

## **Belt & Road Initiative and India: Policy & Concerns**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research article is about the Indian stance on "The New Silk Road initiative". In this paper, opinions of India towards the "One Road and One Belt Initiative "is viewed in the framework of China -India ties. Managing India's ties with China is the primary concern of the Indian policymakers. A rich literature on the Indian concerns and China BRI exists; some authors consider it to create alternative regional institutions by expanding its influence to the neighbourhood. Some researchers see it as more sceptical and some as optimistic. This research article sheds light on the different concerns like Indian strategic Concerns in Asia, CPEC story, String of pearls strategy, India BRI concerns and policy, presence of China in Indian ocean, India political-economic and strategic explanation.

**Keywords:** Belt & Road, Silk Road, China, India, Policy, CEPEC, Indian Ocean

### **Introduction**

The Relationship between India and China is both competitive and cooperative. For this reason, India has suggested its SAGAR initiative as a substitute for "the New Silk Road Initiative" and "Maritime Silk Road". However, despite the concerns regarding BRI, New Delhi choose to join the Chinese new investment and financial institutes, i-e the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), New Development Bank. New Delhi recently joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Economic ties between the People's Republic of China and India are expanding, but they are imbalanced, with a substantial trade deficit favouring China (Chhibber, 2017).

China's One Belt, One Road is viewed as either danger or an opportunity in India, with differing viewpoints. Some see it as a way for China to surround India. Some critics think that it's an excellent opportunity to develop an Infrastructure boosting economy, and it can source to reap many other benefits (Panda, 2014). Meanwhile, Sino-Indian relations have different factors of distrust.

A rich literature on the China BRI exists; some authors consider it as the creation of alternative regional institutions (Acharya, 2015). China is also expanding its influence to the neighbourhood (Bisley, 2017). Some researchers see it as more skeptical (Cheng, 2016) and some as optimistic (Zhai, 2018). This research article sheds light on the different concerns of India.

## **The Context**

The opinions of India towards the One Belt One Road Initiative must be viewed in the framework of China -India ties. Managing ties with China is the primary concern of the Indian policymakers. A massive asymmetry and enormous disparity still exist between the two countries' economies at this time. As Grant (2010) argues that Indians are far more alarmed and concerned about China's rise while the Chinese seem relaxed regarding India's rise. China India's relationship comprises of the three fundamental points i-e, Conflict, competition, and cooperation. For decades, China has served as both a focal point and a major opponent in India's international relations strategy. The prominent factor is border dispute, both countries share a contested border country of about 4000 km, though China opposes the authenticity of Indian boundaries set by British colonialists, and in 1962 the Indo-China war concluded with the Indian defeat, even though the latest event of Doklam rises the Indian concerns vis-à-vis China, as well as Indian fears about China, have been exacerbated by China's economic, military, and political backing for Pakistan.

China is also India's largest bilateral trading partner as both countries' trade rises up to \$80 billion in 2017-18. India's exports were barely \$13 billion, a massive trade imbalance (Sachdeva & Vergeron, 2018). Nevertheless, economic links between the two countries have grown, which hasn't always eased hostilities. Delhi also feels that China has given Pakistan access to nuclear and missile technologies so that India remains isolated in South Asia. India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia is becoming increasingly difficult as Pakistan tightens its grip on the country's western borders. Because of its competition with Beijing's ally Pakistan, China has a comparatively open space in Eurasia (Sachdeva, 2016). To counter all these scenarios, India becomes an active member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ('Quad'), to hedge against China's Rise (A. Sharma, 2010). As well as it seems that the United States consider India as the strategic companion in balancing against China's growing power in the Asia Pacific (Hornat, 2016).

## **Indo- China Relations**

Sino-Indian relations have different factors of distrust. The prominent factor is border dispute; both countries share a contested border country of about 4000 km. However, China opposes the authenticity of Indian boundaries set by British colonialists, and in 1962 the Indo-China war concluded with the Indian defeat. Another factor is that as a counterweight to China's Expanding regional dominance, the United States views India as the strategic and geopolitical partner (Hornat, 2016). Even though India become an active member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ('Quad'), to hedge against China's Rise (A. Sharma, 2010). Interestingly India has certain security-led concerns about Chinese infrastructure and manufacturing investments. Still, both countries are also partnering in the

different international organizations like BRICS, G20, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to serve in the shared interests like global trade, international terrorism, and multipolar world order.

India considers south and east Asia as its traditional area of interest, but the recent increase in China's presence in these regions is seen suspiciously by India (Anderson & Ayres, 2015). In the mid-2010s, China's GDP was almost five times larger than India's. China's economic and social growth, foreign reserves, FDI and ODI stockpiles, and military expenditure have been more steady and went smoothly as compared to India's. All these factors of suspicion and competition make India unnerving.

India sees Belt and Road Initiative projects through the highly securitized lens as these are passing from the Indian neighbourhood. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) creates a land connection between the Indian Ocean and China, as it runs from western China, passing via Gilgit-Baltistan to Gwadar port Pakistan. The Bangladesh–China– India–Myanmar Corridor (BCIM) was initially established as a regional connectivity opportunity among participating countries after the BRI launch. The *21st Century Maritime Silk Road* (MSR), traverses from China's coastal area through the Indian Ocean connecting China with east Africa and Europe. India thinks that this MSR is the Chinese strategy to the encirclement of India (Marantidou, 2014). India also assumes that the CPEC infrastructure projects in POK aim to threaten and destabilize India (Gupta, 2018) as China's Pakistan Economic Corridor enters Pakistan through Kashmir, seen as a violation of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We can say that India is one of the major competitors of China focused on the BRI, as its military expenditures exceeded \$62 billion.

## **India and BRI**

China and India have close economic connections. Both powers are the most significant trading partners, despite the political differences. Meanwhile, the Indo Pacific region's supremacy is the crucial stress and competition between these two nations. China and India have a relationship that has been frequently characterized negatively as a rivalry to control and compete or as one of collaboration. Many key causal factors are distressing New Delhi, like Pakistan and China are like iron brothers; 2017 Doklam stalemate and 2020 Galwan valley battle; the increasing presence of China in the Indian Ocean; and charm offensive and wolf warrior diplomacy of the Chinese. New Delhi actively participates in the Quadrilateral Dialogue (Quad) to counter these circumstances to enhance its global leadership (Jagannath, 2021).

Practically China and India are the most prominent trade partners. That is why both countries are members of the Asian infrastructure bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the BRICS. However, after the announcement of the Belt and Road by Xi Jinping, India declared it against the Indian national interest, security, and sovereignty, so India rejected and opposed this initiative

## **India's BRI Chip**

After the announcement of the BRI, India has responded cautiously and sceptically to the initiative. In 2017 Indian government officially refused to participate in the Belt and Road project meeting hosted by the Chinese government (MOE, 2017). The new Delhi also declined the second forum on the Belt and road invitation in 2019. They were vowing to look into the dept concerns, environmental policies and corruption in the ongoing projects of the BRI (Chaudhury, 2019).

New Delhi does not endorse the Chinese government discourse and claims on the BRI because it is not what China promises to be. The main project CPEC and other BRI projects are likely seen to minimize Indian regional power and ignore the Indian clout in the region. The Indian lukewarm response is also motivated by several factors like; CPEC is passing through the disputed territory, the threat of potential militarization of BRI projects, military existence in the Indian Ocean, lack of transparency and lack of open dialogue before the establishment of the initiative. New Delhi also emphasizes that BRI may result in debt traps, corruption, political instability, ecological degradation, and unrest in the country's nearby neighborhood.

## **Indian Strategic Concerns in Asia**

India has not endorsed the New Silk Road and is opposed to the Maritime Silk Route (MSR), while China opposes Indian meddling in the South China Sea. China's President recently committed USD\$47 billion for railways, Road Infrastructure, Commerce oriented network of roads connecting west China to Pakistan's important Port Gwadar. By utilizing CPEC, China may transport Natural Gas, Crude oil and other petroleum products from Iran and other Arab nations (Chhibber, 2015). Nonetheless, India has voiced support for the Kolkata–Kunming road corridor connecting Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (Chhibber, 2015).

## **CPEC Story: String of Pearls Strategy**

CPEC is the 3000KM network of roads from northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Pakistan's Gwadar Port by boosting industrial cooperation energy, Establishing Gwadar port, and improving transport infrastructure. China-Pakistan relations have become a "strategic long-term partnership" (gov.cn, 2018). New Delhi believes China is working on the string of pearls strategy (network of Chinese intentions in India Ocean Region IOR). CPEC is the Chinese key strategy in establishing crucial commercial ports and military bases in Djibouti. These initiatives could suppress the Indian growing strategic heft in the Indian ocean by making naval bases in the Gwadar, the Indian backyard (Dabas, 2017).

## **India's BRI Concerns and Policy**

Scholars have identified numerous causal reasons driving India's BRI reactions. Economic, political, and geostrategic considerations influence Indian responses to the BRI. India's attitude towards the BRI is cautious that BRI poses a significant geostrategic security danger. Meanwhile, China's mechanism to consolidate its dominance in the regional hierarchy. India opposes the BRI for two reasons. Due to poor economic infrastructures, India believed that joining the BRI would not benefit it. However, the inner-IOR fragmentation restricts potential Chinese financial gains compared to other BRI regional sectors. Economically integrated regions would be better equipped to easily link to future marine Infrastructure, resulting in more considerable future advantages. That's why India has a dim view of the BRI since they do not feel that it can harness the region's commercial potential. So, they consider the IOR to be unappealing to BRI investors. This barrier to business is due to a lack of integration in the region, as the Indian business sector understands. When it comes to utilizing BRI infrastructure, Indian firms have explicitly pointed to two factors as being potential obstacles: the uncertainty about the ability to use BRI infrastructure and the Indian Ocean Regional interconnectivity challenges (Palit, 2017).

India disagrees with the PRC's characterization of the BRI as an "essentially economic initiative focused on profit" and sees it as a "virtuous" endeavour that will provide China economic benefits. To India, the BRI appears to be an effort to reinforce Chinese territorial and financial objectives. China has worsened its image via the "failure to engage non-Chinese parties in keeping the project moving forward" in the eyes of people in several Asian countries. China has further worsened since it is working so hard to develop the Pakistani portion of the road when ties between India and Pakistan are unstable due to disagreements over borders (Palit, 2017). Meanwhile, mainland China's "promise to finance USD\$47 billion for railways, Road Infrastructure, Commerce oriented network of roads connecting west China to Pakistan's important Port Gwadar" is interpreted as an attempt to capitalize on regional territorial conflicts. By utilizing CPEC, which passes through Kashmir, China will transport Natural Gas, Crude oil and other petroleum products from Iran and other Arab nations (Chhibber, 2017).

Some experts believe that India is primarily reacting to the BRI because of its potential challenge to India's position as the dominant force in the IOR. "China is not allowed to control the Indian Ocean because of the BRI. India has launched measures in the Indian Ocean to fight the Chinese to prevent Indian domination. Similarly, the Indian government has launched its own long-overdue measures in the Indian Ocean in order to challenge China's "String of Pearls" and prevent China from becoming the dominant force in Indian Ocean waters. "Project Mausam," "Spice Route," "Cotton Route," "Blue Revolution" are just a few of the names given to India's Indian Ocean marine endeavour. The India Project Mausam programme is much like China's BRI. India's rival initiative, "Project Mausam to the BRI, attempts to take the Indian Ocean commercial Centre back from China

(Chhibber, 2017). The Project Mausam initiative envisions towards reclaiming India's position as the commercial and cultural hub of the Indian Ocean area, rather than China. The Indian project Mausam has a three-dimensional model that it will help in strengthening cultural binding with the participating countries, The second objective of the model is that it will ensure maritime security in the Indian ocean as India thinks that MSR is the Chinese strategy to the encirclement of India (Marantidou, 2014), Third Objective of the Project Mausam is to establish economic connectivity with Nations of the Indian Ocean region (Shankarjha, 2015) .

## **Presence of China in the Indian Ocean**

China's Belt and Road Initiative and Maritime Silk Road is all about commerce and infrastructure investment, and Mainland China has shown a willingness to commit significant resources. However, India and other forces have seen these investments of China. The other countries believe that China is constructing military and economic Infrastructure encircling countries like Japan and other American allies, which may experience severe consequences in a future confrontation. Some are the investment, and details are given below.

- China has a foothold at the Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar. China can convert its commercial maritime Infrastructure to a military one and utilize it to its advantage during a fight. China has sunk a great deal of capital into a 2,400-kilometer gas pipeline connecting Kyaukyu and Kunming as proof.
- China has rebuilt Chittagong port to make it a vital part of the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh and Myanmar are significant places for China's sub-project. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar has been crucial enough for China to invest in them, especially Bangladesh (BCIM). Bangladesh has once again being pressured by China to permit them to establish a naval station near Chittagong.
- While China has a presence in Sri Lankan land, long-standing relations with Sri Lanka have also developed. The Sri Lankan government has given Chinese firm ownership of a new port in Southern-eastern Sri Lanka that a Chinese corporation constructed.
- Almost 60% of the world's shipping is in the Indian Ocean, mainly due to the vast amount of oil produced there. Additionally, 80% of China's oil imports via the Strait of Malacca. So long as China has no other shipping routes, the Strait of Malacca is a critical part of the nation's shipping network.

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Country	Project	Investment (million \$)
Laos/ China	Lao–China HSR	6,000
Cambodia	Phnom Penh–Sihanoukville Highway Corridor Improvements	1,000
Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh City Metro System Master Plan	23,000
Vietnam	Long Thanh Airport	1,5800
Vietnam	Hon Khai island deepwater port	2,500
Myanmar	Yangon Central rail station upgrade	2,500
Myanmar	Myanmar Hanthawaddy International Airport	1,500
Myanmar /Thailand	Kanchanaburi–Dawei Railway	740
Thailand	Development of Bangkok’s MRT Pink Line elevated train	1,584
Thailand	Bangyai–Kanchanaburi motorway	1,540
Thailand	Development of Bangkok’s MRT Yellow Line elevated	1,528
Thailand	Bangkok–Chiang Mai HSR	8,275
Thailand	Thailand Bangpa–Nakhon Rachasrima motorway	2,350
Thailand	Thailand Blue Line Extension	2,290
Philippines	Manila–Makati–Pasay–Paranaque Mass Transit System	8,370
Philippines	Bulacan–Laguna rail	4,500
Philippines	North–South Commuter Railway	3,720
Philippines	North–South Commuter Railway, south line	3,610
Philippines	Laguna Lakeshore expressway and dike	2,620
Philippines	Redevelopment of Ninoy Aquino International Airport	1,583
Philippines	Manila Light Rail Transit (LRT), Line 7	1,540
Philippines	Manila LRT, Line 6	1,390
Philippines	Manila LRT, Line 1 extension	1,365
Philippines	Philippine airport package B	1,300
Philippines	Cavite and Laguna Expressway	1,228
Philippines	Mindoro–Batangas floating bridge	1,125
Philippines	Philippine airport package A	1,070
Philippines	Light Rail Transit, Line 4	1,065
Philippines	Davao Light Railway Transit	842
Philippines	Davao port reclamation	837
Philippines	NLEX-SLEX Connector Road	578
Philippines	Motor Vehicle Inspection System	431
Philippines	Development of Davos Sasa Port	397
Philippines	Mactan–Cebu International Airport, new passenger Terminal	367
Philippines	NAIA Expressway	360
Singapore	Cross Island Line	21,000
Singapore	Tuas Terminal Phase 1	1,800
Malaysia/ Singapore	Kuala Lumpur–Singapore High-speed Rail (HSR)	11,000
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), Line 2	6,500
Malaysia	Penang underground tunnel link	2,000
Malaysia	Senai–Desaru Expressway	423
Indonesia	Trans-Sumatra Toll Road	27,700
Indonesia	Sunda Strait Bridge	24,000
Indonesia	Jakarta–Bandung HSR	5,100
Indonesia	Central Kalimantan Coal Railway Network	2,300
Indonesia	West Coast Expressway	2,000
Indonesia	Kertajati Airport	1,800
Indonesia	Soekarno–Hatta Airport Train Express Line	1,800
Indonesia	East–West MRT	1,700
Indonesia	Balikpapan–Samarinda Toll Road	875
Indonesia	Kulon Progo (New Yogyakarta) International Airport	700
Indonesia	Surabaya Monorail	558
Indonesia	Kalibaru Port, first container terminal	393
Indonesia	Manado–Bitung toll road	330
	Source: The economist Corporate Network (Das, 2017)	

Meanwhile, China invests in infrastructure projects to build ports like Gwadar, Hambantota, Chittagong, and Sittwe. Under the banner of BRI, it is offering trillion dollars as soft loans for Infrastructure, housing projects, establishing special economic zones, railways lines etc.

On a deeper level, though, both the Project Mausam and Maritime Silk Road are intended to enhance their influence in terms of culture, economy, and even politics around the world. For this reason, India came up with Project Mausam in the Indian Ocean. From the Indian ocean, Half of the world's container shipments, one-third of the bulk cargo shipments, and two-thirds of the oil exports all pass through it on their way to other countries (Chhibber, 2017).

### **India Political, Economic and Strategic Explanations Regarding BRI**

After getting independence, India is flushing in the liberal democratic framework. Since its economic reforms in 1991, "India has combined liberal values with the market economy." In 2018 Modi appealed to nations at the Shangri-La Dialogue conference to advocate for naval access to sea lanes, territorial integrity, and respect for all states, irrespective of their size in the Indo-pacific region (Gallo, 2018). Furthermore, The Indian government has risen to prominence as a champion of the liberal order's principles in foreign affairs. The prime minister himself has consistently spoken about the shared principles of democracy at numerous speaking engagements overseas. He has focused on the necessity of economic development through globalization, and his administration stresses the importance of having a structured global order (Saran, 2018).

On following the liberal norms, India also supported the WTO, BRICS, and AIIB and believes it could enhance global political and economic institutions and strengthen regional solidarity. However, working with China, India is mostly focused on bringing equality to power allocation in institutions that already exist (Bajpae, 2017). Thus, Indian strategists are more likely to judge and predict that China's forceful behavior in the area heralds a Sino-centric regional order. To combat this, foreign ministers from Australia, India, Japan, and the United States form The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue QUAD. The group believes that China is a rising superpower, and the present system is in jeopardy" (De Castro, 2016).

Despite the real prospect of China changing the international order, India is planning preemptive actions. India is hesitant to participate in the BRI because it believes the programme supports Chinese strategies for regional economic development. The rise in collaboration between India and the United States, Japan, and Australia indicates India's grievances. The alliances were built to "deny the role of China in the region," albeit each nation still has different ideas of how to react to China. Even while there are areas of disagreement, India also sees certain similarities with other countries. "A free and open Indo-Pacific in terms of governance, basic rights, and economic transparency" is one point of convergence. China is seen as a danger to India's free and open Indo-Pacific. And that's why it is in opposition to the BRI (Vinay, 2018).



The economy of India will benefit greatly from upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific and a rules-based international order. The BRI's involvement puts India's growing market economy at danger. Even though India has almost little economic infrastructure, which would connect its markets to those of the BRI network, the Indian markets might benefit little, and may lose more, from the BRI, especially in comparison to the risk of being left behind by other regional markets. Even if Indian firms considered taking part in the BRI, they believe there are two primary challenges to deal with before they even think about it: an unworkable Indian market and little outside connection. This BRI presents the world with a chance, but nothing that must be missed. "Indian companies are unsure if they can capitalize on the infrastructure investments made by BRI because of concerns about the IOR and India's lack of internal connectivity." The plan is to make BRI appear unthreatening to India's market economy (Palit, 2017).

As a direct response to China's rising influence in the IOR, India has adopted measures like Project Mausam to promote many economic development initiatives (M. Sharma, 2018). Project Mausam has already covered a large number of nations and delivered several academic talks in New Delhi. India believes the project will oppose BRI's soft power projection directly. India wants to achieve the same kind of infrastructure project success as China has seen with BRI. "Present Mausam" aims to project India as the commercial and cultural hub of the Indian Ocean, in opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative, which will further strengthen the connections between China and the global economy. India is attempting to corral its hesitant South Asian neighbours into an Indian-dominated area in order to meet economic demands while boosting security; a contrast to China's clandestine BRI, whose intentions may be seen as more sinister.

## **Conclusion**

India has two main concerns about the Belt and Road initiative: CPEC-related sovereignty concerns and Maritime Silk Road-related strategic concerns. Meanwhile, at the deeper level, both the Indian Mausam project and MSR are about expanding influence strategically, economically and culturally.

However, Indian see BRI and China as threat and express strong concerns. For Example: Military buildup, relationship with neighbours, Diplomacy and Trade.

## **Military Build Up**

In the recent years Chinese Defence Budget has been increased by more than 10% yearly, whereas India's has grown significantly slower. Even though China has kept three war vessels for two years on the Somalia coastline, demonstrating great logistical strength. China is establishing commercial ports in Burma, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (all these ports are in the Indian Ocean). Some Indians fear military usage of the ports in the Indian oceans. China has also created roads, trains, and airports in Tibet, which might be used to attack India. As well as Senior Indian

defence officials also claim India's nuclear weapons are intended to deter China rather than Pakistan. However, the Chinese government believes that they need to be in the Indian Deep-sea to ensure energy and raw material supplies. Moreover, Indians are late in improving their side of the border infrastructure and other development infrastructure projects.

## **Relationships with Neighbours**

China has started warm relations with many of India's neighbours, such as Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

## **Diplomacy**

China's natural resource diplomacy has been more successful than India's. In Central Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the Indians frequently face up against the Chinese controlling natural resources. China's public-sector enterprises are willing to pay over the market price in order to secure contracts over Indian competitors.

## **Trade**

Even though Sino-Indian trade is expanding, it is unbalanced.

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