

dependence on imported oil increases in the years to come. For the moment, however, infrastructural and naval force developments indicate that it is the eastern approaches to the Indian Ocean which most concern New Delhi. India is wary of China's growing influence in Southeast Asia and has noted Beijing's willingness to use naval force against Vietnam to secure its interests in the disputed Spratly islands.³⁹ In this sense, Indian naval developments, including the establishment of forward defences in the Andaman islands, are expressly geared towards securing the key choke point in the east -- the Strait of Malacca.

The Impact of Chinese Naval Developments on Indian Naval Strategy

India is clearly the dominant power in South Asia but China has the potential to dominate Southeast Asia in a mirror-image of its historical hegemony over Indochina. Because of geography, Indian and Chinese interests overlap in the countries of Southeast Asia but their rivalry is most likely to focus on their maritime presence in the region. Whereas China has begun to develop a modern blue-water navy, which will enable it to increase its power projection capability in coming years, even Indian analysts recognize that Beijing is unlikely to develop a capability to engage in gunboat diplomacy as far away as the Indian Ocean for a long time to come. Nevertheless, Chinese naval developments have long concerned New Delhi, particularly when viewed in terms of Beijing's arms supply relationships with Bangladesh and Pakistan. New Delhi's phobia about being surrounded by its enemies is reinforced by the fact that most of Bangladesh's military equipment, including naval vessels, comes from China and Chinese-Pakistani military ties are strong. Most recently, rumours abound in Pakistan -- and no doubt India -- that Beijing will soon offer a nuclear-powered submarine to Islamabad.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Spratly islands lie in the South China Sea midway between Vietnam, Borneo and the Philippines. The islands are the subject of claims by China, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines and Malaysia and were the scene of naval clashes between Vietnam and China in 1988.

⁴⁰ Private conversations with Pakistani defence analysts and Western defence attaches during author's research trips to Pakistan. See also: *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, November 1990.