

# Framing the Conflict of Corridors between China and South Asia

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## Abstract

The Chinese geo-economic corridors under the country's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative touching the remotest corners of Asia has caused a conflict of interest between the China and India. India has been concerned because the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a part of OBOR, undermines India's sovereignty claims in the part of Kashmir under control of Pakistan, besides fearing encirclement due to growing Chinese influence in Pakistan, Myanmar and Nepal. These factors aggravate the mutual distrust caused by festering border dispute that led to the 1962 war. This paper uses the framing analysis method to trace the elements of conflict arising out of the Chinese corridors. The findings suggest that these developments have provoked negative portrayal of Sino-Indian relationship, has intensified the perceived threat that Chinese funding in Pakistan is meant for disturbing the power dynamics in South Asia and such change in dynamics has created scope for the meaningful existence of strategic relationship of these countries with US and Japan. (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8165-1336>)

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Security dynamics of the South Asian region has always been a matter of interest for journalists and researchers. But, the framing of security issues sometimes appears as the barrier to the corridors of development between South Asia and the other Asian regions. This issue therefore requires a deeper investigation from the framing perspective, so that there is clarity on the patterns of reporting the issues of connectivity and the conflicting interests of the countries of the region. The world's two most populous countries, China and India are part of this region and have always remained the centre of dispute concerning their border issues (Ramchandran, 2015). Though both the countries have agreed at policy level that the Asian region must be well connected, a little effort has been made by the media of these two countries to traverse beyond borders and look beyond the conflicting issues.

The three economic corridors between China and South Asian Countries are full of possibilities for a new pathway of communication and have the potential of establishing a new communication order in Asia. The diplomatic relations between these countries will get routed through these corridors in coming future when it is fully operational (Shoiab, 2009). The sharing of resources between these countries is going to prove a model of prosperity because the corridors are meant for exchanging the surplus- either natural or manmade. The Belt and Roads Initiative (BRI) or the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Project of China was intended to connect China with the South and South-East Asia and as part of this initiative three major corridors were finalized. China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor (CNIEC) is one such corridor which is not much talked about in Indian media because Indian government, being the most strategic nation in South Asia, has not yet assessed the pros and cons of this corridor. So is the case with the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC).

China has also planned to sign a deal with Myanmar for Multi-billion China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). But, the most talked corridor in Indian and Pakistani media is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Indian Media has reported the repercussions of CPEC for India and much of debate has centered on the conspiracy behind CPEC. The CPEC passes through Pak Occupied Kashmir, and hence according to Indian government, it is a breach of Indian sovereignty. This study analyzes the rhetoric on all the three corridors and concludes how the economic corridors have been framed in media reports in India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. The findings recommend that while the Indian media and defense analyst see the CPEC as threat and the activities of China in Indian Ocean as "Sting of Pearls", the Pakistani media blames Indian government for conspiring to encircle Pakistan with funding the railway projects between Iran and Afghanistan. No doubt the aim

behind these corridors is to strengthen China's position in global economy, but the implications of such corridors for the countries en-route can't be overlooked (Soti, 2015).

The media needs to play a valuable role in negotiating the implications at international level with empirical researches and thematic framing of the pros and cons of these mega projects. These corridors of Chinese economic ambitions will ultimately require diversification of resources brought to China in the form of energy. Then, the monopoly of China on these resources will have serious implications not only for South Asia but also for the Oil and Energy Producing Countries. The South Asian policy makers will have to think of the implications of these corridors in logical terms and to devise strategy for economic integration between developing countries for the balanced development of the region (Edmonds & Fujimura, 2015). Then only, the South Asian media will have valuable content to debate the alternatives and not only the conflict and the threat emerging out of such corridors.

The first finding of the framing analysis of media reports on Chinese corridors of expansion suggest that it has provoked the negative thinking in Indian political environment towards the corridors and has to some extent led to cautious strategic thinking towards China. The second finding is that despite their agreement for economic co-operation, the corridors of connectivity have created a rift of distrust; India's Act East Policy is apprehended as a threat to China's expansion plan, because if India acts in the East and South East Asia with a vision of expanding its economic base, it will definitely not suit the China's plan of expansion beyond South Asia. The third finding of the study is that there is an extraneous variable which affects the political dynamics between China and South Asia and that is the strategic relationship of India and China with US and Japan.

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