

**RESEARCH PAPER****Emergence of Act East Policy: A Threat to the China's Imperialism in Asian Pacific Region****¹Zainab Iftikhar* ²Dr. Iram Khalid**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses upon the dynamics of India's Act East policy as an emerging threat to china's security in the Indian Ocean region. Modi's policy to build infrastructure in South-East Asian states with the execution of Act East strategy. India's has been closely watching the China's presence in the Indo-pacific region. To keep in mind this scenario India's effort to improve her image in international affairs. The rising power of India as her evolving foreign policy towards the economic powers of the East and engagements in the direction of Asian Pacific region has been more progressive. To counter the China's strategic development and economic advancement towards the Oceania region, that commonly reflected under the String of Pearls policy. In this framework, this paper would analyze India's policy for IOR islands, Quad collaboration and the role of Indian North-Eastern states to strengthening their socio-economic and cultural ties with neighboring border-states.

KEYWORDS Act East Policy, China-India Relations, Foreign Policy, Indian Pacific Region, String of Pearls

Introduction

Indo-pacific region has remained one of the pivotal regions in the world politics throughout the history. Especially Chinese expansion after the cold war period and now the emergence of India actively participating in shaping the geo-political dynamic. Recently, the most important strategic development occurs due to structural shift in the global economy across the world. The role of emerging economic powers to engage their relations towards the Asian pacific nations due to growing influence in which to secure their socio-economic, politically and military concerns. In world politics the definitive location of Indo-Pacific plays a significant role to pursue strategic interest among the major powers

Admiral Alferd Thayer Mahan, stated that: The ones who dominate the Asia Whomever control the Indian Ocean. In the 21st century the fate of the world will be decided by attaining these Oceanic waters, which compromises on seven seas. The pacific region become the spotlight for securing interest and getting strategic footprint, especially the influence of china and USA. But after the geopolitical shift not only Asian pacific also the South Asian becomes the part of game. The importance of this region increases by joining major Asian states like Japan and Australia along with India and USA to restrain China's mounting impact that totally changes the strategic environment of the Pacific Ocean. As we know that China's speedy economic growth based on Sea lines of communication which play significant role to carried their trading facilities. For this purpose, China extending military power, naval capabilities while securing their numerous chokepoints such as Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Lombok and Mandeb strait. Further, China's strategy to build their Military and non-military ports with in the Indian Ocean region.

Moreover, two decades now, Indian policy to pursuing deepen arrangements towards the Asian pacific region. During the recent years, Modi's engagement with East and

Southeast Asia has been ambitious mainly by the encounter of responding to China's emergence.

The Chinese sole claim on the South China Sea, offshore activities in East Africa and rapidly increasing military bases farther on the Strait of Malacca in Indian Ocean region. The expansion of Chinese determination makes more alerted the regional states especially Japan and India. In the Indian ocean region China's engagement poses new threats for India such as speedy growth of naval footprint in Indian Ocean, investment in Srilanka and Pakistan, belt road initiatives, PLA's navy (people's liberation army) for security dominance, expanding on submarines arrangement, Djibouti contract a logistics centre for China. Indian policy has taken various steps to counter China's expansion in Pacific region. The launched of look east policy India's strategy to integrate her economy with South East nation in 1991 at the time of Narasimha Rao is now replaced with the Act East policy by Modi's government. Act East policy more focused on military and economic partnership with South Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. To make a several strategic pacts and military agreements with imperative nation of that region. In which Sittoung port is one of the major project of India to develop naval relationship with Myanmar a Southeast Asian countries. Its strategy to train navies and upgrade their military logistics which gives an emphasis India's to increase their footprint in that region. (Khalid, 2017)

In this context, to curtail Chinese influence the idea of Quad collaboration prompted by Shinzo Abe Prime Minister of Japan. They started Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic negotiation among India, Japan and USA towards the common motive to build Indo-Pacific region as open, free and more prosperous. A strategic co-operative agreement signed between India, Australia, Japan and USA to strengthen their military exercises. The policy of Prime minister Narendra Modi to developed infrastructure within the East Asian nations, so he re-organise the Look East policy of India as the Act East policy. So, in this regard Indian efforts to maintain their good relation with Indian Ocean Regional states (IOR) such as Seychelles, Maldives, Srilanka and Mauritius. To strengthen her ties with Maldives provided military assistance various battlewagons and helicopter. On the other hand India negotiate towards the Seychelles to build military bases and naval exercises in their island. Furtherly Indian policy to developed military base in East African region mainly in Madagascar especially to check the activities of the Starit of Mozambique. When we look toward Indo-Japan joint efforts to enhanced their collaboration to the inclusive Indian Pacific region. In this context, at one side India's focuses on Act East policy while on the other side Japan's initiative through Open and Free Indo-Pacific region. Similarly, in 2016 with the support by Japan PM Modi introduced a project to advance Asian-African Growth Corridor (AAGC). According to this plan their strategy to build free and open Indo-Pacific region by developing a number of Sea-Corridors that link with India and other South East Asian states. The main motive of this connectivity to integrate with Indo-Pacific region by building infrastructure programme. The co-operative engagements of Indo- Japanese keeping in view AAGC to counter China's striving Belt Road Initiative. (Deo, 2017)

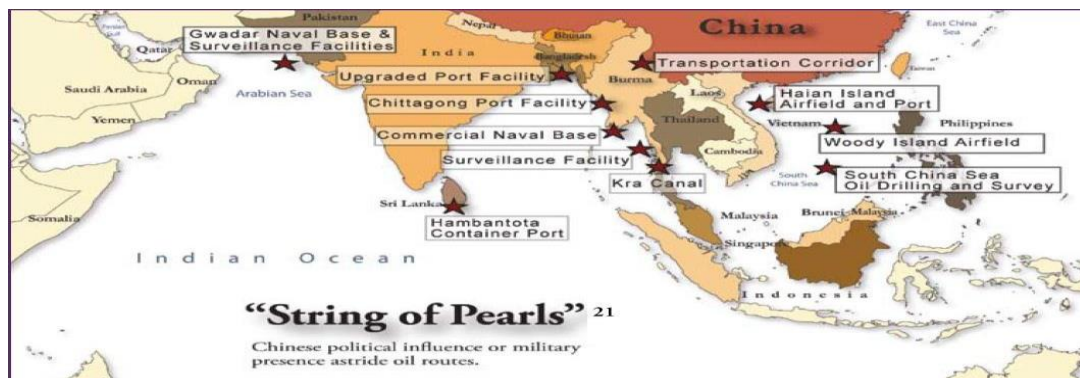
The diplomatic and strategic initiative of India a comeback to the String of Pearls is timely implemented and well designed. These engagements play a significant role to ensure Indian existence in Pacific region.

China's Imperialism in the Shape of String of Pearls

The term 'STRING OF PEARLS' was created by Booz Allen in 2005 in the report known as Energy future in Asia. He forecasted about the Chinese expansion, by naval acquisition, to building infrastructure and friendly connectivity within the Indian Ocean regional states. It is a geopolitical theory that defines china's intentions with in the Indian Ocean region. To a certain extent, the expansion of the Chinese military network, trading facilities and Chinese government relations along the Sea Lines of Communications SLOCs enlarged from mainland of china to Horn of Africa. The strategy of string of pearls mainly based on economic, political, diplomatic and military expansion of China in the Indian Ocean

region. The meaning of pearl symbolizes the seaport of china in Srilanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan, that pearls in the string shows the image of sphere of power and China is trying to protect these pearls along the Indian Ocean region. In the 21st century the inspiration of China’s strategic culture regarding naval exercises and maritime domain in the Indian Ocean region based on some conditions are as follows:

- To stop a state from prohibiting from its shipping or import
 - To secure energy investment from the non-state actor
 - To change the impact of other economic struggler in the Indian Ocean region
 - To strengthen nuclear deterrence ability in contrary to India
 - To comprehend geostrategic control against the challengers
 - To achieves its military ambitions in any option or facing conflicts among the opponents.
- (Ashraf, 2017)



Source: <https://southfront.org/chinas-string-of-pearls-project/>

The economic development of China in Indian ocean region builds upon on trade relations and safe-road for energy reservoir. In command to alleviate this fragility, China has adopted several strategic measures. In this region China has developed various non-combatant and armed seaports and also attained littoral navy. That authorizing their movements and enhanced maritime encouragement at the Sea-Lines of Communication with in the region. The China’s expansion in the shape of developing series of ports and building maritime infrastructure around the India’s neighbouring states. So, the western commentator has been referred to this, a sphere around the Indian territory generating by China named as the geo-political theory of String of Pearls. The exercises of SLOCs started from china to African Port of Sudan and then its routes via the main chokepoints of Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Mandeb and the Strait of Lombok. It also covers the maritime strategic hub in Sri-lanka, Somalia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Maldives. As well as the Belt-Road Initiative is a part of string of pearl policy in association with China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that poses severe danger to Indian security. (Butt, 2020).

Strategic Cooperative Engagements between China and other Countries

Partners	Years	Information Related Partnership
USA	1997	A constructive strategic partnership; 2011 a cooperative partnership based on mutual respect and mutual benefit
AUSTRALIA	2013	strategic partnership of mutual trust and mutual benefit
SOUTH AFRICA	2004	strategic partnership featuring equality, mutual benefit and common development; 2010 comprehensive strategic partnership
RUSSIA	2011	comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination
Pakistan	2005	1999 partnership of comprehensive cooperation in 2005 a strategic partnership

UAE	2012	Strategic Co-operation and partnership
Malaysia	2013	2013 comprehensive strategic partnership

Source: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/181324/China%E2%80%99s%20strategic%20partnership%20diplomacy>

Act East Policy by India’s: A retaliation towards China’s String of Pearls

The Act East Policy was launched by Narendra Modi in 2014 in Myanmar during the East Asian Summit. To improve their ties with ASEAN countries the National Democratic Alliance NDA trusting on three Cs – Commerce, Connectivity and Culture. The main objective of this policy to integrate militarily and as well as economically within the Asian Pacific region. It was replaced by the Narasimha Rao Look East Policy, their main focus to enhance economic incorporation within South East Asian states in 1991. According to Act East Policy engagement between the Southeast Asian countries and East Asian states at the regional, bilateral and multilateral level. It gives emphasizes to encourage cultural ties, promote economic relationship and to establish strategic partnership. (Rajendram, 2014)

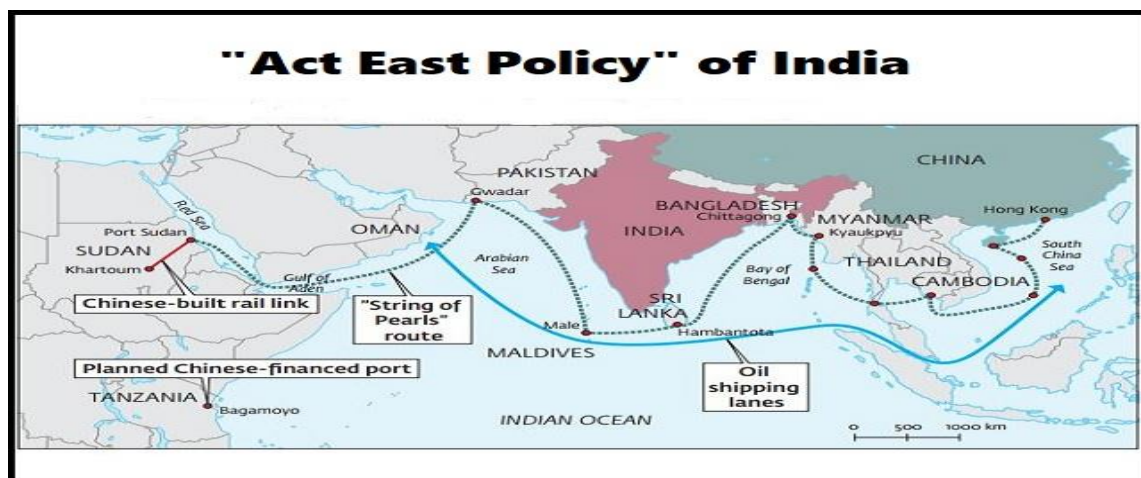
The Act East policy by Modi focused on three basic essentials

First one, India’s policy to protect the Indian Ocean Region towards the better security struggle via improved maritime spheres consciousness, better naval skills and existence, improved infrastructure and functional advancement. For this core purpose, Prime Minister Modi used the SAGAR (Security and growth for all in the region) slogan for the Indian Ocean.

Second, the policy of India to enhance its incorporation military and economically in order to secure a constant stability of authority in the pacific region. This could be achieved through connectivity among the ASEAN countries, but for better functioning bilateral relation requires to the Southeast Asian nations in the field of security, connectedness and trade.

Third, Indian policy in order to expand a strategic engagement with quadrilateral security dialogue including USA, Japan and Australia especially their common concerns regarding the China’s imperialism.

So, in order to mitigate with these core elements, to organise regional trade, naval achievement, overseas investment transmission, air connection, foreign mission enactment and to secure their exports.



Act East Policy of India

Maritime Security Association

In the Asian Pacific region the policy of India through AEP initiative mainly focused to balancing the China's expanding influence with reference to the economic factor. Over the last decade with the emerging capacity of exports and economic power. China control as a decisive stance to maintained trade by developing maritime routes. In 2013, the forceful gaining territory of the neighbouring countries in disputed areas by claiming maritime land of the South China Sea and East China with the strategy of Salami-Slicing tactics. The objection raised by the USA, Japan and India towards the Chinese strategic exercises of reformation and buildings of artificial reef and islands. That furtherly making the complex security architecture in the Asian Pacific Region. The sense of insecurity also raised due to disturbing maritime atmosphere within the ASEAN nation. During the past decade, China also expanding its influence in the Indian Ocean Region through Silk Road agenda maritime collaboration with Pakistan, Srilanka and Maldives. In order to contain India, China strategy to invested a lot by developing infrastructure under the projection of String of Pearls. The receiver of Chinese financial support include Gawadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Srilanka, deep-sea port of Chittagong in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Basically, China's approach would discomfort the Indian intrigue in a distant future. To keep in mind this fact, India re-examine her impression towards the South-East Asian states. India started collaboration with Vietnam to ventured the oil inspection in South China Sea. India also actively participated in shared maritime exercises with Singapore and Japan such as Malabar naval exercises and rescue action in Malaysia an Indonesia with the United States collective management. The India effort to strengthening maritime security co-operation with consenting participants from the East. It often entitled a strategy for fabricating 'Diamond Necklace' against String of Pearls by China's tactics in South China Sea. So, it becomes obvious that India pivotal role to established regional stability in the Pacific Region. In a certain manner, PM Modi to supply civilian and military aid while visiting in Seychelles, Mauritius and Srilanka under the Act East Policy initiative. The procedure to expand the maritime collaboration with compatible partners in order to balancing the Chinese dominancy in the Indian Ocean region. (Chakraborty, 2018)

North-East of India: Doorway to Southeast Asia

Within the context of Act East Policy India's make an effort to construct a bridge with South-East Asian states through the region of Northeast India. The location of this Indian region becoming more important geo-strategically because its shares border with 4 South Asian neighbouring states. The Northeast Region of India (NER) comprises on 8 states ,Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya and Tripura The Southeast region compromised of ten self-regulating states Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Singapore and Malaysia. It provides a lot of opportunities to improve their connectedness either its physical, person-to-person or institutional linkages. It may include Information and Communication Technology (ICT), transport, energy, tourism, culture, education, liberalization of trade and other socio-economic connectivity. (Rabba, 2019)

The initiative to construct Sittwe route, a highway between India, Thailand and Myanmar for trade activities

To Establish educational institution in order to exploring the cultural and historical ties and skills advancement for youth for-example university in Manipur, Tripura , Assam, Tezpur , Shillong and Guwahati.

To increase the tourism capability established, 22 wildlife nature-reserve shelter, 5 national parks and Mjuli island of Assam.

To enhance maritime connectivity India setting up Joint Working Group (JWG) between, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Recently, Japan's involvement in North Eastern region of India through different project for connectivity building road networks, cultural exchange programmes, and contribution in other sectors like health, energy, irrigation, water supply and environment management. (Chiru, 2017)

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The name of this project considered due to the Kaladan river, that runs from Mizoram a state of North-East India through the Chin state of Myanmar also amalgamates into the Bay of Bengal. A trans-boundary networking project by India's, in which northeast region of India to play the role of bridgehead between Southeast Asian and South Asian neighbouring states. connectivity In order to enable easy movement, peaceful trade and trouble-free transportation system, to establish a corridor through multimodal transport joining between Mizoram to Myanmar. The main thought behind this modal to build economies and confined the India and Southeast Asian region become more prosperous. The development of economic partnership between India -ASEAN turn out to be more vigorous. The Indian approach towards Myanmar to maintain close ties through military, culture, social, economic and political development.

The mechanisms of Kaladan project based on

- Buildings of port and Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) terminal at Sittwe, in order to train and upgrade their navy
- Establishment of navigational station from Sittwe to Paletwa along with Kaladan river
- Construction of highway and 7 inland waterway transport barges for the cargo passage between Paletwa to Sittwe
- Building a highway trans-shipment workstation at Paletwa.

India's policy for IOR islands: Security and Growth for All in Region (SAGAR)

All over the globe and especially in Indian Sub-continent the Indian Ocean region IOR strategically increasing their importance. For this purpose, India's started engagement toward the IOR rim or islands, her strategy to take the initiative of (SAGAR) Security and Growth for All in the Region

To keep safe route for oil import, IOR is very important for India. Almost 80% oil is imported in India through the sea route. Most of the Indian Ocean resources used by India in which aquatic food and fishing is particular one. By value 68% trade are directed through this region, so to get her economic objective trade security must be needed. Under the SAGAR initiative the major focus of Indian policy to improving their capacities to precaution the land interests and maritime grounds. At the multilateral level India's policy to conduct many naval exercises in which Milan based in Andaman, Nicobar Islands and other exercises with in Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC). The achievement of maritime collaboration require against piracy in which the case of Gulf of Aden become more safe their rapidly decline of piracy events seen in the region. Among the littoral states India's policy to enhancing port connectivity, with the rise of blue economy initiative her strategy to engage towards Oceania regional states regarding fishing practices, marine biotechnology, exploration of mineral resources and binding energy areas. Enhanced co-operation and sustainability towards regional development India's strategy to engaging with island nation such as Seychelles, Srilanka, Mauritius with the reference of Indian Ocean diplomacy. The main aim to building trust, to resolve maritime disputes, promote oceanic norms and rules, peaceful co-existence while working on a number of projects and boosting their naval logistics. (Kumar, 2019)

A chance for India's progression under the Quad disposition

The quad means a group which compromising of 4 countries co-operation among India, Japan, United States and Australia in 2007. Under the policy of Act East policy

Narendra Modi government made various strategic contract and military collaboration with USA, Japan and Australia in the Indian Ocean region. The initiative of Quad is a response against Chinese emergence and based on strategic attention in the Indo-pacific region. Furthermore, to accelerate more capacity the Quad countries enhancing their engagement at the multilateral, trilateral and bilateral under the Malabar exercises. (Upmanyu, 2020)

These exercises included:

India-Australia naval exercises--- AUSINDEX

Japan-India maritime warfare exercises---JIMEX

India purchases aircrafts and heavy submarines for defence purpose ---Indo-US

To dealing with quad India's focuses on two main geostrategic goals firstly, in the maritime range with her self-assurance to counter China's aggression in borders and secondly to emerge in this region as a security provider network. India's co-operation with quad group can possibly distress the Chinese trade in the region, because most of the China's trade done by the Indian oceans paths their passage comes out with maritime chokepoints. India can take joint action while dealing with disasters such as earthquake in Indian Ocean, providing humanitarian aid, relief management, rescue support, anti-piracy functioning, infrastructure development, prevention regarding climate issue .and such similar initiatives to make connectivity more durable with quad groups. Moreover, quad purpose to check the activities of Chinese imperialism, to guarantee growth and security with all over the region. (Kronstadt, 2020)

Encouragement towards Institutional Structure

The bilateral arrangements between India, ASEAN countries, South Korea, Japan and Australia has been expanded by supporting to build the Institutional network among them. As we know that in 1992 present India as an sectoral partner but after 1994 became the active member of this association. India attained the regular and energetic status on various platforms such as ARF (ASEAN regional forum), East Asian Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus ADMMP. So, right now it will based on thirty sectoral mechanism discussion, Ministerial level negotiation at least seven times with reference to the annual summit consultations. To strengthen their partnership introducing such forums like that defence and strategic dialogue, annual summit based on energy co-operation, counter terrorism, Maritime collaborations, Unites Nation modification and cyber security reforms. The initiative of PM Modi under the act east policy to institutionalized between India and Japan 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, also encompassing bilateral relation and promoting US, Japan and India trilateral conference at the ministerial level. Further in 2017 India's give equal participation in the quadrilateral dialogue along the Japan, Australia and USA in which their interest to exchange their opinion regarding the strategic atmosphere of the pacific region. The regular meeting conduct among the security advisers and ministers of defence similarly in the case of India and South Korea in order to urge their bilateral co-operation and strengthen strategic partnership. In 2019 Rajnath Singh the defence minister visited Seoul in which he participated on defence dialogue at the bilateral level.

The co-operation of Indo-Japanese become the highlighted one in 2017 when the Prime Ministers of both states signed an agreement. In which they established a platform to accomplish their bilateral collaboration named as India-Japan Act East Forum. There are various projects started to enhanced their economic development, for this purpose focused on disaster management, environmental administration and connectivity by tourism and cultural programmes. Similarly, Japan efforts for better connectivity to prolonged the ODA loans

(Official development Assistance) in order to upgrade National Highway (NH 40) development. Japan also funding India's initiative toward the interconnectivity projects with neighbouring states such as Myanmar, Thailand and Bangladesh. (Baruah, 2020)

Conclusion

When we look upon the history, the struggle in maritime sphere has been providing the platform for the rising power to enhancing regional mobility and to establishing greater security design. Today the competition among the great powers is no distinct. The emergence of state under maritime domain bringing arena for geopolitical contest. In the 21st century the geographical evolution of Indo-pacific presenting the strategic essence. At one side the expansion of Chinese influence Indian Ocean region from the post-cold war period. In contrast to this, examining the India strategy and policy options to addressing their challenges and threat perceptions towards the Indo-pacific region. At that time when the Prime minister Narendra Modi came into power in 2014, his efforts, time and spirit towards international engagement increased. India's as a significant actor improved her image in the international matters. Indian policy to improving their maritime relations to challenging the China's strategy String of Pearls. In the Asian pacific region Modi's strengthen its administrative arrangements by proposing the Act East policy. In recent years the growing presence and efforts of Indian policy and strategic arrangements is noticeable in the Pacific region. The reflection of Act East policy presenting by Narendra Modi by the growing concern of India and China, immediately shifting the realities of geopolitically in the Asian Pacific region. The Act east policy by India a response to China's string of pearls. In this framework, India makes better their relation with South Asian and South-East Asian nations. To counter the China's existence in Gwadar port, Indian policy to developing and investing in Iran through Chabahar port. Further the main objective of the Act East policy to establish a socio-economic bond and increasing their strategic cultural diversity among the Southeast Asian countries. The achievement of this policy would be done with the active participation of Quad group and effective progress in the North eastern region of the India.

So, it will observe clearly that Indian policy shows that she wants to become an effective player in the Indo-pacific region. To achieve this goal design her policy with the execution of SAGAR initiatives, participation through quad agenda, prosperity in North Eastern states and financing the littoral nation of the Oceania region. This is the better alternative towards the China's investment and strategic development in the Indo-pacific region.

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