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The China-India-Pakistan Triangle: Belt and Road Initiative and South Asia's Regional Security

Leo Lin

(RIEAS Senior Analyst)

Abhishek Verma

(PhD Candidate, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Neru University, India)

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Leo Lin, Abhishek Verma¹

Table of Content

- I. Introduction***
- II. Geopolitics in South Asia: Dynamics of China, India, and Pakistan***
- III. The Belt and Road Initiative and Regional Security Challenges***
- IV. Implications for India***
- V. Implications for Pakistan***
- VI. The China-India-Pakistan Triangle: Recent Development***
- VII. Conclusion***

I. Introduction

¹ Leo Lin is a senior analyst with Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS); Abhishek Verma is a PhD candidate at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and streamlined border crossing westward and southward to Pakistan, India, and the rest of SouthEast Asia (Chatzky, 2020). The project was first unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, which was identified as a significant element of Beijing's effort to improve ties and stimulate growth and development along its geographic periphery. It was seen as part of an overall Chinese attempt to leverage China's growing economic power and influence to "strengthen and expand cooperative interactions, create an integrated web of mutually beneficial economic, social and political ties, and ultimately lower distrust and enhance a sense of common security" (Swaine 2015). BRI is a shift in strategy to integrate China with the rest of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and in the process, build infrastructure across these regions to boost the economic growth of the region (Hali, Shukui, and Iqbal 2015). China, as a great power, has increasing influence in peripheral regions. By initiating this tremendous project, it is interesting to see how it impacts the regions incorporated into the plan.

This report surveys the development of the BRI and its regional implications in South Asia. Particularly, this report provides an analysis from the perspectives of India and Pakistan. This report deals with two questions: What are the geopolitical dynamics of the China-India-Pakistan relations under the consideration of BRI? Second, what are the implications and impacts of the BRI on India and Pakistan? This paper utilizes the historical and comparative method, and the sources of data were collected from academic articles, governmental reports, and internet resources. The primary analytical approach employed in this book is geopolitics. Geopolitics as an approach to the study of international relations stresses the importance of locational factors in influencing relations among nations. Thus, geopolitics emphasizes geographic factors as important determinants of government policy and major determinants of the relative power position of changes, with developments in many areas (Verma 2007).

The structure of this report is as follows: This report first analyzes the dynamics of geopolitics in South Asia, focusing on China, India, and Pakistan. India and Pakistan's dominant characteristics of external policies, as well as their bilateral relations, will be laid out. Second, this report provides an account of China's mega plan, the Belt and Road Initiative, including the background, the content, and the part of the initiative involving India and Pakistan. Finally, this report will analyze the implications of the BRI on India and Pakistan and address some recent developments.

II. Geopolitics in South Asia: Dynamics of China, India and Pakistan

China's Presence in the South Asian Region

China began its transition from a planned economy to a market economy in 1979. Over the past 36 years, it has witnessed an average annual GDP growth rate of 9.7% and an average annual trade growth rate of 16.4% (Lin 2015). In 2009, China, with its GDP surpassing that of Japan, became the world's second-largest economy.² In 2010, China overtook Germany in export volume and thus became the world's largest exporter.³ In 2013, China surpassed the US in the total volume of import and export trade and became the world's largest trading country.⁴ According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China contributed 27.8% to the world economic growth in 2014.⁵ In 2014, China became the world's largest economy as it overtook the US in overall economic scale, measured by purchasing power parity. China's achievements since reform and opening-up can be described as an unprecedented miracle in world economic history (Lin 2015). In a security sense, China sees itself becoming the greatest power in all dimensions in the world - as it assumes that it was throughout history. It already has a defense

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/16/business/global/16yuan.html#:~:text=SHANGHAI%20%E2%80%94%20After%20three%20decades%20of,government%20figures%20released%20early%20Monday.>

³ <https://intrepidsourcing.com/trade-wiki/exports-from-china-figures-trends-customs-summary/>

⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-02-09/china-passes-u-s-to-become-the-world-s-biggest-trading-nation>

⁵ https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD

budget in excess of US\$ 175 billion in 2018, and reputedly internal security needs a budget higher than its defense budget.⁶ In 2020, China will increase its defense budget by 6.6%.⁷ Chinese generals have indicated that in the case of general hostility with any major power, China would respond with 'unrestricted warfare' against its adversaries, i.e., they would not confine their responses to any normative international standards.⁸ In relation to the South China Seas, the island disputes with Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, etc., China has shown scant interest in settlement other than on their own terms. China's proposed silk land and maritime routes are a peaceful indication of their steadily increasing global objectives (Sen 2016). Through skillful diplomacy and by virtue of its size and weight in international affairs, as symbolized by its position as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China has shown that it cannot be ignored (Verma 2007).

China's Strategic Interests with India and Pakistan

The role of China in South Asia was also bound to increase significantly. The state of its relations, especially with Pakistan and India, would have important consequences for stability in the region. It was still early to say what definitive form this engagement would take (Irshad 2015). China made a more significant move to establish a strong foothold in South Asia and has taken over several important constructions in the region, including the construction of Gwadar Port in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, on the Arabian Sea. China has also begun building the Gwadar road corridor all the way north to Xinjiang. These developments in South Asia are not unusual considering that China has expanded its trade ties with many developing countries, secured more energy supplies from them, and built extensive transport and urban infrastructure (Chen et al. 2014). China's growing presence in South Asia is arguably mainly for its global reach of economic activities. However, if paying a closer look, it reveals the political and security importance of the Chinese presence in the region. Particularly, the regional balance of power can be observed. Unlike in any other world region, China has to contend with India, not so much in direct economic competition but rather in restricting the latter versus its long-time ally Pakistan, thus maintaining a rough balance of power in South Asia (Chambers 2002).

Regarding the dynamics between China and India, the rise of China and India over the last two or three decades continues to make global news headlines (Chen et al. 2014). From a domestic perspective, China and India constitute unprecedented stories of economic development. Owing to vibrant growth rates in the last decade, they have already reached a heavyweight status in the global economy (Bussière and Mehl 2008). China's incursions into South and Southeast Asia worry Indian policymakers as China is stretching its power in the region. The competition between China and India affects the regional political and security dynamics. Their respective positions in the region are complicated by their varied cross-border linkages with the other neighboring countries. Despite the legacy of the 1962 border war, China and India have come a long way in improving their bilateral relationship (Chen et al. 2014). Regarding Pakistan, China has steadily appeared as Pakistan's largest trading partner equally in terms of exports and imports. Mutual trade and commercial links between the two nations were established in January 1963 when both nations engaged in the first bilateral long-term trade agreement (Irshad 2015). Pakistan and China signed a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2006, which came into effect in 2007. The agreement was separated into two parts, with Phase I ending in December of 2012 and Phase II enters into force on December 1, 2019.⁹ China and Pakistan also have close cooperation in the field of diplomacy and other issue-areas. The two countries have frequently exchanged high-level visits ensuing in a variety of agreements and investments in both nations at the government level as well as private bodies (Muhammad and Qi 2015).

⁶ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/05/c_137016482.htm

⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/21/asia/china-npc-meeting-intl-hnk/index.html>

⁸ <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/united-states/article/2188873/chinas-head-start-cyberwarfare-leaves-us-and>

⁹ http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zt_cv/lanmua/201912/20191202919457.shtml (in Chinese)

India and Pakistan's Bilateral Relations

Current political conditions, economic needs, and security aspirations of India and Pakistan seem conducive to consolidating the preliminary gains made in the peace process in recent years (Ahmad and Ebert 2015). From the depths of confrontation and crises, Pakistan and India have been able to take a series of confidence-building measures (CBMs) to establish a modicum of stability to their relations. The strategic relationship between Pakistan and India remains unstable (Verma 2007). Some major confrontation issues can be pointed out. The first one is the "enduring rivalry" between the two countries. The antagonism between India and Pakistan constitutes what scholars of international relations categorize as an "enduring rivalry." Enduring rivalries are defined as "long-standing militarized competitions between the same pairs of states" and are characterized by "the persistent, fundamental, and long-term incompatibility of goals between two states," manifesting themselves in "the basic attitudes of the parties toward each other, as well as in the recurring violent or potentially violent clashes over a long period of time" (Diehl and Cox 2011, Maoz and Mor 2002). The India-Pakistan rivalry shares with these the common features of geographic contiguity and the presence of at least one unresolved territorial dispute (Ahmad and Ebert 2015).

The presence of a territorial dispute drove the emergence of the South Asian rivalries, and that rivalries, including territorial disputes, are "the most persistent and least likely to terminate swiftly" (Diehl and Cox 2011). The second issue is the "Kashmir Conflict." Persistent lingering territorial conflicts over Kashmir, but also Siachen and Sir Creek, however, impede the chances to shift the Pakistani security priorities genuinely and to mitigate the threat perception in India fully. During peace talks in recent years, India has been reluctant to meet Pakistani expectations concerning the resolution of Kashmir, which undeniably remains the main territorial dispute between the two countries. The cross-border terrorist threat from Pakistan has remained India's central concern in recent years. New Delhi continues to perceive this threat as an outcome of the alleged nexus between Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and jihadi groups like Lashkar-e-Tayiba (LeT), who's a history of waging jihad in Kashmir and are also accused of involvement in major terrorist acts in India such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The Indian government dismisses the possibility that disgruntled elements of these groups could act independently to conduct cross-border terrorism (Ahmad and Ebert 2015). A third issue is "nuclear proliferation." One of the major reasons for India and the international community's concern about Pakistan has been its development of nuclear weapons. Pakistan's nuclear program originated in the early 1970s and accelerated in the late 1970s and 1980s. These developments were, in large part, linked to Pakistan's rivalry with India. Pakistan soon emerged as the linchpin of a vast proliferation network that provided sensitive nuclear technology and equipment to several countries, including China, Iran, and North Korea (Levy and Scott-Clark 2007). Over the past several years, Pakistan has increased its production of fissile material and expanded its stockpile of nuclear weapons, despite extraordinary financial stress in the country (Kaura 2016).

Dominant Characteristics of India's External Policies

India's external policies are affected by several factors. The first one is economic factors. Since 1991, Indian foreign policy has increasingly been shaped by domestic, regional, and global economic objectives. Growth in government revenue has allowed Delhi, without increasing the proportion of spending allocated to national defense, to increase military procurement in recent years greatly, thus at times creating the impression that India is primarily driven by geostrategic considerations (Dalmia and Malone 2012). The second is "strategic restraint." India has mostly exercised considerable "strategic restraint," not just vis-à-vis Pakistan but also more widely. While India and China have continued to engage in controlled mutual provocations across their very long border, tensions created by these incidents can now be addressed in a wide range of regularly scheduled consultations and through a useful patchwork of institutional mechanisms. After its humbling experience with peacekeeping in Sri Lanka, India is leery of unnecessary military entanglements in neighboring countries. In Afghanistan, for

example, India has kept a low profile, aside from the security protection Delhi provided for India's reconstruction program there (Dalmia and Malone 2012). "Strategic restraint" has come to be seen as a doctrine of Indian policy, having withstood several recent tests emanating from Pakistan, notably terrorist attacks on India's Parliament in 2001 and even more dramatically on several sites in Mumbai in 2008. While domestic pressure to respond militarily was strong, so was the sense across much of the political spectrum that escalation and reprisals were unlikely to yield a good outcome (Dalmia and Malone 2012). Another of India's dominant characteristics internationally is its "democracy." But its political life remains, mostly, a 'black box' to all but the best-informed observers. Both influence its foreign policy, but not as casual observers might expect, leading to tensions and misunderstandings between Western powers and India over Delhi's analysis of and relations with neighbors such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Myanmar.

On the international stage, India's democracy, overt commitment to the rule of law, and respect in the main for its constitutional values have marked it out as in some ways exceptional, although it is also seen at times by others as self-regarding and hypocritical. The practice of India's democracy, most prominently through its politics, remains a challenge, with implications for its foreign policy in both style and substance (Chitalkar and Malone 2011). Domestic politics also play a key role in determining India's positions on other "hot button" international issues. India's internal affairs overwhelmingly consume most of its political bandwidth, leaving little capacity for geostrategic and foreign policy planning. The fragmented, internally-oriented nature of its exceptionally disputatious politics makes foreign policy formation, particularly any fresh departure, difficult. Not surprisingly, then, significant continuity is evident in the foreign policy of several different governments and coalitions since 1991 (Chitalkar and Malone 2011). The most pressing internal security challenge today is the Naxalite movement (Chitalkar and Malone 2011). Groups acting under a "Maoist" ideology represent grievances stemming from deprivation of land and resources, unemployment, and socio-economic exclusion of Dalits (lower caste communities) and Adivasis (indigenous tribal communities) (Chandran and Joseph 2002). The northeast of India is awash with light weapons flowing in from China - without any hint of government support and utilizing international trafficking through Myanmar and Bangladesh (Bhaumik 2007). India's experience under the Raj remains a vivid factor in Indian diplomacy today. Jaswant Singh, India's former Foreign Minister (1998-2002) comments: "Multilaterally, many Indian voices have been very conscious of years of colonial 'subjecthood'" (Malone 2011).

Dominant Characteristics of Pakistan's External Policies

Different from India, the following factors determine Pakistan's external policies. The first is its domestic agenda and ideological compulsions. Pakistan's security policy imperatives have been inextricably linked with its domestic agenda and ideological compulsions, which have created conditions of insecurity, instability, and the emergence of Islamist terrorism. Pakistan's political leadership has done little to respond to Indian concerns about terrorism in the region emanating from territories under the control and command of the Pakistani military (Kaura 2016). Further, there are two fundamental principles of Pakistan's security policy, and they have remained dominant since the creation of the country in 1947. First is the obsessive desire to "escape India," in the sense of creating a different national identity by forsaking South Asian roots because South Asians would be an acknowledgment that Pakistan was essentially a part of Indian civilization. Second is the fanatical search for parity with India, particularly in the military domain, both conventional and nuclear (Kaura 2016). T.V. Paul points out that Pakistan's military elites have attempted unceasingly to obtain security "by striving for strategic parity with its larger neighbor through arms buildup, alignment with great powers, acquisition of nuclear weapons, offering a home base for transnational terrorist networks, engaging in terrorism on its own, and initiating wars and crises to extract territorial concessions" (Paul 2014). Thirdly, the military domination of Pakistani foreign and security policy has been a reality since the founding of the country. Despite the constant rewriting of its constitution, army generals have seized power directly, claiming that civilian politicians were not capable of running the country (Kaura 2016).

Pakistan has alienated itself regionally and internationally because of the grave mishandling of its Afghanistan and India policies, which have lacked any grand strategic design or farsightedness. The contradictory, irrational, and unsustainable demands of these policies have far outstripped Pakistan's resources, presenting it with the classic situation of a strategic overstretch. Pakistan is also faced with the danger of being branded as a terrorist state (Kaura 2016). The dangers that accompany Pakistan's growing nuclear arsenal clearly mean that addressing the challenge of nuclear proliferation should be at the top of the US foreign policy agenda regarding Pakistan (Kaura 2016). Finally, the US was once seen as the superpower ally who would strengthen Pakistan and allow the latter to stand up to India. With the US appearing increasingly reluctant to do this, China is being viewed by many Pakistanis as an "all-weather ally" who will help the country become India's equal (Kaura 2016).

III. The Belt and Road Initiative and Regional Security Challenges

The BRI Initiative

China is regarded as an important player in global strategy. However, economic interdependence serves as the single most powerful deterrent against an embargo or blockade by China's neighbors, especially in the South Asian region (Verma 2007). The 2008 Global Financial Crisis taught China that if it has hundreds of billions of dollars in dollar-denominated foreign exchange reserves, it can suddenly incur massive losses through no fault of its own. This means it would be safer to deploy the funds in RMB-denominated investments. China's BRI strategy aims to ameliorate these problems and create an international environment of prosperity and stability friendly to China (Overholt 2015). Concerning competing with other major powers in the region, China needed to enhance its presence as well. The existing world economic structure and governance system were established under the US leadership and thus dominated by the US and European economies (Du 2016). Specifically, China needed to: avoid creating strategic uneasiness in the US and confrontational relations with it; avoid middle-income trap through the resolution of its internal developmental contradictions to maintain the upward trajectory of growth based on the diversification of its development strategy; and avert distraction of state focus on development and dissipation of society's energies from the democratization of its polity (Shamsi et al. 2014).

The Proposal of the BRI and Its Advantages

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed to build the "Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)" and the "Maritime Silk Road (MSR)" when he visited Kazakhstan and Indonesia in September 2013 and October 2013, respectively. This initiative, later nicknamed BRI, is a grand geoeconomic vision and a long-term geopolitical strategy. When announcing his vision, Xi Jinping compared the 'Belt' to the historic Silk Road, which, over 2000 years ago, fostered long-distance economic and political relations between Eastern, Central, and Western civilizations. The "Road" was a primogenitor in the Indian Ocean sea routes during 618-907 CE, which connected the Tang Empire with South-Eastern Europe, Southwest Asia, Eastern Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. The contemporary plan is to create both a "Silk Road Economic Belt" - rail and roads running through Central Asia and onto Europe complemented by a "Maritime Silk Road" - ports and shipping lanes network that will connect the Southeast Asian states and countries which border the wider Indian Ocean. Together, both sections make up the Belt and Road Initiative'- an extensive global trade project that will potentially encompass a region of over 65 countries and a combined population of 4.4 billion people. It aspires to strengthen the connectivity between China and Eurasian countries through several land economic corridors, including one called 'Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar economic corridor' (BCIM-EC) between China and the Indian Ocean. The Maritime Silk Road proposes to link China's coast with Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and Africa, extending all the way up to Europe (Hu 2017).

China possesses three advantages when proposing this initiative. First, it has advantages in the construction material industry and capacity in infrastructure construction. Second, China has one of the highest national savings rates in the world, of 46 percent in 2017. China still stands apart with one of the world's highest savings rates, compared to the global average of 20 percent and 15 percent for emerging economies (Zhang et al. 2018).

So, China has ample funds for financing investment in infrastructure construction for participating countries in the BRI. Infrastructure is generally a bottleneck for growth in developing countries so that the investment will be well received. Third, China has an advantage in the developmental stage. Since the reform and opening-up, China has become the world's factory and the largest exporter through the development of labor-intensive processing industries. With continually rising wages in China, these industries have gradually lost their comparative advantages and have to be relocated to other countries with a comparatively low wage level. Most countries along the BRI have a GDP per capita of less than half of China's and thus are ideal destinations for relocating China's labor-intensive industries. Infrastructure construction of the BRI will facilitate these countries to capture the window of opportunity of developing labor-intensive industries, creating more jobs, and increase exports (Lin 2015).

The Content of the BRI Initiative

The key content of the BRI is "One Vision, Two Concepts, and Three Principals." The one vision is grand: development of high-quality infrastructure and common standards on land from Southeast Asia to Western Europe and along the sea lanes from China around Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa to Europe (Overholt 2015). In terms of two concepts, it focuses on connectivity and cooperation. The SREB/MSR strategy is a development strategy and framework which focuses on connectivity and cooperation among countries primarily in Eurasia. 'Connectivity' and 'Cooperation' are the keywords of the SREB/MSR strategy, thus bringing forth the economic development of the Eurasia economies (Du 2016). The scope of the SREB/MSR strategy has expanded to establish a free trade network, to promote the free flow of capital, technology, personnel as well as goods, to promote effective interaction, and to include the promotion of enhanced policy coordination across the Asian continent, financial integration, trade liberalization, and people-to-people connectivity (Du 2016).

The BRI vision document spells out three major principles in building the Belt and Road projects. First, BRI should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all. Second, it is a new type of government-led going-out strategy; that is, the government is responsible for setting up the stage for enterprises, and the private sector has to win business overseas. Third, the 'One Belt One Road' is definitely not just about roads and railways; rather, it is meant to be a comprehensive interaction process between China and the other countries involved, between their peoples and societies in the decades to come. The emphasis is thus on cooperation and "togetherness." It intends to substitute for geopolitical competition and power politics, business deals, and cooperation opportunities. This is a new type of network diplomacy. Although many countries are still skeptical, a larger game of networking is being played out along the ancient Silk Roads (Hu 2017).

The Actions Plan

The action plan will promote infrastructure development, trade and financial cooperation, and cultural and scientific exchange. To establish an interconnected infrastructure network, the action plan explains that separated road sections need to be linked. The actions plan references various bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, including ASEAN PLUS China (10+1), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), China Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), China Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Dialogue (GCC), and other organizations having specific security issues. Beijing envisions integrating the development of the countries along the Belt and Road through six major economic corridors on land and two maritime corridors. The six economic corridors on the Eurasian landmass are as follows:

- China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Cooperation Corridor;
- New Eurasian Land Bridge;
- China-Central Asia–West Asian Economic Cooperation Corridor;
- China - Pakistan Economic Corridor;
- China - Indochina Peninsula Economic Cooperation Corridor;
- China - Bangladesh - India - Myanmar Economic Corridor.

The two maritime routes are as follows: one from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and the other is from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific (Xu 2015). Through intergovernmental cooperation, it would build on shared interests, enhance mutual political trust, and establish consensus. Development strategies, policies, and plans will all have to be negotiated. This is the crucial first step before implementation (Banerjee 2016). The unrestricted and free trade across borders calls for enhanced customs cooperation, including mutual recognition of regulations, standards, and mutual assistance in law enforcement. Also, financial cooperation will require a stable currency system and seamless investment and financing arrangements leading to integration. Finally, strengthening people-to-people contacts is crucial. Public interest activities concerning education, health care, poverty reduction, biodiversity, and ecological protection for the benefit of the general public would be encouraged. The financing for the endeavor will come from various sources, namely, the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS New Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund. Additionally, the China-ASEAN Interbank Association and SCO Interbank Association will render finance (Jianmin 2015).

BRI and South Asia's Regional Security

Among the above-mentioned projects in the blueprint, two have strong implications for South Asia. One of them is the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the other is Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor. They both have elements of comprehensive economic cooperation but also intend to secure the supply of energy to China's Xinjiang and Yunnan provinces. Driven by the rapid pace of industrialization, China's reliance upon imported energy has surpassed the USA, and it is facing enormous challenges of ensuring adequate energy supply (Steeves and Ouriques 2016). These two economic corridors are aimed at assisting China with secure transportation of energy into China, but both of them are experiencing the challenges and potential risks caused by internal political instability in Myanmar and Pakistan (Hu 2017).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The CPEC aims to revive the earliest Silk Road, emphasizing infrastructure and establishing the strategic structure of bilateral cooperation. The project associates China's strategy to improve its western constituencies with Pakistan's concentration on enhancing its economy, comprising the infrastructure construction of Gwadar Port, together with focusing on energy cooperation and investment programs (Irshad 2015). China and Pakistan are privileged to have an "all-weather" friendship. Their geographical nearness enhances geoeconomic worth to their overall relationship. To enhance the benefits of their common border, the two sides in 1982 accomplished the legendary Karakorum Highway (KKH), linking China's Kashgar to Pakistan's Islamabad through the Khunjerab Pass. Throughout the 2000s, the highway was stretched and modernized to make it function for all kinds of traffic year-round. An internal network of roads connects KKH with Pakistan's Gwadar and Karachi ports in the south of the country (Ghulam 2015). The CPEC will behave as a channel for the novel Maritime Silk Route that imagines connecting three billion people in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The importance of the project is enormous for China, as in the wake of any adversity, war, or natural disaster within the Indian Ocean or eastwards, China's trade with Africa, the West, and most importantly, its oil imports from the Middle East would remain unhindered. It is through the massive investments in infrastructure in Pakistan that China seeks to tackle the menace of terrorism, which in the eyes of international observers, will hinder progress (Perlez 2014). Financing in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, China not only considers it possesses short-term economic benefits but also cares about the long-term strategic need of Pakistani economic development (Xiguang and Lizhou 2015).

Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM)

As China and India continue to grow their bilateral trade, they have become co-leaders of the BCIM Corridor project (Chen et al. 2014). With its strategic location in the southern part of Asia astride the Indian Ocean, Delhi has a crucial role to play in the overall fruition of BRI. In the past, the South Western routes of the Silk Road linked India to Chengdu (Sichuan) and Kunming (Yunnan) and from Kolkata and Kalinga on the coast of Orissa to the outside world (Banerjee 2016). India is connected to the Silk Road Economic Belt, also through its trade links to Tibet under its Treaty with China in 1954. From China's historical point of view, India is the converging point of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and the ancient Silk Road on land. China has already showcased to Indian Diplomats and Journalists China's preparations to build the New Silk Road (NSR) from the historic city of Xian, once the flourishing capital of imperial China. Once the territorial issues regarding the province of Jammu & Kashmir are finally resolved and the India-China border is peacefully settled, the historical trade route from Ladakh to Xinjiang and beyond can be resumed across the mountains (Banerjee 2016). China has denied that the new projects were aimed at establishing China's influence, saying Beijing is not aiming to establish influence, nor will it establish a new mechanism for the Silk Roads. China also links its proposed Economic Corridor through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as part of the Silk Road project. The (China-Pakistan) Energy Corridor will be built on the ancient Silk Road, which practically passes through Pakistan and links with the Middle East and India (Sen 2016).

Regional Security Challenges

There are three hot spots of security challenges under the BRI: The McMahon Line, the Himalayas and Tibet, and the Brahmaputra and the Ganges Delta.

First Hot Spot: The McMahon Line

The McMahon Line was named after the British diplomat Henry McMahon in 1914 at the Simla Conference. The agreement between the British Empire and Tibet was not signed by the Chinese government, and the boundary is not recognized by the People's Republic of China. Since the conclusion of the Indo-Chinese War in 1962, an uneasy peace has reigned over the "McMahon Line" as China now trumpets the discovery of an estimated \$60 billion gold find, and the beginning of mining operations in the Arunachal Pradesh region on the Chinese side of the Himalayas, along with plans to dam the headwaters of the major rivers in South East Asia and the publishing of new maps which shows Arunachal Pradesh as "South Tibet." Tensions are rising. While China denies it will construct more dams affecting the Brahmaputra River, China also lied about the construction of the first dam that was constructed on the Brahmaputra, which was finished in 2015. With both nations becoming ever more nationalistic, the possibility has increased. The Chinese government has also been encouraging the settlement of the Han Chinese in this area to strengthen its claim to the Himalayas, and what China claims is their rightful ownership of territory under dispute between China and India. Recently, the Chinese government has been referring to Arunachal Pradesh, which is currently under India's governance, as "Southern Tibet" or South Tibet. Since Tibet is under the military control of the Chinese in the Tibetan Plateau, China is following the same political formula which it followed when it seized the South China Sea via the military buildup of artificial islands in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Philippines.

Second Hot Spot: The Geopolitical Significance of the Himalayas and Tibet

One of the underlying principles of military science has always been to seize the high ground. The Himalayas are the highest mountain range in the world. China, since ancient times, has always regarded the Himalayas and Tibet as vital to its national security. China has historically referred to Tibet as "Xizang" or the "Western Storehouse" in Mandarin. While the Indo-Chinese War concluded in 1962, the cessation of hostilities was little more than an uneasy truce. At the time of the close of the Indo-Chinese War, neither power possessed nuclear weapons. Today both of these giant Asian powers possess nuclear weapons, so any conflict between India and China has the

potential of rising to the level of nuclear weapons being employed. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is an essential water resource for both India and China. The mighty Yangtze River and the Yellow River both receive water runoff from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau from Tibetan glaciers and the snowmelt from the mountains of the Himalayas. On the Indian side, the rivers, the Brahmaputra and Indus also are fed by the glaciers of Tibet and the snowmelt of the Himalayas. For India, the status of the Brahmaputra is the most sensitive as the Chinese are developing dams on the Tibetan Plateau that could severely restrict the flow of water from Tibet into the Brahmaputra. This could rapidly become a serious flashpoint between India and China. For the moment, the two nuclear powers share the water resources, and neither one has attempted to gain a monopoly on the source of water for both countries. However, with China becoming more bellicose in her official statements, particularly by calling the Arunachal Pradesh "South Tibet," China appears to be setting the groundwork for an attempt to force India from the Arunachal Pradesh to gain total control of the source of water which is vital to both countries. Besides water, there are large deposits of copper in Tibet's Yulong Copper Mine as well as oil and other precious minerals, which China wants to use to supply her manufacturing base. For decades the Chinese have been constructing the necessary infrastructure to be able to develop the Tibetan Plateau, and finally, their hard work is going to pay off. The work of building this infrastructure is hampered by the climate of the Himalayas, especially the altitude, which only allows men and women to work at the high altitudes for limited amounts of time.

Third Hot Spot: The Brahmaputra and the Ganges Delta

The Ganges Delta, also known as the Green Delta, is fed by the rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Ganges river. While the Ganges River arises from the western Himalayas in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, the Brahmaputra begins its journey from the Angsi glacier in Tibetan territory, which is controlled by China. The Ganges Delta is one of the most fertile deltas in the world. One of the major rivers feeding the Ganges Delta is the Brahmaputra. With the construction of the Zangmu Dam, which became operational in October of 2015, the possibility of war between China and India has been simmering. With the renewed aggressive behavior of China in regard to the Arunachal Pradesh region in northeastern China, the ability of the Chinese to simply stop the flow of water to the Brahmaputra has quietly raised tensions between the two nuclear powers. China continues to clash with India over the Tibetan Plateau. In 2017, India and China became embroiled in a military standoff in Doklam in Bhutan. Since 1949, India and Bhutan have an agreement where India is responsible for guiding the affairs and national security of Bhutan. China, on June 16, 2017, after publishing maps that disputed the Convention of Calcutta, which was signed in March of 1890, moved armed troops along with construction crews into Doklam and began expanding a road leading southward onto the Doklam Plateau. On June 18, 2017, India dispatched 270 armed troops with two bulldozers to prevent the Chinese troops from extending the road. After several clashes, in August of 2017, both sides withdrew, and the status quo antebellum was restored. During this period of time, China interrupted the water flow date of the Siang River that feeds the Brahmaputra, which raised the alarm in India and the Green Delta. The Chinese claimed that the interruption was the result of an adjustment to its measuring stations. Remarkably, after the standoff at the Doklam Plateau had been resolved, the Chinese were able to resume sharing water flow data with India. With the Chinese constructing additional dams in the Tibetan Plateau, the threat of cutting off water to India's northeaster plain and the Green Delta cannot be easily dismissed. With nationalist governments in power in both countries, the ability to disengage from future standoffs will be more difficult to achieve. As a result, the odds of war between the two nuclear-armed countries have increased, which does not bode well for peace between China and India.

IV. Implications for India

The BRI covers highways, railways, pipelines, ports, and other infrastructure projects that will connect China with Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, East Africa, Europe, and other Eurasian countries overland as well as via sea route. Massive infrastructure projects designed and financed by the Chinese across the length and breadth of Asia and Europe certainly have their own attractive character, especially for small lower-income countries in South Asia and beyond. As discussed above, it has also been accepted by a number of small and big countries to enhance connective and boost their economy. The project

covers 71 countries, accounting for 30% of the world's GDP and 62% of the world's population. However, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is seen differently by one of the most significant players in the region, India. Since its inception in 2015, India has a firm reservation on this project. In an official statement, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs was quoted saying, "Regarding the so-called 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC),' which is being projected as the flagship project of the BRI/OBOR, the international community is well aware of India's position. No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity" (MEA: 2017). It is often conceived as a Chinese 'debt trap Diplomacy.' India listed a set of criteria such initiative must follow, which included avoiding 'unsustainable debt,' taking into account environmental protection,' making a 'transparent assessment of project costs,' guaranteeing the transfer of skill and technology to local communities, and respecting 'sovereignty and territorial integrity. While explaining the Indian stand on CPEC, the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs answered on the floor of Indian Parliament, "Government's concerns arise in part from the fact that the inclusion of the CPEC as a flagship project of 'OBOR/BRI,' directly impinges on the issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity of India. This so-called CPEC passes through parts of the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, which are under illegal occupation of Pakistan. Government has conveyed its concerns to the Chinese side about their activities in areas illegally occupied by Pakistan in the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh and has asked them to cease such activities." (Rajya Sabha, 2018). The corridor will run through India's periphery, more significantly, Gilgit Baltistan, claimed by India as part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In due course, this geopolitical reality of the CPEC could potentially impinge upon India's geo-security calculations and pose a strategic challenge (Network, 2015). India's Ambassador to China Vikram Misri was quoted saying, "No country can participate in an initiative that ignores its core concerns on territorial integrity and sovereignty."

India also takes cognizance of expanding BRI at its southern periphery. As a part of BRI, China has expanded its presence in the Indian Ocean region and Island states which was considered by India as its own backyard. Almost all the island nations have joined BRI, which was too much an economical bait which they couldn't resist. Over a period of time, eventually, the official Indian position against BRI hardened to the extent that India was the only key country in the IOR and among the major powers not represented at the international Belt Road Forum organized in Beijing in May 2017 (Khurana: 2019). India has a long coastline of almost 7520 km, and it is inextricably linked to its security structure. As a matter of fact, the terrorists of the 2008 Mumbai terror attack entered India from the sea route itself.

India believes that China aims to bolster its investment in IOR and alter the long status quo by challenging Indian pre-eminence. India often calls it China's 'string of pearls' strategy in the Indian Ocean Region (He: 2020). It is even seen by different international media as an expansion of Chinese military infrastructure. In Sri Lanka, Chinese investments include a 99-year lease and 70 percent stakes in the deepwater port at Hambantota. In the Maldives, the island state owes China \$1.5 billion (about 30% of GDP) in construction costs. Bangladesh's main port at Chattogram has been upgraded, and an industrial park installed as well by China (He: 2020). China is also involved in the development of a multi-billion-dollar deep seaport in Kyaukpyu in Myanmar on the coast of the Bay of Bengal (Patrabonis: 2018). All these developments coupled with Sino-India historical animosity create a crucial recipe for mistrust and misperception.

China Pakistan Strategic Partnership

There has been a long history of India-Pakistan rivalry. For the past 70 years, no major common ground could be achieved because of numerous contentious issues. Pakistan has stalled talks on the Kashmir issue, and India is willing to resume dialogues only after Pakistan renounces cross-border terrorism as a state policy. However, Pakistan has been able to build a strategic 'all weather' friendship with China against India. By allowing China to build a \$46 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor, Pakistan has permanently added the Chinese angle to the India Pakistan conflict. China is providing technical assistance to Pakistan to help it develop a sea-based tactical Nuclear weapon to offset India's conventional military superiority against Pakistan (Kanijo:

2017), CPEC, passing through, Gilgit-Baltistan is being managed by the Chinese military. This exacerbates two serious concerns for India on its northern border. First, in case of conflict between India and Pakistan, these Chinese forces are most likely to aid their all-weather friend Pakistan's army. Second, there remains a possibility of a second front from the western side of Jammu and Kashmir in case of conflict with China. Recently, Indian Army Chief MM Naravane said at Annual Press Conference that "there is no doubt that Pakistan and China together form a potent threat and there is an aspect of collusion, and it is very much form of our assessment while formulating plans." Hence there is a serious security implication even if India joins BRI.

Geopolitical Vulnerability

India imports a substantial quantity of its energy requirement from the gulf countries. All these imports are routed through the Arabian Sea. The strategic location of Gwadar port could be used against Indian Sea Lanes of Communications, threatening hydrocarbon supplies through the Strait of Hormuz. Recently China and Iran cracked a 25-year Cooperation Program or Comprehensive strategic partnership. Based on the agreement, China has agreed to invest US\$280 billion to US\$400 billion through Foreign Direct Investment into Iranian oil, gas, and petrochemical industries (Saleh: 2020). The agreement has a wide scope ranging from economic to cultural to security aspect of both the countries. Given Pakistan, as an all whether a friend of China and equally antagonistic to India, along with Iran, may choke India's access to Afghanistan and other parts of Central Asia. India is already out of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project that connects Chabahar port to Afghanistan (Haidar 2020). There has also been the active involvement of China in Chabahar port. This entire geopolitical dynamic should make the Indian strategic and diplomatic community brainstorm on expanding the Indian footprint around and extended regions produce suitable leverage over China Pakistan nexus.

Security Implications at Indian Ocean region

Traditional Chinese military threat at the Himalayas has often led to major military confrontations, including the ongoing Galwan crisis. The People's Liberation Army Navy's established presence in Indian Ocean Region could add a seaward dimension to China's existential continental threat. Presently, India enjoys naval superiority in the IOR. However, to secure its BRI Investments, China is trying to gain sea- control in the IOR against the opposing forces. India has in the past registered reservations with the Sri Lankan authority against the presence of Chinese naval ships at Hambantota port. Sri Lanka clarified that these ports would never be used for military activities against any country. Djibouti now hosts China's first overseas military facility, the port of Gwadar is evolving into a Chinese outpost, and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) already utilizes Karachi and Seychelles for replenishment and refueling. The creeping militarization of port investments in other countries, from East Africa to South and Southeast Asia, can no longer be ruled out.



Source: [chinas-bri-saudi-arabia-and-the-confusing-game-inside-pakistan-1024x742jpg-1589780713](#)

Strategic Aspect

India has been one of the few countries in the region that did not attend the belt and road forum. Expanding reach and influence of BRI across the region, including South Asia, have been quite compelling for India to be pro-active with its strategic moves. India's stand on BRI apart from sovereignty issue is that "connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, openness, transparency and equality," which "must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create an unsustainable debt burden for communities." (MEA: 2017). India has tried to either balance or offsets the Chinese sphere of influence in the region by providing practical alternatives. The advantage inherited by India in this regard is its Geographical proximity which cannot be hedged by the smaller neighbors.

India's foremost strategy is to maintain strategic cooperation with like-minded countries across South Asia and Indo- Pacific region. One of the natural outcomes of Chinese increasing influence and assertiveness is the convergence of India, Japan, Australia, and the United States, formally named QUAD, an acronym of Quadrilateral Arrangement (Sajjanhar: 2020).

India had rightly transformed its 'Look East policy' to 'Act East policy' when BRI intensified. A major component of this 'Act East policy' as envisaged by India is Strong relations with Vietnam, pursuance of the Trilateral Highway project, proposed Mekong-Ganga Economic Corridor, strengthening BIMSTEC, and developing maritime relations with Indonesia and Singapore (Pathak: 2019). India has further intensified its 'go west strategy' to increase its footprints in the West. The major initiative under this strategy is partnering North-South Transport Corridor, ensuring access to central Asia and Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) jointly developed by India and Japan (AAGC: 2020).

Economic Aspect

Whether India likes it or not, BRI has commenced and has been accepted by almost 70 countries across Asia and around the world. Although there have been apprehensions regarding its opacity and debt trap potential, the positives cannot be ignored. Connectivity through rail, road, or waterways has the potential to usher in a new era of a flourishing economy. Of course, there would be some apprehension of such a huge scale project, but that can be managed. At a time when most of the Indian neighbors and other partners in different regions have participated in this project, it would be an isolationist tendency of India if it does not consider engagements and negotiations on major contentions. Here are few points as illustrated by Mukul Sanwal, former India UN Diplomat, on the necessity for this strategic move.

- The 21st century belongs to Asia, and BRI can be seen as a part of the transformation, something very similar to the industrial revolution of the 18th century. Middle-class consumption growth is estimated to increase by \$30 trillion by 2030, of which only \$1trillion is expected to come from the western economy, and most of the rest is to come from Asia. China has one-third population of Asia, and by 2050 its population of working age will shrink by 200 million, while in India, the working-age population will increase by 200 million. So, from the long-term perspective of providing favorable infrastructure for the coming workforce, joining BRI is an important strategic consideration.
- Belt and Road Initiative and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank have effectively challenged Western dominance in the economic sector. Major western economies such as Italy have accepted the BRI as well as Britain joined the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank in 2015. So as Joseph Nye points out, the Western-dominated world order has been an aberration in the long history of human civilization, and the rise of resilient Asia is inevitable (Nye: 2011). This is a propitious moment to be a part of this historic transformation.
- Asian Development Bank, during its formative years, drew global attention to infrastructure as a key driver to economic growth in Asia. BRI has the capacity to provide a network of physical and digital infrastructure or transport, energy transmission, and communications, harmonized with a market of advanced manufacturing and innovation-based companies. According to a recent analysis, only 8 of 68 countries are at risk of default which is certainly not going to have much impact on the overall viability of the \$3 trillion reserves of China for potential investment.
- There has been a lot of apprehension about BRI's transparency and insensitivity to national concerns. On the other side of the spectrum, BRI is evolving towards standards of multilateralism through linkage with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The International Monetary Fund describes it as a "very important contribution" to the global economy and is "in very close collaboration with Chinese authorities on sharing the best international practices." China has also started seeking co-finance with multilateral institutions as well as private capital investments.
- Like the Marshall Plan of the 1950s, BRI, too, entails a similar strategic objective. The Marshall Plan also required the recipient to accept certain rules for deepening trade and investment ties. Through BRI, Chinese control of supply chain routes and their naval presence will increase significantly, but it will remain substantially below United States fleet deployment (around 800 overseas bases). *India needs to extract commercial opportunities to benefit Indian technology companies.*
- Belt and Road Initiative projects such as CPEC and BCIM which is linked to India, can also be used to fast track the implementation and effectiveness of Indian connectivity projects. 'Act East Policy' that aims to connect the Indian North Eastern Region with Myanmar and other ASEAN countries could be a game-changer in developing Indian stakes in South East Asian countries.

India remains a recognized power in the South Asian region. For effective implementation and to realize the true potential of BRI Chinese government will always be ready to welcome India into BRI. "We will keep the door open on India's participation in BRI. China has repeatedly extended invitations to India to be part of BRI,"

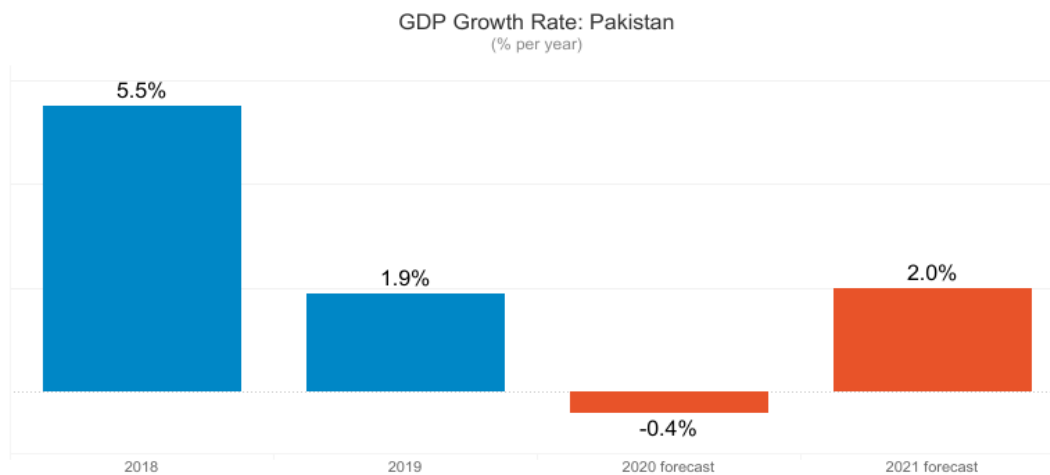
said Associate Professor Huang Yunsong, Associate Dean, Sichuan University School of International Studies (Singh: 2018). India needs to realize its importance for BRI and try to use BRI to enhance its own connectivity projects and presence around the region and beyond. India needs to work towards 'multilateralising' the BRI with a set of rules (Sanwal: 2019).

V. Implications for Pakistan

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in general and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in particular have altered the security and economic dynamics of Pakistan to a great extent. Launched in 2015 through CPEC, Pakistan has been able to bandwagon with China primarily to counter Indian perceived threats and get out of their economic woes. Welcoming CPEC in Pakistan, the then PM Nawaz Sharif called it an opportunity to transform the country into a regional hub and pivot for commerce and investment'. The Pakistan prime minister was recently quoted saying, "If we can learn from any one country in the world, it is China. Their development model suits Pakistan the best. The speed with which China developed in the last 30 years is something we can learn from". From Pakistan, China Pakistan Economic Corridor appears to be a much aspired economic and strategic engagement that will have a huge implication on Pakistan's economy and security. Following are few implications of the CPEC project on Pakistan.

Economic Aspect

For a decade or so, Pakistan's economy has been suffering from a major multi-frontal crisis. With a 24.5% population living below National Poverty Line (ADB: 2015), Pakistan is facing a huge demographic disaster. COVID-19 has further deteriorated the situation for the worst. Asian Development Banks chart below statistically shows the recent and forecasted economic situation. Pakistan's current account deficit in 2018 was 6% of its GDP, a major increase from 1.6% in 2016. The foreign direct investment plunged by 60% to \$1.4 billion; the rupee fell by another 13% during the eight months to April 2019 as the foreign exchange reserves continued to be under pressure (Nazar: 2020). During 2018-19, GDP growth crashed to 1.9% from 5.5% in 2017-18, debt-to-GDP increased from 72% of the GDP to 85%, while exports remained flat.



Source: Asian Development Bank. Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2020 Update (September 2020)

Strategically CPEC claims to bolster the economic dimension of the China-Pakistan relationship, which has been defined by security cooperation for decades. CPEC is a strategic economic project aiming at enhancing regional connectivity for the economic development of Pakistan and China. The economic corridor will connect Pakistan's Gwadar port with China's north-western region between 2014 and 2030. It is expected to be beneficial for Pakistan and China and is also expected to have positive spill over effects on other neighboring countries by

enhancing Pakistan's geographical connectivity with landlocked Central Asian states. More than \$62 billion is slated to be invested in Pakistan's power, infrastructure, industrial and agricultural sectors under the CPEC. The project would lead to a reduction in a power outage due to enhancement in electricity generation capacity and investment in other sectors of the economy. Based on this fact, the GDP growth rate of Pakistan is targeted to increase to 7.5% by 2030 with the addition of about 2 million jobs. CPEC also aligns with Pakistan's vision 2025 that projects rapid urbanization and high GDP Growth rate by 2025. (Faizal et al., 2019). Asim Saleem Bajwa, Chairman of Pakistan's CPEC Authority, was quoted saying, "we will increase our exports, and it will be a big boost to our economy. And similarly, when we go into agriculture, this is going to benefit maximum people by creating more employment and enhancing yields of the crops of the farmers.....CPEC is the project which will eventually benefit the people of Pakistan" (Xinhuanet: 2021).



Strategic Aspect

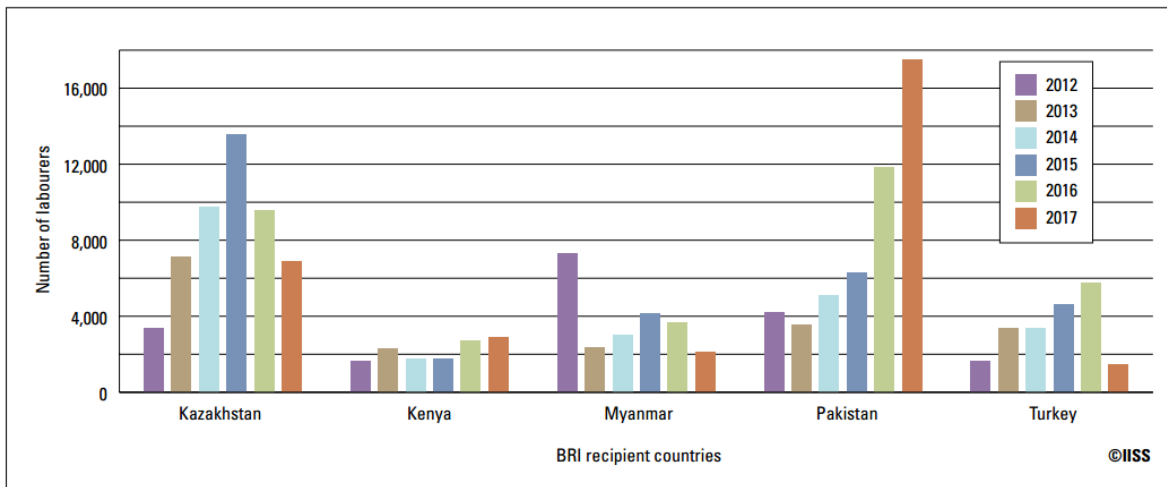
BRI provides Pakistan a huge strategic replacement. It would offset the pressure stemming from the US stepping away from its position as Pakistan's strategic partner by securing a parallel commitment from China (IISS: 2020). This is fueled by two broad factors: one, mutual animosity towards India. Two, the US is becoming more reticent and conditional in extending aids. USA's recent retrenchment policy in Afghanistan and its growing defense convergence with India (recently India US upgraded their relationship to Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership) has further disturbed Pakistan's strategic calculations. Scholars believe that the army was the biggest beneficiary of the billions that the United States poured into Pakistan in the name of support for the war on terror. When that well seemed to dry up, it found a willing donor in Beijing for whom CPEC became a flagship project for its ambitious BRI (Gupta, 2020). China has assisted Pakistan not only in developing an arms industry for tanks, armored vehicles, and fighter aircraft, but they have also been closely involved in Pakistan's strategic weapons program, including providing them missile technology. Chinese financial assistance is estimated 20 times more than that coming from the US (Sareen, 2019). Pakistan's Prime minister went to the extent of publicly blaming the USA for nurturing terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He said at a meeting at the Centre for Foreign Relations in 2019 that "There was always a link between Pakistan and al Qaeda.....there had to link.....because they trained them". He further said that Islamabad's joining of the

US coalition in its war against terror after 9/11 attacks was "one of the biggest blunder" made by his country. China had over the years, become an indispensable ally while the US is perceived as an undependable, unreliable, and overbearing country.

Chinese assertive foreign policy at its periphery and its high dependence on the Malacca strait for energy transportation create a strategic vulnerability. China is the second-largest energy user in the world. Almost 85% of total imports of China is conducted through Malacca Strait, out of which 80% are energy imports (US Energy Information Administration: 2018). These statistics show that how much the control over Malacca Strait is critical for China. In order to overcome this lingering vulnerability, China has contemplating various alternative routes by offering incentives of mutual growth, especially amongst developing nations (Nadeem: 2018). Among these initiatives are Thailand's Kra canal, China Pakistan Economic Corridor etc. CPEC is the most important project under Belt and Road Initiative as it provides the best alternative route for energy transportation that bypasses the Strait of Malacca. There are several strategic advantages of Gwadar port in the south-western region of Pakistan. Shipment from Gwadar port, which is very close to the gulf, to Kashgar in western China would reduce the distance to 3000Km and ten days as against 13000Km and 40+ days. Presently the energy shipment route is juxtaposed between the Andaman Sea, The Bay of Bengal, and Malacca strait while exposing it to piracy and naval terrorism at chokepoints. Gwadar- Kashgar route provides a more protected trade passage to China. Among others, CPEC also provides less risk and fewer traffic routes with mutually beneficial options. Pakistan targets its economic downturn while China is keen to develop an alternative for the Malacca dilemma.

Security Aspect

China Pakistan Economic Corridor presents a huge challenge as well as an opportunity to control or manage the restive regions of both China and Pakistan. CPEC is exposed to a wide spectrum of security risks because of its direct link to China's security goals in its western region and its route passing through Pakistan's restive western region of Baluchistan, where regional nationalism and violence-prone separatism runs deep. So far, Baloch separatists have presented the most high-profile security threats to CPEC projects (IISS: 2020). A prominent luxury resort in Gwadar, Pearl Continental Hotel, which is frequently visited by Chinese officials in connection with the CPEC project, was stormed by four heavily armed gunmen affiliated to Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) on 11TH May 2019. Despite the presence of high state security, it took 12 hours, four hotel staff, and 1 Pakistan military officer's life before the militant was subdued. This was the resistance to the growing Chinese presence in Balochistan. Prior to the Pearl Continental, there have been several attacks on Chinese nationals to show local's resistance to the project. This includes an attack (explosion and firing) on the Chinese consulate in Karachi, killing two civilians and two police officers in November 2018, a bus carrying Chinese engineers traveling southwest Baluchistan targeted by suicide bombers in early 2018, and many more. Increasing animosity among the Baloch insurgents towards Chinese nationals is in part induced by the perception that China is accompanying Pakistan in "colonization" of their land. The following chart shows the number of Chinese workers employed in various BRI recipient countries.



Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, China Statistical Yearbook 2013–18

The increasing deployment of Pakistan forces to protect Chinese assets and nationals working in the region has further radicalized BLA. In a deliberate targeting of CPEC, Baloch militants seek to attract greater international attention to their cause and political demands (IISS: 2020). In addition to BLA, Islamic extremist terrorist groups in Pakistan, including Islamic State in Khorasan Province (IS-KP), along with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and al-Qaeda militants, present another prominent threat to CPEC. The regions through which CPEC passes include some of the highly unstable and fragile areas. Kashgar region in Xinjiang, which CPEC connects on one end to Gwadar in Pakistan on the other, is the center of Uyghur separatists with a possible link to the Pakistani Baloch insurgents. China is exposed to two frontal vulnerabilities as a result of its choice of CPEC route intersection. One is the threat of terrorism which can compromise the progress and legitimacy of CPEC. Two, the threat of transnational terrorism spilling over to Chinese territory cannot be discounted—Xinjiang borders eight countries, including India, Pakistan, and Russia. Culturally distinct, ethnically alien, and religiously ostracized, Uyghur identifies themselves more aligned to Central Asian nations. Once a part of the famous ancient Silk Road with a thriving trading post and strategically important Kashgar city, Xinjiang is now a restive place, an epitome of Chinese state repression (Verma, 2020). China has further accentuated a crackdown on Uyghur Muslims of the Xinjiang region through larger standardization, surveillance, and securitization measures as it fears US-designated terrorist group 'East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Since September 11, 2001, China has been able to link growing Uyghur resentment with global jihad's radicalism (Ramchandran: 2018). The objective of the state in Xinjiang is the securitization of the Uyghur management as a part of the broader counter-terrorism narrative. Hence, from a security perspective, CPEC presents both an opportunity to bring development in the restive regions as well as a challenge to manage violent radicalism that can potentially jeopardize the execution of the projects.

VI. The China-India-Pakistan Triangle: Recent Development

India and China

In 2017, BRI was written into the Communist Party of China's constitution, which underlines its special status. Coronavirus wrecked-havoc across the length and breadth of the globe. Almost all the countries closed their border and focused their economic, political and psychological attention on controlling the pandemic. Amidst the pandemic, there occurred a violent clash between India and China at the Line of Actual Control (Biswas: 2020). This has further deteriorated the ties between the two. Trust deficit which has been the major hindrance, has further solidified (Saran: 2020). Starting in May 2020, China started amassing troops in Galway Valley, which was never a point of contention between the two. According to experts, the construction of a strategic

Daulat Beg Oldi road infuriated the Chinese. But as a matter of fact, the Chinese have enormously upgraded the infrastructure in Eastern Ladakh, including a heliport construction close to Line of Actual Control (LAC) (Bhat: 2020). This clearly brings out the Chinese 'middle kingdom' mentality wherein their world view is quite hierarchical, and their belief system is based on a tributary system (Saran: 2020).

Considering the feasibility of the Belt and Road Initiative, amidst pandemics, China faced calls from countries in Asia and Africa to delay or waive the exorbitant debt repayments. The Kiel Institute for the world economy in Germany said last year in a report that the world's debt to China grew ten times between 2000-2017, with developing countries owing \$380 billion to China (Krishnan: 2020). COVID Pandemic has also impacted the BRI projects in Europe adversely. One of the more closely involved European countries in the BRI: Greece, has delayed projects by half a year (Goulard: 2020). At the same time, European engagement with the Chinese, to some extent, depends on Sino-American relations. Many of the Chinese projects under BRI in Europe is suffering from unsubstantiated delay and transparency issues.

Pakistan and China

Pakistan had embraced CPEC with alacrity when it was launched in 2015. Strategic, security, and economic dimensions discussed above induced Pakistan to comprehend politico-strategic leverage over emerging economic pressure. Whether it is 12-year high inflation last year or weakening of Pakistan currency to 160 Pakistani Rupee per dollar or ballooned total national debt to 110% of the GDP, out of which more than 40% is taken by China itself (Bansal, 2021), Pakistan's economy is in doldrums hitting new lows. When it comes to international loans, Islamabad has been turning to foreign banks to meet its balance of payment requirements. In addition to the \$7.3 billion it secured from IMF, Pakistan had been granted 300 million from Asian Development Bank last year. According to World Economic Forum, 8.5% of Pakistan's youth population (age below 30), which constitutes 65% of their overall population, is unemployed. There have been reports that China is backing away from its initial promises. According to researchers at Boston University, the state-backed China Development Bank and Export-Import Bank of China extended \$75 billion in 2016, which came down to \$4 billion in 2019 and further \$3 billion in 2020. CPEC projects are fraught with corruption which has recently been exposed. Several cabinet members of the present government have been involved in a big corruption scandal in the power sector. The investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) unearthed alleged irregularities of \$1.8 billion in which Pakistani higher officials were complicit (Wani, 2020). Pakistan approached IMF in August 2018 for a bailout package when Imran Khan Government took over. It is to be noted here that in 2018 World Bank cautioned the participating countries in the BRI Projects about impending debt risks, stranded infrastructure, social risks, and corruption (World Bank, 2018). All these risks propounded by World Bank seem to be coming true for CPEC, which has been interfered with by the military, fraught with corruption, and made Pakistan more debt-ridden. IMF, in 2019, approved a \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF), which aimed at returning sustainable growth to the country's fragile economy and improve the standards of living. But the third tranche of loan has been delayed due to COVID-19. Coronavirus pandemic has made visible what was earlier understood by scholars and political elites.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

If we look at the security cooperation between China, India, and Pakistan, the three most important geopolitical strategic locations of Asia in terms of trade and politics both, we see that it has initiated with the entry of India and Pakistan in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on June 2017 at the Astana Summit of Kazakhstan right after the 2014 CPEC agreement in Pakistan. CPEC is a flagship project of BRI, and China wants to make it secure from Pakistan and India's years-long arch rivalry, terrorism, and border skirmishes as they share the history of four wars with each other within a short year of their independence. China in order to secure the CPEC route and BRI project, has put forth the proposal of considering Pakistan and India as a full member of SCO in front of other member SCO states. After certain sessions of SCO and voting, it has been decided that Pakistan and India should be made full members of SCO.

The entry of Pakistan and India in SCO was considered a symbol of strength by Beijing in the security cooperation of a region as it will significantly calm down the security issues arising between the two. The purpose of SCO is to address the challenges of separatism, extremism, and terrorism mainly, whereas the other associated problems with them are drug trafficking, information security threats, and cross-border crimes. Terrorism is one of the biggest challenges for SCO, whether it's state-organized terrorism or individual militant groups organized terrorism, for it doesn't limit itself to a specific territory but goes beyond borders. This evil has affected this region for a long time and more vigorously after the US abrupt attack on Afghanistan.

The people of this region have suffered a lot when it comes to prosperity and free trade. SCO is considered as a source to introduce secure free trade in this region through its principles of equality. However, China and India don't share a very nice history when it comes to border demarcation. They share a history of the dispute over Tibet and the Himalayan region over the McMahon Line, and McMahon Line is considered a bone of contention between the two. According to this borderline, North East Frontier Agency, now called Akasai Chin, and Arunachal Pradesh is made a part of India under the Simla convention, 1914 against the "Line of actual control." The Line of actual control was considered the actual border between China and the subcontinent till 1935, even after Simla convention.

It was made the one-sided decision borderline officially by Britain upon the advice of Olaf Caroe (then British Civil Servant). When Pakistan and India became independent of British rule, Britain has included Akasai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh in India against "Line of actual control." This controversial border demarcation has also led India and China to war back in the war back in 1962 as a result of which China has occupied all of the disputed territories but announced the withdrawal from Line of Actual control regions on November 20, 1962, while declaring a ceasefire. After that both China and India have a dispute over the northern tip of Sikkim. Even after sharing such a disturbing history with India, China has introduced India along with her friend Pakistan in SCO to ensure peace.

To ensure peace, control over cross border crimes is really important. To control cross-border crimes, SCO established Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in June 2004. The purpose of RATS is to control crimes like drug trafficking, trans-border terrorism, and cyberwarfare. It is designed like a Security watch organization whose purpose is to control crime through bilateral and unilateral agreements among states. Everything was ideal for the Asian region under the flag of SCO and participation of Pakistan and India as full members until the alliance of India with the US against the wishes of Russia. After that, the peace that appears to be actual through SCO among Pakistan, India, and China slipped into troubled waters and affected regional politics adversely. It is evident from history that an alliance made out of the region at the stake of regional peace and politics is never beneficial for the country that made it nor even for the region. Similar is the case with India. Although the trade between China and India is double the size of Pakistan and China, the dream of India to increase its geopolitical influence in the region has dragged it into war and poor relations with both Pakistan and China.

As far as the relations between Pakistan and China are concerned, they are always found friendly. Both Pakistan and China have supported each other diplomatically when they face any problem and need internal support. Like back in the 1960s, Pakistan has introduced China to the world by facilitating Ping Pong diplomacy. Recently when Pakistan was considered by the FATF to be greylisted, China was the only country that has supported Pakistan by not voting against her. Even when the issue of Kashmir has claimed much attention due to article 370, China has backed Pakistan in this issue at the diplomatic level instead of India, for India is making the wrong claims by going against the UN resolution. India, the 3rd largest Asian economy, has recently initiated a war with China by constructing the Indian road in the disputed Galwan River valley, which is considered an attack by China on its sovereignty. This incident resulted in war between the two states, and now China is advancing every day and building new military camps in the areas she is occupying. Recently there is the news that China has

taken control over Arunachal Pradesh, too, according to LAC, as India has violated a ceasefire. Hence, the dream of cross-border crime cooperation can only be materialized with the settlement of disputes between China and India, leading to the successful initiation of BRI.

VII. Conclusion

The BRI offers considerable potential in several economic, political, cultural, and strategic realms; it also presents many uncertainties and potential concerns. It has clearly become a major foreign and economic policy hallmark of the Xi Jinping government and is consistently supported as such by all manner of Chinese observers (Swaine 2015). To enhance the cooperation and connectivity between China and South Asian countries, China has utilized the BRI initiative to gain its political, economic, and security interests. The two key projects, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor, have enabled China to "link" itself and the region comprehensively. In particular, China's best strategic partner - Pakistan and its competitor - India, has played a crucial role in the process.

The BRI initiative has several important implications for China, India, and Pakistan. For China, this initiative is a strategic footprint to the fulfillment of the "China Dream." Also, as this initiative provides China great access to South Asia and the Middle East, and Europe, the strategic interests this initiative provided are highly valuable. As China's key partner in the region, Pakistan will play a crucial role in the projects. For Pakistan, it is apparent that China has emerged as Pakistan's great economic hope, as this initiative, especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, will be able to provide tremendous economic, political, and security opportunities for Pakistan. If successfully implemented, Pakistan will become a strategic hub for China and potentially in the region. It would give Pakistan ample opportunities to boost regional economic and trade collaboration by linking the region through roads, rails, and pipelines. It will also enhance the security of Pakistan, facing security threats from India. The BRI initiative has become an ambitious plan in the region and would become a game-changer in the South Asian region.

For India, the initiative's implications are not very clear, as India has yet to take a positive stance towards the projects. As a traditional competitor with China and Pakistan, China's BRI initiative has provoked some political sensitivity within India, and the decision-makers in India must be cautious in every step they take. However, the projects could benefit India by providing economic and business opportunities. New Delhi will need to carefully consider how it could gain its long-term economic development objectives from the projects and balance them with India's national security needs. India is also striving to gain strategic interests and become an important global power in the region. As the former Indian ambassador to China and former National Security Advisor, Shivshankar Menon (2020) argues, "the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) shows China's greatest strength, her ability to learn and to adjust policy pragmatically... Whether it succeeds or not, its connectivity and infrastructure projects will change the Asian geopolitical environment markedly."¹⁰ On the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, another former Indian ambassador Kishan S Rana (2017) states that India can "maintain its position of principle and in other regions, be it Central Asia and to the East of India, we can use new connection routes where they serve our interests, treating them as international public goods."¹¹ Since the BRI is an ongoing project, India could use it to influence the China-India-Pakistan triangle, and "make some positive, tangible progress in India-Pakistan relationship."¹²

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¹⁰ <https://www.icsin.org/publications/china-asias-changing-geopolitics>

¹¹ <https://www.icsin.org/publications/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-implications-prospects-consequences-impact-on-indian-its-china-diplomacy>

¹² <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/india-has-nothing-to-fear-from-chinas-belt-and-road/>

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