

China's Belt and Road Initiative towards Central Asian States: Analysis from an Indian Perspective

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Abstract: This article has captured evolving Indian narratives concerning One Belt One Road (OBOR) or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the context of changing scope of the BRI, perceptions are also evolving. The article has covered wider perceptions, which would be the centerpiece of China's foreign policy and internal economic plan is the One Belt One Road program. It seeks to revitalize the Silk Roads, historic trade routes that will open up markets both inside and outside of the area. In this Scenario, India has shown mistrust towards the initiative's potential strategic consequences thus far. India stands to gain significantly in terms of commerce if it let's go of its inhibitions and actively participates in its implementation. However, the Cooperation has advanced significantly since then, especially in the areas of energy, communication, and defense. India's unfulfilled commercial interests in the area and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects have combined to push India to become more aggressive and explore new economic opportunities in future. In addition to a new pattern of comprehensive economic policy adopted by China in 21st century for being established with "One body two Wings" of the OBOR plan. After all China wants to use this project to modernize and develop its impoverished and landlocked southern and western provinces, provide them to access the markets from West Asia to South East Asia, and shape China's regional periphery via the exercise of economic, cultural, and political influence. In this Scenario India also trying connecting through Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, China's North-South link to South-East Asia has been fostering to East-West connectivity. The BCIM Economic Corridor, which connects Yunnan to the north-eastern region of India, is a source of concern for India's security and economic development in future.

Key Words: China, BCIM Project, OBOR, East Asia, CPEC.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the era of Neo-liberal Politics China's One Belt One Road Initiative program, known as the "Silk Road Strategy", aims to link the economies of Europe and Asia with the Chinese economy through the Eurasian corridor. The project's stated goal is to improve connection and trade with the Chinese periphery. The Silk Road wistfully evokes the tightly intertwined economies of medieval Asia and Europe under the Han Dynasty in China. In order to connect South Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, and Europe via an integrated land corridor, the project is intended to create transportation infrastructure and communication networks involving roads, railroads, and fiber optic highways. Liberal theorists contend that Beijing is driving the OBOR plan in an effort to establish a win-win situation where in China and India gain from improved trade capacities, more robust financial institutions, and global economic corridors.

This essay has a liberal viewpoint while discussing India's participation in OBOR. China is and will undoubtedly continue to be the biggest investor in Central Asia through the BRI. It is the only nation capable of attracting significant investment to the area, well in excess of what Russia and the West can provide. The effectiveness of this connectedness is, however, dependent on a number of factors. In reality, corruption and inefficient administration waste a portion of the funds pledged, and projects are evaluated mostly based on their financial performance rather than higher sustainability requirements. Furthermore and this is a crucial point it appears that Chinese ventures are struggling to generate the type of greater economic effect that would result in the creation of more employment locally and the transfer of expertise. But regardless of the results, China's increasing influence in Central Asia is a long-term phenomenon that marks a turning point in the region's post-Soviet history and economic growth. Embedded conditionality is another kind

of conditionality that is very pertinent to Central Asia. Often referred to as “tied aid”, this type of funding originates from China and is associated with plans that benefit Chinese companies. For infrastructure and technical support projects, concessional loans require that at least half of the supplies, machinery, technology, and services acquired under the contract originate in China.

However, India has viewed this effort with both respect and scepticism. India is concerned that if it joins the OBOR project, it will violate international norms and standards, undermine its claims to sovereignty over disputed border territories, and give China significant geopolitical and economic influence over the decisions made by India's neighbours. This is because the CPEC¹ passes through POK. Given that China would inevitably expand its influence along India's as a border whether or not India joins it, why not do so and modify the plans to benefit India? Should the Belt and Road Initiative be constructed, China would emerge as a top choice for nations looking to invest and engage in commerce, so taking trade away from India. As a result, India's relations with its neighbours would worsen and it will become less of a prominent power in negotiations with India and some other Countries of South East Asia.

2. China's OBOR initiative towards Central Asia

At Nazarbayev University in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled China's Belt and Road (BRI) Initiative. The BRI Initiative's conundrum and Central Asia's effects thorough and detailed examination of China's New Silk Road initiative, including its objectives, obstacles, and reception throughout Central Asian states. The China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia by combining on methodological and theoretical techniques from a variety of disciplines, including economics and sociology, and functioning at both micro and macro levels. The BRI Initiative, formerly known as “**One Belt, One Road**” (OBOR)ⁱ, is a collection of individual projects with the overall goal of establishing new maritime and continental infrastructure to connect China with the rest of the world. In 2016, it was one of the most hotly contested issues in China and Central Asia. Instead, it represents a new facet of China's soft power, its “Peaceful” and “Multilateral” ascent, and met to discourse on the Silk Road strategy.

Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is primarily a reaction to China's internal economic problems, delaying the critical time when Chinese production will need to shift from a low-cost model “**Made in China**” to a value-added production model, despite the rhetoric about its role as a giving and investing nation. Last but not least, China's progressive “Securitization” of the continent in response to the US's increased emphasis on the Asia-Pacific area and the resurgence of tensions in the South China Sea constitutes a crucial security component of the Belt and Road Initiative. Repackaging and consolidating the several current or finished infrastructure projects in Central Asia supported by China under the new megaproject is a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At least when it comes to the quantity of contracts signed, a new dynamic has emerged and collaboration has reached unprecedented heightsⁱⁱ. Nevertheless, it's unclear which will catch on since a number have already been postponed.

Furthermore, not all of the Central Asian governments are as committed as others: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan are the most involved. Although Uzbekistan remains mostly in the background, things might change if Shavkat Mirziyoyev², the country's new president, adopts more aggressive measures to encourage Chinese investment. China already controls the lion's share of Turkmenistan's gas trade, but this is a niche market with little connection to BRI infrastructure initiatives. Chinese help is generally promoted as being unconditioned politically, unlike aid from international financial organizations and the Westⁱⁱⁱ. Beijing, however, demands that recipient nations and Central Asian states in particular ascribed to the “**One China Policy**”, which includes refusing to listen to Chinese investors. Furthermore, there are a number of negative features to Chinese help. Despite, Beijing's loud proclamations of multilateralism, the BRI financial mechanisms are not well integrated with those of other multilateral financial organizations. This is a lack of collaboration with other contributors in this reason^{iv}.

3. OBOR Initiative Perspectives on third World :

From the third world perspective some nations have made an effort to weigh the possible advantages of the BRI against their worries about China's intentions. In light of this, India has made an effort to persuade other nations that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a plot by China to control strategic chokepoints in the region by imposing unmanageable

¹ **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor** is a framework of regional connectivity. CPEC will not only benefit China and Pakistan but will have positive impact on Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian Republics. This project was launched on April 20, 2015, when Chinese Pres. Xi Jinping and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed 51 agreements.

² **Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev** is an Uzbek politician who has served as President of Uzbekistan and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan Since 14 December 2016. He is the 2nd President of Uzbekistan form Liberal Democratic Party.

debt burdens on its neighbors along the Indian Ocean. This strategy has been dubbed a “**String of Pearls**”³ by some analysts. Particularly, China’s long standing support of Pakistan, a longtime adversary, has long unnerved New Delhi. In the meantime, India has given its neighbors, particularly Afghanistan, with \$3 billion in economic support for infrastructural projects. Despite being a founding member of China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)⁴, trade policy has subsequently caused differences between Indian and Chinese authorities.

As a result, the US sees India as a counterbalance to China’s hegemony over the area and has worked to strengthen its strategic ties with it, mostly targeted on future Indo-Pacific Economic Framework on the regional forum⁵. Though the European Union is one of the main investors in the economy of Central Asia, that balance is gradually shifting in China’s favour. To strengthen relations with the countries in the region, the EU adopted a new strategy on Central Asia: The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership, which ‘focuses on promoting resilience, prosperity, and regional cooperation in the region.

In the Case of Tokyo approach is comparable to that of New Delhi in that it strikes a balance between long-standing misgivings about China’s objectives and its interest in the development of regional infrastructure. Japan has provided public and private funding for infrastructure projects in Asia totaling more than \$300 billion. Japan has also committed to developing the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)⁵, a proposal to connect and expand ports from Myanmar to East Africa, together with India. However, since the initiative's announcement in 2017, not much has changed. In this Perspective Europe also the part of OBOR Initiative of China With significant Chinese infrastructure investment, more than two thirds of EU members have formally joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Projects like the reconstructed Piraeus port in Greece and the Budapest-Belgrade railway in Hungary are the result of this initiative. Additionally, Beijing has provided funding for other non-EU projects across the continent. Greece and Hungary have impeded attempts by the EU as a whole to censure China, and these investments have made it harder for the EU to craft a united approach to China⁶.

Some European nations have been harsher. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron cautioned that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would turn partner nations into “vassal states”. The EU unveiled Global Gateway in December 2021, a \$300 billion infrastructure investment initiative that is specifically designed to compete with BRI. Critics claim that Global Gateway is insignificant in comparison to BRI. Others are concerned that China is gaining access to the centre of the EU single market by using BRI financing to influence Balkan nations like Serbia that aspire to join the EU⁷.

4. One belt One Road Initiative on Indian Perspective :

The Indian action that has been taken thus far to oppose the BRI is the primary justification for India's cooperation with the OBOR plan. In an attempt to confront China, India has been sluggish to recognize the need for and execute a swift strategy for rich maritime heritage on regional connectivity towards the ethnic and cultural ties with the South East Asian Nation. Beginning with the “**Project Mausam**”⁶, India, the plans to construct a port at Chabahar and a train route connecting the port city to Afghanistan have been proceeding on granting access to the northeast via a port in Sittwe, Myanmar, which was constructed by Indians. After that, a Japanese effort that India joined to oppose China still has to meet its goals, as does the cooperation of quality infrastructure project and the last road link into Mizoram. India needs top-notch, contemporary ports that can handle the biggest ships in order to draw in foreign shipping companies and promote “**Make in India**” project of India towards from South East Asia to Horn of Africa.

India is already on board with BCIM⁷ (China suggested integrating the corridor as part of its vision for the BRI). The route that connects Kolkata and Kunming, which passes through Bangladesh and Myanmar, forms the core of

³ The **String of Pearls** is a strategy deployed by China, by building a network of commercial and military bases and ports in many countries. This strategy has been deployed by China to protect its trade interests, as a major chunk of its trade passes through the Indian Ocean and various choke points like Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca and Lombok Strait.

⁴ The **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** is a multilateral development bank that aims to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia. It is headquartered in Beijing, China. AIIB started operations in **2016** under with **57** founding members. At present, there are 105 members of AIIB.

⁵ The **Asia-Africa Growth Corridor or (AAGC)** is a product of India and Japan’s co-envision. This plan was envisioned during the **52nd** Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank (AfDB) summit in **Gandhinagar**, between **22 May to 26 May 2017**.

⁶ The **Project Mausam** seeks to document and celebrate the common economic ties and cultural values of countries in the Indian Ocean world, beyond contemporary ethnic and national boundaries, to strengthen the connections between countries in the Indian Ocean. This project initiative by ministry of culture and tourism in April, 2014.

⁷ The **Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM)** was a proposed corridor connecting India and China through Myanmar and Bangladesh as a corridor. In 2015, China proposed including the corridor as part of its vision for the Belt and Road Initiative,

BCIM. The primary goal of the corridor is to improve communication and trade between the impoverished, landlocked regions of south-western China and northeastern India. In addition to aiding in the growth of commerce in energy, tourism, and tariff-free trade, the BCIM can play a significant role in these areas. Similar to how CPEC will benefit India, India should participate in the project since it will lower the cost of energy import transportation, improve connectivity between India and Central Asia (giving access to the region's abundant resources and market outside of the Chabahar Port), and, lastly, aid in monitoring and influence.

India's economic growth may be hampered if the country chooses not to participate in CPEC-OBOR, particularly given the current situation when the GDP of the nation is declining. China will create a commerce and architectural framework among the BRI nations that will not be advantageous to India. China would gain strategic ground on India as a result of increased economic cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative. Now the fact is that China will anyhow increase its presence in the Indian borders with India being a part or not, then why not join it and alter the plans as on favourable to India. If BRI is built, China will become a preferred destination for countries seeking investment and trade and the trade gets diverted from India. Thus India's relation with neighbours will deteriorate and India will lose its bargaining power as a major power.

5. Conclusion :

This article not only focusing the OBOR initiative but also to India's connectivity towards South East Asia to Horn of Africa, that any of these Indian initiatives are ineffective; rather, it suggests that the pace of these initiatives should be accelerated to avoid losing neighbors to China's quick infrastructure development and easy credit. India had the new airports in Delhi and Mumbai been constructed twenty-five years earlier, Singapore might not have become the airline hub of the periphery of South Asia as easily. India ought to re-evaluate its decision to join the OBOR in light of this. Although, India's views on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a danger to its sovereignty, the growth of the Gilgit-Baltistan area will lessen security risks within India territory. Additionally, India's participation in the remaining BRI projects increases her influence in the decision-making process to build the CPEC along lines that benefit both Pakistan and India. As a result, India would be able to direct trade in the oceans to a greater extent than it has been able to do with the available infrastructure.

On the future perspectives India's economic growth may be hampered if the country chooses not to participate in CPEC-OBOR, particularly given the current situation when the GDP of the nation is declining. China will create a commerce and architectural framework among the BRI nations that will not be advantageous to India. China would gain strategic ground on India as a result of increased economic cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative.

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