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New Chinese submarine base in Indonesia



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14 May 2005: Deepening its "strings of pearls" strategy of acquiring bases and cultivating ties from the Middle East to Southern China, China is now planning a submarine facility on one of the Indonesian islands close to the Malacca Straits, and Australia has protested this.

Diplomatic sources said that China ostensibly wants to protect the sealanes of communication in the Indian Ocean, especially the transit of oil tankers from the Persian Gulf, but it is also seen as a measure to preempt a US blockade of China's energy sources in the event of a war with Taiwan.

In January, The Washington Times published an internal report for US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld in which the "strings of pearl" strategy was posited, and the key under-construction Chinese bases that were identified were Gwadar in Pakistan, and facilities in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and the South China Sea generally, but Indonesia is a new addition.

The Pentagon report said, "China is building strategic relationships along the sealanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in ways that suggest defensive and offensive positioning to protect China's energy interests, but also to serve broad security objectives."

The report added that "China...is looking not only to build a blue-water navy to control the sealanes, but also to develop undersea mines and missile capabilities to deter the potential disruption of its energy supplies from

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potential threats, including the US Navy, especially in the case of a conflict with Taiwan.”

“The Iraq War, in particular,” said the report, “revived concerns over the impact of a disturbance in Middle East supplies or a US naval blockade,” adding that Chinese military leaders wanted an ocean-going navy and “undersea retaliatory capability to protect the sealanes.”

As a direct consequence of such thinking, China will mass the Indian Ocean with attack submarines, and sources do not rule out deployment of nuclear submarines as well.

Because of anomalies in GPS data immediately available to undersea submarines, diplomatic sources warned that there would be a growing number of Chinese territorial violations in respect of India, and Australia has already objected to the upcoming Chinese facility in Indonesia.

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