

String of Pearls Strategy of China - And Counter Strategy by India

The rapid economic growth of China is dependent on securing sea lanes which helps it in carrying out trade. Hence China with an expanding military power and after acquiring blue water navy capabilities it is focusing on securing the various choke points such as Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Mandeb and Lombok Strait. Hence China has resorted to developing civilian and military ports in the countries located in the Indian Ocean Region, which can be accessed by Chinese Navy. This strategy of encircling India by the Chinese has been termed as the String of Pearls strategy. There are reports that China plans to establish 18 deep water ports in Africa and Indian Ocean Littoral Countries.

Countering Chinese String of Pearls - Indian Strategy

India is using a multi pronged strategy to counter Chinese String of Pearls Strategy. The strategy involves 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 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.

Some of the important actions that are undertaken by India to counter Chinese Navy and its influence in the South Asia and Indian Ocean Region are listed below.

Coastal Radar Networks

1. Bangladesh - India has recently signed an agreement with Bangladesh to install 20 Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems along the coastline of Bangladesh. This will help India to monitor Chinese Warships which have been frequently visiting the Bay of Bengal.
2. Maldives - India will install 10 Coastal Radar Systems in Maldives. These radars will relay live images, videos, location information of Ships moving in Indian Ocean Region. The project is implemented by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). As of 2019, 7 are completed, there were small hiccups in the project due to the Government of Maldives. Once a Government that is favourable to India came to power, the project is moving with full speed.
3. Sri Lanka - 6 Coastal Surveillance Radars (CSR) have been installed in Sri Lanka. As per some reports India is planning to set up at least 10 more CSR in Sri Lanka.

4. Mauritius - 8 Coastal Surveillance Radars have been installed in Mauritius.
5. Seychelles - 1 Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) have been Installed in Seychelles. The 1st Coastal Surveillance Radar in Seychelles became operational in 2015. It was commissioned on the main island of Mahe. More Coastal Surveillance Radar will be installed in the small islands of Astove, Assumption and Farquhar. There are plans for 32 more Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems in Seychelles.
6. India - BEL had set up 46 Coastal Radar stations and 16 command and control systems in 2015 in India. In the next phase 38 more Coastal Radar stations and 5 command and control systems will be set up.

India also set up the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) that will share real time maritime information with friendly nations, which will be based out of Gurgaon. All the Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems are connected to provide a comprehensive real time picture to Indian Defence Establishment regarding Chinese presence in the region.

Building & Accessing Ports

1. Iran - India is involved in building Chabahar Port in Iran. It is strategically located close to Chinese Gwadar Port in Pakistan and is close to Strait of Hormuz.
2. Indonesia - India is building a deep sea Port in Indonesia, a place named Sabang. It has strategic significance as it is close to the Strait of Malacca and India's Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
3. Myanmar - India built a deep water port in Sittwe in 2016.
4. Bangladesh - India would help Bangladesh modernize Sea Port in Mongla. India can also use Chittagong port in Bangladesh.
5. Oman - India has signed agreements to access strategically located Naval facilities of Oman. This facility is close to the Strait of Hormuz. More than 30% of oil exports pass through the Strait of Hormuz.
6. Singapore - India has signed an agreement to access Changi Naval Base of Singapore, which is strategically located close to the Strait of Malacca.

Building ports in collaboration and signing bilateral agreements with countries is usually to improve trade ties with the respective countries and open different trade routes for India. It helps India to counter the Chinese influence in these countries.