



Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia: India as a Factor

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Abstracts

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an ambitious initiative intending to reshape the economic environment along its route in the fields of commerce, investment, and energy supply. Its main point is that China, Eurasia, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean are all connected. China has a lot of strategic potential in South Asia because of its location. Beijing is trying to increase its economic influence in the subcontinent by investing in infrastructure development, especially the building of seaports. With more Chinese trade and investment in the area, Beijing is also increasing its diplomatic power in what has been thought of for a long time as India's sphere of influence. Due to a long history of strategic hostility and unresolved territorial issues, New Delhi doesn't trust Beijing's intentions and is worried about Beijing's growing influence in a region that New Delhi has long thought of as its sphere of influence. In this situation, the BRI could make competition between China and India worse, and the Modi government has studied and taken steps to oppose China's diplomatic moves. It's still not clear if and how Asia's rising powers can reduce their lack of trust and find ways to work together in ways made possible by the BRI, working toward a cooperative, win-win future for Sino-Indian relations and the region as a whole. The goals of this paper are to study the on Belt and Road Initiative in relation with South Asian Countries and also see how China engage with South Asian Countries from the infrastructural investment and manner of giving loan. This paper seek to understand as to how India respond to China's Belt and Road Initiative, it concerns and opportunities.

Introduction

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping during his trips to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, shared his goal to construct a Silk Road Economic Belt as well as a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Both of these initiatives are related to the Silk Road. After that, he sought to remove the "bottleneck" that existed in Asian networking. This concept ultimately resulted in the establishment of the BRI. The plan called for investments of over one trillion dollars to be made in partner nations by the year 2025 and was to be driven by China. More than 60 nations have now signed BRI agreements with China, and infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America are either in the planning stages or are now under development as a result of the programme. To help pay for the construction of infrastructure along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is offering countries massive loans at market interest rates, which must be repaid over a predetermined period of time. The western world has leveled accusations of debt entrapment on China, saying that it extends "predatory loans" that coerce other nations into handing over important assets to China.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) appears to have hit a wall in recent years as yearly Chinese funding to foreign nations has decreased from its all-time high of \$125 billion in 2015 to somewhere between \$50 and 55 billion in 2021 (Sahay, R.K. 2016). The BRI's overarching goal is to link the developed economies of Europe and the United States. The project's two primary pillars are the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the maritime 21st-century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). This is the Economic Belt of the Silk Road.

You know, the 'Belt. From Xian in central China to Venice in Italy, the SREB spans a whopping 14,800 kilometres of various modes of high-speed transportation (road, rail, energy pipelines, fibre optics, industrial parks, and smart cities). The Belt links together US \$ 21 trillion in economic production, or almost 4.4 billion people (Chatzky, A. & McBride, J.2020). Through Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, and finally Europe, the Belt would go. Chongqing-Duisburg trans Eurasia rail route is one of the Belt's most important components that is already fully operational. Transporting products from Chongqing, China to Duisburg, Germany via freight train on this 11,200 kilometre rail route takes only 13 days, 30 days fewer than that via container ship, and costs one-fifth as much. There are now 25 freight trains each week that run between Chongqing and Duisburg. The construction of this railroad has already had far-reaching, beneficial consequences on the economy of the German metropolis, and similar results for the rest of the Eurasia continent are possible in the future (Beeson, M. & Crawford, C. (2022). This refers to the land-based economic corridors. Six economic corridors are outlined in the Vision Document as making up the Belt. One new land connection between Asia and Europe is the New Eurasian Land Bridge. The Economic Corridor Connecting China, Central Asia, and West Asia; and the Economic Corridor Connecting China and the Indochina Peninsula.

To enhance Chinese strategic goals, Beijing has also launched the 21st century Marine Silk Road (MSR), a maritime effort that complements the SREB. President Xi Jinping first discussed the broad strokes of MSR during an address to the Indonesian parliament in October 2013. He emphasised the need of working together economically, as well as bolstering marine economy and collaborating on scientific endeavours (Jin, F.2017). Beginning in China's Fujian province, it would pass through the Red Sea and the Mediterranean to connect Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Jakarta, Indonesia, Kolkata, India, Colombo, Sri Lanka, Nairobi, Kenya, and Athens, Greece, before ending in Venice, Italy. This route would pass through 50 different countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe. The MSR's other branches would go east, toward the South Pacific.

BRI Funding Process

Financing the BRI is a complex maze involving several different government-run financial organisations, most notably the China Development Bank, the China Export-Import Bank, Silk Road Fund, EXIM Bank and the China Agricultural Development Bank. Multilateral development institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS Bank, and the World Bank are all a part of this system. Even if provincial governments and private enterprises in China were to invest, the sum of the known money for the BRI as of this writing would still be woefully inadequate. In addition, the BRI might hasten the internationalisation of the Yuan as a preeminent international currency by establishing China's AIIB and the BRICS Bank as an efficient and financially strong alternative to the West's World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank (Beeson, M. & Crawford, C. 2022).

Understanding BRI Routes

The New Silk Road Economic Belt consists of trade and investment centres to the north of China, as well as going out to Eurasia and incorporating a link to India via Myanmar. Maritime Silk Road (MSR): It starts by passing via the South China Sea and then heads into Indo-China and South-East Asia. After that, it goes across the Indian Ocean and finally reaches Africa and Europe. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a path of infrastructure projects extending for 3,000 kilometres from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous

Region in China's northwest to the Gwadar Port in the Balochistan province in Pakistan's westernmost region (Sahay, R.K.2016). It is a joint venture between Pakistan and China that aims to improve connectivity throughout Pakistan by constructing a system of highways, railways, and pipelines, in addition to a variety of other infrastructure development projects in the areas of energy production, manufacturing, and other areas. It would allow China to reach the Indian Ocean and open the path for China to connect the Middle East and Africa via Gwadar Port. In exchange, China will assist development projects in Pakistan to help Pakistan overcome its energy issues and stabilise its faltering economy.

Pakistan and BRI

During his trip to Pakistan in 2015, President Xi Jinping presented the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the BRI's largest project in a single country (CPEC). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the most significant economic corridor and the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) because of the following reasons:

(a) The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will provide China with access to a deep water port by establishing a connection between Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, an impoverished and unruly region in China, and Gwadar. Even if the line of communication were to be blocked off by the port's foes during a conflict scenario, the port would still be able to maintain its commerce and alternate energy lines coming from the Middle East. In addition, the time it takes for oil to travel from the Persian Gulf to China is reduced from 45 days to little under ten days thanks to Gwadar port.

(b) Gwadar is located at the intersection of three of the most economically significant areas in the world, namely West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia. Therefore, the CPEC has a tremendous amount of potential in terms of its economic impact. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would provide China with a great launch pad from which to develop its western area as well as cement closer links with southern, middle, and western Asia. Multiple projects involving various forms of energy, transportation, and communication infrastructure were envisioned as part of the CPEC.

The construction of the city of Gwadar into a modern port city at a cost of 700 million dollars was at the core of the CPEC project. This development was intended to make Gwadar the "Singapore of Pakistan." Other significant endeavours include the construction of the orange line of the metro, coal power plants to address the issue of energy scarcity, and the Main Line 1 rail project, which will connect Peshawar and Karachi. There have been several reports that demonstrate how the maritime activities at the Gwadar Port are currently essentially nonexistent, with the exception of minor commerce with Afghanistan. Residents of Gwadar have staged demonstrations against the massive security force that has been stationed there to safeguard Chinese nationals who are working in construction projects.

Additionally, Chinese nations have become the target of many lethal strikes carried out by Baloch liberation militants. Chinese companies have invested in and overseen the construction of coal plants in Pakistan in an effort to improve the country's electricity condition. Chinese electricity companies are discontinuing their business activities since their Pakistani counterparts have not settled debts totaling 300 billion Pakistani rupees (about \$1.5 billion) (Carothers, T. & O'Donohue, a.2020).

The success of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will have a significant impact on Pakistan's future. China is not only Pakistan's greatest commercial partner but also the country's largest investor in the country's physical infrastructure. It is possible that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will provide a significant boost to these sectors and bring prosperity to large parts of Pakistan that continue to have abysmal standards of living, particularly in the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is in light of Pakistan's chronic

energy crisis, poor infrastructure, and consequently low industrial output. If and when the CPEC is able to reach its full potential, Pakistan, which has a favourable geographic position in relation to Asia, would most certainly emerge as a significant economic powerhouse for the area, potentially at the expense of India. Many people in Pakistan have the opinion that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is "not a game changer but a fate changer (Chatzky, A. & McBride, J.2020). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) brings forth both opportunities and dangers. Because of Pakistan's tense relationships with India and Afghanistan, its precarious internal security situation, proliferation of and support to rabid Islamic terrorist groups and their backlash, weak political structures, mistrust in civil-military relations, and a crisis-ridden moribund economy, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an extremely high-risk project that may result in enormous wasted expenditures for the Chinese government (Dangwal, A.2022).. However, time is the most reliable of all judges.

Srilanka and BRI

Since the BRI's inception in 2013, various Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka have been brought within its purview. This occurred shortly after the BRI's establishment in 2013. China was given the opportunity to take over the development of the East Container Terminal at the Colombo port in 2021 after India and Japan were disqualified from participating in the transaction. Some of the BRI projects in Sri Lanka, like the Hambantota port, have been called "white elephants," which is an unfortunate description (Singh ,A.G. 2019).

The port had long been considered secondary in comparison to the bustling port of Colombo, until the latter port ran out of space. Other important projects that will be carried out as part of the BRI include, amongst others, the construction of the Colombo International Container Terminal, the Central Expressway, and the Hambantota International Airport.

BRI and Afghanistan

Despite the fact that Afghanistan signed an MoU with China in 2016, the country has not been fully integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The sum of one hundred million dollars that China had pledged to invest in Afghanistan is very tiny when compared to the sums that it has paid out in various other South Asian countries. The initiatives have not yet come to fruition, and the degree of uncertainty has increased since the Taliban took control of the country a year ago.

Maldives and BRI

The Maldives, which are situated in the centre of the Indian Ocean and are comprised of two hundred islands, are a location of strategic relevance for both India and China. The China-Maldives Friendship Bridge is a four-lane bridge that is two kilometres long and costs two hundred and fifty million dollars. This bridge is one of the most notable BRI projects being carried out in the Maldives. The majority of China's investment in the Maldives took place during the presidency of Abdullah Yameen, who was generally regarded as being favourable toward China.

Bangladesh and BRI

After Pakistan, Bangladesh, which joined the BRI in 2016, was promised the investment amount that would be the second-highest in South Asia, which would be around \$40 billion (Augustine. 2021). It has been successful in reaping benefits from the BRI while preserving diplomatic and strategic links with both India and China. It has been successful in avoiding upsetting India by convincing India to develop infrastructure projects in the nation that are comparable to the BRI. Among the projects that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative BRI are the Friendship Bridges, special economic zones, the Karnaphuli River tunnel project which will cost \$689.35 million, an upgrade to the Chittagong port, and a train connection that will connect the port to China's Yunnan region (Singh

,A.G. 2019). While on the other hand, the gradual flow of cash by China has caused many projects to be put behind schedule.

India's Concern on Belt and Road Initiative

Relations between India, Pakistan, and China are complicated due to a history of warfare, unsolved boundary issues, and fundamentally different types of governments among the three countries. India stands to benefit in a variety of ways from both the BRI and the CPEC. However, they cannot be considered in isolation since there are many other issues that have not been resolved.

(a) A breach of India's constitutionally mandated sovereignty, as it travels across territory that is currently occupied by Pakistan, the CPEC compromises the integrity of Indian territory. Even though China is dismissive of India's concerns, the United Nations has validated India's worries by pointing out that the CPEC could incite political instability in South Asia as well as geopolitical tension between India and Pakistan. China, on the other hand, has dismissed India's worries.

(a) The militarization of India's neighbours and surrounding areas. There is a strong connection between India's strategic and national interests and the maintenance of peace and order in the IOR. On the other hand, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, which are all located in her immediate neighbourhood, are seeing a level of militarization that has never been seen before thanks to backing from China in the shape of military equipment, fighter planes, warships, and submarines (Type 039A-Yuan class). The fact that China directs 70 percent of its weaponry shipments into these three nations raises India's security worries to a higher level (Kanwal,G.2018)..

(c) North East India and BCIM-EC in general. Additionally, India is concerned about the potential safety issues that might arise as a result of the BCIM-establishment EC's of a link between its volatile North East and the Yunnan province of China.

(d) The Obstruction of United Nations Sanctions India's efforts to have the United Nations impose sanctions on terrorists and terrorist organisations like Jamaat-Ud-Dawa, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Lashkar have been consistently thwarted by China, who has shown itself to be untrustworthy in this matter. e-Taiba, which has been verified to receive funding from Pakistan.

(e) The Threat to India's National Security and the Safety of Indian Shipping The BRI and CPEC would most certainly result in an increase in the amount of shipping congestion in the IOR. This will provide a security risk to India as well as Indian shipping and will make it more difficult for India to maintain its awareness of her maritime domain.

(f) Isolation from the Economic System Because China dominates the financial institutions that are funding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this could have unfavourable effects on India's share of global trade, the flow of foreign direct investment, the allocation of funds for infrastructure projects, and it could even lead to India's economic isolation (Kanwal,G.2018)..

The Government of India issued a statement on May 13, 2017, declaring that they will not participate in the BRI. Due to its advantageous location in the IOR and its rapidly expanding economy, adopting such a strict stance would be detrimental to the country's interests (Jin, F.2017). The success of the BRI depends on India, but it also depends on India in order for the BRI to be successful. It's possible that India has no other choice than to pursue pragmatic strategies and reactions to the challenges it faces. India has to capitalise on a number of sites of convergence, including the following examples: a) India is in desperate need of basic infrastructure, particularly in its border

regions in the North and the North East, as well as in its island possessions. India is able to leverage China's knowledge and ability in the management and completion of large-scale projects in a rapid manner.

(b) India introduced Project SAGARMALA in March 2015 with the intention of hastening the country's economic growth by making better use of the potential offered by marine resources. The project will entail the building of mega ports, the modernization of existing ports, the development of inland waterways, the enhancement of port connection through road, multimodal logistics parks, pipelines, and waterways, and will in turn ensure the growth of coastal communities. The early cost estimate for the project is a staggering four hundred thousand billion rupees (Ramesh, S & Yadarvar, S.2020).. Both in terms of finance and carrying out the project, India cannot do it on its own. It is precisely in this area where there is the potential for convergence with China.

(c) In order to stimulate the manufacturing sector and increase employment, India has introduced a significant number of major initiatives, such as the "Make in India," "Small City Project," "Skill India," and "Digital India" programmes. These programmes might use a boost from China's potential to capitalise on its surplus of industrial and technical production, which may be investigated.

While working together to cooperate in areas of shared interest is highly desirable, India, Pakistan, and China also have a responsibility to address areas of contention via dialogue and confidence-building activities. A recognition of India's security concerns and a plan to address those concerns, compliance with international rules and norms, increased transparency in the terms and conditions of BRI, and, last but not least, congruence in Chinese actions and intentions are all necessary conditions for India to join CPEC and BRI.

China is making steady inroads into India's traditionally dominant strategic domain in South Asia, despite India's longstanding position as the region's most important power. Because maintaining a "business as usual" pace in relations with China is impossible, India will need to realign her national goals (Ramesh, S & Yadarvar, S.2020). The following are some tactics that can be used to combat the expanding influence of China: -

(a) Due to the country's complex socioeconomic situation, India is unable to take part in any kind of competition, whether it be in the military or in any other arena. An attitude of "tooth for a tooth" as a means of responding to the expanding power of China will only wear it down. India needs to work on its "Hard Power" by focusing on indigenization and building a flexible force that can handle all kinds of conflicts and fight back against China's new "fang-led" capabilities. This is in addition to strengthening its other elements of national power, namely its Diplomatic, Informational, and Economic powers. To counteract the military imbalance with China, it is essential to undertake long-overdue reforms of the Higher Defense Organization, reorganise the armed forces with a focus on the 'tooth to tail' ratio, establish integrated commands, and develop infrastructure on island territories and border areas. India needs to make sure that it has berthing, crew turn around, and replenishment rights for its naval ships and military aircraft in friendly countries within the IPR. This will allow India to extend its reach and decrease the amount of time it takes to react in the event that it is necessary to use these assets.

(b) India must strengthen its diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military connections with the nations that are immediately next to it in order to reestablish its former importance and prestige in the region and foster goodwill among its neighbours. In order for India to ensure that its existing initiatives, such as the "Act East Policy," BIMSTEC, "Neighborhood First," "Go West," Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN), and "Mausam," produce results that are in line with the country's top priorities, the country needs to strengthen those initiatives.

(c) India needs to show that it is a reliable and effective alternative to China when it comes to development projects, even if they are on a much smaller scale and involve more local participation and ownership. This is in stark contrast to China's unfriendly approach to development projects.. In order to accomplish this, India must project itself as a reliable and efficient alternative to China in undertaking development projects. India is responsible for

ensuring that all of the development projects it has promised to carry out in its neighbouring nations are carried out as quickly as possible by marshalling all of the resources at its disposal.

(d) India needs to improve its relationships with both China and Pakistan, make it easier for people to understand each other so that differences don't turn into fights, and create a good environment at home so that it can meet its important social and economic goals. This is provided that its core security concerns are addressed.

Role of India as a Way Ahead

The majority of the investments made in accordance with the BRI are carried out by state-owned firms and banks in China. In addition, the majority of the contracts—93 percent—have been awarded to state-owned firms in China (Sahay, R.K.2016). There isn't much of a part for the host country or any of the other firms to play.

1. The Increased Bribery and Decreased Competition as a Result of Chinese Monopoly. The Chinese monopoly in the lending and development of infrastructure has further led to increased bribery. Because there is no participation from the commercial sector, the programme does not contain any elements of competition.
2. Lack of Openness and Environmental Concerns: Due to the debt trap diplomacy, the lack of transparency, and the very strict lending terms, the plan has gotten a negative reactions. At least 236 BRI projects are now experiencing difficulties with their debt loads. Dumping of steel and cement has also occurred as a result of this, which has raised environmental concerns. Most of China's connectivity projects went to countries that wanted to follow the same path as China's economic model for infrastructure projects, even though it wasn't good for those countries. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a recipe for total failure. China sold the majority of its connectivity projects to countries that were looking to China for the success of its economic model in infrastructure projects.
3. China has overcommitted itself, and as a result, it is unable to continue funding the assistance programme. There is no telling what will become of those projects because they were just begun and not completed. More than one-third of the whole portfolio of projects is currently mired in the execution stage.

Nations who are farther along in development need to initiate alternative initiatives that are likewise participatory in nature, taking into account the interests of the countries that will be the recipients or hosts of the aid. It is not certain that the project will be successful if there is not a cooperation with the country that is hosting it. These connectivity initiatives need to take into account alternative methods of financing, such as the G7 nations' \$600 billion plan for global infrastructure and intelligence. Additionally, additional expert financial institutions should be solicited for aid in resolving these kinds of problems. It will be necessary for India to collaborate with its partners in the area in order to provide its neighbours with alternate connectivity options. Connectivity is being considered more and more as an instrument that may be used to exercise influence over foreign policy. If India takes the initiative to increase interconnection in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, it would create a new arena for geopolitical conflict between India and China in these regions. Connectivity also affords India the chance to reassert its preeminence in the area, which is a significant benefit. India's ability to act alone in South Asia and the greater Indian Ocean is restricted, hence it is important for India to collaborate with countries that share its worldview. It is imperative that it seek assistance from countries such as Japan whenever it is required in order to construct and improve its infrastructure and develop an alternative to connectivity corridors and infrastructure projects headed by China. Countries such as Australia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States already have a presence in the region and possess the technological skills necessary to contribute.

The execution of India's objectives in the area, as well as exploiting the space as a building block for a multipolar world order, requires India to engage in appropriate diplomatic manoeuvres, as well as economic and military

assertiveness. The viewpoint of India is to collaborate with other nations in the Indo-Pacific area that share the same values in order to manage a rules-based multipolar regional order via cooperative efforts. This would prevent any one country from dominating the region or its waterways. Supporting the Governments of the Indo-Pacific Region It is necessary to provide support for the governments of the Indo-Pacific region. This support can come in the form of both international assistance and development policies.

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