

# China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia: Implications on India

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## Abstract:

*The consistent and spectacular rise of China in world politics as political, economic, and regional power is an important and defining event of 21<sup>st</sup> century International Politics and has significant implications on both regional and world politics. Out of the seven South Asian states, China shares borders with four namely Bhutan, India, Pakistan, and Nepal. Much of the relations of China with South Asia have been shaped by the boundary disputes among the South Asian States. Barring its relationship with Pakistan, China until recently lagged far behind India in terms of economic and political engagements with South Asian countries. However in the Post-Cold war period, particularly over the past decade, China has expanded its political, economic, and security engagements with the South Asian region dramatically challenging India's position. Increasingly the governments in South Asia are becoming more accommodative of Beijing's interests. BRI is an initiative of huge magnitude and is bound to produce a significant geo-economic and geo-political impact. If implemented successfully, the BRI retains the promise of altering the existing structural arrangements in Asia and beyond.*

**Keywords:** China, OBOR, India, Regional Power, etc.

## Introduction

OBOR is a long term plan to construct the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road. It is the centerpiece of Xi Jinping's pro-active foreign policy and the most ambitious development plan conceived by any country ever extending from China to Europe. Envisioned on the *ancient Silk Road*, the Belt, and road project will form a network of trading routes influenced by geographical proximities, commerce, and geopolitics. OBOR is seen by Chinese leaders as a way of achieving the dream of making *China great again*. The underlying goals and motives behind this grand initiative according to Tom Miller<sup>1</sup> are:

1. First, China wants to protect its national security. Through a network of economic dependency, China wants to secure its regional leadership against the United States alliance structure in Asia.
2. The second driving force behind this initiative is Economic motivation. Beijing calculates that

better connectivity will help its underdeveloped border regions become viable trade zones.

China has traditionally been a passive player in global diplomacy and global events, preferring to hide behind the mantra of what Miller calls "*Non-Interference in other countries' affairs*"<sup>2</sup>. However in the last decade, particularly after the Global Financial crises of 2008-2009, China has emerged as a major economic global power. In the 1990s Deng Xiaoping pronounced the doctrine of "*Tau Guang Yang Hui*" meaning "*lie low and work hard*" to describe Chinese foreign policy. He urged Chinese leaders to "*observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities, and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile and never claim leadership*"<sup>3</sup>. Before Xi, China concentrated on economic diplomacy, worked vigorously with "Association of South East Asian Nations"(ASEAN), provided them billions of dollars in the wake of the global financial crises of 2008, which eventually helped to allay fears that China was a competitive threat to its neighbors.<sup>4</sup> However, after the leadership transition in 2013, the old doctrine of Foreign policy began to unravel. In October 2013, Xi Jinping in a speech at a party work conference dedicated to regional diplomacy said that foreign relations must secure "*good external conditions for China's reform, development, and stability*" and should foster a sense of "*common destiny in Asia*"<sup>5</sup>. He advocated that China's diplomacy should be "*fenfa Youwei*" meaning "*enthusiastic and proactive*" suggesting a break from Deng's Lie low and work hard dictum a similar term used by foreign minister Wang Yi in 2014.<sup>6</sup> But Under Xi Jinping, China seems moving away from its traditional rhetoric and embracing a much more assertive foreign policy to play an active role in international affairs marking a fundamental shift from the past.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This paper is an attempt to have a comprehensive assessment of China's One Belt One Road initiative and track its strategic implications on India. The paper establishes that China is expanding its wings in South Asia thereby threatening the interests of India. The paper is organized in the following manner: First, it will discuss China's grand initiative of OBOR. Second, it will explore the response of Smaller South Asian nations to OBOR. Third, it will discuss its strategic implications Vis-Vis India.



## **METHODS/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

Theoretically, this paper is rooted in John Mearsheimer's offensive realism which postulates that China is going to Challenge the US in near future. He predicts that China will try to become a regional hegemon in Asia as its economic and military capabilities grow. For valid research, different books, reports, journals, articles, speeches, and government reports were consulted.

### **Unpacking the BRI:**

Soon after Xi Jinping visited Astana and Jakarta in 2013, the Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road were officially endorsed<sup>7</sup>. However it was only in 2015 that the plan started to feature in State Council's reports and planning documents, and the official plan was jointly published by National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Commerce (MoCOM), and the Ministry of Foreign affairs, in March 2015<sup>8</sup> setting forth guidelines in *vision and actions* document titled as "*Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*". The document laid down main routes and projects for the Belt and Road Plan. Then in the 13<sup>th</sup> 5-year plan, a whole chapter was dedicated to the initiative outlining the country's key priorities for 2016-2020<sup>9</sup> and was also included in the Communist party's constitution in 2017. The aim of the project according to the Vision and Action document is "*promoting the orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets*".

The document describes BRI as a "systematic project which should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all and effort should be made to integrate the development strategies of the countries along the BRI." Supported by over 60 countries, BRI encompasses six major corridors across Asia, Africa, and Europe covering an area with 55 percent of world GDP, 70 percent of the global population, and 75 percent of known global energy reserves<sup>10</sup>. The rapid and spectacular development of the Chinese economy in the last three decades has enhanced the demand for more energy, raw materials, and markets for its manufacturing sector. Thus OBOR is seen as a project to help China to fill gaps in energy, raw materials, and markets<sup>11</sup>. OBOR, a grand Geo-Economic plan is set to unite Chinese neighboring countries and those along its periphery into a common economic region. Soon after espousing the plan, Chinese leaders began the political process of implementing the BRI. The proposed title, "*Major issues concerning comprehensively deepening reforms*" was adopted in the third plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress held in Nov 2013<sup>12</sup>. China's OBOR can also be seen as a response to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in Asia and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and investment partnership (T-TIP) since both are led by the United States. From the apparent Chinese announcements, it is clear that China wants the initiative to project its geostrategic realm in

both continental and maritime dimensions having clear political and security implications. The geographical scope of BRI is not fixed, as it is an open-ended network system<sup>13</sup>. China's new peripheral diplomacy starting from 2013, also reinforces the impression that primarily OBOR has geostrategic aims. The concept is divided into two: the Land and the Sea, then further into several corridors and countries which are further divided into specific projects and locations. On land there are three routes, located in three broad geographical areas:-

- (i) One extends from North-East China and northwest China to Europe and the Baltic Sea Via Central Asia and Russia,
- (ii) One from North-East China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, via Central Asia and West Asia,
- (iii) One from southwest China to the Indian Ocean through the Indo-China Peninsula<sup>14</sup>.

These three routes lead to six major corridors, the infrastructure of which is provided by the network connectivity consisting of Railways, Highways, Sea Routes, oil and gas pipelines. Unlike the ancient Silk Road, BRI is not only about transportation, but is predominantly about bringing economic integration, with deliberately designed and planned economic corridors rather than letting them evolve naturally<sup>15</sup>.

Belt and Road initiative apart from catering to China's economic and security challenges, reflects China's regional and global ambitions as well. China's ideas to acquire ports across South East Asia and the Indian Ocean precedes the initiation of BRI<sup>16</sup>. Some notable development strategies and actions under BRI include port acquisitions, project approvals, and new rail routes. The AIIB that was created in 2014, though has no official links with the BRI but is an emerging source of funding for BRI<sup>17</sup>. BRI represents a movement of ineluctable expansion of Chinese influence. China had started the connectivity drive-in home in 2000 focusing to develop its western regions to reduce the economic gap between its coastal areas and western areas. In the *Great western development strategy*, connectivity, transportation, and infrastructural development were the driving force.<sup>18</sup> Then Beijing began to look beyond its borders to increase the connectivity with its neighbors over land and through the sea.

### **Corridors of BRI:**

There are six corridors in the BRI connecting more than sixty countries:

#### **A. CPEC:**

Belt and Road projects in Pakistan are having a significant impact on the whole project of BRI and act as China's Gateways to the Indian Ocean much similarly as Kazakhstan

acts as a gateway for China to Europe. The forces to bring the two economies together are already powerful due to their decades back strategic ties, which makes the progress more swift in developing the economic corridors from Kashgar to Gwadar. Moreover, Pakistan is rich in resources, has a vast market, thus becoming a valuable asset for BRI. CPEC connects the Xinjiang province with the entire territory of Pakistan. The Spatial layout is described as comprising one Belt, three axes, and several passages. Connecting Kashgar, Tumshuq city, Atushi City, and Aktu city in the autonomous region of Xinjiang, with the Punjab, Sindh, Gilgit, Baltistan, AJK, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. The most important and central project within the CPEC is the development of Gwadar city and its port. Gwadar, being located in a strategic position, will play an important role in linking China's western Province with the Indian Ocean. CPEC, which is set to be completed by 2030 with an investment of \$46 billion is regarded as a *crown jewel* of the OBOR project<sup>19</sup>. It comprises of construction of Gwadar port, multiple Economic Zones, highways, railways, and many energy pipelines. CPEC will act as an alternative and stable route for China to reach Malacca straits for importing oil and other energy resources from West Asia acting as a trade bridge between Asia, Africa, and Europe<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, CPEC connects the Land route of OBOR in Eurasia with the Sea Route in South East Asia thereby connecting more than 60 countries. Through the CPEC gas pipeline, it would take only 6 days for energy supplies to reach China's border than earlier 32 days via the current marine route<sup>21</sup>. China fears the Malacca blockade by the USA or India because of any military confrontation, thus immensely increasing the importance of CPEC for China. As China would use the self-constructed Gwadar port to acquire strategic advantage. Through CPEC China wants unhindered access to the Indian Ocean. Since CPEC passes through the disputed territory of the Gilgit-Baltistan region, India feels it is a violation of the principle of sovereignty. Indian Spokesperson of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated, "connectivity projects must be pursued in a manner that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity"<sup>22</sup>

#### **B. New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor:**

It consists of a series of rail corridors running some 7500 miles (12000km) from Yiwu in Eastern China To western European countries, passing through thirty countries linking the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean<sup>23</sup>. It could be a catalyst for China's "Go West policy" launched in 2001. Overland trade between China and Russia dated back to two millennia. Along the routes of Samarkand, Bukhara, Merv, etc. which were some of the busiest and famous trade cities of the world. However, the discovery of sea routes around 1500 by the Portuguese navigators led to the destruction of land routes<sup>24</sup>. For the next 500 years, the sea route was preferred as the dominant mode of transport from Europe to Asia. Although several rail tracks were also constructed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century none of them was significant because of the low cost

along the sea route. In 1990, a new railway line was constructed between Kazakhstan and China's Xinjiang region which served bilateral trade between China and Kazakhstan<sup>25</sup>. The construction of several new international rail routes has already been started, offering rail-to-rail freight transfer, and a "one declaration, one inspection, one cargo release" system for cargo moving across borders<sup>26</sup>.

#### **C. China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Corridor:**

This corridor involves both road and rail networks connecting China, Mongolia, and Russia. It comprises of two routes, one extends from Beijing to Russia via Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia); and the other from Dalian in China to Chita in Russia, connecting the Russian Trans- Siberian Railway.

#### **D. China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor:**

CICPEC links China with the South East Asian countries namely Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Malaysia via an extensive transportation network. Even before BRI was introduced, South East Asian nations have been important trading partners of China, however, CICPEC is considered an economic game-changer in South East Asia.

#### **E. China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic corridor:**

CCWAEAC links China and the Arabian Peninsula through the ancient silk route originating from Xinjiang and reaches the Persian Gulf via Central Asia, the Mediterranean, and the Arab peninsula<sup>27</sup>. It connects 5 Central Asian Countries and 17 West Asian Countries. It involves an important Mineral and energy source thereby becoming an important energy source region for China.

#### **F. Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor:**

BCIM, which was founded in 1999 was initially known as the "Kunming Initiative" with the explicit rationale being the development of China's Landlocked Southwestern areas, India's North-Eastern areas, along with Myanmar and Bangladesh, two adjoining Least Developed Countries (LDC) through the promotion of trade, connectivity and other forms of cooperation<sup>28</sup>, thus is aptly referred to as an "international gateway to South Asia". BCIM consists of an expressway and a high-speed rail link connecting Kunming in China to Kolkata in India Via Mandalay (Myanmar) and Dhaka (Bangladesh). This corridor would also provide China an outlet to the Bay of Bengal. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar are rich in resources, thus increasing the importance of this corridor for China<sup>29</sup>.

#### **South Asian response:**

Due to the absence of any governing agency at the international level, competition among the major powers of the world is natural in this anarchic world. And smaller states face a dilemma in strategizing their foreign policy<sup>30</sup>. According to realists, the primary interest of any state is to ensure its survival and to maximize its security in an anarchic

world. In the South Asian region, the two emerging regional powers are locked in a struggle for influence through economic, political, security, and diplomatic initiatives in these states. With the Launch of BRI, China has largely invested in Asian Countries. In South Asia, China's \$ 62 billion CPEC is the largest economic package that China has offered to any country under BRI and is a significant example of China's growing investments in the region. China's growing geopolitical and economic assertiveness in the region under BRI has led to concerns in New Delhi fearing it would drastically undercut Indian influence in the region. To study the response of South Asian States, I have taken the case study of Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka.

### **Bangladesh:**

Bangladesh-India relationship dates back to Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1970 when India stood on the side of Bangladesh<sup>31</sup>. In the early years of the Awami League government in Bangladesh, a pleasant relationship developed between the two countries however after only a few years of Independence, an anti-Indian military regime took over in Bangladesh which resulted in hostile relations against each other 1975 to 1990.<sup>32</sup> During the military-led regimes, Bangladesh India's relations didn't improve. It was only after the AL government came to power in 2009 that relations started improving significantly. Bangladesh is bordered by India on almost all sides except on the Bay of Bengal i.e. it is landlocked by India. China is the closest neighbor of Bangladesh with only 100 km of distance (Indian territory) between their borders. Bangladesh is located in between the Indian Mainland and its seven insurgencies rivaled northeastern states, has a very crucial geostrategic importance for India. Moreover, Bangladesh shares a 4000 km long border with India. Due to the very nature and geographical proximity Bangladesh is significant to India in a variety of ways among which three are specifically mentioned:-

- First, an unfriendly government in Dhaka can pose a considerable security risk for India, which we witnessed during one and a half decades of the military regime in Bangladesh, serving as a conduit for arms transfer to India's North Eastern insurgents. Whenever the Awami League party returned to power there was a lull in the arms transfer which was subsequently reversed by the unfriendly governments in Dhaka.
- Secondly, India can be more vulnerable to terror attacks if it doesn't obtain Dhaka's cooperation and Vice Versa.
- Thirdly New Delhi considers Bangladesh as a part of its security sphere viewed in terms of overall sub-continental security i.e. any neighboring state under threat is bound to ask India for Help otherwise it would be viewed as anti-Indian.<sup>33</sup>

Because of China's BRI, the relations have seen further deepening with China investing heavily in infrastructure building and triggering Sino-Indian Competition in Bangladesh. With its spectacular economic growth, China has broadened its horizons externally by launching some projects, the noted among them being the BRI and Bangladesh's importance to China need to be conceived in terms of implementing the BRI since BRI is one of the key pillars of China's international politics. Bangladesh formally joined the OBOR initiative in October 2016 following Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh wherein both the countries signed some bilateral deals worth \$21.5 billion. A joint statement issued on 14 October 2016 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dhaka stated :

*"Bangladesh is appreciative of China's initiative of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (the Belt and Road Initiative), believing it will bring important opportunities for Bangladesh's goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2021 and a Developed Country by 2041. The two sides agreed to enhance the alignment of the development strategies of the two countries, fully tap the potentials of cooperation in various areas, work on "the Belt and Road Initiative", to realize sustainable development and common prosperity of the two countries."*<sup>34</sup>

Bangladesh being at the center of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic corridor occupies a vital strategic position along with the OBOR initiative. In an absolute contradiction to India's stand on OBOR, Bangladesh's foreign secretary Shahidul Haque reaffirmed his country's desire to join OBOR, at the World Economic Forum in October 2017 in New Delhi. Explaining the need to balance "Sovereignty" and "economic integration" he stated that,

*"We cannot remain link-less in the current situation. We have to go beyond. And that's what we think would eventually benefit us. We look at sovereignty and integration rather from a different angle,"*<sup>35</sup>

Bangladesh is a part of the proposed *Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic corridor (BCIM)*, one of the six corridors of OBOR. Also under the Maritime Silk Road, China has shown interest to develop a deep seaport in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Located on the strategic juncture between the Indian Sub-Continent and South East Asia, makes it an important player in inter-regional integration plus its proximity to India, and most importantly the proximity to the Bay of Bengal is severely important for China's geopolitical and geo-economic interests. China's increasing influence in Bangladesh following its investments in a large number of the project under BRI has inevitably led to Sino-Indian Competition in the country due to the Vital stakes of India there. This has put India at a significant political, economic as well as strategic disadvantage. As Bangladesh is located at the tip of the Bay of Bengal, it holds importance to

China in terms of its Maritime silk route also as China intends to build port facilities in Bangladesh.

To counter China's growing footprints in Bangladesh and to wean away from it from China's influence, India offered a \$5 billion line of credit to Bangladesh in 2017, its biggest loan offer to any single country in addition to the assistance offered for building power plants, ports, and nuclear power plants as well as grants and loans for various medium and small-sized projects. On a closer look at the various projects of BRI and their implementation in Bangladesh, it reveals that Bangladesh had to cancel some of the projects of BRI or slow down their implementation due to growing pressures from India. Bangladesh along with smaller south Asian nations seem to be perplexed due to the growing competition between the two powerful neighboring states.

#### **Sri Lanka:**

In the context of the regional security structure of South Asia, Sino-Sri-Lankan relations have a special place and date back to the Rubber-Rice Pact of 1952. The geographical location of Sri-Lanka at the center of the Indian Ocean has made it a central focus of all great powers over history<sup>36</sup>. It has been an important sea-lane of Communication and was colonized by British, Portuguese, and Dutch to be used as a trading hub for transit goods. The ethnic issue in Sri-Lankan politics remained a predominant one since its independence in 1948 becoming complicated with each passing day. And India's policy towards Sri-Lanka was also by and large guided by the Tamil Issue since the beginning. The diplomatic relations between Sri-Lanka and China were established in 1957 and the agreement on technical and economic cooperation was signed in 1962, following Sri-Lankan Prime Minister, Srimavo Bandaranaike's visit to China. In 1963, the two countries signed an agreement on commercial maritime relations, and the China-Sri-Lanka joint trade agreement was signed in 1982 while an agreement on economic and trade cooperation was signed in 1984. Later on, both the agreements were merged to form Sri-Lanka joint commission in 1991. Chinese massive investments in Sri-Lanka during the Rajapakshe government garnered the deepest debates among scholars.

Hambantota is situated at the southern extremity of Sri-Lanka, overlooking South Asia's vital sea lanes of communication, making it an important commercial and strategic asset for China. It provides a strategic pivot to China in India's underbelly. For now, China might conform only to commercial templates avoiding any naval deployments there but whenever the need arises Chinese leadership would not hesitate to leverage its possession for strategic gains, expanding the enterprise into intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance outpost. Indian analysts seem to be convinced that Hambantota will be a crown jewel in China's "String of Pearls" strategy. India's political and economic influence in Sri-Lanka is gradually decreasing and

India is worried about Sri-Lanka being sucked into China's orbit. After 2009, the India factor in Sino Sri-Lankan ties became more visible. With the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at the hands of LTTE. India restricted itself to an approach of non-interference and excessive caution. The Sino-Indian Competition for the influence that plays out in Sri-Lanka is evident. The growing transfer of arms and ammunition between Sri-Lanka and China is a cause of concern for India. In 2014, Sri-Lanka allowed two submarines and a warship to dock at the Colombo port. Which until recently was an uncommon occurrence. This can be seen as a sign of diminishing Indian influence in the Island nation. While Chinese imports to Sri-Lanka have grown considerably, Indian imports have remained stagnant over the years, a sign of India's failure to strengthen trade relations with the South Asian region. During a meeting between Chinese Premier Li and Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena in May 2019, the two leaders expressed an interest in progressing with BRI projects, consistent with the last joint statement issued in 2016.<sup>37</sup>

#### **India's concerns about OBOR:**

Unable to shun away the historical baggage of geopolitical rivalry, Sino-Indian rivalry has intensified in recent years with the launching of China's OBOR. Among the six corridors in OBOR, four-run through the South Asian neighborhood. Through the OBOR Beijing has shown a renewed vigor to carry regional connectivity in its India's Neighborhood thereby changing the security environment and power dynamics in India's Backyard. India has shown serious apprehensions about the OBOR due to its certain projects in the disputed territories particularly the China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor<sup>38</sup>. This new economic, as well as political collaboration with India's immediate neighbors, has created a sense of unease in India as India is faced with the twin challenge of maintaining its pre-eminence in its backyard and also to maintain its relationship with China, its biggest neighbor. India is viewing these moves by China as threatening and non-conductive to its interests. Former Indian foreign secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar noted in 2016 that the "interactive dynamic between strategic interests and connectivity initiatives – a universal proposition – is on particular display in our continent."<sup>39</sup> These regional connectivity initiatives by China are viewed as tools to influence the foreign policy of other countries. In the South Asian subcontinent, BRI underscores the growing Sino-Indian Competition in South Asia and also in the Indian Ocean region. In protest against the crafting of BRI, India didn't attend the 2017 Belt and Road Forum hosted by China. Since both the countries are rising simultaneously, in the same geographical area, both are competing for the untapped resources and minerals in the region. Due to the changing geopolitical realities, both the countries are trying to invest in regional infrastructure investments. Due to the coming of the theory of Strategic encirclement, the tensions between the two countries have escalated. India fears

encirclement by China while Pakistan fears encirclement by India and in the meanwhile, China fears encirclement by the United States due to its close relationship with India, Japan, and South Korea in addition to the US troops stationed in Afghanistan<sup>40</sup>. These fears have spurred greater infrastructure growth in all surrounding countries, as the potentially encircled look to set up alternate transit routes and project military power outside their own borders. The mistrust ever since the 1962 war, unresolved border dispute, Chinese occupation of Aksai Chin and frequent border incursions, (2013, 2017, 2019, the latest being the Galwan valley clash in June, 2020 in which 20 Indian Soldiers were killed), and China's claim on Arunachal Pradesh, has led to escalated tensions between the two countries. Amongst this China's investments and Military co-operation with South Asian Nations in India's immediate neighborhood has led to worries in India. India fears that ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, Pakistan by China is in consonance with China's policy of India's encirclement. There are some other issues that have led to trust deficit among the two countries that include China's consistent opposition to India's membership in NSG, frequent technical hold to save Jaish-e-Muhammad Chief Masood Azhar, from being declared a global terrorist by United Nations and increasing China's presence in the Indian Ocean in recent years. On the other hand India's shelter to Dalai Lama has been a major cause of irritation for China leading to troubled relationship with India. The recent month's long military stand-off between the two countries at Galwan Valley, an earlier undisputed area in which 20 Indian Soldiers were killed, has led to the lowest ebb of bi-lateral relations since 1962.

India has issues with the four specific corridors of OBOR that run through South Asian neighborhood and constitute the important components of BRI: the CPEC, BCIM Corridor, the Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor and the MSR. Running close to India's continental and Maritime borders, these corridors have a direct strategic bearing on India as it fears that China will use its presence in the region to advance its strategic interests. The Maritime Silk Road (MSR) that aims to create a sea corridor between China and the Europe via Indian Ocean is specifically an issue of concern for India as Indian Ocean has remained the primary interest of India and is directly linked to India's strategic, security, and Maritime interest. Due to the absence of any other alternative, China's capital has been a welcome addition for needed infrastructure developments in South Asian Smaller countries. The growing Competition between India and China has raised the Stakes in South Asia. China's rise in the region has led to increasing wariness that Beijing's increased presence in the region is threatening to India's standing as a leader. China through its diplomatic outreach seems to create a system more favorable to its own interests in the region profoundly affecting New Delhi's strategic and national interests. Malik argues that India's apprehensions are founded on PLA's "strategic plans to enhance control

over Pacific and the Indian Ocean in accordance with the 'high-sea defence' policy by pursuing its 'string of pearl strategy'<sup>41</sup>.

The project has the potential of altering the economic as well as the geopolitical landscape of Asia in a fundamental way. The relations between the two countries are largely defined by their engagement in Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean region. For India OBOR is not only an economic initiative but an attempt to advance China's geopolitical Objectives (Chakma. B, 2019). Since OBOR vehemently encloses all of South Asia, Sino-Indian rivalry and competition is bound to happen in the region which New Delhi perceives as its sphere of influence. Having both economic as well as geopolitical implications, these connectivity initiatives across Asia and Indian Ocean region in the form of infrastructure building, inter-linkages, roads and railways will arguably redraw the map of continent<sup>42</sup>. More than 50 countries, mostly Indian Neighbors have accepted and endorsed China's OBOR project presenting a major diplomatic challenge to India. In September 2018, Myanmar facing the international criticism for its Human rights violations against Rohingya Muslims, signed agreement with Beijing to establish the CMEC, providing China with another node to the Indian Ocean, which will help China to reduce trade and energy reliance on Malacca straits.

### Conclusion

Because India perceives South Asia as its own responsibility, it is clearly alarmed by the China's growing g investments in South Asia. Belt and road isn't one thing, one activity or one project, it is a cluster of activities, and a very ambitious and expensive undertaking. Since, BRI also includes building of ports all across South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, there is a growing fear of strategic encirclement by China in New Delhi. The growing collaboration with India's neighbors through different infrastructural projects is creating a sense of unease in New Delhi. In order to provide an alternative to Chinese-led connectivity initiatives to protect its strategic goals and remain a dominant power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, India will have to work with its partners in the region to offer alternative connectivity arrangements to its neighbors. To date, New Delhi has been slow in identifying, initiating, and implementing a coherent approach to connectivity in the region.

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