

Deterring the Dragon:-India's manoeuvres to balance China in the Maldives

Soorya Kavunga¹, Keshav sankar.²

PhD scholars, Department of International relations and politics, Central University Of Kerala, India

Abstract-- Maldives is an archipelago located about 560 Km away from Lakshadweep. It has been sovereign through much of history. It is also a clear example of how geographical positioning can provide a country with strategic relevance that far outweighs its size and material capabilities. The island's northern and southern parts are adjacent to two important Sea Lanes Of Communication (SLOC), between Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz, and Malacca strait. These channels are of vital importance, owing to growing energy demands. There is fierce competition between India and China to bring Maldives under their sphere of influence. Contemporary political developments in the Maldives indicate a shift of strategic importance. During the initial stages, Maldives kept away from India owing to its fear of internal democratic forces. Maldives in the period from 2013-2018, witnessed increased distance from India and closeness to China. The government that took charge in 2018 had been more lenient to India. The present presidency that took charge in 2023 has explicitly signalled a shift towards Chinese interests. The present Maldivian government has demanded that India vacate her military base. The 2015 law amendment in Maldives has enabled Chinato lease islands, and this is a national security threat. Taking a look at the course that India ought to follow to increase her influence and counter that of China's becomes imminent, with respect to the Maldives.

Keywords- Balance of Power, Regional Hegemony, Geopolitics, Maldivian politics, National Security

Research questions

1. What effect would the changing paradigms of Maldivian politics have on the region?
2. To what extent is the geo-strategic location of the Maldives important to India?
3. How does the dynamics of Balance of Power between India and China operate with regard to the Maldives?

Research objectives

1. To analyse India-Maldives relations in the light of changing political aspirations in the Maldives?
2. To explore the regional hegemonic ambitions of China in the Indo-pacific with regard to the Maldives?
3. To evaluate India-China engagements in the Maldives with respect to India's national security?

I. INTRODUCTION

The present world is divided into nation states. The term 'Inter-National', denotes this structure/system in which these nation states exist. 'Inter-National', the term presupposes the institution of the state as the primary unit in the international system. Since there is no overarching authority to penalise states that can violate norms, there is continuous instability and competition in the system. Structural realism posits that states compete with each other for survival in the international system. (Steven. E .Lobell, 2010). Therefore, it is assumed that each state will take recourse to that mode of action which is most conducive to its own survival. This is the reason why realism is the dominant school of thought in the discipline of International Relations.

India and China are aspiring hegemonies in Asia.(Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, Hussain Abbas, Ahmed Ijaz Malik,2020). From the perspective of realism, thus, their interests would more often collide, rather than collude. The uncertainty of intentions, and uneven distribution of capacities of these two countries, result in a classic security dilemma.(Mearsheimer, 2001). The situation that has been developing in India's neighbourhood in the recent past, can also be viewed as an extension of this dilemma.

China's 'String of pearls' strategy, is an innovative application of an antique military tactic, one of encirclement of the enemy forces, that was pioneered by Genghiz khan (C.R Gabel and J.H Willbanks,2012 and V. Marantidou, 2014). China, in order to fulfil its regional hegemonic aspirations, has been drawing India's neighbours into its own ambit, through a carrot (development aid) and stick(debt trap diplomacy) policy. Development aid for Oil and Gas pipelines in Myanmar(S.Yoshikawa,2022) , Debt trap diplomacy in Sri Lanka (M. Himmer and Z. Rod, 2022), Extensive defence cooperation with Pakistan as was evident in the Trend Indicator Value (TIV) (which is a unit that is used to measure the quantum of arms transfer, not a financial value) that touched US \$8,469 million in the last 15 years.(Sameer P Lalwani; 2023). This posits that China's interest is to dominate the region by increasing its influence over India's neighbours.



In the 2015 'Military strategy white paper' released by China, it was made clear that great emphasis must be laid on the management of seas and oceans. It also said that the mentality that land outweighs sea should be abandoned. The Chinese had a naval strategy that focused on "near-coast defence" (jinnan fangyu) prior to the mid-1980s. It moved to the "near-seas active defence" (jinhai jujū fangyu) by the mid-1980s, and then to the advancement of a "far-seas operations" (yuanhai zuo - zhan) strategy by the mid-2000s. The far seas are the Indo-Pacific stretches of the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This reflected China's expanding maritime ambitions. (C.J Pehrson, 2006)

The two-ocean (liang ge Haiyang) strategy indicated the Chinese intention to deploy in the Indian Ocean, apart from the Pacific Ocean. India's perspective is that this is a maritime encirclement of India.

II. HISTORICAL AND EVOLUTION

The history between India and Maldives is one that spans centuries, characterised by shared cultural, economic, and geopolitical ties. The close relationship between these two neighbouring nations has endured through various historical periods and continues to thrive in the modern era. This article aims to explore the depths of this historic bond, explore its origins, key milestones, and the factors that have contributed to its enduring strength.

The relationship between India and Maldives can be traced back to ancient times, it was rooted in cultural and trade connections. Evidence suggests that Indian merchants frequently traversed the Indian Ocean, establishing early maritime trade links with the Maldivian archipelago. These connections were strengthened with the spread of Buddhism from India to the Maldives during the ancient and mediaeval periods, leading to the adoption of the religion by the Maldivian people. (T C, 2019)

During the Vijayanagara Empire the 14th to 17th centuries, India's influence expanded across the Indian Ocean region, with the Maldives falling within its sphere of trade and cultural influence. The Maldives sought protection from regional threats by seeking alliances with powerful Indian kingdoms, such as Vijayanagara. This alliance consequently led to the establishment of Hindu temples in the Maldives and further deepened cultural exchange between the two regions. (Chatterjee, 2024)

In the 16th century, the Maldives fell under European colonial influence, particularly from the Portuguese and later the Dutch. Despite this external interference, the connection between India and the Maldives endured, as Indian traders continued to have a significant presence in the Maldivian economy and society. (Chatterjee, 2024)

The post-colonial era witnessed the Maldives gaining its independence from the British in 1965. India played a substantial role in supporting the Maldivian independence movement and subsequently signed a Treaty of Friendship with the newly independent nation. This treaty laid the foundation for strategic cooperation between the two countries in areas such as defence, trade, and development assistance.

In 1988, when the then Incumbent Maldivian president faced an attempted coup, the Maldivian government sought India's assistance to restore order. India promptly responded, sending troops and successfully foiling the coup attempt. This incident further solidified the bilateral relationship, with the Maldives recognizing India's steadfast support during times of crisis.

India and the Maldives have fostered robust economic collaboration over the years. Indian companies have made significant investments in the Maldives in sectors such as tourism, infrastructure, and healthcare, contributing to the archipelago's economic development. Likewise, Indian tourists comprise a significant portion of visitors to the Maldives, drawn to its pristine beaches and luxurious resorts.

The cultural ties between India and the Maldives have been nurtured through various initiatives. Indian cultural festivals, music, dance, and art are regularly showcased in the Maldives, enabling the people of both countries to celebrate their shared heritage. In addition, India has been instrumental in providing scholarships and educational opportunities to Maldivian students, enabling them to pursue higher education in Indian institutions.

The historic relationship between India and Maldives has flourished through centuries of shared culture, trade, and strategic cooperation. From ancient maritime connections to modern-day economic collaboration and cultural exchange, these two nations have forged a bond based on mutual respect and common interests. The enduring partnership between India and Maldives continues to evolve, reflecting the multifaceted ties that bind them together.

III. RELEVANCE

The relationship between India and Maldives remains highly relevant in the twenty-first century, particularly in terms of security. The Maldives strategic location in the Indian Ocean makes it crucial for both India's security and its regional influence. From a security standpoint, the two countries collaborate to maintain a stable and secure maritime environment in the Indian Ocean, which is essential for trade, energy resources, and global commerce.



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As archipelagic nations, India and the Maldives share common concerns regarding maritime security, including piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, and drug trafficking. Both countries work together to enhance maritime surveillance, intelligence sharing, and joint patrolling to ensure the safety of their waters and combat these challenges effectively.

India and the Maldives have a history of defence cooperation, which remains vital in the contemporary era. India provides training and support to the Maldivian defence forces through joint military exercises and personnel exchanges. This collaboration strengthens the Maldives' defence capabilities. Both countries face the threat of terrorism and extremism. The Maldives has fallen prey to the radicalization of some of its citizens, leading to concerns about their potential involvement in global terror networks. India and the Maldives collaborate closely in intelligence sharing, capacity building, and counterterrorism operations to prevent the spread of extremism and ensure regional security.

The economic security of the Maldives is intertwined with its relationship with India. India is a significant source of investment, trade, and tourism for the Maldives, contributing to its economic prosperity. A stable and secure region is crucial for sustaining economic growth, and India's commitment to the security of the Maldives plays a crucial role in maintaining this stability. India and Maldives signed a trade agreement in 1981, which provides for export of essential commodities. According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India, the bilateral trade between India and Maldives was valued at US\$215.98 million in 2019-2020 USD and 500 million mark in 2022. India emerged as Maldives' 2nd largest trade partner in 2022. India's exports to Maldives have been growing steadily. In 2019-2020, India's export to the Maldives amounted to approximately US\$208 million and as of 2023 september it is 410.28US\$. India's major exports to Maldives include petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, machinery, cereals, meat, and dairy products. India's imports from Maldives primarily consist of sea products and its derivatives. In 2019-2020, India's imports from Maldives were valued at around US\$8.9 million. During Aug 1-4, 2022 official visit of H.E. President Solih to India, facilitation of duty free tuna exports to India from Maldives was announced. India has also made significant investments in various sectors in the Maldives. India has been one of the top investors in the Maldives. As of 2019, India's cumulative FDI in the Maldives amounted to around US\$1.5 billion. India has invested primarily in sectors like tourism, real estate, infrastructure, and energy. (*India-Maldives Bilateral Relations India and Maldives Share Ethnic, Linguistic, Cultural, Religious and Commercial Links Steeped*, 2023).

Along with the investment ambitions, India has been providing economic and development assistance to the Maldives through various projects and initiatives. These include infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and capacity building. One notable project is the construction of the Greater Male Connectivity Project, which aims to improve the transportation network and connectivity in the Maldives. Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in 1995, Maldives Institute of Technical Education (now called the Maldives Polytechnic) in 1996, Technology Adoption Programme in Education Sector in Maldives in 2011, National College for Police and Law Enforcement (NCPL) in 2022 were constructed with the aid and grant from India as part of developmental projects. Bilateral projects under Cash Grant of INR 50 crore (MVR 106.8 million) in 2019, Large Grant Projects of 2019, High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) under grant in 2019-2023 were the major projects between India and Maldives. Infrastructure & Connectivity Projects under Exim Bank Line of Credit of US\$ 800 million for which Credit Line Agreement between Ministry of Finance, GoM and EXIM Bank of India was signed in March 2019. (*India-Maldives Bilateral Relations India and Maldives Share Ethnic, Linguistic, Cultural, Religious and Commercial Links Steeped*, 2023)

India has been a traditional partner for the Maldives in human resource development across sectors for decades. Maldives has been a partner of the ITEC programme for several years. In 2019-20, the in-person ITEC slots were increased to 200. 174 Maldivians benefited from ITEC in-person programmes in 2022-23. India, since 2000, offers ICCR scholarship to the Maldivian students. India is seeking to initiate/strengthen institutional linkages and in the past 5 years, institutional linkages between counterpart organisations on both sides have increased adding heft to capacity building and training initiatives. (*India-Maldives Bilateral Relations India and Maldives Share Ethnic, Linguistic, Cultural, Religious and Commercial Links Steeped*, 2023)

The Maldives is a popular tourist destination for Indian travellers. In 2019, around 166,363 Indian tourists visited the Maldives, making India one of the top source markets for tourism in the Maldives. In 2019, the total tourism revenue of the Maldives was around US\$2.7 billion, with Indian tourists contributing a significant portion to this revenue. In 2023, India with 193,693 tourists arrivals (until 13 Dec 2023) is the 2nd leading source market for Maldives with a 11.1% market share. The Maldives provides employment opportunities for Indian workers, particularly in sectors like tourism, construction, and healthcare.



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The presence of Indian workforce in the Maldives contributes to the economic ties between the two countries. India and Maldives have signed multiple trade agreements to facilitate and promote trade between the two countries. In July 2020, India and Maldives signed a currency swap agreement worth US\$400 million. (*India-Maldives Bilateral Relations India and Maldives Share Ethnic, Linguistic, Cultural, Religious and Commercial Links Steeped*, 2023) This agreement aims to support the Maldives' financial stability and bilateral trade. These agreements aim to reduce trade barriers, enhance market access, and strengthen economic ties.

IV. MALDIVIAN POLITICS

India-Maldives relationship holds immense relevance in the twenty-first century, especially in terms of security. Their collaboration on maritime security, defence cooperation, counterterrorism, and economic security is needed to ensure the stability and well-being of both the nations and the wider region. Recognizing the shared security interests, India and the Maldives need to continue to strengthen their relationship to address evolving security challenges in the contemporary era. Since the independence of Maldives, India acted as a concerned neighbour and helped in the nation building process of Maldives. Bilateral engagements till 2000 were stable and minimal. The politics of Maldives started intervening in India-Maldives relations in a vicissitudes. In the Maldives, a small island nation located in the Indian Ocean, political parties play a crucial role in shaping the country's democratic landscape. Since the transition to multi-party democracy in 2008, the Maldives has witnessed the emergence of various political parties, each with distinct ideologies and agendas. The Maldivian Democratic Party, founded in 2003, is the largest and most influential political party in the Maldives. It advocates for democracy, human rights, social justice, and sustainable development. The MDP has historically attracted a diverse range of supporters, including young voters and those seeking political reform. The Progressive Party of Maldives, established in 2011, is another prominent political party in the country. It leans towards conservative and nationalist ideologies. PPM has attracted support from various sectors, including business elites and those advocating for stability and traditional values. The Jumhooree Party is a relatively new party in the Maldivian political landscape, founded in 2012. It focuses on economic policies, promoting free-market principles and liberalization. JP has also positioned itself as a party advocating for political reform and greater transparency.

All those political parties and their political goals play a critical phenomena with respect to the relationship with India and China. (Kumar, 2016) In this way, the politics and political parties of Maldives tightly indulged with the foreign policy of India towards Maldives.

In 2004, India provided extensive humanitarian assistance to the Maldives in the aftermath of the tsunami. The Maldives political unrest of 2008 saw the rise of Mohamed Nasheed as President. India supported the democratic transition and provided assistance during this period. India and the Maldives signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2009, cementing ties in the defence sector and facilitating military collaboration. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the Maldives in 2011, reaffirming India's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. Both the nations maintained robust political, economic and cultural ties in this period. In 2012, Mohamed Nasheed, a pro-India leader, who had been the President of the Maldives since 2008, was ousted from power. This event strained the relationship, as India perceived it to be a setback for democracy in the region. The Maldives witnessed a change in government again in 2013, with the election of Abdulla Yameen as President. India offered support and congratulated the new leadership. Abdulla Yameen visited India in 2014, focusing on strengthening economic and defence ties, as well as enhancing cultural and educational exchanges. 2013 onwards the Maldives, under President Abdulla Yameen, significantly increased its engagement with China. ("India-Maldives Relations: Its Flux Through Decades," 2022, 497-503) This included several infrastructure projects, FTA and increased economic ties. India expressed concerns about China's expanding presence and influence in the Indian Ocean, raising questions about the implications for regional security, because Maldives is at the heart of the Indian Ocean and which act as an icon in the evolving Indo-Pacific world order. Maldives is surrounded by important sea lines of communication, and strategically located between India and Diego Garcia—making it a preferred destination for operating a military base and maritime surveillance for India. The Maldives government, under President Yameen, abruptly cancelled agreements with Indian infrastructure firms for various projects, including the construction of an airport during 2015. (Kumar & S Y Surendra, 2016) This move was seen as a setback for India's diplomatic efforts and raised concerns about the trajectory of the bilateral relationship. In February 2018, President Yameen declared a state of emergency in the Maldives, following a political crisis.



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India expressed its concerns regarding the suspension of civil liberties and urged the Maldivian government to abide by the rule of law. The state of emergency strained the bilateral relationship between India and Maldives. (Sajjanhar, 2018)

Later Maldives faced a political crisis during 2018, leading to a state of emergency being declared by president Yameen. India expressed concerns and called for the restoration of democracy and stability. Then the Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected as the new President of the Maldives in 2018, signalling a potential shift in the country's foreign policy towards India. He always uphold the "India first policy" and maintained a reputed relationship with India. President Solih's victory was seen as a positive development for the India-Maldives relationship, as he emphasised the need to deepen ties with regional partners, including India. President Solih's government has sought to rebuild and strengthen ties with India since taking office. This has included high-level visits, cooperation in defence and security, and mutual support on international platforms. In 2019 Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Maldives and inaugurated various infrastructure projects, consolidating India's investment in the Maldives' development. During the pandemic in 2020 India provided medical assistance, including vaccines and supplies, to the Maldives to aid in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The 11th Joint Defense Cooperation Committee meeting between India and the Maldives was held in 2022, reaffirming mutual defence commitments and strategic cooperation. (Pant & Shivamurthy, 2023)

On September 30th, 2023 the Progressive Alliance party candidate Mohamed Muizzu defeated the incumbent President Ibrahim Solih. There is a view that Muizzu's foreign policy will be similar to that of the Abdulla Yameen administration during 2013-18 when the country relied more on China and Saudi Arabia, severed ties with the Commonwealth and deemphasized Maldives' relations with India and Western countries. (Sultana, 2023) It's important to note that the India-Maldives relationship is complex and influenced by multiple factors. These events and incidents have played a significant role in shaping the dynamics between the two countries in recent years.

The relationship between the Maldives and China has gained significant attention in recent years, raising concerns for India regarding its own security interests in the Indian Ocean region.

China has actively sought closer ties with the Maldives, primarily through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other economic investments.

Chinese investments in infrastructure projects, including ports, airports, and resorts, have increased China's presence in the Maldives, raising questions about Beijing's intentions and potential security implications. (Shukla, 2023)

The Maldives strategic location allows it to control crucial sea routes in the Indian Ocean, making it a significant maritime node. With its proximity to major shipping lanes, a Chinese presence in the Maldives could potentially enable Beijing to exert control over these vital sea routes, which raises concerns for India's security and freedom of navigation. The Maldives proximity to India's southern maritime borders makes it particularly significant. China's increasing presence through infrastructure projects and investments in the Maldives could provide Beijing with a foothold to project power and challenge India's regional influence.

India sees the Maldives as part of its strategic backyard and has traditionally enjoyed close ties with the island nation. China's engagement in the Maldives raises concerns for India's security interests, including the protection of its trade routes, maintaining regional stability, and countering any potential Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean.

The political and financial crises faced by the Maldives in recent years have raised concerns about the feasibility of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects. There are fears that the Maldives' growing debt to China could result in Beijing exerting undue influence over the country's domestic and foreign policies, potentially compromising India's security interests in the region.

The Maldives' most recent instance of inflaming tensions in the region is the outrage expressed by a few of its ministers in response to the Indian prime minister's recent visit to Lakshadweep, that was pretended against Maldivian tourism by some local news channels of Maldives. India and the Maldives' diplomatic ties have become more difficult as a result of the unjustified responses by some of Maldivian ministers. Social media of India and Maldives went through an online war related to the tourism of both the nations. (Banks et al., 2024) "India Out" campaigns started again in response to the issue. Soon China intervened into the issue and promised full support to the Maldives, as part of this online war, the Maizzu government issued a notice to the government of India to withdraw its military personnel from the country by March 15, 2024. There are 88 Indian Military persons in the Maldives according to the government of India. (*Muizzu Asks India to Withdraw Troops by March 15: Why Are Indian Soldiers in Maldives?* 2024). All those events increased the tensions between India and Maldives. In this scenario a theoretical analysis of India Maldives is the need of the day to predict the future of India's relation with Maldives.



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As India works towards ensuring its own security and regional stability, it will closely monitor the evolving dynamics between the Maldives and China, seeking to maintain its own influence in the region and protect its strategic interests.

V. THEORETICAL DESCRIPTION

Realism propounds a conflict-ridden international system, wherein each state is left to fend for itself. It can be described as a combination of Plato's 'State is the man writ large' and the Hobbesian view of the state of nature, where man's life is 'Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. Therefore, the interaction between these actors who are left to fend for themselves would be of a hostile nature, because there is no way for a state to increase its power without menacing, or even attacking, another state. (R. Jervis, 1978) This competition for power, which is aimed at improving security, is what characterises the international system.

There is no supranational authority like a world government that can punish those states who do not obey rules, and states may have more incentive to disobey them. Realism, however, also presumes that states are rational actors, and they engage in utility maximising behaviour. So even when they act in contravention to the existing norms, they would do so only if the benefits outweigh the costs. (Mearsheimer, 2001)

Realism can help explain how the Maldives is 'Balancing' with China to resist India's hegemonic aspirations, while also predicting how India should do 'Balancing' against China. In the sense how Dyadic Balance of Power theory focuses on the relationship between states and seeks to explain the 'balancing' behaviour that counteracts a growing threat.

The competition between states can be beneficial in certain ways, particularly with regard to the balance of power between two bigger countries that may help a smaller country retain its sovereignty. 'This is primarily because an alignment that preserves most of a state's freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination under a potential hegemon. Because intentions can change and perceptions are unreliable, it is safer to balance against potential threats than to hope that strong states will remain benevolent.' (S. Waltz, 1985)

In the case of the Maldives, its aligning with the Chinese can be seen as an attempt to shift the offence-defence balance against India, given how proximity and resources could possibly make a state perceive threat from a bigger power and would prompt it to join a balancing alliance (S. Waltz, 1985), and therefore a possible Chinese intervention can reduce this advantage India has against the Maldives, by making costs outweigh the benefits.

Realpolitik has a Chinese variant too. Carl Von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini, the great military theorists of the west, treat strategy as a different field. As Evidenced by the Clausewitzian dictum 'War is the continuation of politics by other means' (Clausewitz, 1832). For the Chinese, both of these are one and the same.

Western strategic thought of the Clausewitzian school places its emphasis on a total destruction of the enemy forces. "If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes, and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war" (Clausewitz, 1832)

Sun Tzu, the legendary general who authored the 'Art of War', idealises a scenario where wars do not have to be fought. For achieving this goal, A major technique is employed. This technique is called 'Wei Qi,' which is, Strategic Encirclement.

Wei Qi is originally a game, wherein two competitors have to play with stones in a board, each trying to encircle the other, and rupture the opponent's stone. Multiple contests take place simultaneously, and success is dependent on relative advantage. This is unlike chess, wherein the game is about a decisive action through which the opponent's King is prevented from moving without being destroyed.

This strategic flexibility, emphasis on relative advantage over total victory, placing primacy on a protracted campaign as opposed to a decisive action, are natural corollaries of a line of thinking that merges seemingly unrelated, yet interconnected elements. The political and psychological advantages that need to be accrued, in order to make victory a foregone conclusion, and thus, disincentivizing the opponent's offensive intention, is at the core of Chinese realpolitik.



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There is also the Quality of 'Shi' that is discussed at length in Chinese strategic thought. Shi refers to a developmental tendency in a situation. It refers to a general trend, as well as the continuously changing configuration of forces. Through timing and preparation, the exploitation of psychological weaknesses of the enemy, resistance of the opponent has to be weakened, before striking at the point where the opponent can offer least resistance. Observation, Subsequent adaptation and a flexibility to harmonise with change are key elements of this philosophy. (H. Kissinger, 2011)

Therefore, it can be observed that the Chinese making diplomatic inroads, into India's neighbouring states is a conscious strategic activity, that aims at a domination that is not purely of a military nature, but strategically important in terms of perception, relative gains and a harmonisation with the ever changing whole, the entire nation state system.

It is in this backdrop that the hypothesis of 'String of pearls' needs to be studied. China's massive economic transformation, post its moving away from traditional Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology and introduction of socialist market economy, has turned it into a huge consumer of petroleum and natural gas. The pipelines from Russia and Central Asia are not sufficient to meet China's energy needs. China and the Maldives signing a Free Trade Agreement in 2018, Maldives's formal membership in the Belt and Roads Initiative (BRI), Infrastructure projects including the bridge from male to hulhumale, islands, et cetera are examples for how China is attempting to convert Maldives into another 'Pearl' in the string. This is also an example of Debt trap diplomacy, because, as of 2018, Maldives already had a debt of 1.5 billion USD. (M. Kugelman, 2021)

The classic Chinese philosophy can be seen at work here, since there is no evident arms transfer or defence treaty, yet the psychological perception of China becoming powerful is planted in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and also the cultivation of a number of potential allies in the face of hostilities against India. This is also a counter balance of threat, to the threat that China faces in terms of a blockade hampering its energy supplies.

Along with the conventional security threat from the Chinese intervention, India also has to take note of another growing menace, that of Islamic terrorism.

The radicalisation of the population, particularly the youth, in Maldives is a pressing issue for India. The assassination attempt that was made against President Abdulla Yameen on 28 September 2015, was an incident that highlighted the gravity of this crisis. In 2015, An interrogation report of the Sri Lankan Mohammed Hussain Mohammed Sulaiman was shared by Malaysia.

It pertains to the plot by the Leashkar e Toeba and Al Qaeda to attack the U.S. consulate in Chennai and Israeli consulate in Bengaluru. The plot involved two Maldivian suicide bombers. The apprehended terrorist also stated that he was to ferry the two suicide bombers from the Maldives to the South Indian coast to carry out the terrorist attacks.

At the least, about twelve Maldivians have died fighting in Syria. In 2014, nearly 200 individuals took out a march in support of the ISIS and called for the implementation of the sharia law and an end to secular rule in the Maldives. About 20 individuals who left Kerala to join the ISIS in 2014 are also Maldivian citizens.

Criminal gangs like Kuda Henveiru are more prone to recruitment by foreign jihadist organisations. Criminal gangs in the Maldives often resort to the murder of clerics, journalists and political figures. Adhaalath Party (AP), as well as extremist NGOs, such as Jamiyyatul Salaf (JS), DhiSalafiyah and the Islamic Foundation of Maldives are the most prominent preachers of Salafi ideology on the island. (I. Dharmawardhane, 2015)

Growing Islamic radicalism on the island, is an ideology that gives birth to non-state actors which are a security threat. For realism to understand this threat, it has to go beyond the structural homogeneity that it presumes, which in fact is a form of socialisation which rewards imitation and punishes deviation. This limitation of expecting states to be 'same' and engage in competition to protect self-interest, is insufficient in the case of analysing non-state actors.

Realism as a theory, is mostly concerned with relations between states. This may impose on it a certain limitation with regard to analysing non-state actors, which play an important role in India's relationship with the Maldives. Realism tends to look at the system as one that is composed of like units, whereas in the present era, a serious analysis of International relations is not possible without taking certain Non-conventional security threats into consideration. Particularly, Islamic Terrorism.

Realism essentially premises itself on the assumption that interactions between states are the most important, but that is merely under conditions that are deemed to be 'Normal'. The theory has to accommodate deviations also, in order to understand how radicalism, perpetrated by non-state actors, plays out. Lakatos's 'Monster adjustment' is a method via which realism can be instilled with a capacity to analyse new situations. turning a counterexample, in the light of some new theory, into an example. (Lakatos, 1976)

Lakatos was inspired by the Hegelian dialectics. Thesis and Antithesis merge to form a synthesis, which goes on to become another thesis, and the process repeats.

The application of Hegelian dialectics to mathematics revealed a need to depart from the deductive nature of theorems in the present era. In Lakatos's 'heuristic presentation, on the other hand, as proposed by Hegel, A history of the theory is studied in order to understand the continuous evolution of that theory, and it is presented along with a problem. A naïve answer (Primitive conjecture) to the problem is offered, which is subjected to criticism. It is thus a combination of how the theory applies generally to independent units in a system, and how the specific (Independent units) affect the general principle, that is, a method that simultaneously involves the Deductive and Inductive paradigms.(B.Larvor,1999)

Monster adjustment is therefore, a technique with which the deductive nature of a theory can be transformed with the help of a counterexample. 'Monster-barring' on the other hand, according to Lakatos, refers to fending off putative counterexamples, if they do not fit into the rigid structure of the theory. Though realism has a 'Monster-barring' tendency within, it cannot be allowed because it disallows a chance to revolutionise the theoretical framework.(W.J Brenner,2006)

Thus, Realism has to accept criticism in order to acquire a capacity to re-structure its fundamental assumptions, and modify itself to consider non-state actors also as independent units, operating in an anarchical situation, and engaging in competition with other independent actors, State and Non-state.

VI. CONCLUSION

The conflict regarding the model of rationality that a state would follow, continues to be a debate between structuralists and culturalists. Whereas the former would emphasise on 'objective' conditions, the latter would look at national styles of strategy to determine the course of action that a state would ideally resort to.

Three elements that form the core of strategic culture are 1) The role of war in human affairs, 2) The nature of the adversary and the threat it poses, 3) The efficacy of the use of force. (Johnston;1995)

The Chinese strategic thought emphasises more on the use of deception, subterfuge and misinformation, the building up of strength over a long period of time, thus outmanoeuvring the opponent. The Confucian dictum "Ultimate excellence lies Not in winning Every battle But in defeating the enemy Without ever fighting. The highest form of warfare Is to attack [the enemy's] Strategy itself; The next, To attack [his] Alliances. The next, To attack Armies; The lowest form of war is To attack Cities. Siege warfare Is a last resort . . .

The Skillful Strategist Defeats the enemy Without doing battle, Captures the city Without laying siege, Overthrows the enemy state Without protracted war." (H.J Allen;1894) (H.Kissinger;2011)

Thus, we can see that the chances of open hostility, and China following a path of armed aggression against India is largely absent. In the case of the Maldives, India has to be prepared for fighting a battle without arms, one that is potent politically, in a diplomatic manner.

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