

Indian Ocean: India Is Playing Catch Up With Pakistan And China



By Panos Mourdoukoutas

After declaring the South China Sea its “own sea,” China is racing to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean, teaming up with Pakistan. And perhaps, to call the Indian Ocean its ‘own sea’ too.

That’s certainly bad news for India, which is still trying to forge partnerships with Japan and the US to catch up with China and Pakistan in shoring up its presence in the Indian Ocean.

“India’s baby steps toward a deeper and more meaningful partnership with Japan and the US come as the country is

confronted by China's rapid progress in the region," say Daniel Stacey and Alastair Gale in a recent piece in Wall Street Journal.

The Indian Ocean has always been a strategic water way for trade between Africa and the Middle East on the one side, and Asian countries on the other. But it has become even more important in recent years with the rise of China – as a major trade competitor of Japan, and a challenger to America's dominance in both the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

In fact, China cannot secure its dominance in the South China Sea without expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean. For a simple reason. A blockade of the Strait of Malacca by the US and its alliance will cut China off from Middle East oil supplies and from its "Second Continent" Africa.

That's why China is shoring up Sri Lanka's major ports and working feverishly with Pakistan to build an alternative route to Middle East and Africa—the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

"Besides having investments that have purely commercial goals in Pakistan as they would in any other country, the Chinese have two main goals in investing in that particular country," explains Dimitrijevic. "First is to continue the "String of Pearls" strategy of developing commercial and military outposts along their main maritime trading route. These include the Strait of Malacca, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives, the Strait of Hormuz and Somalia.

There's a second reason for the Chinese to invest, and that's to make India feel the strong presence, in its arch-rival Pakistan."

That's should certainly put pressure on India to form its own partnerships to counter China and Pakistan. But New Delhi

doesn't seem to be moving fast enough. Meanwhile, international investors should pay close attention to these developments, as they place their bets in the financial markets of the region.

Courtesy: Forbes