on lending as there is more to the BRI than just economics, In Sri Lanka China loaned about 1.5 Billion dollars for a new deep-water port for the maritime port .However by 2017 it was cleared that Sri Lanka couldn't pay back the loan , so instead they gave China control of the port as part of a 99 years lease . China also controls the strategic port in Pakistan-where it has a 40 year lease, it's pushing for a similar agreement in Myanmar and it just opened an actual Chinese naval base in Djibouti, these are all signs of what we call String of Pearls theory. India's immediate neighbors – Sri Lanka, Pakistan , Nepal and Maldives – have either plunged into an economic crisis or are showing signs of economic distress. Apart from economic distress, one thing common between these countries is that they are all part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) . China is strategically using String of Pearls, Debt Trap, CPEC and Belt and road projects as tools to encircle India and it is a threat to India's national security, series of ports and maritime facilities extending from the Chinese mainland to the African coast, passing through crucial sea lines in the Indian Ocean. This strategy aims to secure China's energy supplies and enhance its naval capabilities, thereby projecting its influence across the Indo-Pacific region. In response, India –Japan and the US have signed a treaty and are working together to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. India has also formulated the "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy, aiming to establish a network of alliances and strategic partnerships to counterbalance China's influence. This paper examines the components and efficacy of India's strategy within the broader geopolitical context.

### China's strategic Gateways



The Chinese "String of Pearls" Route Map

China passes through vital locations in the Bay of Bengal such as **Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh and Hambantota in Sri Lanka**. The Chinese government has financed a container shipping facility in modernizing the Chittagong Port for smooth and fast transit of commercial activities in Bengal. China is not only investing in port modernization but also investing a lot in other domestic infrastructural development like railway, transport, communication, information technology, gas pipeline etc. They want to get access to **Mongla and Sonadia Port of Bangladesh**. China has set up a naval base in Chittagong in the name of securing trade interests. China as a part of BRI is planning to construct a deep-sea port at Kyaukphyu, on Myanmar's west coast which is 970 km from India's Andaman and Nicobar islands, at an estimated cost of \$7 billion. It is also engaged with military installation on Small **Coco Island**, situated within the Alexandra Channel. This strategic location serves as a crucial link between the Indian Ocean and the Andaman Sea, positioned to the north of India's Andaman Islands. These developments enable China to actively surveil Indian naval activities within the **Bay of Bengal**.

Furthermore, the installation facilitates the monitoring of missile testing conducted at India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) testing facility in Chandipur are all part of China's strategy .

By The 'string of pearls' strategy China took Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on account of Sri Lanka's failure to pay Chinese debt and **6 Coastal Surveillance Radars (CSR)** have been installed in **Sri Lanka**. Strategists have also identified the **Marao Atoll, in the Maldives**, as a potential Chinese military base of operations. **Mauritius** – 8 Coastal Surveillance Radars have been installed in Mauritius. **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, a significant component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through substantial investments, infrastructure projects, arms sales, and financial assistance, China plays a vital role in Pakistan's development. Consequently, Pakistan's reliance on Chinese support has positioned it as a strategic tool for China to exert influence over India. Notably, China holds complete control over the construction and operations of **Gwadar Port**, a key asset within the CPEC framework. While officially designated for economic purposes, the port's military potential raises concerns for India's national security.

In the event of a conflict between China and India. With China's focus on building ports and bases in the Indian Ocean, Chinese companies are also building a railway from **Khartoum to Port Sudan** to access Sudan's oil reserves. **China's first overseas naval base in Djibouti**, costing \$600 million, strategically positions them at the entrance to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, with an annual rent of \$20 million.

China is not only making its presence in the **Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal** but also capturing strategic locations through **Debt Trap Diplomacy**.

### Implications for India

The "String of Pearls" strategy poses significant challenges for India, including potential encirclement, threats to maritime security, and disruptions to India's trade routes. The strategic presence of Chinese facilities in close proximity to Indian waters raises concerns over surveillance and military capabilities.

Additionally, China is actively backing and aiding groups and nations that are hostile towards India. They are also manipulating and deceiving neighboring countries. India believes that China's aim is to surround India by establishing ports that serve both commercial and military purposes. India is particularly worried about its maritime security. As a response, India is implementing defensive measures known as the "**Necklace of Diamonds**."



## India's Counter Strategy

India is tackling China's "String of Pearls" strategy with its human-centric development approach, cooperative strategies and humanitarian aid, and also with a comprehensive plan which involves building ports, installing advanced surveillance systems, and importing high-tech aircraft to monitor Chinese naval activities. India is also strengthening defense ties and expanding relations with countries in South Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and Southeast Asia. Similarly, India has developed its own strategic countermeasure called the "Necklace of Diamonds."



India's necklace of diamonds Strategy

## India's Strategic Bases

The "Necklace of Diamonds" is not a part of any official Indian document, so it cannot be claimed which investment is under this strategy, so all the diamonds' names will come only in speculative assessments. Starting from Bay of Bengal India's own territory **Andaman and Nicobar islands** which is close to Malacca strait, India is actively modernizing its military facilities in this territory. In 2019 India released 56 crore infrastructure development plan and on 24 January 2019 Indian Navy expanding NAS Shibpur facilities commissioned Diglipur INS Kohasa became India's 3rd naval air base, after INS Utkrosh at port Blair and INS Baaz at Campbell Bay. Towards east of Andaman and Nicobar islands is **Sabang Port of Indonesia**, In 2018 India got military access to Sabang Port and developing Deep Sea Port which is located right at the entrance of Malacca Strait and **Strait of Malacca** considered as one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. It is the primary shipping lane between the Indian and the Pacific ocean. This strait is one of the world's famous choke points. A large chunk of trade and crude oil passes on to China through this region. This is integral as it connects China with the rest of the world and India will have the capacity to block the strait of Malacca and India can threaten China's energy security. Towards east of Sabang port around 1090 km is **Changi Naval base in Singapore**, In 2018, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement with Singapore, giving the Indian Navy direct access to the Changi Naval Base. This allows Indian ships to refuel and rearm while sailing through the South China Sea. Also when Indian trade has to cross South China Sea, it doesn't need to depend on Andaman for refueling, it can get the refueling done at the Changi Naval Base and operations will become easy in future. Another diamond is **Philippines**, in August 2021 India and Philippines conducted bilateral exercise in south

China Sea and Philippines is the first country to purchase Brahmos missile from India. Towards west is **Vietnam**, India has signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2016 and India is maintaining good relations with Vietnam and has so far sold AKASH Surface to Air system, DHRUV-Advanced light helicopter, Brahmos Missile and 4 patrol boats to the country. Next is **Japan** which is close to China, India and Japan have jointly declared to build the **Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)**. Another diamond is based in central Asia is **Mongolia**, Prime Minister Modi is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit this country under Act East Policy, Both the countries have agreed for a collaboration to develop a **bilateral air corridor** using India's credit line, and defense cooperation like Nomadic Elephant and Khan Quest helped in defense Cooperation. Next is **Chabahar Port, Iran**. In 2016, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement to build this port and 2019 India started conducting operations. The port provides access to Afghanistan and an important trade route to Central Asia. Another most important diamond is **Duqm Port** which is located on the south-eastern seaboard of Oman. The port facilitates India's crude imports from the Persian Gulf. In 2018, India got another military access after Sabang Port in Indonesia. In addition to this, the Indian facility is located right between the two important Chinese pearls-- Djibouti in Africa and Gwadar in Pakistan. Gwadar port located very near to Iran and Pakistan, India can counter the Chinese build and have a check on Chinese submarines entering the region. India can keep an eye on Chinese activities in that region. In 2015, India and **Seychelles in Assumption island** agreed upon the development of the naval base in the region, and military access was granted. Apart from getting direct access to the strategically placed naval bases, India is also developing new naval bases, developing the old bases and is enhancing relations with other nations like **France**, **Australia** and **the United States** are also cooperating with India to counter Chinese Navy and its dominance.

However it is a difficult task with China having economic relations with maximum countries.

## Conclusion

The term "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy was created to counter China's "string of pearls". The Chinese academy of social science has released its annual report on the development of the Indian ocean region(2016) where it showed that Indian diplomacy has asserted its dominance in China's traditional stance of influence and strained China's freedom of action. In the coming decades, the geopolitical environment of the Indian Ocean may unfold in different ways, and it will have a greater impact on international politics.

India and China's increasing reliance on trade from the Indian Ocean and the security to protect their Sea Line of Communications (SLOC) have compelled them to increase their strategic influence in the IOR. Both countries have intentions to increase their strategic influence to secure and challenge their competitors.

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