



## China's Growing Footprint in our Neighbouring Countries: Security Implications for India

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**Abstract:** China's encirclement policy—whether intentional or an outcome of broader strategic ambition has reshaped the security dynamics of South Asia. While it strengthens Beijing's geopolitical posture, it has also led to growing strategic distrust in the region, especially with India. As the contest for influence continues, the future of Asia's balance of power will hinge on how both giants manage their rivalry while avoiding direct confrontation.

**Keywords:** Encirclement Policy; String of Pearls; Belt and Road Initiative; Johnson Line; Line of Actual Control.

**Introduction:** Over the past two decades, China's rise has been marked not only by economic expansion but also by a strategic recalibration of its foreign policy—particularly in Asia. A key aspect of this recalibration is what many analysts describe as an "**encirclement policy**": a set of political, economic, and military strategies aimed at expanding Beijing's influence while limiting the strategic space of regional competitors, most notably India.

**History:** on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1950, India established its diplomatic relationship with China. Prime Minister Nehru considering the importance of approximately 4,057KM border with China wanted to have peaceful relationship with China. So, he visited China in 1954 and was instrumental in bringing global recognition to China through Bandung Conference in April 1955. In 1962, there was a serious setback to this peace process as China attacked India. It was during the period of Sri. Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 tried to improve the relation with China. Major breakthrough in the relationship happened during the period of Sri. Narasimha Rao in 1993 signed an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). In 2003 Sri.Vajpayee visited to China and signed Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation and decided to appoint Special Representatives (SRs) to resolve boundary disputes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China in May 2015 and announced extension of e-visa facility to Chinese nationals.



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### Reasons China's Growing Footprint in Neighbouring Countries:

- 1) **Land Dispute:** India shares 4,050 K.M. of border with China spreading from Karakoram, Kunlun to Himalayan Mountains. This Boundary was demarcated by the Britishers through Shimla Agreement signed between British India, Tibet and China during 1913-14. Later, Chinese Government denied recognising this border agreement as legal. Britishers divided border between China and India in Ladak named Johnson Line and Line of Actual Control in North-eastern part of India. But, this border division was not accepted by the Chinese. China claims that the traditional border between India and China is not demarcated or defined properly.
- 2) **Economic Supremacy:** During later part of 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century China trying its best to achieve economic supremacy at the Global level as well as in the South Asian region. But, India remains a stiff competitor in achieving the same. Adding to this, United States and Other European Countries are supporting India in order to contain economic dominance of China at the global stage. This has become an irritating factor for China.
- 3) **Military and Strategic Calculus:** China wants to revive the old silk route via BRI project (Belt and Road Initiative). This initiative passes through Karakoram region which includes parts for which India and China have sovereignty dispute. Moreover, China's intension to build direct road link to Pakistan and huge investment in Gwadar Port is sensed as a major security threat by India and also china is making investment in ports, roads, etc in neighbouring countries posing direct threat to India's national security.

Recently, both India and China are improving their border roads and infrastructure. Both countries are improving their border roads and infrastructure and also making huge investments in modernising their military and space technology leading to conflictual relationship between two countries.

- 4) **Power Play:** In International Politics major powers like USA, European Union and Russia wants to play their power politics using China and India. Knowing this politics well, these two major powers of Asia want to take advantage of this and strengthen their position at the global level. So, China or India makes any move towards the



other gains global attention and becomes more intensified dispute between two countries.

### Major Arguments:

- 1) **String of Pearls:** This is a strategy adopted by China to encircle India by building commercial, military bases as well as Ports in countries surrounding India. This string of Pearls extends from Chinese mainland to port Sudan in Africa by creating maritime choke points in Straits of Mandeb, Malacca and Hormuz, etc. China is not only trying to encircle India but also will have negative impact on India's global trade, national security and territorial integrity.

China is specifically interested in Indian Ocean region because Indian Ocean possesses 2/3 of global petroleum reserves, 35% of global gas, 60% Uranium, 40% Gold and 80% of world's diamond reserve. So, having dominance in Indian Ocean region will not only curtail India's economic interest but also will have negative impact on India's global power ambition.

China is having maritime centres in:

- a) **Pakistan:** China is investing and building Gwadar Port in Pakistan and intends to build naval military base in this port.
  - b) **Srilanka:** China has constructed a commercial shipping centre in Hambantota. Later, Srilanka leased out this port for 99 years to China for non-payment of loan to China.
  - c) **Bangladesh:** China has financed a container shipping facility in Chittagong. There is a credible report that China wants to use this port for military activities.
  - d) **Myanmar:** China is planning to construct deep sea port in Kyaukphyu in the west coast with an estimated cost of \$7 billion.
  - e) **Maldives:** China is planning to build a military base in Marao Atoll.
  - f) **Horn of Africa:** China is making an investment of \$600 million to build a naval base in the entrance of Red Sea on the route to Suez Canal giving it a strategic advantage to control the trade route.
- 2) **Trade:** China is building strong trade relationship with neighbouring countries, for eg: In 2022 China's export with neighbouring countries are given below:



Si. No	Country	Trade in Billion/ Million
01	Bangladesh	\$ 26.81 Billion
02	Pakistan	\$ 23.09 Billion
03	Myanmar	\$ 13.62 Billion
04	Srilanka	\$ 3.76 Billion
05	Nepal	\$ 1.66 Billion
06	Afghanistan	\$ 553.08 Billion
07	Maldives	\$ 451.29 Million
08	Bhutan	\$ 165.84 Million

Strong trade relationship with neighbouring countries of India will not only provide commercial profits to China but also acts as a factor to curtail India's economic and security interest.

- 3) **Belt and Road Initiative (BRC):** BRC project was an attempt by the China to revive the old silk route. Through this project China is constructing highways, Bridges, Solar Plants, Ports, etc. in countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc. which not only threatens economic interest but also threatens the sovereignty and national security of India.
- 4) **Cultural and Other Factors:** China is building Confucius Institute of Language in SAARC countries to teach Chinese language. So, that it acts like soft power to build Chinese influence in these countries.

During COVID China supplied large quantities of Vaccination to Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. through which it wanted to build good will factor among the people of these countries.

- 5) **Military Support:** China supplied sophisticated weapons to Srilanka army to fight against the LTTE. Recently, China backed candidate won the Maldivian presidential election and immediately after assuming the charges Maldivian president ordered for the complete removal of Indian military presence in Maldives. Replacing India, China wants to strengthen its military presence in Maldives.

Pakistan military is the largest buyer of military equipment's from China including military tankers, war planes, etc. Adding to this terrorist groups operating



from Pakistan are increasingly using China manufactured equipment's in their operations against India.

In Conclusion, China is encircling India not only in terms of Military advantage but also culturally and economically. Moreover, China is providing weapons as well as financial support to terrorist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir and in North-Eastern States. Adding to India's worry recently China is trying its best to settle its border problems with Nepal and Bhutan providing added advantage to China strategically. All these developments are not only threatening India national security but also its territorial integrity.

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