

Securing SLOCs by Cooperation
--China's Perspective of Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean
Ye Hailin

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National Maritime Policy Research Center
Bahria University Karachi, Pakistan

Abstract

The essay addresses that, after 30 years open and reform policy, with the increasing connectivity with the rest of the world, China has been transforming from a traditional land power to a new type of sea power. This transformation requires a sophisticated and modernized Chinese navy, and more frequent international engagement on maritime security, but it not necessary means that China would follow the model of traditional Western sea power to seek for its regional thalassocracy.

The essay argues that, at least in the medium term, even for the long term, China's maritime strategy pursues to control its marginal sea and secure its SLOCs. Chinese sea policy is and will be peace-nature and encourages regional and international maritime cooperation.

The essay points out, the strategic value of the Indian Ocean for China, an energy-thirsty giant is vital. The vulnerability of the SLOCs for China from the Gulf to the Malacca Straits has drawn a lot of concern of China, and to secure this energy transportation channel has become a significant component of China's maritime security strategy. Meanwhile, more intensive participation and wide presence of Chinese Navy and merchant marine in the Indian Ocean will make greater contribution to its Western Development Strategy, and also could be regarded as an indirect strategy to enhance China's position on its marginal water dispute with some Southeast Asia countries.

The essay suggests that, in the framework of China's Indian Ocean security strategy, Pakistan should be regarded as a decisive partner and Gwadar project should lay the cornerstone for this strategy. The meaning of Gwadar port for China is a bridge to reach energy diversity, not a fort to scout and dominate the Indian Ocean.

The article consists of four parts, 1. Review of China's Maritime Strategy; 2. Chinese Perspective on Sea Power; 3. "String of Pearls" or "Line of Life"; and 4. Secure SLOCs via Cooperation.

Key Words: SLOCs (Sea Lines of Communications), Indian Ocean, China, Pakistan

Preface

Chinese Navy set sail for anti-piracy mission from a port in province of Hainan for Somalia on December 26th, 2008. Senior officers from Chinese Foreign Ministry and Navy emphasized the military move is "supportive to the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council and efforts of the global cooperation in combating piracy" and "our target is, on one hand, to protect the ships and personnel passing through the Gulf of Aden and waters off the coast of Somalia. On the other hand, we are in charge of safeguarding the vessels transporting humanitarian materials from international organizations." [1]

However, this **historic** expedition to the Indian Ocean of the small scale Chinese Navy fleet [2] still caused wide suspicion. Even a ridiculous Internet rumor [3] echoed hot debates on the conventional mass media of China and relevant country. The rumor and its spread

proved how serious the mistrust and misunderstanding to Chinese Navy's expedition are. It should be pointed out that the misunderstanding not only occurred in South Asia, but also in China itself, especially in some young military amateurs who were fuzed by improper nationalism. Some cheered the expedition as a decisive action of "sailing to glorious" and the beginning of China's maritime era, but in fact, the mission is just a safeguard action under the permission of UN solution and restricted in untraditional security field.

Frankly, China should take part of responsibility of the suspicious atmosphere around the expedition, for Beijing never published its official Maritime Strategy. China only explained its military maritime intention in its serial National Defense White Papers which the naval parts usually consisted of one or two pages and only provided brief introduction. It left huge illegibility to be misinterpreted.

With the expanse of Chinese overseas interests, it's predictable that China will be more active on international maritime move. In this circumstance, more transparence approach is required for China to clear its maritime request, to define its maritime interests and to elaborate its maritime strategy.

Review of China's Maritime Strategy

For the recent six centuries, China had been a land power in nature which based on its agriculture-oriented economy. Zheng He (郑和), the great vanguard of Chinese oceangoing exploration is just a shooting star in Chinese history, his cause had never been inherited till 1950s, after the victory of Anti-Japanese war and the People's Republic came into existence. From 1950s to 1980s, in spite of suffering from China's backward economy and political turbulence, Chinese Navy and merchant marine still made remarkable progresses, laid the foundation for the development of its maritime cause after the adoption of open and reform policy.

Since 1980s, China got rid of isolation status and shifted from "inward-leaning economy" to "outward-leaning economy" step by step, the connectivity between China and the whole world has been getting closer and closer, the importance of sea for China has been observably increased. China, as "an increasingly capable and influential nation, is acquiring a growing interest in maritime security and commerce, which are essential to its national program of peaceful development".^[4] With development of its maritime cause and expanse of its overseas interests and requests, China has been transformed from a traditional land power to a new sea power.

China has 18,000 km of coastline, claims over 4 million square km of sea area, and operates over 1,400 harbors. In 2006, China's maritime industries generated an estimated 10 percent of its GDP^[5], a significant increase from the last years. It is estimated that contribution of maritime industries to China's economy could reach \$1 trillion by July, 2020. Meanwhile, the rapid growth of China's economy relies on its international trade more and more, although China also tries to boost its domestic demand. Even suffered by the current global financial crises, the favorable balance of China in January, 2009, jumped to 39 billion US\$, a new record for recent six months. The world not only witnessed China's fast economic growth, but also more active global participation of Chinese enterprises. Chinese energy and natural resource investors and textiles, home appliances and even automobile manufactures rushed into Africa and Latin America, where links with China mainly by maritime transportation. Another factor which shapes China's new sea strategy is its huge demand for overseas energy. China is now the second energy consumer of the world, and

60% its hydrocarbon energy consumption came from the Gulf and transited via Malacca Strait.

Chinese enormous international trade profit, close global connectivity and extreme energy demands, all of them highly rely on the security of Chinese Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). The development of maritime industries, the dependence on the security of SLOCs forced China to rethink its traditional conservative maritime strategy. In general, "the ultimate drive to develop sea power is oversea trade".^[6] It also means that increasing overseas trade needs to be protected by a strengthening Navy, and as coherent consequence, the expanse of sea power.

China realized that sea power and right are vital for the future development of China, or Chinese "national great renaissance". To protect its overseas interests, to control its marginal water territory, to secure its SLOCs, draw more and more attention of Chinese government, mass media, think tanks and the public. Although China took more active approach on maritime issues, its maritime strategy is still in peace nature and emphasis the importance of regional and international cooperation.

Chinese scholars often quoted Chinese history as evidence to prove peaceful nature of Chinese regional and international policy, unfortunately, such kind of address usually aren't convincing. Not only because the truth of history is always arguable, but as a common sense, the behavior of people is flexible, what people did yesterday doesn't illustrate his action tomorrow. In the context of international relations, history just provides lessons and references, but far away from enough to offer the parameters to predict future action of state. Actually, the decisive factor to shape Chinese foreign relation and its maritime strategy is the model of Chinese rising.

The economic miracle of China—30 years fast growth—basically is the consequence of its open and reform policy. This policy leads to highly mutual dependence between China and its global and regional partners. China never tried to build up a separated economic community which parallel with the global market. On the contrary, China is the most dramatic advocator for the global integrity and trade freedom. China clearly realizes that its wealth and influence come from its global participation and connectivity, which highly relies on a peaceful international and regional environment. China regards the peaceful environment as pre-condition of its rising, so seeking for peace became the priority of Chinese foreign policy. Guided by this diplomatic credendum, China believes that seeking deeper understanding between China and other regional and global powers would help reduce tensions and foster more effective multilateral solutions to its security concerns, such as energy transportation, overseas interests protection and so on .

Chinese foreign policy and maritime strategy character as their peaceful nature, but peaceful doesn't mean passive. Driven by the expanse of maritime interests, China launched more frequent maritime move in recent years, China emphasized keeping the stability isn't contradictory with maintaining its rights. China is cautious to avoid the potential conflicts with its neighbors on maritime issues, meanwhile take more steps to attend international and bilateral joint action, such as naval exercise, natural disaster rescue and anti-piracy mission. The Chinese Navy actively engaged in "military diplomacy" in recent years, particularly in the form of joint military exercises with other nations. China expect that, with the help of such MOOTW (military operations other than war), China could enhance its soft power and increase its influence in its neighboring region.

Adapt to transformation of Chinese maritime strategy, Chinese navy abandoned its coastal defensive tradition. Since 1980s, Chinese Navy "has realized a strategic transformation to offshore defensive operations".^[7] To reach this transformation, China makes great efforts

on building up a more sophisticated and modernized navy, Chinese Navy "has been striving to improve in an all-round way its capabilities of integrated offshore operations, strategic deterrence and strategic counterattacks, and to gradually develop its capabilities of conducting cooperation in distant waters and countering non-traditional security threats, so as to push forward the overall transformation of the service" and meanwhile the Navy "works to increase the country's capabilities to maintain maritime, space and electromagnetic space security and to carry out the tasks of counter-terrorism, stability maintenance, emergency rescue and international peacekeeping. It takes military operations other than war (MOOTW) as an important form of applying national military forces".[\[8\]](#) The Somalia move of Chinese Navy is actually kind of MOOTW.

Chinese Perspective on Sea Power

Joan Johnson-Freese, a professor of US Navy War College and outer space policy expert discussed the vast misinterpretation in Sino-US space relationship studies in her book. She pointed out that US frequently tends to ignore the common sense that "think outside box does not necessarily reflect US government policy"[\[9\]](#) and misinterpret un-authoritative academic research into official policy when US researches the China's space policy and activities. She quoted the story of Wang Hucheng (王虎成) and his opinion on so called "Unrestricted Warfare" ("超限战"). Actually, such phenomenon not only occurred in space field, but also in a lot of countries' understanding on Chinese maritime policy.

Just as I mentioned in the preface, China should be responsible for the widespread phenomenon because China usually prefers not talk too much about its intension voluntarily and forwardly. Wang's story was recurred in maritime policy studies in another version, the version of Ni Lexiong (倪乐雄). Ni is a professor of Shanghai Institute of Politics and Law[\[10\]](#), his essay "Sea Power and China's Development" was described as "unabashed advocacy for China's Sea Power" by some US experts and he is regarded as representative of Chinese school of Mahan thought. Ni indeed is one of leading maritime strategy scholars in China, his arguments on building up a strong navy spread widely by Internet and are very popular among the young people, but it is obviously that his argument does not stand for Chinese official policy and only one of many views on Chinese maritime strategy----although maybe the most famous and furious one.

One of lessons should be learned from Ni and Wang's storied is that correct inference about any country's any official policy could not be drawn only from a few isolated words of scholars or mass media. But Ni's argument and its popularity do indicate that after 30 years splendid economic growth, how solicitous Chinese demos' expectation of strong sea power is. From 1840 to 1949, China's sea power existed in name only and paid enormous costs for this fatal weakness---countless casualties, innumerable war indemnity and indelible humiliation caused by many times defeated wars with the global and regional sea powers, such as Britain and Japan.

Seeking for strong sea power not only bases on the request of increasing connectivity between China and the rest of world, but also is a national-widely mental demand. Chinese government should not ignore it, although this mental demand always is quoted as the evidence of growing of "Chinese Nationalism" and interpreted as a threat to the regional stability by Western world and some China's neighboring countries. Based on the requests of actual interests and mental demand Chinese government would be remiss, if it doesn't seek for stronger sea power and its performance, a powerful navy.

In fact, such mental demand is not unique phenomenon for China. Basically, to build up more advanced and effective defense power is universal request for any country if the costs—technology gap, budget limitation and geopolitical consequence—were not problems. But there is an expression that “only poets write strategy without a budget”, China’s maritime strategy also is restricted by the factors mentioned above. China is still a developing country and continuously purchases a relative long-term peaceful environment. Its economic and political wherewithal is limited, and it has long way to go toward acquiring sophisticate and usually expensive technology to support modernization of its navy, meanwhile, China also seriously concerns the so-call “China Threat” and hostile attention of Western world and neighboring countries to Chinese Navy modernization projects, tries to avoid the contradiction between the expanse of sea power and its traditional principles of peace and development.

In principle, that is unquestionably China will impose more active maritime strategy, seek for more effective sea power and accordingly to build up a more sophisticate navy, but China also clearly acknowledges that sea power could be divided into different levels and each level requires different economic and political investments, meanwhile leads to different geopolitical impact.

Basically, **Sea Power** could be divided into four levels: The first and essential level is **marginal sea control**. The second level is **security of SLOCs**, which only requests to ensure the safety of the merchant ships, which could be reached by multiple ways including safeguard mission of navy fleet or friendly geopolitical environment provided by successful diplomatic inter-activities, also could realized by international or regional coalition missions.

The third level is **navigate freedom**, which seeks for liberty of maritime mobility, not necessarily to monopolize ocean, but capable to confront potential threat or hostile action; these two levels of sea power require a strong navy and usually unilateral and exclusive action. The fourth and the top level is **thalassocracy** or **Maritime Supremacy**, which leads to the approach of ocean dominance, intents to deny the access to its dominant water territory of any other navy, destroy the hostile navy fleet on the request;

During Bush, Jr. Administration, US military has replaced its threat-based planning with capabilities-based planning, intended to defeat any conceivable attack in anytime from anywhere. Chinese Navy even did not reach the level of threat-based planning, still presses forward to upgrade its capability to fit its request-based planning. In the context of Chinese navy strategy, the difference between the threat-based planning and the request-based planning is that the potential hostile navy forces of China on Pacific Ocean is the global ocean hegemony and its coalition. It is not possible for China to imagine to build up a strong Navy or to invent some kind of “Shashoujian”(杀手锏)[\[11\]](#) to deter the adversary’s hostile intention. Due to its model of planning and limitation of capability, China’s perspective on Sea Power is also far away from US and its traditional school t of Mahan thought.

In the medium and long term, to establish the **thalassocracy**, even to seek for **Navigate Freedom** would not be the intention of China’s maritime strategy. Because the model and path of China’s rising don’t request these two levels of sea power. Their costs would counteract the potential benefits even exceed the latter. It is highly possible that the ambition for the **thalassocracy** or the **Navigate Freedom** of China would result in serious backfire effect to impact China’s peace and development, for such ambitions definitely lead to overthrow current regional maritime order, or even topple international system, which provide maybe not very satisfied but acceptable peace environment for China, a supposed decisive precondition for Chinese national great renaissance.

Thus China will impose a limited maritime strategy and seek for primary levels of sea power for at least medium term. It intends to realize effective **marginal sea control** and ensure **security of SLOCs**. For the **marginal sea control**, China will try to obtain regional and tactical naval advantage to deter separatism of Taiwan and to protect its natural resources in South China Sea and East China Sea. For the disputes with some neighboring countries, China suggests adoption of the principle of Detaining Disputes and Developing Together, meanwhile it insists on the sovereignty over disputes territories. It is a relative conservative approach for China, sometimes lead to nationalism echoes inside China.

But for the **security of SLOCs** level, Chinese attitude has been shifting from its long term passive and conservative approach to more active and energetic engagement in recent years. China considers that, marginal sea disputes is avoidable risk and potential benefits brought by military intervention even a successful limited war is marginalized but with highly cost. On the contrary, to ensure the **security of SLOCs**, it's an essential request for China's development, just as what mentioned above, China has been already highly relied on its connectivity with rest of the world. The security of maritime transportation occupied the priority of Chinese maritime security strategy.

The vulnerability of "sea line of life" from the Gulf to Malacca Strait draws much attention of Chinese government and demos, because it transports 80% of Chinese imported energy and links China with African continent, the new and fastest growing market for Chinese enterprises. Unlike the potential and avoidable risks on the marginal sea, the vulnerability of the Indian Ocean is "present and clear dangers" due to rampant piracy, hostile regional military situation and atrocious geographic condition. It required Chinese more active engagement in multiple ways.

"String of Pearls" or "Line of Life"?

On 21st, February, the Chinese Navy DDG-168 Guangzhou set sail for the North Arabian Sea to participate the joint Naval exercises "Aman-09", thus, DDG-169 and DDG -168, only two of Chinese Navy's the most sophisticated homemade destroyers Class 052B, both were expedited to the Indian Ocean to carry out the different but kin missions. Even now the battle effectiveness of Chinese surface warships deployed in the Indian Ocean is still very limited, especially comparing with existed navy fleet of the other sea powers. Chinese Navy did not change the current military situation in the Indian Ocean. It lacks of such capability and actually did not have such ambition at all. However, the two destroyers' move should be regarded as an emblem of transform of Chinese maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean to more active and energetic engagement.

Since the first years of 21st Century, China use the term of "Malacca Dilemma" to describe the potential problems of sea routes crucial to China's trade and energy transportation, especially the fragile Malacca Straits. China not only concern the danger of being subject to interdiction from another state, but also the highly possibility of the Straits obstruction causes by artificial accidents or natural disasters, after all, the Straits is too narrow and too busy, any gigantic oil tanker's leak accident could force the Straits to be almost completely closed down. Actually, the similar accident occurred before in other sea channel, and the question is not whether it would happen in the Malacca Strait or not, but when and how serious. At the same time, the international war on terror has also raised the specter of economic terrorism aimed at disrupting commerce via the Straits.

In fact, the "Malacca Dilemma" is not all contents of Chinese concern on the security of SLOCs, the security situation of the "front end" of Chinese SLOCs is not much better than the Straits at all, if it is not more troublesome. That is Chinese sea "line of life" from the

Gulf via the vast water territory of the Indian Ocean to the Straits. The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean for China is exactly as same as the Malacca Straits; actually, they are the two sides of one coin, or the two ends of one bridge. Most of Chinese merchant ships and oil tanks which transit via the Malacca Straits sailed for long time voyage before they entered that narrow ocean channel. SLOCs are just like chain, any threats to any links of them would definitely cause the same impact to China; it is true that the Malacca Straits is very convenient for severing Chinese energy blood vessel, but obviously, it is not the only place. Any parts of the SLOCs on the Indian Ocean could play the same role for any Chinese potential advisories—states or non-states.

One version of the so-called “Chinese threat” is the ambition of China to build up “string of pearls” alongside the Indian Ocean, especially Indian’s neighboring countries. China intends to establish close military and political connect and cooperation with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Burma. In July 2006, in his report for the Pentagon, Lt.Col. Christopher J. Pehrson listed each “Pearl” of the “String”, he addressed that “each ‘pearl’ in the ‘String of Pearls’ is a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence. Hainan Island, with recently upgraded military facilities, is a ‘pearl.’ An upgraded airstrip on Woody Island, located in the Paracel archipelago 300 nautical miles east of Vietnam, is a ‘pearl.’ A container shipping facility in Chittagong, Bangladesh, is a ‘pearl.’ Construction of a deep water port in Sittwe, Myanmar, is a ‘pearl,’ as is the construction of a navy base in Gwadar, Pakistan.”[\[12\]](#)

China did sign a series of contracts of ports construction projects, including the most outstanding one Gawdar project. The port construction projects cooperation between China and South Asia countries echoed wide spread suspicious not only in this region but also globally. Lt.Col. Pehrson claimed that “string of pearls” as “the manifestation of China’s rising geopolitical influence through efforts to increase access to ports and airfields, develop special diplomatic relationships, and modernize military forces that extend from the South China Sea through the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on to the Arabian Gulf”. [\[13\]](#)

As response, China always argues that all the cooperation on ports development with its South Asian partners are peaceful in nature and economic interests oriented, however, in principal, all merchant ports could be used as naval base or at least provide logistic support for warship fleets. The dual-used nature of ports just like space technology, unquestionably, a set of satellite launcher could be developed as a missile. Dual use technology and facility are not always easy to identify. In this context, both Chinese argument and others’ suspicious sound convincible. Whose opinion is accepted only depends upon different stances and perspectives of audiences.

The priority of Chinese maritime security strategy is to secure SLOCs, China has been a net oil importer since 1993, is the world's number two oil consumer after the US. The strategic importance of imported energy and the security of its transportation for China is clear and self-evident. Just like an Indian correspondent said, for China, “in the presence of sporadic power shortages, growing car ownership and air travel across China and the importance of energy to strategically important and growing industries such as agriculture, construction, and steel and cement manufacturing, pressure is going to mount on China to access energy resources on the world stage. As a result, energy security has become an area of vital importance to China's stability and security.”[\[14\]](#)

Ironically, the author argued that China’s quest for energy security would possibly lead to “New Cold War”[\[15\]](#). If China desires for the regional hegemony, the New Cold War is not only possible, but inevitable. However, just as mentioned before, the priority of Chinese maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean is to secure the security of SLOCs. How China could

make itself safer via involving of so-call "New Cold War" and taking a risk to challenge the existed regional and international sea supremacies?

Trying to impose a blockade surrounding its regional adversary or competitors is not only totally meaningless in politics perspective for China, but also obtrusive stupid in military practice. China didn't own the "blue water navy" permanent deployed in this region. Without the protection of an active and effective ocean warship fleet, several ports separated with thousands of miles distance could not form so-called "string of pearls", on the contrary, just a crowd of "sitting ducks" which could be easily eliminated by regional maritime supremacy.

Actually, based on the requests to ensuring the security of its SLOCs, China does need several ports for its safeguarding fleets to receive logistics supply. For instance, Chinese Navy DDG-169 and DDG-171 took four days voyage to enter the Indian Ocean from their base in Hainan Island, and without logistics supply from land bases, only could carry out 90 days mission. Even for counter-piracy mission, lack of logistics support seriously restrains the combat capability and endurance of voyage of Chinese small scale fleet.

Since 26th, December, 2008, Chinese Navy fleet had already provided safeguard for 63 merchant ships in 22 missions, patrolled in the Indian Ocean for almost three months, so the question is what about the next step of DDG-169 and DDG-171? China could make a choice from three options, **Option One:** Receiving supplement from some temporary logistic base. From 22nd to 23rd February, Chinese Navy fleet anchored at Aden merchant port for logistics supply. This is the first time that Chinese Navy received supplement from foreign merchant port during its MOOTW. However, temporary logistics supply just could extend the mission for a certain term, finally, it still had to back to option two or option three, because as a conventional fleet, DDG-169 and DDG-171 were not designed to conduct long term combat mission in the ocean;

Option Two: Claiming the mission accomplished and going back home, leaving the safeguard mission to other foreign Navies existed in the North Arabia Sea; **Option Three:** Setting up a long term cooperation with some regional partners and seeking for a permanent logistic base in the Indian Ocean to make sure that in case of emergency, just like accident of "TianYu" (天裕), the destroyers wont take another four days to come back. The option which finally be selected indicates the perspective of maritime security of Chinese Navy and China itself.

Conclusion: Secure SLOCs via Cooperation

To fulfill the mission of safeguarding and counter-privacy, Chinese Navy should be deployed in the Indian Ocean for longer term, which requests supports from the regional partners and encourages cooperative approach. Unilateral action won't help to improve the situation. In fact, cooperative approach is the only effective method to ensure the security of Chinese SLOCs which only request acceptable costs and would bring marvelous benefits, not just allow Chinese Navy deploying longer time or expanse Chinese soft power by an "existence fleet".

The factors which could threat the security of Chinese SLOCs in the Indian Ocean basically are similar with those in the Malacca Straits, privacy, artificial or natural accident, existence of foreign Naval bases in that region, and the last but not least one, in the context of Grand Strategy, "uncertain trumpet" of the regional sea powers. All the threats could be confronted or even neutralized by a powerful navy fleet permanently deployed but with highly expensive financial and potential political costs.

Base on cost-benefit assessment, comparing with unilateral action aiming at seek for maritime supremacy, cooperation with regional and international partners is a more effective strategy. China could consider the following options: **Option One**, set up a permanent logistics supply base in this region allowing long term deployment of Chinese Navy fleet to make quick reaction mission under request. **Option Two**, initiate or join in an international joint navy fleet to impose counter piracy mission. **Option Three**, develop several merchant ports in this region and build up land traffic system (railway and road) connecting China inner land with them to provide additional transportation method avoiding vulnerability of the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Straits.

In fact, all these three options are paralleled and intend to secure Chinese SLOCs by comprehensive strategy. Pakistan, Chinese tradition all weathers and all dimensional friend in this region, occupied the most important position in all the options.

In the last visit of Pakistan President Asif Zardari to China few days ago, President reemphasized that Pakistan could offer China another "access to warm waters"[16]. In the first years of General Musharraf's regime, Pakistan redefined itself as an energy corridor connecting East Asia (China) and South Asia (India) with the Middle East and Central Asia. President Zardari and PPP administration inherited General Musharraf's diplomatic legacy of energy corridor strategy. Actually, this strategy did not emerge during General Musharraf regime; it can be traced back to the 1960s as part of a strategy of Baluchistan's development initialled by Pakistan's central government at that time. The trans-Pakistan pipeline is at the core of this strategy and the Gwadar Port project is one of the cornerstones.

The Gwadar Port project started on 22 March, 2002. Phase I has been completed and Phase II is in process. This project costs 0.248 billion US\$, of which 50 million US\$ is paid by Islamabad and the rest, 198 million US\$, is contributed by China in the form of official development assistance (ODA).

According to Pakistan's government, "Gwadar as a deep-sea port will shortly be an additional and alternate port to the existing port infrastructure of Pakistan. It will provide an economical access to the sea for cargo generated in the Northern and southern parts of Pakistan and Neighboring states. Pakistan offers the shortest route to Central Asia from its ports in the south through a modem road and rail network".[17] Phase I consists of three multipurpose berths, each 200m long, a 4.5 km long approach channel dredged to 11.6m-12.5m (width 130-165m) and related port infrastructure and port handling equipment and pilot boats, tugs, survey vessel etc. Phase II will consist of ten berths (two hulk cargos, two oil, and six containers), a 5.0 km approach channel, a 600m turning basin, and affiliated roads.

As the biggest overseas construction of China since the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, the Gwadar project has drawn a lot of surmise and suspicion, especially with regard to China's intentions. Does China want to use Gwadar as her first overseas naval base? Is it the shining and precious pendant of the "String of Pearls"?

Gwadar and Land Bridge between Pakistan and China

Resource: Pakistan Board of Investment, <http://www.pakboi.gov.pk/>

Considering the dual-use nature of ports, it's obviously Gwadar port would be a pearl of the string, but more important and more urgent concern for China is to ensure security of

SLOCs, just as mentioned above, China has no power and political intention to create Indian Ocean maritime supremacy. Gwadar project could be expected to be part of Chinese energy diversity strategy. It would shorten the thousands of miles than traditional ocean transportation. Economic motive is not the only reason for China to support this project. To ensure energy security, energy diversity strategy means not only source but also transportation diversity. Currently, 50% of merchant ships passing through the Malacca Straits carry Chinese products or imported materials and energy resources, ensuring their security is crucial for Chinese future development, finding additional ports will help China to reduce the burden of the Malacca Straits and to improve its maritime security.

Meanwhile, Gwadar project and Pakistan's energy corridor strategy also could bring at least another four advantages for China, domestically, regionally and even in the context of Grand Strategy.

Firstly, it could make contribution to the Chinese Western Development Strategy.

Supposing Pakistani initiative of Sino-Pakistan railway system could be fulfilled, a magnificent part of Chinese import oil could be transit via Gwadar port and transported by railway to Xinjiang, China. This Autonomous Region is the Chinese first hydrocarbon energy base in possession of sound and advanced oil and natural gas infrastructure. However after six decades of exploitation, its own resources almost run out, enormous the oil and natural gases transit via Pakistan not only could bring marvellous transportation costs retrench for China, but more important, it also could fuel energy for the development of Xinjiang hydrocarbon energy related industry. Also, the land transportation system ending at Gwadar could be used as a bridge for the agriculture and industrial products from western part of China to access to the Indian Ocean.

Secondly, it could bring an opportunity for China and India to cooperate in the Middle East.

Both China and India have a vested interest in open and secure sea lanes. China has been providing the crucial assistance to Pakistan's energy transportation construction, and should enlarge and deepen its participation. Because the transportation channel via Pakistan would not only transport natural gas or oil, but also contribute to the mutual trust and interests among China, India and Pakistan. For both China and India, Pakistani energy corridor strategy will have far-reaching influence. This pipeline project connecting Pakistan and India or China proposal no matter via Gwadar or not will bring China and India an opportunity to tight up their linkage with Middle-East countries. Middle East energy suppliers now are also trying launching their own energy diversity strategy to avoid the danger of over-depending on their western customers. To build up a pipeline by jointed venture, China and India, as long-term and stable big customers in Middle East energy market, would get important influence to the regional countries. As an example, the first Gulf countries suggested to build a pipeline via Pakistan to China is not Iran, the 'riot state' in the sight of USA, but Saudi Arab, the key ally of USA in the region. Gulf countries, no matter their attitude toward current global economic structure, all wish could realize diversity strategy, which offers the rising-up Asian powers a significant opportunity to involve that region's affairs.

Thirdly, it would help to improve the stability of regional situation and enhance the mutual confident between India and Pakistan.

The Pakistani energy corridor strategy has the potential value for promoting regional peace, security and economic development. Tensions on the Subcontinent have held the pipeline hostage for over a decade, but these tensions are now thawing. The leaders of Pakistan and India have made economic development their top priority. India cannot dream of achieving significant growth without new sources of energy. But India deeply concerns the possibility that in case the regional situation getting tension, Pakistan would like to turn off the tap. New Delhi also worried about the pipeline connecting India with Iran would be a negative factor to new

emerging India-USA 'partnership', Washington strongly oppose any projects Iran involved. Saudi Arab-Pakistan-India pipeline is not welcomed by New Delhi because of its heavy costs and tiny benefits to India. If China could join the project to share a certain route of the pipeline, Chinese back to the project bid could bring more confidence to India. Then the triangle relations among China, Pakistan and India will be expected less competing while more cooperation.

The last and not the least, it would provide more options for China to reply to the Malacca Straits Dilemma. In principle, the essential request of maritime power is to impose marginal water control. Thus, the expanse of Chinese seek maritime power should aim at south and east direction to protect its natural resources on its marginal water and exclusive economic zone (EEC) and to claim its sovereignty over the dispute territory. But given the geopolitical reality—the coalition between some of Chinese neighboring countries and the global sea supremacy—confronting and challenging this regional maritime security structure is not necessarily meet Chinese interests and beyond Chinese capability. In this context of Grand Strategy, part of strategy of some Chinese neighboring countries for the global sea power supremacy is to form blockade surrounding China, so called "the first island chain". So access to the Indian Ocean via Pakistan could reduce the dependency of China on the Malacca Straits and correspondently devalue the function of some Chinese neighboring countries in the Grand Strategy of the global hegemony. Such response to "the first island chain" is somewhat kind of application of Liddell Hart's "indirect approach" theory. Just like a well-known expression "aim at a pigeon and shoot at a crow", China also could try to manage its Pacific Ocean challenge with the help of its Indian Ocean chess game.

But it should be pointed out that, realization of such blue print shouldn't be expected recently because of security tension, political turbulence and geographical environment difficulties in Pakistan. At present Gwadar is symbol of friendship and will be beneficial in the future if Pakistan's situation improves enough to be an energy corridor as is expected. But it needs more time to justify its value. The stability of Pakistan is crucial precondition of Chinese cooperative maritime strategy.

Just like President Zardari addressed, "a stronger China needs a stronger Pakistan"[\[18\]](#). To help Pakistan to improve its stability and enhance its security is not only the responsibility for China, but also the interest of China. After all, China should acknowledge that, marching to westward also reaches at the ocean.

[\[1\]](#) Liu Jieyi (刘结一), Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister, and Rear-Admiral Du Jingchen (杜景臣), the Chinese fleet commander, told the China Radio International (CRI), December 26th, 2008.

[\[2\]](#) The fleet consists of 2 destroyers: DDG-169 Wuhan (武汉), DDG-171 Haikou (海口) and 1 Supply Ship, Weishanhu (微山湖 pennant number 887).

[\[3\]](#) See "Indian submarine spooked warship: Chinese media" Express India, Feb 04, 2009. It results about 26,700 for Google.

[\[4\]](#) Andrew S. Erickson: New U.S. Maritime Strategy: Initial Chinese Responses, *China Security*, Vol. 3 No. 4 Autumn 2007

[\[5\]](#) About 270 billion US\$.

[\[6\]](#) Ni Lexiong: Sea Power and China's Development, the Liberation Daily, 17, April, 2005.

[\[7\]](#) The Chinese National Defense White Paper 2008.

[\[8\]](#) *ibid.*

[9] Joan Johnson-Freese: Space as a strategic asset, Columbia University Press, 2007, pp217.

[10] He does not work for Shanghai National Defense Institute as Wall Street Journal reported, actually, there is no such institute in Shanghai at all.

[11] This word is transliteration of a Chinese phrase, in context of military, it usually stands for some secret weapon system could cause deadly threat to the hostile or reverse the process of war. Some young military amateurs keen on advocate such kind of weapon or technology on Internet, but most of them are just based unauthorized and unreliable information resources.

[12] http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/indian_ocean/060701string_of_pearls.htm

[13] Ibid.

[14] "Setting the Stage for a New Cold War: China's Quest for Energy Security"

http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=272&language_id=1.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Zardari offers China access to warm waters,

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/>

[default.asp?page=2009%5C02%5C22%5Cstory_22-2-2009_pg7_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C02%5C22%5Cstory_22-2-2009_pg7_1).

[17] <http://www.pakboi.gov.pk/>

[18] Interviewed by shanghai Oriental Morning Post, 24th February, 2009.