

Necklace of Diamond: The Indian Strategy to Counter China

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Introduction



Source: Caspian Report

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China is increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean over the past few years through its Debt Trap Diplomacy and Strings of Pearls strategy to contain Indian hold in the Indian Ocean. In recent years, China has been expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean through its 'Debt Trap Diplomacy' and 'String of Pearls Strategy.' Satellite images have recently indicated that China has



Source: Vecteezy

been upgrading its military base in Djibouti.² Using its debt trap policy, China entices strategically located nations around India to take on infrastructure loans. Once these nations are heavily indebted, China exerts pressure on them to align with its geostrategic interests.

Through the String of Pearls strategy, China aims to curtail India's influence in the Indian Ocean by establishing a network of strategically placed allies. This network includes locations such as Chittagong in Bangladesh, Karachi and Gwadar port in Pakistan, and Colombo and Hambantota in Sri Lanka, among other facilities.³ In this time, China's increasingly aggressive stance against

² Javaid, Arfa. 2020. "What Is Necklace of Diamonds Strategy?" Jagranjosh.com. July 21, 2020. <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/necklace-of-diamond-strategy-1592404137-1>.

³ Review of *China's "String of Pearls" in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications*. n.d. ResearchGate. Gurpreet S. Khurana. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247526108_China's_'String_of_Pearls'_in_the_Indian_Ocean_and_Its_Security_Implications.

India and other countries in the IOR and the larger Indo-Pacific brings into focus India's 'Necklace of Diamond' Strategy.

Why Both India and China are Contesting for Taking Control in the Indo-Pacific?

The Indian Ocean is a vast theatre, stretching from the Strait of Malacca and the western coast of Australia in the East to the Mozambique Channel in the West. The Indo-Pacific region is a geopolitical area that spans two regions of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Stretching from the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, the Indo-Pacific is a 24 nations regional framework comprising the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting the two in the general area of Indonesia.⁴



Source: DrishtiIAS

⁴ "What Is Happening in the Indian Ocean?" 2021. Carnegieendowment.org. 2021.
<https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2021/03/what-is-happening-in-the-indian-ocean?lang=en¢er=global>.

The importance of trade and the sheer scope of its many sub-regions make the Indian Ocean critical in terms of military and strategic engagement. It is a vital trading hub, connecting the Middle East to Southeast and East Asia, as well as Europe and the Americas.⁵

If we take a closer look in the region's geography, we can find that:

- The Indian Ocean Region encompasses 28 countries across three continents.
- As a vital artery for international trade, the Indian Ocean connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
- Approximately 80% of the maritime oil trade transits through three critical chokepoints:
 - **Strait of Hormuz**
 - **Malacca Strait**
 - **Bab el Mandeb Strait**



⁵ Dutta, Suyesha Dutta, Suyesha. n.d. "India's Competition with China for Dominance of the Indian Ocean." Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/balancing-tides-indias-competition-china-dominance-indian>.

These strategic passageways are essential for the flow of global commerce and energy resources. Both India and China have been racing to establish presence in the vicinity of these routes, for choking these routes means having a leash on the other's economy. For instance, ex-Chinese president Hu Jintao coined the term 'Malacca Dilemma'⁶ to refer to the risk posed by various factors that could block the Southeast Asian strait, to Chinese economic development. To secure its trade interests in the Indian Ocean, the String of Pearls strategy is being deployed by China whereby the Chinese protects its trade by building a network of commercial and military bases and ports in many countries. This idea of choking the other with a string of 'pearls'/ 'diamonds' forms the core of the India's and China's strategies.

What is Necklace of Diamond?

"Necklace of Diamonds" strategy, a phrase first used by India's former foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh while speaking at a think tank in August 2011.⁷ He used the term to refer to India's efforts to protect its interests, in response to China's String of Pearls Strategy.

In a counter-action of China's "String of Pearls", India has started working on the 'Necklace of Diamonds' strategy. This strategy aims at garlanding China or in simple words, the counter encirclement strategy. India is expanding its naval bases and is also improving relations with strategically placed countries to counter China's strategies.

⁶ Paszak, Pawel. 2021. "China and the 'Malacca Dilemma.'" Warsaw Institute. February 28, 2021.

<https://warsawinstitute.org/china-malacca-dilemma/>.

⁷ "Necklace of Diamonds vs String of Pearls : India-China Standoff." 2022. Times of India Blog. June 23, 2022.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/youthwrites/necklace-of-diamonds-vs-string-of-pearls-india-china-standoff-43458/>.



Source: Jagran Josh

Necklace of Diamond also involves the building ports, extensive Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) systems to track Chinese Warships and Submarines, importing state of the art surveillance planes which can track down Chinese submarines, operating Airport in the neighbouring country to keep a check on the Port built by China, deepening defence ties, expanding bilateral relations with South Asian countries, Island nations in Indian Ocean region, Southeast Asian Nations and carrying out regular military exercises with navies of USA, Japan, Australia.⁸

⁸ Ladwig, Walter C. 2009. "Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, 'Look East,' and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific." *Asian Security* 5 (2): 87–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799850902886476>.

Strategic Bases of India within the “Necklace of Diamonds”⁹

- 1. Changi Naval Base, Singapore:** In 2018, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement with Singapore. The agreement has provided direct access to this base to the Indian Navy. While sailing through the South China Sea, the Indian Navy can refuel and rearm its ship through this base.
- 2. Sabang Port, Indonesia:** In 2018, India got the military access to Sabang Port which is located right at the entrance of Malacca Strait. This strait is one of the world's famous choke point. A large chunk of trade and crude oil passes on to China through this region.
- 3. Duqm Port, Oman:** In 2018, India got another military access after Sabang Port in Indonesia. The Duqm Port is located on the south-eastern seaboard of Oman. The port facilitates India's crude imports from the Persian Gulf. In addition to this, Indian facility is located right between the two important Chinese pearls-- Djibouti in Africa and Gwadar in Pakistan.
- 4. Assumption Island, Seychelles:** In 2015, India and Seychelles agreed upon the development of the naval base in this region. This gives the military access to India. This base is of strategic importance to India as China desperately wants to increase its presence in the African continent through the maritime silk route.
- 5. Chabahar Port, Iran:** In 2016, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement to built this port. The port provides access to Afghanistan and an important trade route to Central Asia.

⁹ Jaaved, Amjed. 2020. “Is China's String of Pearls a Fact or Fiction? What about India's Necklace of Diamonds?” Modern Diplomacy. August 24, 2020. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/08/24/is-chinas-string-of-pearls-a-fact-or-fiction-what-about-indias-necklace-of-diamonds/>.

Strategic Cooperation of India to Counter China

India is adhering to certain policies that would play a vital role in keeping the Chinese threat under check. Such policies include India's Look East Policy which was launched as an effort to integrate India's economy with South-East Asian nations.



Source: The Statesman

It has been used to make important military and strategic agreements with Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand helping India to counter China.¹⁰ One another policy is the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) Policy, which comprises India's policy or doctrine of maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The policy was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 12, 2015.

Therefore, it is quite evident that India would do everything to safeguard its mainland and islands and defend its interests. The Indian interests in this region are safety and security of Indian shipping, fishing, seaborne trade, energy supply, assets, and resources in the maritime domain and Indian citizens who are working overseas. Further, India will also work to ensure a safe, secure,

¹⁰ Review of *India's Look East Policy and the Northeast*. n.d. Ministry of External Affairs- Government of India. Amb (Retd) Dilip Sinha. <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?505>.

and stable Indian Ocean region (IOR).¹¹ Also, through SAGAR¹², India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbors and assist in building their maritime security capabilities.

Conclusion

India's "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy represents a proactive and strategic response to China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean through its "String of Pearls" approach. By establishing



Source: Arab News

a network of military bases, strategic partnerships, and economic collaborations across the Indian Ocean Region, India is not only safeguarding its maritime interests but also enhancing regional security and stability.¹³ This strategy underscores India's commitment to maintaining a balance of

¹¹ *The Times of India*. 2024. "Will Ensure IOR Is Free, Safe: Navy Chief amid Pirate Strikes," March 24, 2024. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/will-ensure-ior-is-free-safe-navy-chief-amid-pirate-strikes/articleshow/108739046.cms>.

¹² admin. 2018. "REVISITING 'SAGAR' – INDIA'S TEMPLATE for COOPERATION in the INDIAN OCEAN REGION." National Maritime Foundation. April 25, 2018. <https://maritimeindia.org/revisiting-sagar-indias-template-for-cooperation-in-the-indian-ocean-region/>.

¹³ Review of *Can India's Necklace of Diamonds Strategy Defeat the China's String of Pearls*. n.d. Researchgate. Ce Dr Sumanta Bhattacharya.

power in the region and ensuring the free and open movement of trade through critical maritime routes.¹⁴ As geopolitical dynamics continue to evolve, India's "Necklace of Diamonds" will play a crucial role in shaping the future security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362124651_Can_India's_Necklace_of_Diamonds_Strategy_Defeat_the_China's_String_of_Pearls.

¹⁴ Joshi, Aarav. 2024. "Encircling the Dragon: India's Strategic Counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative." Medium. June 7, 2024. <https://india.epochsandechoes.com/encircling-the-dragon-indias-strategic-counter-to-china-s-belt-and-road-initiative-85143e07b870>.