



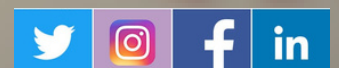
CENJOWS

ISSUE BRIEF

# 10 YEARS OF BRI: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CPEC AND CMEC

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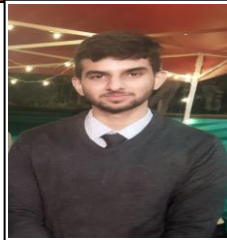


# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

### 10 Years of BRI: A Critical Analysis of CPEC and CMEC



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#### Abstract

*The Belt and Road Initiative of China has completed a decade. Started in 2013 and till now has achieved a lot in terms of debt trap, environmental concerns, bad reputation, and security concerns from its neighbors. The huge array of development and investment activities were initially conceived to connect East Asia and Europe through physical infrastructure. Since then, the initiative has spread to Africa, Oceania and Latin America, greatly expanding China's economic and political power. The CPEC project running through Pakistan under the BRI in a linear fashion was launched in 2015 with the objective of linking northwestern China to southern Pakistan's Arabian Sea coastline through a network of roads, railways, and pipelines. The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) agreement, which was signed between the two countries, has far more geopolitical ramifications than economic ones. India must carefully monitor the future development of these two "Corridors" in its neighbourhood as these pose geopolitical challenges for India.*

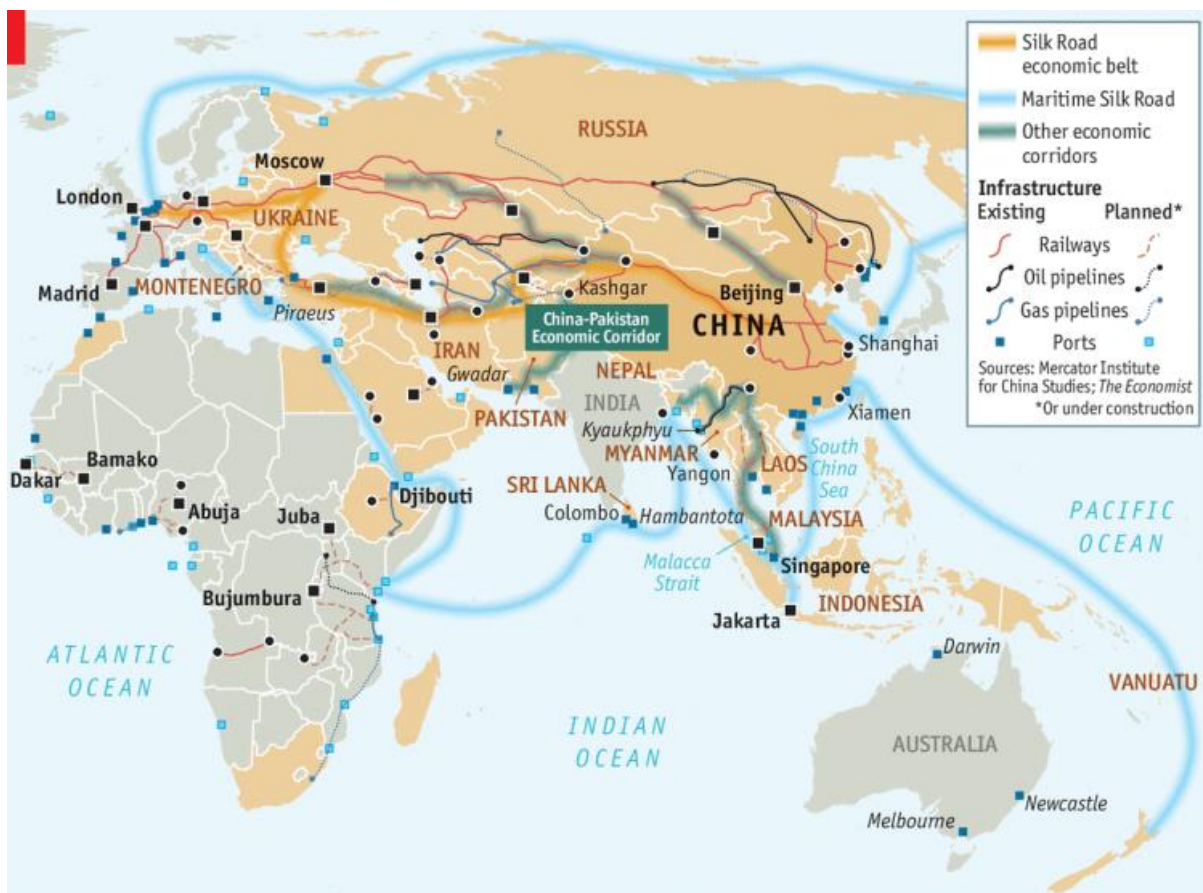
#### The BRI

Sun-Tzu (孙) held that deception, is the fundamental determinant of warfare and diplomacy. Over the past decade, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as one of the most ambitious and controversial global development projects which reflects Sun-Tzu's thought. Launched in 2013, the BRI aims to enhance connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation between China and countries across Asia, Europe,

Africa, and bring back the Ancient Silk route back to glory. The most notable projects in the BRI initiative of this are the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), which aim to strengthen the strategic alliance of China with Pakistan and Myanmar. By virtue of several programs, the shifting strategic environment in Southern Asia to observing increased interaction between politico-military-strategic and operational challenges. Numerous large projects are complete and serve as signs of the BRI's trajectory, potential influence and soft power. Rail projects such as the China-Europe express train via Russia to Belarus, the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed train (HSR), Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), and Ethiopia's Addis-Ababa-Djibouti Railway. These projects may sooner or later be exploited by the Chinese PLA in the name of development. <sup>1</sup>

The countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are spread across all continents:

- 44 countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa
- 35 countries are in Europe & Central Asia
- 25 countries are in East Asia & Pacific (including China)
- 21 countries are in Latin America & Caribbean
- 18 countries in Middle East & North Africa
- 6 countries are in South- East Asia



The Economist

(S

ource: *The Economist* | World News, Economics, Politics, Business & Finance. (n.d.).

The Economist | World News, Economics, Politics, Business & Finance.

<https://www.economist.com>)

The BRI works with 18 countries of the European Union (EU) and 9 countries of the G20.<sup>2</sup> But New Delhi's immediate concerns lie only with 2 nations participating in BRI, that is Pakistan and Myanmar.

### **Stated Aims and Beyond**

By analysing Party Congress statements and official CCP press releases, we can gain insights into the current position of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) within China's foreign policy. Since its inception in 2013, the BRI has been portrayed as a flagship international policy of China, aiming to enhance connectivity with the country and stimulate economic growth in developing nations through extensive investments worth trillions of dollars. Xi Jinping has stated that the BRI is a public road open to all and has no backyards or high walls. It is open to all kinds of systems and civilizations and is not ideologically biased. We are open to all cooperation initiatives in the world that are conducive to closer connectivity and common development, and we are ready to work with them and help each other succeed.<sup>3</sup>

However, over time, other international initiatives have emerged that can be seen as developments or extensions of the BRI's trajectory.<sup>4</sup> In 2022, President Xi Jinping announced two new initiatives called the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and Global Development Initiative (GDI). These initiatives indicate a shift towards prioritizing domestic and financial security. Despite limited information being available about these strategies at present, it is essential to note that references to the BRI continue to appear in speeches and statements made by CCP officials.<sup>5</sup> Considering the significant footprint of ongoing BRI projects and long-term contractual commitments already made, it is likely to witness further evolution of this initiative in the coming years. This evolution will involve consolidating lessons from ten years' worth of experience with implementing BRI projects while adapting strategies to align with changes in today's geopolitical environment.<sup>6</sup>

### **Historic Connect**

The original Silk Road originated during the expansion of China's Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) to the west. The silk trade and the establishment of the Silk Road were the most important contributors to the Han dynasty's economic prosperity.<sup>7</sup> This led to the establishment of trade networks that spanned across present-day Central Asian region (CAR) countries, including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Additionally, it extended southward towards modern-day India and Pakistan. These routes stretched over four thousand miles all the way to Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Central Asia played a crucial role as the epicentre of one of the earliest waves of globalization. It facilitated connections between eastern and western markets, resulting in significant economic prosperity and cultural exchange. The usage of these trade

routes reached its peak during the first millennium under notable powers like the Roman Empire followed by Byzantine rule and China's Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE).<sup>9</sup>

### **Charm Allurement Diplomacy**

China's BRI has undeniably achieved several notable milestones in the past ten years. Before delving into the issues that the BRI poses, it is important to analyse its current state. Looking at finished projects or those that are presently in progress, offers some insight into the current state of the project. Firstly, it has facilitated massive infrastructure development across participating countries. Through the construction of roads, railways, ports, and power plants, the BRI has improved connectivity and boosted economic growth in regions that were previously underserved. Further afield, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a network of energy facilities, industrial zones, roadways, trains, city transit linkages, and ports. CPEC has transformed Pakistan's transportation network and energy sector, injecting vitality into its dying economy. All while making the BRI look lucrative and charming.<sup>10</sup>

The **Digital BRI** is one aspect of the charm policy which China is using in order to lure in other nations. The digital aspect of the BRI is that it's a digital sphere, which is interconnected with many other digital fields of BRI such as health, and e-commerce sectors, which will involve underdeveloped countries into its digital development strategies involving China's international development cooperation agency.

**BRI space and cyberspace** projects have increased participating countries' economic dependence on China in ways that might give Beijing even greater leverage over them. By offering to provide innovative space capabilities, ICT investments, and cybersecurity assistance to key participants as an alternative to reliance on Chinese space systems and communications networks.

In that sense, new digital technologies can empower these low GDP and underdeveloped nations. With many different sectors and projects including these connected to sustainable development bring in these nations as they see lucrative potential to grow and develop.

The BRI has strengthened economic ties between China and participating nations so that it can gain a strategic foothold. By promoting trade and investment, this initiative has expanded market access for Chinese companies and created new opportunities for China through its "Charm and Allurement Diplomacy" which then traps the host nation in a vicious circle of Chinese Debt. China has become the largest trading partner for over 130 countries, with bilateral trade volume reaching \$6 trillion in 2020. Additionally, the BRI has helped China to exploit international markets by dumping its mass manufactured cheap products.<sup>11</sup>

## **Debt Trap Diplomacy**

The financial feasibility of BRI projects is currently facing significant weaknesses. Moreover, host countries are experiencing deep structural challenges that are becoming increasingly evident. These issues can be attributed to a lack of rigor in strategic and financial planning during the initial stages of the projects. Additionally, the Chinese side may have insufficient understanding of the unique social and infrastructural conditions prevailing in each BRI host country. As a result, these factors have contributed to the emergence of critical problems within the BRI projects and their implementation. BRI has faced significant challenges and threats that warrant careful analysis.<sup>12</sup> One primary concern is the potential debt burden it imposes on participating countries. Chinese loans often come with high interest rates and strict conditions, leading to unsustainable debt levels. Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port is a victim of Chinese diplomacy, where the inability to repay loans resulted in the port being leased to a Chinese company for 99 years and has dragged down the Sri Lankan economy and India had to maintain a \$1BN USD Line of Credit for Sri Lanka to bail them out of the crisis.<sup>13</sup> China is implementing measures to prevent countries from avoiding their debts. As part of debt rescheduling agreements, China is demanding that countries award contracts for additional projects, which can prolong their debt crises. This occurred in Cambodia, where China cancelled \$90 million of debt but secured significant new contracts in return.

Sri Lanka serves as Exhibit A. China has provided 128 rescue loans in 22 countries from 2008 to 2021. China has little overseas debt and a high national savings rate. Most of the debt is state-owned, which gives the government the ability to manage the situation. Countries that are indebted to China the most are Pakistan, Angola (\$36.3 billion), Ethiopia (\$7.9 billion), Kenya (\$7.4 billion), and Mongolia. China financed \$22 billion in Malaysian projects; the Maldives owes China \$3.5 billion in loans, which included \$1.5 billion in government-to-government loans, private loans, and sovereign guarantees; and Laos owes 11% of its debt to China from bilateral loans totalling nearly \$12.2 billion. Although Laos is not in a debt trap, it is in trouble. It shows the length and breadth Xi is willing to go in order to complete the ambitious and vital Maritime Silk Road.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the BRI has provided China with strategic leverage over participating countries. By investing in critical infrastructure and gaining economic influence, China can shape the foreign policies of partner nations to align with its own interests. This has raised concerns among some countries, particularly those sceptical of China's intentions and its growing assertiveness in territorial disputes.

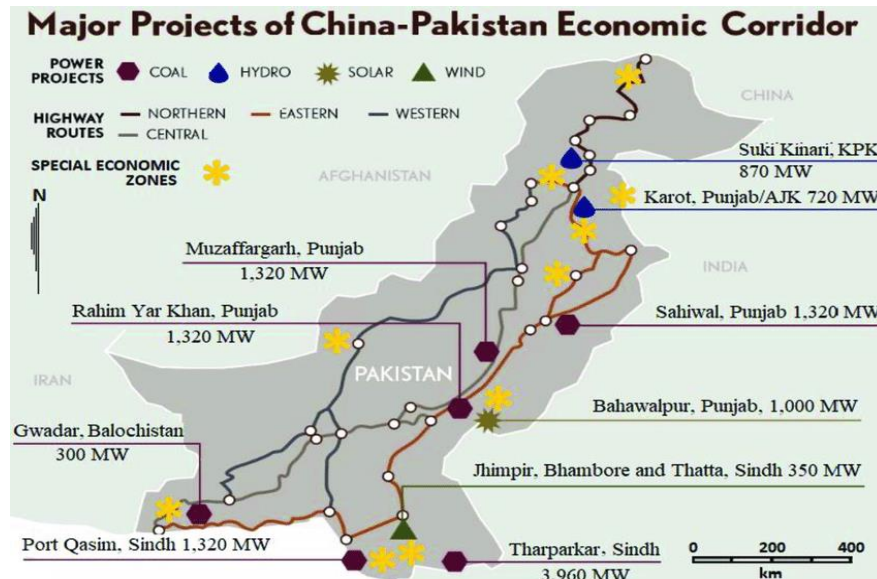
## **Indian Neighbourhood**

### **CPEC**

CPEC aims to upgrade and build new infrastructure in Pakistan, including transportation networks and energy projects, to promote economic growth and development. Baluchistan's coastal city of Gwadar would be connected to the



province's largest town, Sorab, via a 650 km-long road, according to the Pakistani Ministry of Planning, Development, and Reform. This route will connect Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, with Gwadar. The remaining western route will travel 2,517 kilometres from Gwadar to Kashgar, China, via Baluchistan and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the northwest.<sup>15</sup>

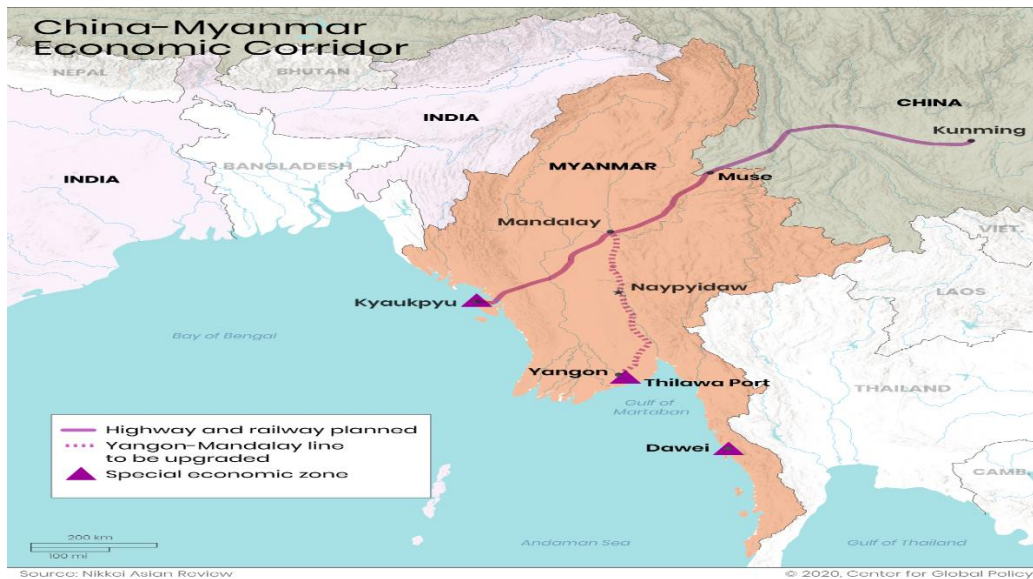


(Source: Figure 1. Map showing major projects of China-Pakistan Economic. . . (n.d.). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-showing-major-projects-of-China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor-13-14-15-16\\_fig1\\_327638000](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-showing-major-projects-of-China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor-13-14-15-16_fig1_327638000))

The CPEC is described as "a framework of regional connectivity, enhancement of geographical linkages, and a step towards economic regionalization in a globalized world." In China, the adage "taoguang yanghui" (韬光养晦) (hide your power and bide your time) was still prevalent, and the Chinese government was afraid of being perceived as an international spoiler state or even supporting one. Pakistan needs China more than China needs Pakistan; hence China felt no need to advertise their alliance.<sup>16</sup> Launched in 2015 with the goal of connecting northwest China to southern Pakistan's Arabian Sea coastline with a network of roads, trains, and pipelines. The Gwadar port shortens the travel from West Asia to China via the Malacca Straits by up to ten to twelve days, reducing the current 7,000-mile route to 1500 miles. The CPEC project runs across Pakistan under the BRI in a linear form which will make China a near Indian Ocean nation through Gwadar port.

## **CMEC**

In 2018, Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to become a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As a result, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) emerged as a prominent project with an inverted Y structure within the BRI framework. The main objective of the CMEC is to establish connectivity between Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan province in China, and Mandalay in Myanmar. From there, it aims to extend further towards Yangon and Kyaukphyu.<sup>17</sup>



(Source: *China-Myanmar Economic Corridor*. (2020, November 10). China-Myanmar Economic Corridor – the Rohingya Post. <https://www.rohingyapost.com/myanmar-chinas-strategic-interests-in-the-indian-ocean-basin/china-myanmar-economic-corridor/>)

Under the CMEC, several projects were revived while new ones were conceptualized. These include significant initiatives like:

- 1) Leptadaung Copper mine project: Valued at US\$1.065 billion.
- 2) Railway linking Kunming to Kyaukphyu: Estimated at US\$8.9 billion.
- 3) New Yangon City project: Budgeted at approximately US\$1.5 billion.

These projects are part of efforts to enhance infrastructure connectivity and stimulate economic growth within Myanmar under the BRI's framework. <sup>18</sup>

## **CPEC and CMEC- Flowering or Floundering**

### **CPEC Flowering**

On July 31, 2023, Pakistan and China signed 6 important documents to facilitate the implementation of the second phase of China, Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is valued at \$60 billion. This collaboration further strengthens the long standing strategic relations between these two Iron brothers.

The signing ceremony took place in Islamabad, and was attended by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif of Pakistan and Vice Chief Premier of China He Lifeng. The event commemorated 10 years since the initiation of the CPEC, a comprehensive initiative comprising various infrastructure projects that have been in construction in Pakistan since 2013. <sup>19</sup> According to officials in both nations, CPEC has attracted more than \$25 billion in direct Chinese investment, and it is anticipated that this amount will rise to \$62 billion by 2030, when all CPEC projects, including a number of industrial zones, are expected to be finished.



## Win for Afghanistan

The 92-kilometer-long Wakhan corridor, which connects Badakhshan and Xinjiang, is Afghanistan's shared border with China. Despite the corridor's three crossings, Afghanistan's direct inclusion in the BRI is unlikely in the near to medium term due to its risky geographic location. It is thought that extending the Karakoram Highway, which connects Peshawar and Kabul via the Khunjerab Pass, is a viable option for connecting Kabul to the CPEC and ultimately to China.<sup>20</sup>



(Source: *A China-Financed Economic Corridor Brings Promise and Discord to Pakistan*. (2016, January 10). Global Voices. <https://globalvoices.org/2016/01/10/a-china-financed-economic-corridor-brings-promise-and-discord-to-pakistan/> )

Any influx of investment in infrastructure and the recovery of the Afghan economy is welcomed by a cash- and influence-starved Taliban. The group has been open to the concept of reviving the medieval Silk Road trade routes via the Wakhan region in order to promote commerce with China. It has enthusiastically welcomed China's "long-term political support," anticipating that Beijing will enhance its investment in the country. Both the IEA's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment agree that the country's membership in the corridor will bring much-needed investment and help the 'iron and energy generating' industries. It is also seen as allowing Kabul to become self-sufficient and stop relying on others for economic progress.<sup>21</sup>

## CMEC Flowering

CMEC gas pipeline projects have a capacity of 12 billion cubic meters, while the oil pipeline has a capacity of 22 million tonnes of crude oil per year. Myanmar will reap several benefits just by permitting transportation. The yearly transport of 22 million tons of crude oil through pipeline will generate \$ 22 million in addition to \$ 13.6 million in transit fees. The export of 12 billion cubic meters of gas will generate \$1.5 billion. This matters a lot to the country's beleaguered economy. Myanmar also receives the right to

utilize 2 billion cubic meters of natural gas for domestic purposes.<sup>22</sup> This is expected to be utilized by big cities along the pipeline to deliver energy to interior regions, improving their economies. Myanmar is expected to collect \$ 30 billion from this project over the next 30 years. Without a question, it is a win-win situation for both countries: China for geopolitical reasons and Myanmar for economic reasons.<sup>23</sup>



(Source: Vivekananda International Foundation | *Seeking Harmony in Diversity*. (n.d.). <https://www.vifindia.org/>)

## **CPEC Floundering**

BRI is the Neo-Colonialism of Pakistan by China.<sup>24</sup> Chronic economic hardship is still a problem in Pakistan. There are concerns about a default on foreign debt obligations rather than any indications of an economic turnaround even after CPEC investments. Pakistan now owes \$100 billion in foreign debt, with China responsible for \$33 billion of it.<sup>25</sup> By agreeing to a \$3 billion agreement with the International Monetary Fund before its program was about to expire on June 30, 2023 Pakistan has so far avoided the possibility of defaulting on its responsibilities to pay its foreign debt. Pakistan's severe balance of payments crisis and low foreign exchange reserves persist.

Chinese power plants are owed more than \$1.26 billion (350 billion rupees) by Pakistan. China has refused to postpone or restructure the payment and CPEC loan repayments since the sum continues increasing. Nearly 30% of Islamabad's foreign debt comprises all loans from China, including those from both government and commercial institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Locals in Pakistan are bearing the burden of the economic downturn. In June, 2023 inflation reached 29.4%, with food prices rising 40% and transportation expenses rising 20% over the previous year 2022. The country's poverty rate is expected to hit an alarming 37.2 percent. And, despite all of the extra energy generated by the CPEC projects, many Pakistanis are unable to pay the high electricity bills, just as rising gas prices prevent them from traveling on the CPEC-built roadways. However, Chinese interests in Pakistan have been targeted by militants in recent years, upsetting Chinese authorities and prompting requests for Islamabad to beef up security for its nationals.<sup>27</sup>

China has long been interested in the copper, gold, gas, and coal reserves of Balochistan. Both Xinjiang and Balochistan have seen military crackdowns by their respective national governments. Terrorist attacks on Chinese nationals and projects by the BLA (Balochistan Liberation Army) have stalled CPEC progress. Gwadar Port in the insurgency-marred western Balochistan province, a crucial link, poses security challenges due to insurgents targeting China's interests with multiple attacks: Chinese consulate in Karachi (2018), Chinese tourists at Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar (2019), Confucius Institute at Karachi University (2022) <sup>28</sup>, and most recently strategic port of Gwadar on 13 August, 2023. <sup>29</sup>

China has expressed its resentment and hopes that Pakistan will take decisive and effective actions against various terrorist organizations within the country to guarantee the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel in Pakistan. The Chinese foreign ministry warned that if the growing terrorism threat is not adequately addressed, it could have severe consequences for the ongoing economic cooperation between Pakistan and China, as well as Chinese investments in Pakistan. <sup>30</sup> This situation is not the "win-win" scenario that both China and Pakistan desired.

### **Pakistan Environmental Concerns**

Pakistan's Thar deserts extensive pole reserve is being used to supply the BRI with the required amount of energy it needs. 19 of the CPEC Projects which is nearly half, require coal reserves to meet its energy demands. Thus, making BRI environment friendly energy claims baseless. The BRI proposed energy generation is 32% higher in rates compared to conventional energy <sup>31</sup>. And recent sustainability reports have shown that the Thar Coal Reserve won't be able to sustain these kinds of projects in the longer run. The carbon emissions from this project have led up to an excessive 51 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emission. <sup>32</sup> Although Beijing is said to be working towards a more environmentally friendly strategy in emerging nations, many of which have the lowest Environmental performance index (EPI) <sup>33</sup>. But Beijing has a 'non-binding, target setting documents', leaving room for donors to opt out. Which means leaving the safeguards and environmental concerns behind and completing a project in 6 months which would usually take up to 2 years.

### **CMEC Floundering**

Contrary to the public perception that the CMEC projects were stalled by the Coup, they actually gained momentum during the civilian government's tenure before the military coup.<sup>34</sup> However, after the coup, the projects have faced challenges, and the Chinese government persisted in trying to move them forward. Unfortunately, Myanmar has been grappling with a large-scale civil war, leading many rural areas to join the anti-coup forces in an ongoing armed struggle against the military government.

One significant issue is the public sentiment in Myanmar, which was already unfavourable towards China even before the coup took place. The coup further exacerbated this sentiment due to various reasons:

- 1) People believed that China approved of the coup.

- 2) Continuous Chinese support for the military government at international forums like the United Nations, particularly within the Security Council. <sup>35</sup>
- 3) The transfer of submarines to Myanmar's military in December 2021. <sup>36</sup>

While China has not explicitly endorsed the coup, it is important to note that under the previous civilian government, Myanmar had a positive relationship with China. However, as the military government seeks to establish new relationships with neighbouring countries and Russia, Myanmar aims to change this dynamic and not solely rely on China as its main ally. Currently, China is seen more as a distant business partner rather than a close ally of Myanmar's military government. <sup>37</sup>

Chinese projects in Myanmar have faced social, environmental challenges and have become susceptible to attacks by the anti-coup forces due to the belief among the Myanmar public that China is supporting, or at least not condemning, the military government. The prevailing anti-China sentiment in Myanmar poses significant risks to the CMEC projects as well. Over the course of eighteen months following the coup, there have been around three hundred clashes near the areas where the CMEC projects are planned to be implemented. <sup>38</sup>. There also has been widespread opposition throughout Myanmar against a proposed dam construction on its main river since 2011. This project's future remains uncertain due to these objections. Additionally, there are concerns about job opportunities being primarily offered to workers from China instead of utilizing local labour forces within these Chinese companies operating in Myanmar.<sup>39</sup> Considering this situation, there is a real possibility that Chinese citizens working on these projects could face harm if the CMEC projects are expanded on the ground amid the ongoing conflicts.

### **Myanmar Environmental Concerns**

Since 2010 China has been exploiting Myanmar's natural resources. BRI's environmental impact cannot be overlooked. BRI projects utilize coal-fired power plants, which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbate climate change. The construction of Myitsone dam project in Myanmar <sup>40</sup> caused displacement of local communities and adverse environmental consequences. The electricity deprived Myanmar got the \$3.6 billion project, but now supplies China with its 90% produced electricity. In the Leptadaung copper mine project <sup>41</sup> China, hand in hand with Myanmar's military, has taken over 1900 acres of farming land. Kyaupaku Port along the Bay of Bengal is China's important strategic terminal point from Yangon to Yunnan. This 1700 kilometre long stretch has led to forced relocation of 20,000 Rakhine residents and dictated militarization. <sup>42</sup>

Critics link the BRI to climate change. Despite China's commitment to stop building coal-fired power plants abroad by 2021<sup>43</sup>, non-renewable energy investment has accounted for nearly half of all BRI spending; however, it is unclear whether the commitment applies to existing projects or only new projects, and whether it restricts coal-fired power plant financing in addition to construction. BRI is actually producing the world's most expensive electricity and has no plan on going forward changing its

ways. According to the study by “Greening the belt initiative”<sup>44</sup> BRI will be responsible for eradication of 1739 species of birds from the area. Over 400 dams are expected to be built throughout the Mekong River delta which will result in the disruption of the flow of the river and will create a loss of 1 million ton fishes missing every year.

In light of environment concerns Pakistan and Myanmar’s air and environment is not just the nations but a shared domain and the entire region will have an adverse effect due to its exploitation and especially the immediate neighbourhood that is India in both cases. Additionally, the construction of infrastructure often leads to deforestation habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity As China desperately seeks to be a global leader in sustainable development but it is doing at the cost of environment, which is rhetoric in nature and is not ready to address these environmental concerns which is the result of BRI’s unviable development.

### **Governance and Planning**

Concerns revolve around the lack of transparency and governance standards in BRI projects and the direct involvement of PLA in some aspects. The absence of competitive bidding processes and environmental impact assessments has raised concerns about corruption and ecological damage. It is unknown how BRI choices are made and what possible projects are in the pipeline.<sup>45</sup>

The data and statistics provided by the BRI planning committee do not include official aid flows from other ministries, which also do not include contributions to international development organizations, such as the World Bank, by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, and only cover aid figures from the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and concessional loans from the Exim Bank of China. The subsidies, which occasionally are given by China are locked grants, primarily intended to create a supportive environment for China's growth and to open up job prospects for Chinese labour.<sup>46</sup>

However, because BRI projects are decentralised, information and data are dispersed and difficult to discover. Initially, the BRI was positioned as the PRC's main international strategy, with trillions of dollars invested to improve connectivity with the PRC and economic growth in developing countries.<sup>47</sup>

### **Challenges For India**

#### **China**

China is challenging the traditional dominance of Western countries. Through its economic engagement, China seeks to reshape the global order, potentially undermining the influence of established powers such as the United States, the European Union and rival India. The BRI has pushed US and China into Cold war 2.0 which has made the other countries balance and align accordingly. By using infamous salami slicing, dividing and conquering threats and allies in order to deter opposition,



China has captured areas and engaged in cartographic warfare along with India due to which India is critical of CPEC. In terms of CMEC if Myanmar becomes a Satellite State of China, then it will have to do bidding on its part in regional affairs under pressure. This may be inimical to the Indian interests in the region and put India's projects with the ASEAN nations and the grand strategy of "Act East Policy" at risk which works for a better connectivity with ASEAN and Myanmar is the connecting bridge for that. <sup>48</sup>

### **Security Concerns**

India's concerns over CPEC are based on legitimate security issues. China has claimed Indian territory Aksai Chin and cartographic claims over India's Arunachal Pradesh. By viewing these border issues through the prism of India's concerns about China, we can comprehend why it is growing increasingly concerned about China's involvement in the Karakoram Highway.

While India chose to join the AIIB and has a total of 8% voting rights at AIIB and is the second-largest donor to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) but is not a member of BRI. India cannot afford Chinese presence in the disputed Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) and Gilgit Baltistan. The Karakoram Corridor would provide China access to the Indian Ocean, and it will be used for military purposes which is a direct threat to India's sovereignty. No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity. <sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, Delhi is concerned that freshly constructed roadways along the Indian border in the POK region may increase infiltration of anti-India militants from Pakistan into India. Another major concern for India is the deployment of PLA troops in POK to safeguard Chinese interest and assets. Any perceived threat to these interests may elicit a military response and has the potential to spiral into a conflict duly abetted or manipulated by Pakistan. Pakistan has been employing terrorism as an instrument of the state and this further bolsters the quarter century old proxy war against India. China, with access to Gwadar, will wield a powerful influence in the Indian Ocean, even though geographically speaking, China is not an Indian Ocean Power. Indian concerns from China's stake in Hambantota, Sri Lanka, the Sittwe Port in Myanmar and Chittagong in Bangladesh are emanated from the fact that China retains the options of positioning naval assets.

An open and functional CMEC, similar to Pakistan's CPEC, may significantly alter the region's and China's geopolitical stance by confronting India and addressing the Malacca Dilemma. The CMEC aims to challenge India's Act East policy while the India-US ties strengthen. For the area as a whole, CMEC epitomizes China's BRI projects' strategic and domestic objectives, as well as its ambition to see them through. <sup>50</sup> China's strategic interest and involvement in Pakistan have also contributed to Pakistan's military arsenal and nuclear capabilities. With the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US involvement in the region has declined, and China seems to be effectively filling the vacuum created by America's diminishing interest in

Afghanistan. India has maintained a clear stance on China. China's accelerated growth of CPEC and haste despite India's stance may push India towards an anti-China bloc.

### **Dual Use Implications of CPEC Infra**

The presence of China and Pakistan is becoming increasingly persuasive in terms of operational deterrent planning and dual use of infrastructure. Recurring Chinese transgressions in India's northern and western border areas could be part of a plausible military strategy to keep the two fronts tactically active and build up tactical pressure on the Indian Armed Forces, putting a major strain on South Asia's existing conventional deterrence equations. Following the severe clashes between the Chinese and Indian soldiers in India's eastern Ladakh region on 15-16 June 2020, which resulted in casualties for the first time in almost 45 years, India's transition from a dissuasive deterrence stance to one of effective deterrence is gaining support.<sup>51</sup>

China's cartographic warfare is well known in the Eastern sector along Arunachal but keeping the Aksai Chin active<sup>52</sup>, which includes, maintenance, and expansion of the Karakoram Highway to military specifications, as well as an estimated 7,000-11,000 Chinese PLA Construction Corps soldiers reportedly deployed in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Given its significant stakes inside Pakistan's borders, China's presence in Gilgit-Baltistan provides a legitimate background for China to secure Pakistan's security.<sup>53</sup>

In the current environmental situation China and Pakistan may push past the deterrent setup with India with the development of the CPEC in accordance with dual use military infra. Pre-planning the roads and infrastructure and repping it up to military specifications so that it's able to withstand. While initially, these projects were projected as civilian in nature but turned out to have dual use military capability. Both the proposed OBOR project and the CPEC will have a material impact on India security. The entire conventional operational capabilities of the Chinese and Pakistani armies will have a direct influence on the strategic context, as the conflict spectrum evolves and becomes significantly more asymmetric. The existence and threat of China and Pakistan collide in India's strategic-security framework.

### **Mitigation of Malacca Dilemma**

The August 2015 Karamay declaration detailed Pakistan's role in China's global scheme.<sup>54</sup> The corridor equally important provides alternative transportation routes to China other than the vulnerable Malacca Strait. Control of Gwadar allows China to transport oil from the Middle East via Pakistan land routes to Xinjiang through mitigating the Malacca dilemma and ensuring China's energy security<sup>55</sup>. The Chinese policy of opening up and developing its Western region because of the geographical proximity to these areas is nothing new. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to establish a presence in the Indian Ocean, giving China the ability to protect the maritime oil transport routes from the Middle East and investment in Africa is something which is there trying to protect through BRI and promoting regional

economic integration This will contribute to the development of closer relations and cooperation between China and the countries of Central Western and South Asia; this is a security concern for India. As the development of Djibouti Space port <sup>56</sup> nears Indian security interests in the region are challenged<sup>57</sup>. The Malacca Dilemma is a security concern for not just the Indian allies and India, but for the entire Indo Pacific as a region. And Western interests are aligned with the Indian concerns. <sup>58</sup>

## **Indian Counter Response**

### **Sagar Mala**

The Sagar Mala is for securing and governing the maritime domain which provides an optimised approach to encourage regional solidarity. Policymakers in New Delhi fleshed out Sagar Mala in terms of its functional strategy India and its partners in the region finding alternatives to enhance economic connectivity in the Pacific that are more attractive than the BRI. While the Indian government has been making concentrated efforts in order to enhance its sustained reach for its naval forces with regional countries, Mauritius and Seychelles the prevailing geopolitical involvement will continue to be a major impediment. The Indian Navy bears major responsibility in the geopolitical environment to shape the Indian Ocean region in a manner that is favourable to Indian policy. Thus, the recent reorientation of its operational mission based philosophy deployment, is *inter alia* meant to counter the BRI. <sup>59</sup> Oceans are open spaces in which international collaboration is required for security. Building partnerships would be critical for India in assisting governments in ensuring coordinated and mutually beneficial activities across the SDGs and unlocking the productive potential of maritime assets. The IPOI is built on a strategic relationship with like-minded countries.

### **IPOI**

Since its inception, India's vision of the Indo-Pacific has been centred on the area expanding eastward from the nation, with ASEAN as the focal point. New Delhi is expanding the scope of its Indo-Pacific strategy to encompass the Western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

Indo Pacific is a maritime domain which has many major and minor players but specifically QUAD. In recent years due to China's aggressive expansionist policies the region has been marked with a heightened sensitivity and uncertainty. Major powers like India, USA and Japan are trying to keep the Chinese ambitions at bay. India is championing the IPOI and the Sagar initiative. Moreover, initiating the security forums and platforms to advocate for the security and safety of the Indo-Pacific, India views the Indo Pacific from the lens of geographic strategic stretch and is acting diplomatically in that domain.<sup>60</sup>

With India acknowledging "both geographical extremities" of the Indo-Pacific spectrum, it is time to give equal weightage and respect to the two unique sets of policies known as 'Act East' and 'Act West' as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy.

### India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMT-TH) project highlights the significance of peace and stability in border areas, as well as trafficking problems, and aims to closely integrate its Myanmar policy with ASEAN. The IMT-TH has tremendous potential for increased connectivity and regional integration. Its goal is to connect India's Northeast region to Thailand via Myanmar, boosting trade and commerce, health, education, and tourism between the three countries while also creating a more efficient and cost-effective transit route. India has suggested expanding the road network to encompass Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, expanding its reach and potential effect even further.



(Source: Mitra, P. (2016, May 25). *1400 Km long highway to connect India, Myanmar & Thailand*. Newscast Pratyaksha English. <http://www.newscast-pratyaksha.com/english/1400-km-long-highway-to-connect-india-myanmar-thailand/>)

Since its inception in 2002, the Trilateral Highway project has suffered several delays and problems, including political instability in Myanmar and financial issues. However, current initiatives include the renovation and repair of roads between Kalewa (India) and Monywa (Myanmar), the construction of a new Bago bridge financed by Japan, and the creation of an arterial route between Bago and Kyaikto in Myanmar, aided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This will help Myanmar's economy and development as instead of an east-west development of CMEC the highway is focusing more on north-south development of the nation.

## **FOIP**

Japan and India recognize the importance of advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) to serve their respective national interests. They believe that promoting a FOIP is crucial for ensuring global peace, prosperity, and upholding a rules-based order. As hosts of upcoming G7 and G20 Summits, Japan and India should leverage this opportunity to solidify the FOIP as the foundation of a world that is free and open in all aspects. By prioritizing the FOIP agenda at these summits, they can contribute towards shaping an international environment that embraces openness, inclusivity, and adherence to shared principles.

The concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) has witnessed increasing convergence between Japan and India. Both Kishida, the Prime Minister of Japan, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have emphasized the importance of defending peace while rejecting the use of force to undermine sovereign territories. They have also advocated for governance systems that prioritize individual-centric representation. The two nations are also working towards the Dawei port in Myanmar through Thailand.<sup>61</sup>

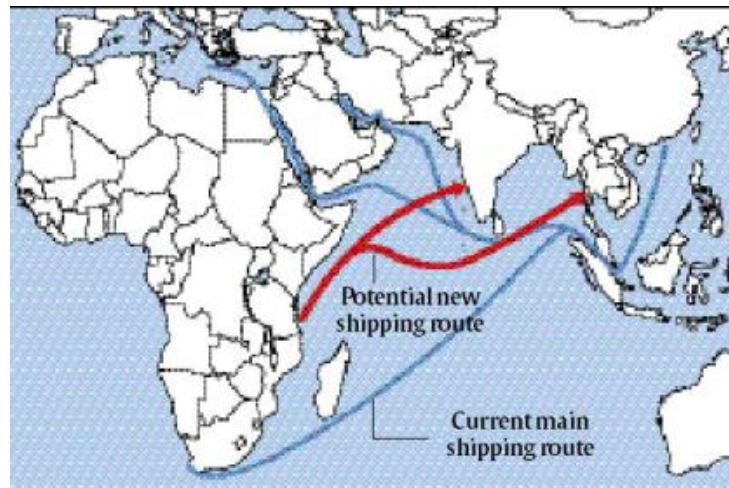
At its core, a FOIP upholds principles such as sovereignty, accountable governance, and adherence to a rules-based order. In this regard, India and Japan emphasize the inherent attributes of a FOIP: inclusivity, diversity, resilience, and openness. These values stand in contrast to autocracy and totalitarianism in international affairs. India and Japan are well-positioned to demonstrate their commitment to promoting a peaceful region that is both free and open. Besides safeguarding peace, these two nations are poised to drive economic growth and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific by fostering an environment conducive to freedom and openness.

### **Asia-Africa Growth Corridor**

The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), a collaborative effort between India and Japan, was officially announced at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank (AfDB) summit in Gandhinagar, India, in May, 2017. Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized during this announcement that both countries aimed to enhance developmental cooperation in Africa. The presence of African and Japanese representatives at this meeting added significance to the announcement. It is worth noting that this declaration occurred against the backdrop of China's Belt and Road Forum (BRF) meeting held in May, 2017, in Beijing.<sup>62</sup>

This decision by India has led many to speculate that the announcement of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), in collaboration with Japan, is a strategic move to counterbalance China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly its outreach efforts in Africa and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The AAGC and BRI have been compared extensively since both initiatives encompass Africa and the Indian Ocean as key components. Chinese strategic circles have responded critically to the AAGC initiative. They argue that it duplicates existing concepts like their own "freedom corridor."<sup>63</sup>





(Source: G., & Singh, A. G. (2019, January 17). *India, Japan and the Asia Africa Growth Corridor* - Gateway House. Gateway House.  
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PM Modi has emphasized that Africa is a "top priority" in India's foreign and economic policy. He has described India's relationship with Africa as a new developmental partnership, characterized by a "model of cooperation" that is demand-driven and free from conditions. This approach reflects Prime Minister Modi's Africa policy, which shares similarities with Japan's outlook on the continent. Both countries prioritize fostering cooperative relationships with African nations based on mutual development goals and non-interference principles.

### **Pivot to Asia**

The BRI's rapid expansion and increasing influence have significant implications for global politics and economics. Along with the Made in China 2025 economic growth policy, BRI is considered as one of the primary pillars of a stronger Chinese statecraft under Xi. For Xi, the BRI is a response to the much-touted US "Pivot to Asia."<sup>64</sup> The pivot to Asia was described as a strategic realignment of US resources and priorities toward the world's most populated continent, which would almost certainly be the centrepiece of the most significant global issues of the twenty-first century. Having long maintained good links with Japan and South Korea, the US desired a more comprehensive Asia-Pacific policy<sup>65</sup> that included more engagement with Southeast Asian states in order to counter China's rising aggression.

### **Takeaway**

The Belt and Road Initiative has revived the Silk road significantly in the past ten years, with infrastructure development, enhanced economic ties, and expanded market access along with aggression, dominating small nations, exploiting the Indian neighbourhood. The evolving equation of the Sino-Pak relationship that extends beyond the pro forma support in a situation to the major financial investment that would have both strategic and operational fallout. The security and military implications of the Belt and Road Initiative will be largely determined by perceptions of a China-led economic order in Asia, in which Beijing's potential inducements and punishments will

lead countries to limit their security cooperation with India and the US and be less willing to challenge Chinese assertiveness.

What is rattling the Chinese at the moment is the new nomenclature of the Asia Pacific into the Indo Pacific region. India is making waves, using diplomatic channels and multilateral platforms in order to counter the BRI through various multilateral forums. To counter the BRI initiatives, India is showing greater influence in Asia on trade and economics, by offering economic alternatives, renewing the Trans-Pacific Partnership and engaging comprehensively in multilateral organisations.

India also confronts a challenge in confronting Chinese naval presence in its neighbourhood since it cannot aspire to equal China's force projection in its neighbourhood. New Delhi should speed up Indian naval operations in the Indo-Pacific littorals to challenge PLA Navy's assertiveness and as well as mount more troops in both the theatres facing China to keep them vigilantly operational and bring in more initiatives in its neighbourhood to increase its soft influence. However, the challenges that lie in front of the world are in terms of debt trap, lack of transparency, and extensive environmental damage. The BRI's implications for global security, politics, economics, and the environment are far-reaching and require major steps from the Indo Pacific countries. But CPEC and CMEC might not be viable on China's and especially, Pakistan's and Myanmar's coffers in the long run. The entire Chinese ambition of BRI appears to be staggering.

## **DISCLAIMER**

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