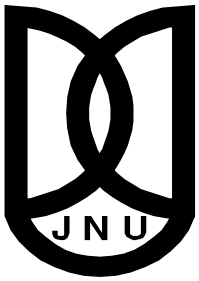
CHINESE STRATEGIC ACCESS TO SOUTHERN ASIA: INDIA'S RESPONSE

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

for award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RAJEEV RANJAN CHATURVEDY



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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "**CHINESE STRATEGIC ACCESS TO SOUTHERN ASIA: INDIA'S RESPONSE**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Place: New Delhi

Date: 19 August 2019 **Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAGC	Asia- Africa Growth Corridor
AEP	Act East Policy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIC	ASEAN-India Centre
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN+3	ASEAN Plus Three (Japan-China-Republic of Korea)
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
BCIM	Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar
BBIN	Bangladesh–Bhutan–India–Nepal
BIG-B	Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
BoP	Balance of Power
BOT	Build-Operate-Transfer
BRF	Belt and Road Forum
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRO	Border Roads Organisation
BRICS	Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa
CBIC	Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCS	Cabinet Committee on Security
CDB	China Development Bank
CEZ	Coastal Economic Zone
CICIR	China Institutes of Contemporary International Relation

CIIS	China Institute of International Studies
CIP	China-India Plus
CLAWS	Centre for Land Warfare Studies
CLMV	Cambodia–Myanmar–Laos–Vietnam
CMEC	China Machinery Engineering Corporation
CMEC	China-Myanmar Economic Corridor
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CMP	China Merchants Ports Holdings Ltd.
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
COPHCL	China Overseas Ports Holding Company Ltd.
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DBT	Design, Build and Transfer
DIPP	Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion
DMIC	Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor
DoNER	Department of Development of North-Eastern Region
DPDC	Dhaka Power Distribution Company Limited
DTTI	Defence Technology and Trade Initiative
ECEC	East Coast Economic Corridor
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
E&P	exploration and production
ERIA	Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia
EU	European Union
EXIM Bank	Export–Import Bank
FAGIA	Foreign Aid and Government-sponsored Investment Agreements
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FWO	Frontier Works Organization

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRSE	Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd.
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
HIPG	Hambantota International Port Group
HIPS	Hambantota International Port Services
IDE-JETRO	Institute of Developing Economies and Japan External Trade Organization
IMSS	Indian Maritime Security Strategy
IMT	India-Myanmar-Thailand
INCH	India and China towards
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IRT	International Road Transport
JAI	Japan, America, India
JCCL	Jiangxi Cooper Corporation Ltd.
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JICF	Japan-India Coordination Forum
KKH	Karakoram Highway
KMTT	Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
LEP	Look East Policy
LoC	Line of Control
MCC	Metallurgical Corporation of China
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MGC	Mekong-Ganga Cooperation
MIEC	Mekong-India Economic Corridor
MILES	Millennium of Exceptional Synergy

MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MNCs	Multi-National Corporations
MoRTH	Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
MVA	Motor Vehicles Agreement
MW	Megawatt
NASSCOM	National Association of Software and Services Companies
NCPP	Norochcholai Coal Power Plant
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NEC	North East Council
NER	North East Region
NFI	Neighbourhood First Initiative
NH	National Highway
NITI Aayog	National Institution for Transforming India
NOCs	National Oil Companies
NPP	National Perspective Plan
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group
OBOR	One Belt One Road
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PIB	Press Information Bureau
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People’s Republic of China
RIS	Research and Information System for Developing Countries
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SARDP-NE	Special Accelerated Road Development Programme – North East
SD	Security Dilemma
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SIDCOP	Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza
SIIS	Shanghai Institutes for International Studies
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication
SLPA	Sri Lanka Ports Authority
SOEs	State-Owned Enterprises
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
Tcf	trillion cubic feet
TKK	Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
US	United States
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
WTO	World Trade Organization
YASS	Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Growing trade ties between China and India are often taken as a harbinger of a new and cooperative relationship between the two countries. However, “trust deficit” appears as one of the key elements in descriptions of India-China relations by many people in the government, industry, academia, or media. Geopolitical tensions, geography and competition for greater strategic access are the main reasons for the ongoing lack of trust. China has been witnessing extraordinary economic growth for two decades and thus is actively more involved in global affairs than ever. This definitely has significance in the international power structure.. In order to improve its overall geopolitical position China is taking decisive steps to secure natural resources and is extensively involved in construction of transport networks including roads, railways, ports, and is heavily investing in energy projects in its neighbourhood and beyond (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012). As a result of its growing global economic and strategic influence, it finds itself assuming a greater role in infrastructure development and connectivity projects. China’s push for greater strategic access through politics of routes is an expression of geopolitical and geo-economic efforts and huge investments that are transforming the regional landscape. It is, therefore, not surprising that acquiring strategic access and to develop dual-use infrastructure and shore facilities overseas have become important aspects of China’s foreign policy. While advances in military technology have reduced the need for such facilities, still these facilities continue to serve many vital functions. The need for strategic access and facilities is not likely to disappear despite all technological advances. Moreover, improvement in access, including transportation and communication, between different states is above all the best way of bringing people into touch with one another and thereby avoiding misunderstanding (Burchall 1935). A rapid and reliable transportation system is an essential link in developing a strong bond of understanding and could accelerate the process of regional integration and trade. This study focusses on “Chinese Strategic Access to Southern Asia: India’s Responses” and examines the politics of routes.

China and India have had a long-standing border dispute. The countries had agreed to keep this aside. But the issue has come up again in recent times. This acquires increased importance because of the unprecedented economic rise of China, modernisation of its armed forces, the rising global influence and greater assertiveness. At the same time, India has also risen and is now increasingly taken as a future world power by others and also in its own perception. In this context, the dichotomous nature of the bilateral relations between two large neighbours, and their politics of routes take on strategic connotations. Interactions between China and India have blown hot and cold during the last two decades and the relationship between these two countries is set to reshape Asia's geopolitical space (Karl 2012).

The living standards of people in China are on rise due to its vast economic growth. Both economic growth and living standards are complimentary and both are dependent on raw materials including metals and strategic minerals which are scarce in China; thus, in order to secure these resources and for securing energy China today is consolidating its land borders and beginning to turn outward (Kaplan 2010). Indeed, China has embarked on an impressive politics of routes and is approaching neighbouring countries to participate in its most ambitious and impressive cross-border transport infrastructure projects, including energy projects (Holslag 2010). Since 2000, China's engagement with developing countries has witnessed an historic expansion in almost all categories — trade, investment, aid, diplomacy, media, culture, education, party-to-party, person-to-person, military-to-military, and many more categories. On a nearly weekly basis, China's state-owned firms and banks conclude multibillion dollar investment or financing agreements throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Indeed, the pace and scope of China's emergence have been outstanding (Eisenman and Heginbotham 2018). Industrial demand for fossil fuels is on a constant increase in China whereas their supplies are limited and declining further due to over-exploitation, however, even if this continues to happen, the nation may have incentives to expand its supplies through Foreign Aid and Government-sponsored Investment Agreements (FAGIA) with developing countries and regions. The predominant projects under FAGIA include those related to: (a) natural resources, including both energy related projects and extraction of minerals and other metals; (b), infrastructure (including construction of roads, ports, railways, electric power – both hydro and thermal power, and other social

infrastructure such as schools, housing and telecommunications development); and (c) all other (consisting of trade development, , technical assistance, humanitarian assistance, debt relief, "in-kind" aid, educational and cultural assistance) (Wolf, Wang and Warner 2013). In the case of Southern Asia, China's focus is more on infrastructure development and financial aid, perhaps driven by the demand side.

Internal dynamism in a state creates external ambitions. As states become economically, politically and militarily stronger, they develop multifaceted economic and strategic interests and start focusing outward. It is not surprising, therefore, that China is also stepping out. Indeed, China has gradually built greater economic and strategic influence both in its neighbourhood and in far-flung locations that are rich in resources needed for its growth. China is gaining access to these resources in order to provide for the rising living standards of its citizens and create a stable order within the country. In a deliberate display of power, Beijing is building roads, railway routes, port facilities and listening posts worldwide without any clear distinction between economic and strategic motives. Some Chinese projects in Southern Asia, for example, Gwadar Port in Pakistan, are emerging as a confluence of sea, pipeline, and land and air transport facilities (Sloan 2017: 208-209). The politics of routes is not only expanding the geographical scope of foreign policy of China, but it is also creating a new geopolitical reality. Moreover, Beijing has increased the scope of its politics of routes with the ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) or eventually termed as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This will enable Beijing to meet demands of its increased industrial and construction capacity and thereby gaining higher returns. China is creating funding mechanism for foreign governments and is providing them incentives to take loans for projects that are being carried out by Chinese firms. Most of these loans are made through policy banks like the China Development Bank and Export-Import Bank. This in turn will help its state-owned and private firms to take advantage of economic opportunities arising in less developed countries. (Eisenman and Heginbotham 2018). There is a new reliance on protecting overseas investments and sustaining lines of communications for the supply of raw materials. Strategic access, therefore, has become an indispensable foreign policy mechanism for China, empowering it to sustain its developmental path and limit its external vulnerabilities.

China's concerns and motives appear to be inclined more towards getting strategic access and to create regional balance in its favour rather than searching for natural resources. Specifically, improvement and expansion of port facilities, for example, in Pakistan or Sri Lanka, may enable porting rights and logistics support for elements of the People's Liberation Army Navy (also known as PLA Navy) that is increasing its patrol missions in the Indian Ocean to protect sea lanes of communication and counter piracy. Hence, China's increasing access to Southern Asia has special significance as it provides the critical component for mobility and defence and thus, serves China's strategic interests. China's influence in its Neighbourhood and expansion of transport and energy networks in Southern Asia is a matter of concern for India. It is China that is still identified, by several Indian strategists, as one of the principal agents of insecurity and the greatest potential threat for India.

Speaking at the Second Round Table of ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) at Vientiane on 10 September 2013 Khin Zaw Win of Tampadipa Institute Yangon said that, "China-India relations uneasily combine the competitive dynamics of power politics with the cooperative impulses of growing economic engagement." Although Beijing and Delhi have forged strong economic ties, issues such as border disputes, Tibetans in exile, energy security, and China's increasing influence in India's neighbourhood continue to hamper bilateral relations and adversely affect mutual trust. Some strategists think that both the countries are on an economic rise and are rival to each other, however, leaders of both countries downplay the notion of budding rivalry and assert their potential of becoming part of economic forces. Whereas others are of view that both countries are already against each other for being economic leaders of the rising Asian Century (Kristof 2006). *The Economist* (2010) dubs it as the "contest of the Century". Still, others anticipate "increasing military frictions" and even "outright conflict" (Verma 2009; Chellaney 2008; Ahmed 2011; Garver and Wang 2010).

Review of the Literature

The rapid and parallel rise of India and China has resulted in critical comparisons of the two Asian giants. That both countries are steadily improving their ties has been noticed extensively. The contemporaries hold a view that both nations are making efforts to leave the past behind and have a new relationship based on the emerging

global strategic realities. However, there is a mutual suspicion in their relationship and few analysts appreciate the possibilities for strategic cooperation between India and China. China's rise in Asia is a major concern for India. Over the past decade, there has been a debate over whether a rising China is a threat or an opportunity. China has demonstrated greater awareness in promoting trans-border connectivity towards the subcontinent by linking geography with strategy (Miller 1982; Hamid 1979; Jones 2004; Kreutzmann 1991 &, 2004; Jasparro 2003; Haider 2005a&b; Niazi 2005a&b; Ramachandran 2005; Garver 2005; Subramanian and Arnold 2001).

Security and economics are two main categories that appear in most of the literature studies on Sino-Indian relations. A large number of scholars focus on the security relationship. Garver (2001) provides a comprehensive and lucid history of fifty years of India-China relations and argues that both India and China have overlapping issues in Southern Asia and these have resulted in constant tension between the two. He further notes, "rise of China's influence in the subcontinent and its environs over the last two decades — in the form of deepening strategic relations with Pakistan; a new position in Myanmar; and expanding links with Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — has declined India's ability to maintain primacy in its own security zone in the subcontinent."

Garver's characterisation of the relationship as driven by rivalry has provided a touchstone for scholars (and others) looking at China-India relations over the intervening years but, while this has driven an important focus on China and India, a large number of works essentially echo Garver's thesis. Some authors emphasise the emerging pattern of a contest between China and India for influence in Southern Asia (Dixit 2002; Paul 2005; Lall 2006). Pant (2012) argues that Sino-Indian relations are getting more complicated by the day. He points out that China is the 'neighbourhood dragon' against which India has no 'economic, diplomatic or military leverage'. Chinese scholars[1] have been focussing on the American efforts to woo India into its strategic orbit and are confused as to why India is improving its relations with some ASEAN countries and Japan. During the past few years, India's increasing naval

[1] I interviewed several Chinese scholars in Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming, Chengdu, and Singapore between 2009 and 2017. While some scholars and officials wanted to remain anonymous, other will be quoted in the relevant chapters.

diplomacy and defence cooperation in China's neighbourhood have been viewed by many scholars with suspicion.

In contrast, there is no dearth of literature on economic relations. Both Chinese and Indian scholars are very optimistic and emphasise the economic complementarities as the basis of a new and strong interdependence. Among others, border trade, bilateral investments, tourism, development of frontiers, and transport integration are main sectors of their focus.

The Rise of China in Asia

The recent phase of the relationship between India and China indicates that economic interdependence has gained salience for the decision-makers in both countries. The dominance of development over security has emerged as a new positive factor in their relationship. As the world increasingly acknowledges the rise of India and China, it becomes pertinent to address the question as to how these rising powers will behave in the future. The existing literature on the likely behaviour of rising great powers dwells on the rise of China and its impact on evolving security dynamics. There has been significant debate over policy towards China and whether China is an opportunity or a threat (Mearsheimer 2001; Mearsheimer 2006: 160-162; Shambaugh 1996: 180-209; Roy 1996: 758-771; Goldstein 1997/98: 36-73; Sahni 2006: 163-168).

Shambaugh (2004) examines the various dimensions of attempts made by China to engage its periphery and provides a systematic look at the region. A series of alternative conceptual models are considered by him for understanding the dynamics and the evolving order of China. China's rise will have implications on the future regional order. He provides some reflections on these implications. Some studies draw lessons from European history and see that Europe's past is getting repeated in Asia (Friedberg 1993/94). Challenging this thesis about "Europe's past" becoming "Asia's future", other studies suggest that Asian tradition will guide and ensure its future stability and would sustain regional order. Indeed, as Acharya (2003/04) says, "Asia is increasingly able to manage its insecurity through shared regional norms, rising economic interdependence, and growing institutional linkages." Thus, the future of the Asia-Pacific region depends not only upon China's choice of strategy but also upon the strategies of other regional countries and major powers in the region.

The growing economic interdependence among Asian states and its implications for security in the region have been studied by some scholars. According to a number of literature studies trade continues to play a critical role in economic growth of Asia. China's has been witnessing an explosion in its economic growth. As a result of this rapid growth a web of interdependence has been formed which has linked not only friends but also rivals. (Tellis 2006). However, the very notion of economic interdependence, does not clearly portray the nature of the changing dynamics in Asia, in general, and India-China in particular. While India-China trade is registering high growth, though unequal, there is also a rise in military expenditure of both the countries. Despite improvements on the surface, there is still a strong feeling of mistrust which adversely impacts the bilateral ties. There is mistrust in relations among both the states, and hence, economic interdependence and improving trade relations do not provide the best framework for the understanding of India-China relations. China is well aware that to meet its energy supplies it is mainly dependent on its sea lanes of communications and has, therefore, sought to diversify its access to resources and routes. More importantly, geopolitical shifts and their implications are also influencing China's emerging patterns of strategic access. Asian security environment and architectures are being shaped by several emerging triangular and multilateral relations (Chellaney 2006; Garver 2002a; Frankel and Harding 2004).

Though India and China are inching closer to each other, some studies suggest that Sino-Indian relations in the last few decades represent the classic case of the security dilemma (Collins 2004; Glaser 1997; Herz 2003; Garver 2002b). The Sino-Indian competition for influence across the Himalaya and in the Indian Ocean littoral states, their attempts to build alliance-like relations with neighbours of the other, and their attempts to jockey for position in southern Asia all seem to fit in well with the theory of security dilemma. A study by Athwal (2008) focusses on issues relating "to maritime security, economics, energy and elite bilateral dialogue, and underline that the security dilemma argument between India and China is overstated and provide alternative explanations for both Chinese and Indian activities in Southern Asia through analysis of positive elements within the Sino-Indian relationship, such as growing economic interdependence, energy convergence and elite consensus". China's internal and external demands are growing in number and variety and through its foreign policy it is trying to balance these competing demands. Moreover, China's

future behaviour (both content and character) in the international order will be ultimately guided by these demands. These may also result in unpredictable and contradictory behaviours, at times. ng (Medeiros 2009).

In fact, as Holslag (2010) states, "economic drivers are too weak to reverse the Chinese threat perceptions, and the sense of security interdependence is not strong enough to temper the race for regional influence". The growing interest in trade has fuelled power plays. China has been making all efforts to surround India and limiting it within the regions. Its strategy towards Southern Asia is clearly reflects its aim of delimiting India (Pant 2014). China is actively keeping a check on emergence of India as a major world power and thus has embarked on a policy to constrain India and challenge its regional supremacy in South Asia. There are other aspects of rise of China, for example, the implications of China's military modernisation and dual-capability use infrastructure developments in India's neighbourhood, that impinge directly on India (Kondapally 2006; Rehman 2009; Holstag 2010; Pant 2012; Shambaugh 2013).

Strategic Access / Politics of Routes

The economic rise of China has made it more powerful allowing greater integration with the global economy. This greater participation in the global economy has led to an increase in its national interests. The expanding demands for natural resources in the nation have increased vulnerabilities. Therefore, in order to have a steady supply of energy resources and raw material, China is making all efforts to protect its trade routes. China's greater strategic accesses to Southern Asia and beyond is a result of such efforts. Various infrastructure projects, for example, roads, railways, energy pipelines, are being used by China for influence in the region.

Indeed, we are politically involved in access in a variety of ways; however, it is very rarely placed at the centre of interest. Instead, politics is the main subject, and access or routes are secondary to it. Routes provide a critical component for mobility and defence. "A nation can maintain its existence within its specified physical boundaries only because somewhere within it there is a core, a focus upon which power is centred and from which control over all parts of the nation radiates. The dynamics of politics requires that there be effective communication between men occupying various areas

of a political entity, and between men controlling different political entities. It further requires that there be the possibility of physical movement, that is, of transportation, among these areas and between these entities – transportation of goods, of men, and, in times of stress, of the means for making war" (Wolfe 1963: 3-7).

Since the beginning of China's 'Open Door' policy in 1978, its outward foreign direct investments have increased steadily. "China's overseas investments have been motivated not only by traditional determinants, such as resource-seeking, market-seeking and efficiency-seeking, but also by the pressure of globalisation and regionalisation. Indeed, China's decision to invest overseas is heavily guided by political and strategic considerations" (Wang 2002; Voss 2011). Some scholars suggest that China's foreign policy and foreign aid are mainly guided by ambitions of its companies investing overseas and its political (Wang 2002; Voss 2011). Manufacturing, resource exploitation and resource augmentation sectors have attracted more encouragement from the Chinese government. Through a series of international investments, China is increasing its influence. Contracts provided by China to the developing nations with investments offers having no other conditions, other than accepting its "one China" policy are readily accepted (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012).

A geographic framework is required in order to understand the dramatic changes that are taking place in the geographic distribution of power. Such a framework should also offer tools to understand such changes. In the age of globalisation, the increasing interdependence has brought geography again at the centre of attention. Geostrategy focussed on control of resources and lines of communication can help states to increase and maintain their position of power. In fact, strategic response to geographical features holds key to maintain and establish power in the international field. Hence, geography remains one of the essential features shaping the grand strategy of states. Locations of states and their geological features with respect to other states are remain important elements in understanding behaviour of states. Indeed, geopolitics, geography and strategy serve together (Grygiel 2006; Gray and Sloan 1999).

When developing infrastructure all political, economic, strategic, and geographical concerns seem to be intertwined. Hence, developing routes or access to resources could be related to any one of the above concerns. It could be for economic development or might be for internal security or external defence . Its motive will depend on its location and specifications. (Chaturvedy 2014). Ispahani (1989) offers a meticulous argument for the irreducible, independent, and primary role of routes as tools of analysis in the modern politics of developing areas. Some studies have examined the role of transport infrastructure in states' integration. There are several cases in which states have built routes for political and strategic reasons and the politics of routes has generated rivalry among major powers (Spykman and Rollins 1939; Gilpin 1981; Hartshorne 1950; Woodman 1969; Ispahani 1989; Gray and Sloan 1999). These scholarly works provide a conceptual framework to analyse Chinese strategic access.

China is currently the largest energy-consuming country in the world and thus overseas investment in energy are strongly supported by the Chinese government (Wu 2014). The implications of China's search for energy security will affect China's energy policy and its geopolitical grand strategy (Cao and Bluth 2013). China had many times made decisions that have prioritised geopolitical and strategic concerns over economic and efficiency. This is mainly because of the increasing vulnerabilities that have driven China's policy. In fact, "maritime territorial conflict is a major cause of energy-supply anxiety for China and risk of war prevents energy security from becoming exclusively a rationale for strategic cooperation". China's energy supplies are less secure due to potential instability in the areas from where resources are acquired as well as due to possible conflict with neighbouring countries for resources in contested territories (Leung 2011; Noël 2014; Odgard and Delman 2014).

China's influence has increased in India's neighbourhood and it is constructing dual purpose (civil and military) transport links in in the region. This increasing presence of China in India's neighbourhood have become a great concern for Indian policymakers and strategists. As a practitioner of a "Sun Tzu-style balance-of-power strategy aimed at averting the rise of a peer rival in Asia and engaging the world on its own terms, China blurs the line between commercial and military interests. Its investments in ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan have been

driven largely by strategic considerations" (Garver 2006; Batabyal 2006; Chellaney 2007).

Though there has been great interest among scholars regarding the simultaneous rise of China and India, and their roles in shifting the dynamics of global power, it is surprising that hardly any attention has been paid in the literature studies on 'strategic access' or 'politics of routes'. Certainly, the politics of routes has not appeared as an important tool of analysis. There are very few studies that focus on Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia and India's responses to such developments. Despite strategic access is gaining much attention in the political and strategic lexicon, research and understanding of this area are very limited in India. Further, existing works of literature are more journalistic, focussing on how China's infrastructural developments are antithetical to Indian interests, but there is no systematic examination of India's responses to such developments. More importantly, hardly there are studies on strategic access that focusses on perceptions of the local populace. This study aims to enhance an understanding of the interaction between the two facets of state policy, namely, security and development through the examination of strategic access. It examines how China is pursuing a geo-strategy that focusses on control of resources and lines of communication, and how India is responding to such developments. It is evident from the survey of the existing pieces of literature that there is limited research on Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia. This study attempts to fill this gap.

Definitions, Rationale and Scope of the Study

Growing means of travel, movements of people, economic exchange and historical forces create elements of cohesion. The tendency to artificially divide interlinked geographies has led to intense specialisation, adding greatly to our knowledge of finer details, but the task of integrating this knowledge into a general mosaic of interconnectedness is still incomplete. Moreover, the unfolding effects of globalisation have resulted in a gradual change in the attitude and ideas of people and states towards their approach to artificially partitioned landscape. Generally, studies on India's neighbourhood are mainly centered on India's relations with the SAARC members, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. However, the Government of India includes China, Myanmar, and

sometimes Iran also in its lists of neighbours. Moreover, recently the government under PM Modi has added the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Mauritius and Seychelles to the existing list of India's neighbours and thereby redefining India's neighbourhood policy. With this change, the geographical scope of neighbourhood policy has expanded and now has two components – continental and maritime. 'Southern Asia' better captures the widening of neighbourhood net and changes in the mental map of the neighbourhood. Southern Asia, therefore, is a logical geographical and geopolitical area to assess the essence of regional transformation under the rubric of strategic access, the focus of this study.

This study is focussed on the strategic access or politics of routes. It asserts that it is crucial to study the evolution of linkage between geography and strategy of a region by an examination of routes of access. The study uses the facts of physical access to determine the politics of routes in Southern Asia. 'Politics of routes' and 'strategic access' have been used in this study interchangeably. The term 'access' normally includes "all types of physical connectivity through roads, railways, ports and other facilities (including technical installations), aircraft overflight rights, port visit privileges, and use of offshore anchorages within sovereign maritime limits. Strategic access is used more broadly and includes, for instance, access to markets, raw material sources, and/or investments; penetration by communication channels, and access for intelligence operations" and many other categories .

The rationale for this study strongly stems from the fact that this area has not been intensely researched in India despite the fact that access to routes and resources hold high strategic implications for India. Although a few works exist related to some issues of the study, they are not adequate to address such critical issues. There are limitations in research and literature on Chinese strategic access and India's responses. We are politically involved with transportation in multiple ways and it pervades almost all political discussions, however it is very rarely placed at the centre of interest.

This study is an attempt to fill the literature gap on the subject – strategic access or politics of routes. It approaches the matter from an Indian perspective contextualising the changing dynamics and imperatives of the region. This study scans expanding China's transport and energy corridors across the Southern Asia region; the strategy

behind those developments; and how India is responding to such developments. More importantly, it adds the perception of local populace on strategic access, which enhances understanding of this complex issue.

In tracing Chinese strategic access, the study focusses on the lines of communication or routes that link states with one another, port developments, and energy cooperation. Routes on the peripheries, on the borderland, and on the zones of transition are of particular importance in this case, so as evolving geopolitics. Grygiel (2006) rightly asserts that "geopolitics is the geographic distribution of centres of resources and lines of communications assigning value to locations according to their strategic value"[2], and "it is a variable which explains the changing geographic distribution of routes and of economic and natural resources." The geopolitical situation alters the economic, political, and strategic importance of locations. Hence, it is important to develop an understanding of linkages between geography and strategy. This study, with a focus on the geopolitics of access, examines the aims and objectives of China's strategic access, its perceptions in India, and India's responses to such developments. This study is also intended to understand the linkage between geography and strategy that influences future relations. Geostrategy is the geographic direction of the foreign policy of a state. Hence, this study examines if Chinese strategic access reflects the underlying geopolitics.

As India is progressing well on its growth ambition, it is clear that one of the principal constraints on its growth has been the absence of adequate infrastructure mainly in transport and energy sectors. However, there is a strong realisation in the Indian government that strengthening the transport and energy sectors is an essential prerequisite for development. Indeed, this study is very significant as it attempts to develop a better understanding of an important subject of strategic access in Southern Asia.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to understand the motives for and magnitude of expansion of Chinese strategic access in India's neighbourhood, India's responses to

[2] Strategic value means the impact of the control, or lack of control, of such locations would have on a state.

such developments and the implications of these developments for future Sino-Indian relations. In this overall context the study looks in detail at:

- The nature and causes of China's attempts in expanding physical connectivity to Southern Asia (India's neighbourhood).
- The consequences of Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia and its larger implications for India.
- India's moves to counter-balance China's strategic presence in its neighbourhood.
- The possibility of both the countries working together in a cooperative way in the changing geopolitical and security dynamics.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions: how has China defined its interests in Southern Asia? What are the main objectives of Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia? What policies are being pursued by China to support its interests and its foreign policy objectives? What are the approaches that are being used by Beijing with nations in the region to achieve its objectives? What are the implications of China's strategic access for India and on regional affairs? How has India responded to the Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia? The questions are analysed in the specific context of the development of border and maritime infrastructure, and access to strategic routes and resources by the two countries.

Hypotheses

The study seeks to test the following hypotheses:

- Investments in physical connectivity encompassing transport and energy that are in proximity of international borders primarily have security motivations.
- China's increasing influence in India's neighbourhood, of which the development of border infrastructure is one of the principal components threatens India.

- India appears bereft of any plausible vision on cross border connectivity, in most cases reacting rather than being proactive in addressing the Chinese advances.

Methodology

The study uses qualitative research methods that are based on an analysis of both primary and secondary information. Hence, the approach taken in this study is interpretative in nature. The study examines the relationship between geopolitics and geostrategy, particularly with a focus on access to routes and resources. The route is the key variable in this study and this study examines the impact of security consideration on developing transport networks and vice versa.

In addition to publications by government agencies, primary information for this study was collected through field surveys in China, India, and some other countries, including in the US, Canada, Japan, and Singapore. The purpose of the primary fieldwork was to initially collect information on the different aspects of the question being addressed and subsequently to test the validity of the preliminary research findings. Several interviews were conducted through a semi-structured and open-ended questionnaire. The respondents were strategic thinkers, researchers, and opinion-makers connected with the subject, and some concerned government officials. Several Chinese respondents (who preferred speaking Mandarin) facilitated interviews through interpreters who helped in translating their views. A snowball sampling technique was applied to identify potential respondents that could be interviewed. Appropriate measures were taken regarding research ethics. Secondary information includes existing literature – books, articles, website sources and newspapers.

Organisation of the Study

The study is divided into seven chapters. The second chapter that follows this introductory chapter discusses the conceptual framework of the study. It highlights concepts of grand strategy, balance of powers, security dilemma, and finally, strategic access. This chapter sets the framework of study. Chapter three focusses on China's strategic interests in Southern Asia. Chapter four covers development of China's physical connectivity and energy corridors in Southern Asia. It discusses how China

is continuously expanding its reach across and along India's bordering states and what strategy is being used by China to expand its physical connectivity (road & rail line) and access to energy throughout the region. Chapter five discusses port development strategies of China. China's evolution as a major power has witnessed a sharp increase in its bilateral interaction with countries in the Indian Ocean region. China is developing ports in some of these countries. The Gwadar port is a good example of it. Further, China has announced to revive the ancient Maritime Silk Road into 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This chapter covers all such projects and related initiatives and developments. Chapter six focusses on India's responses to Chinese strategic access. Finally, the concluding chapter sums up the findings of this study and also examines the validity of the proposed hypotheses.

CHAPTER 2

STRATEGIC ACCESS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter develops a conceptual framework for this study. The route is the key variable in this study and this conceptual chapter explores the impact of security consideration on developing transport networks and energy corridors and vice versa. This chapter also looks at investment strategies behind large scale overseas transport and energy projects for a better understanding of such developments. The chapter looks at why states need strategic access? What are the strategies and how is it done? The chapter explains why states always want to control routes. Since markets continue to expand, transportation vastly improves, mobility increases, and traditional notions related to political boundaries of states are changed, strategic access or politics of routes becomes more important. States not only use politics of routes as a means to enhance national security and project power but also to get access to centres of resources. The progress in transportation technology has altered the relationship of time and space to security and diplomacy. Indeed, technological advancement along with rising economic capabilities of a state has widened and strengthened its reach through access diplomacy. The chapter evaluates a linkage between geography and strategy. Further, it discusses concepts of security dilemma (SD) and balance of power (BoP), which are prevalent and useful concepts in understanding different dynamics of China-India access diplomacy.

Strategic Access

Transport infrastructure is a fundamental prerequisite for any country looking to gain strategic access. It not only helps in realising its economic, political and military potential but also reflects its physical capabilities and territorial reach. In fact, it helps to chart the political evolution of a developing area. It is essential to understand the concept of strategic access. Hence, the following section of this chapter elucidates the concept of strategic access, and the idea of strategic geography, which is the main focus of this study. In order to understand "the geopolitical reality, it is necessary to understand the location of resources" and the lines of communication linking them.

Strategic access is fundamental to politics. Geopolitics is the study of the relationship between transportation and politics, in geographical terms, pursued with the aim of

explaining the origin and development of states and global powers. The political state and the modes of transportation stand in reciprocal relations to each other – the state needs transportation and transportation needs the state. Indeed, routes are an ideal instrument to ascertain the relationship between security and development. For a better understanding of strategic access, it is imperative to know strategic geography.

What is Strategic Geography?

According to Kemp and Harkavy (1997), "Strategic geography refers to the control of, or access to, spatial areas (land, water, and air, including outer space) that has an impact either positive or negative on the security and economic prosperity of nations. It embraces all dimensions of geography, which includes both physical and human geography." Changes in physical geography of a region are very slow, however, with the help of technological innovations, topographical features of a regional such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and coastal lines can be transformed significantly. However, these have their own consequences. Climate change in a region can happen even more rapidly than its topography. There is no fixed time for occurrence of physical changes some like depletion of natural resources can occur within decades, while others may not occur for even a longer duration of time.

The human geography of a region changes very rapidly and depends on a number of factors. These factors can be further divided into dozens of subcategories. However, in this study we have laid focus on three of them, namely political, economic and military geography. Political geography is concerned with the control and organisation of the territory and borders of a country, including people and assets. Economic geography includes infrastructure facilities, activities, and matters that contribute in the economy of a region. Military geography is concerned with the deployment and power projection of military assets in relation with "space, time, and distance and the impact that physical constraints have upon both offensive and defensive" military operations.

A war, a revolution or any other political disturbance can change political geography overnight. The economic geography of a region or country or city can change is more fluctuating than other two sub-geographic categories discussed in the study. It can change both in positive ways or negative ways depending upon the new technologies

and market trends. It is also influence by decisions about developing connectivity corridors that will have impact on economies in long term. As a result of these connectivity some countries will be on par as compared to others, and thus this will have political implications. Similarly, it has been observed over the centuries that developments in technology have been strongly affecting military geography.

Geography and Strategy

A geographically informed analysis of international relations provides clear answers to policymakers: with whom to seek an alliance, how to project power, where to act, and where to set up defences. Hence, for a better understanding of States' policies and actions, it is necessary to look at their location, review their interiors and surroundings. Geography, therefore, is an important explanatory variable. At the level of foreign policy, as Grygiel (2006) said, "geography is a geopolitical reality to which states respond by formulating and pursuing geostrategy." Further, geography plays an important role in aggravating or alleviating threat perceptions by influencing balance. Indeed, "natural barriers, large territory, possession of strategic resources and secure lines of communication endow a state with great defensive capability" (Grygiel 2006). The change in distribution of routes, economics, energy and natural resources across geographical landscape is reflected in Geopolitics. Geostrategy covers the fundamentals of geopolitics and is the geographic direction of a state's foreign policy. Also, it tells a State where to direct its efforts through military projection and direct its diplomatic activities.

The strategy is "a complex decision-making process that connects the ends sought (objectives) with the ways and means achieving those ends" (Drew and Snow 1988: p.13). Geopolitical factors are very significant in making the strategy. Geographical aspects remain same in any strategic situation. All political matters have a geopolitical dimension (Gray and Sloan 1999: 164). Indeed, "geography is the most basic and enduring of the influences upon state policy, both as limitation and as opportunity" (Gray 1991: 311). Thus, all parties that are in a conflict have to address issues relating to the physical environment. Collins notes, "Strategic masters manipulate the physical environment, exploit its strengths, evade its weaknesses, acknowledge constraints, and contrive always to make nature work for them" (Collins 1973: 167).

According to the U.S. Department of the Navy (1997), "the physical environment encompasses not only the traditional elements of geography such as landforms, terrain, oceans and seas, and climate, but also spatial relationships, natural resources, and lines of communications. Together, these factors exert considerable influence on a particular strategic situation. The political, economic, and social makeup of a nation results in part from its physical environment". Geography provides "opportunities, challenges, and dangers, and help condition the frame of reference for official and public debate over national choices in policy and grand strategy" (Gray 1991: 311). On the one hand, location and distribution of natural resources may result in a conflict and, at the same time, it can be one of the causes of the outcome of the conflict. In large part geographic relationships determine political interactions between nations.

Describing about the role of Geography in making of strategic decisions, Collins (1973: 168) wrote, "Geography influences the way in which all elements of national power are applied. While the effect of geography on a conflict varies with the nature, location, and duration of that conflict, the physical environment always has an impact. Strategists must analyse and understand the local, regional, and sometimes global effects of this environment in order to use the elements of power effectively in a specific strategic situation". (Collins 1973: 168). It is not surprising, therefore, that geography is described as "the mother of strategy". Sloan and Gray (1999) writes, "the geographical factors which influence politics are a product of policymakers selecting particular objectives and attempting to realise them by the conscious formulation of strategies." Also, changes in transportation and military technology affect the decision-making process. This dynamism is an important link between geopolitical theory, geography and strategy (Sloan and Gray 1999).

Further, geography is "pertinent at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of conflict. Geography does not describe the choices of policymakers; however, it does influence those choices" (Gray and Sloan 1999: 23). Hence, "geography cannot be an optional extra for consideration by the strategic theorist or planner, because it drives the character and the potential contemporary reach of tactical, hence operational, prowess" (Gray and Sloan 1999: 164). Therefore, "geographical factors including location, size, and character of the national territory and neighbours", and so forth are

very important elements influencing strategic and security planning and policies. Gray (1991) and Luttwak (1987) also share the same opinion as they write "though, geography does not dictate choice in policy or strategy, it influences the character of every conflict at all levels of analysis: policy, grand strategy, military strategy, tactics, and technological choices and performance".

The strategic choices of a state are definitely determined by the relationship between geostrategy and geopolitics. Lines of communication and centres of economic and natural resources determine geopolitical reality. Moreover, geopolitics is "an objective reality" and is "independent of wishes and interests" of a state. In order to bring a change in geopolitics there is need to change routes or the location of resources which no country can do single-handedly. Geopolitical shifts are a result of changes in the production and transportation technology. The changes happen over the course of time and are not controlled by any one country. Therefore, to have an understanding of the geopolitical reality there is a need to look at the locations of resources (power distribution) and the lines of communication that link them. These two variables imparts strategic value to locations and as a result some locations get a privilege over others (Grygiel 2006). These attributes would be helpful in deciphering China's strategic access policy. The perceived vulnerabilities of supply routes and sea lanes of communications could be shaping and influencing large scale investments by China in getting greater strategic access.

How does geography help to develop the strategy? Geography works for strategy in at least three ways. As Gray (1999: 164) explains: "First, it is the physical playing field for those who design and execute strategy. Second, as physical parameters are unique to each environment, geography drives and shapes the technological choices that dominate tactics, logistics, institutions, and military cultures. And third, geography works as inspiration for the grand narrative of high theory that appears as the common understanding of geopolitics." Although the policy of a state is not entirely dependent on its geography, it cannot be drafted without considering geography. Size, shape, location, topography and climate of a state all impact the policy. High economic growth rate results in an exponential increase in the demand for raw materials which makes it essential for states to gain access to external sources in new geographical locations to fuel their economy.

Access to resources and the ability to sustain lines of communication and the associated transport technology, pipelines for oil and gas, etc., is immensely important for a country's national security. Strategic access becomes a more significant tool when a country is portrayed as an emerging power. Rising economic and military strengths of an emerging power enable it to aspire for a greater role in global affairs in addition to dealing with perennial domestic challenges. This leads to greater attention on enhancing security through improving accessibility and acquisition of new resources. Developing both hard and soft connectivity, therefore, assumes unprecedented consideration.

Chaturvedy and Snodgrass (2012) raise concerns about scarcity of scarce natural resources. They describe, "while demands for scarce natural resources including energy are accelerating, scarcities within a country may provoke competition and conflict with other countries over the access to alternate supplies of those resources. Resource scarcity is capable of generating a clash of interests and even of provoking conflict". Therefore, it is essential to understand how the geopolitics of access plays out in Southern Asia. The ballooning demands of limited resources could be a source of increasing competition and rivalry. While greater strategic access enhances the safety and security of a nation, it could also generate apprehensions among other nations about the objectives and implications of such developments. This kind of phenomenon is described as "security dilemma" – "a situation in which a state tries to increase its security and decrease the security of other states" (Jervis 1978: 169). The following section elaborates the idea of the security dilemma and the factors associated with it.

Security Dilemma: Making One's Adversary Less Secure

A security dilemma describes "how the interaction between states that are seeking only security can fuel competition and strain political relations" (Jervis 1976: 62-76; Glaser 1997: 171). According to Robert Jervis, "a number of factors are associated with a security dilemma that hampers states' abilities to work cooperatively towards the mutually desired goal of general security" (Jervis 1978). First, it is feared that current policies of a state that seem non-alarming, kind and non-threatening as of now might affect the state later. Second, states try to bring areas outside their territory in their influence or even control them in order to safeguard their own boundaries and

territory. In this case it is quite evident that the second state that is being tried to be put under influence or control will look at this event as an aggressive intent. Third, in order to create buffer areas around their boundaries the states try to control, or at least neutralise areas along their boundaries. In order to maintaining a buffer zone a state requires to have a larger influence over the country in buffer zone, again from the perspective of the buffer country this action appears to be of aggressive intent and increases vulnerability of the buffer state. Fourth, a state acquires military instruments and weapons in order to have greater security but the acquisition of military weapons and other instruments is obviously seen as a threat by other countries. Finally, the more efforts a country make in order to protect itself, it is likely that its efforts will clash with those of another state.

In such a competitive and fast changing global environment, mutual misunderstandings create perceptions of threat and as a result it is difficult to understand each other's motives, intentions and capabilities; and a resulting difficulty about the most rational way of responding (Herz 1959; Booth and Wheeler 2008: 4-5). States worry more about the capabilities and intentions of their neighbours than they do about distant potential threats. Therefore, a better understanding of politics of routes is very important to mull over Chinese strategic access. Why politics of routes and lines of communication are immensely important for foreign policy strategy of a country? The following section deliberates upon the politics of routes and elements of access diplomacy.

The Politics of Routes

Acquiring control of transportation routes, and safeguarding them once controlled, generate a great deal of political activity, military and otherwise. But transportation itself has always been the means of political action (Wolfe 1963). There has been a tendency that security concerns win over developmental concerns. It is not surprising, therefore, that perceived insecurity (potential or real) has often inspired development (McNeill 1982: 163). In the building of major routes, security concerns generally get primacy. Moreover, the politics of routes has been instrumental in military affairs, economic growth, political development, and cultural change in Southern Asia (Chaturvedy 2014). The authority emanating from the centre must be compelling at the farthest reaches of the state, more compelling than that of any nearby state, no

matter how powerful or how much closer the neighbouring state's centre of authority is to the common boundary. This statement suggests that transportation is not the whole story, but it remains an element that must not be disregarded. The difficulties that arise when transportation links are tenuous are most prominently illustrated in very large countries, such as China, whose struggles to retain control over outlying provinces have a long and well-known history (Wolfe 1963: 45).

The past one hundred years have transformed isolated peripheries of Southern Asia into areas of considerable strategic interest. Access by means of routes, is essential for security, development, and administration of state policies. Therefore, routes could serve as an important analytical tool (Ispahani 1989: 2-5). Political considerations have resulted in developing roads in uneconomic locations, for instance, inhospitable terrains of Himalaya-Karakoram mountains. Moreover, developing states have acted most often when strong security concerns intervened. In fact, the infrastructure of access begins to emerge, even flourish in strategically significant areas. Thus, a route can have both strategic and developmental consequences (Ispahani 1989: 6).

Ispahani describes how "a route is both a geographical and a political idea." The study of a route helps to understand the link between development issues and security. "Routes create access and lie at the heart of people's relations to the environment, and it is as much political as it is geographical" (Ispahani 1989: 2). Access in space has been "organised at all times in history to serve political ends, and one of the major aims of politics is to regulate conditions of access" (Gottmann 1973: 27). Priority for security consideration can be traced in matters of development particularly in peripheral regions. For example, the western regions (Tibet and Xinjiang in particular) in the case of China and the northeast (Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, etc.) in the case of India, present a good case in point.

Routes are "the means for the movement of ideas, the dominant culture and ideology of the political centre, to its peripheries" (Gottmann 1952: 515). Routes (land, sea, air) are important for a country in order to realise its political, economic, and military potential. They show the extent of the territorial reach of a country and its physical capabilities. Ispahani points out the significance of land routes in the following words:

> "Land routes, in particular, are important and useful for historical analysis in the modern world. They have meaning and function in the vital areas of state life – in the economy, in politics, in the dissemination of ideas and ideologies, in internal security, external defence, and the pursuit of foreign policy goals… Transport infrastructure defines, in a sense, the material conditions for a state's internal and external capabilities" (Ispahani 1989: 3).

Lines of communication or routes connect states with one another. They are also important "for the internal economic and political cohesiveness of a state" (Spykman and Rollins 1939). In fact, states project power and access centres of resources through routes. International relations include exchanges between the states. These exchanges could be commercial exchanges, information exchanges or cultural exchanges or even military clashed. All of these exchanges happen through routes which are determined by geography and technology. Routes can be seen as "the nervous system of the world, through which international exchanges happen. Most of the global exchanges, from oil trade to information flows, are related to geography". Further, global maritime trade is increasing at a steady annual rate of 3-4 per cent, making sea lanes increasingly important.

States project their power and access resources through line of communication. Till today, the "bulk of military power is projected though land or sea" routes. Over the past century it has been seen that "the logistical support needed by armies has increased exponentially" in volume, thus the strategic value of routes increases even further. Grygiel describes why controlling of routes has always been an objective of states, "A state that controls lines of communication has full strategic independence. It does not have to rely on the goodwill and protection of other states to access the resources it needs, project power where it wants, and maintain commercial relations with whom it wants. When a state does not have control over the routes linking it with the source of resources and other strategic locations, it falls under the influence of the power in charge of those lines of communication. This is why control of routes has always been an objective of states" (Grygiel 2006: 26-27).

The configuration of routes changes on the basis of three variables: "the discovery and creation of new routes, changes in transportation technology, and changes in the location of resources" (Grygiel 2006: 28). Further, trade routes and the location of resources considerably influence the geopolitical situation. Therefore, in order to gain maximum economic benefits from trade with other countries it is essential to control

the trade routes and even expand them further. Integrated regional groupings are formed by states to increase their economic productivity, security, and expand market size. In these groupings members states have privileged conditions of access over the non-member states. In order to make these regional groupings successful the states work together to expand the physical channels of transport and communication. Thus, routes are helpful for any State in maintaining full strategic independence (Gilpin 1981: 112).

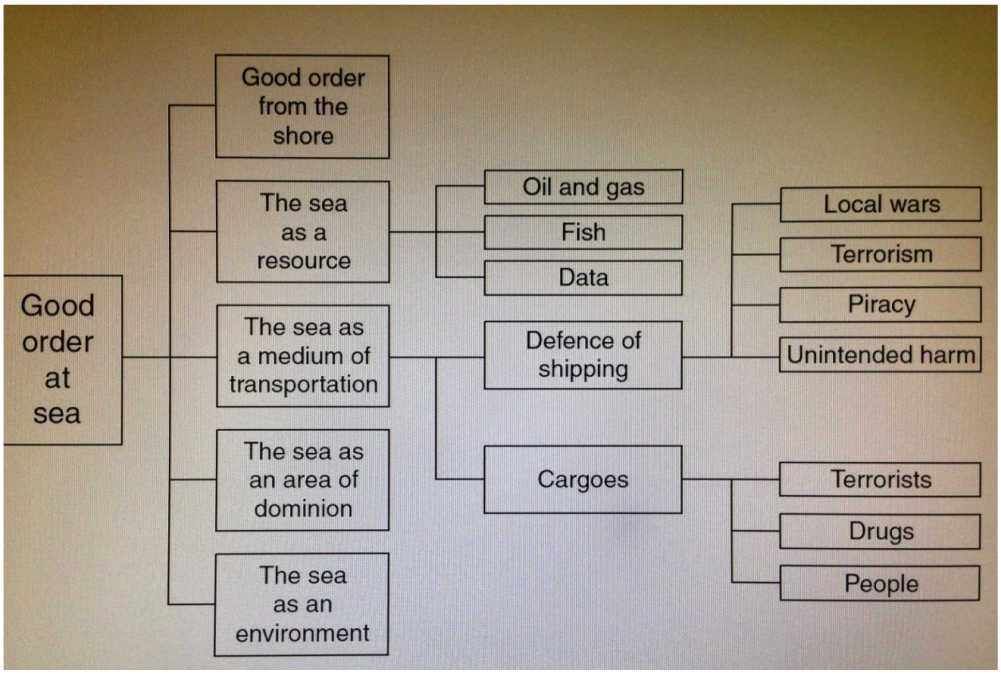
Ispahani (1989: 10) notes that "in decisions on foreign infrastructural aid, economic, political, strategic and geographical concerns intersect. The infrastructure of access is also dual-use: depending on its location and specifications, it can be an instrument of economic development or a tool of internal security or external defence". States are characterised by network of "routes and communication which enable the movement of people, goods, and ideas within the state and to other parts of the world" (Hartshorne 1950: 104). In most developing states, access remains a fundamental aspiration and a contested goal. Processes of achieving security and development are, in a rigorous and fundamental way, processes of controlling – expanding or restraining – access (Ispahani 1989: 215).

Maritime Strategic Access

Maritime trade routes are essential instruments for protecting national security and economic development. To safeguard maritime rights and interests and to maintain access to vital shipping lanes, a country needs to strengthen its maritime strategic access through building ports or getting privileged access to ports and facilities beyond its territorial water.

According to maritime history professor Geoffrey Till (2009), "there are four key and interdependent attributes of sea power, one, the sea as a medium for trade; two, the sea as a resource, in terms of what lies within, as well as underneath its waters; three, the sea as a medium for informational and cultural exchange; and four, the sea as a medium for dominion" (see Figure 1). Moreover, these attributes of maritime power through improved maritime strategic access enable states to advance their national interest. In many ways, the navy serves as an effective tool of diplomacy.

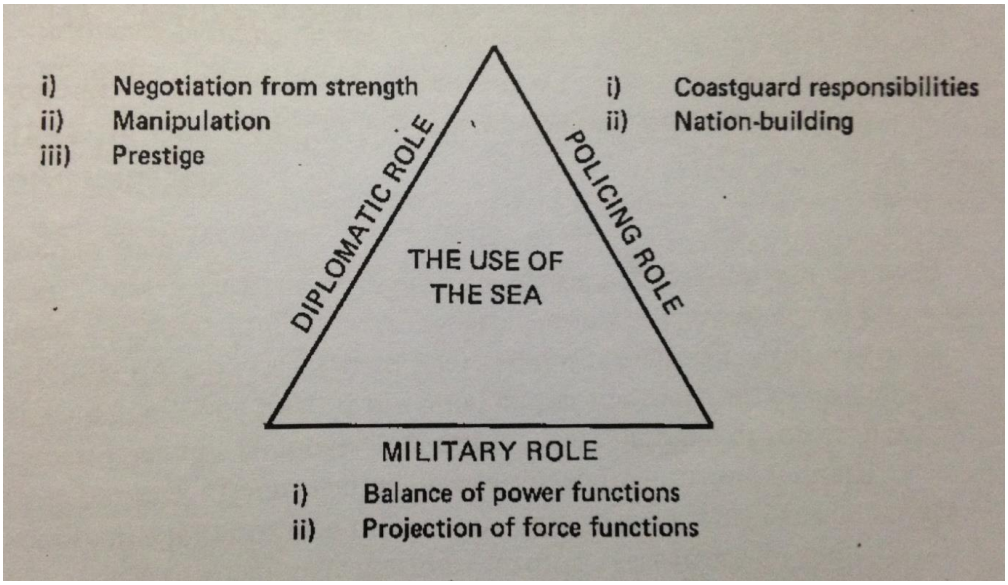
Figure 1: Attributes of Sea



Source: Till (2009).

Indeed, navy has conventionally been used as an invaluable instrument of diplomacy and foreign policy. The fundamental attributes of a navy include inherent mobility, strategic flexibility, and geographical reach. These attributes of a blue water navy make it a useful instrument of strategic policy even when there is no competitions and contentions (Luttwak 1974: 1). Naval power can be used flexibly and in a discriminating manner, easily adaptable to controlled escalation and the needs of a broad spectrum of situations. Warships are versatile in the tasks they can perform which range from humanitarian to military actions. Ships are easily controllable by decision-makers to escalate or withdraw. They are highly mobile and thus can deal with situations both at near and far away spots of trouble; they are efficient platforms that can carry a variety of weapons systems which make them useful against land targets, other ships, or aircraft. The freedom of the seas guarantees ships high accessibility; they have a clear symbolic value. Finally, ships are endurable, they can stay for relatively long periods in positions, close or beyond the horizon, can be visible or invisible, and be withdrawn and committed again quite easily (Vertzberger 1985: 147).

Figure 2: The Functions of Navies



Source: Booth (1977: 16).

Broadly, states use the sea for three main purposes: "(i) for the passage of goods and people; (ii) for the passage of military force for diplomatic purposes, or for use against targets on land or at sea; and (iii) for the exploitation of resources in or under sea" (see Figure 2) (Booth 1977). Navies help to meet these ends. Consequently, navies remain as an instrument of statecraft. The diplomatic role for major navies has involved a wide variety of operational tasks that are induced by both latent and active means. "The range of functions within this role encompasses actions with a degree of implicit or explicit coercion (negotiation from strengths) to actions promising rewards (naval aid) to actions seeking to oil the wheels of relationship by improving an image (influence and prestige)" (Booth 1977: 9-19).

According to Booth (1997) the naval diplomacy is carried out through five basic tactics. "The first two tactics, standing demonstration of naval power and specific operational deployments represent naval power politics; the rest, naval aid, operational visits and specific goodwill visits are naval influence politics." There is, of course, a considerable degree of interrelationship between these two types of strategies. Standing demonstrations of naval power facilitate (and make necessary) routine operational visits, and also increase the opportunities for specific operational deployments when crises or incidents arise, or specific goodwill visits when conditions are opportune .

Maritime strategic access, therefore, has become an important component of "linkage politics", crucially related to numerous other important global regimes and networks of transactions. Though, the very nature of port or facility access requirements has changed in recent years, as new technologies and associated new military requirements have created needs for new types of overseas facilities – variously, for intelligence, communications, and ocean and outer space surveillance purposes – and where arms control verification requirements are juxtaposed to those for traditional national security concerns. Less visible, but now often as important as operational or staging bases, these new types of facilities are crucial for antisubmarine warfare (strategic and tactical), telemetry monitoring of rivals' missile tests, electronic (radar) intelligence, detection of nuclear explosions through seismological signals or the gathering of isotopes in air samples, tracking of satellites and communication with them, and interception and transmission of a variety of military communications. The competition for access has, thus, changed drastically. From an essentially one-dimensional plane on the surfaces of the earth and oceans it has moved to three dimensions, involving the upper atmosphere, outer space, and the under seas domains.

In the past decade or so, the patterns of port access have changed, and so has the basis for – and modes of – maritime access diplomacy. Access rights have increasingly become items of bargained diplomatic exchange, in line with a more balanced reinforcement of leverage and influence for emerging powers. Many small powers have acquired very strong albeit indirect interests in matters of strategic port developments, in that their arms supplies (and those of rivals) may depend on the access decisions of other small nations en route from major power metropoles. Port-denial diplomacy, as well as port acquisition or privileged access to port facilities and other logistics, has become an important attribute of contemporary foreign policy. The problem of growing rivalry over raw materials acquisitions in the developing areas, highlighted by the realisation of vulnerability to embargoes and cartels, has focussed renewed attention on the "protection of sea lanes, control of choke points, and access to forward staging areas for possible interventions related to resource requirements". Such trends, therefore, have fuelled a competition for strategic access based on often tenuous and bargained-for support points, and not on outright, large-scale territorial control (Harkavy 1982: 3-19).

The various types of strategic ports or facilities (here using these terms interchangeably) may be defined according to a spectrum or complex matrix describing their basic justification or purpose, the kinds of military operations conducted from them, and by size, visibility, and military service. Often, a given port complex could be used to serve several functions at once, sometimes spanning the traditional service breakdown between army, navy, and air force. And, over time, the existing features of facilities of a major power, their locations, and their numbers change with technological progress, military requirements and the patterns of global diplomacy. Further, the functions of many ports are fully explicable only in relation to interlocking regional or global networks where numerous separate elements are needed to perform a mission or continuous operation.

Some scholars, incidentally, prefer virtually to subsume maritime strategic access under the broader heading of logistics, with a heavy emphasis on long-range power projection, and the extension and preservation of influence or global maritime predominance. Such a focus is, of course, closely intertwined with the heartland-versus-rimland geopolitical perspectives of Mahan and Mackinder – centrally involving comparisons of logistical chains by distance and cost. Naval and air bases, if alone, are not necessarily there primarily to defend the country in which they are located, and may, therefore, be more vulnerable to political pressures both with respect to their continued existence and to their use outside the host's borders.

Access to sea logistics facilities also assumes importance for the stationed ground forces in a foreign country as depending upon their size, these forces often require support facilities, involving barracks and mess halls, storage and maintenance facilities, ammunition storage, hospitals, schools, training areas, and numerous specialised communications and intelligence facilities, as well, often, as nearby air facilities for airlift of replacement personnel or of additional units "earmarked" for military contingencies, as well as of materiel.

Use of overseas naval ship facilities by the major powers can assume any of a number of forms across a spectrum describing types of vessels provided access, as well as levels of permitted access, permanence, and use for various contingencies. The functions served by naval shore facilities can be grouped into four categories: consumables replenishment, intelligence and communication sources, repairs, and

direct combat support. Generally speaking, extensive naval repair and support facilities provided to major powers by smaller or dependent states imply and usually correspond with close security relationships or alliances, while symbolic or routine port visits merely for refuelling or showing the flag are often made by navies in countries where there are only weak ties or even a degree of enmity.

The major navies nowadays exert great efforts to persuade smaller countries to allow their fleets' short visits, and thus naval diplomacy has become one more aspect of the strategic access. Sometimes this is perceived as an opening wedge promising more extensive and militarily significant access. Some "traditional" naval and air facilities, or rather modes of access, may fall into a grey area between civilian and military use. Major powers have developed or are developing an extensive network of facilities and privileged access for their growing fleets of fishing and oceanographic vessels, many of which may have less benign than advertised purposes – such as electronic warfare, military communications relays, shadowing of others' ships, antisubmarine detection, and disruption of and interference with communications cables and underwater sonar arrays. The important technical facilities can be grouped into tasks related to "intelligence, communications, surveillance, and electronic warfare". Among the numerous activities included are communications, photographic, and electronic intelligence; radar; navigational aid systems; naval and top-level communications networks; high frequency direction finders for aircraft; tracking networks and ground data links for satellites; deep space surveillance; oceanographic surveys; nuclear test detection (seismographic and air sample collections); terminals for submarine detection; and a variety of facilities involved in monitoring both strategic and tactical missile tests. Regarding satellite intelligence, numerous ground facilities are apparently used to query the satellites for information and to process the information received from various modes of transmission (Harkavy 1982). Such information helps strategists and policymakers to map potential threats and to develop insights into how to manage operations in strategically important locations.

The emergence of satellite technology has also been related to new requirements for overseas facilities in connection with weather forecasting, satellite tracking, positional navigational aids for nuclear submarines, and geodetic surveying. Tracking of one's own and others' satellites requires near-global coverage from numerous points, and

interruptions in coverage may pose disadvantages; that is, one's satellites could be destroyed without one knowing it immediately. Global communications facilities constitute a crucial aspect of overseas maritime strategic access. A variety of facilities and corresponding technologies thus comprise the modern global communications networks which require overseas strategic access.

Generally, as the instruments of war have become more complex, and as modern war scenarios often envisage hair-trigger time dimensions for long-range pre-emptive capabilities, the demands for real-time information gathering and processing have increased apace. Overseas installations are, therefore, essential to a great power to provide a worldwide communications-sensing-navigation complex, to respond instantly, for instance, to ominous large missile launchings, anti-satellite activities, or mobilisation indicators.

The global or regional systems of "port facilities and other forms of military access are an important part of the geopolitical equation", both objectively in terms of real and potential relative military power, and perhaps in a more symbolic sense as well, denoting the more subjective aspects of status, position and presence. Enhanced strategic access is an important component of a nation's power and one measure of its diplomacy, but then, its power also ascertains and get reflected by the extent of its overseas access. Finally, the geographical locales of the competition for ports and facilities may tell us much about the broader basis of the global struggle at any given time.

Though, technological progress has reduced the need for naval facilities abroad, these amenities continue to serve many vital functions. The advantages of bases or facilities for navies operating at a considerable distance from their homeland are self-evident: by sustaining forward presences, they shorten the time necessary for intervention in a local conflict, and make force readily available; they increase the time ships can spend on station, whatever tasks they are performing; they improve the efficiency of performance by easing the exchange of crews, and by facilitating replenishment; they ease maintenance problems; and they provide opportunities for rest and recreation. In addition, especially today, shore facilities are important in providing facilities for naval related air activities and surveillance systems (Booth 1977: 89-90).

Airbase Facilities

Some permanent facilities – air, naval, and ground – are used primarily for training purposes, often where uncongested space in the air or on the ground, or certain kinds of climate or terrain are required, if not readily available at home or where major forces are permanently stationed. Regarding ground forces, some pivotal areas are used for logistical support for the entire region, given the need for extensive organisational support and central depots.

Airbase facilities are used to serve numerous functions aside from the obvious major ones of deploying tactical and strategic combat aircraft. There are also facilities for deploying and staging airlift transports, for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, and for reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft. Many bases, particularly the larger ones, may serve several of these roles simultaneously, though some are primarily specialised for only one. Airbase complexes also often house a variety of communications and other technical operations, along with the usual mix of housekeeping units and installations.

Staging of transport aircraft for arms supplies, personnel, and other material accounts for numerous overseas facilities – sometimes co-located with combat functions, sometimes involving large installations with permanently stationed user personnel, but also often involving joint control or use of client states' facilities on a more or less ad hoc basis. Some facilities of this type are used on a more or less normal basis during peacetime for routine arms and personnel shipments, while at other times they must be bargained for just before and during crises. Many staging bases are also used for ferrying short-range tactical aircraft over long distances, often where time constraints preclude or render less desirable alternate movement by ship (Harkavy 2005).

"Some nations have allowed others more or less full, unhindered, and continuous overflight rights (perhaps involving only pro forma short-term notices), while in other cases, ad hoc formal applications for permission to overfly must be made well ahead of time, which may or may not be granted depending upon the purpose and situation, be it normalcy or crisis" (Siegel 1995).

Strategic Access Approaches

Economic diplomacy has become the most visible and well-articulated aspect of external engagement of emerging powers encompassing trade promotion, foreign direct investment (FDI), and the financing and execution of infrastructure projects. Indeed, economic means are the most prominent and valuable aspect of strategic access approaches. Economic assistance has various categories including grant aid, interest-free loans and concessional loans mainly for humanitarian and disaster relief, technical projects, healthcare and medical facilities, education, state capacity building, social infrastructure development including construction of houses, schools, etc., and environmental protection. However, strategic access linked assistances are primarily focussed on infrastructure development and are mainly driven by the state agencies. These types of projects include "all types of transportation projects, including rail, roads, ports, airports, and electricity and telecommunications projects, and various other projects related to connectivity". More importantly, economic means are increasingly employed to achieve political and strategic interests.

Generally, there are three main strategies for large scale investments: "market-seeking investments"; "efficiency-seeking investments"; and "resource-seeking investments" (Dunning 1993, 2000). Market-seeking FDI is mainly based on the market size and market growth of a host country. Efficiency-seeking FDI is said to occur when companies move some of their businesses to other locations in order to lower costs of their operations and production. It also covers investments in which companies shift their locations for acquiring new technologies and designs and to internalise supply chains to increase competitiveness through advanced efficiency. Resource-seeking investments as the name suggests are for gaining access to resources that are either not available in the country or are scarce. However, resource-seeking investments can be further divided into "three sub-groups: (i) natural resource-seeking investments, (ii) technology-seeking investments, and (iii) strategic asset-seeking investments". The natural resource-seeking investment are made to acquire the natural resources such as oil, minerals and other raw materials. These investments are for commercial purposes or are meant for gaining access to rare raw materials for the national economy, thereby fulfilling the national economic policy agenda. Technology-seeking investments are made in order to gain technological advancements. The third,

strategic asset-seeking investments are made by MNCs to get better access to local distribution systems and managerial practice and expertise.

Conclusion

Strategic access concept is an effective tool to understand nature, objectives and strategies of China's politics of routes. There are various interests and motivating factors driving access diplomacy. A clear linkage between geography and strategy guided by emerging regional and global geopolitics often motivates countries to enhance strategic access. Transportation and other modes of connectivity are directly linked to national security of states. Though, economic interests are important, strategic and political considerations drive agenda of strategic access. Strategic access concept provides better insights into the security-development dilemma explaining relationship between geographical and political facts and how politics of routes is shaping regional security dynamics. The conceptual framework discussed in this chapter will guide remaining of the study in analysing Chinese strategic access. The study illustrates in subsequent chapters the importance of strategic access in shaping the foreign policy and grand strategy of China.

With this conceptual framework of strategic access discussed above, the subsequent chapters examine China's interests, objectives and strategies for strategic access in Southern Asia. The rise of China has inspired both hope and despair. A common aspiration throughout Southern Asia and beyond is that a strong China means economic prosperity for all. The prevailing wisdom is that the sheer size of the world's second largest economy and its demands for trade will translate into jobs, business opportunities and economic growth for neighbouring countries. If anticipation has been fuelled by visions of economic splendour, the anxieties have been more puzzling. The growing levels of Chinese investments have been impressive and their implications have been wide-ranging. They have brought to Southern Asia new economic opportunities, regional cooperation and development, but they have also included allegations of land grabbing, environmental degradation, cultural conflict, political bullying and distrust. Furthermore, underlying these tensions are long intertwined histories characterised by both trust and suspicion. The new wave of investments is happening against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions surrounding China's territorial dispute with India. Moreover, China's strategic access

and related investments have emerged as flashpoints of protests and controversy. From government orders to suspend the Chinese-backed projects in Myanmar to protests over Chinese investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, strategic access has become a key factor for tensions and anxieties surrounding China's growing influence in Southern Asia. Therefore, various elements of the concept of strategic access provide a suitable framework to examine Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia. It helps better understand China's growing power resources and its politics of routes in Southern Asia and how Chinese strategic access is shaping India's policy choices.

CHAPTER 3

CHINA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES IN SOUTHERN ASIA

The last twenty years have seen enormous shifts in Beijing's foreign policy objectives and methods. In the past, Beijing's foreign policy aims in the developing world were mainly dominated by ideological and military concerns, however, now the focus of China's foreign policy has largely shifted to business. China has made remarkable economic growth over the last two decades. This tremendous growth of China has shaped a strategy in the developing world. This strategy reflects country's need for energy, markets, and political support in the international community. Its growing acceptance of free market principles and a willingness to actively participate in regional and global associations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and ASEAN+3, have helped integrate China into the larger global economic and diplomatic order. China has determined that in most circumstances—and at least for now—its needs are best met by seeking to shape the current global framework from inside the tent. This trend has generally added relevance and predictability to our current multilateral frameworks, but it has also generated a level of insecurity among members unsure of China's authoritarian system and intentions (Eisenman, Heginbotham, and Derek 2007).

As China becomes more militarily capable and politically assertive, it is important to understand Chinese strategic culture. Chinese strategic culture is "a tradition grounded in the cult of the offense and a thirst for imperial expansion" (Wilson 2016). Many Chinese wars were defensive, but they were also fought to defend territory previously seized from neighbours. The wars of classical age were primarily campaigns of conquest. The Chinese classics offer abundant rationales for and rationalisations of offensive military action. Confucianism presents inherently mixed message to the military leaders and rulers of the classical and imperial China. That world insists that the Son of Heaven be a moral exemplar, but it nonetheless obligated to march against anyone who does not acknowledge his authority. Expansion, subjugation and annexation were core tenets in Chinese classical thought long before the Qin consolidation in 221 BCE. The 'long walls' of the Spring and Autumn periods and

Warring States era, from which the first Great Wall was strung together by the First Emperor of China, were as much about defining and holding conquered territory as they were about defending territorial borders. Long walls also served as convenient logistical channels along which supplies and manpower could be moved and massed in anticipation of further campaigns of conquest and expansion.

Chinese states have progressively absorbed vast swathes of the modern China coast, the southwest region of Yunnan, and the foothills of Tibet, and have occasionally attempted to annex portions of what are now Vietnam and Myanmar. The impetus to expand has historically been rooted in security and prosperity. Chinese polities have expanded territorially to support ever-larger populations and have built buffer zones around cultivated core. The continued control over and even expansion of imperial territory was also bound up in the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty. The inability to control or expand territory hinted at a decline in the power and influence of the emperor and has historically viewed as emblematic of inexorable dynastic decline. The China have inherited this feature for territorial integrity and for stark interpretations of sovereignty. That they continue to do so in a world that is generally becoming less obsessed with sovereignty is particular dangerous.

This chapter discusses China's strategic interests in Southern Asia. Motivated by its intertwined domestic and external dynamics, China is strengthening its relations with countries in India's neighbourhood. First, this chapter looks at drivers of China's foreign policy, followed by China's strategic interests. To understand the Chinese perspective, several eminent Chinese scholars have been interviewed over a period of time, and their views have been presented here. Cooperating with various countries in its periphery, particularly Southern Asia, not only contributes in its efforts to improve strategic access in neighbouring countries but also "enhances its national security and economic development, particularly stability and prosperity in the periphery" (Zhao 2011: 55).

Drivers of China's Foreign Policy

China today continues to call itself the world's largest developing nation, even as it reaches out and connects itself to the international community to a degree unprecedented in China's long history. In fact, China's power and influence relative

to those of other major powers have "outgrown the expectation of even its own leaders" (Wang 2011: 68). China's presence and influence in Southern Asia "has arisen so rapidly and has so many dimensions that it raises questions about China's intentions" and the implications for India's economic and security interests. What are the key drivers that determine China's foreign policy orientation? According to a study done by Evan S. Medeiros (2009), "there are at least three historical factors that shape China's foreign policy trajectory: "China is in the process of reclaiming its status as a great power; many Chinese view their country as a victim of shame and humiliation at the hands of foreign powers which has fostered an acute sensitivity to coercion by foreign powers and especially infringements (real or perceived) on its sovereignty; and, China has a defensive security outlook that stems from historically determined fears that foreign powers will try to constrain and coerce it by exploiting its internal weaknesses" (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012).

Medeiros (2009) elaborates that "China's view of its security environment has two overarching dimensions. The first is a widely held belief that China's success is inextricably linked to the international community, more so than ever before. The second is the pervasive uncertainty about the range and severity of threats to China's economic and security interests." On balance, Chinese leaders have concluded that their external security environment (for China's view of its security environment, see Box 1) is "favourable and that the next 15 to 20 years represent a 'strategic window of opportunity' for China to achieve its leading objective of national revitalisation through continued economic, social, military, and political development. Chinese policymakers seek, to the extent possible, to expand this 'window of opportunity' through diplomacy. Indeed, this is clearly visible in China's foreign policy and its growing weight in global affairs" (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012). China has made remarkable achievements and the developing world is inspired by its developments.[3] Also, Chinese politics of routes suggests that China defines its responsibilities in ways that augment its geopolitical and geo-economic interests.

[3] For example, China's success in lifting millions of people out of poverty; its fight against disease and illiteracy; its embrace of technology that has put Chinese astronauts in space.

Box 1: China's View of Its Security Environment

• No Major Power War: There is a low probability of large-scale war among major powers, and thus the next 15 to 20 years is a unique period for China to continue to develop and modernise.

• Globalisation: Globalisation has redefined interstate economic and political interactions, bolstering China's global economic importance and enhancing interdependence among states. Globalisation has imposed some constraints on China.

• The Global Power Balance: Multipolarity is rapidly emerging; although the United States remains a predominant power in the world, it is declining gradually and in relative terms. The United States is both a potential threat to China's revitalisation as a great power and a central partner in China's realisation of this goal.

• Non-traditional Security Challenges: China faces a variety of such challenges, including terrorism, weapons proliferation, narcotics and human trafficking, environmental degradation, the spread of infectious diseases, and natural disasters. These are redefining China's relations with major powers in Asia and globally, including by creating opportunities for tangible cooperation.

• Energy Insecurity: China defines energy security in terms of two issues: price volatility and security of delivery. China feels vulnerable on both fronts. Such perceptions are increasingly driving its efforts to gain access to crude oil and natural gas resources, especially in the Middle East and Africa.

• China's Rise: Chinese policymakers see the "rise of China" as an influential factor in global economic and security affairs. China is increasingly confident in its diplomatic reach and influence and feels it has succeeded in dampening fears of a "China threat," especially in Asia.

Source: Medeiros (2009).

Across the region large scale investments "by Chinese state-owned entities with nebulous links to the Chinese government or military have begun to attract greater scrutiny and criticism", raising questions about potential security implications and the shadowy nexus between economics, geopolitics, and grand strategy (Smith 2018). India has more clearly and consistently enunciated these concerns. Former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran argues that Chinese see economic and security objectives collectively and do not draw lines dividing each other. Indeed, "each dimension reinforces the other, even though the economic dimension may sometimes mask the security imperative" (Saran 2015).

China is making strategic "inroads into Southern Asia. It's presence in Southern Asia has been on the rise since the mid-2000s", when Chinese leaders started to understand Beijing's heavy reliance on the Straits of Malacca as a primary channel for energy supplies and its vulnerabilities. "This potential threats to Chinese supply lines prompted China to focus more on the security of sea lanes stretching from the North Arabian Sea to the Malacca Strait, as well as invest in infrastructure development to sustain alternative trade routes". Various railroads, ports and energy corridors under the rubric of the Belt and Road Initiative, are "meant to resolve China's 'Malacca dilemma' while facilitating the development of its western provinces and providing Chinese industry access to new markets" (Xiaoping 2018).

In order to increase its own "economic and political influence and to lessen the ability of potentially hostile powers to injure its interests" China wishes to have friendly cooperative ties with Southern Asian Countries. China thinks that strategic links are common in international cooperation and thus pursues its objective of increasing physical connectivity and strategic ties with Southern Asian countries.[4] Thus, "Chinese designs are driven primarily to boost economic growth and enhance security (both traditional and non-traditional)" (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012).

According to the white paper "China's Peaceful Development 2011", China's core interests include: "(i) state sovereignty; (ii) national security; (iii) territorial integrity;

[4] Based on interviews and discussions with scholars in China at various institutions including, the Institute of Asia-pacific Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relation (CICIR), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Tsinghua University, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), Tongji University, Fudan University, China Agricultural University, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Yunnan University, China West Normal University, Shanghai Maritime University, and Chinese Academy of Military Science.

(iv) national reunification; (v) China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability; (vi) basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development." Sovereignty denotes "country's ability to exercise ultimate authority over all of its geographic claims", including all land and maritime borders. Threats to sovereignty include "challenges by rival claimants to disputed territory". Security refers to the country's protection from internal and external threats to territorial integrity and political stability. Developmental interests comprise of "access to the resources and goods required for the country to sustain economic development". Any disruption of sea lanes of communication and "instability in distant countries that could interrupt China's access to important natural resources and markets" are considered as threat to developmental interests (Scobell et. al. 2014).

Top priority of China's leaders is regime security, and hence, to maintain the Communist Party of China (CCP) control. Supremacy of CCP is of utmost importance. Therefore, "any attempt to undermine the party's legitimacy" is perceived as threatening. Chinese leaders recognise that "ensuring economic growth and defending China's sovereignty and territory are critical to maintaining public support". Moreover, Beijing has shown increasing eagerness "to help curb transnational threats to international trade". To assert its effective influence and control, China "has also defied international norms that challenge China's efforts and interests in the near seas", such as the 2016 ruling by the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea regarding the South China Sea. Beijing also opposes norms that legitimise foreign intervention, such as "the responsibility to protect, democracy and human rights promotion, and freedom of information", as these could undermine CCP's authority (Scobell 2014).

For decades, "China's leaders have prioritised economic development and avoided burdensome international obligations and war". To reassure countries that are nervous about China's growing power, Beijing "has emphasised the country's peaceful development for years". However, changes in circumstances and growing confidence due to increasing economic and strategic power, China is talking about the "China Dream," and aims "to shape a favourable international environment" to materialise

that dream.[5] In the 2015 speech to the UN General Assembly, Xi stated, "We cannot realize the Chinese dream without a peaceful international environment, a stable international order and the understanding, support, and help from the rest of the world" (Xi 2015).

Table 1: China's Interests

Interests	Components	Important Threats
Security	*National security *Regime security	*Military threats *Threats to social cohesion *Threats from terrorism, separatism and other global challenges *Challenges to CCP rule
Sovereignty	*Territorial sovereignty and integrity (land and maritime) *National reunification	*Territorial disputes
Development	*Access to strategic geographies, resources and markets *Safety of investments and trade routes	*Investment in volatile regions *Political risks *Transnational threats to trade

A vital aspect of "Chinese leaders' understanding of their country's history is their persistent sensitivity to domestic disorder caused by foreign threats" (Wang 2011: 69). Therefore, the proliferation of both traditional and non-traditional security threats, such as "radical ethnic nationalism, terrorism, transnational crimes, uncontrolled immigration, weapons of mass destruction, disputes over maritime resources, safety of sea lanes, environmental protection, infectious diseases, and natural disasters", all call for developing strong ties "based on geographic proximity, historical linkages and comparative advantages to facilitate cooperation" going beyond national boundaries. "China shares common interests and concerns with many of its neighbours in finding collective solutions in economic cooperation and the

[5] The analysis of the white paper "China's Peaceful Development 2011" is based on RAND Report *China and the International Order*.

handling of transnational security threats. Cooperation with various countries in its periphery to cope with these transnational issues enhances China's national security and economic development, particularly border area stability and prosperity" (Zhao 2011: 53-67).

According to Chinese scholar Suisheng Zhao (2011), "one of the key concerns of China is radical ethnic nationalism, which has increasingly threatened its frontier security and stability." China shares land borders with 14 countries and "many people in these border areas are non-Han Chinese nationalities, also known as trans-border nationalities, and have close cultural and kin connections with their ethnic communities across the borders". Ethnic nationalism, therefore, "remains alive among some ethnic minorities in China's frontiers, such as Tibetans, Uighurs of Xinjiang" and is considered "a serious threat to the territorial integrity and stability in the peripheral China".[6] As part of the effort to create a peaceful periphery, "China began to formulate a regional policy known as 'zhoubian zhengce' (periphery policy) or 'mulin zhengce' (good neighbouring policy) in the late 1980s". Chinese periphery policy is "based on the principles of 'yu lin wei shan, yi lin wei ban' (becoming friends and partners with neighbours) and aimed at 'mu lin, an lin, and fu lin' (building an amicable, tranquil and prosperous neighbourhood)" (Zhao 2011). Moreover, China's cooperation with neighbourhood is also aimed at enhancing its influence in respective countries.

China's Southern Asia Strategy

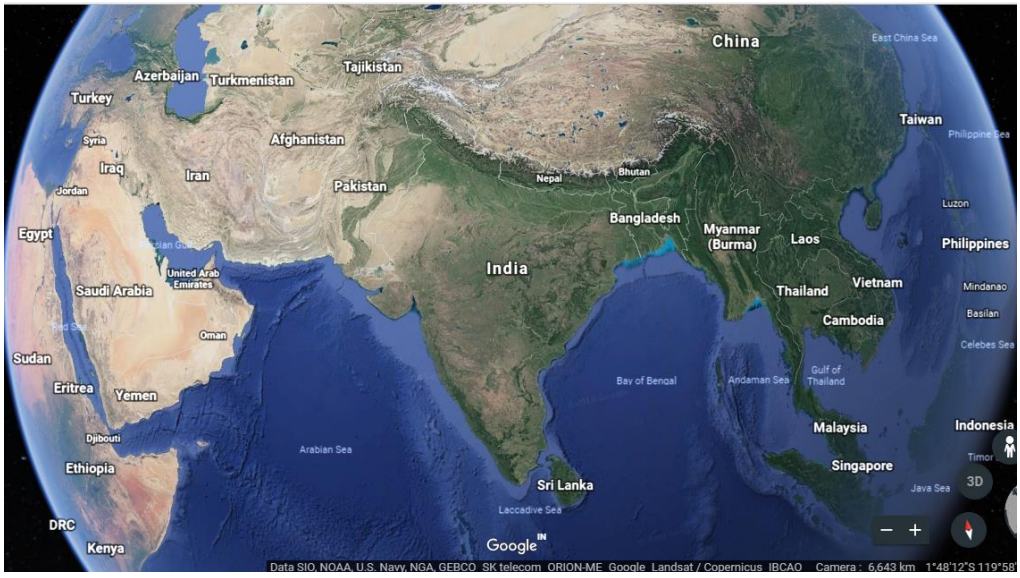
China has had a long historic linkage with Southern Asia, with travellers from China visiting Southern Asia and writing about their travels. Trade ties can also be traced back to the Tang Dynasty and many Chinese artefacts have been found in the Southern Asia region – from the subcontinent to Sri Lanka and Myanmar.[7] "China (Tibet/Xinjiang) is linked to Southern Asian states by 'mountains and rivers'. That expression is not merely a diplomatic platitude; it is a hard geopolitical fact of life" (Josse 2006: 221).

[6] This perspective was offered by several Chinese scholars during their interviews between 2009 and 2018 at various institutions in China.

[7] The scholars at the YASS and at Yunnan University in Kunming highlighted various aspects of historical linkages between China and India during their interviews.

China shares common borders with Southern Asia and thus it is vital to the region. If we take a look at the map (Figure 3) of Southern Asia, geographic proximity, and geopolitics makes inevitable for China to strengthen its strategic access to this region. "All these borders had been disputed to begin with and have sparse yet overlapping populations. China's unresolved boundary with India makes these states critical buffers, thus increasing their strategic significance for both New Delhi and Beijing. Boundary disputes have been a dominant cause of suspicions and threat perceptions" between India and China. Beijing has continued to modulate its Southern Asian policy to suit its foreign policy objectives including a 'peaceful periphery' (Singh 2002: 53).

Figure 3: Map of Southern Asia



Source: https://earth.google.com/

China's foreign policy has been dominated since 1949 by both perceptions of threats and opportunities provided by its external environment, and more by the first than by the later. Southern Asia, including the Indian Ocean, which was an area of relatively negligible importance and almost benign neglect, has become an area into a focus of growing attention and active diplomacy for the Chinese government. The change of priorities attached by China to this region has emerged incrementally over more than a decade of dealing with the region, with which China had a history of little interaction. China's gave lesser priorities to its Southern Asian borders in 1949 during the Communist takeover. A number of incidences, however, resulted in a reassessment of Beijing's approach towards the region. Further, China started paying more attention to

its western region once the Chinese central government realised the scale of domestic challenges emanating from Tibet and Xinjiang and also some major global challenges including terrorism from neighbouring countries. Military balance between China and the neighbouring countries, and the Cold War geopolitics shaped China's position. Indeed, the Chinese envisioned Southern Asia and the Indian Ocean as a spring board to Africa, or at least that Chinese presence in Southern Asia could improve Chinese strategic access, its geostrategic and political position (Vertzberger 1985: 1-5).

Chinese are hyper-sensitive about Tibet and Xinjiang, which are "seen by the Chinese as their 'soft strategic underbelly'. China's Southern Asia policy had always been guided purely by an aim to ensure its territorial integrity as a nation" (Singh 2002: 53). Tibet and Xinjiang, both are rich in minerals and resources and a bigger concern for China is fear of secession, and hence huge securitisation of both provinces. Sparsely populated Xinjiang is "the largest political sub-division of China", rich in energy and natural resources, and is "a valuable real estate to accommodate the huge Han population. Mega projects like the East West Gas Pipeline from Aksu and Karamay connecting to Shanghai have been built under the China Western Development Policy" (Arya 2010: 189-190). Ethnic problems in Tibet and Xinjiang worked as a catalyst for Beijing's improvement of access to both regions and the feeling of insecurity became key driver for development of routes and greater access. Moreover, historically, geographically and geo-politically, Tibet and Xinjiang, make China a part of Southern Asia region (Khatri 1987: 242).

China's initial Southern Asia policy was very limited in the past and it could be described as a reflection of China's arduous long march from ideology and revolutionary zeal to national interest and pragmatism, defining the core of China's national objectives (Singh 2003: 329-341). In fact, China's standing in world affairs has evolved significantly in recent times. The growing political influence of China in Southern Asia, and in particular, its "strategic relationship with Pakistan, has been an important concern for New Delhi" (Mohan 2003b: 150). China has developed its strongest ties in Southern Asia with Pakistan in response to Pakistan's security needs (Syed 1974: 15) and to strengthen Chinese access to the sea.

Although China's broad objective in Southern Asia may be the expansion of multi-dimensional relations with all countries of the region, strategic access is currently one particularly important form of China's expanding ties to Southern Asia. Prof. Moham writes, "As Chinese economic power spills over boundaries, its integration with neighbouring regions is inevitable. In the past, China sought strategic connectivity to the subcontinent by building the Karakoram Highway through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (Pok) and the Kodari highway to Nepal. At present, the economic imperative has made the access to the waters of the Indian Ocean an urgent political goal. Beijing wants to build new highways through Nepal into the sub-Himalayan plains. The Tibet railway is at the edge of the subcontinent. On the eastern flank, China is trying to develop the Irrawaddy corridor that will connect land-locked Southwestern China to the Bay of Bengal. On the western flank, the Gwadar port in Pakistan could make the Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea an enduring one. China's practical search for energy and maritime security has compelled Beijing to raise its maritime profile in the subcontinent. Besides Gwadar, there is growing Chinese activity at Chittagong in Bangladesh, the long western coastline of Myanmar, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka" (Mohan 2005e).

China envisages positioning itself along strategic maritime gateways or chokepoints to protect its sea lanes of communication, particularly through hostile and unsafe sea spaces. Beijing is expanding its access through political, military and commercial diplomacy. Similarly, "to realise the goal of local economic integration China has extensively used border trade as a main instrument". According to the estimates "border

trade through China's 120 inland towns and ports accounts for almost half of China's total foreign trade."[8] A high degree of autonomy is provided to provincial governments by the centre. For China "Nathu La Pass in Sikkim is a vital physical economic entry into the huge market of Southern Asia as this is the shortest route (roughly 590 km between Tibet and Sikkim) to the heartland of India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal".[9]

[8] Based on interview with Prof. Mahendra P. Lama in Gangtok, Sikkim.
[9] Based on interviews with the scholars at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences in Kunming.

Figure 4: China's Strategic Access

Source: Lamont and Kazmin (2009).

Further, Tibet is rich in mineral resources which have "a potential value of more than US$ 125 billion".[10] As the cost of transportation is high, it is not easy to transport raw materials out of the province. To overcome this barrier, huge investments are made by China to improve infrastructure. New opportunities are being created for the people of the region by the Tibet railway. In fact, in response to the Nepalese request that the Tibet railway be extended to promote trade and tourism, the Chinese authorities announced their intention to extend the railway from Lhasa to Khasha on the Nepalese border. Chinese scholars tend to feel that in India, there are misperceptions about the nature of these developments, and thus, about Chinese strategic access.[11]

[10] Prof. Zuo Ting at the China Agricultural University mentioned these facts during discussion with the author in Beijing.
[11] Based on discussions and interviews in China.

China is establishing trade and investment linkages with the well-endowed regions of eastern India, through the larger process of the 'Kunming Initiative' in order to realise the potential of the vast untapped market.[12] China is seeking to promote Kunming as a regional transportation hub. The BCIM forum is a regional cooperation initiative meant for boosting regional cooperation by transforming it into a growth quadrangle. It is "an effort primarily by the non-state actors of the member countries to influence policymakers, business people and government representatives" to achieve its objectives. BCIM accounts for about 40 per cent of world's total population and about 7.5 per cent of total global GDP. Along with "the economic factors, the strong cultural affinity, the closer geographical proximity and the presence of informal border trade among the countries, strong optimism exists for forming a regional trading bloc comprising BCIM". Moreover, it is expected that the BCIM cooperation will help to revive the centuries-old Silk Road.[13] The scholars at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences underscored the significance of cross-border connectivity and they think that the BCIM initiative would bring prosperity to the region. However, they also emphasised that no significant trading has taken place through Nathu La Pass due to poor road conditions and infrastructure facilities, and India's restrictions. Recently, Chinese leaders called for the joint development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. This clearly reflects grand strategy of China. China wants to work on both of these routes – overland and maritime – to create a strategic space for itself and transform Asia.

Dr. Evan A. Feigenbaum sees four puzzles in Chinese strategic access – one, the Chinese are very competitive internationally; two, they are the lowest bidder in infrastructure projects or resource access; three, all these developments are sheer

[12] The Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Development among China, India, Burma and Bangladesh was held in Kunming in August 1999 under the auspices of Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS) and the Yunnan Provincial Economic and Technological Research Centre in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province in the south-western region of China, approved by acclamation what was called the Kunming Initiative. The main thrust of the exercise was to exhort the governments concerned to improve communications between the south-western region of China and the north-eastern region of India by developing appropriate road, railways, waterways and air links. The scholars at YASS made these points to the author during their discussion at the Academy.

[13] The Silk Road, or Silk Route, is an extensive interconnected network of trade routes across the Asian continent connecting East, South and West Asia with the Mediterranean world, including North Africa and Europe.

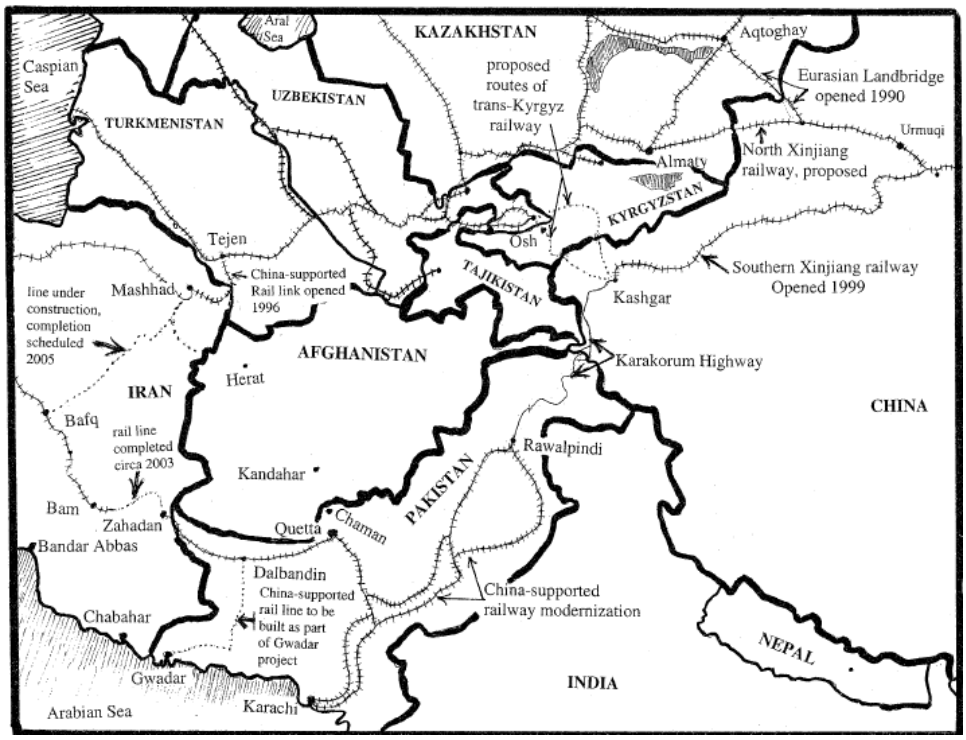
commercial interests and are not merely driven by strategic interests; and finally Pakistan is "China's Israel", the country's closest external security partner, which cannot be grouped with other Southern Asian countries.[14] Malik (2006b) writes that despite warming Sino-Indian relations, Beijing has made many strategic moves to isolate India in South Asia. These major strategic moves will further shrink "India's traditional strategic space in the region, keeping it tied down with multiple sub-continental concerns. After Pakistan and Myanmar, Beijing is skillfully employing economic and military means to draw Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka into China's orbit" (Chellaney 2007). Thus, China has been busy enhancing access to Southern Asia through cross-border connectivity. Why are the Chinese developing roads, rails, ports, and related infrastructure in Southern Asia? What could be the objectives of such developments?

China's Objectives of Strategic Access

Broadly, there are two dimensions of Chinese strategic access (Garver 2006). First, China's economic rise is quite evident in all of the big investments that are being made by China in building roads, railways, ports, and energy corridors in Southern Asia. A second dimension is that these new transportation link will be carriers of China's influence in the region. As discussed earlier, railways and better roads will not only bring Chinese trade and commerce but will also serve as routes of cultural influences. The various rail lines under China's rail links expansion programme are illustrated in Figure 5. These routes will help to develop trade flows and lead to inter-dependence.

[14] It is based on discussion with Dr. Evan Feigenbaum in Washington D.C.

Figure 5: The Expansion of China's Transport Links



Source: Garver (2006: 20).

In fact, establishing of direct links with neighbouring countries is "a new feature in China's foreign policy strategy. Certainly, China's influence is on rise, in the region where it was historically limited by the tough geographical terrain and huge distances". Its economic rise and technological advancements are lending a hand to promote connectivity. Regime security, national unification, territorial integrity, maritime security, and regional stability are the main strategic aims of China.[15] Here again, an insecurity component appears to be the key reason for development in the peripheral regions. Since uncertainty and insecurity is on rise in Tibet, the development in peripheral regions has become one of the main concerns for China. "These concerns have resulted in huge investments in infrastructure building, including the Tibet railway".[16] Indeed, transport infrastructure has boosted Tibet's domestic and foreign investment since its opening in 2006.

[15] Based on interview with Professor M. Taylor Fravel at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
[16] Tibet railway was completed in five years at a cost of US$ 3.68 billion.

The Chinese are seen to be 'hypersensitive' about their territorial integrity and sovereignty.[17] And it is possibly one of the reasons why China is paying much more attention to integrating its peripheral regions to the main heartland. In terms of development the western regions of China lag far behind when compared with its coastal regions. Thus, the transport networks that are being made in China and neighbouring countries are aimed at "reducing regional inequality; improving resource supplies; securing national security and unity; and ensuring economic growth and development".[18]

How do Chinese scholars interpret these developments? According to Rong Ying of the China Institute of International Studies, "Southern Asia is an important part of the Chinese periphery and China pursues an independent foreign policy of peace. The priority at the moment for China's foreign policy is to ensure a peaceful international environment and a peaceful and stable periphery, in particular. And this is a very important reason why China wants to develop stable, close relations with the Southern Asian states. We have always said that China has no hidden agenda and we mean what we say".[19]

Rong Ying underlines that China's future development needs a prosperous, peaceful, and stable Southern Asia. Hu Shisheng from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations sees several Chinese interests in Southern Asia including security interests, economic interests, political interests, and technological interests.[20] Hu believes that the Southern Asian region is more volatile, and vital for China's stability and security, and so China pays much attention to Southern Asia. He points out that China has both traditional and non-traditional security concerns and emphasises that "we have to have good relations to the Indian Ocean Rim[21] countries". He also observes that though the Cold War has ended, the Cold War

[17] Professor Alastair Iain Johnston at the Department of Government, Harvard University mentioned this during his Interview at Harvard University.
[18] These points are based on interviews with various scholars working on China.
[19] Interview with Rong Ying in Beijing.
[20] Interview with Hu Shisheng in Beijing.
[21] The Indian Ocean Rim defines a distinctive area in international politics consisting of coastal states bordering the Indian Ocean. It is a region of much diversity, in culture, race, religion, economic development, and strategic interests. It was launched in Mauritius on 6-7 March 1997. The Association disseminates information on trade and investment regimes, with a view to helping the region's business community better understand the impediments to trade and investment within the region. These information exchanges have been intended to serve as a base to expand intra-regional trade.

mindset persists. Likewise, he adds that there exists a kind of balancing strategy in both countries which creates a strategic distrust between China and India. Other Chinese security interests in the region are issues related to Tibet and Xinjiang, ethnic problems, and problems related to drug smuggling. Nevertheless, in terms of economic interests, Hu sees Southern Asia as a huge potential market for China.

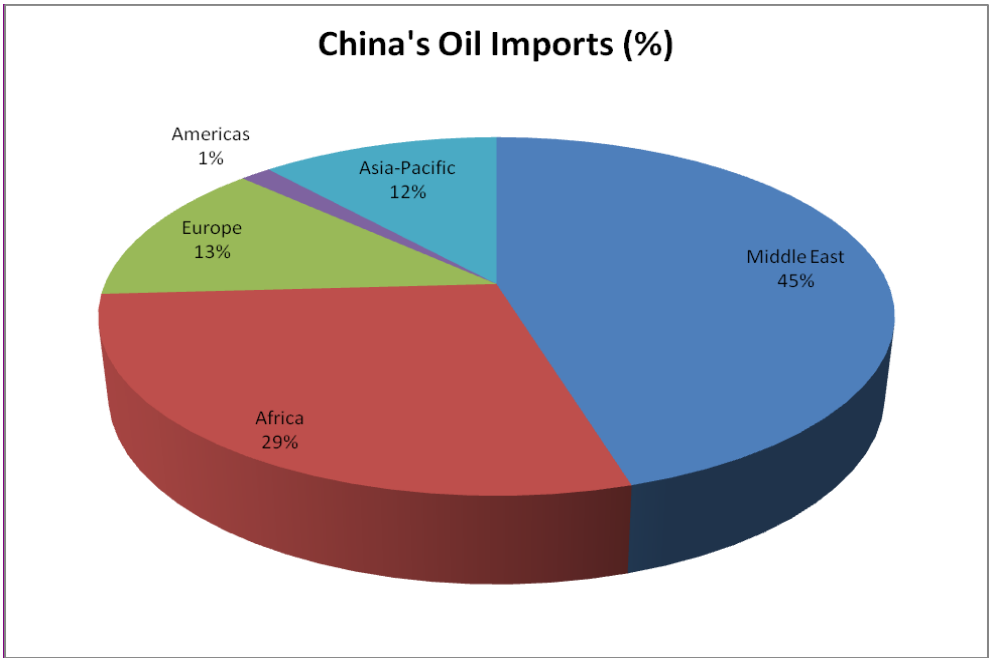
Sun Shihai at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences spells out the objectives behind China's strategic infrastructure developments in Southern Asia as follows: "China is attempting to connect Southern Asia. China needs such places for market, export, investments, and these are the objectives. There is no intention to contain India. It does not make any sense".[22] Though, China's energy acquisition efforts are expanding globally, largely its energy supply comes from politically volatile regions. Maritime choke points and contested maritime space create further concerns for China. Hence, securing supply of energy is critical for China. Being the largest importer of crude oil globally, "more than 70 per cent of China's crude oil supply in 2018 came from imports. This dependence on foreign energy is likely to increase. Some estimates have suggested that by 2040 around 80 per cent of China's oil needs will be sourced from elsewhere." China has, therefore, taken steps to diversify its oil portfolio (see Figure 6), and is aiming to get access to strategic waterway to manage potential risks.[23] It is clear from Figure 7 (important world oil transit choke points[24]) why China is developing ports in different countries. From the Chinese point of view, all of these efforts are to secure sea lanes of communications and energy supply.

Ma Jiali thinks that the main objectives of China's strategic access in Southern Asia are: (1) to ensure stability and peace in the region – a stable Southern Asia is very important for China; (2) to promote economic cooperation; (3) the Tibet issue – support from outside, government in exile; and (4) counter-terrorism." [25] Ma emphasises that "China is helping Southern Asian countries to develop their

[22] Interview with Sun Shihai in Beijing.
[23] Zhao Gancheng and his colleagues underlined these issues during their discussion with the author at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS). Indeed, the energy security issue was highlighted by almost all the Chinese scholars during the discussions.
[24] Chokepoints are narrow channels along widely used global sea routes. They are a critical part of global energy security due to the high volume of oil traded through their narrow straits.
[25] Interview with Ma Jiali on 22 June 2009 in Beijing.

economies and infrastructure, with an objective to find alternative routes to ensure its supply of natural resources, while recognising the vitality of Straits of Malacca."

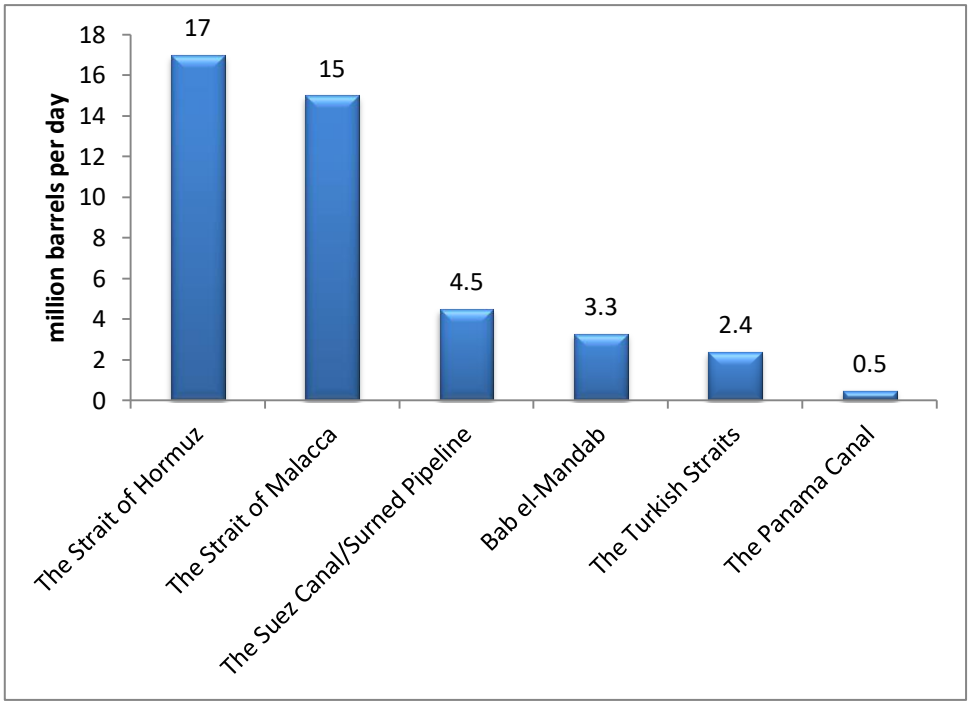
Figure 6: China's Oil Imports



Source: Energy Information Administration, Official Energy Statistics from the US Government.

Ma stresses that China wants 'peace and tranquillity' in its periphery and in Southern Asia. China has strategic resources but it does not want to meddle with political instability in any country. In his view, the Chinese do not want to see its assistance in infrastructure development, including roads, rail lines, and ports in Southern Asian countries purely as competitive relations with India. He underlines that the Tibet issue is very important for China's internal security. As such, China must develop projects like Tibet railways. Although it could be used for military purposes in case of territorial dispute or war, Ma says, China has no such political intentions. Such developments exist simply to promote and strengthen links and connectivity. Also, such developments are to promote national integrity, strengthen its links economically, culturally, and politically. Transport networks are very significant for economic development.

Figure 7: Important World Oil Transit Choke Points



Source: Energy Information Administration, Official Energy Statistics from the US Government.

Li Bo, an environmentalist and the Director of a Beijing based organisation, namely, 'Friends of Nature', has a different perspective. He believes that there is no credible evidence of linkage of infrastructure with internal security.[26] According to him, transport networks are mainly for resource transfer and to increase the mobility of people. He adds that China is looking towards the West for its economic development. Another Chinese scholar Zuo Ting at the China Agricultural University observes that Chinese objectives are, in all likelihood, economic. He says, "China has huge foreign currency reserves and it needs places to invest. Chinese companies are very powerful and they have their economic interests".[27] He adds that China also aims to ensure the safety and security of its main sources of resources.

Also, it was highlighted by some Chinese scholars that "China is aware of the possibility that its growing stature could be construed as a threat to other countries in Asia, so a generally benign approach to gain influence is pursued through the use of

[26] Interview with Li Bo in Beijing.
[27] Interview with Zuo Ting at China Agricultural University, Beijing.

investments, development packages, and diplomatic gestures".[28] Chinese President Xi underlined that China has now "crossed the threshold into a new era," which represented a "new historic juncture in China's development". China has now "achieved a tremendous transformation—it has stood up, grown rich, and become strong; and it now embraces the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation". Such conviction is fostering an aspiration in China "to become more influential in setting and enforcing rules and shaping the character" of global order. Chinese leaders and experts see China playing a pivotal role in the emerging world order. Perhaps, China is using its economic influence and military capabilities to establish a Sino-centric order in Asia. Whether such ambitions can be aligned with the interests of other rising powers remains unclear.

China's behaviour "largely has been consistent with its policy objectives. From the Chinese perspective, it is thus very clear that it's twin goals of maintaining economic growth and domestic stability are the motivations and drivers" of its strategic access to Southern Asia and elsewhere. China's priorities are "protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity, promoting economic development, and generating international respect and status".[29] Though there could be "a military component to these developments, this is unlikely to be the primary motivation" (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012).

Interestingly, no one in China talked about "the military dimension of these developments. Emphasis was always placed on the economic dimension of relations. However, the lack of information and availability of statistics on the economic benefits and activities add fuel to the logic of insecurity", i.e. insecurity fosters economic and social developments in the borderlands (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012). In fact, it may be argued that high insecurity draws considerable attention from policymakers and brings massive investments in infrastructure in border regions, resulting in greater access to neighbouring countries.

[28] Interviews with scholars at SIIS in Shanghai.
[29] These points emerged throughout discussions in China. Indeed, some other respondents in the United States, Canada and India expressed similar views.

Conclusion

China is "looking for markets and resources on an ever-increasing scale in order to sustain its developmental needs" (Chaturvedy 2013). The preservation of the existing political order is predicated on sustained and rapid industrialisation. China is everywhere in Southern Asia, both physically, as an agent of globalisation, and temporarily, as a growth model. There has been a marked change in its approach and strategy. In the last 30 years, "China transformed itself from an astute proponent of ideological influence and covert supporter of insurgency to builder of cross-border modern infrastructures and wild market grabber".[30] According to Professor Mahendra P. Lama, there are three very abiding and powerful interests and objectives of China's increasing connectivity in the Southern Asian region: "expansion of its military base and strategic access; economic and commercial penetration into the huge South Asian market and through it to the Middle East; and to tackle its own potential internal instabilities".[31]

It is clear that Chinese strategic interests and objectives in Southern Asia are manifold, which can be recapitulated as: regime security; securing national security and unity; reducing regional inequality; improving resource supplies; and ensuring economic growth and development. Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia is an effort to "bolster control of its security interests, even when they overlap" with those of neighbouring states. Geography and geopolitics are guiding Chinese policies to serve its key foreign policy interests and objectives. Though large-scale infrastructure projects, China is not only coping with "excess industrial and construction capacity and gain higher returns" but more importantly, it is increasing its political and security influence in the region. Indeed, China's Southern Asia ties are "dictated by geography, the need for security and stability, mutual economic advantage, shared cultural traditions, the movement of people, common approaches to the management of natural disasters and climate change, and developmental priorities".[32] It is clear from above discussions that in Southern Asia China's ties are primarily political-military in content unlike the ties in East Asia, where they are mainly economic.

[30] Interview with Professor Mahendra P. Lama in Gangtok, Sikkim.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Interview of a very high-ranking Indian government official, who wanted to remain anonymous. However, in general, Indian government officials see China as a potential threat to India's national interests. The dominant view in the Indian government officials is that all these developments are centred at India's encirclement. Nevertheless, the general approach is, say or do nothing to provoke Chinese. These points are based on the author's interview with various Indian government officials (civil and military).

CHAPTER 4
DEVELOPING PHYSICAL CONNECTIVITY AND ENERGY CORRIDORS

Southern Asia is witnessing unprecedented opportunities and challenges due to fast-changing security and economic architectures and the world is in a state of flux. China's rise and increasing engagement in Southern Asia during the past two decades have produced admiration as well as anxiety. This has resulted in an increasing effort to make an assessment about China's goals, actions, and intentions. China's objectives in Southern Asia are shaped by geography, geopolitics, history, and national priorities influenced by global transformations. The previous chapter examined Chinese strategic interests and objectives in Southern Asia. This chapter analyses physical connectivity and energy corridors which are being developed by China in Southern Asia in order to accomplish those interests and objectives.

Notions such as "the power, the resources, and the wealth of nations occur and develop in space, which are largely measured by spatial effects such as conquest, zones of influence, expansion of foreign trade" etc. The immense significance of such factors has been underlined as position. Thus, "great routes are controlled by a small number of well-chosen positions". When we look at our political world, it "extends only over the accessible space". Accessibility, therefore, "is the determining factor: areas to which men have no access do not have any political standing or problems. The uniqueness of its territory's position provides each country with a unique historical background" (Gottmann 1952: 512-514). Hence, physical connectivity is immensely important for better strategic access. Further, changes occurring in Southern Asia along with changes in the global environment, have also influenced Chinese perceptions, priorities and approach towards the region. It has resulted in greater attention and participation by China in Southern Asia. Indeed, China's relations with Southern Asian nations have been altered from "a primarily security relationship to one where investments in energy, resource production and transportation imperatives are more prominent. Clearly, domestic economic policies and sub-regional economic connections, as much as security concerns, drive much of its new policies in Southern Asia" (Bhalla 2016: 206). From a security viewpoint, it is important to note two facts, first, "raw materials are not distributed equally among the

nations of the world and, second, the locations where they are distributed are often not the locations where they are needed. These two facts are the source of considerable concern" in Beijing (Schoultz 1987: 143). However, with a remarkable rise in Chinese economic power, its integration with neighbouring regions is inescapable.

China has taken several rail-road and energy pipeline projects in various countries in the region. While some projects were developed in the past, there is a renewed emphasis on upgrading some existing routes and developing high-speed rail projects, new roads and energy pipelines in recent years. China has accelerated its effort to build and support such projects, particularly in Southern Asia neighbourhood. Indeed, China is deepening its strategic access through a meticulous selection of locations in Southern Asia and developing transport and energy connectivity.

This chapter focusses on developments of China's overland physical connectivity and energy corridors in Southern Asia. The Chinese leadership has unveiled a detailed plan to expand its reach and accessibility through land and the sea. The scope of this chapter is limited to land connectivity and energy pipelines and corridors. The chapter examines China's strategy to expand its physical connectivity (roads and rail lines) and energy pipelines throughout Southern Asia. Dwelling upon Chinese strategy, this chapter also discusses some completed and ongoing projects as operational elements of this strategy. The remaining chapter is divided into three main parts: discussion of China's vision and approach to physical connectivity; some milestone road projects which have been completed or are being upgraded or undertaken; and some energy pipeline projects. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor along with the Karakoram Highway (KKH) project has been discussed in great detail which is among the most important strategic connectivity project between China and Pakistan. The KKH project, the most outstanding symbol of China-Pakistan relations, has been upgraded as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a pilot project of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Further, other Chinese projects on roads and resources access in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar have also been discussed. It also underlines some backlashes and challenges that China is having in implementing projects in Southern Asia. Finally, the chapter sums up key points in the concluding section.

China's Vision and Approach to Physical Connectivity

China is grouped mainly into three regions - Eastern, Middle and Western. The "Western region comprises twelve provinces and autonomous areas" and it accounts for 71.5 per cent of China's total area. Since the reform and opening-up, while China has witnessed a high degree of economic growth, "there are huge disparities between various regions of the country in almost every indicator of economic development. This is even more so between the Eastern and Western regions of the country" (Ren 2006: 411).

China has remained sceptical of the people inhabiting its south-western borders. Beijing's policies have perhaps sought to emphasise differences and minimise contacts among the non-Han people, who often had more in common with one another than with China's cultural traditions and contemporary political objectives. These policies not only limited the contacts and cross-border interactions but they also impeded development and exacerbated the economic and cultural divide between the rest of China and its frontier communities. By the start of the twenty-first century, however, Beijing had concluded that policies previously justified on security grounds were producing consequences that endangered internal stability and limited China's influence on and access to these markets and resources. The result was a shift in China's perception of and policies toward Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal. Beijing's perceptions of potential problems and possibilities in the region have been shaped by enduring historic linkages between these neighbouring states and China's remote and sparsely inhabited provinces on its south-western frontiers. Most of such linkages were between people, not governments or other politico-economic institutions. Indeed, their socio-cultural linkages were worrisome to Beijing because they connected the increasingly restive minorities that populate China's southwest frontier to fellow ethnics on the other side of the border. Beijing's view of the region was, therefore, largely shaped by its security concerns about its "soft underbelly" resulting from colonial legacies of the Great Game competition for control of lands along China's periphery (Fravel 2008: 72; Smith 2013: 58).

China's relationships with countries in Southern Asia were driven mainly from the security/threat dimension. None of the states had the high-end inputs China needed at the beginning of its opening-up and reforms. However, with the cumulative success of China's economic strategy and changing international conditions over time, Beijing's perception of threats and opportunities changed in ways that resulted in greater efforts to engage the countries of Southern Asia. End of the Cold War changed the regional security dimension that helped China to think about its frontier regions differently than in previous decades. Other developments occurring at more or less the same time altered Beijing's perception of possibilities and potential problems in the region. One such development was the magnitude and accelerating the pace of economic growth in China's eastern provinces. Sustained growth and rising expectations were increasing the demand for energy, metals, minerals, and other resources. Chinese firms and foreign investors began to look further afield for reliable supplies. They also began to take greater interest in the newly independent countries of Central Asia and previously neglected neighbours along the south-western frontier.

Another reason was growing concern about the imbalance between development in the eastern and western provinces of China. This was seen as a multidimensional problem. One dimension involved concern that imbalances between east and west would eventually slow growth at the national level. That was seen as a problem because the legitimacy of Communist Party rule rested heavily on its ability to meet escalating expectations by sustaining high rates of growth. It was also seen as a problem because the regions of the country that lagged most in terms of growth and modernisation had the highest proportions of ethnic-minority inhabitants. The congruence of changed security circumstances and increased recognition that more had to be done to increase rates of growth in the frontier regions enabled and required Beijing to reformulate its approach to Southern Asia.

Given the importance of security, it is natural, even inevitable, that one of the most important criteria employed by Beijing when deciding whether, when, and how to engage with other countries is the effect that engagement would have on China's own security and internal stability. Development is the second pillar and objective of China's domestic and foreign policies, and one can often explain and predict China's approach to and engagement with particular countries by examining what the other

countries can do to assist or impede China's quest for sustained economic growth and modernisation. Some countries can provide capital, technology, training, and markets for goods produced in China. Others can provide resources (for example, oil, metals, minerals, timber), transport routes, and markets for Chinese products. Some can provide items from both lists, and some can provide little or nothing that China wants without resolution of political issues, construction of infrastructure, or other measures to satisfy requisite conditions for engagement.

China's view of Southern Asia in the twenty-first century reflects the increasing importance of the region as a provider of inputs needed to sustain growth at the national level and as an economic partner playing a key role in the development of minority areas on the Chinese side of the border. China's security concerns about the region would remain at more or less the same level, but the nature of concern gradually shifted away from military and geostrategic threats toward threats to stability and internal security from Islamic terrorists and cross-border support to separatists and disgruntled minorities in Xinjiang and other border provinces.

Thus, China's vision and approach to connectivity in Southern Asia are guided by a broad notion of security that identifies economic development and security as interconnected. According to Carla P. Freeman, "Beijing sees benefits to its security from boosting regional development, which it perceives as contributing to improving the stability of its complicated regional neighbourhood" (Freeman 2017: 83). This stability is vital to China's economic development and in preventing external threats to domestic security. "With an uptick in financial diplomacy, China packages positive messages about win-win cooperation, economic development and increasing people-to-people relations through enhanced connectivity" (Freeman 2017: 83). However, the growing Chinese influence through such projects, particularly in India's neighbouring countries has strategic connotations as well.

Explanations portraying China's ambition for strategic access to Southern Asia as driven mainly by competition with India mislead China's policy objectives. Beijing's intentions are to institute regional mechanisms "for routinised consultation and policy coordination among states, making them instruments for more mutually beneficial exchanges, more stable and, therefore, more secure economic and political regional relations" (Wu 2012).

A comprehensive view of security envisions linkages between economic goals and political objectives which means that the national development objectives are also intended to gain political support for regime security (Buzan and Zhang 2014). Explaining this "thin dichotomy between Chinese economic and security policy", Adam Segal notes, "Beijing's promotion of regional multilateral institutions, its offer to enter into free trade agreements with ASEAN, and its promotion of direct investment in regional economies all have both a strategic and an economic logic" (Segal 2007). China's strategic access in Southern Asia is also seen as consistent with its economic development goals (see, for example, Moore 2007). Several studies focussed on sub-regional dynamics explain that China has engaged neighbours in Southern Asia with the dual purpose of development and security (Freeman 2010; Goh 2007; Ong 2002; Soni 2010; Summers 2016).

Chinese President Xi underlined the strategic importance of neighbours in a high-level meeting on periphery diplomacy and stressed the need for Beijing to develop a strong economic, security and people-to-people relationship (Mu, 2013). He elucidated that "China should, turn its neighbourhood areas into a community of common destiny, continue to follow the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness in conducting neighbourhood diplomacy, promote friendship and partnership with our neighbours, foster an amicable, secure and prosperous neighbourhood environment, and boost win-win cooperation and connectivity with its neighbours" (Ministry of External Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2014).

The concept of the 'community of common destiny' is related to China's BRI vision, that foresees physical, financial, trade, digital and people-to-people connectivity across vast regions. Many in China portray BRI as a 'strategy' (Wang 2016). BRI has emerged as a vehicle for channelling Chinese-led investment and infrastructure projects and is facilitating economic integration and development in Asia and beyond. More importantly, it is also helpful in boosting China's economic growth and could be very helpful in promoting development in China's western region (Swaine 2015) as well as other less developed regions (Bickford 2016).

China's President Xi Jinping announced the BRI's overland component, known as the "Silk Road Economic Belt," in September 2013 during an address at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University. One month later, on 2 October 2013, Xi proposed the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" in an address to the Indonesian Parliament. At that time, he also "announced the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and proclaimed China's intention to unite the nations of Asia in a "community of common destiny"". Freeman (2017) notes:

> "The proposed trans-continental "Belt" bears a resemblance to the ancient land-based Silk Road trade routes from antiquity to the beginning of the modern era that linked China to Europe through Central Asia and Mesopotamia. As described in official Chinese publications, the new "Belt" will branch out to Southeast and South Asia and expand across the Eurasian landmass. The Chinese government has invested tremendous political, financial, and intellectual resources in the BRI, suggesting that the initiative is now one of Beijing's highest priorities. According to Chinese sources, Xi Jinping personally supervised the development of plans for an infrastructure initiative with a small group of close advisers before his elevation to the post of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Secretary General at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. Since then, all major statements related to the BRI have been made by Xi himself. His personal identification with the BRI, similar to his association with the "Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and the anti-corruption campaign, indicates its top-level importance" (Freeman 2017: 85).

The Belt and Road initiative is very important for a strong and influential Chinese nation. BRI "was well-received as soon as it was proposed" and was described by some Chinese scholar as "the best strategy that matches China's superpower status" (Wei 2018: v). Some Chinese scholars see BRI as "an economic revolution of gigantic scale that will recreate economic geography of China and the world. From a diplomatic point of view, it will give rise to an era of win-win cooperation" (Wei 2018: v). The Third Plenum of the 18th CCP Congress formally approved the BRI strategy in November 2013, and it has also featured notably in "State Council's Reports on the work of the government since 2015".[33] To streamline coordination among various stakeholders related to the BRI projects, a Central Leading Small Group on "Advancing the Development of the OBOR" was formed in February 2015 (Zhang, 2015). Moreover, the BRI projects have access to substantial financial resources through various institutions and funds announced by China, including AIIB,

[33] Chronology of China's Belt and Road Initiative is available on http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0624/c90883-9077342.html

the Silk Road Fund, BRICS's New Development Bank, the China Development Bank etc. The BRI projects seem "to combine all elements of Chinese power and to use all of the nation's strengths and advantages" in order to implement the ideas and to get intended outcomes. "China's banks, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), diplomats, security specialists, intellectuals, and media have all been summoned to join in this effort" (Freeman 2017: 95). Thus, the BRI has become one of the key component of China's strategic access strategy, managing vast national resources in pursuit of a key political objective. The following section discusses China's transport networks and energy pipeline projects.

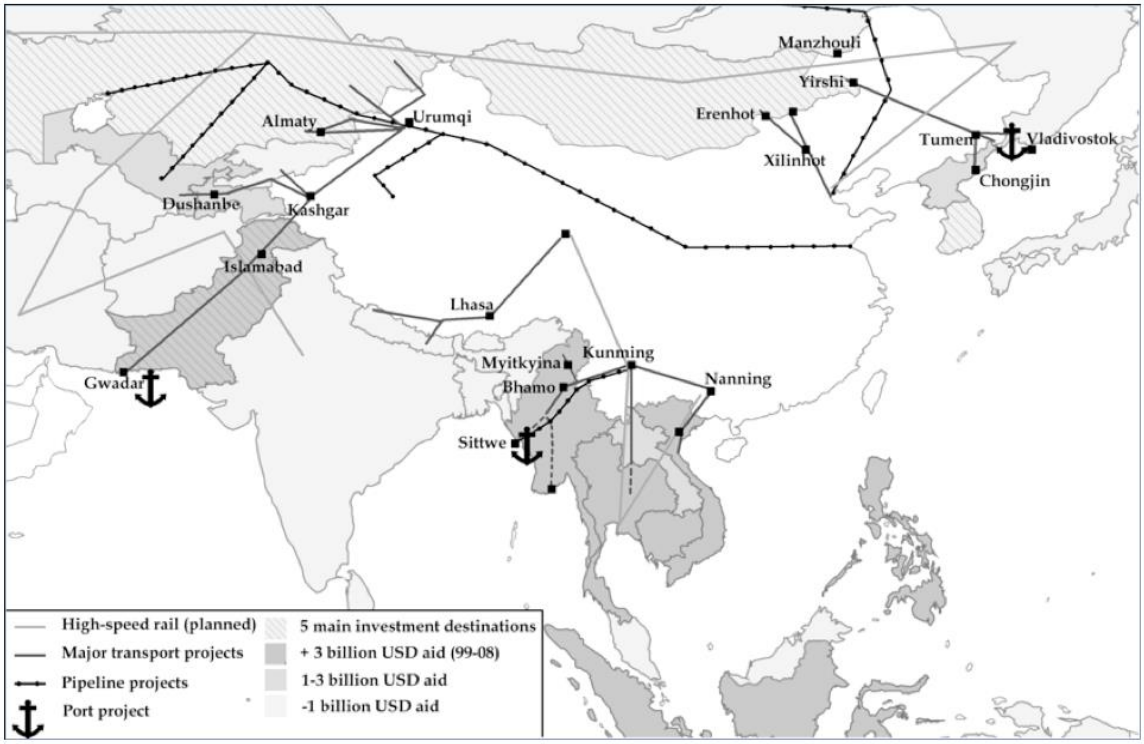
China's Transport Networks and Energy Pipelines

Chinese investments in developing countries have risen sharply in recent years. China's foreign policy and foreign aid are successively streamlined with the overseas investment ambitions of the Chinese companies and the political goals of the national government (Voss 2011). China's official development aid is largely assigned to "transportation and telecommunication infrastructure projects" but also includes the construction of new sports facilities, parliaments and other real estates (Pheng and Hongbin 2003). Chinese loan offers are very attractive and help Beijing to increase its political stance on and influence in the host country. It also "supplies Chinese companies with international contracts which help them to establish an overseas market and set up affiliates in a government-backed, and hence low-risk, manner" (Voss 2011). Strategic considerations are an important factor behind the growing Chinese strategic access, particularly in Southern Asia, though commercial interests are also involved.

As shown in Figure 8, China has made impressive progress in unlocking its hinterland to neighbouring countries (Holstag 2010). Starting in the south, the Provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan have been turned into interfaces with ASEAN. China leads the world in infrastructure investment. In fact, China has overtaken the US and the EU to become the world's largest investor in infrastructure. Moreover, China's infrastructure investments also bring "cheap construction technology and Chinese labour" along with it (Ellis and Solstad 2013). Further, "many of the projects China has been involved in and spells out the message very clearly: if you need roads built, China is your answer". More importantly, "developing nations appear to appreciate the

contracts provided by Beijing, especially when China offers investments that, other than recognition of its one China policy, impose no conditions" (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2012). China remains neutral to regime-type when it comes to resource security and could deal with any nation who is ready for such relationships.

Figure 8: China's Developing Regional Corridors



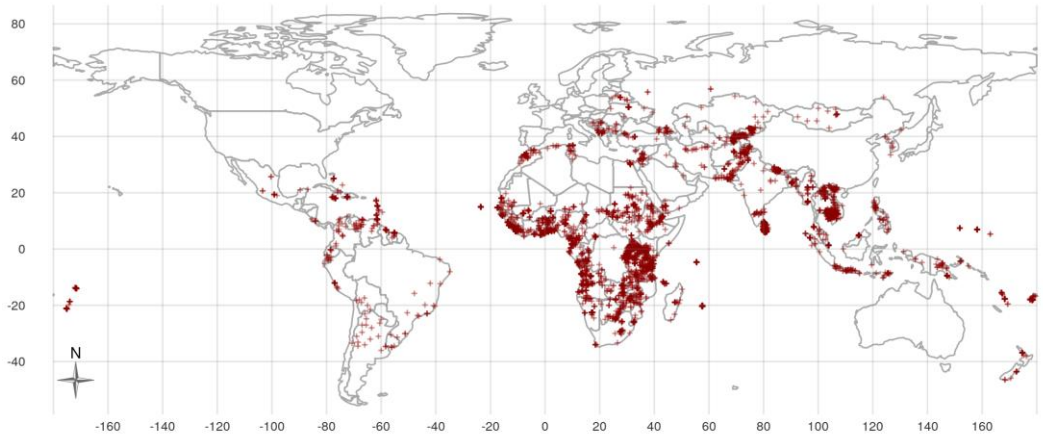
Source: Holslag (2010: 6)

China's "booming oil and gas needs, combined with its growing projection of economic and diplomatic power regionally and globally, have touched off an increasingly competitive political atmosphere in Asia in which competition over energy supplies and transit has become a key element in regional rivalries" and strategic access. These elements have created very competitive conditions for emerging corridors and regional pipeline development and control.

From energy self-sufficiency in the mid-1990s, China has increasingly become dependent on oil imports. This energy dependence is likely to grow as China continues on its growth trajectory and it has limited domestic production (Speed, Liao and Dannreuther 2002). "Driven by the transportation, petrochemical, and residential sectors, China's use of petroleum products has been growing rapidly for the past two

decades" and Beijing's increasing dependence on imported oil has become a serious concern for the Chinese leadership (Wu 2014). Leung, Cherp and Wei (2014) underlines critical role of Oil in China for at least three main reasons, it "dominates as well as lacks substitutes in defence, transportation, and food production; its use is rapidly and steadily growing primarily due to the growth in demand for mobility services; and its national (and global) resources are limited, regionally concentrated, and often perceived as insufficient to provide for this growth in demand" (Leung et al 2014: 318). Therefore, it's normal for the state to set-up strong institutions to govern and secure oil supply chains. Amidst growing demands of oil and gas, it is utmost important for China to prioritise oil and gas security. It is not surprising, therefore, that the "Chinese government has increasingly made energy security a high priority in its five-year programme and long-term energy planning. Among many measures taken and planned by the Chinese government, diversification of oil and gas supply sources and increasing overseas oil and gas investments are two of the key strategies" (Wu 2014).

Figure 9: Locations of Chinese Government-Financed Projects, 2000-2014

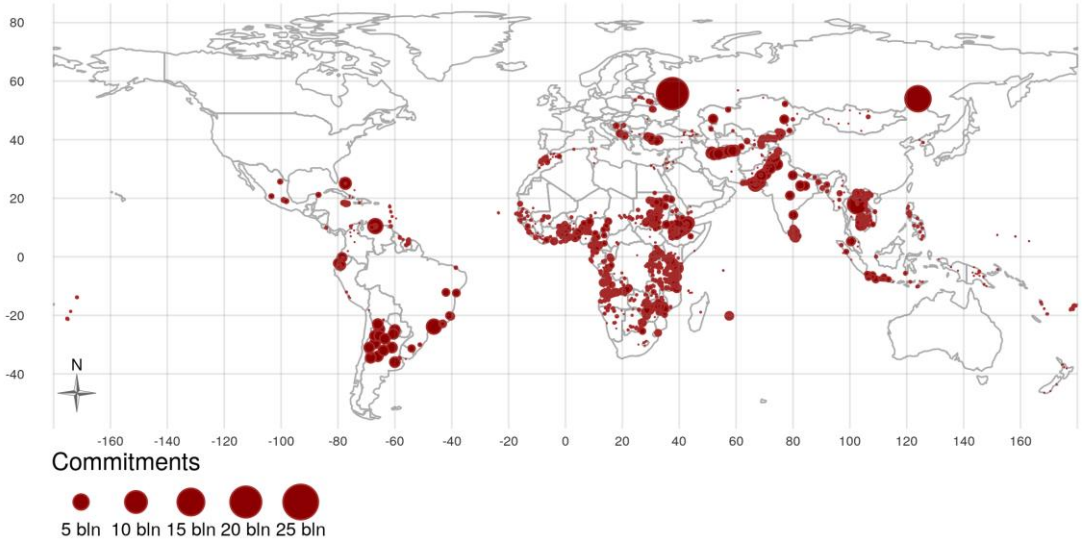


Note: The figure shows all geo-referenced Chinese Government-financed projects that reached the implementation or completion stage over the period 2000 to 2014.

The Chinese government visualises investment in overseas energy as one of the most important area to deal with China's energy security challenges. Several Chinese national oil companies, like, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), PetroChina, China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), China National Offshore Oil

Corporation (CNOOC) etc. are leading investments and are expanding their footprints globally (Wu 2012b).

Figure 10: Financial Size of Chinese Government-Financed Projects (in constant 2014 US$), 2000-2014



Notes: The figure shows all geo-referenced Chinese Government-financed projects that reached the implementation or completion stage over the period 2000 to 2014. The total financial size of each project has been divided by the number of locations where each project was active.

China's started its investment drive in overseas energy resources in "the 1990s and has intensified its efforts in the latter part of the decade". Later, the Chinese government extended support through policy measures which led to a bigger push to overseas expansion of energy investments. In recent years, "China has increased its overseas oil and gas asset investments in both numbers and size" (Brownetal 2008; Yong and Wu 2012). Wu (2014) explains following motivations for Chinese NOCs to move overseas aggressively:

> "to Leverage on the Chinese government's growing concerns over energy security; to diversify sources of energy supplies; to expand to maintain competitiveness in the domestic market and enhance global competitiveness; to seek international profits to offset any potential losses in the domestic market; to complement individual corporate strategies; to tap on the vast pool of energy resources in the international market, including both conventional assets and unconventional assets; and to develop technical know-how and

capabilities through joint exploration and production (E&P) projects with other NOCs and international oil companies" (Wu 2014).

The consequences of China's infrastructure financing activities—including the Belt and Road Initiative—are sources of growing speculation and debate (example, Perlez and Huang 2017). Some scholars claim that China prioritises speed over quality and often funds "white elephant" projects. This has resulted in scaling back of Chinese funded projects in several countries due to debt fear. The challenges have been discussed later in this chapter. However, many developing countries have unmet infrastructure financing needs, and the leaders of these countries are quick to point out that China is willing and able to finance roads, bridges, railways, and ports at a time when other donors and lenders are not (Dollar 2018). Western aid agencies and multilateral development banks have become significantly more risk-averse about bankrolling large-scale infrastructure projects because of the environmental, social, and financial risks that they pose (Nielson and Tierney 2003; Hicks *et al.* 2008; Buntaine 2016). Figure 9 illustrates the global reach of Chinese official finance in the 21st century, which are densely concentrated in African and Asian countries. Figures 9 and 10 also call attention to the fact that many Chinese Government-financed projects are situated in coastal regions, including some of the highest-value projects financed by Beijing. The following sections discuss some projects in Southern Asian countries in more details.

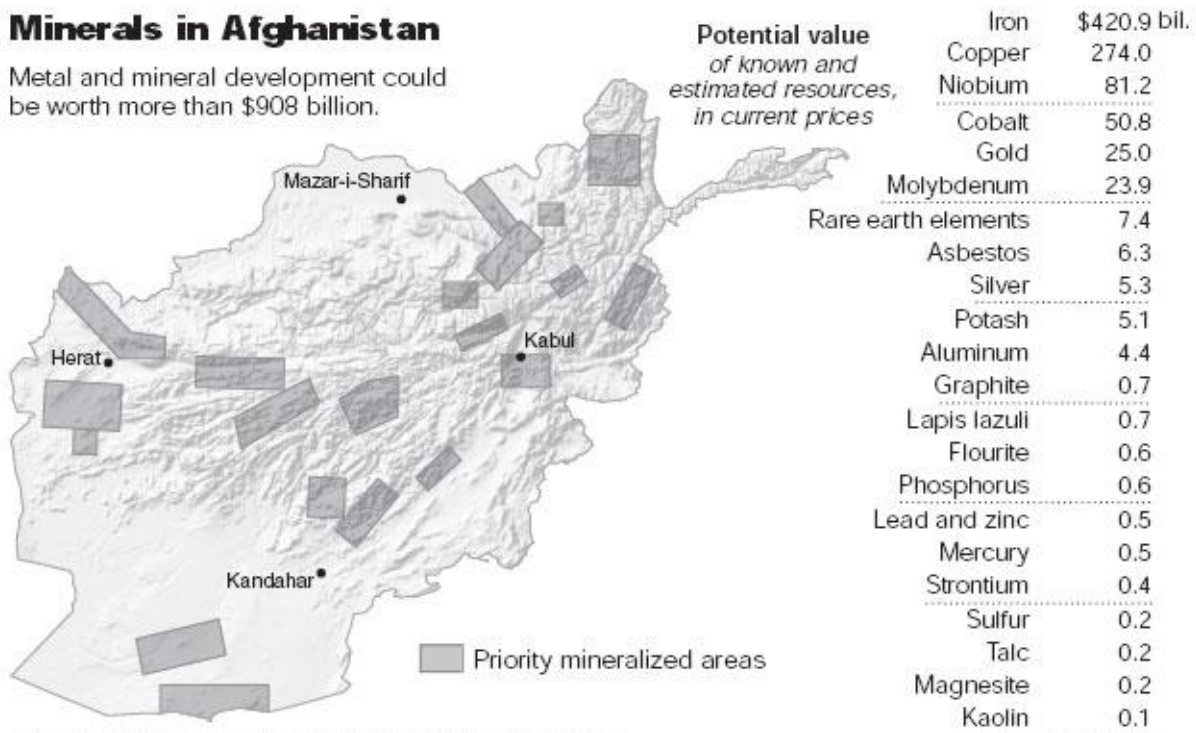
Afghanistan and Pakistan

China views Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak) as "countries of considerable geostrategic significance" (Scobell, Ratner and Beckley 2014). China historically has shown relatively little interest in Afghanistan until recently. Although it "is the largest and one of the most significant political neighbours of Afghanistan" (Sharma 2010: 202). Beijing and Kabul established diplomatic ties in 1955. Both the countries "share a short but inhospitable 92-kilometre mountainous border. There are no roads leading to the border on either side, and there is heavy snow cover for most of the year. On the Afghan side of the border, the Wakhan Corridor connects with the rest of the country. The terrain is rugged on the Chinese side as well" (Fravel 2008: 119, 324).

Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, “the China-Afghan border was the only one without conflict. However, Afghanistan has now become critical, due to China’s Xinjiang autonomous region, with a Muslim population and hence susceptible to unrest and conflict spreading from the neighbouring countries” (Siddiqa 2012). Beijing’s policy towards Kabul “has been strongly influenced by its desire to protect its strategic partnership” with its all-weather friend Pakistan, check the spread of religious extremism into Xinjiang province, and “curtail the proliferation of drugs and further its commercial interests” (Sharma 2010: 201-215). Thus, insecurity in the peripheral regions appears as one of the key drivers of Chinese strategic access to Af-Pak and Southern Asia.

Assessing factors driving China’s Afghan policy, Scobell et. al. (2014) underline two main factors – “to protect China from the threat of Islamic extremism and to prevent Afghanistan from being used by other great powers to influence Chinese interests”. The authors add that “Beijing also views Afghanistan as a convenient outpost for rival great powers to constrain or even contain China”. In addition to these primary reasons, two other motivations for Beijing’s Afghan policy are “curbing the flow of illegal narcotics in China and tapping Afghanistan’s wealth of natural resources, including iron ore, copper, lithium, petroleum and natural gas” (Scobell, Ratner and Beckley 2014). Afghanistan has huge “unexplored reserves of oil and natural gas in the northern parts of the country”. It also has “large iron ore deposits between Herat and the Panjsher Valley, and gold reserves in the northern provinces of Badakshan, Takhar, and Ghazni. Major copper fields also exist in Jawkhar, Darband and Aynak. All of these resource-rich areas are situated in the relatively stable northern and north-western regions” (D’Souza 2010). China is looking for “overland energy supply diversification in the neighbouring states in Central Asia”, and potentially also in Afghanistan (Norling 2008). Afghanistan also holds “the potential to serve as a trade and energy transit corridors” from Pakistan and Iran (Sharma 2010). China is “slowly, gradually and tactfully increasing its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan by investing in critical sectors such as mining and communication” (Siddiqa 2012). More importantly, “Xinjiang’s security situation and the Silk Road Economic Belt strategy have each added urgency to China’s need to secure a stable Afghanistan” (Zhao 2015).

Figure 11: Minerals in Afghanistan



Source: *The New York Times,* 14 June 2010.

In 2007, Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Corporation (JCCL) agreed to make US$ 4.4 billion investment after winning a tender to develop the world's second largest underdeveloped copper deposit at Aynak in Logar Province. In 2011, "China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and its Afghan partner, Watan Oil and Gas, secured the rights to the three oil blocks in the provinces of Sari-i-Pul and Faryab in north-western Afghanistan", in which CNPC expects to invest US$ 400 million initially to develop (Downs 2012). The Chinese bid also includes building a 400 megawatt, coal-fired power plant, needed to produce electricity for mining and extraction, and a freight railroad passing from western China through Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Pakistan, which "will contribute to supplying the mineral resources to western China to be used for the region's development. In addition, the Chinese telcom companies are building up their presence in the telecommunication sector in Afghanistan" (Siddiqa 2012). However, Chinese investment in resource sector in Afghanistan is not necessarily driven by the government. Some research suggests that such investments are driven in the pursuit of Chinese companies "own corporate interests". In fact, companies benefitted from

Beijing's concerns about resource security, and it became easy for them to secure the required approval and support (Downs 2012: 65-84). One of China's major domestic security concerns is "to ensure that Islamists do not penetrate the western autonomous region of Xinjiang" (Siddiqa 2012). Explaining this concern, Aparna Pande notes:

> "when China signed the 1963 border agreement with Pakistan, Chinese strategists had hoped that the Sino-Pakistani border would be safe… Over the years Chinese policymakers believed that friendly relations with Pakistan would discourage aid and assistance for any insurgency in its own Muslim population… However, despite Pakistani assurances, Chinese civilian and military policymakers remain worried about the large number of Uyghurs across the border in Pakistan and Afghanistan where they receive succour from local and global jihadi groups" (Pande 2011: 131).

China has "expressed its concern to Pakistan on several occasions, with Beijing's reaction varying from diplomatic protest to extreme annoyance expressed in the form of temporary closures of the border with Pakistan" (Siddiqa 2012). It appears that Chinese strategic access to Afghanistan and Pakistan is mainly driven by domestic security concerns as well as by huge economic opportunities created by trade and transit corridors and access to resources. "Pakistan is probably China's closest and most enduring ally. No other capital has maintained such a good, sustained relationship with Beijing as Islamabad" (Scobell, Ratner and Beckley 2014).

China's close relationship with Pakistan is a long-standing friendship that has been tested by adversity. "Pakistan played a major role in China's strategy for coping with India" (Garver 1996: 323). Sino-Pakistani "security and strategic nexus have remained a central issue in India-China relations ever since Beijing and Islamabad signed a historic border agreement in March 1963, ceding a chunk of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to China" (Jain 2004: 261). Realistically enough, "the deterioration in Sino-Indian relations following the 1962 war provided a propitious opportunity for Beijing and Islamabad to forge a common strategic understanding" with the aim of limiting India's influence in the region in their respective national interests (Freeman 2017: 85). Allen S. Whiting opines:

> "Pakistan's geopolitical situation has attracted China's support since the early 1960s. It was a useful counterweight against India, perceived both as a neighbouring threat and a client of the Soviet Union. In addition, the proximity of Kashmir to the disputed Sino-Indian border area took on strategic importance with a nearby road from Xinjiang through western Tibet serving essential military logistics needs (emphasis added)" (Whiting 1994: 264).

The Karakoram Highway

Following its invasion of Tibet in 1950, China occupied parts of Ladakh, Baltistan and the upper Shimshal Valley in the mid-1950s. While the Chinese border with Indian-held Kashmir is still in dispute today, a thaw in China-Pakistan relations in 1964 led to a border agreement, China's return of 2000 sq. km of territory, and talk of linking the two countries by road (Jones 2004: 253). "In 1966 the two countries embarked on one of the biggest engineering projects since the Pyramids – 1200 km road across some of the highest mountains in the world – the Pamir and the Karakoram, from Kashgar in China to Havelian in Pakistan" (Jones 2004: 253). Pakistan drew up plans for such a highway, the Indus Valley Road in 1959 and subsequently built sections of that road with its resources. The 525-mile long all-weather road linked Pakistan's major cities with Gilgit. It met an existing Gilgit-Hunza track, making feasible access across the Karakoram and rough travel into Kashi in Xinjiang. Later this route got upgraded and incorporated into the Karakoram Highway (Jain 1974: 143).

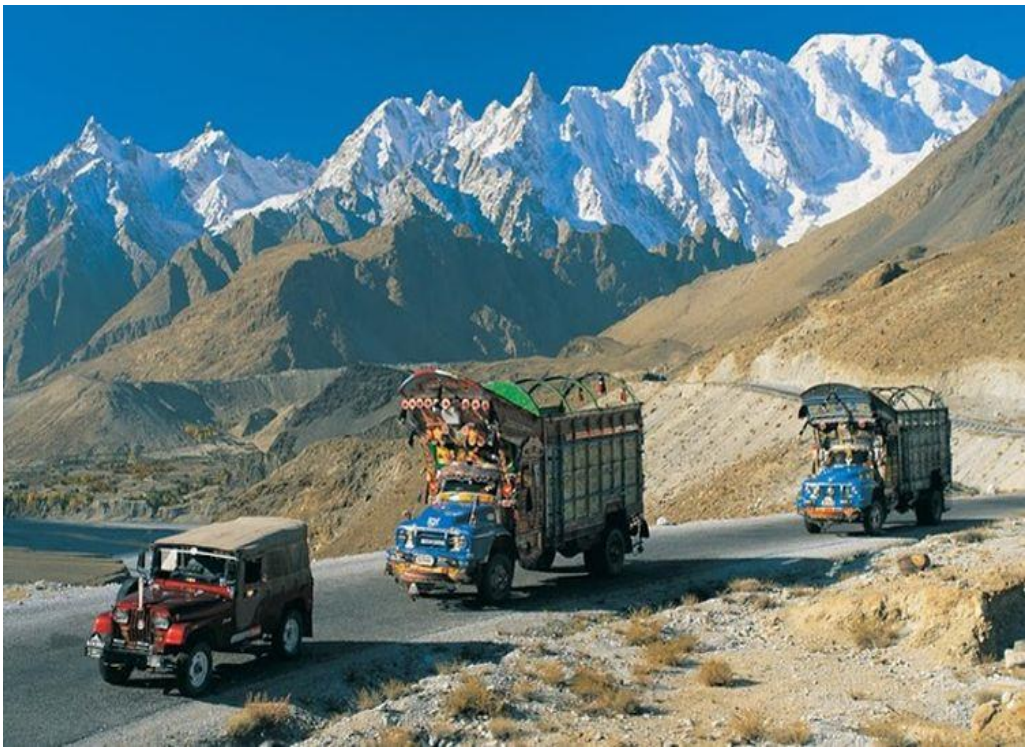
China agreed in 1964 to assist with the construction of the road, and work on it began in 1966. The two governments, however, announced their agreement to build highways on 21 October 1967 (Syed 1974: 135). Thousands of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers and engineers then entered the Gilgit and Hunza regions of northern Pakistan to push the road through the high mountains and steep valleys of the Karakoram Range. "The workforce in Pakistan at any one time was about 15,000 Pakistani soldiers and between 9000 and 20,000 Chinese, working separately. Few statistics are available about work on the Chinese side" (Jones 2004: 253). Construction was extremely difficult and costly in both financial and human terms (Garver 2001: 205-206).

> "The Karakoram Highway hacked through the majestic Karakoram mountain range is a marvel of modern engineering skill. It also is a lasting tribute to the most challenging and hazardous task of its kind ever undertaken. Cutting through the difficult terrain of Kohistan, Gilgit and Hunza, the Highway reaches the Khunjerab Top beyond which lies the sprawling Sinkiang province of China, connecting that country with Pakistan" (Hamid 1979: 159).

The Karakoram Highway stretches an incredible feat of civil engineering across the roof of the world, linking China with Pakistan. One of the many plaques along this road reads:

> "Sometimes in the future, when others will ply the KKH, little will they realise the amount of sweat, courage, dedication, endurance and human sacrifice that has gone into the making of this road, but as you drive along, tarry a little to say a short prayer for those silent brave men of the Pakistan Army, who gave their lives to realise a dream now known as 'THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY'" (Miller 1982: 45).

Figure 12: A Glimpse of the Karakoram Highway



Source: http://www.caingram.info/Pakistan/karakorum_highway_3.jpg

The Karakoram Highway winds its way through some of the world's highest mountain ranges, the Karakoram, Hindukush and the great Himalayas, linking the ancient and the orient in one harmonious continuum of natural wonders. Audacious in planning, monumental in construction, and perpetually under repair, the KKH is considered by many to be the eighth wonder of the world. It is also the cause of hundreds of deaths. According to one signpost near Besham, it is now possible to

drive from Karachi to Beijing, the capital of China, some 7,250 km distant (Miller 1982). In the Special Issue of Beijing Review commemorating the 55th anniversary of China-Pakistan diplomatic relations, Muhammad Iftikhar Raja wrote,

> The Karakoram Highway is about 1,300 km long. Most of the road is overshadowed by towering, barren mountains and a high altitude desert… It hugs the mighty Indus River in its northwest, which flows for over 300 . Here KKH together with the Indus divides the mountain ranges of Himalaya and Karakoram and winds around the foot of Nanga Parbat, the ninth highest peak in the world. The highway then leaves the Indus for the Gilgit, Hunza and Khunjerab Rivers to take on the Karakoram range… Finally, the road reaches the 4,733 meter Khunjerab Pass… It then crosses the high Central Asian plateau before winding down through the Pamirs to the fabled Chinese city of Kashgar, at the western edge of the Taklamakan desert. The Karakoram Highway follows the eastern branch of the famous Silk Route along the valley of the Indus and passes the towns of Gilgit and Hunza to the China border at Khunjerab Pass (Raja 2006: 6-7).

The story of this astonishing undertaken stretches over two decades during which the Army Engineers plodded their way through hard rock and worked tenaciously in the harshest conditions and in an extremely inhospitable area braving the vagaries of the climate, facing blinding blizzards here and treading blazing rock there. The KKH makes one marvel at this engineering feat of Chinese and Pakistani who worked to make it into a symbol of eternal friendship between Pakistan and China.

According to Hamid (1979: 60), the factors that prompted the undertaking of this project were many – this long-sequestered area had to be opened to bring Pakistan closer to China by a land route. There was the need to exploit the vast mineral wealth that had lain out of reach in the mountain recesses and also to develop tourist spots of promise. Although the new Pakistani state desired the extension of its territorial and economic grasp into the peripheries, it could also justify their integration by political and military necessity. With India standing prepared in Kashmir, Afghanistan next door, and the former Soviet Union only a few score miles away across Wakhan, it was

to Pakistan's military advantage to increase the centre's physical connectivity with Northern Areas. The proximate danger from India, Afghanistan, and the former Soviet Union was increased by the distance of the Northern Areas from the Pakistani centre.

Even before the completion of the new Karakoram Highway, "China had built a 118-mile long highway from the Khunjerab Pass to Qila Nabi, which lies on their main strategic supply route between Xinjiang and Tibet". The road connects the Karakoram Highway with China's own frontier routes. The route runs approximately perpendicular to the Akasi Chin Road and connects Mor Khun on the Gilgit-Kashi route with Qila Nabi in eastern Xinjiang on the Kashi-Aksai Chin- Lhasa Highway. This particular land link further reduces the distances between China and Pakistan. It also improves China's ability to deter attempts to intercept military equipment and supplies travelling to or from southern Xinjiang. Karakoram Highway maintenance units function throughout the year. Between the old capital of Hunza and the Sino-Pakistani border, the Highway is to remain under the permanent control of the Pakistan Army Engineers (Hamid 1979: 169, 173-174).

Road building in the Northern Areas did not come to a standstill with the inauguration of the Karakoram Highway. Shortly afterwards, work began on a 104-mile road running along the Indus to link the Karakoram Highway with Skardu to the southeast. This all-weather road opened up the 10,000-sq mile area of Baltistan, which since 1947 has had no land links with the rest of the world (Margolis 2001). The Sino-Pakistani road building continued to flourish and became an inflamed issue in the politics of Southern Asia. Chinese access across the mountain divide symbolised a transformation of the historical separation between these Asian regions. The strategic dynamics of the situation cannot be ignored.

Upgrading the Karakoram Highway

Soviet disintegration in 1991 and the subsequent emergence of independent Central Asian states broaden the scope of the Karakoram Highway to Central Asia. Pakistan took initiative for promoting trade and commercial relations with China and Central Asian states via Karakoram Highway. In late 1998, Pakistan, China and the two

central Asian states, namely, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan signed an accord and agreed to provide trade and transit facilities via the Karakoram Highway to the port of Karachi (Ahmar 2001: 189). The Karakoram Highway also provides an important link to Central Asia.

The decision to upgrade the KKH further was taken during the then Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf's visit to China in February 2006. The two countries stressed "the promotion of land trade through the Karakoram Highway and were willing to take measures to facilitate that trade" (Zhang 2006: 5). The then President Musharraf said, "This road, when upgraded, will provide the shortest route to the sea for products manufactured in China. The same road can serve to provide an overland route for trade between China and India, thus linking two of the largest markets in Asia" (Musharraf 2006). Thus, Pakistan offered to China a transit and energy corridor through the Karakoram Highway, Pakistani territory and its ports. With the development of the western regions of China, the Karakoram Highway could become the natural entry and exit point for Chinese imports and exports.

China Road and Bridge Corporation and Pakistan's National Highway Authority signed an MoU for the up-gradation of "the 335 kilometre-long section of the road between the Raikot Bridge and the Khunjerab mountain pass. Under the up-gradation programme, the road will be made an all-weather road, and its width will be expanded from ten metres to thirty metres so that it can handle long vehicles" (Aiyar 2006). The existing condition of the road, however, does not allow handling of heavy traffic. On 4 July 2006, the then "President Musharraf inaugurated a dry-port at Sust, some 200 kilometres from Gilgit, on the border with China. The dry port was built in 2004 as a Pak–China joint venture, at a cost of Rs 90 million, to expand and streamline border trade between the two countries" (Khan 2006). At the inaugural ceremony, Musharraf said, "This landmark project is poised to give further depth and strength to Pakistan–China economic and political ties and help expand Pakistan's commercial linkages with the regional countries, including Central Asian states… We are talking of Pakistan–China inter-connectivity in terms of energy and trade, improvement in highways, development of railway link and gas and oil pipeline

linkages and even fibre-optic connectivity along the highway under one project" (Khan 2006). Further, Pakistan "has already signed a quadrilateral agreement with China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan for transit trade facilitation, which has been operational since 2004". However, a lot of effort is needed to short out several issues to make full use of this agreement (Rahman 2007).

Pakistan and China have signed an agreement to open four new passenger and cargo road links. Two of the four roads are for cargo transportation, while the other two are for passengers. "The two cargo routes run from Kashi in southern Xinjiang to Pakistan's ports of Karachi, Qasim and Gwadar, and the passenger lines run from Kashi and Taxkorgan, also in southern Xinjiang, to Pakistan's Northern Gilgit and Sost Pass respectively" (DNA 2006). China effectively "has linked its western regions bordering Central Asia and Pakistan with central China" through various railroad projects and these projects could be used for expanding trade with West Asia and South Asia.

Further, "a railway line along the KKH, connecting Pakistan and Western China, is being considered" (Rahman 2007). An international consortium is carrying out a feasibility study for this ambitious 1000 kilometre rail track (Akbar 2006). In Pakistan, "the 750 kilometre track starts from Havelian, a small town near Abbottabad in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), and passes through the Karakoram mountains up to the Pakistan–China border at Khunjerab. The second part, consisting of a 250 kilometre long track will be constructed inside the Chinese province of Xinjiang. The total cost of the rail-track project up to Xinjiang will be around US$ 5 billion" (Akbar 2006). The proposal to develop a rail-line aims to improve trade as well as to develop alternative supply line. The plan is to link railway to Gwadar where oil-refining and storage facilities are being constructed (Mohan 2006).

Karakoram Corridor Development Plan also includes construction of 22 tunnels between Hunza and Khunjerab Pass. "Gilgit-Baltistan is highly suitable as a storage base for high-value military weapons like missiles and tunnels enhance such capability. Among them, one major tunnel will pass under the infamous Khunjerab Pass, which is also known as the gateway to India, or China's Khyber Pass. Called the

Friendship Tunnel, the Chinese claim it as a significant milestone in the Sino-Pak relations, which will provide all-weather access to revolutionise inter-regional travel and freight carriage" (Sering 2012: 22). Mystery surrounds "the construction of tunnels in secret locations where Pakistanis are barred". The P.L.A. construction crews are also "building big residential enclaves clearly designed for a long-term presence" (Harrison 2010; Sering 2012: 22).

The Sino-Pakistani alliance of access across the Karakoram has altered the geopolitics of the area. The mountains that had earlier been the subcontinent's natural barrier to invasion from the north were breached by a route, and the physical distance between China and Pakistan was lessened. The Karakoram Highway permitted unprecedented ease of movement in a region where passage had been rare and difficult.

Officially, the Karakoram Highway was intended both to improve the economic and social lot of the people in the Northern Areas and to expand tourism and trade with China. It has been called as restoration of the Silk Route, conjuring up visions of intense economic activity and the exchange of precious goods between Central and South Asia. The prospects of trade and economic cooperation were said to motivate this huge investment in men, material, and money. At the time of the highway's construction, it was suggested that volume of Pakistan's trade with China would increase and that Chinese trade with the Middle East would expand through Karachi.

China's principal reasons for financing and building the network of Karakoram routes, however, were neither the development of the remote Northern Areas nor the development of Xinjiang (Sherwani 1986: 105). The Karakoram Highway has interfered in the political and military relationships between Central and South Asia. "No single highway has run through such sensitive territory, an area where the borders of Pakistan, India, China, the former Soviet Union, and Afghanistan come close together" (Woodman 1963). The KKH extends the control of Pakistan's central government into previously inaccessible frontier regions. Pakistani troops now possess greater operational flexibility along the northernmost frontier. Today Pakistani troops stand guard to the north of the Karakoram Highway, watching

Wakhan, and to the South, along the Line of Actual Control in Kashmir, watching India.

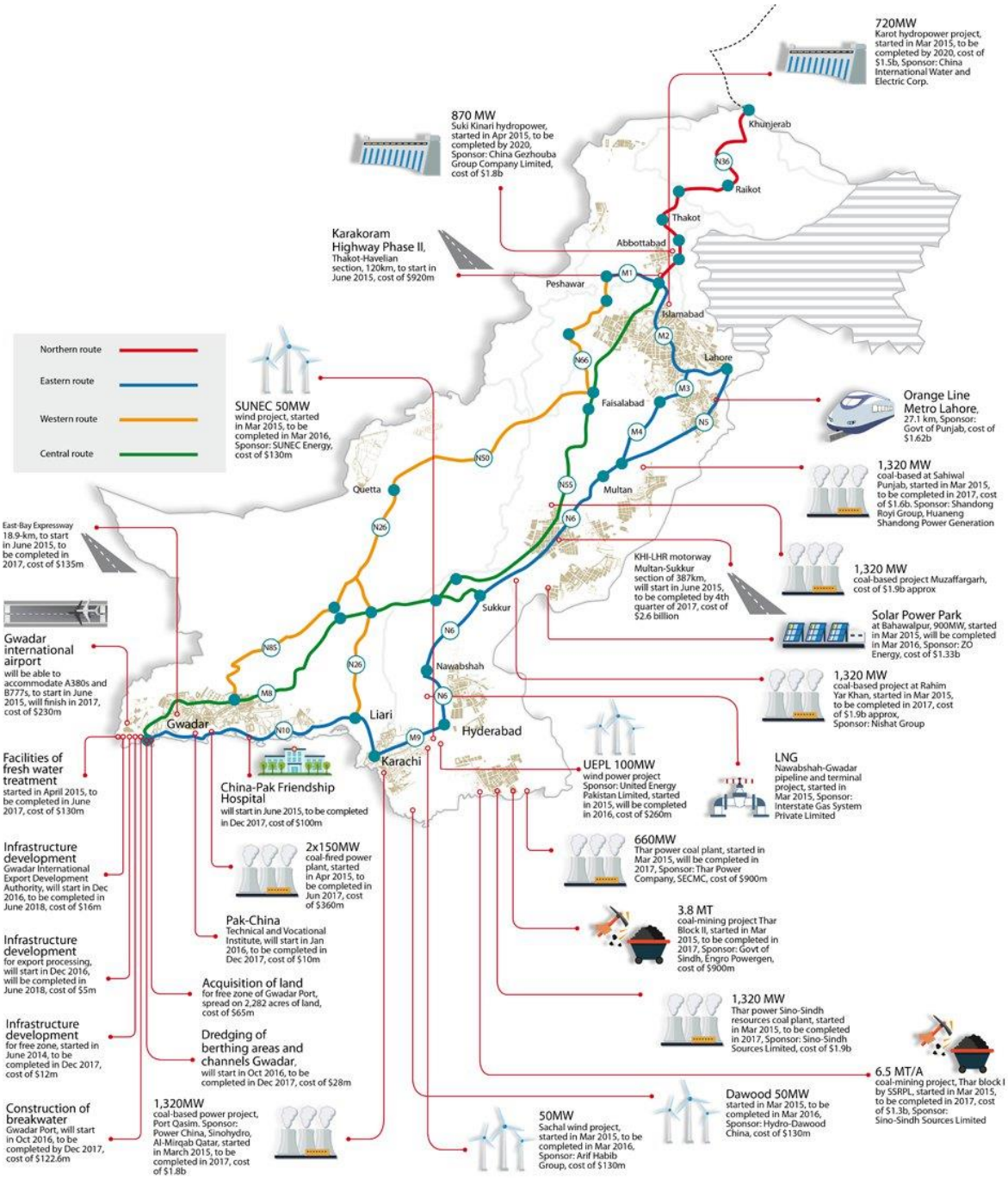
China's own broad political and military purposes in South Asia resulted in the development of the Northern Areas. China has used the Karakoram Highway as a form of "aid diplomacy" and simultaneously "strengthened ties with the enemy of its enemy". Pakistan and China have used the KKH to send strong messages to their rivals and neighbours. Upon completion of the Highway China's Deputy Premier, Li Xiannian said publicly that the Karakoram Highway "allows us to give military aid to Pakistan" (Haider, 2004). In 1971 the Karakoram Highway was reportedly used to ferry military supplies to Pakistan from China. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, President Yahya Khan of Pakistan ordered sections of the Karakoram Highway closed to foreigners. This move was regarded as a "gesture which was intended to draw a veil of concealment across the overland route" (Jackson 1975: 49, 105).

According to some scholars, the Karakoram Highway, contrary to Chinese and Pakistani claims, has "strategic military implications" (Vertzberger 1983b: 82; Ellis 1981: 695). Although objectively the Karakoram Highway may not be an ideal logistics route, it has been important to foreign and security policymakers. The nature of conflict and the direction of progress in the Karakoram and Himalayan borderlands will continue to be determined by the amalgamation of politics with geography.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) during his visit to Pakistan in May 2013 which has been given post-facto approval by Pakistan's National Assembly. The CPEC "planned to connect Kashgar in China's western region with Gwadar Port on the Baluchistan coast in Pakistan – through rail, road and oil and gas pipelines (see Figure 13) – is expected to spur investments along the way and boost trade flows. It is also likely to result in the setting up of economic zones along the way, with emphasis on energy production that will help Pakistan's chronic energy shortages" (Ashraf 2015).

Figure 13: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)



Several measures for the CPEC are already underway. After Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's announcement of the CPEC plan in May 2013, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in July 2013 after the then Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Beijing. Further, the Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan in April 2015 and announced:

> "US$ 46 billion investment for the numerous projects of the CPEC, signing as many as 51 MoUs with priority given to energy projects – which received US$ 30 billion – and transportation projects. A CPEC Unit was then created within the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Planning, Development, and Reforms was given the daunting task of rapidly executing CPEC projects in collaboration with its Chinese counterpart, the National Development and Reform Commission. The Frontier Works Organization (FWO) has built 850 km of road in Balochistan, part of the 3000 km CPEC, to connect Gwadar Port via the Western Route to Kashgar. Other routes will be the Central and Eastern Routes. In November 2015, Pakistan's government allocated more than 2000 acres of land on a 43-year lease to the China Overseas Port Holding Company Ltd. (COPHCL) to build a state-of-art airport – which will be Pakistan's largest – at Gwadar along with an industrial zone. In another historic move, China has made the CPEC part of its 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development for the period 2016-2020" (Malik 2015).

China has specific objectives regarding the CPEC. The Corridor "exploits Pakistan's strategic location to bypass the 'chokepoint' of the Malacca Straits. Rerouting part of its energy supplies to Xinjiang from the Persian Gulf via Gwadar shortens the distance by several thousand kilometres" and lessens the transport time by about 10 days (globalvoices.org 2016). Further, the CPEC has potential "to diversify energy trade routes to and from the Middle East" (Ritizinger 2015). Thus, such linkages could help Beijing in reducing its dependence on imports through maritime chokepoints. It is believed that the CPEC "corridor will unlock the potential of landlocked western China, especially Xinjiang. Further, by establishing its physical footprint in Gilgit Baltistan, China hopes to cut off the ingress and egress of Uighur militants en route to Afghanistan and Pakistan for jihadi training" (Devasher 2015). The motivations behind China's promised investment in Pakistan are "providing economic support to a long-time ally and strategic hedge, facilitating trade and building linkages to the west by which China can expand its influence" (Ritzinger 2015). China expects that a substantial economic infusion will create economic opportunity and could be helpful in bringing stability both at home and abroad while strengthening its struggling ally. Most importantly, China sees Pakistan as trustworthy and valuable partner, and greater strategic access to Pakistan suits very well for China's growing geopolitical and geo-economic ambitions.

The CPEC is following "'1+4' cooperation structure: economic corridor at the centre and the Gwadar Port, energy, infrastructure and industrial cooperation" as four key areas. The CPEC also aims for creating manufacturing hubs along the corridor. The

proposed project is mainly financed by China with some Pakistani co-funding. The whole project is expected to be completed in 2030, but some projects are expected to be completed within the next one to three years. The CPEC plan includes "a combination of cross-sectional components, including infrastructure, trade, connectivity, transport, energy, services, etc." (Ashraf 2015). Gwadar and Lahore will be developed as Chinese Overseas Special Economic Zones.

The CPEC plan has identified three different alignments – western, eastern and central. While eastern and central routes have fewer security risks, western alignment possesses the greatest security risks. Eastern alignment work will be carried out by Chinese companies on BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) basis under the public-private partnership. Building all three routes require huge investments and long time-frame. Hence, Islamabad, while promising to develop western route first, in most likelihood, it will focus on eastern alignment. This is mainly due to two reasons – one, there are serious concerns about safety and security of investments; and two, Beijing is keen to work on early harvest projects first.

The CPEC could "help Beijing to expand its maritime capabilities, particularly in the Indian Ocean region". The CPEC would help China widening its geopolitical influence and possibly its military presence in the region. It is all part of China's quest for influence throughout the continent via aid and investment (Chowdhary 2015). Further, it will "increase China's influence and control over key maritime trade routes, to improve access to the source of energy. China could massively extend its influence in Central and South Asia. This is also an attempt to get clear Pakistani commitment and concrete activities to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the PRC, namely to undermine all efforts from Pakistan based terrorists and separatists to destabilise 'mainland China', foremost Xinjiang" (Satgin 2016). The CPEC is an expression of China's claim to be a 'great power'. Besides the wish to increase its leverage in Pakistan with the establishment of the CPEC, Beijing is planning to counter the US and Indian influence in the region. The "project should help to reduce the imbalance in development between prosperous eastern and underdeveloped western part of China" (Satgin 2016). The CPEC is supposed "to open up remote, landlocked Xinjiang, and create incentives for both state and private enterprises to expand economic activity, create jobs and boost cooperation"

(Discussions in Urumqi 2019). It would give additional logistics support and coordination to Chinese business activities abroad.

However, there are problems with the CPEC agreement. In an interview given to Reuters, Pakistan's State Bank governor, Ashraf Mahmood Wathra said that "CPEC needs to be made more transparent… many crucial details of the various projects to be executed under the CPEC umbrella remain hidden" even from him. Wathra remarked that he was not aware of the exact details of proportion of debt, equity and kind. Such revelations are important to understand the potential economic implications of projects (The Dawn 2015). There were confusions about the proposed CPEC routes and their impact on local economies (Younus 2016).

Some Chinese analysts, however, argue that geographic barriers render a CPEC unfeasible in the near and medium term. These "analysts express grave reservations about the security situation in Pakistan in light of the country's perpetual violence and increasing political instability, along with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorist attacks against outsiders. Indeed, Chinese workers have been kidnapped and killed in at least three separate incidents" in the regions that would be traversed by the proposed pipelines and railways (Ericson and Collins 2010: 93). These overland corridors would also transit through Pakistan occupied Kashmir. In addition to political problems and security risks, there would also be serious financial barriers. "Geography and cost alone would pose major challenges, however, even under the best of conditions. The pipeline would have to be constructed in some of the world's most challenging terrain. Moreover, it would need to lift oil from sea level at Gwadar up to the 15,400-foot-high Khunjerab Pass, requiring massive pumping power and steady electrical supplies in remote areas vulnerable to insurgent activity" (Ericson and Collins 2010: 94). Moreover, "offloading seaborne crude in Pakistan would be problematic because it is far from China's mainland economic and military centres" (Scobell et.al. 2014).

Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka

In the past four decades, "China-Bangladesh relations have undergone a speedy transformation. Trade between the two countries has grown rapidly, making China Bangladesh's largest trading partner, with the two-way trade accounting for about US$

12 billion in 2014. While Mainland Chinese investment in Bangladesh is still low, China is fast becoming an important partner in developing the latter's physical infrastructure" (Islam 2015). In fact, Beijing has agreed to finance 10 large infrastructure projects in Bangladesh involving nearly US$ 8.5 billion. The "projects to get Chinese assistance are — single line dual gauge railway track from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar via Ramu and Ramu to Gundum near Myanmar border project, Dhaka-Chittagong railway chord line project, Padma rail link from Dhaka to Jessore project and multi-lane road tunnel under the river Karnaphuli". Some others projects are "Chinese economic and industrial zone in Chittagong area, digital connectivity for Digital Bangladesh, expansion and strengthening of power system network, Payra seaport project, Dhaka-Ashulia elevated expressway, Unit-2 of Eastern refinery and single point mooring project" (Ahsan 2015).

The centrepiece of "China's growing influence in Bangladesh is symbolised by its interest in modernising the Chittagong port, which handles around 92 per cent of the country's import-export trade, and in building a new deep-water port facility from scratch at Sonadia, located near Cox's Bazaar" (Ellis and Solstad 2013). Chittagong's strategic location could become an important market access point for Chinese commerce. According to Shanghai Institute for International Studies' South Asia director, Zhao Gancheng, "Developing the port is a very important part of China's co-operation with Bangladesh, and China is aware of its strategic significance." He added, "While there is currently no oil pipeline running to Bangladesh, access to Chittagong will be of greater importance in the future when this infrastructure is put in place. With the development of China's transportation of goods and energy in the Indian Ocean, China will certainly continue to attach more importance to this port" (Ranashinghe 2011).

Beijing has become the major supplier of military hardware to Dhaka. The "Bangladesh Air Force has signed an agreement with China to purchase sixteen F-7BGI fighter planes, three MI-171 helicopters and two Air Defence radar systems, worth roughly US$ 600 million" (Chowdhury 2012). Bangladesh also features in the BRI proposal both as part of the overland component – via the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor – and as a port hub for the Maritime Silk

Road. While Chinese investments and strategic access to Bangladesh are increasing gradually, they are still very limited.

Beijing has focussed its policies vis-à-vis Nepal on "encouraging the Himalayan state's neutrality by trying to reduce its dependence on India in the political, economic, and security arena" (Dabhade and Pant 2004: 160). Indeed, in recent decades, the main aim of China's policy in Nepal was to complicate India's relationship with the Himalayan state so as to limit New Delhi's ability to take effective action beyond the South Asian region (Rose 1977: 234).

China's occupation of Tibet in 1950 heightened both Chinese interests in and influence over Nepal. On the one hand, "Beijing feared that Nepal, bordering Tibet, would be used by its Cold War rivals for anti-China activities, a problem that was further compounded over the years by the growing presence of Tibetan refugees in Nepal" (Khadka 1999: 62). On the other hand, the occupation of Tibet extended Beijing's reach into Nepal. China reportedly regarded Tibet as the palm and Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, and the region today covered by much of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as the five fingers of Tibet.

In the decade after the Tibetan invasion, Beijing was careful not to raise Indian concerns about Chinese expansionism. In 1955 China yielded to Indian wishes and refrained from establishing a resident embassy in Kathmandu, and in 1956 it obtained India's approval before signing a treaty with Tibet. However, by 1959 Beijing began to encourage forms of anti-Indianism in Nepal, seeking opportunities to exploit friction between Kathmandu and Delhi while entering into direct confrontation with India in the Himalayas, culminating in the 1962 China–India border war. However, its attempts to sow seeds of discord between India and Nepal during B. P. Koirala's premiership (1959–60) largely failed (Prasad 1989: 70, 73-75).

Around that time, Beijing also started to flex its muscle vis-à-vis Kathmandu. In 1960, China unexpectedly staked a claim to Mount Everest, setting off a nationalistic frenzy in Nepal, which culminated in an unprecedentedly large anti-Chinese demonstration in Kathmandu on 21 April 1960, to affirm Nepal's sovereignty over the world's highest mountain (and Nepal's most visible asset globally). In another incident on 28

June 1960, Chinese troops intruded into the Mustang region of northwest Nepal, killing one and capturing several other Nepalese border guards. Nepal protested this action energetically the following day. The then Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai expressed deep regret over the incident, returned the prisoners, and paid compensation for the killing of the Nepalese guard (Prasad 1989: 75-76).

After this episode, China was careful to allay Nepalese fears about possible China's expansionist designs in order to maintain the goodwill of Nepal while it consolidated its position in Tibet. In 1961, King Mahendra paid a state visit to China on the latter's invitation, during which an agreement was reached on the construction of the Kathmandu-Kodari road,[34] popularly known as the Kathmandu-Lhasa road, which Beijing agreed to finance.

Today, "Beijing's policy towards Nepal appears to be driven by the twin objectives of expanding influence in Nepal and suppressing anti-China activities of the Tibetan community residing there" (Mathou 2005: 517-518). China's "interest and involvement in Nepal are perhaps greater than Beijing claims, but also significantly more modest than India's fears. One issue – Tibet – continues to override all others" (Chaturvedy 2016). China makes friends with any Nepalese government that keeps a lid on political activity by the estimated 20,000 Tibetans in the country (Pandey 2006: 2). Whether monarchist, Maoist, or led by the traditional parties – the nature of the government has made little difference to Beijing, which has moved effortlessly from supporting one to the next. China's top priority is "to stifle any protests among the Tibetans in Nepal and to stop other "anti-Chinese" activities. On this topic, Chinese diplomats and Beijing are vocal and insistent" (ICC Asia Report 2009). Nepalese "governments of any political type have little choice but to bow to their powerful neighbour's primary" (indeed only important) concern. Indeed, Beijing's concerns are not entirely irrational: external encouragement of the Khampa rebellion in the 1960s was pronounced from Nepal. Yet China's efforts to cut off access for Tibetans to Nepal runs counter to the preferences of Western powers, such as the United States, and may also (quietly) distress India.

[34] An agreement to construct an all-weather highway linking Kathmandu with Tibet was signed in October 1961 – at a time when neither Kathmandu nor Beijing had cordial relations with New Delhi. The Kathmandu-Kodari road opened in May 1967.

Chinese apprehension is at its most intense in times when its occupation of Tibet is potentially the most controversial, as in the run-up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Most recently, it has expanded security and police posts along Nepal's border with Tibet, significantly reducing the number of people crossing the border to seek refuge in Nepal and beyond (Yardley 2010). China has spent little to win friends in Nepal. It invests next to nothing in the relationship compared to India, but it tends to be more successful at making sure that its very limited interests are protected. Thus, its construction of new road access from Tibet into Nepal is accompanied by sharp messaging on the need to curtail access to India through Nepal by Tibetans seeking contact with the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist religious figures.

Since 2006, China has stepped up aid, opened new cultural centres, expanded visits, and offered Nepal non-lethal military aid and training by the PLA.[35] Many in China, see these activities as to help Nepal achieve development and stability, which is in line with China's international role and the aspirations of the international community. Indeed, China's growing preoccupation with Nepal appears to be commercial and economic, as it seeks outlets for the manufacturing that drives its own phenomenal growth. Trade between China and Nepal is growing significantly. In addition to the older Kathmandu-Kodari Highway, which is widely used for the transit of Chinese goods to other parts of the region, the other seven important transit points between China and Nepal are being strengthened (Lama 2008: 101-102). In 2012, "China offered US$ 119 million in aid to Nepal to boost infrastructure and security. Chinese projects include a US$ 1.6 billion hydropower plant, a recently completed 22 kilometre stretch of road, and an offer to build an international airport in Pokhara. On top of infrastructure development, two dozen Chinese companies have invested US$ 100 million in tourism and other areas" in Nepal (Ellis and Solstad 2013). China is developing a "rail network connecting the Tibetan capital of Lhasa with the market town of Khasa on the Sino-Nepal border and also planning for six additional highways to link up with Nepal, the development of cross-border energy pipelines and optical fibre" (Ramachandran 2008).

[35] The government of China extended a 'non-lethal' assistance worth 28 million Yuan to the government of Nepal. China made the commitment during a meeting between a six-member Chinese delegation led by Major General Jia Jialing and then Minister for Defence Bidhya Bhandari on 16 December 2009.

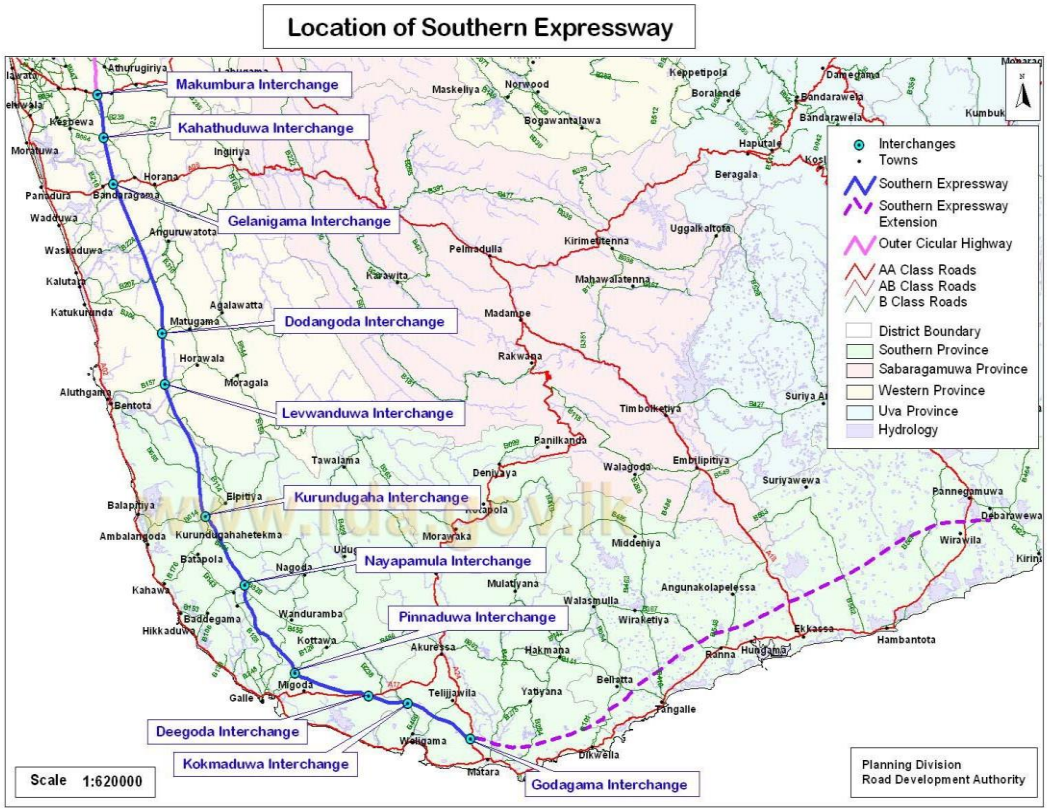
Further, Beijing is planning "to extend the newly launched Golmund-Lhasa rail link up to Xigaze, south of Lhasa and from there to Yatung, a traditional trading centre situated at the mouth of the Chumbi valley". There is another Chinese proposal "to extend the Golmund-Lhasa line to Nyingchi, an important trading town north of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, at the tri-junction with Myanmar. From Nyingchi, this rail link is further scheduled to link up to Dali in Yunnan province" (Ramchandran 2008). From Chinese Military point of view, this Lhasa-Nyingchi-Dali route has huge strategic advantage which could significantly improve the mobility for military. Moreover, China's trans-border infrastructures that are build-up are no longer merely for military leverages but are also instruments for the expansion of Chinese economic influence into the region.

Beijing has "financed a large number of infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka in recent years, including the country's second international airport (US$ 209 million), the Hambantota Port (the planned second phase will add US$ 1 billion in Chinese loans to the roughly US$ 400 million borrowed for its initial phase of development)", Colombo–Katunayake Expressway, Southern Expressway – Pinnaduwa to Matara (Figure 14), the Norochcholai coal power plant and the country's first communication satellite. The Southern Expressway, which connects "the capital city of Colombo to Galle, has cut the journey time down from 6 hours to just 90 minutes. The Expressway was built with Chinese investment, engineers and workers, with an extension further south and east to Matale". The entire 160 kilometre route took "five years to complete, costing US$ 10 million per kilometre to build. An East-West route is also planned to link Colombo with Kandy" (Ellis and Solstad 2013).

The proposed Norochcholai "Coal Power Plant (NCPP) in Norochcholai, a coastal fishing village 120 km north from Colombo along the west coast, has an ultimate capacity of 900 megawatts of electricity" (Embassy of Sri Lanka in the People's Republic of China (2019). The construction of the facility began in 2007. It was constructed in 3 phases and completed by September 2014. The first stage was "completed at a cost of US$ 455 million and generates 300 Megawatts to the national grid while the second and third phases generate 600 Megawatts. The cost for the second and third phase was estimated at US$ 891 million. The first phase of 300 MW of NCPP" was ceremonially commissioned by then President Mahinda Rajapaksa

(Embassy of Sri Lanka in the People's Republic of China 2019). The construction works of the Power Plant were carried out by the China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) while the funding was provided by the EXIM Bank of the Republic of China. The project was carried out on "a Design, Build and Transfer (DBT) basis. The main objective of the project is to cater to the increasing demand for electricity while supplying steady and low-cost electricity to the national grid" (Embassy of Sri Lanka in the People's Republic of China 2019). Further, there are several other project proposals in the pipeline. Moreover, several Chinese proposals including port developments were surrounded by controversies.

Figure 14: Southern Expressway



Source: https://trip2lanka.com/2014/03/southern-expressway-highway-e01-from-colombo-to-galle-and-matara/

Myanmar and the Maldives

Myanmar is "the second-largest country in Southeast Asia and is located at the juncture of Southeast and South Asia. Given its resources, natural endowments and strategic location bordering China and India, Myanmar finds itself at the centre of political wrangling between major powers. While India's culture and religion have influenced the Burmese way of life over the centuries, China has traditionally exerted geopolitical and strategic pressure on Myanmar" (Malik 2017).

Myanmar and China call each other '***paukphaw***'[36] (fraternal) (Zin 2010: 264), a "Myanmar word for siblings. ***Paukphaw*** is not used for any other foreign country, reflecting Myanmar and China's close and cordial relationship" (burmalibrary.org). For Myanmar, "China has historically been by far its most important neighbour, sharing the longest border of 2227 kilometres" (Kudo 2008: 87). Successive governments in Myanmar have "described the relationship with China as "blood relatives" (swemyo paukphaw) since the 1950s. In the sibling hierarchy, China enjoys the role of the older brother and Myanmar the younger" (Zin 2010: 264).

During the Second World War, Myanmar became China's "gateway" or "back door" and it realised Myanmar's military and strategic significance. Since then, the "Burma Road" has become "a concrete and the most well-known example illustrating Chinese understanding of Myanmar's importance for China" (Fan 2011: 44; Fitzgerald 1940: 164-165). During 1988–2013, "Beijing stepped in with liberal economic assistance, cheap loans, trade, investment, energy deals, and military and diplomatic support. Nearly 60 per cent of Myanmar's weapons imports came from China, and Chinese firms contributed 42 per cent of the country's total foreign direct investment (FDI) (some US$ 33.67 billion). Between 2008 and 2011, China promised approximately US$ 13 billion in infrastructure investments and also became its largest donor country" (Chow and Easley 2016). In return, Beijing "gained access to Myanmar's rich natural resources and moved closer to gaining a strategic passage from southwest China to the Bay of Bengal—its 'long-held ambition to create a proxy west coast and turn Myanmar into "China's California"" (Miller 2017; Myint-U 2011; Malik 2017).

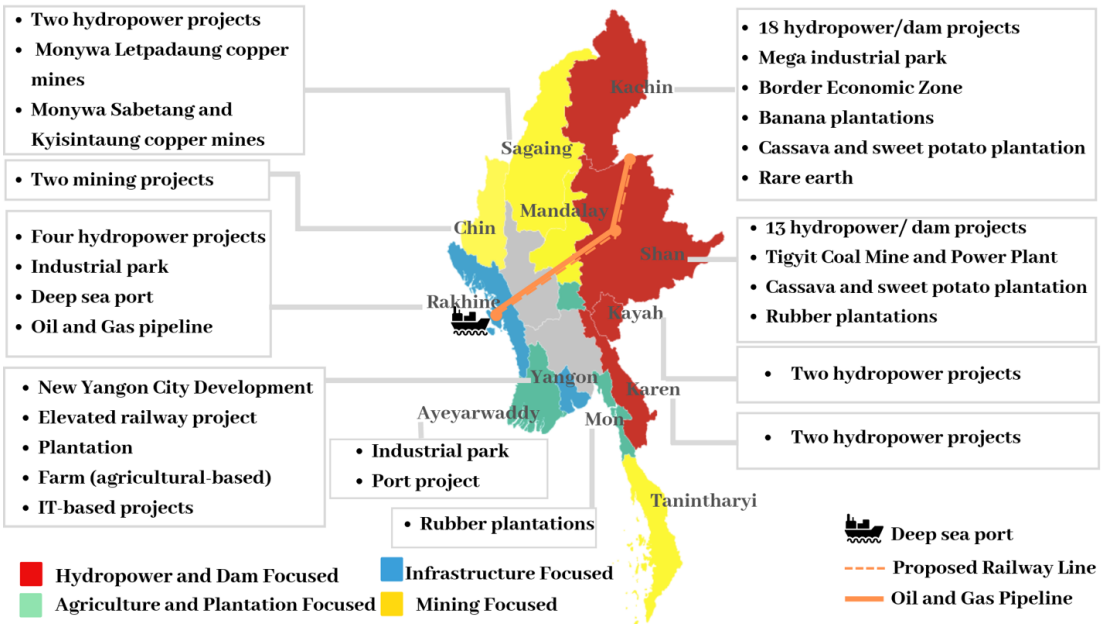
China has "made efforts to undertake and push the Sino-Myanmar transport corridor since the advent of the 21st century. The project is driven by China's geo-economic and geo-strategic interests" (Chenyang and Hofmeister 2009). The corridor is like "an

[36] According to a Burmese dictionary, the word '***paukphaw'*** means "1. sibling, 2. intimate, and is an affectionate term conferred upon the Chinese by the Myanmar people".

adhesive to draw closer bilateral geopolitical and economic bond" (Fan 2011: 45). Since 1988-89, Myanmar holds "key importance for China in terms of natural resources and security" (Zin 2010: 268). On 27 March 2009, "China and Myanmar signed an agreement for the construction of energy pipelines that will transport Middle East and African crude oil from Myanmar's Arakan's coast to China's southwestern Yunnan Province" (Ramchandran 2009).

Several Chinese multinational corporations (MNCs) "are involved in at least 90 hydropower, oil and natural gas, and mining projects in Myanmar. These projects vary from small dams completed in the last two decades to planned oil and natural gas pipelines across Myanmar to southwest China" (Mizzima 2012). Further, the Myanmar government has consented "to begin work on key projects under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) agreement under the BRI. The proposal includes upgrades to three major roads through Mandalay and Muse on the Myanmar side of the border with China, and some other roads in Shan state" (Belt & Road News 2019). Among 24 proposed projects with an estimated cost of US$ 2 billion, Myanmar has agreed to begin works of nine major projects.

Figure 15: Chinese Projects in Myanmar



Note: All Chinese investment projects in Myanmar, including the proposed, under progress, completed projects and suspended due to various issues.

Source: https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/infographic-30-years-chinese-investment-myanmar.html

The country is geopolitically and geo-economically important to China "given its access to the Indian Ocean, and its extensive natural resources ranging from dense forests and untouched rivers to vast reserves of minerals, oil, and natural gas. Burma's oil and natural gas resources and the prospect of constructing dual pipelines from the Indian Ocean to carry imports of oil and natural gas from the Middle East, South America and Africa and dangerous Straits of Malacca make Myanmar a particularly desirable partner in China's pursuit of energy security" (burmalibrary.org). Several Chinese MNCs have been involved in "onshore and offshore oil and natural gas projects" in Myanmar. In addition to fossil fuel exploration, CNPC and Sinopec spearheaded the construction of parallel oil and natural gas pipelines, stretching more than 2,380 km. The "pipeline starts in Kyaukpyu in the western state of Rakhine and runs through the northern border town of Muse on the Myanmar side and Kunming in China, terminating in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing" (Matsui 2015). This pipeline significantly reduces the shipping distance of crude from the Middle East, and China receives almost 10 per cent of its crude oil supply from Middle East through this. Thus, the Kyaukpyu-Chongqing pipeline is strategically very important for China. Looking to boost its energy security, China has been steadily building up its foothold in Myanmar (Matsui 2015; Sui, 2015).

The China-Myanmar "crude oil and gas pipelines are driven by divergent dynamics. The crude oil pipelines are driven by a set of convoluted factors, including the desire of scholars to make a real policy impact, the parochial interests of local governments, rivalry among Chinese NOCs", concern over oil security, and geopolitical consideration (Ritizinger 2015). By contrast, the natural gas pipeline is largely driven by supply and demand dynamics. The pipelines are perceived as providing China with long-term strategic dividends and a stepping stone for China to access the Indian Ocean and should be considered part of the country's "two-ocean strategy" (Kong 2010: 57-65). "History is a factor" influencing China's attitude towards China-Myanmar transport and energy corridor as well as "Myanmar strategic significance as it has a bearing on Beijing's strategic thinking and policies" (Fan 2010: 54). Getting strategic access is an important measure to gain influence and to play a leading role in emerging transport and energy corridors.

Many Chinese large-scale investments, however, have encountered nationwide protests in Myanmar. There are forceful campaigns against irresponsible foreign investment practice. While the Myanmar government will receive various forms of tax and fee revenues, most of the energy and natural resources to be extracted from the projects will go to China. Overall, Chinese economic interests in Myanmar include substantial investments in a range of hydroelectric power schemes and mineral extraction, as well as cross-border trade that helps boost the economy of China's landlocked southwestern provinces. Beyond economic cooperation, Myanmar is of unique geopolitical importance to China. Its location between China and the Indian Ocean allows oil imports from the Bay of Bengal, Middle East and Africa to be transported through the Sino-Myanmar pipelines to China, as well as boosting the economy of China's impoverished southwest region. The reasons for opposition to the Myitsone dam, Letpadaung copper mine, and Sino-Myanmar pipeline are complex, yet they stem from similar root causes. The projects lack accountability and transparency in disclosing the destination of revenues and benefits. Communities became victims to land grabbing, forced eviction, unacceptable living standards in relocation sites, inadequate compensation, and environmental destruction.

Figure 16: The Maldives-China Friendship Bridge

Source: *The Financial Times* (11 February 2019).

Large-scale Chinese investments created political crisis in the Maldives undermining democratic institutions. For India, this was a warning that Chinese investments could "alter India's geopolitics by manipulating latent, unresolved hostilities. Chinese investments in the Maldives – focussed on infrastructure, housing, power and hotels – played a role in creating this situation" (Bhandari and Jindal 2018). Sino-Indian rivalry in the Maldives became visible when an Indian company's contract to develop the Male international airport was scrapped in 2012 and Beijing Construction Group was given the contract. Afterwards, the Maldives received numerous Chinese projects and investments which boosted further after maiden visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2014. Perhaps, the Maldives' strategic location generated so much interest in Beijing. "With 1,200 islands stretching over a latitudinal distance of 850 km, the Maldives claims an exclusive economic zone of 859,000 square kilometres in a section of the Indian Ocean that touches the main shipping route between China, the oil suppliers of the Middle East and Europe" (Maldives Times 2019). Chinese funded several large-scale projects after Xi's visit. "Maldivian finance ministry data show that well over US$ 1 bn in loans were agreed". According to media reports,

> "Chinese state companies lent US$ 547.9 million to fund the construction of 11,000 apartments in high-rise blocks that would be built in the second phase of Hulhumale. They lent a further US$ 180.9 million for work to extend the electricity grid to the new island, and US$ 421 million to expand the airport serving Male and Hulhumale. The most celebrated project was the US$ 210 million Friendship Bridge, funded mostly by a US$ 126 million Chinese government grant and a US$ 68 million loan from Export Import Bank of China. (Maldives Times 2019).

While China has flaunted its investments in the Maldives as BRI led development projects in smaller countries, the new government in Male claims large scale corruption and problems related to debt sustainability. In fact, "the controversy around recent Chinese investment in the Maldives is part of a worrying recent pattern for Beijing, in which newly elected governments have sought to cancel or amend supposedly unfavourable deals with China agreed by their predecessors" (Maldives Times 2019). The US$ 62 bn China-Pakistan Economic Corridor plan has come under pressure after electing of Imran Khan as Pakistan's prime minister. Karachi's Dawn newspaper reported that the government had decided to scrap plans for a US$ 1.6 bn Chinese-built power plant. Pakistan is now enmeshed in an economic crisis. Also, there are several thousand Chinese nationals are working across Pakistan. There is a

huge deployment of security forces for the protection of Chinese workers and investments, which is further complicating matters. Myanmar Naypyidaw renegotiated a massive Chinese port project in 2018 at its western town of Kyaukpyu, two years after awarding contracts to subsidiaries of CITIC Group. The new deal dramatically reduced the financial scale of the project to US$ 1.3 bn, from the US$ 9 bn originally planned. Myanmar is also resisting pressure from Beijing to allow work to resume on a Chinese-backed hydropower dam in its north. Sri Lanka Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa struck a deal with China to build a US$ 1.3 bn port named after him at Hambantota on the country's south coast, before being voted out of power in 2015. Colombo's new government was saddled with heavy losses from the little-used port, and in 2017 handed it over to a Chinese state company on a 99-year lease, sparking domestic controversy. These are some clear indicators of difficulties being faced by Chinese projects in various Southern Asian countries. Announcements of many projects without political and security risk assessments, and perhaps, investments in volatile regions has strengthened the view that these projects in Southern Asia are primarily driven by security (both domestic and external) considerations.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed Chinese transport and energy corridors and politics of routes in southern Asia. It focussed on roads, railways and pipelines. The examination of select Chinese transport and energy projects have indicated that the selection of locations and projects are primarily driven by geopolitical and security considerations rather than economics. Many flagship projects are already "proving uneconomical, prompting multi-billion-dollar debt write-offs". Inadequate scrutiny of projects has led to many difficulties and risks. As risk awareness spreads among various countries, an increasing number of countries are suspending or scaling back major planned transport and energy projects, while others seek to offload failing projects. It appears that various projects are poorly designed and driven by economic short-termism. Socio-political dynamics of recipient states, projects related land grabs/acquisitions and evolving geopolitics have caused negative impacts on several projects in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan and other countries.

CHAPTER 5

PORT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF CHINA

The ocean is an important theatre for international political struggle. The seas are of critical importance to a country's security, development and prosperity. Great powers, as well as emerging powers, require strong navies to protect their commercial shipping as well as for opening foreign markets to trade. And to have a strong navy, a country needs privileged access to a network of cooperative security locations and support facilities. China's port investments serve two purposes, first is to promote economic development and the other is to increase presence of its Navy (People's Liberation Army Navy – PLAN) in the Indo-Pacific. Since 2002, China has made investments in ports all across the eastern coast of Africa to the South China Sea. According to China these infrastructure investments will provide an economic boost to the economy of the partners, however, many scholars are concerned about China's intentions as these port facilities could be used to host PLAN vessels as some of them have been seen to be doing so. Further, Chinese port development projects, particularly in Southern Asia, surrounded with some controversies in recipient countries cause a doubt among some countries including India. Are these projects really for win-win cooperation or have some other hidden motives?

Chinese officials and scholars are of a view that China needs "to build up a strong sea power" in order to protect itself from threats to its outward leaning economy by other major powers. Chinese thinking about sea control has also focussed on the Far Seas, as opposed to Near Seas operations for the defence of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and China's wider interests. In 2004, the then President Hu Jintao set out some 'new historic missions' for the PLA that reflected China's growing stake in the global maritime transportation system for its energy security, increasingly for essential grain and other foodstuffs and raw materials, as well as for the export of its manufactured goods. As China increases its exposure to the world economy, its distant interests will grow and so will its need to protect them. This expanding concern is reflected in developments as varied as the presence of a PLAN warship standing by the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in 2011 and the emergence of China's capabilities in the Arctic. These expanding concerns have become increasingly obvious in Chinese discourse and policy statements.

President Hu has, for example, alluded to the country's 'Malacca Dilemma', by which the country's prosperity and strategic independence rests on secure sea lines of communication over which China can currently exert little or no control. The attention paid to the importance of this task is likely to increase in consequence of China's determined campaign to build up a state-owned oil and gas tanker fleet to bring in its energy supplies, thereby reducing one source of its strategic and commercial vulnerability. China's capacity to provide the effective escorts, maritime patrol aircraft, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability and logistics supply chain needed for a sustained and comprehensive campaign of SLOCs defence in the Indian Ocean, however, seems remote.

Traditionalists in China, however, argue that the potential insecurity of its SLOCs remains a major strategic vulnerability which needs to be corrected in the long run, not least because the continued goodwill of the United States (or for that matter other countries such as Japan or India) should not be assumed. As China's National Defence in 2004 made clear, "struggles for strategic points, strategic resources and strategic dominance [will] crop up from time to time". Because of this, the PLA should build forces capable of "winning both command of the sea and command of the air", evidently the first such explicit mention of the notion in the official documentation. Major-General Jiang Shiliang made the same point: "In modern times, efforts aimed at securing the absolute control of communications are turning with each passing day into an indispensable essential factor in ensuring the realisation of national interests", not least since economic development depended on "the command of communications on the sea". In 2009, PLAN Commander-in-Chief Wu Shengli, writing in the Communist Party journal *Qishi*, identified the need to maintain "the safety of oceanic transportation and the strategic passageway for energy". Semi-official and growing American interest in developing an alternate 'Offshore Control' anti-SLOC strategy (which may seem much less escalatory and technologically demanding than an attempt to take on China's A2/AD strategy through the Air–Sea Battle construct) will have been noticed in Beijing.

Chinese naval discourse has acknowledged the obvious problems they would encounter in any bid to protect their SLOCs against serious opposition, namely problems in forward-logistics support, weak anti-submarine capacities and an absence

of organic airpower and ocean-going battlegroups. China is clearly now in no position to defend its foreign energy-supply and general trade routes but may feel the need to build such a capacity up for the longer term. This kind of thinking has led to China's alleged 'String of Pearls' concept for an extension of their areas of concern around Southeast Asia and across the Indian Ocean to the Gulf and East Africa. Zhang Wenmy (2005) of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations said that "China has to turn to the international resource supply system, and will seek military force to safeguard its share when necessary." He added: "There has never been a case in history where such a pursuit was realised in peace."

The consequent aspiration to defend these interests illustrates a strong and markedly traditional aspect of Chinese maritime thinking, although with its Confucian notions of the 'Harmonious Ocean' there is also a growing emphasis in Chinese discourse on cooperative concepts of sea control. China's doctrinal approach to sea control is noticeably specific in terms of both area and putative adversaries. China's sea-control thinking also reinforces the notion that for all its current focus on the defence of its interests in the near seas, the country nonetheless harbours eventual blue-water aspirations as well. Port development strategy, therefore, is a vital part of China's grand strategy. This chapter focusses on China's port development strategy. First, it discusses the revival of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), a vital part of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It then, analyses select China's port development projects in Southern Asia.

New Maritime Silk Road

China is keen on reshaping its global position by building an economic system centred around itself and the Chinese leadership is taking bold and creative steps to achieve this objective. The proposal of "reviving the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) demonstrates this innovative approach. Indeed, the success of the MSR initiative will be of greater importance to regional stability and global peace. The oceans are critical for both peacetime and wartime activities, from trade to national conflict" (Chaturvedy 2017). Also, "the maritime strategies of the Asian powers are designed primarily to defend their homelands and associated vital national security interests on the oceans and seas" (Cole 2013: 1). It is not surprising then that the proposal of revising the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) has attracted attention of policymakers and

academics. However, there is need to analyse whether the proposal is a result of common maritime interests or it is an instrument of Chinese strategic access.

Origin and Development of the Maritime Silk Road

The origin of the earliest silk routes could be traced in the intricate relationships between "urban-agricultural China and pastoral people from the Eurasian steppe" (Chaturvedy 2017). Liu and Shaffer (2007) have discussed the emergence of the Silk Road of the Sea. "Around the middle of the first century CE, there were two separate but simultaneous expansions of communities known for their interest in trade. One movement involved the Yuezhi-Kushan nomads. Almost two centuries earlier they had moved from east to west, from the steppe on China's northwest frontier to a region that was northwest of the Indian subcontinent in present-day Afghanistan. Then, they crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains and expanded towards the southeast, extending their rule over a large part of the Indian subcontinent. The other expansion, which was solely commercial in nature, was carried out by maritime traders from the eastern end of the Mediterranean whose homelands had been conquered during the eastward expansion of the Roman Empire. In the middle of the first century CE they went eastward from Egypt to India by sea. The people involved in these two expansions met at the Arabian Seaports on the Indian subcontinent's western coast, in present day Pakistan and north-western India. Thus, the Yuezhi-Kushan pastoralists and the Mediterranean sailors together created a new, maritime branch of the silk roads" (Liu and Shaffer 2007: 44).

Since ancient times, China had been one of the leading maritime power . The decline of the Silk Road was a time of looking out new routes and traders from China as well as their partners began searching for alternative routes in sea. (Zheng 2012: 23). "The Roman Empire traded with Iran and India by sea, for the profit was tenfold, and the emperor wanted to send emissaries to China. Since Iran tried to monopolise the silk trade, it prevented the overland Silk Road from being opened to traffic, forcing China and Rome to open up sea traffic. Iran's continuous monopoly made Rome anxious to bypass the overland route and establish a direct sea route to China. In 166 CE, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius succeeded in dispatching an envoy to China via Vietnam with ivory, rhinoceros' horns, and hawksbill tortoises, initiating direct trade between the two sides" (Yang 2009: 55).

Figure 17: Silk Road of the Sea

Source: Jiao (2010: 425).

Recent archaeological research on the Martime Silk Road indicates that "ancient Asian ships carried people and goods quickly and safely" (Jiao 2010). "The MSR had reached its maximum extent, linking the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to China by the first century CE. Much of Eurasia witnessed remarkable prosperity and cultural progress at this time. Asia enjoyed a significant advantage in the balance of trade with the West" (Miksic 2013: 32-33). "The oldest surviving texts suggest that commercial practices had already become standardised along the MSR by the time of the Roman Empire" (Miksic 2013: 35).

As stated above, the Chinese had "begun to look for sea routes since ancient times to export silk, and, in turn, these routes helped China to have friendly contacts with the outside world. Early in the Western Zhou Dynasty, sea routes were established between China and Japan to the east and between China and Vietnam to the south" (Chaturvedy 2017). During the Han Dynasty, the maritime city of Guangzhou was a home of thousands of foreign travellers who came to China for trade and commercial ties, they docked their ships here and as a result the city of Guangzhou became a bustling mercantile center for "pearls, rhinoceros' horns, elephant tusks, and

hawksbill tortoises". During the Western Han Dynasty, "Chinese seagoing vessels sailed from the Leizhou Peninsula, the southernmost tip of mainland China via South China Sea with huge quantities of gold and silk to Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Myanmar and further to Kanchipuram in southern India, and brought back pearls, precious stones, and other specialities" of those countries (Chaturvedy 2017). The ships would then sail back from Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka were the main exchange centres (see Figure 17). This route was opened for general trade purposes but since huge quantities of silk were transported through it, it gained the name silk route. .

Chinese silk was very popular and a great attraction for the rest of the world. Rulers of Southeastern, Southern, and West Asian, and European countries sent envoys to establish good relations with China. They brought huge treasures as gift for Chinese ruler and in return were presented by the silk. This was actually a disguised form of trade and and Chinese silk became a symbol of peace and friendship. Silk was presented as a Royal Gift and thus the value of silk rose.. The historian Will Durant writes: "the Romans thought [silk] a vegetable product combed from trees and valued it at its weight in gold." Thus, the MSR gained far greater importance than merely a mercantile route and became a route of diplomatic and friendly relations.

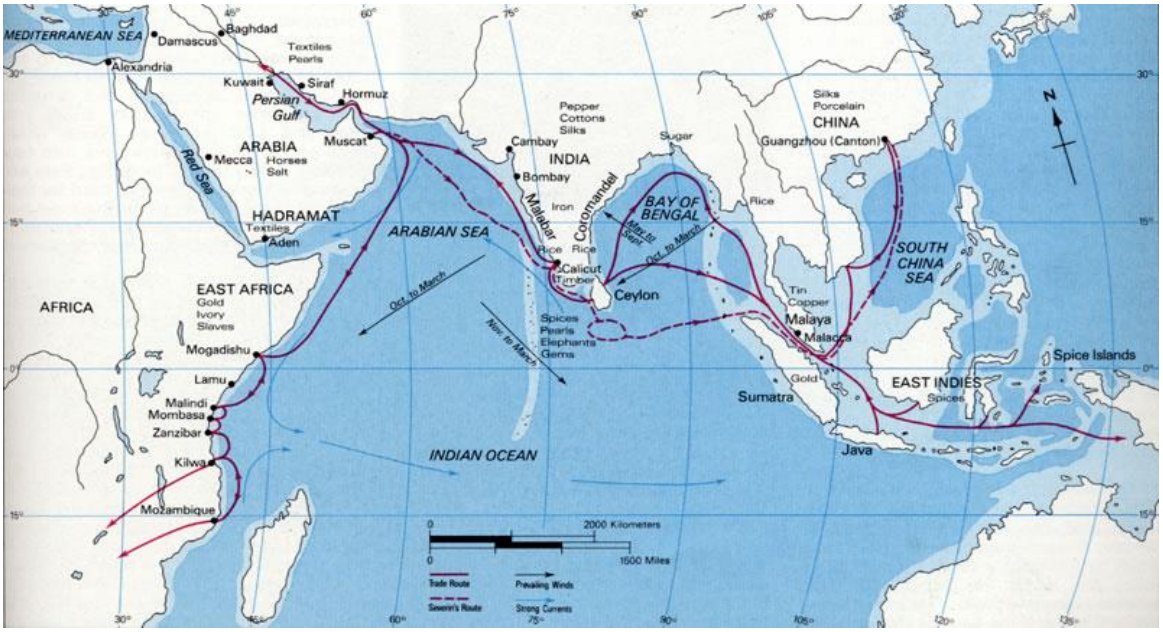
Figure 18: Ancient Silk and Spice Routes

Source: http://draconia.jp/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/SilkRoadMapOKS.jpg

Many other reasons also led to the development of the MSR. Travelling via the roads became difficult as it was attached by bandits and it was under the control of the foreigners. Chinese export commodities, such as silk, porcelain, China (plates, bowls, cups, vases) and tea, were mainly produced on the southeastern coast whereas the road passed through the west. The Silk Road passed through difficult terrain and travellers were subjected brutal weather conditions, and thus, the transport of heavy or fragile merchandise was expensive and inconvenient. Moreover, "in the middle of the Tang Dynasty, when Turkey seized Central Asia, and Tibet occupied Hexi, the overland Silk Road went into decline. Sea transport, on the other hand, looked very attractive" (Sun 1989).

China with a vast coastline of about 18,000 kilometers had excellent shipbuilding and navigational skills. The sea routes were closer to the export production centres, and ships could carry more products and were less expensive and safer than land routes. By this time, navigation was fairly advance, and Chinese navigators had better knowledge about weather patterns, world geography and also had some ability to predict monsoons. Indeed, people living in the coastal areas were "persistent in creativity and innovations while accruing valuable experiences, resulting in improved navigation capabilities in water" (Li 2006: 7). Thus, the Silk trade via sea flourished.

Figure 19: Season of Sailing and the MSR



Source: http://www.seaceramic.org.sg/events/agm07/trade_routes800pix.jpg

What is really remarkable about the Silk Road is the fact that, by and large, "it remained a peaceful means of inter-state commercial activity and inter-ethnic cultural exchange. The ancient Silk Road did not lead to wars and strife, much less colonialism and imperialism" (Wong 2014). The MSR was not just a trading route but also a course for cultural and religious interactions. The preaching of the Buddha also entered China via the silk road.

Reviving the Maritime Silk Road

The Chinese leadership has proposed for revival of the ancient Silk Routes into a 21st century Maritime Silk Road. Policymakers and scholars all around the world are attracted towards this proposal as they seek to find how this could be used as a means of diplomacy and help the Chinese leaders in their idea of China's global revival. . However, there is need to analyse whether the proposal is a result of common maritime interests or it is an instrument of Chinese strategic access. Since antient times it has been seen that maritime access has a vital role in strategic alliances and security ties. Thus, this proposal of reviving the MSR should be seen in this light.

Peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit were the element of the spirit of the ancient silk road and it contributed in the development and prosperity of the countries along this route. Recalling this spirit, the Chinese President Xi Jinping called for the joint development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. This clearly reflects grand strategy of China. China wants to work on both of these routes – overland and maritime – to create a strategic space for itself and transform Asia. How could such development help to achieve strategic objectives?

Initiatives such as the development of routes as is being persuaded by China could help to achieve strategic objectives, through a number of ways, including "supporting friends and trade partners, pressurising enemies, neutralising similar activities carried out by other naval powers, using a more diffuse influence in politically uncertain situation" in which even one's own objectives may be uncertain, or simply by showcasing one's naval power. Indeed, "maritime power has certain advantages as an instrument of diplomacy. First, naval forces are more resilient. Second, naval forces have greater visibility. Being seen on the high seas or in foreign ports a navy can act as a deterrent, provide reassurance, or earn prestige. Third, and more importantly, sea

allows naval ships to reach distant countries and makes a state possessed of sea power the neighbour of every other country that is accessible by sea" (Bull 1976: 1-9). Thus, the proposed initiative of the MSR has "a clear strategic purpose and is a helpful channel for Chinese grand strategy" (Chaturvedy 2017).

21st Century Maritime Silk Road

China is experiencing a "Deng Xiaoping Moment 2.0" (Chaturvedy 2014). China is keen on reshaping its global position by building an economic system centred around itself and the Chinese leadership is taking bold and creative steps to achieve this objective. The proposal of reviving the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) demonstrates this innovative approach. The proposed Silk Routes is depicted in Figure 20. According to this figure, the MSR will begin in Fuzhou province and will pass by Quanzhou, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang, and Haikou and then will head south to the Malacca Strait. From Kuala Lumpur it will go to Colombo in Sri Lanka to Kolkata in India, it will then cross the rest of the Indian Ocean to reach Nairobi. From Nairobi it will go north to Horn of Africa and will move through the Red Sea into the Mediterranean to reach Athens and will finally reach Venice, which is also a point of the land-based Silk Road.

Figure 20: 21st Century Silk Routes

Source: Xinhua at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-04/17/c_135286862.htm

Indeed, the success of the MSR initiative will be of great importance to regional stability and global peace. Today, with this initiative wants to recreate the history at sea. Indeed, "A 'Great Leap Outward' onto the world's ocean is visible in China's growing merchant marine; rise in the global shipbuilding market; increasing reach in building and managing off-shore ports and port facilities; and efforts to develop a modern 'blue-water' navy" (Dooley 2012: 55).

Aims and Objectives of Reviving the Maritime Silk Road

According to the China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, "the reason why China proposed the building of the Maritime Silk Road is to explore the unique values and ideals of the ancient Silk Road, namely mutually learning from each other, and to add new content of the current era, thus to achieve common development and common prosperity for all countries in the region."

> "China proposed to build the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century with the aim of realizing harmonious co-existence, mutual benefit and common development with relevant countries by carrying out practical cooperation in various fields, such as maritime connectivity, marine economy, technically-advanced environmental protection, disaster prevention and reduction as well as social and cultural exchanges in the spirit of peace, friendship, cooperation and development" (Chinese Foreign Ministry 2014).

In fact, since the Tang Dynasty, China made contacts with the rest of the world through the ancient maritime silk routes. These routes not only serve as channels of trade but were also major channels of communication.

The idea of the revival of the maritime silk road was outlined by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in his speech at the 16th ASEAN-China Summit in in Bandar Seri Begawan, capital of Brunei, and later by President Xi Jinping in the Indonesian Parliament in October 2013. The Chinese leaders "emphasized on the need of reviving the centuries-old sea route as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road while celebrating the 10th anniversary of the ASEAN-China strategic partnership. The main emphasis was placed on stronger economic cooperation, closer cooperation on joint infrastructure projects, the enhancement of security cooperation, and the strengthening of maritime economy, environment technical and scientific cooperation" (Chaturvedy 2017). The new leaders gave a "2+7" cooperation framework:

> "Briefly, 2+7 means consensus on two issues—strategic trust as part of the good neighbour principle, and economic cooperation based on mutual benefits—and seven proposals—signing the China–ASEAN good neighbour treaty; more effective use of the China–ASEAN FTA and intensive Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations (the FTA between ASEAN and China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand); acceleration of joint infrastructure projects; stronger regional financial and risk-prevention cooperation; closer maritime cooperation; enhanced collaboration on security; and, more intensive people-to-people contacts along with increased cultural, scientific and environmental protection cooperation" (Tatar 2013).

The framework has been successful for China as at the 21st China-ASEAN Summit Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said, "We upgraded the 2+7 cooperation framework to the 3+X framework, and achieved a leap in our ties from quantity to quality." Gilpin (1981: 187) argues that "as its relative power increases, a rising state attempts to change the rules governing the system." Certainly, China wants "to reshape the world order and change the existing international system in a way that reflects its values, interests and status". Chinese President Xi Jinping, speaking at a conference in November 2014 said, "We should strengthen unity and cooperation with other developing countries and closely integrate our own development with common development of other developing countries. We should advance multilateral diplomacy, work to reform the international system and global governance, and increase the representation and say of China and other developing countries" (Xinhua 2014). China launched the multilateral development institution the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to meet huge investment demands of the BRI infrastructure. AIIB is Beijing's brainchild to steer development along the proposed Silk Road. AIIB began its operations in January 2016. At that time the bank had 57 founding members, including India. Its membership has now expanded to 80 which makes it the world's third largest multilateral financial institution after the IMF and the World Bank. AIIB will enable China to reshape the global order and play a greater role in the global financial system. Thus, the MSR is not just any economic trade route but with the MSR initiative China wants to increase its political influence by creating a community with "common interests, dependencies and responsibilities".

In order to improve its overall geopolitical position China is taking decisive steps to secure natural resources and is extensively involved in construction of transport networks and is heavily investing in energy projects in its neighbourhood and beyond.

. "As in ancient times, the 21st Century MSR could play a great role in uniting nations and strengthening cooperation. According to me it can be a 'symbol of unity'. Further, this initiative could contribute to greater connectivity and complementarities for entire Asia. Cooperative mechanisms and innovative approach through this scheme could help to develop and improve supply chain, industrial chain, and value chain, and would, thus, strengthen regional cooperation."[37]

Through the "Belt" and "Road" China aims to "boost infrastructure development and structural innovation, to improve business environment of the region, to facilitate an orderly and unimpeded flow of production factors and their efficient distribution, to accelerate development of landlocked countries and the remote areas, to lower costs and barriers of trade and investment, and to drive greater reform and opening-up by regional countries" (Wei 2014). Through its 'new diplomacy' China aims to strengthen people-to-people exchanges; explore the potential of the "soft" aspect of exchanges and cooperation; promote friendship; and attain peace and development in Asia.

As discussed above, "the MSR will also be helpful in promoting certain strategic objectives like supporting friends and trade partners, neutralising similar activities by other naval powers, or simply by showcasing one's maritime power. Thus, the proposed MSR has clear strategic objectives, and India and many other countries are studying the implications of this bold policy statement carefully" (China 2017). Amidst the 'irresistible shift' of global power from the West to the East, China is worried about the US pivot towards the Asia-Pacific region. Also, the MSR could be an attempt to counter the "string of pearls" argument. China has 'acrimonious' relations with some Southern Asian countries due to their territorial disputes. This has complicated circumstances for China in having good relations with its neighbours. Through the idea of reviving the maritime silk road, China wants "to give a new lease of life to its peripheral policy and to reduce the tension with neighbours. Chinese leaders want to reassure" that they are committed for peaceful development, emphasising that "a stronger China will add to the force for world peace and the positive energy for friendship, and will present development opportunities to Asia and the world, rather than posing a threat" (Chaturvedy 2017).

[37] It is based on a discussion with a Chinese scholar at the China West Normal University.

In her study on the BRI, Nadège Rolland argues that "Beijing's primary goal is to accumulate political and economic leverage created by Chinese-funded projects" (Rolland 2017). Some scholars argue that "China-funded ports lack the infrastructure necessary to support a conventional war" (Yung, et al. 2014). However, the authors do not rule out that China is developing dual-use port facilities.

With the announcement of BRI China's outbound investment rose to new heights and it is now funding at least nine multinational economic corridors and maritime passages. President Xi Jinping announced the creation of the US$ 40 billion Silk Road Fund in November 2014 and it was official launched by China on 16 February 2015. Of the initial US$ 10 billion pay-in, 65 per cent is drawn directly from China's forex reserves. It started operations in a short period after its announcement this shows the urgency and priority to provide funds for BRI projects. Also, in late 2014, China began to prepare the launch a new multinational multi-billion development bank, namely, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) AIIB started began its operations in January 2016. The bank has a total capital of US$ 100 billion. 50 per cent of this is being provided by China and has considerably more voting shares than the next largest contributor. All told, "Beijing is anticipated to pay an estimated US$ 1 trillion towards the BRI projects" (*The Economist* 2015).

The BRI's Maritime Silk Road component is vital to understand China's infrastructure connectivity. China is developing ports in Gwadar in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaupkyu in Myanmar, Malacca in Malaysia, Mombasa in Kenya. . However, in Gwadar, Chittagong and Colombo port deals extended to include the construction of free trade zones and industrial parks. Further, "the ports projects fall along the "China-Indian Ocean-Africa-Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic Passage" or the "China-Oceania-South Pacific Blue Economic Passage," which are intended to link land-based economic corridors via international shipping lanes" (Vision of Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative 2017). According to BRI policy document the goal of the BRI is to have a "win-win" economic development and win-win cooperation and thus the characteristics of Chinese port developers and companies should be in agreement with the official goals. However, this does not seems to the case.

Official BRI policy documents are available at the BRI portal. The first such document, "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," issued in 2015, states that "the Initiative will focus on... jointly building smooth, secure, and efficient transport routes connecting major seaports along the Belt and Road." According to the Belt and Road Portal, it further "advances the establishment of a port network through friendship and sister port agreements." The 2017 "Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative" builds on this idea by proposing "blue partnerships in maritime resource exploitation, marine industries, ecological protection, and maritime security, while also establishing the three blue economic passages" listed above.

The objective of the BRI (or the MSR) as stated by the officials is greater economic development through policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, energy connectivity, unobstructed trade, trade and investment cooperation, financial integration and people-to-people contacts. There is no mention of strategic goals of China in official policy documents, though Chinese analysts are aware of "the security challenges of having projects in areas of conflict, turbulence and crisis". President Xi Jinping, stated, at the Opening Ceremony of The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation on 14 May 2017, "Some regions along the ancient Silk Road used to be a land of milk and honey. Yet today, these places are often associated with conflict, turbulence, crisis and challenge". The Chinese government rejects concerns. While delivering a speech at the Indonesian Parliament on 3 October 2013, President himself said, "We will not resort to outdated geopolitical maneuvering. What we hope to achieve is a new model of win-win cooperation". He added, "We should foster a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation; and we should forge partnerships of dialogue with no confrontation and of friendship rather than alliance… Work for win-win cooperation.... 'The interests to be considered should be the interests of all'".

Even if China does not want to create a strategic place for itself through its most ambitious BRI initiative , China's white paper on "Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation" (2017) acknowledges that "security and development are closely linked and mutually complementary," in that one facilitates the other. Further, "increasing numbers of overseas Chinese companies and citizens, as well as growing amounts of

overseas capital, necessitate that China be able to provide security". China's 2015 military strategy white paper notes that "the security of overseas interests... [including] institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue" (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2015).

In 2016, Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi further said, that "how to protect China's ever-expanding overseas interests is an urgent concern for Chinese diplomacy" (Xinhua 2016). This increasing demands of security in infrastructural projects was felt since China took control of Gwadar Port in 2013. The Gwadar Port is highly guarded by Military. As reported by Bloomberg, "Beijing has become increasingly vocal over the risks in Pakistan." In December 2017, China's embassy in Islamabad warned Pakistan about terror attacks on its projects and people. In February 2018, a Chinese manager at Cosco Shipping Lines Co., was gunned down in an upmarket area of Karachi. Following this murder China called on Islamabad to provide more security. Thus, Beijing's involvement "has increased in Pakistan's internal security" environment.

China is vying for a strong and a great maritime power. The then president Hu Jintao's report to the Chinese Communist Party's 18th Party Congress notes, "[we] should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a strong maritime power" (Xinhua 2012). It is clear from Hu's statement that, "extraction of economically important marine resources, especially fish and energy, development of the marine economy (shipping and shipbuilding), protection of the marine ecological environment, and safeguarding of China's rights and interests with regard to its territorial claims and security of SLOCs" are main pillars of its maritime concept. Hu's report also called for having a military (the PLA) that would be "commensurate with China's international standing". Beijing is already on a path to achieve these goals. China is already a world leader in shipbuilding, and it has the world's largest fishing industry and has the largest fishing in the world. China has invested in two-thirds of the top 50 container ports. China also has the world's largest number of coast guard vessels. Chinese defense white paper (2015), *China's Military Strategy*, states that "the PLA Navy (PLAN) will gradually shift its focus from "offshore waters defense" to the

combination of “offshore waters defense” with “open seas protection,” and build a blue water navy. The PLAN will “enhance its capabilities for strategic deterrence and counterattack, maritime maneuvers, joint operations at sea, comprehensive defense and comprehensive support.” To achieve its objective PLAN’s presence in the region is increasing. In 2017, the China’s navy held three live-fire drills in the waters of the western Indian Ocean. Further, the PLAN’s hospital ship Peace Ark was received in Sri Lanka for the first time. Continuing this new trend, presence of PLAN warships have increased in the Indian Ocean and its anti-piracy patrols have also increased in the Indian Ocean (McDevitt 2016).

The following sections examine some Chinese port development projects to understand China’s maritime strategic access. The Gwadar port project has been discussed in detail to examine China’s maritime strategic access and strategy along with some other projects.

The Gwadar Port

Gwadar situated at a strategic geographical point has been a neglected province of Balochistan. The word ‘Gwadar’ means the ‘Gate of Wind’. Located at the entrance of the Persian Gulf, Gwadar has 600 km long coastline. Its shining blue water and marble white sand makes it one of the most beautiful ports of the world. Gwadar has become a new commercial hub. Gwadar deep seaport enjoys a unique strategic significance. “The Government of Pakistan’s vision is for Gwadar to be a link between the East and West that will change the national economy as well as the fate of this region” (President of Pakistan’s Address on 22 March 2002).

Gwadar is strategically located. The deep-sea port is just 460 km from Karachi and 72 km from the Iranian border. More importantly Gwadar is in close proximity of the Persian Gulf. It is located close to the mouth of this strategic water body, and about 400 km from the Straits of Hormuz, world's single most important oil passageway .

Figure 21: Location of the Gwadar Port

Source: Microsoft Encarta (2006).

Historical Perspective of the Gwadar Port

Gwadar is surrounded by Dasht and Kolanch valleys and has a rich historical background. Great Iranian King Kaus, Afrasiab of Turan, Khusro and Lahrasip, Gwadar ruled Gwadar. It was then ruled by Alexander the Great when he, incidentally found the sea in this region while returning to Macedonia from India. He then lost it to Chandragupta Maurya in 303 B.C. Gwadar was always a part of Mekran. About a century ago the then ruler of Mekran allotted one of the Arab Sheikhs to take refuge in the town because he was a holy man Syed. Syeds are held in great esteem by Muslims. Gwadar was invaded by the Portuguese invaders in 16th century. A well-known Portuguese writer gives a detailed account of this is in his book *The History of Portuguese Days.* Local Kalmat tribe as Mir Hamal fought bravely with invaders and defeated them. However, he was later captured and taken into custody. Mir Naseer Khan Noori, the Khan (head of the state) of Kalat included Gwadar in his realm in 1777. In 1783, Mir Naseer granted suzerainty of Gwadar to Taimur Sultan, the defeated ruler of Muscat. Taimur Sultan recaptured Muscat and continued to rule Gwadar after the death of Mir Naseer Khan. After Independence, "the Gwadar

question was raised again by Haji Muhammad Iqbal Baloch and Khan Liaqat Ali Khan, the first prime minister of Pakistan. Haji Muhammad Iqbal Baloch advised the government of Pakistan that due to geo-strategic and economic importance Gwadar must become a part of Pakistan". As a result of a range of bold efforts, Gwadar was repurchased from the Sultan of Oman on 8 September 1957.

Since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the overlooked province of Balochistan was recognised by Western policymakers. The US officials point to "Balochistan as the most plausible example of a future Soviet target. Zbigniew Brzezinski has specifically underlined its applicability to Balochistan as a part of a broader U.S. commitment to Pakistan" (Harrison 1981: 152).

"A glance at the map of Southwest Asia quickly explains why strategically located Balochistan easily became a focal point of superpower conflict. Stretching across a vast desert expanse of western Pakistan and eastern Iran bigger than France, the Baluch homeland commands more than 900 miles of the Arabian Sea coastline, including the northern shores of the Straits of Hormuz" (Harrison 1981). Controlling of the Baluch coast will provide a new powerful springboard for increasing the political influence throughout the Middle East and Southwest Asia and will also change the military equilibrium in the region.

Gwadar was identified as a deep-port site in 1964. As explained above, Gwadar is strategically located which made it a suitable candidate when thoughts for developing new port started. It has the capability to handle mother ships and harbor large oil tanks. Keeping this aspect in view and after analysing the economic benefits that Gwadar port can offer, Pakistan included the development of Gwadar port in its 8th Five Year plan.

During the 1971 war the Karachi port complex came under Indian Missile attack and thus a need for an alternate port was felt. However, "it was apparently the Kargil crisis of 1999 that prompted Pakistan's leaders to forge ahead with it" (Garver 2002: 17). Pakistan requested the United States to finance a seaport along the Makran Coast in 1973, however, this request was declined. Pakistan could not work on this idea for over 25 years because it lacked funds. Then Pakistan's "all-weather friend" China made advancement for not just financing port but building it. China built the port at Gwadar for its strategic importance in its ambitious project – BRI and Gwadar is at

the heart of this initiative since it is located in the Indian Ocean which gives it geographical advantages. Pakistan now has three major seaports, namely, the Karachi Port, the Muhammad Bin Qasim port, and hte Gwadar port. Muhammad Bin Qasim is the oldest port while the Karachi port is the busiest one. The newly developed deep seaport of Gwadar is one of the deepest ports of the world and have a depth-capacity to handle as high as 16-meter deep cargo ship. Several other ports are under consideration (Pakistan Cargo4u 2017).

Interpreting China's Grand Strategy

Gwadar has a strategic position in the Indian Ocean. It is located at the crossroads of the Middle East and Central Asia. Since, the world's energy needs are increasing and there is tension in the Persian Gulf that is the main supplier of the oil resources, there arose the need to find alternative sources of energy. Central Asia became an answer for this. It attracted attention towards itself because its substantial natural resources and strategic location. In 1992, the Nawaz Sharif Government decided to develop deep-sea port at Gwadar to reduce the dependence on Karachi port and to cater to the external trade of the Central Asian Republics and Xinjiang Province of China. The project took-off in 1992 but was held up due to political instability in the region because of the Baluchi issues. The project was first given to a Chinese company but was cancelled by the Nawaz Sharif Government in 1995 and awarded it to the US-based Forbes and Company. However, the project remained a non-starter due to post-Chagai economic sanctions (Raman 2005).

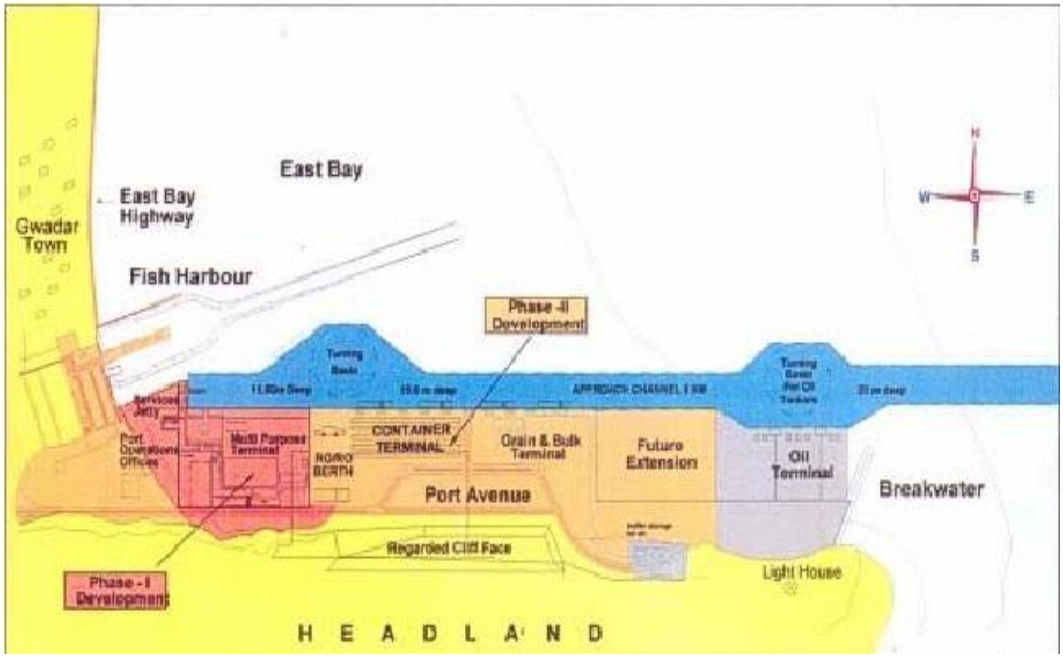
Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visit to Pakistan in May 2001 lead to firm commitment by Beijing to develop the Gwadar port. "Zhu assured Pakistan's leaders of China's full cooperation and all possible assistance for the project" (Garver 2002b: 18). "Intense Sino-Pakistan discussion over Gwadar during the summer of 2001 lead to three agreements signed in August when Pakistan's Minister of Communication and Railways, Javed Ashraf Qazi, and Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz visited China" (Garver 2002b).

The project was reopened with a total of US$ 198 million investment by China for Phase I of the project. Chinese Vice Premier Wu Bangguo laid the foundation of the port on 22 March 2002 and added a golden chapter in "all-weather Pakistan-China Friendship". The Port was developed in two phases (Figure 22). The first phase was

completed in just three years. Chinese Harbour Engineering Company worked on the first phase. Three berths, with a depth of 12.5 meters, and approach channels were constructed in the first phase. The port handles cargoes from West China, Europe and the American continents. In Phase-II nine additional berths, one bulk cargo terminal, two oil terminals, and one grain terminal will be built. The estimated cost for the phase II is around US$ 600 million. Apart from financing the project China provided technical assistance as well and sent about 450 engineers for the project. According to the Gwadar Port Authority's vision statement, "Gwadar deep seaport is the second great monument of Pakistan-China friendship after the Karakoram Highway linking Pakistan and China."

The government has established the Gwadar Development Authority that is committed to developing Gwadar town as one of the Modern cities of Pakistan. China financed a "highway-link from Gwadar to the Central Balochistan town of Khuzdar, on the Karachi-Bela-Khuzdar-Kalat-Quetta-Chaman Highway (RCD Highway) connecting Karachi and Quetta". The Makran Coastal Highway linking Gwadar with Iran via Karachi has shortened the trade route between the two countries (Figure 23).

Figure 22: Phase I & II of Gwadar Port



Source: Board of Investment, Government of Pakistan.

Similarly, Islamabad and Beijing "are considering the upgradation of the existing highway via Loralai and Dera Ghazi Khan". The two countries signed a Memorandum

of Understanding (MoU)for carrying out this work. China will build "a 90-km highway link connecting the Chinese side of the Karakoram Highway to the Russian built highway network that already connects all the five Central Asian Republics. This regional highway network (see Figure 23) directly links Gwadar to Xinjiang" and the landlocked Central Asian Republics (Chaturvedy 2006). "It's taken decades of work to build the road from China's Xinjiang to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, but it's finally partly operational. Chinese cargo began to be transported overland to Gwadar Port in late 2018. Eventually, seaports in Gwadar and Karachi will be linked with northern Pakistan, western China and Central Asia. Building the road had been difficult", said Liu Qitao, the chairman of China Communications Construction Group. "We've spent decades and 88 Chinese workers have died from natural disasters," he said (*The News* 2019).

Figure 23: Road Network from Gwadar

China has made a strategic move with the development of the Gwadar port. It should be also noted that it holds a long-term lease in the project. With this it is clear that China is making its influence in the region to create a security environment for itself. "China has marked the turn of the millennium with a significant decision to embark

on the development of strategic infrastructure in its Western regions, particularly Xinjiang and Tibet" (The Economist (London) 2000). Xinjiang and Tibet link China to countries in Eurasia, Central Asian Republics, South Asia and South East Asia. Strategic infrastructure development in Xinjiang by China improves her strategic capabilities in her western most region. This can improve her force-projection capabilities in the region.

Economic Imperatives of China's Grand Strategy

Trade and growth are inter-related. Trade significantly contributes in the income of a nation. Easy access to the seas have resulted in exponential growth in the trade. Pakistan also depends on sea routes for trade and commerce and these routes are of great importance for country's survival as an independent sovereign nation. "Gwadar is strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz, through which 40 per cent of the world's oil tankers passes. In addition, it could become a key shipping point. This will bring great economic returns for Pakistan. And once road and rail links are developed connecting it to the rest of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia, it can, along with the surrounding areas, become a new trading hub.. Since Pakistan carries out most of its trade (about 95 per cent) ports are of key importance for Pakistan. In the words of the then President Musharraf:

> "History is being made in the relationship between Pakistan and China. I think this banner right behind us, which reads Pakistan-China friendship journey from Karakoram to Gwadar depicts very truly the relationship that Pakistan and China enjoy which has led from Karakoram in the north of Pakistan as a symbol of this relationship and has reached all the way through Pakistan on the coastline at Gwadar. This is the journey of our friendship which, I am sure, will reach new heights. With passage of time, it will be maintained and it will grow from strength to strength... If we see whole region, it is like a funnel. The top of the funnel is this wide area of Central Asia and also China's western region. And this funnel gets narrowed on through Afghanistan and Pakistan and the end of this funnel is Gwadar port. So, this funnel, futuristically, is the economic funnel of this whole region" (President of Pakistan's Address at the Ground Breaking ceremony of Gwadar on 22 March 2002).

"Gwadar has been envisioned by Pakistan officials since the mid-1990s as the terminal point for a new pipeline to carry petroleum from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the sea" (Rashid 2001). The Pakistani government pointed out the economic benefits of the development of the Gwadar port as follows:

- "Capitalise on opportunities for trade with landlocked Central Asian States and Afghanistan.
- Promote trade and transport with the Gulf States.
- Trans-shipment essentially of containerised cargo.
- Unlock the development potential of the hinterland.
- Diversion of the influx of human resources from upcountry to Gwadar instead of Karachi.
- Socio-economic uplift of the province of Balochistan.
- Establishment of shipping related industries.
- Oil storage, refinery and petrochemicals.
- Export Processing and Industrial Zones.
- Reduce congestion and dependency on existing Ports Complex at Karachi.
- Serve as an alternate port to handle Pakistani trade in case of a blockade of existing ports.
- To develop a Regional Hub for major trade and commercial activities" (Board of Investment, Government of Pakistan 2005).

Thus, Gwadar port for exports originating from the western region could provide her preferred option. Tarique Niazi (2005a), a specialist in resource-based conflict, points out that "the Gwadar Port is intended to serve China's threefold economic objective:

- First, to integrate Pakistan into the Chinese economy by outsourcing low-tech, labour-absorbing, resource-intensive industrial production to Islamabad, which will transform Pakistan into a giant factory floor for China;

- Second, to seek access to Central Asian markets for energy imports and Chinese exports by developing road networks and rail links through Afghanistan and Pakistan into Central Asia;

- Third, to appease restive parts of western China, especially the Muslim-majority autonomous region of Xinjiang, through a massive infusion of development funds and increased economic links with the Central Asian Islamic nations of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan."

Haider (2005a: 97) writes that "the economic significance of the port is two-fold. First, the Gwadar Port will provide a stable and proximate point of access to the Gulf ports. Second, the Port will provide the landlocked Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan, and the Chinese Xinjiang region access to the Arabian Sea's warm water." The Port will serve as a point for transferring oil from Central Asia to the world market, in return Pakistan will gain from transit fees.

The Gwadar port is expected to bring prosperity and economic benefits in the country in general, and the in the backward province of Balochistan, in particular. Once the industries are established at Gwadar and in the surrounding areas huge trade will flow through the Gwadar port making it a new commercial hub. To meet these objectives the government of Pakistan has established Special Economic Zones with various exemptions for the investors..

Due to its strategic location, the Gwadar Port is expected to become "a regional hub for incoming and outgoing commercial traffic of the Middle Eastern and Gulf countries, the Xinjiang province of China, Iran in the west and Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in the south and east". Pakistani President Musharraf said, "We are interested in setting up a trade and energy corridor for China.". Here the President was referring to Gwadar Port (China Daily 2006). Under an agreement, Pakistan, China, Kazakhistan, and Uzbekistan have made commitments to develop extensive railroad links from Central Asia and the Chinese province of Sinkiang to the Arabian Sea coast. The completion of the network "will not only facilitate the movement of goods from China and Central Asian Republics to the countries of the Persian Gulf, West Asia, East Africa, the Indian Ocean and beyond through Gwadar, the countries of

these regions will also have an easy and short route for access to Central Asia for trade and economic cooperation" (Garver 2006: 20).

Strategic Imperatives: China's Grand Strategy

"Pakistan has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean region. On the west is Iran, which has traditionally been a close ally. On the east is India, which is seen as a potential adversary. In the north is China, which has been a close friend, and to the northwest is Afghanistan, which is likely to remain friendly towards Pakistan because of her geo-economic compulsions. On the other hand, Pakistan is also located strategically in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf and acquires a special significance as nearly 21 million barrels of oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz daily" (US Energy Information Administration 2019). About 90 per cent of Pakistan's trade is sea-borne. Thus, the commercial port at Gwadar is of great significance for Pakistan.

China and Pakistan have a long "history of collaboration in the military realm and international politics, stemming from a shared view of an adversarial India". Despite improving Sino-Indian relations, Sino-Pakistani development projects have continued with the Gwadar as well as a host of associated projects such as rail-road links, industrial complexes, etc. In addition to the economic benefits, the Gwadar project is strategically important in several ways. General Musharraf had said, "Pakistani security interests lie in maintaining a regional balance… and in this it would desire on an active Chinese role. This role will remain vital especially in the changing geo-strategic realities." G. Parthasarathy, a former High Commissioner of India to Pakistan, said that "the port is of strategic importance, not only because of it being more distant from India than existing naval facilities at Karachi but also because access to the facilities in Gwadar will provide the capabilities for control of access to the strategic Persian Gulf" (Parthasarathy 2001a).

In Islamabad on 15 May 2001, in response to a question posed by the editor of the Urdu daily Ausaf, Musharraf told that "the main objective of letting the Chinese develop Gwadar port was that as and when needed the Chinese navy would be in Gwadar to give a befitting reply to anyone". Pakistan was interested in the project to seek strategic depth further to the southwest from its major naval base in Karachi that

has long been vulnerable to the Indian Navy. The Government of Pakistan has designated the Port area as a "sensitive defence zone".

The Gwadar Port meets the maritime defence objectives of both the. Pakistan's Navy Chief has described "the Gwadar Port as the country's third naval base after Karachi and Ormara. He sees it as an improvement in Pakistan's deep-sea water defence" (Pakistan Defence News 2005). The Gwadar Port will provide Pakistan with crucial strategic depth along its coastline. "Of course, the real reason for the port may be Pakistan's Navy's desire to prevent giving the Indian Navy an encore performance of the 1971 war with India, in which it found itself blockaded in the port of Karachi" (Faruqui 2006).

Garver (2006: 20-21) has discussed the strategic importance of the Gwadar project in detail. He writes, "the Gwadar complex would substantially diminish India's ability to blockade Pakistan in wartime. It would also substantially increase the capability of China to supply Pakistan by sea and by land in wartime. New highways, railways, pipelines, cargo terminals and freight handling facilities of all sorts would have the capacity to expedite the movement of the military as well as civilian cargoes. Its existence would also diminish India's ability to isolate Pakistan from outside support in the event of a future India-Pakistan conflict. The Gwadar project fits with longstanding Pakistani ambitions of establishing Pakistan as the main corridor for trade and transport between the newly independent Central Asian republics and the outside world." Gwadar had long been envisaged as the coastal terminus for those new pipelines. Garver sees Chinese support in sustaining and strengthening Pakistan as maintaining the balance of power in South Asia. Gwadar port is important for China from both economic and security point of view.

Haider (2005a: 98) points out that "the Chinese presence at Gwadar allows China to ensure the security of its energy-related shipments along existing routes. It could also monitor U.S. naval activity in the Persian Gulf, Indian activity in the Arabian Sea, and future U.S.–India maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean." South Asia, West Asia, Africa and even Europe are closer for China through the Indian Ocean than the West coast across the Pacific (Anwar 1999: 33). Though, at present, China is not in a position to intrude in the Indian Ocean, yet yet it can assert influence in the region as its maritime power is rising. "The Chinese are well aware of the geo-strategic realities

and have been engaged in diplomatic, economic and military activities to build a maritime infrastructure to safeguard their maritime interests" (Kohli 1978: 123). China's eagerness to expand infrastructure in the Indian Ocean is significant as it is probably the start of long-term Chinese objectives in the region. As Brahma Chellaney writes:

> Beijing is reinforcing the strategic significance of the naval base-cum-port it is completing at Gwadar, Pakistan, by linking it up with the Karakoram Highway to western China through the Chinese-aided Gwadar-Dalbandin railway, which extends up to Rawalpindi. In addition, the Chinese-supported Makran costal highway is to link Gwadar with Karachi. Gwadar, already home to a Chinese electronic-listening post, is a critical link in the emerging chain of Chinese forward-operating facilities that stretch from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal and then to the Gulf of Siam. Protracted by cliffs from three sides, Gwadar will not only arm Pakistan with critical strategic depth against a 1971 – style Indian attempt to bottle up its navy but it will also open the way to the arrival of Chinese submarines in India's backyard… A Karakoram Highway-Gwadar link-up is bound to create a strategic-multiplier effect (Chellaney 2006).

Concerns of Regional and Extra Regional Powers

Major powers are increasing their engagements in a changing geopolitical environment. "A high-stake geopolitical game is sweeping Asia. Triggered by a roaring economy, propelled by swelling confidence and funded by cheque book diplomacy, Beijing is projecting its new might across the continent and setting off alarm bells from Washington to Tokyo" (Walsh 2005).

Two main regional players, Iran and India, have cautiously watched the development of the Gwadar Port. Iran has economic in the Indian Ocean as is concerned that Pakistan's new port will affect its trade. As a result, to compete with Pakistan and save its own interests Iran decided to develop Chabahar Port. "For India, China-Pakistan collaboration at Gwadar and Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea heightens its feeling of encirclement by China from all sides" (Ramchandran 2005). One cannot ignore developments like the announcement of General Pervez Musharraf about China being provided facilities by Pakistan to base its navy at the Gwadar port. However, the Port's importance lies in "its ability to connect vital Central Asian and Middle Eastern energy sources to world markets, to facilitate trade, and to project naval power in the Indian Ocean" (Haider 2004). The substantial economic and military potential of the port "has propelled regional players to manoeuvre around

each other by establishing trade links and engaging in development projects with other states, upgrading their own internal infrastructure, and expanding their naval capabilities" (Haider 2004).

The strategic competition "surrounding the Gwadar Port and the transit routes need not be viewed solely through a confrontational lens. The inter-port rivalry may, in fact, prove to be beneficial by stimulating even greater trade in the region. The competition and cooperation over the Gwadar Port thus demonstrate the increasingly important and fluid linkage between countries in the Middle East and Central, South, and East Asia as economic ties are created and new security relationships are formulated" (Chaturvedy 2006). The Gwadar Port offers Pakistan an invaluable opportunity to strengthen its position in the region.

Port Development in Sri Lanka

Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka was developed by China. This port too has strategical location for China. In addition to this port, China has made many unprofitable infrastructure investments in Sri Lanka which clearly reflects that China is in the process of creating "strategic support states". Through these investments China established substantial financial leverage over Sri Lanka and is using this to repeatedly extract benefits for itself, including transfers of equity, PLAN visits, and land acquisitions. Sri Lanka was not even able to set new policy as China held its influence on China even during the elections.

Unequal Terms

It was promised that the Hambantota Port (it was earlier called Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port) would become a world-class hub and will help in significantly transforming Sri Lanka's economy. However, the port's performance is contrary to the promise and it remained slow for nearly a decade. In 2010, "the government of Sri Lanka began offering concessions to vessels transporting vehicles in order to route them through Hambantota instead of Colombo and thus boost traffic" (Dias 2011). "Yet by 2017, Hambantota had allegedly lost US$ 300 million" (Fuhrman 2017). In the same year, the president of the Vehicle Importers' Association of Sri Lanka announced that "vehicle imports might switch from Hambantota back to Colombo, citing reduced transport costs" (Jabir 2017). The port is controlled by China's state-

owned China Merchants Port Holdings Co., Ltd. (CM Ports) under a Supply-Operate-Transfer (SOT) model and thus the majority of profits went to China. Sri Lanka was caught in Beijing's loan-debt and had to let a China's state-run company purchase a 99-year lease of the port in exchange for writing off US$ 1.2 billion of Sri Lanka's total US$ 1.5 billion debt incurred from Chinese loans. This gave China even more control over the port and this is a cause of worry for India. "Still, 95 per cent of Sri Lanka's net government revenue goes to service foreign debt" (South China Morning Post 2016). "While Chinese-owned debt comprises only one-eighth of total public debt, one-third of Sri Lanka's debt service payments go to China" (Moramudali 2017, Chowdhury 2016).

CMP's lease agreement also included 15,000 hectares of land to develop a free trade zone near Hambantota. This zone will be developed on China's "Port-Parks-Cities" model. This zone was opposed by the locals and all gathered against the land -grab. China is also building a new port city in Colombo on a 665-acre land reclaimed from the sea and has long-term lease in this as well. It is being funded by China Communication Construction Company. Critics are of view that the controlling of country's two largest ports by a Chinese state-owned enterprise undermines Sri Lanka's sovereignty and threatens its national security. To address the concerns raised Sri Lanka has limited China's commercial operations at the port. A joint ventures between Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SPLA) and a third-party, private Chinese company have been created for port management and security in order to protect sovereignty of Sri Lanka. Several foreign missions had sought clarification from Sri Lanka about whether the PALN would be using Hambantota port as it increases its presence in the Indian Ocean. Responding to these concerns, Ports Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said, "We told China that we can't allow the port for military use and that 100 percent responsibility of security matters should be with the Sri Lankan government." According to the latest agreement, "Sri Lankan Ports Authority would have the right to inspect ships entering Hambantota" (Reuters 2017).

Interpreting Objectives and Motivations of China

China has time and again rejected allegations that driving force of the BRI is its own strategic security . Chinese politicians, including PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi had said that "China's Belt and Road initiatives not a tool of geopolitics, and must not be

viewed with the outdated Cold War mentality" (China Daily 2015). However, some unofficial PRC state- and CCP-affiliated publications have found in their research that according to some Chinese analysts the development of BRI and China's security interests are closely inter-linked. In fact, Chinese analysts—in both diplomatic and military publications—explicitly discuss using international assistance and the BRI as a pretext for pursuing China's grand strategy. A report by C4ADS, a non-profit US-based research institute, examined official Chinese policy documents and unofficial reports by Chinese analysts to analyse the intentions of Beijing's ambitious economic development programme. It said, "Rather, the investments appear to generate political influence, stealthily expand China's military presence and create an advantageous strategic environment in the region" (Throne and Spevack 2017).

Investments for Generating Political Influence

Chinese research mainly focusses on the benefits of the BRI benefits, such as sustainable infrastructure development. There are few analysis that discusses both strategic and economic aspects of the mammoth initiative and those put China's national security interests above the win-win economic development. China's nation security issues mainly concerns energy security and access to critically important SLOCs China's increasing maritime investments in the Indo-Pacific, and other activities, such as anti-piracy missions are often seen as expanding China's influence in the region. According to many Chinese analysts, China is using cooperation and infrastructure development as soft and coercive power in order to pursue its "core interests."

An article in the journal *China International Studies*, a publication by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "China must build itself into a strong maritime power by deploying military, diplomatic, and economic approaches." The author writes that that "Beijing's goals would be to establish a strategic advantage in East Asia's near seas and to maintain an effective military presence in the Western Pacific and the northern portion of the Indian Ocean" (Hu 2017: 85-102). Another article "Maritime Strategic Access" authored by a PLAN Commodore, highlights that China is leveraging on "military operations other than war", including international maritime security cooperation, and this in turn would increase the trust between China's militaries and militaries of the relevant countries and in turn will help China to build a naval

presence around critical SLOCs without drawing excessive attention from the international community (Liang 2011: 314-333). According to Sun (2017) China has "indisputable economic and security interests in the IO [Indian Ocean]".

International Strategic Analysis 2006/2007, a book from National Defense University of China further notes that "China has successfully used investment as a tool for enhancing its energy security." The authors argue that "Chinese investments have reinforced cooperative relationships with oil-exporting countries" and explains importance of the planned (or completed) pipelines to carry oil from the Indian Ocean through Myanmar and into China by land, thereby avoiding China's "Malacca Dilemma" (International Strategic Analysis 2006/2007: 277-281). The 2015 "Seminar Summary of the 'China Periphery Diplomacy of the Xi Jinping Era: New Ideas, New Concepts, New Measures,'" says that China should "be decided [and] unyielding, seize opportunities [and] adjust pressure, take the initiative [and] expand westward". To achieve this and defend China's "core interests," China must promote "strategic support states" by building regional cooperation and investing in regional infrastructure for the sake of "making relevant countries believe China's benevolence" (Zhao 2015: 135-137). According to Xu and others "China has the ability and resources to guide the actions of the country so that they fit into [China's] strategic needs" (Xu, et al. 2014: 14-23). Sri Lanka's serves as an example to show how project finance can generate political influence and benefit China's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific area.

Chinese analysts do not openly discuss the coercive capacity of China's finance, infrastructure loans can lead the recipient country into a debt trap that severely limits policy options. Sri Lanka is an example in this case. As US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said China "encourages dependency using opaque contracts, predatory loan practices, and corrupt deals that mire nations in debt and undercut their sovereignty, denying them their long-term, self-sustaining growth, Chinese investment does have the potential to address infrastructure gap, but its approach has led to mounting debt and few, if any, jobs in most countries" (Dorsey 2018). . "Should a project fail to generate revenue, the government must fulfil the debt obligations of the guarantee; failure to repay this foreign-held public debt has led to sovereign defaults in the past" (Dash 2016). "Sovereign guarantees are relatively commonplace in infrastructure

development. However, when applied to large-scale projects in recipient countries with high pre-existing foreign-held debt-to-GDP ratios, these guarantees can sabotage a country's economic development and endow its creditor with outsized leverage" (Throne and Spevack 2017).

US annual report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019 also expressed concerns overs China's strategic moves for increasing its international influence. It said that "China increasingly seeks to leverage its growing economic, diplomatic, and military clout to establish regional pre-eminence and expand its international influence."

Ports as Platforms for Expanding Military Presence

China's latest White Paper on National Defence indicates that China plans to establish more foreign military bases to protect its overseas investments and also cope with emerging challenges in the international political system. It noted, "As the world economic and strategic center continues to shift towards the Asia-Pacific, the region has become a focus of major country competition, bringing uncertainties to regional security". It further mentioned, "Regional hotspots and disputes are yet to be resolved. Despite positive progress, the Korean Peninsula still faces uncertainty. South Asia is generally stable while conflicts between India and Pakistan flare up from time to time. Political reconciliation and reconstruction in Afghanistan is making progress in the face of difficulties. Problems still exist among regional countries, including disputes over territorial and maritime rights and interests, as well as discord for ethnic and religious reasons. Security hotspots rise from time to time in the region". Thus, China's increasing investment is ports is seen by analysts, as discreetly "enabling China to enhance its military presence" which is seen as critical for "avoiding containment at the hands of foreign powers and defending China's access to key SLOCs". Such infrastructure facilities have dual-use capabilities and could be helpful in creating favourable strategic environment for Beijing.

PLAN Admiral Sun Jianguo said in 2016 that "opening the Djibouti [military base]... will better support China's military as it carries out escort missions, humanitarian missions, and other such tasks. It also has important implications for China more effectively fulfilling its international duties" (Sun 2016). One official underlines that

"these activities also provide China with a pretence for establishing a naval presence around critical SLOCs without incurring the international community's scrutiny" (Liang 2011: 317). Further, such facilities also serves the purpose "of protecting China's national interests and preserving strategic transportation channels" (Yang 2012).

Thus, China seems to take incremental approach to use the ports first for civilian purposes and later for military. This suggests that, commercial ports would be built and later developed into "strategic support points" that can "assist China in defending maritime channel security and grasp[ing] key waterways" (Zhang 2015: 103).

Conclusion

China's maritime strategic access is an important element of its active foreign policy that is driving its politics of routes around the world. Ports and related infrastructure facilities, as discussed above, are inherently dual in nature and are capable of advancing both economic and strategic interests. China appears to pursue a strategy that uses economic leavers to generate political influence, quietly increase China's military presence, and create an profitable strategic environment.

CHAPTER 6

INDIA'S RESPONSE TO CHINESE STRATEGIC ACCESS

The emerging politics of routes has generated immense interest among academics and policymakers. As discussed in earlier chapters, strategic access is an important element of China's foreign policy agenda in Southern Asia. The Belt and Road Initiative has become a signature initiative of the current Chinese President Xi Jinping. Interestingly, India was the only major country which didn't participate in BRI projects and international forum. Moreover, India also outlined its principled position regarding BRI. Further, there has been widespread acknowledgement in both India and China that their relationship is becoming increasingly intricate, competitive in several aspects and contentious. Apart from the unresolved border problem, there is ample evidence of competitive elements for getting strategic access to Southern Asia. In fact, there is a factor of unease in India-China bilateral relationship, though they try to make efforts to come to terms with each other's rise. Despite the official statements regarding the amiable relations between the two, the distrust between the two is on a rise, even alarming. Further, even the increasing economic cooperation and bilateral political and socio-cultural exchanges have not been able to do much to moderate concerns of each country about the intentions of the other (Pant 2016: 35).

While Chinese strategic access presents enormous opportunities to improve infrastructure and connectivity, it also brings a range of challenges and risks to India's national interests and security. The bilateral relationship between these two countries is also full of contradictions. Elements of cooperation and competition are existing simultaneously. It is not surprising, therefore, that relationship is being described as "co-petition" (a combination of cooperation and competition). Mixed signals from China adds fuel to anxieties in some quarters of India as to how to deal with China. There is an enduring trust deficit between these two neighbours. At the same time, the 1962 border war has not succeeded in eradicating the deep cross-border relations that prevail in the India-China borderlands, making regional integration a logical, not just a political or economic necessity (Ling 2016). So, how do Indians perceive Chinese strategic access? How do people in the India-China border region see these developments? What are India's responses to Chinese strategic access? This chapter

addresses these questions and examines India's response to Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia. First, it deliberates upon Indian perception of Chinese strategic access, followed by an analysis of India's policy response to these developments.

India's Perceptions of Chinese Strategic Access

India and China are world's most populous countries, geographical neighbours and major powers in Asia. Both are witnessing high economic growth rates and through the means of economic growth as well as through the use of soft and hard power options both countries are trying to have regional and global influence. China with US$ 11.4 trillion economy is second only to the U.S. While China's economy is five times larger than India's US$ 2.3 trillion economy, annual growth rate of India is increasing faster than China's and it makes India the fastest-growing major economy of the world since 2014–2015. India's growth rate in 2016–2017 was round 7.2 per cent while that of China was 6.6 per cent. In order to continue on the path of economic growth and development both India and China want stability and security in their neighbourhood. However, relationship between India and China are uneasy (Chaudhury 2017).

China–India relationship clearly shows many features of a security dilemma (Garver 2002b). Yet, both the countries have have made strategic compromises to ease tensions when necessary, for example, India has acknowledged sovereignty of China over Tibet and China has agreed that Sikkim is part of India . They have also shown capacity to cooperate in some areas. Both countries regularly hold dialogues, such as a China–India Defence Dialogue and a Strategic and Economic Dialogue.

"Although on the global stage there are points of friction related to India's membership in global security mechanisms, such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group, new international groupings such as the so-called BRICS and the BASIC blocs comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa offer forums in which the two countries often adopt common positions" (Freeman 2018). In September 2014, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the mantra of 'INCH (India and China) towards MILES (Millennium of Exceptional Synergy)' explaining the potential of India-China relations. He said, "every inch we cover can rewrite history of humanity and every mile we cross will go a long way in making this planet a better

place. He hoped that together India and China cover several miles. Several miles that take not only the two nations forward but also all of Asia and humankind towards the path of progress and harmony" (Press Information Bureau 2014). Chinese President Xi Jinping also reinforced the same spirit. During his India trip in May 2015, he said, "If China and India speak in one voice, the world will listen and if China and India join hands in cooperation, the whole world will watch" (China Embassy 2014). While India-China trade keeps growing day by day, the bilateral relations also witnessed the height of border tensions at Doklam engendering peace and stability in the region. Moreover, an informal summit between the top leadership of both the countries eased tensions and provided strategic guidelines for improving bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries. It is not surprising, therefore, that Indians have different perceptions regarding the Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia. At least, there are three broad perspectives on this subject: some view Chinese strategic access as an opportunity for India. Some see these developments as potential threats to India's national interests. And some others perceive Chinese strategic access as a double edge sword, and depending on unfolding policies and emerging geopolitical dynamics, these developments could be opportunities or challenges.

Let's first analyse, the Indian government's approach to this important matter. For example, to review the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and to get content of participating countries, political leaders, China organised a two-day Belt and Road Forum (BRF) for International Cooperation in Beijing in May 2017. Chinese President Xi Jinping termed the Forum as a "gathering of great minds". Views were exchanged in the forum to pursue international cooperation for BRI, a project of the century. Major points discussed in the forum included measures for going forward, facilitate development strategies of countries, deepen partnerships to work across various sectors like industrial development and infrastructure development. Representatives from over 100 countries participated in the forum. India was the only major country which did not take part in this important forum. Moreover, the Indian government issued a statement and clarified India's position meticulously. Responding to a question on why India did not participate in OBOR/BRI Forum, the official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India said:

> "We had received a formal invitation to participate in 6 separate forums that China is organizing as part of the Belt and Road Forum being held in Beijing on May 14-16, 2017.We are of firm belief that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. Connectivity initiatives must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burden for communities; balanced ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards; transparent assessment of project costs; and skill and technology transfer to help long term running and maintenance of the assets created by local communities. Connectivity projects must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity" (MEA 2017d).

The Statement also outlined India's own strategy and response. The spokesperson said:

> "India shares international community's desire for enhancing physical connectivity and believes that it should bring greater economic benefits to all in an equitable and balanced manner. We are working with many countries and international institutions in support of physical and digital connectivity in our own immediate and near neighbourhood. Expansion and strengthening of connectivity is an integral part of India's economic and diplomatic initiatives. Under the 'Act East' policy, we are pursuing the Trilateral Highway project; under our 'Neighbourhood First' policy we are developing multimodal linkages with Myanmar and Bangladesh; under our 'Go West' strategy, we are engaged with Iran on Chabahar Port and with Iran and other partners in Central Asia on International North South Transport Corridor. BBIN initiative is aimed at enhancing logistics efficiencies in South Asian region. We are also actively considering acceding to TIR Convention" (MEA 2017d).

The statement underlined that India has taken a "principled position" and has communicated to China. It said, "Guided by our principled position in the matter, we have been urging China to engage in a meaningful dialogue on its connectivity initiative, 'One Belt, One Road' which was later renamed as 'Belt and Road Initiative'. We are awaiting a positive response from the Chinese side" (MEA 2017d). This was not the only statement to understand India's perspective, policy and position on strategic access and connectivity. In recent years, India has consistently reiterated its policy and perspective on these matters. For example, in his Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue on 1 June 2018, India's Prime Minister Modi underlined India's position on connectivity. He said:

> "Connectivity is vital. It does more than enhance trade and prosperity. It unites a region. India has been at the crossroads for centuries. We understand the benefits of connectivity. There are many connectivity initiatives in the region. If these have to succeed, we must not only build infrastructure, we must also build bridges of trust. And for that, these initiatives must be based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability. They must empower nations, not place them under impossible debt burden. They must promote trade, not strategic competition. On these principles, we are prepared to work with everyone. India is doing its part, by itself and in partnership with others like Japan – in South Asia and Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean, Africa, West Asia and beyond. And, we are important stake-holders in New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank" (MEA 2018b).

Thus, the Indian government has clearly articulated its policy and strategy. Moreover, there are several inconsistencies, contradictions and pitfalls in the BRI strategy, China's most ambitious strategic access initiative under President Xi Jinping. First, Xi remarked during the BRF that "all countries should respect each other's sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other's development paths and social systems, and each other's core interests and major concerns" (emphasis added). Certainly, there is a mismatch between China's vision and actions on the ground. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) overlooks India's sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns. Similarly, he said that "we should work to resolve hotspot issues through political means, and promote mediation in the spirit of justice" (emphasis added). Are these standards applicable to China as well? China, in her territorial disputes with her neighbours, is assertive and hypersensitive. It consistently intimidates countries on sovereignty issues. More importantly, the Chinese strategy of incrementally increasing its leverage – known as "salami slicing" – needs to be cautiously examined. Beijing pursues its policy to claim and unilaterally change the status quo of disputed territory and continues to assert its claims, with only an occasional reference to mediation. When has Beijing ever wanted to settle its own territorial disputes with its neighbours on a bilateral basis? So, how can it expect other countries to accept such proposals?

Second, there have been much-hyped details regarding various projects, the extent to which these projects exist on the ground is uncertain. Many pre-existing projects have been labelled as pilot projects of this initiative. Even if we ignore this fact, another issue is that many BRI infrastructure projects are in regions and countries that are politically unstable and have weak security. More importantly, the lack of

transparency reinforces the view of the importance of geopolitical considerations in China's BRI. China has been making heavy investments overseas guided by its political and strategic considerations. A few examples which reflects the above view are CPEC, Hambantota Port, and Mattala International Airport (the latter two both in Sri Lanka). asunder the BRI it was proposed that these projects will be game changers for the host countries, however, contrary to this, these projects have been economically unsustainable for the host countries (Chaturvedy 2017). Sri Lanka is already in a perpetual debt trap due to this purportedly "win-win" BRI project. Similarly, according to Tom Miller, CPEC is economically unviable and is "actually a form of bribe". Miller added that China expects to lose 80 per cent of its investment in Pakistan and the vision is driven by strategic factors rather than commercial logic (Miller 2017). Further, recent revelations of the CPEC 'masterplan' in a Pakistani newspaper, *The Dawn*, presents evidence that the BRI is a key instrument in China's grand strategy (Husain 2107). Due to the lack of economic benefits for Pakistan and its likely debt burden, CPEC was deemed by some as "colonising Pakistan to enrich China" (Fair 2018). The vagueness surrounding Chinese strategic access endeavours, particularly the BRI, has also led to allegations of graft, mismanagement, and in some cases, the initiative has pushed some countries into a debt trap.

Third, the BRI is an approach of China's strategy for building a new network that is based upon China and organised according to its interests and its values. China is flexing its economic muscle with the expectation of loyalty in return; given the advertised benefits of BRI, it is very difficult for many countries to overlook the initiative. China has the ability to inflict substantive economic damage if countries refuse to participate. More importantly, China is unwilling to listen to criticism even from its closest friends. How China plans to build a harmonious society when it is unsympathetic to a pluralistic society and cultural diversity is unclear. For example, China's intolerance of Islamic names, culture, and halal food in Xinjiang highlights an area where Beijing has imposed its Chinese values rather than encouraging cultural diversity and harmony. Similarly, when India raised its legitimate sovereignty concerns regarding CPEC, Beijing not only ignored Delhi's apprehension but also termed India's response as a "Cold-War mentality" and "geopolitical game". A mismatch between Chinese words and actions exposes Beijing's double standards.

Addressing the Regional Connectivity Conference on South Asia in the Indo-Pacific Context in New Delhi on 1 November 2018, India's Foreign Secretary reiterated India's principled stand. He said that for India, the subject of connectivity has deep-rooted historical associations and enormous contemporary policy relevance and regional connectivity in Southern Asia is today very much of relevance to the wider Indo-Pacific. He emphasised that "physical connectivity is only a part of the larger web of trade and economic interaction, digital connectivity, people-to-people links and knowledge connectivity that are the defining parameters of the Indo-Pacific region". He also stressed that "India views the Indo-Pacific as a positive construct of development and connectivity, in which India can play a unique role by virtue of its geographical location and economic gravity". Articulating India's official views on connectivity, the Foreign Secretary made four important points (MEA 2018c):

First, the shift in the fulcrum of global economic growth towards the Indo-Pacific is creating unprecedented opportunities for connectivity in the region. There is a huge infrastructure deficit in the region which needs to be met to fulfil the growing needs of the people. There is a need for a common and universally applicable rules-based world order so that physical connectivity across border is sustainable. Sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality of all nations must be respected under such an order. International commitments made by nations must be respected. This is the main requirement, and therefore a demanding need in the Indian Ocean and any such order must naturally give due importance to the countries located in the Indian Ocean region.

Second, "connectivity can be meaningful only when everyone has equal access under international law to the use of global commons that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law."

Third, "connectivity efforts in the region must be based on principles of economic viability and financial responsibility. They should promote economic activity and not place nations under the irredeemable debt burden. All connectivity initiatives must follow universally recognised international norms, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. Incorporation of ecological and environmental standards and skill and

technology transfer makes connectivity and infrastructure sustainable in the long term."

Fourth, "connectivity initiatives that straddle national boundaries must be pursued in a manner that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations. They should promote trade, not tension."

Thus, it is amply clear that in its vision for connectivity, India has been strictly positioning itself as a development partner and not as a lender or leader. From Africa to Afghanistan and to CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam) nations , India has always prioritised and continues to prioritise projects in fields beyond mega infrastructure projects, like renewable energy, human resource development, capacity building, restoration of historical and cultural sites, exchange of scientific and technical personnel and information and data, cyber security and IT among others. India's association with partner countries is mostly centred on 'people' and in line with the priorities of the receiver country and its people.

Indian Perspectives

In India, some scholars view Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia as an opportunity for India (Ling, et al. 2016). These proponents of "border as capillaries" recognise a simultaneous flow of power and resources from inside-out, bottom-up, and periphery-centre" and focus on a more participatory, dynamic and truly globalised world politics. These scholars underline the need to take into account local understandings and the stakes involved in the peripheral region while examining the politics of routes. Beyond geography, economics, or politics, borders also encompass memory, identity, and social relations. Hence, it is essential to take into account for a sustainable policy response. This perspective is also a reflection of observations from the local populace. These scholars see borders as "capillaries" – organic, multidirectional, and life-giving analogy and conceptualise borders as fluid, mobile conveyors of life. Physical arteries pass along people, goods, technology, and capital. But life requires non-material assets as well: for example, memories, identities, beliefs, and social relations in general.

However, deeply securitised borders became a source of national insecurity, and hence, required protection from the military only. Further, the borderlands underwent systematic dismantling when they had previously sustained the region's cultural ecology. Political economy, biodiversity, and environmental flows. Orthodox military thinking is reflected in the region's strategic, social, political, and economic infrastructure and more so in the nature of highly restricted cross border exchanges. The situation, however, is changing. Lessons from the past are helping to create more opportunities and improving connectivity has become critical for policymakers. Lama (2016) sees the objectives of Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia as an opportunity for India. In order to meet and provide for its developmental needs China is on an outlook for markets and resources on an ever-increasing scale. The preservation of the existing political order is predicated on sustained and rapid industrialisation. In an interview with the author, Professor Lama said that "China is everywhere in Southern Asia, both physically, as an agent of globalisation, and temporarily, as a growth model. There has been a marked change in its approach and strategy. In the last 30 years, China transformed itself from an astute proponent of ideological influence and covert supporter of insurgency to builder of cross-border modern infrastructures and wild market grabber". Commenting on Chinese objectives, he underlined that there are three very abiding and powerful objectives of China's increasing connectivity in the Southern Asian region – (1) expansion of its military base and strategic access; (2) gaining economic and commercial access in large markets of South Asian and thereby reaching the Middle East through South Asia; and (3) to tackle its own potential internal instabilities. He also added that all these three objectives have very clear indicators. Lama underlines that there are three elements of China's neighbourhood policy – first, a regional engagement policy; second, a conscious policy to engage countries at the national level; and finally, a conscious policy to engage countries in Southern Asia region at a very local level. The government of China has a very clear policy instrument to achieve these goals at the local level. It gives a free hand to traders to go and negotiate in the markets themselves. For example, Tibetan traders are allowed by China to go to Sikkim and negotiate despite their other fears. The Chinese government has essentially given a perceptible degree of autonomy, a very distinct instrument and tool to conduct foreign policy. In addition, strategic access is also the core component of Chinese military lookout in Southern Asia and elsewhere. Finally, politics of routes is the strongest tool

in their strategy including the railway to Nepal, the Indian border, linking the Karakoram Highway with Gwadar Port, Hambantota Port, Chittagong Port, Sittwe Port, etc.

Some analysts argue that China is likely to pursue strategic access in the Indian Ocean region to get privileged access to facilities and logistic support for specific purposes and contingencies. A report by the US Institute for National Strategic Studies suggests that "China's expanding international economic interests are almost certain to generate increasing demands for the PLAN to operate out of the area to protect Chinese citizens, investments, and SLOCs. Such tasks could include protection of PRC citizens living and working abroad, of Chinese property or assets on foreign soil, of Chinese shipping from pirates and other non-traditional security threats, and of SLOCs against hostile adversary states. The PLAN could be assigned specific missions to protect those interests. There is, however, little physical evidence that China is constructing bases in the Indian Ocean to conduct major combat operations, to encircle India, or to dominate Southern Asia. China's current operational patterns of behaviour do not support the String of Pearls thesis. PLAN ships use different commercial ports for replenishment and liberty, and the ports and forces involved could not conduct major combat operations" (Yung, et al. 2014).

The report underlines that "China is unlikely to construct military facilities in the Indian Ocean to support major combat operations there. Bases in Southern Asia would be vulnerable to air and missile attack, the PLAN would require a much larger force structure to support this strategy, and the distances between home ports in China and PLAN ships stationed at the String of Pearls network of facilities along its sea lines of communication would make it difficult to defend Chinese home waters and simultaneously conduct major combat operations in the Indian Ocean. China's strategic access through a mixture of access to overseas commercial facilities and a limited number of military bases most closely aligns with China's future naval mission requirements and will likely characterise its future arrangements. For example, Pakistan's status as a trusted strategic partner whose interests are closely aligned with China's makes the country the most likely location for an overseas Chinese military base. It suggests that the port at Karachi would be better able to satisfy PLAN requirements than the new port at Gwadar." The report adds that "the

most efficient means of supporting more robust PLA out of area military operations would be a limited network of facilities that distribute functional responsibilities geographically (for example, one facility handling air logistics support, one facility storing ordnance, another providing supplies for replenishment ships). Hence, access to airport infrastructure and related maintenance facilities may also be required for the PLA Air Force (PLAAF). A future overseas Chinese military base probably would be characterised by a light footprint, with 100 to 500 military personnel conducting supply and logistics functions. Such a facility would likely support both civilian and military operations, with Chinese forces operating in a restrictive political and legal environment that might not include permission to conduct combat operations. Long-term access to overseas military facilities would increase China's strategic gravity and significantly advance China's political interests in the region where the facilities are located. Some experts describe Chinese access arrangements as overseas strategic supporting points or supply stations" (Tao 2013; Shen 2015).

Many in New Delhi see a significant risk that India and China will "compete and even clash in the same strategic space" (Prakash 2007). Admiral Sureesh Mehta, the then Chief of Naval Staff, asserted that "China is shaping the maritime battlefield in the region. It is making friends in the right places, for example, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and down below Africa" (NDTV India 2007). Similarly, an Indian Integrated Defence Staff report commented that "increased Chinese submarine activity in the Indian Ocean constitute a grave danger to India's interests" (Singh 2013).

China has realised its own limitations of scarce natural resources and is going into those areas where there are vast deposits of resources, for example Africa. China's transport infrastructure projects may be for the purpose of development but if these infrastructure developments are designed to be used for purposes other than development, then this raises concerns for India. There is a lack of information regarding such infrastructure developments, which may result in a perceived threat. In essence, two contradictory actions are playing out – on the one hand, healthy, sustainable, economic, political, and cultural relations are being established, but on the other hand, the Chinese are taking on some activities without considering their implications for other countries. For example, the Chinese are building a road to the

base camp of Mount Everest. Such developments raise suspicions and concerns among neighbours including environmental and religious concerns. Also, the lack of transparent information regarding the types of movements on roads, amount of trade, etc., adds fuel to the China threat theory in India.

Many experts, however, do not see transport networks as antithetical to India's interests. Indeed, China's Southern Asia ties are "dictated by geography, the need for security and stability, mutual economic advantage, shared cultural traditions, the movement of people, common approaches to the management of natural disasters and climate change, and developmental priorities".[38] According to one Indian Military official, "China may be almost a superpower now, but it is not an irrational power. It has as big a stake in stability as India. Its economy, finance, and exports are all much more globalised than ours, so do not expect China to take any risks by way of entering into military conflict with India".[39] Ajay Shukla, a senior strategic analyst in India, points out, "A lot of this is an overreaction on part of the strategic community in India. We should not misinterpret every Chinese move as a threat to India.[40] The China-Pakistan nuclear nexus, however, is a serious concern in India, so is a lack of transparency in information sharing. If both governments can increase information sharing in a transparent manner, dramatic improvements may be seen in the relations between the two countries. Also, there is a requirement for further exchange of ideas, and visits between officials of these two countries. The unprecedented challenges arising for India from the rise of China need additional confidence building measures. China is becoming a "strategic challenge" for India and thus there is no other option for India other than engaging China.

Professor C. Raja Mohan points out that the scale and significance of China's challenge have become extraordinary. He thinks that China's future behaviour will be unlike its past behaviours. Both countries have vital interests in protecting the supply of resources outside their borders. Strategic access helps in sustaining a forward

[38] Interview of a very high-ranking Indian government official, who wanted to remain anonymous. However, in general, Indian government officials see China as a potential risk to India's national interests in several dimensions. The dominant view in the Indian government officials is that all these developments are centred at India's encirclement. Nevertheless, the general approach is, say or do nothing to provoke Chinese. These points are based on the author's interviews with various Indian government officials (civil and military).
[39] Based on interview with the Indian Military official.
[40] Based on interview with Ajay Shukla.

position. However, there is tension between competing interests of both the countries, which may be a cause of conflict between them. Raja Mohan emphasises that "China wants a multipolar world and a unipolar Asia, but India wants a multipolar Asia." Raja Mohan correctly says that India is not going to accept the number two position in Asia. Both India and China have a sense of responsibility of self-defence.[41] Therefore, competitive elements are there and to avoid any kind of conflict in the future, confidence building between these two giants is essential.

Though, strengthening of Beijing's special relations with Islamabad has further fuelled concerns in India, some scholars underline changes in China's major interests "from viewing Pakistan as a key asset in Sino-Indian strategic rivalry to keeping Pakistan as a stable, secure, and reliable neighbour in a strategically important region" (Yuan 2018). Therefore, Beijing's primary objectives are to seek Islamabad's assistance in stemming extreme ethnic separatist and terrorist elements posing a threat to China's north-western region and Chinese personnel working in Pakistan; to develop Pakistan's infrastructure such as Gwadar Port and energy facilities; and to maintain defence and security cooperation with its long-standing ally (Yuan 2018: 43). Thus, Beijing's policy towards Pakistan has been informed by at least three important considerations: the need to maintain a solid, pragmatic, and flexible relationship; China's position on India-Pakistan territorial dispute; and Pakistan's role in assisting Beijing to address ethnic and terrorist activities and insecurities in Xinjiang.

China's presence in Sri Lanka has been increasing over the recent years. This has been another cause of concern for India. Under President Mahinda Rajapaksa, economic ties between Colombo and Beijing deepened. China invested in several major infrastructural projects in Sri Lanka. It invested US$ 1.5 billion for the development of Hambantota Port. A US$ 1.4 billion project to build a new port city in Colombo on a 665-acre land reclaimed from the sea is being funded by China Communication Construction Company. In this project, the Chinese company will have 35 years of lease of four out of seven container berths. Another investment is being made for construction of Lotus Tower in Colombo that is being built by two Chinese companies that are well renowned for their extensive defence-related works

[41] Based on interview with Professor C. Raja Mohan.

especially in electronics and aerospace. The estimated cost of the project is around 103 million. Indian analysts fear that the tower could possibly be used for electronic surveillance. Since 2009, China has been providing loans to Sri Lanka for its infrastructure development. Till now China has provided loans worth US$ 5 million for construction of railways, ports, roads, expressways, airports, and power plants in Sri Lanka (Taneja 2015; Roy 2015). Sri Lanka has been strategically important for India since ancient times. Also, the two countries share historical and cultural ties. Thus, from India's perspective, China's growing presence in Sri Lanka is alarming. As through investments, particularly the leasing of port facilities, Beijing is gaining an important foothold in a country of significance to India. However, what really alarmed India was the docking of China's PLAN submarine and a submarine support ship in Colombo in September 2014(Sakhuja 2015). The incident seemed to be giving an indication that India was losing grip on what is considered its southern flank, resulting in intensified efforts by New Delhi to exert its influence (Velloor 2015).

The second Indian perspective on Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia pertains to the construction of dual-purpose (civil and military) transport links by China. I Increasing China's influence and development of transport links along both sides of India is a cause of concern for Indians. With the use of Pakistan, China has been making an attempt to counterbalance India within the region (Hoffmann 2004: 41). Across the Indian Ocean and Southern Asian region, India is cautiously watching actions of China and its expanding military and political roles. There is fear on the Indian side that it is being strategically encircled by China (Garver 2006). Some Indian strategists share a view that though China does not pose direct military threat to India in the near term, but there is uncertainty for its actions in longer term. Chinese ambitions are being enforced in phases – economic first which are later accompanied by military presence or access. According to Brigadier (retd.) Gurmeet Kanwal, the then Director of Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), a think-tank of the Indian Army, Chinese strategic access is aimed at India's strategic encirclement through the building of transport networks and a string of pearl strategy, by developing ports, such as, at Gwadar.[42] Kanwal writes:

[42] Based on interview with Brigadier (retd.) Gurmeet Kanwal.

> While China professes a policy of peace and friendliness toward India, its deeds clearly indicate that concentrated efforts are under way aimed at strategic encirclement of India. For the last several decades, China has been engaged in efforts to create a string of anti-Indian influence around India through military and economic assistance programs to neighbourly countries, combined with complementary diplomacy. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have been assiduously and cleverly cultivated toward this end… China's foreign and defense policies are quite obviously designed to marginalize India in the long term and reduce India to the status of a sub-regional power by increasing Chinese influence and leverage in the South Asian region (Kanwal 1999).

Some Indian analysts are alarmed by China's security relations with India's Southern Asian neighbours. According to Sujit Dutta, an eminent expert on India-China relations, "Beijing has over the years . . . developed some of its closest external relationships in the region built on defense and intelligence ties, military transfers, and political support. Unlike China's ties in East Asia, where they are essentially economic, in South Asia ties are primarily political-military in content" (Dutta 1998: 91-114). Adding to this, he highlights that there has been little movement on removing Indian insecurities regarding China's strategic postures and defence ties in the region. Highlighting India's concerns, G. Parthasarathy, a former Indian diplomat, writes:

> China remains the most destabilising factor for Indian national security. It has consistently sought to undermine India's influence in Asia and indeed across the world… There are disturbing signs that China is seeking naval and monitoring facilities across the Indian Ocean from Myanmar to Pakistan. General Pervez Musharraf has stated that in moments of crisis he would not hesitate to provide base facilities to the Chinese navy in the Gwadar Port… A Chinese naval presence in Gwadar can challenge the security of oil supplies from the Persian Gulf to India (Parthasarathy 2006a).

Brahma Chellaney, strategic analyst, encapsulates the China's designs (new regional links and capabilities) as antithetical to Indian interests. He writes:

> With its new wealth, China has been inventively building trade and transportation links to further its larger interests. Such links around India's periphery are already bringing this country under strategic pressure on three separate flanks. China is fashioning two north-south strategic corridors on either side of India – the Trans-Karakoram Corridor stretching right up to Gwadar, at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz; and the Irrawaddy Corridor involving road, river and rail links from Yunnan right up to the Burmese ports. In addition, it is shoring up an east-west strategic corridor in Tibet across India's northern frontiers (Chellaney 2006).

There is no clarity of thought in India about the implications of China's strategic access to Southern Asia. Both the countries, China and India have similar and strong attributes of a powerful power, i.e. large personnel resources, strong scientific, advanced technological and industrial bases, and formidable military. Both possess nuclear and space powers and have growing ambitions. This is the first time in history when both countries are rising at the same time. China and India are increasingly looking like actual or potential impediments to each other. The Chinese feel that a stronger India would limit China's freedom of manoeuvre and its dominance in Asia. Bill Emmott, a consultant on global affairs with expertise in Asia, writes that in the next decade and beyond China and India relations are going to become increasingly difficult and managing them will be one of the important tasks of the global affairs. He adds, "managing the relationship will also be difficult because as both India and China grow, and expand their trade and overseas investment, those countries' economic and political interests are going to overlap more and more, with each encroaching increasingly on what the other considers to be its natural backyard" (Emmott 2009: 14).

Thus, in the future, there will be a competition between India and China for acquiring resources and this may cause friction between the two. From the theoretical concepts discussed above, it is evident that the overlapping sphere of influence, in particular when there is very limited interaction between these two rising powers, can be dangerous for both. If any one of these countries miscalculates intentions or motivations behind these developments and responds accordingly, it may create tension. In such a condition, a security dilemma and balance of power help to understand their foreign policy discourse. Also, their historical and colonial past and lack of transparency shape the decision-making process. Against this backdrop, what is India's strategy? How are Indian policymakers responding to Chinese strategic access or politics of routes?

India's Responses to Chinese Strategic Access

Since the short, sharp, and disastrous war of 1962, China has hovered over India as its most serious security threat (Gupta 2009). Over the last half a century, the gap between India and China relative to their perceptions, attitudes towards each other and expectations from each other has widened. This has happened despite the fact the

interactions between India and China at all levels – political, cultural and economical – have been increasing over the years. Their negative characterisations of each other in the media, deep-rooted prejudice, tensions over the disputed territories, competition for acquiring natural resources and markets, and new Chinese suspicions about India's evolving relations with the US and Japan, add to mutual mistrust and tensions.[43] Similarly, India seems to increasingly matter to the Chinese. The Chinese wonder why the United States President Barack Obama chose the Indian Prime Minister as the first state guest at the White House. Thus, there is an element of mistrust and suspicion.

There has been a lot of talk from both countries about the partnership and mutual progress but in reality, each has sought to thwart the other. Publicly, diplomats from each capital point to declarations made on many occasions by the political leaders of both the countries that China's development and India's development are each other's opportunity rather than a threat. Their actual policies and actions, however, demonstrate that in fact, the opposite is true (Malik 2009: 180). C. Raja Mohan writes, "For nearly two decades, India's China policy has stood on three legs: say nice things in public about Sino-Indian friendship, Asian unity and anti-Western solidarity; nurse intense grievances in private; and avoid problem solving because that would need a lot of political courage" (Mohan 2009). Moreover, it appears that the current political leadership in India seems more determined to deal with challenges from the rise of China. Chinese politics of routes has become one of the most important strategic challenges for India. So, what are India's responses?

New Delhi's response to China's strategic access in Southern Asia has been multi-pronged, combining diplomatic engagement with strategic countermeasures and hedging options. Broadly, India's responses can be grouped into four categories. First and foremost is to restore and enhance India's influence in the region by developing and improving relationships with its Southern Asian neighbours. To that effect, the Government of India has become diplomatically very active to counter growing Chinese influence, especially in securing and promoting its influence in its neighbourhood, from Sri Lanka to the Bay of Bengal through its "neighbourhood

[43]Chinese scholars raised concern regarding India-US ties and India's joint naval exercises with Japan and other countries during their interviews with the author. Also, Chinese scholars underscored that the Indian media plays a negative role in India-China relationship.

first" policy. India has also strengthened its naval capabilities to exercise selective sea control from west of the Strait of Malacca to the northern Indian Ocean. The Indian government is to allocate additional resources to build a stronger navy with a sizeable fleet of surface ships, aircraft carriers, and submarines. Second, India has explored great power diplomacy by actively promoting economic ties and pursuing security partnerships with the other major powers, most prominently the US and Japan. These include expanded trade and investment opportunities, bilateral and multilateral joint military exercises, defence procurement programmes, and support for rule-based orders in international and regional affairs. India has also formed security partnerships with the region's other key countries with shared concerns over China's rising influence and its increasingly more assertive behaviour. Third, since 1991, New Delhi has adopted a Look East Policy, which has become Act East Policy under the Modi government. India's eastward strategy includes developing greater economic and security ties with Japan, Australia, and the ASEAN countries. India's policy responses reflect that India is focussed on developing a multi-polar Asia. Clearly, New Delhi seeks to carve out a greater role in this region, both to serve its national interests and to counter China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Finally, an important aspect of India's responses is continued engagement with China. While standing firm on many issues directly bearing on India's national interests, the Indian government has sought to engage in diplomatic and security dialogues with China and continued to build trust and expand cooperation in areas of similar interests of both the countries. In recent years there have been frequent high-level exchanges between leaders of the two countries at bilateral summits and multilateral meetings.

Thus, India's responses can be summed up as: promoting economic development and internal security through enhancing connectivity; prioritising relationship with neighbouring countries; strategic partnerships with like minded countries; bilateral cooperation and engagement with the major powers; strengthening defence and security cooperation and regional economic integration with southeast Asia and east Asia; and soft power diplomacy. In other words, India's responses to Chinese strategic access can be called as "smart power diplomacy" (Suryanarayana 2016). The following sections explain the broad categories of India's responses as discussed above.

Redefining India's Neighbourhood

Generally, discussions on India's neighbourhood are mainly centred on India's relations with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (SAARC members). However, the government of India includes China, Myanmar, and sometimes Iran in its lists of neighbours. Moreover, recently the government under PM Modi has added the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Mauritius and Seychelles to the existing list of India's neighbours and thereby redefining India's neighbourhood policy. With this change, the geographical scope of our neighbourhood policy has expanded and now has two components – continental and maritime. This change in neighbourhood policy clearly reflects the changing priorities and approach of the government.

A strong leadership and rising Indian economy have raised India's status in global sphere and many now view India as a key driver of the global economy. Thus, it is clearly visible why the major powers of the world want India to do well economically. They want India to become a responsible stakeholder on the global front. Global views of rising India will be shaped by its economic performance and vibrant economy in the coming years. The real challenges lie in achieving sustained economic and comprehensive growth and the Modi government clearly understands these challenges. PM Modi has shown his keenness in putting economics first, and therefore, national economic development has been made the focus of India's global relations. PM Modi seems to believe that a high rate of economic growth needs a more robust and business-oriented external engagement and this is clearly reflected in many policies being developed by the Modi government like Make in India. Moreover, for a sustained economic growth, India needs a peaceful periphery. Hence, the primacy of neighbourhood in foreign policy is obvious.

Modi's Vision towards India's Neighbourhood

Proximity is the most difficult and testing among diplomatic challenges a country face. Modi has certainly inherited a messy, even chaotic state of affairs in India's neighbourhood. However, "the neighbourhood is India's existential space and its backyard needs to be stable, peaceful and also prosperous" (Sinha 2015: 175). So, what is Modi government's vision for India's neighbourhood?

Speaking about his vision for India's neighbourhood PM Modi said, "My vision for our neighbourhood puts a premium on peaceful and harmonious ties with entire South Asia. That vision had led me to invite leaders of all SAARC nations for my swearing in" (MEA 2017a). This statement clearly reflects that there is a major shift towards India's neighbours through a "neighbourhood-first" initiative (NFI) under the current government. Modi dreams of a "thriving well-connected and integrated neighbourhood". PM Modi emphasized that India's "actions and aspirations, capacities and human capital, democracy and demography, and strength and success will continue to be an anchor for all round regional and global progress. Our economic and political rise represent a regional and global opportunity of great significance. It is a force for peace, a factor for stability and an engine for regional and global prosperity" (MEA 2017a). Indeed, the neighbourhood-first approach has given new life to India's relations with its neighbours. As a result of this approach the Modi government has been able to reconnect with all its neighbours barring Pakistan[44] to bring together the region. .

India's strategy is mainly centred around realism, cooperation, co-existence and partnership. Moreover, Modi's foreign policy doesn't fit a "hard nationalist script" that is based on India's military strength, rather it is guided by the core value of "Vaasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the entire world is our family). Reaffirming leitmotif of "Sab Ka Sath, Sab Ka Vikas" (together with all, progress for all), the Modi government has made partnerships with almost all neighbouring countries in a dynamic manner.

Addressing the 18th SAARC summit held in Kathmandu at the end of November 2014 PM Modi gave a clear message to South Asian leaders on regional cooperation. He said "We can all choose our paths to our destinations. But, when we join our hands and walk in step, the path becomes easier, the journey quicker and the destination closer". What is even more important is what he said in Hindi – "pass hone se saath hone ki taaqat zyaada hai (being together is more important than being near each other). This statement by PM Modi reflects the character of his neighbourhood-first policy. Emphasis of the Modi government is clearly on working

[44] India has not had talks with Pakistan because of terrorism issue. India has clearly stated that it will hold talks with China only when it walks away from terrorism.

together across boundaries and extended neighbourhood through various regional and sub-regional forums such as BIMSTEC, BBIN, BRICS.

India's Maritime Neighbourhood

India's economy is highly dependent on the seas and sea lines of communication. Much of its trade and commerce take place though seas, thus, India is making efforts to develop its marine economy and explore new possibilities. To meet these ends, India has increased its efforts in engaging its maritime neighbours[45] (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) 2015). The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) dedicated a whole section to India's maritime neighbourhood in its 2014 manifesto. In fact, the manifesto included all maritime elements in it. Certainly, these elements indicates that priorities of maritime affairs are increasing in India's policy. Indian Maritime Security Strategy reiterates that "India's dependence on her maritime environment has expanded significantly in the last couple of years" (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) 2015). In the foreword of IMSS 2015 Admiral R K Dhowan underscores the importance of this transformation, as he writes "three significant developments have resulted in shifting of India's approach in its maritime policy: first, the shift in worldview from a Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus and the repositioning of global economic and military power towards Asia has resulted in significant political, economic and social changes in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) and impacted India's maritime environment in tangible ways; second, a considerable change in India's maritime security environment with the expansion in scale and presence of a variety of non-traditional threats; and third, a national outlook towards the seas and the maritime domain, and a clearer recognition of maritime security being a vital element of national progress and international engagement" (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) 2015). A proactive and holistic approach is required towards India's maritime neighbourhood as there has been a rise in the sources, intensity and types of threats as well as there is blurring of traditional and non-traditional lines.

[45] According to the Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS) 2015, India's maritime neighbours are not only those sharing common boundaries of India's maritime zones but also nations with whom it shares the common maritime space of the high seas.

A detailed framework for India's engagement with its maritime neighbours has been put forward by PM Modi. The main objectives of this framework include deepening of security cooperation with its maritime neighbours; increasing cooperation on blue economy; building multilateral maritime security cooperation to enhance security in the Indian Ocean; focus on inclusive sustainable economic development; collective action and cooperation with extra-regional powers; and safeguarding India's maritime interests (Mohan 2015, Chaturvedy 2015). The government under PM Modi has clearly outlined the significance of maritime affairs and has clearly spelled it in its foreign policy. The government appears to be decisive about being a valuable security partner and is making concrete efforts to promote security and economic prosperity for all through regional mechanisms. India is playing a larger role in ensuring stable and rule-based Asian security architecture. Its policy initiatives are designed accordingly to help it in its pursuit. Prioritisation of the maritime neighbourhood by the Indian government is an attempt in the right direction to strengthen India's engagements with its partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

Modi's Vision of a Blue Economy

21st century has been termed as the "century of the seas" by the Indian Government. Seas will continue to be important facilitators in India's global resurgence. Thus, articulating the importance of seas for India, the Indian government under PM Modi has laid a detailed framework for India's maritime engagement. While speaking at the International Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam on 7 February 2016 PM Modi articulated his vision of a blue economy. He:

> An important part of India's transformation is my vision of [a] "Blue Economy". The Blue Chakra – or the wheel – in our National Flag represents the potential of the Blue Economy. An essential part of this pursuit is the development of India's coastal and island territories: but, not just for tourism. We want to build new pillars of economic activity in the coastal areas and in linked hinterlands through sustainable tapping of oceanic resources. Strengthening our marine research, development of eco-friendly, marine industrial and technology base, and fisheries are other elements of our goal (MEA 2016a).

Indeed, maritime domain has become crucial for India. It is an important element in India's external strategies as well as is crucial for India's internal development. India's maritime security strategy, entitled "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime

Security Strategy" released in October 2015, takes a holistic approach and highlights India's present maritime security considerations. It also underlines the greater importance India attaches to security of seas and thereby securing its maritime interests.

Since the articulation of blue economy vision by PM Modi the blue economy concept is gaining momentum in India. Research community and businesses are working on it. Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), a research think-tank based in New Delhi, in association with the Ministry of External affairs launched a research programme on blue economy in 2015. The programme aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on the emerging concept of blue economy, and implementation of a blue economy in India and different regions of its strategic interests. It has also started the IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) Blue Economy Dialogue in collaboration with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) to focus on various facets of the blue economy including an accounting framework; renewable ocean energy; fisheries and aquaculture; ports, shipping and manufacturing services; and exploration of sea beds and minerals. The dialogue also highlighted the sectoral priorities and policy measures (Goa Declaration 2015).

Similarly, working on PM Modi's vision of blue economy FICCI, a prestigious and apex business chamber of India set-up a task for creating a business model for the India's engagement with the Blue Economy. The outcome of this exercise is FICCI's comprehensive blue economy vision document, titled "Blue Economy Vision 2025: Harnessing Business Potential for India Inc and International Partners". This vision document was presented at the Second IORA Ministerial Conference on the Blue Economy held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May 2017) FICCI's Blue Economy Vision 2025 "makes a convincing argument that the oceans, with a current estimated asset value of US$ 24 trillion and an annual value addition of US$ 2.5 trillion, would continue to offer significant economic benefits both in the traditional areas of fisheries, transport, tourism and hydrocarbons as well as in the new fields of deep-sea mining, renewable energy, ocean biotechnology and many other areas. It suggests the integration of sustainable practices with our business models."

Salient Features of Modi's Neighbourhood Policy

Speaking at the general debate of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), PM Modi reiterated the primacy of India's neighbourhood and aptly remarked, "A nation's destiny is linked to its neighbourhood. That is why my government has placed the highest priority on advancing friendship and cooperation with her neighbours." Indeed, to become one of the key powers in Asia India needs to manage its immediate neighbourhood. India needs to attain a stable and secure neighbourhood in order to become a reliable power in the global arena (Chaudhury 2018: 101). As discussed earlier, the Modi government wants a peaceful and stable neighbourhood for its development and is making all efforts to attain that. India is actively engaging with its neighbours to improve its relations. This reflects its desire for a peaceful order. Further, India's neighbourhood priorities were manifested though the first presidential address to parliament, which underlined Modi's government's "determination to work towards building a peaceful, stable and economically inter-linked neighbourhood which is essential for the collective development and prosperity of the South Asian Region." In this context, what are the salient features of India's policy towards its neighbours under the Modi government?

The first feature of India's policy towards its neighbours under the Modi government is have dialogues and engagements to build political connectivity. Prime Minister Modi, former Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj and senior officials have undertaken extensive visits to neighbouring countries. PM Modi has demonstrated his will to engage with India's neighbours and have shown his zeal and vigour in engaging them at the highest political level. Modi has a clear view regarding political relations which is quite evident in his visits to neighbouring countries. He believes that political relations are as important as economic ones. Both PM Modi and the then Foreign Minister Swaraj met a number of political leaders, including those in opposition, in neighbouring countries and promised them that India believes in mutual cooperation and development and thus will work together with their country for shared prosperity. During his visits, Modi also reached out to large sections of respective national elites and ordinary people. Modi's convincing leadership style and his formidable diplomatic skills could help India to gain friends.

The second important feature is to follow through announcements and tracking progress. Modi always looked for the tangible outcome. The BJP government is remembered for its noteworthy achievements in the past (including India's nuclear test). India is determined to bridge chronic foreign policy delivery deficit by executing the neighbourhood initiatives. Substantial progress in several projects that were going on for years, setting and meeting of timelines and regular follow up all indicated that the present government is not just delivering talks but walking them. Modi's accomplishments in the neighbourhood have been "significant, if not exceptional" (Kaura 2018). Undoubtably, a mutual partnership could bring positivity in the relations, and reduce the mistrust factor and as a result the so called "China threat" could be muted. If such policies become successful, cooperation on more sensitive and alienating issues like terrorism, insurgency, separatism, ethnic strife, and religious fundamentalism could be tried with more chances of success.

Connectivity – economic, physical, and digital is the third feature of the India's policy towards its neighbour. Stronger connectivity is at the heart of neighbourhood-first policy. Modi has a clear vision that without connectivity it is impossible to create a peaceful neighbourhood that is articulated in his neighbourhood-first policy, thus in order to build a peaceful, democratic, stable, prosperous and economically inter-linked neighbourhood Modi has emphasised on five Ts: talent, trade, tourism, technology, and tradition. Speedy Implementation of key infrastructure projects to enhance connectivity and enable a freer flow of trade and energy in the region seems to be the top priorities of the Modi government. The government has been making efforts in this direction and as a result several agreements has been signed including in the fields of hydroelectricity, power transmission, grid-connectivity, transport connectivity, motor vehicle agreement, , humanitarian aid, disaster relief, healthcare, education, and other sectors. There is greater cooperation among neighbouring countries on these sectors. Further, in order to strengthen infrastructure connectivity Modi government is trying to bring investments by making India a better place to do business and has taken steps towards improving India's ease of doing business ranking including tax reforms with lowering of tax rates, simplifying procedures, labour reforms, reducing non-tariff barriers, boosting regional cooperation, and integrating common markets. India is also increasing cooperation with neighbouring

countries in the areas like weather forecasting, disaster management or satellite capabilities.

However, the biggest challenge for India is to persuade its neighbours that the rising India is an opportunity and not a threat. India gives them opportunity to gain access to a huge market and a productive neighbourhood which in turn will open door for greater economic opportunities and growth which will be far greater than ones offered by their domestic markets alone. Economic cooperation represents the easiest "sell" to various constituencies within the countries of the region. Modi has signalled on several occasions that "a strong economy is the driver of an effective foreign policy". Therefore, India's economic revival is a major element of India's economic diplomacy.

The fourth important feature is extra-regional collaborations and partnerships with major power on issues of mutual interests including infrastructure development, technological cooperation, information sharing, defence cooperation and cooperation between law enforcement agencies to counter transnational criminal threats such as terrorism, trafficking, human trafficking, narcotics, financial and economic fraud, cybercrime and transnational organised crime. In the past few years, Japan has emerged as an important partner for India. Japan and India have partnered for infrastructure development and increasing connectivity among countries across regions, including Africa (Asia-Africa Growth Corridor), South Asia, and the Indo-Pacific. India and Japan are making infrastructural investments in rail, roads, highways, ports are confident that apart from being put to good use, these infrastructural developments will help local economies to further benefit from the SEZs, manufacturing and trading hubs.

The fifth important feature is related to India taking and playing leadership role in the region. China is increasing its sphere of influence in South Asia and IOR which is considered by India as its own sphere of influence and thus in order to reclaim its position the Modi government is making efforts to deepen partnership with all the neighbouring countries. The government is extending various kinds of assistance to its neighbours and time and gain have emphasised that it wants to take along its neighbours on path of prosperity. Modi has also been making efforts to increase people-to-people connectivity social media and this is an important instrument of his

digital diplomacy. India has traditionally extended assistance to its immediate neighbours and still continues to the most prominent partner providing development assistance and investments. India has also made new strategic and political partnerships with Indian Ocean littoral countries. An analysis of foreign aid figures of India in the "Expenditure Profiles" of the Union Budgets from Financial Year (FY) 2014-15 to 2019-20 reveals that though majority of the aid went to immediate neighbourhood India also extended assistance to countries in its extended neighbourhood. India has started to conclude white shipping agreements with some neighbouring countries. India has also given the coastal surveillance radar system to a number of nations. These radar systems are given for monitoring of white shipping and to help countries to preserve their sovereignty in their exclusive economic zones. Further, India is emerging as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean. It is also expanding humanitarian cooperation with IOR nations by providing HADR assistance as necessary and is also first responder to HADR situations far beyond the region. This emerging trend of first responder is likely to grow in future and reflects the India's growing capability and increasing will of assuming the role of a leading power. National Security Strategy of President Donald Trump says, "We will deepen our strategic partnership with India and support its leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region." Thus, it is clear that the NDA government is ready to engage the global order to pursue its national interests and take up the international responsibilities.

Finally, the sixth important feature is related to power. While India has always followed the soft power route but the scenario is changing now. India still believes in constructive engagement with its neighbours, but at the same time it has sent a strong and loud message to the world that if and when required, India can be uncompromisingly tough. It has been clearly emanated by India that its soft policy of engagement should not be misunderstood as a weakness. This was clear from the way India handled issues with Pakistan and China. "Despite the power differential, India successfully raised the cost of China's land grab activities at Doklam. While India managed to call Chinese bluff, simultaneously it also allayed Bhutan's concern." The Modi Government has taken a strong position against terrorism emanating from Pakistan. The surgical strikes after Pulwama terror attack and India's attempts to get Masood Azhar, Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed's (JeM) chief, declared as a

global terrorist after China lifted its block on the move clearly indicates that India is clear about its approach to counter terrorism. Similarly, the Modi government has done a remarkable job through its soft power diplomacy when in 2014 it lobbied the United Nations to designate 21 June as International Yoga Day. Since then Yoga Day is celebrated in entire world which shows its popularity acrss the globe. Other initiatives of government like the International Solar Alliance or social media campaigns like #selfiewithdaughter (an initiative in support of a girl child that started in a small town became a worldwide trend when PM Modi talked about it in the ninth edition of his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme) are good examples of India's soft power strategy. Buddhism and cultural diplomacy also continue to play a key role in Modi's soft power strategy. PM Modi has been time and again speaking about our cultural and spiritual links with our neighbours. Mention of spiritual links between India and Nepal, between India and Myanmar and Ayodhya link with Korea in high-level meetings or forums are all examples of soft power strategy. Apart from dwelling on the past India is focussed about the future and the government is working on technological innovations in health care and traditional medicine, satellites for education and other developmental cooperation and is sharing this knowledge with neighbouring countries and partners which again shows that India wants to have a shared prosperity.

Engaging the Extended Neighbourhood

Deeper engagement with countries in the Indo-Pacific region has become an "integral and irreversible plank" (Ram 2015: 19) of India's foreign policy. India has been expected to play larger role in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the area was almost neglected during the previous years and as a result in order to play the greater role. It was first time during the PM Modi reign that the Indo-Pacific was laid at the heart of India's engagement with the world. Modi has also announced 'free, open, inclusive' Indo-Pacific policy. India's Indo-Pacific policy lays emphasis on inclusiveness and takes all along towards prosperity and peace. While announcing the policy Modi has also made it clear that ASEAN would be at the core of Indo-Pacific. Under the rubric of the "Look East Policy" (LEP) the Indian government has been able to cultivate and strengthen its economic and strategic relations with the ASEAN countries and its East Asian neighbours. According to Das and Thomas (2016), "Designed to help India

reposition itself further towards its eastern neighbours, the Look East Policy has indeed shaped New Delhi's engagement with the Indo-Pacific for over two decades, substantially deepening its economic, institutional, and security relations with the region". For example, India's trade turnover with ASEAN countries increased from US$ 10 billion in 2000 to US$ 76.53 billion in 2014-15, turning ASEAN into India's fourth largest trade partner (MEA 2017a). India's trade with other East Asian and Asia-Pacific countries, such as China, South Korea, Japan and Australia, also increased significantly over the same period. Apart from trade, India-ASEAN bilateral investment has also increased substantially. "FDI inflows into India from ASEAN between April 2000 to May 2016 was about US$ 49.40 billion, while FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries from April 2007 to March 2015 was about US$ 38.672 billion" (MEA 2017b). Under the LEP India has further expanded its engagement to include Northeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. In recent years, the policy has acquired a strategic dimension with a significant emphasis on naval cooperation (Ram 2012, 2015).

The LEP has been a reflection of India's willingness to open up to the world, particularly to the ASEAN nations, developing ties with them and learning from their experiences. This led to India's participation in ASEAN-centric forums like the ARF, EAS, ADMM Plus, etc. Gradually India's initial agenda of trade, investment and economic exchanges with ASEAN nations grew into a larger strategic engagement. India's Look East policy went beyond ASEAN to cover Japan, Republic of Korea, and China. In recent years, India's outreach in the Asia Pacific has extended to Australia and the Pacific Island Countries.

The Look East Policy (LEP) got upgraded to Act East Policy (AEP) with a change of government in Delhi, when the BJP came to power in a landslide victory in May 2014 under the leadership of Narendra Modi. On 26 August 2014, chairing a brainstorming session the then India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj discussed the foreign policy initiatives under the new BJP-led government and asked them to 'Act East' and not just 'Look East'. The session was attended by 15 Indian "Heads of Mission" in South East and East Asia. The meeting was convened "to chart out the future roadmap and to get a frank assessment about the Indian foreign policy in the region and its potential" (The Economic Times 2014). This was the beginning of this

departure from the Look East to the Act East. Later, PM Modi himself remarked in his addresses at India-ASEAN and East Asia Summits in Myanmar in November 2014 that India's Look East policy had become Act East Policy (AEP). Speaking at the East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw on 13 November 2014, PM Modi remarked, "Since entering office six months ago my government has moved with a great sense of priority and speed to turn our 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy'". He underlined that "the East Asia Summit is an important pillar of this policy because it's critical for peace, stability and prosperity in Asia-Pacific and the world which brings together such a large collective weight of global population, youth, economy and military strength" (emphasis added). Since then, this has become a part of the official discourse of Indian foreign policy.

In reply to a question in Lok Sabha (House of the People or Lower House of the Parliament), the Minister of State for the External Affairs Gen. Dr. V. K. Singh (Retd.) remarked, "India's Act East Policy focusses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region. The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation" (emphasis added) (MEA 2015c). With AEP in place India now wants to have deeper engagement and interactions in the Indo-Pacific region. This clearly show that India is eager to participate actively and constructively in the changing strategic and geopolitical landscape to protect its national interest as well as to address challenges from unprecedented rise of China. What are the reasons for this shift from the LEP to the AEP? What are the determinants of this change? What are the objectives and what has changed in shifting the gears from the Look East to the Act East?

Why is this transition?

While, over the years, under the rubric of the "Look East Policy" (LEP) the Indian government has been able to cultivate and strengthen its economic and strategic relations with the ASEAN countries and its East Asian neighbours, the changing strategic, geopolitical and economic dynamics of the region foresees India at the very centre of things in Asia with an active participation and deeper engagements. The LEP was motivated more by a gradual convergence of economic and security interests with neighbours. This convergence of interests has grown over the years. Moreover,

China was increasingly seen by the Indian elite as a potential threat and principal source of insecurity for India (Grare 2016: 3). This feature of India's foreign policy emerged as an important tool to deal with challenges posed by the rise of China. It also positions India as a counter balance to the strategic influence of China in the region. "India has been mindful of the China factor in wanting to expand its footprint in this part of Asia (emphasis added), the ASEAN countries too have wanted to bring India into the region more effectively to create a better balance with China's presence there" (Sibal 2012: 193). So, there are common economic and strategic interests between India and ASEAN countries as well as between India and the other major powers in the Indo-Pacific region.

Over the years, China's assertiveness has increased regional fears of a potential China threat. The changing geopolitical environment required greater attention on political and security matters. AEP covers a wider area than just ASEAN. Thus, an up-gradation of the LEP into the AEP fits in well with the change in narrative from East Asia to the Indo-Pacific. It should be seen as dynamic approach to the evolving regional dynamics in the Asia-Pacific. As India becomes one of the fastest growing economies with a huge potential, willingness to take greater responsibilities and to become an effective player in the emerging security and economic architectures in the Asia-pacific region, it is imperative for India to reposition itself in the evolving dynamics towards its east.

Key Drivers of the Change

India's Act East policy did not develop all at once. Several developments and factors have impacted and will continue to impact India's policy in this region. Here six major factors which led India to shift from LEP to AEP are explained.

First, the strategic and geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific is changing. China's growing assertiveness vis-à-vis its neighbours, South China Sea dispute and China's naval and diplomatic expansion in the Indian Ocean is a matter of concern for India as well as other countries in the region.

Second, India-China relations have become more difficult and India's relationship with Pakistan got stymied despite all efforts by the Indian government.[46] A significant power asymmetry between India and China has translated into a "much more active and interventionist Chinese role" (Saran 2017) in India's neighbourhood. Further, China's commitments to Pakistan and other countries in South Asia have seen an increasing trend. China is also showing greater interest in domestic politics of India's neighbouring countries. China engagement in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan has generated a fear in India of losing ground to China. Perhaps, India had become "very nervous of China".[47] This made the new Indian government change its approach and narrative towards the region.

Third, some of the powers in the region often take confrontational positions. For example, the US-China trade war has been rising in the region. There is also Chinese threat in the South China Sea. Thus, many countries of the Indo-Pacific want India to deepen its economic and security engagement and play a larger role in the region to ensure stability in the region. This call by nations made India change its approach.

Fourth, the Western countries are blaming globalisation for all the ills faced by their economies. Many Western nations have taken protectionist and anti-globalisation measures after 2008 financial crisis and continues to be on the path of anti-globalisation. On the other hand, in Southeast Asia regionalism has helped in trade liberalisation, and economic integration across the Asia-Pacific. The leaders of countries in the region believe in free, open and inclusive region and thus are negotiating regional trade agreements. These regional trade agreements have important significance for India and thus it is natural for India to engage more with its neighbours.

Fifth, the most important factor which set in motion the change of discourse from LEP to AEP was a recognition that North East Region of India is vital for its engagement eastwards. The Modi government acknowledged that the policy starts in India's own northeast region and relates significantly to India's relations with its neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It was, therefore, imperative to look at and engage India's extended neighbourhood from the

[46] This is based on interview with India's former National Security Advisor Ambassador Shiv Shankar Menon.
[47] Ibid.

North East region, which didn't get necessary attention in the past. Development of the NER became a trigger and pivot to India's Act East.

Finally, India can achieve its internal growth targets when there is peaceful neighbourhood which needs cooperation of all the . countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, India is making developmental as well as economic partnerships in the region to continue its growth story and take along its partners. Modi government has introduced several reforms for improving India's ease of doing business ranking and has also highlighted the importance of domestic agenda in its relations with ASEAN and other major powers in the region.

Objectives, Key Features and Progress

What are the key objectives of the AEP? According to the Government of India, "The objective of Act East Policy is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region including Arunachal Pradesh with other countries in our neighbourhood" (emphasis added) (MEA 2015c). Further, AEP offers "an interface between North East India including the state of Arunachal Pradesh and the ASEAN region". It is crystal clear from this statement that in its new *avatar* (form), the focus has shifted to the NER.

With the AEP in place, the rhetoric and narrative have changed. Further, the intensity of engagement with the Indo-Pacific region[48] has deepened. India, however, has a long history of its eastward engagement and it has become an increasingly important political, economic, and strategic factor in the Indo-Pacific region (Medcalf 2017: 9-10). With a shift in approach and discourse from Look East to Act East, it has acquired a greater strategic dimension. According to Jawed Ashraf, India's High Commissioner in Singapore, "an engagement that began primarily as an economic one

[48] The idea of an Indo-Pacific region involves recognising that the growing economic, geopolitical, and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions are creating a single "strategic system." The term "Indo-Pacific" is also being used by the Indian government in speeches and joint statements. For example, Indian Prime Minister talked about it at the Second Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi. The term gained new prominence recently with its repeated use by the US President Donald Trump and other senior figures in his administration. Gradually, the term 'Indo-Pacific' is becoming the preferred way of understanding the world's most dynamic region.

has become increasingly strategic in content. With each ASEAN partner, as also with other major countries and small island states in the wider region, India has developed strong political, economic and defence relations" (emphasis added) (Ashraf 2017). "India has not only institutionalised regular consultations on foreign and defence affairs at ministerial and senior official levels, but it has also established strategic partnerships of varying depths and intensities with a number of countries in the region" (Das 2013; Pant 2007 & 2013). According to Professor Sumit Ganguly, a renowned expert of India's foreign policy, the shift in terminology was more than cosmetic. He emphasises that the AEP has two distinct prongs, "while it builds upon existing commercial ties, it also includes a security component which stems in considerable part from the government's concern about growing Chinese influence in the region" (Ganguly 2017: 136).

Developing North East: The Heart of Act East

If one looks at the transition from LEP to AEP, the most important shift is the centrality of the NER. From the NER perspective, the AEP marks a major foreign policy initiative and, in many ways, a distinct shift in India's relationships with its ASEAN neighbours. However, a shift in focus underlines that for the NER, the AEP is much more than a mere trade and commercial opportunity. AEP acknowledges the importance of NER by scripting and defining the region's specificity as an essential part of India's developmental trajectory as well as fitting the region into its foreign policy architecture. Second, AEP clearly assigns a definitive role and agenda for the people of NER in India's pursuit for economic relationships with ASEAN countries. Third, the AEP is the only major policy initiative available to the region for the improvement of substantial exchange and business with its neighbouring nations.. Fourth, the policy provides an opportunity to the different communities in the region to re-establish their age-old socio-cultural ties as well as historical links with the people of the Southeast Asian nations (Rajkumar 2016: 144). The Indian government is working with a concrete action plan and is providing resources to implement those agendas in a given time-frame. Hence, it is expected that the AEP would bring fundamental changes including economic, political, socio-cultural and psychological aspects in peoples' lives in NER.

India had announced a huge programme to construct roads and airstrips along its entire fringe with China during Dr Manmohan Singh's leadership. This was a step to move away from an old policy which neglected areas bordering China fearing that better connectivity in these areas will expose them to China. Under this programme, New Delhi endorsed development of several strategic roads by the BRO (Gupta 2006; Chaturvedy 2006c). Remarkably, after four decades of closure Nathu La Pass was opened for trade from 6 July 2006 and border trade resumed between India and China. In the past Nathu La Pass was a strategic part of the flourishing old Silk Route, connecting the Indian state with ancient China. The reestabilishing of trade between India and China via the Silk Route was a major confidence building measure and also reflects the shifts in India's foreign policy (Dasgupta 2006; The Hindustan Times 2006; Chaturvedy 2006b).

Coming out of a "defensive mindset", the Indian government on 29 June 2006 sanctioned the construction of 608 km of roads along the Sino-Indian border. The roads stretches from Ladakh area in Jammu and Kashmir to Diphu La in Arunachal Pradesh. The cost of this project was around Rs. 992 crores. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took this decision. The CCS also directed the Border Roads Organisation to complete the monumental task in six years (Sharma 2006; Tikku 2006). The BRO first surveyed the roads along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in view of the density of the roads. As the density roads in border areas is low as compared to all India. The government also decided to revive airstrips along the China border and as a result, in 2008, Antonov-32 aircraft landed in Daulat Beg Oldie airstrip in Ladakh after a gap of 43 years. India-China border has been neglected by Indian governments for several decades and thus, the government under PM Manmohan Singh took all these steps to reverse the effects of that neglect The other two fields are in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. India has finalised 27 projects involving the construction of new roads in the India-China border area as part of its programme of developing infrastructure along its boundaries.

Myanmar and India also agreed to build two more border roads to connect Myanmar's northern Chin state and India's Mizoram state and to promote the border trade activities between the two neighbours in addition to existing Tamu-Kalewa road. Likewise, "India had proposed the launch of cross-LoC bus services between Kargil

and Skardu in PoK and Jammu and Sialkot. These, together with the existing Delhi-Lahore and Srinagar-Muzaffarabad routes, could have considerably helped to link India and Pakistan. New Delhi is also upgrading and constructing an integrated state of the art checkpoints on its borders with every neighbour. Besides the old Nathu La trading post, New Delhi wants to open another border trading point with China at Gumla" (The Hindu 2006a). However, several plans of the previous government lingered due to the considerable delivery deficit.

India's has poor road network and faces frequent power cut, these remain the Achilles' heel of fast-growing Indian economy and hampers its ability to compete with China. In fact, "Delhi slept through the 1990s and in the early years of this decade. When it finally woke up a couple of years ago, Delhi did announce major road construction all along the China border. But the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government seems to have no capacity to follow through even when the projects are of such paramount importance for national defence and security" (Mohan 2009). Figure 24 below shows the poor condition of strategic roads in India's state of Arunachal Pradesh. The on-the-ground reality was markedly different from the Indian government's lofty announcements.

Figure 24: A Glimpse of Roads in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

Source: Picture taken by the author.

Coinciding with the new wave of globalisation, the Indian government wanted "connectivity" to define its relations with the neighbourhood, which could have the constructive effect of making borders irrelevant. Emphasising on infrastructure development as "transmission belts", the then India's Foreign Secretary said, "The sobering reality is that despite the initiatives of the past few years with Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar and others, we have not even been able to get back to the connectivity which existed in South Asia before 1947" (The Hindu 2006b). Although, the Indian government had announced many projects, India was not able to follow through despite the obvious strategic implications of such developments. See pictures 25 and 26, which shows India's road development programme. It clearly shows a lack of commitment to following through on promises made. Examples such as these result in the people in the border region feel neglected. Also, Border Road Organisation (BRO), the agency responsible for building strategic roads in border regions could not deliver projects on time. BRO had lack of manpower and technology to deliver projects speedily. In addition, there are environmental concerns as well.

Figure 25: Special Accelerated Road Development Programme?

Source: Picture taken by the author.

The China threat theory in India greatly affected the pace of border region development. Perhaps, it was due to the idea that the difficult terrain of northeast along with absence of well-developed roads increases the security of the heartland and if roads and bridges are constructed they might provide easy access to inimical forces including arms and drug-dealers, smugglers or even legitimate traders and not necessarily armed forces. However, smugglers and gunrunners do not come to border check posts to seek a comfortable crossing. They employ other means and have long been doing so. The absence of development, incomes, employment and opportunities actually encourages illegal or informal trade.

The current Indian government realises the imperatives of developing infrastructures in peripheral regions. It is not surprising, therefore, that developing northeast region of India has become a priority for the Modi government and it is taking concrete efforts to make it the heart of India's Act East policy.

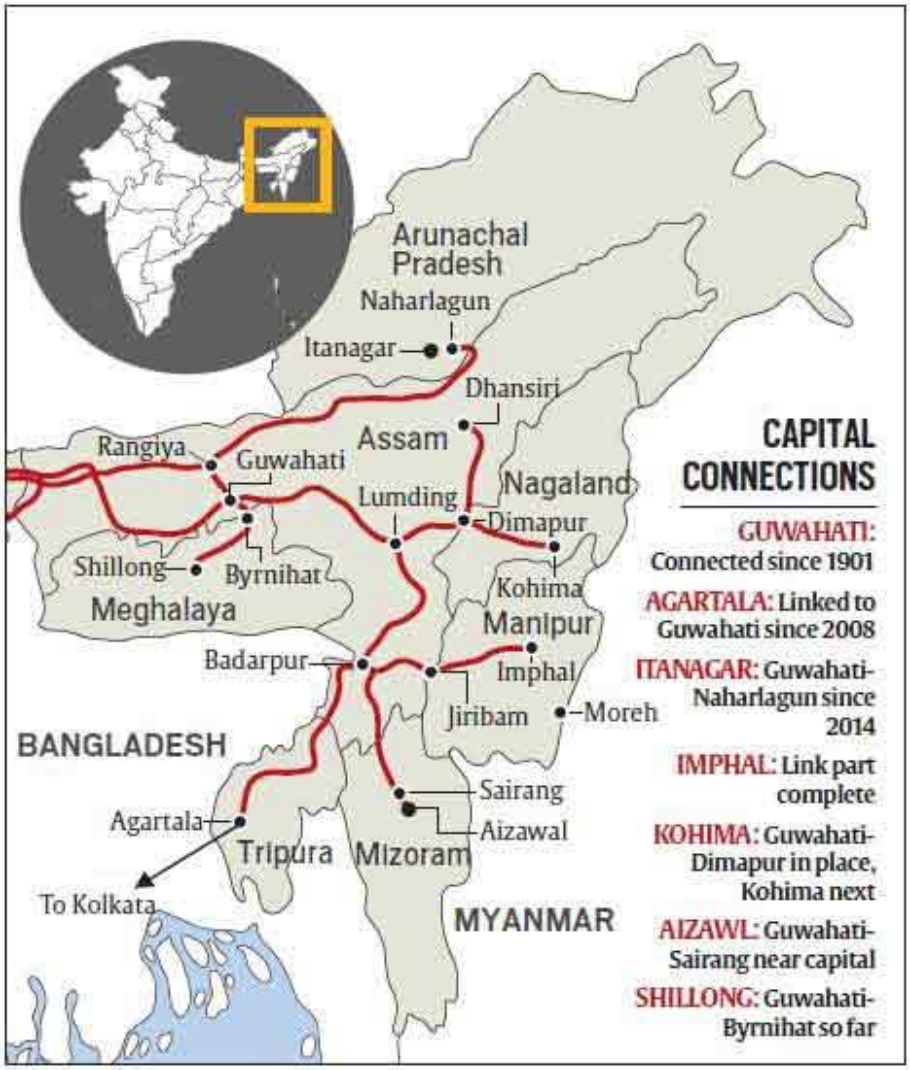
Figure 26: A road construction sight of India-China border region

Source: Picture taken by the author.

The Modi government has taken several steps to implement the ambitious agenda of developing NER and to strengthen connectivity between the NER and ASEAN via trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and infrastructure development. The government is working on various plans including economic cooperation with Asia-Pacific facilitating bilateral trade via NER; enhancing sea and road connectivity of NER through other nations; enhancing rail and air connectivity internally in the NER; developing NER as an organic farming hub and agricultural exports; Buddhist-Hindu circuit from India to South-East Asia passing through the North East with an aim to boost tourism. Further, the government is working on getting access to the sea via Bangladesh and Myanmar which transforms landlocked North East's economy and living standards, reduces road and rail transport time and reduces fuel cost. Similarly, work in progress on India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand via Mandalay in Myanmar will improve connectivity. In addition, inland waterways are also being improved for the transport of goods to important ports in ASEAN. Nineteen additional waterways have been declared National Waterways (The Times of India 2017).

In recent years, India has been making sustained efforts to hasten economic growth in the Northeast through policy measures as well as by strengthening physical infrastructure. For instance, the Indian government has extended tax incentives to industries in north-eastern and Himalayan states till March 2027 (LiveMint 2017). There have been persistent attempts to improve infrastructure in the Northeast. For instance, in 2016, the current government announced its intent to spend US$ 5.8 billion on infrastructure in Northeast India (Maini 2017). In the last budget, more than Rs 30,000 crores have been earmarked for the North East region. As mentioned by PM Modi in one of his speeches, a specialised highways construction agency, i.e., the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation has already been created in 2014 for better connectivity of the North East region. "Since then, it has set up branch offices in each of the North Eastern States and is implementing 34 projects covering a length of 1001 kilometres, at a total cost of over Rs 10,000 crore" (Narendra Modi 2016). The Bhupen Hazarika Setu connecting upper Assam with the Eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh, which was inaugurated by PM Modi in 2017, has been one of the flagship projects of the region.

Figure 27: Capital Connections in India's Northeast

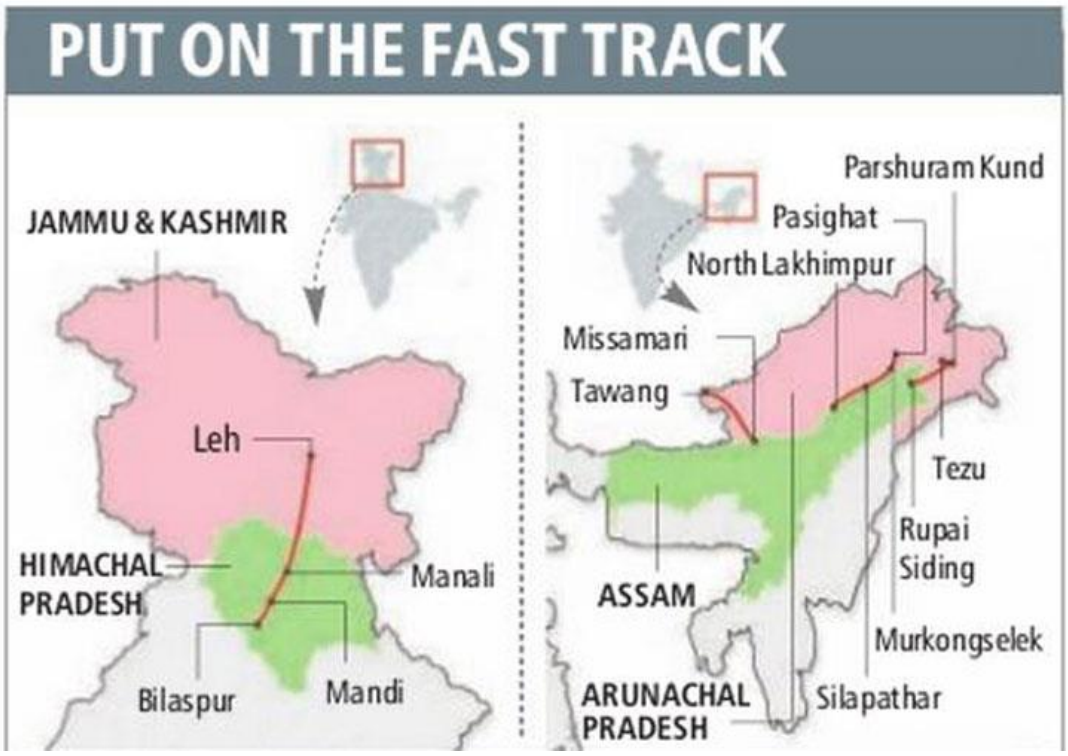


Source: Kashyap (2016).

There have been steady improvements in railway connectivity in Northeast India. The Indian government has expressed its intent to connect all state capitals in Northeast India with a broad-gauge railway network. Recently, Mizoram and Manipur were connected by broad-gauge railway lines (The Times of India 2016). Further, it is being estimated that by 2019, the broad-gauge line will reach Sairang (close to Aizawl) (Kashyap 2016). Sairang will be a major transportation hub on the Kaladan Multi-Modal Project. There are plans for extending the railway line from Sairang to Hmawngbuhchhuah covering the north-south length of Mizoram (Chhetri 2016). The railway works pertaining to Bhairabi-Sairang (Mizoram), Dimapur-Zubza (Nagaland) and Sevok-Rangpo (Sikkim) are also progressing. In the coming years, approximately

Rs 10,000 crore will be spent on improving rail connectivity in Northeast India (Deccan Chronicle 2016). The construction of the railway lines in the north-eastern region is a difficult enterprise because of the terrain. For instance, the proposed Bhairabi-Sairang New Broad Gauge Line would require 23 tunnels, 38 major bridges and 6 tall bridges (North East Frontier Railway 2016).

Figure 28: Strategic Rail Lines Along China Border



Source: Dastidar 2014.

In addition to these lines, the Indian government has conceptualised three strategic railway lines in Arunachal Pradesh viz., "Bhalukpong-Tenga-Tawang (378 km), North Lakhimpur-Bame-Aalo-Silapathar (247.85 km) and Pasighat-Tezu-Parsuram Kund-Rupai (227 km)". Among the proposed three lines, Pasighat-Tezu-Parsuram Kund-Rupai can be completed quickly because the terrain is relatively friendly for the construction of railway lines (The Economic Times 2017a). On the other hand, the Railway line to Tawang will have to pass through treacherous hilly terrain and will severely test Indian infrastructure capabilities. Tawang is located very close to the China border and is, therefore, strategically very important. A railway line will

fundamentally alter the geopolitical landscape. It will give India power-projection potential deep into Tibet.

As indicated by PM Modi, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have been placed on the rail map. Agartala in Tripura has also been connected with a broad gauge line. All North East states are now to be incorporated on the rail map. The Indian Railways have already commissioned about 900 kilometres of broad gauge in the North East since 2014-2015, leaving only about 50 kilometres of meter gauge lines to be converted. New Maynaguri – Jogighopa, a third alternative connectivity route to the North East has also been commissioned.

Figure 29: The Bogibeel Bridge

Source: The Indian Express (2018).

More recently, with the inauguration of the Bogibeel Bridge (see Figure 29), the journey between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh by train has now been reduced from 500 km to 100 km, according to details released by the project developers. The 4.9 km-long bridge built on the Brahmaputra river is Asia's second longest rail-cum-road bridge. The bridge also facilitates quicker movement of defence forces and equipment to India-China border areas. Further, it also benefits tourists, and facilitates movement of trade goods and provides quick access to people in case of medical emergencies. In October 2018, the Indian government announced "a plan for construction of a 19-km bridge over the Brahmaputra from Dhubri in Assam to Phulbari in Meghalaya. The proposed time of completion is 10 years. Once that happens, three of India's five

longest bridges would be running across the country's widest river" (The Indian Express 2018).

The Indian government had announced a Special Accelerated Road Development Programme (SARDP-NE) with an intent of "providing road connectivity to all the district headquarters in the north eastern region by minimum two-lane highway standards apart from providing road connectivity to backward and remote areas, areas of strategic importance and neighbouring countries" (Press Information Bureau 2013). An important component of the SARDP-NE is the ambitious Trans-Arunachal Highway. The mega two-lane 1,500 km Trans-Arunachal Highway will seek to connect Tawang in the westernmost section of the state with Kanubari in the south-eastern tip of Arunachal Pradesh (Business Standard 2015).

In a positive development, in 2017, India's longest bridge – Dhola-Sadiya bridge in Assam – was inaugurated. This bridge, on the mighty Brahmaputra, will improve connectivity between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. While the feasibility study was cleared in 2003, construction began in 2011. The new bridge will reduce the distance between Tezu and Tinsukia by about five hours (The Indian Express 2017). Further, the bridge will also be able to handle heavy military equipment and will enable rapid deployment of heavy weaponry to the India-Myanmar-China trijunction areas. The successful completion of the Dhola-Sadiya bridge seems to have imparted greater confidence to conceptualise other ambitious projects. In April 2017, Union Minister of Road Transport, Highways and Shipping, Nitin Gadkari, announced a proposal to develop the 1,300 km-long Brahmaputra Express Highways project in Assam with an estimated Rs 40,000 crore (NDTV 2017). India is also planning to seek the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s assistance for the following projects: "Siliguri-Mirik-Darjeeling road; Kolkata to Bongaon (on India-Bangladesh Border); upgradation of road connections to Diamond Harbour in West Bengal; Ukhrul-Tolloi-Tadubi road in Manipur, NH 102 A; and split four-lane road on Kohima-Kedima Krong Imphal Section of NH 2 (old NH-39)". These projects will have a positive impact in terms of enhancing eastward integration. In addition to building road infrastructure, passenger services are also being augmented. Till recently, there were four passenger bus services between India and Bangladesh: (1) Kolkata to Agartala via Dhaka; (2) Dhaka to Guwahati via Shillong (3) Kolkata-Dhaka; and (4) Agartala-Dhaka (Ministry of

Road Transport and Highways, Government of India 2016). In 2017, a new passenger bus service between Kolkata–Khulna-Dhaka was added.

Northeast India and Japan

India considers Japan as its "closest and most reliable partner" in its connectivity programmes. Right after assuming office in 2014, PM Modi made the first bilateral visit outside India's immediate neighbourhood to Japan. This shows that Japan is an old friend of India and always receives high priority in foreign and economic policies of India. Indian policymakers never fail to recognise the paramount importance of Japan in India's vision for its own development and prosperity as well as in peace, stability and prosperity in Asia at large. They argue that both India and Japan are peace-loving and democratic nations and together they can play an significant role in shaping the future of Asia and the world.

The India-Japan Summit held on 1 September 2014 saw bilateral relations upgraded to a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership". A significant expansion of India-Japan economic relations was also announced, ranging from connectivity and industrial corridors to high speed rail, next generation infrastructure and transport systems to the development of industrial cities and townships, smart community projects to renewable energy.

As India is ramping up its connectivity projects in the Northeast, it is receiving valuable assistance from Japan. The 2016 India-Japan Joint Statement notes the necessity of developing synergies between India's Act East Policy and Japan's Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) with Northeast India being the site of these collaborative endeavours (MEA 2016h). In the recent past, Japan has scaled up its Official Development Assistance (ODA) for various connectivity projects in Northeast India. "For the North East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project (Phase I), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will provide 67,170 million Japanese Yen, which is approximately Rs 4000 crores, at concessional interest rates of 1.4 per cent on project activities and 0.01 per cent for consulting services, with a 30-year repayment period" (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2017). As a part of this assistance programme, two important highways – NH 54 and NH 51 – are to be upgraded. The NH 54 connects Aizawl to

Tuipang in Mizoram and is part of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Corridor. The expansion of this highway will result in the strengthening of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Project. On the other hand, NH 51 connects Tura to Dalu in Meghalaya. This will strengthen India's road connectivity with Bangladesh. It is interesting to note that while these projects are being operationalised in India, they will have regional implications as they improve Northeast connectivity with Bangladesh and Myanmar. This is a very good example of deploying or operationalising bilateral projects with a broader regional vision.

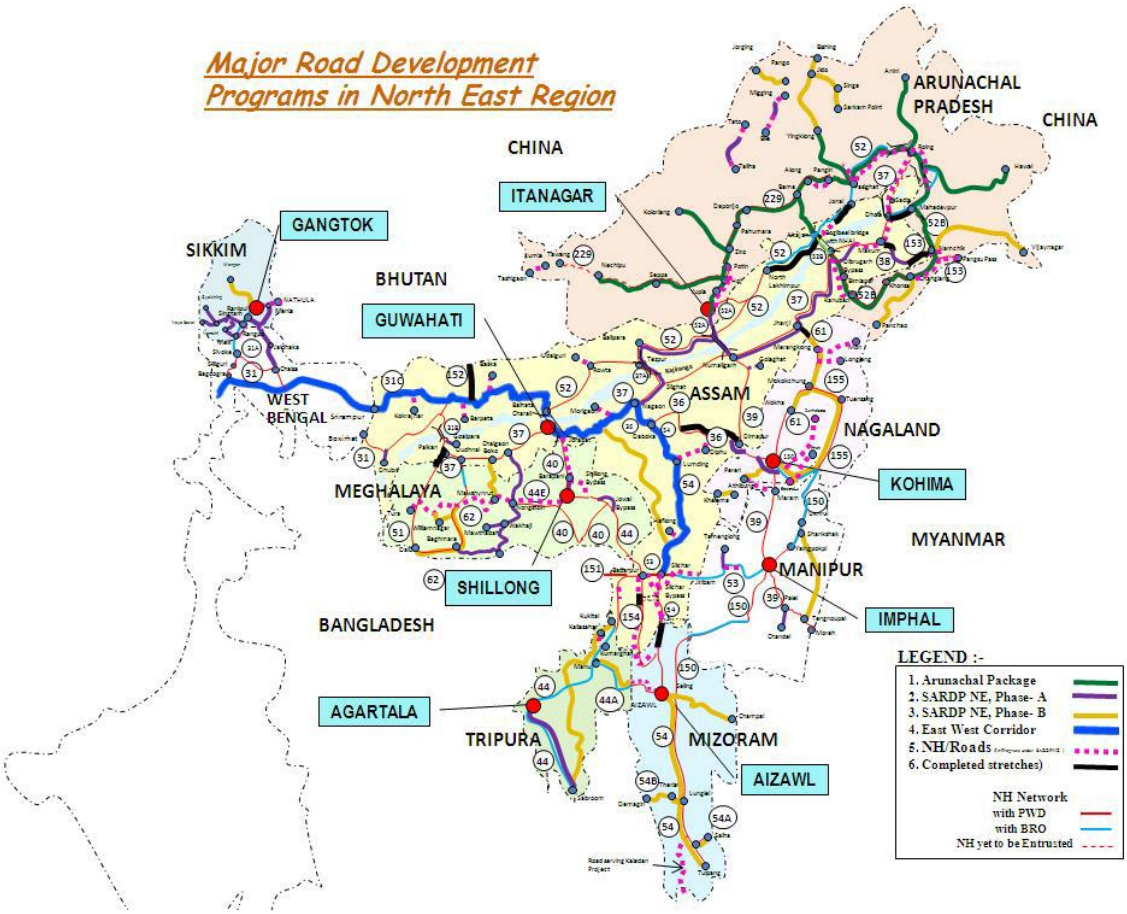
More recently, the Japan-India Coordination Forum (JICF) for Development of the North-Eastern Region was initiated, and its first meeting was held on 3 August 2017. The meeting witnessed the participation of the Secretary, Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (DoNER) and the Japanese Ambassador to India. The forum envisages participation of various ministries of the Government of India and developmental agencies of Japan (Press Information Bureau 2017). Even if there are changes in personnel, the initiation of JICF will institutionalise cooperative engagement and will help in sustaining the momentum of the underlying vision. India has been hesitant to engage with external actors for the development of the north-eastern region. However, with Japan, it is scaling up collaboration on connectivity projects and is creating new institutional frameworks, which indicates very high levels of trust between these two countries. At their latest bilateral summit held on 14 September 2017 India and Japan also decided to set up a Japan-India Act East Forum to accelerate Japan-assisted connectivity projects in India's northeast. Another tranche of Japan's ODA assistance for these projects was also announced (MEA 2017j).

In terms of power, the government has been making a heavy investment in the North East at a cost of around Rs 10,000 crore. The commissioning of Bishwanath-Chariyali-Agra transmission line has also brought 500 Mega Watt additional capacity to the region. An improved internet connectivity project for the North East region is currently underway in collaboration with Bangladesh.

India has also hastened the process of connecting the North East region with the larger ASEAN region through different projects. An India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement is presently under discussion and a task force for maritime connectivity and working groups on air services and shipping arrangements have been

set up to enhance physical connectivity between North East India and ASEAN. A specialised body called Inland Waterways Authority of India has been formed and given the responsibility for converting 106 rivers across the country into navigable rivers. India is making efforts to harness the waterways of rivers such as the Brahmaputra in Assam, Barak connecting India and Bangladesh and Irrawaddy in Myanmar for promoting trade and people-to-people connectivity.

Figure 30: Major Road Development in Northeast Region



Source: http://mdoner.gov.in

The active involvement of North Eastern state governments through cooperative federalism has added new dimensions to India's connectivity initiatives. According to government sources, Assam is taking the lead in this space. It has already started taking measures to connect state level policies with India's Act East Policy. By setting up a dedicated Act East Department and by organising events like the Namami Brahmaputra event, Assam is striving to generate awareness about its untapped

business potential, its culture and its people among neighbouring regions and thereby helping fast-track its own development process.

According to the Union Minister for Road Transport, Highway, Shipping, Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation Nitin Gadkari, "India has proposed a US$ 1 billion line of credit to promote sea, air and road connectivity projects with the ASEAN." Speaking at the inaugural day first ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit on the theme "Powering Digital and Physical Linkages for Asia in the 21st Century", Gadkari said, "India has set up a project development fund of US$ 77 million to develop manufacturing hubs in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam." The summit was organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC). The summit underlined the importance of international corridors for increasing trade in the region (Financial Express 2017).

North East Council (NEC) has been tasked to implement and monitor development activities in the NER. More importantly, for the first time, a roster of eight Union Ministers has been created which ensures that they visit North-East every fortnight and constantly review major projects in the region and their progress. PM Modi takes a special interest in the development of the NER and he uses a 'War Room' approach to address emerging challenges in project implementation. The government is also setting up the Brahmaputra Study Centre to conduct a research on the river's ecosystem in the region.

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) Project

While connectivity networks will improve the movement of goods and services within Northeast India, there is a need to offset the disadvantages that stem from the landlocked nature of Northeast India. It is to address this challenge that Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) Project was initiated in 2003. The KMTT has four components: (1) Shipping transit between Kolkata and Sittwe port (539 km); (2) Inland Water Transport component between Sittwe and Paletwa on River Kaladan (158 km); (3) Road component between Paletwa to Indo-Myanmar Border (110 km); and (4) Border to Lawngtlai road component (100 km). The project experienced considerable delays in execution. However, in the recent past, the project seems to have acquired a momentum. Works pertaining to the port and inland water terminal at

Sittwe, trans-shipment facilities at Paletwa, improvements to navigation channel along the Kaladan river and deployment of inland transport vessels have been completed (MEA 2017c). In 2017, contracts have been awarded to complete the road component between Paletwa and the Indo-Myanmar border, which would be linked to a four-lane highway connecting Aizawl-Tuipang (Bose 2017). The KMTT is now estimated to be completed in another three years. There are plans for operationalising a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) close to Sittwe (Mizuno 2017). Since the development of transportation networks are already in progress, the development of a SEZ will make the KMTT a comprehensive project. India has reportedly invited ASEAN countries also to participate in the proposed Sittwe SEZ (Chaudhury 2016).

Figure 31: Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport

Source: Ramesh (2013).

In addition to implementation challenges, the KMTT will also be impacted by the spurt in sectarian violence in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Particularly, if India decides to operationalise/implement the SEZ in Sittwe, the political turmoil in the region will need to be factored in. Moreover, China is also operationalising Kyaukphyu SEZ, south of Sittwe. The presence of two SEZs in close proximity on the Bay of Bengal coast of Myanmar may negatively impact each other's economic viability.

Trilateral Highway

While the KMTT seeks to address the landlocked dimensions of Northeast India, there is a need to leverage Myanmar's geographic location as India's land-bridge to Southeast Asia. It was way back in 2002 that the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway was conceptualised at a Trilateral Ministerial Meeting on Transport Linkages, and a decade later, in 2012, a Joint Task Force to operationalise the highway was created (MEA 2012). The 3200-km highway was to connect Moreh in Manipur (India) to Mae Sot in Thailand after traversing through large parts of Myanmar. The completion of the project will enable people to travel by road from Manipur to Mandalay and onward to Thailand. Interestingly, in the initial conception, Mandalay was not on the map of the trilateral highway. However, given the importance of commercial hubs such as Mandalay, it became imperative for the IMT Trilateral Highway to connect with Mandalay. In November 2015, a trial run of passenger vehicles on the Imphal-Mandalay-Bagan-Naypyitaw component of the IMT was completed. While the current status of the IMT highway can handle passenger traffic, it was recognised that upgradation of 71 bridges would be required to handle/manage container traffic. It was decided that Myanmar will upgrade two bridges and 69 will be upgraded by the Indian government. In order to expedite the completion of the project, in 2015 the Indian government "approved the construction of 69 Bridges including Approach Roads on the Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section of the trilateral highway in Myanmar at a cost of Rs 371.58 crore" (Press Information Bureau 2015). A year later, in June 2016, tenders for the construction of bridges and approach roads were issued (MEA 2017e). The Indian government has also expressed an intent to extend the trilateral highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam (MEA 2016i). In order to facilitate easy movement of vehicles on the highway, India, Myanmar and Thailand are negotiating a Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA). However, the conclusion of the MVA was delayed due to the political transition in Myanmar. The new government which came to power after the 2015 elections reportedly wanted to restart the negotiation process afresh (Basu 2016). The completion of the IMT highway and conclusion of the associated MVA will give a boost to transnational movement of people and goods between Northeast India, Myanmar and Thailand.

The KMTT and the IMT Trilateral Highway will also increase India's economic engagement with Myanmar. Till 1960, India and Myanmar had good relations and India was a major player in Myanmar's social and economic landscape. India's interactions with Myanmar were greatly affected when the democracy was thrown by military dictator ship. However, now as the political transition from military dictatorship to democracy gains in momentum Myanmar, it provides strategic opportunities to India to explore new areas of cooperation and participate in peace-building process in the nation.

In the economic realm, bilateral trade between the two countries is around US$ 2.2 billion, and Indian public and private sector investment in Myanmar amounts to about US$ 750 million (MEA 2017g). While India imports agricultural commodities, such as pulses, it exports pharmaceuticals and electrical goods to Myanmar. India's import of pulses and cereals is substantive. As former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar, Gautam Mukhopadhaya, pointed out: "Indian imports of beans and pulses play a vital part in our food security and Myanmar's economy. Standing at around a million tonnes and US$ 1 billion in value, over 90 of which is exported to India, this is vital to Myanmar's farmers and foreign exchange earnings, greater even in the value of its exports of rice to China that are prone to periodic restrictions" (Mukhopadhaya 2017). In bilateral trade as well as in public and private investments, there is scope for significant improvement. However, official statistics do not capture the informal trade on the India-Myanmar border. As the Myanmar government ushers in greater transparency in decision-making, India's economic engagement will register an increase. As already noted, the progress on the much delayed Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway has picked up momentum in the recent past.

In terms of security issues, India shares approximately 1643 kms of land border with Myanmar and this border is critical for maintaining stability and peace in India's Northeast. Some Northeast insurgent groups carry out their operations across the border. Therefore, response to threats posed by these groups requires cooperation and consent of the Myanmar's army. In 2015, India conducted a cross-border strike on insurgent groups operating out of Myanmar.

Myanmar holds significance for India since ancient times. We share common cultural and religious heritage. Since the political transition in Myanmar Indian government has made efforts to engage more with Myanmar. There have been high level interactions between the leaders of the two countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014. During the visit PM Modi met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Then Myanmar's President U Htin Kyaw took visit to India in 2016 and later in the same year State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi visited India. She again visited India for the 25th India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in January 2018 and met PM Modi on the side lines of the event. Military cooperation has also started between the two countries with visits of high-ranking officials from both sides. "In an interesting development, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, visited Myanmar in August this year. During his interactions, he referred to Myanmar as 'Brahmadesh' and updated his hosts on the improvements to the Buddhist circuits in India. The fact that the Chief Minister of the most populous state chose Myanmar for his first overseas visit suggests that this neighbour has acquired a prominent position in the cultural map of the ruling party in India" (Pulipaka 2017).

In an important development, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar in the first week of September 2017. In addition to infrastructure connectivity projects, both sides reviewed progress on the agreement to facilitate the movement of petroleum products across the land border, easing the procedures pertaining to cross-border movement of people and starting a coordinated bus service between Imphal and Mandalay. They also stressed the importance of concluding an agreement on the movement of motor vehicles. India has decided to scale up development assistance to strengthen socio-economic development in the Rakhine state, establish industrial training centres in Monywa and Thaton, and to grant gratis visas to all Myanmar nationals (MEA 2017h). It should be noted that India has refrained from commenting on the ongoing religious violence in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. However, it has scaled up assistance aimed at improving socio-economic indicators precisely in those areas which are experiencing sectarian violence. All this indicates that Indian engagement of Myanmar is increasingly becoming multidimensional and also very nuanced.

Maritime Imperatives of Act East Policy

Over 90 per cent by volume and 70 per cent by value of India's external trade is shipped by sea. Maritime resources also play a central part in India's strategy to develop its blue economy, which is expected to help bolster the country's rising economic power. PM Modi's vision of Blue Economy is an important part India's transformation policy.

Consultation process has been started by NITI Aayog to take forward Modi's vision of blue economy. India, a major maritime nation, has the longest coastline in the region and it has known the significance of the oceans since the ancient times and now with the technological innovations carried out in the marine sector it is taking a lead role in the blue economy.

Adding a new dimension to its AEP, India has offered a hand of partnership and friendship to 14 Pacific island countries, including Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. PM Modi announced a series of cooperative measures with small island nations (Roche and Rizvi 2015). India's expanding outreach to these countries has broadened the geographical scope of the AEP. As such, the Modi government appears pragmatic and decisive in pursuing a larger role in the promotion of regional mechanisms for collective security and economic prosperity.

River and port connectivity is capable of boosting trade and investment, thus the government is giving special focus to developing the maritime sector. India is planning to create cruise tourism (network) which can be connected to ASEAN countries. The government is building a cruise terminal in Mumbai to enhance cruise tourism (Financial Express 2017). Through the Sagarmala Project, the government envisages "to promote port-led direct and indirect development and to provide infrastructure to transport goods to and from ports quickly, efficiently and cost-effectively. This project aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services" (MEA 2015b).

The Press Information Bureau (2016) of shared the information that "The National Perspective Plan (NPP) for the Sagarmala programme was prepared and approved by the National Sagarmala Apex Committee on 9 April 2016 and Prime Minister Modi released the Plan at Maritime India Summit on 14 April 2016. India's Minister of State for Shipping, Shri P. Radhakrishnan, in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha on 21 July 2016, informed parliament that a total of 173 projects under four categories – port modernisation, port connectivity, port-led industrialisation and coastal community development – have been initially identified under NPP." Dr Vijay Sakhuja, an eminent strategic affairs expert and former Director of National Maritime Foundation underlined the significance of cruise tourism and marine leisure industry as the niche component of the connectivity projects between India and ASEAN countries during the first ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit and suggested development of cruise triangle between Lankavi Island, Andaman and Kolkata connecting with coastal cities of Thailand and Myanmar (Confederation of Indian Industry 2017: 7). In addition, he stated the development of the blue economy and use of digital technology as the key for improving connectivity between the islands of the ASEAN countries with the Andaman and Nicobar Island. These ideas are in sync with evolving policies and plans under the AEP.

The maritime dimension of the Act East Policy will likely become a major focus of India's future regional policy, especially when the notion of the security and development inter-linkage between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean has been increasingly accepted in recent years. Known collectively as the Indo-Pacific, the term has gained salience in India as Delhi begins to appreciate the importance of its economic and strategic interests (Mohan 2015: 49-58; Medcalf 2015; Townshend & Medcalf 2016). At the same time, given India's rise and its expanding military capabilities, there is a growing regional interest in India's larger contribution to peace and stability in Southeast Asia (Mohan 2013: 134) . Indeed, India has engaged in joint naval exercises and exchanged port calls with some Southeast Asian states, including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. The Indian Navy has also been involved

in several high-profile humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in the region.[49]

Moreover, is playing a larger role in ensuring stable and rule-based Asian security architecture. Its policy initiatives are designed accordingly to help it in its pursuit. Towards this end, "India has established or co-established its own multilateral regional institutions, including the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Scientific, Technological and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)" (Mukherjee and O'Donnell 2013). Through these policy initiatives, India wants to build a robust physical connectivity in the region and create a connected Asia that must be governed by commonly agreed international norms, rules and practices.

India as a Net Security Provider

India has reasons to be worried about China (Subrahmanyam 2007). Moreover, given India's history and geography, its key concern regarding its connectivity vision is the threat of disruption to connectivity. "This threat particularly emanates from the spread of terrorism, which has mutated to become even more technologically advanced and lethal with time", notes the then External Affairs Minister Swaraj. She further observes that "the use or threat of use of force by nations in territorial disputes is yet another source of concern for India in the context of connectivity." Furthermore, nature itself may play the biggest challenger to connectivity initiatives. Therefore, security of connectivity routes is on high priority list of the Indian policymakers. As a natural corollary from this narrative emerges the importance of India as a net security provider in its extended neighbourhood (MEA 2016b).

Accordingly, India has been consistently taking the lead in humanitarian assistance and relief efforts in both natural and man-made disasters. For instance, India was one of the first responders during the earthquake in Nepal; carried out operation Raahat to evacuate civilians from Yemen; and provided humanitarian assistance in the Maldives and Fiji after they were hit by devastating cyclones (MEA 2017a). "For the

[49] For example, the Indian Navy has actively participated in HADR operations in the aftermath of Tsunami in 2004, Cyclone SIDR in Bangladesh in 2007, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) in Yemen in 2015, Sri Lanka's flood and Cyclone Mora in Bangladesh, both in May 2017.

maintenance of international peace and security, India has increased its collaboration with different countries on coastal surveillance, white shipping information and fighting non-traditional threats like piracy, smuggling and transnational crimes" (MEA 2017a). India has also been taking the lead in combating pressing global challenges like global warming, by making ambitious commitments towards renewables and taking the lead on initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (MEA 2017a).

India and Infrastructure Connectivity

As mentioned earlier, infrastructure connectivity, in the Indian narrative, is a stepping stone towards realising India's broad-based connectivity vision. There is a broad consensus in New Delhi that infrastructure connectivity to Southern Asia region offers "game-changing possibilities" not only for India but also for the entire region (MEA 2017i). Consequently, higher priority is being accorded to the timely completion of key infrastructure projects like the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project to India's east, and Chabahar Port, the Trilateral Transport and Transit Corridor, and the International North South Transport Corridor to the west (MEA 2016d).

Taking its commitment towards physical connectivity to the next level, India has also ratified the International Road Transport (TIR) Convention. Joining this multilateral international transit treaty, which functions under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), is "intended to integrate India with Myanmar and Thailand as well as Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. On the west, it will enable India to move cargo along the International North-South Transport Corridor via Chabahar port in Iran, to access landlocked Afghanistan and the energy-rich Eurasian region" (Bhaskar 2017).

In addition to terrestrial/land-based physical infrastructure development through roadways, railroads, transit/economic corridors etc., India is giving equal weightage to areas like digital connectivity and maritime connectivity.

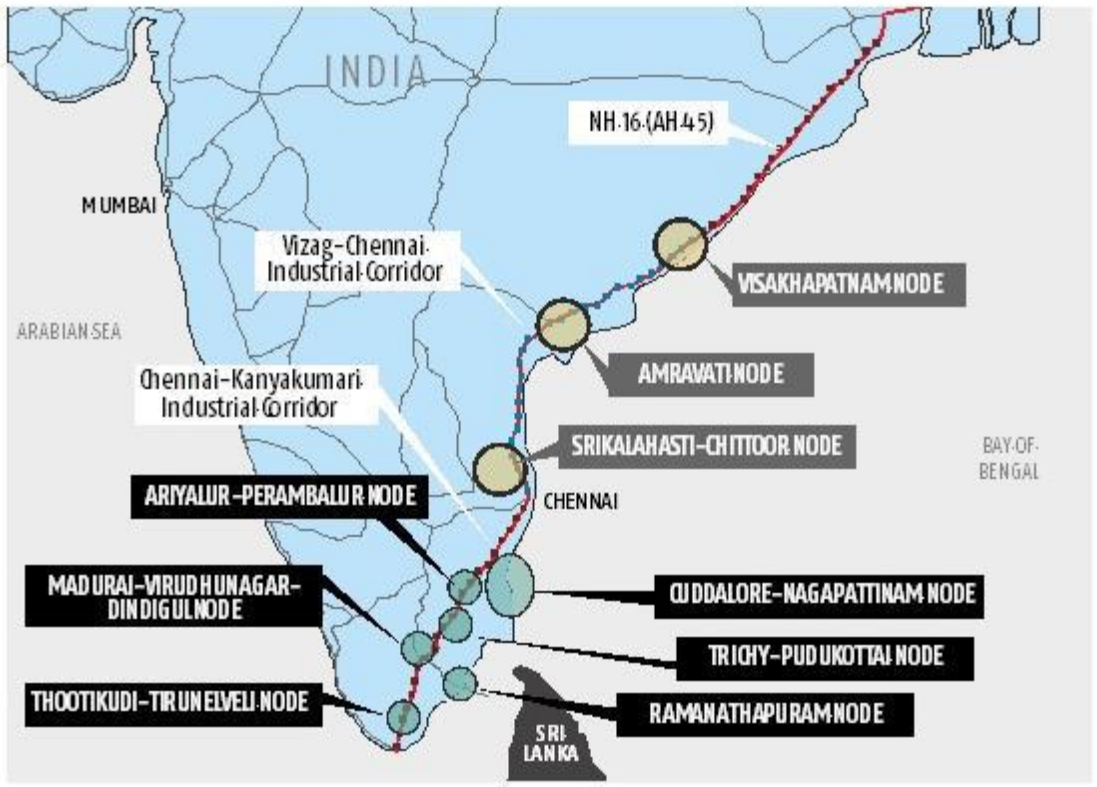
Maritime Connectivity

As outlined above, India's vision for maritime connectivity across the Indian Ocean has already been articulated by Prime Minister Modi as 'SAGAR'- 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'. India's official discourse on maritime connectivity is that "the vast sea space to India's south means that India's vision for connectivity is as much maritime as it is territorial. The oceans around India and the associated blue economy link security and prosperity strongly in the maritime domain" (MEA 2016b). Committed to "safe, secure, stable and shared maritime space", India is focusing on capacity building, both in the bilateral space and on regional platforms. For instance, with Seychelles, India has developed elaborate partnerships in areas like offshore patrolling, coastal surveillance, improvement of logistics and expanded hydrography. Furthermore, India's approach towards maritime connectivity encompasses "meeting traditional and non-traditional threats, contributing to a climate of trust and transparency, ensuring respect for international maritime rules and norms, and resolving maritime disputes without threat or use of force. India's agreement with Bangladesh on the maritime boundary stands out as an example in this regard" (MEA 2016b).

In addition to Northeast India and improved connectivity networks with Myanmar, India's eastward regional integration will be determined to a large extent by strengthening of infrastructure on its Bay of Bengal coastline. The east coast of India (or the Bay of Bengal coast) is relatively less developed than the west coast, which lies along states such as Maharashtra and Gujarat with robust economic growth. In order to address this disparity, new economic initiatives are being conceptualised to spur growth in the domestic market as well as promote greater regional economic integration with the Southeast Asian countries. A step in this direction has been the Asian Development Bank (ADB) supported East Coast Economic Corridor (ECEC). According to Ronald Antonio Butiong, Senior Official with the ADB, the ECEC will run "along the entire east coast from Kolkata to Kanyakumari, is a multi-modal, regional maritime corridor that can play a vital role in unifying the large domestic market, as well as integrating the Indian economy with the dynamic global value chains of Southeast and East Asia" (Ministry of Finance, Government of India 2017). The first phase of the ECEC will be building the corridor between Chennai and Vishakhapatnam, for which the ADB has approved a loan of US$ 631 million, and the Government of Andhra Pradesh will be spending about US$ 215 million (The Hindu 2016). The ECEC envisages port hubs as well as air cargo hubs to connect peninsular

India with wider Bay of Bengal region (Banerjee 2017). Once fully operationalised, the ECEC will be the first coastal industrial corridor in India.

Figure 32: East-Coast Economic Corridor

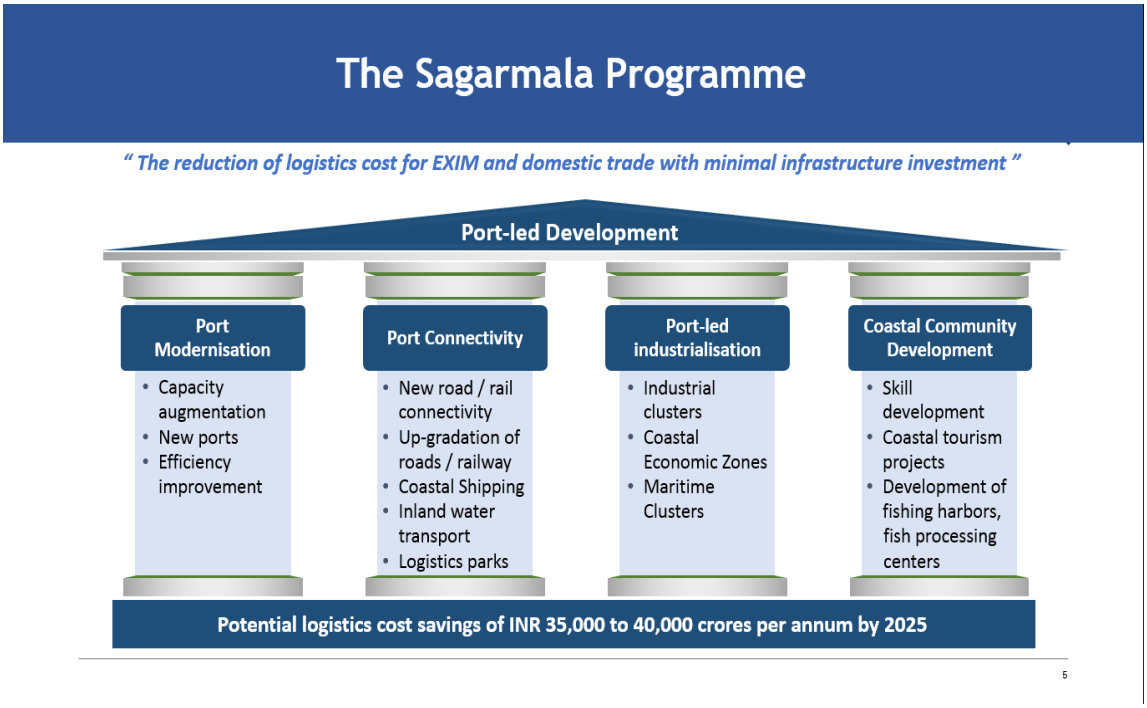


Source: Narasimhan (2017).

In consonance with the ECEC vision, the India government has simultaneously launched a comprehensive port and coastal development programme – the Sagarmala Programme – which aims at leveraging India's long coastline and natural maritime advantages (Ministry of Shipping 2016). Its goal, as stated by then Foreign Secretary Dr S. Jaishankar, is to increase coastal shipping five-fold, develop India's inland waterways and generate maritime logistics as will be required in the future by a more industrialised India. Much importance is being given to the development of India's east coast, which is believed to hold "a real potential for the structural re-orientation of Indian economy and society" (MEA 2016g). Articulating the vision of the Sagarmala programme (see Figure 33), India's Ministry of Shipping underlines that "Sagarmala is an ambitious national initiative aimed at bringing about a step change in India's logistics sector performance, by unlocking the full potential of India's coastline and waterways" (Sagarmala website). The programme aims for seamless

connectivity, efficient ports, synergistic and coordinated development of logistics intensive industries, and requisite skill-base, which will help to unlock economic value.

Figure 33: The Sagarmala Programme



Source: Sagarmala website, http://sagarmala.gov.in

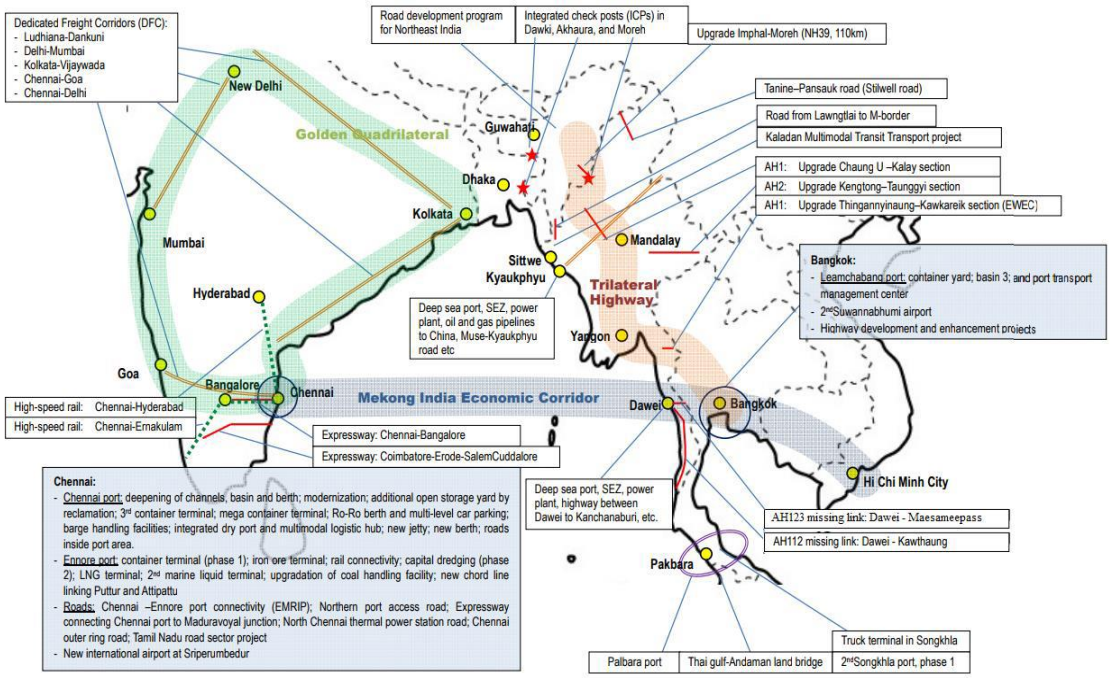
The programme proposes to take up approximately 415 projects with a focus on "port-linked industrialisation and coastal community development", and it also envisages setting up of six new ports. Four of the six ports - Sagar Island (West Bengal), Paradip Outer Harbour (Odisha), Sirkhazi (Tamil Nadu), and Enayam (Tamil Nadu) - will be on the Bay of Bengal coast (Ministry of Shipping, Government of India 2017). The target of the government, by means of the Sagarmala project, is to harness the country's 7,500-km coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways, and strategic locations on vital international maritime trade routes. The Sagarmala project also envisages operationalisation of Coastal Economic Zones (CEZs) (Press Information Bureau). The Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways and Shipping, Nitin Gadkari, has stated that "it is expected that besides saving Rs. 35,000-Rs. 40,000 crore as logistics costs annually, boosting exports by about US$ 110 billion and generating one crore new jobs, Sagarmala will also double the share of domestic waterways in the modal mix in the upcoming ten years." He added that "The idea is to industrialize the port areas by developing 14 coastal

economic zones. This would be supported by modernization and augmentation of the port infrastructure, improving the connectivity of ports with the hinterland through road, rail and waterways, and development of the coastal community" (Business Standard 2017).

Mekong-India Economic Corridor

The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) had conceptualised the idea of the Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC) in 2011. The MIEC seeks to link Southeast Asia and peninsular India by connecting important ports such as Dawei in Myanmar and Chennai in India. Specifically, the corridor is proposed to connect Ho Chi Minh City of Vietnam with Dawei via Bangkok in Thailand and Phnom Penh in Cambodia and further onwards to Chennai (Business Standard 2017). The MIEC can also link up with the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (Banerjee 2013 November 18). In terms of countries, the MIEC would be linking the Greater Mekong countries, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and India. While the Mekong-Ganga cooperative framework has a strong cultural component, the MIEC has clearly articulated economic frameworks that seek to build connectivity between the Mekong countries and India.

Figure 34: Selected Infrastructure Projects for ASEAN-India Connectivity



Source: Kimura and Umezaki (2011: 25).

Chennai is not the terminal point of the MIEC. On the contrary, the MIEC conceptualises a linkup with the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor. In the Union Budget of 2013, the then Finance Minister had announced that "the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) are currently preparing a comprehensive plan for the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor. The corridor will be developed in collaboration with Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The next corridor will be the Bengaluru-Mumbai Industrial Corridor on which preparatory work has started" (The Times of India 2013). The five crucial business hubs identified in the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor are Hoskote and Bangarpet in Karnataka; Palamaner and Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh and Sriperambudur in Tamil Nadu (The Times of India 2013). The Joint Statement concluded between India and Japan during the official visit of PM Modi to Japan in 2016, in addition to references to the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), also referred to the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC) (MEA 2016h). With the operationalisation of the CBIC associated high-speed rail networks, the ECEC, in conjunction with the MIEC, will spur economic activity along the Bay of Bengal coast and boost India's engagement with Southeast Asian countries.

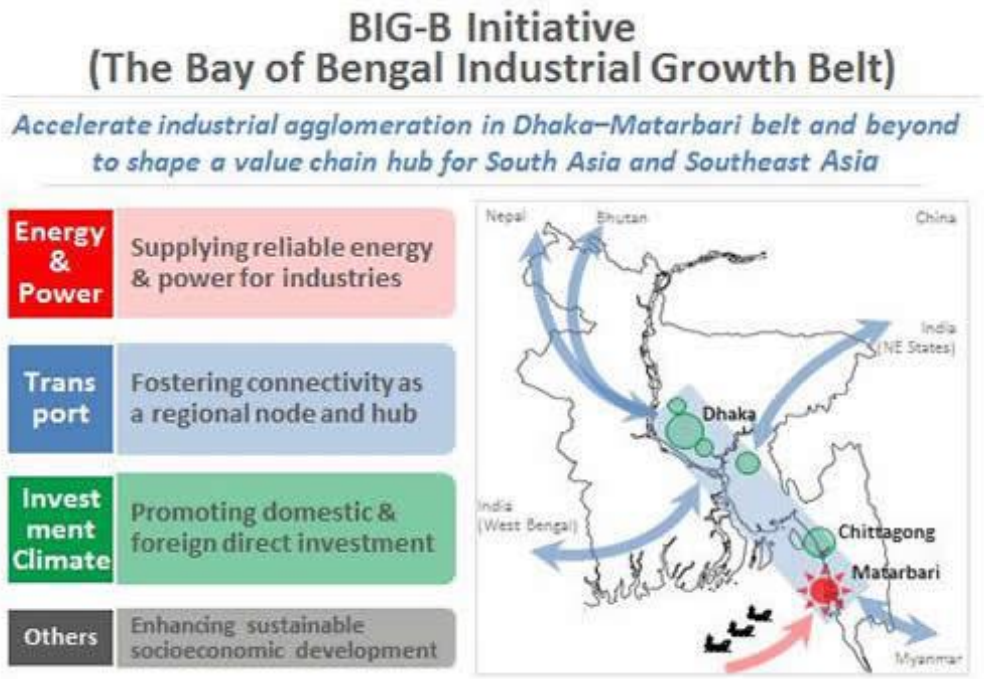
Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B)

Bangladesh, because of its location, can play an important role in strengthening the connectivity frameworks in India's eastern neighbourhood. In the recent past, India-Bangladesh relations have witnessed significant improvement. India and Bangladesh have now formalised the "Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary between India and Bangladesh and Related Matters of 1974 (referred to as the 1974 LBA)" (Press Information Bureau 2017). Both countries today are members of the evolving BBIN framework and have also signed a coastal shipping agreement. Bangladesh has allowed Indian ships to dock at Chittagong port for trans-shipment of turbines to be used in power projects in the Indian state of Tripura. Tripura has been supplying power (100 MW) to Bangladesh since March 2016, and has recently agreed to supply an additional 60 MW of power (Business Standard 2017). In terms of

railway connectivity between India and Bangladesh, the two countries are connected by the Maitree Express, which runs between Kolkata and Dhaka (Mazumdar 2017). In April 2017, the Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh inaugurated the trial-run of the Khulna-Kolkata rail link between the two countries (The Economic Times 2017b).

Japan has been at the forefront in conceptualising connectivity frameworks in Bangladesh, which will have economic as well as geopolitical implications. During his visit to Bangladesh in 2014, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe articulated the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) framework. This framework recognises Bangladesh as a fulcrum for South Asian and Southeast Asian interactions. Specifically, BIG-B seeks to "accelerate industrial agglomeration along the Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox Bazar" axis (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2014). In consonance with the articulated vision, Japan has agreed to give Bangladesh ODA loans to the tune of approximately US$ 1.59 billion (Energy Bangla 2017). This amount will be used for operationalising six infrastructure projects: (1) Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport Expansion Project (I); (2) the Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti 2nd Bridges Construction and Existing Bridges Rehabilitation Project (II); (3) the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project (Line 1); (4) Matarbari Ultra Super Critical Coal-Fired Power Project (III); (5) the Dhaka Underground Substation Construction Project; and (6) the Small Scale Water Resources Development Project (Phase 2) (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2017). The proposal to build a deep seaport in Bangladesh is also receiving serious consideration. While China wanted to develop the Chittagong port, it could not make significant progress. On the other hand, Japan's proposal of building a deep seaport in Matarbari along with power plants has moved forward. In comparison to Chittagong and Sonadia port (near Cox Bazar), the Matarbari port has a much better draft to handle heavy cargo (bdnews24.com 2015). The development of the Matarbari port falls along the Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox Bazar Axis as envisioned by the BIG-B initiative. Significantly, India is also building a bridge on River Feni, which would connect Agartala with Chittagong (Bhaskar and Sood 2017).

Figure 35: The Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt



Source: JICA (2014).

It is interesting to note that two regional frameworks promoting India's eastward regional integration came to the fore in the late 1990s, viz., the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum for Regional Cooperation. The BIMSTEC was conceptualised on the principles of open regionalism as it brought together countries from South Asia and Southeast Asia. The emergence of BIMSTEC was preceded by India becoming a sectoral partner of ASEAN in 1992 and full dialogue partner in 1995. India's economic reforms generated enthusiasm in Southeast Asian countries to enhance regional economic cooperation initiatives with New Delhi. The BIMSTEC, therefore, is a manifestation of such interest to promote economic engagement with India. Further, the countries in the BIMSTEC constituted the rim countries of the Bay of Bengal. Implicit in this regional framework is the assumption that countries in the Bay of Bengal region share cultural similarities as well as a shared economic destiny. Not surprisingly, the initial thrust of the BIMSTEC was to increase the economic growth and social progress in the sub-region through joint efforts in a spirit of equality and partnership.

The BIMSTEC was neither subjected to benign neglect nor was it operationalised with great enthusiasm. Between 2004 and 2014, it held only three summit meetings. However, there were a plethora of foreign ministerial, economic ministerial and senior official meetings since its inception. For the first few years, BIMSTEC did not have a Secretariat and since 2011, the BIMSTEC Secretariat has been based in Dhaka. In the recent past, there has been growing interest regarding the BIMSTEC framework. This was evident during the 2016 BIMSTEC Summit on the side-lines of the BRICS Summit in Goa (India). This renewed interest in BIMSTEC is a consequence of the following factors:

- Growing recognition of the importance of connectivity networks in sustaining economic growth. Given that the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) project and India–Myanmar–Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway are nearing completion, there is enthusiasm regarding the sub-regional framework.

- The progress in the Bangladesh–Bhutan–India–Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) has generated hopes for a possible BIMSTEC MVA.

- Given the presence of natural gas resources in the Bay of Bengal, hydropower potential, and differential national time zones, the possibility of profitable energy cooperation looks promising.

- Major countries in the BIMSTEC framework such as India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand have been victims of terrorism with varying degrees of intensity and face some common security challenges. Therefore, the need for a regional framework to address security issues was recognised.

In consonance with the above factors, the BIMSTEC Goa Summit stressed the need to enhance cooperation in the realms of transit, trans-shipment, movement of vehicular traffic, an early conclusion of a BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement, cooperation on countering terrorism, and an annual meeting of National Security Advisors. Subsequently, the first meeting of the National Security Chiefs of BIMSTEC member states was held in New Delhi on 21 March 2017.

Bay of Bengal region has attained greater geopolitical and geo-economics significance in the changing dynamics of the region, reflecting on this the 4th BIMSTEC Summit was held in Kathmandu on 30-31 August 2018. The growing importance of BIMSTEC and its attempt to generate synergy by building on common strengths of member states can be understood through the following main reasons.

First, all the leaders who met in Kathmandu were convinced that geographical contiguity, abundant natural and human resources, rich cultural and historical heritage presents greater potential to the BIMSTEC for promoting deeper cooperation in the region..

Second, due to its unique position BIMSTEC serves as a bridge linking two main high-growth centres of Asia, namely South and Southeast Asia. BIMSTEC members are committed to make the Bay of Bengal region a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable region. Connectivity is an essential tool to achieve this objective. Therefore, BIMSTEC needs to address two dimensions of connectivity – one, integrating national connectivity into the regional roadmap; and two, developing both hard and soft infrastructures. The connectivity framework of the BIMSTEC will also provide access to the land-locked developing countries in region and help them in their development process. The discussions on BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement are in an advanced stage and are likely to be finalised soon. BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) has been tasked to develop the draft of BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity. Similarly, leaders are committed to an early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area negotiations. Through the BIMSTEC Business Forum; BIMSTEC Economic Forum; BIMSTEC startup conclave, BIMSTEC Ministerial conclave at the India Mobile Congress the leaders hoped for increasing cooperation among the Governments–Private sectors in the areas of information technology and communication, trade and investment. The members also tasked the Expert Group on BIMSTEC Visa Matters to continue negotiation for early finalisation of the modalities for the BIMSTEC Visa Facilitation. While, the summit has addressed all the priority areas of BIMSTEC, namely, poverty alleviation, connectivity (transport and communications), trade and investment, counter terrorism and transnational crime, environment and disaster management, climate change, energy, technology,

agriculture, fisheries, public health, people-to-people contacts, cultural cooperation, tourism, mountain economy and blue economy, the leaders did not make any lofty promises. There is an attempt to follow up on earlier announcements and to focus on a concrete action plan.

Third, terrorism and transnational organised crimes are one of the biggest global threats. BIMSTEC region is also deeply affected by this as some states in the region provide shelter to the terrorism. In order to deal with terrorism and transnational organised crimes there is need of sustained efforts and cooperation and comprehensive approach involving active participation and collaboration of the member states. BIMSTEC leaders agreed that the terrorism could be countered by holding States and non-State entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism accountable.

Fourth, the leaders agreed to enhance the institutional capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat and thus decided to establish a BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee to handle aadministrative and financial matters of the Secretariat and the BIMSTEC centres and entities as well as coordinate, monitor and facilitate the implementation of BIMSTEC activities and programmes. Similarly, Secretariat was tasked to prepare a draft charter for the BIMSTEC. This will enhance its visibility and stature in international fora. India has also committed to set up a Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies at the Nalanda University for research on art, culture and other subjects in the Bay of Bengal.

India's Ministry of External Affairs remarked in a press briefing before the Summit that "BIMSTEC links the unique ecology of the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, reflecting the growing political support and commitment from India. Indeed, BIMSTEC holds a special significance for India in a changing mental map of the region." Certainly, making the Bay of Bengal integral to India's "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" policies could accelerate the process of regional integration. Therefore, BIMSTEC holds greater significance for India and the region.

While the BIMSTEC framework regularly operates at the Track-I level, the BCIM framework is yet to become a regular Track-I framework. The Kunming Initiative, which began as an interaction between scholars and experts, constituted the embryo of

the BCIM framework. The BCIM framework is essentially a continental framework. The need to ensure greater international engagement for China's Southwest provinces, such as Yunnan, is one of the reasons that seem to have guided the evolution of BCIM. There was also the thinking in some countries such as Bangladesh that engaging with an economically vibrant China will have positive developmental spin-offs. Simultaneously, there are also concerns that enhanced economic engagement with China may not result in equitable outcomes. For instance, in Myanmar, there is a strong public opinion that China's economic engagement has led to exploitation of natural resources (which were shipped across borders) but has not contributed to sustainable employment opportunities for the local population. As a consequence of such apprehensions, the BCIM framework is yet to scale up into a full-fledged regional framework. There is no denying that the Kolkata-to-Kunming car rally organised in February 2013 and the reference to BCIM in India-China Joint Statements suggest the possibility of the BCIM graduating into a genuine Track-I forum. However, the absence of a summit meeting involving the BCIM heads of states indicates the distance that the regional framework needs to travel.

In a related and significant development, the agreement on the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN MVA) was concluded in 2015. "Bangladesh, India and Nepal have agreed on the text of the operating procedures for passenger vehicle movement in the sub-region under the BBIN-MVA signed in June 2015, and will soon complete the internal approval processes for signing of the passenger protocol. The participating countries have also agreed to conduct more trial runs for cargo vehicles under the agreement. High-level officials of the three countries discussed the implementation of the MVA at a meeting held in January 2018 in Bengaluru, convened and chaired by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) of the Government of India. Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have already ratified the MVA and have agreed to start the implementation of the MVA among the three signatory countries, with Bhutan joining after it ratifies the Agreement" (Press Information Bureau 2018). An important objective of the evolving BBIN cooperation is to deepen regional integration for peace, stability, and prosperity. The BBIN framework seeks to achieve this by promoting cooperation in trade, finance, energy, infrastructure and time-bound project implementation. As part of the BBIN MVA pilot run, the first cargo truck was

flagged off from Kolkata, which travelled approximately 640 km to Agartala through Dhaka in November 2015. The first BBIN Friendship Motor Rally 2015 was also held from 14 November to 1 December 2015 covering a distance of 4,500 km in 19 days, with around 20 participating vehicles (Ali 2015). Following this, a cargo truck with a consignment from Dhaka reached Delhi on 5 September 2016 under another trial run of the BBIN MVA (The Indian Express 2016). Inspired by the draft SAARC Regional Rail Agreement template, the BBIN group have agreed to conduct discussions on the possibility of a BBIN Rail Agreement (The Economic Times 2016). Furthermore, the Coastal Shipping Agreement between India and Bangladesh has the potential to provide impetus to the BBIN cooperative framework as it is likely to boost bilateral trade (through ports) between the two countries.

Over time, the BBIN MVA may contribute to the strengthening of the BIMSTEC framework. The emergence of the BIMSTEC and BBIN frameworks suggests that the locus of regional cooperation has witnessed an eastward shift. More importantly, frameworks such as BIMSTEC suggest the strengthening of regional cooperation with a maritime locus.

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)

An important new initiative with a maritime regional development and connectivity focus is the recent Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). The India-Japan Joint Statement in 2016 stressed the importance of "improving connectivity between Asia and Africa" (MEA 2016h). Subsequently, in May 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking at the 52nd Annual General Meeting of the African Development Bank Group called for operationalisation of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (The Indian Express 2017). More recently, the Joint Statement issued after the summit meeting of Indian and Japanese Prime Ministers on 14 September 2017, reiterated the resolve of the two countries to "develop industrial corridors and industrial networks for the growth of Asia and Africa" (MEA 2017j).

Indo-Pacific region is now becoming the centre of the global financial activities. India and Japan are working together for shaping the economic, political and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. The AAGC is an outcome of common vision of India and Japan for the Indo-Pacific region.

The Vision Document of the AAGC, titled "Asia Africa Growth Corridor: Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development" has been prepared by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) in New Delhi, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) in Jakarta and the Institute of Developing Economies and Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO) in Tokyo. The vision document notes that "the AAGC would be based on four pillars: enhancing capacity and skills; quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity; development and cooperation projects; and people-to-people partnership" (ERIA 2017). There is need to look at quality infrastructure and people-to-people partnership in a broader political context.

In the past, Africa was exploited by European colonialism as at that time Europe was an emerging economic power. In the present time, China is also seen as one of the new rising powers. China has not adopted any new approach in Africa and is following the European footsteps. In fact, China is called by many as the new imperialist in Africa as it is entangling Africa in its debt-trap and dominate its land and natural resources. Whereas, India's and Japan's approach, through the AAGC initiative, is totally different they see Africa as a partner. This is evident from Vision Document of the AAGC as it notes that "the conceptualisation of the AAGC will be conducted by constituting a joint study team with other think-tanks and organisations in Asia and Africa" (ERIA 2017). The Vision Document also asserts that "contribution to the local society and economy" will be an important aspect of the quality infrastructure in Africa. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaking in Kenya in 2016, also emphasised "the importance of quality, resilience and stability in Japan's engagement in Africa" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2016).

India has had historical connections, and maritime connectivity with Africa since ancient times as is evident from the large presence of Indian diaspora in Africa. Also, both countries have been under colonial rule. They both share a long history of past struggles. India had been a supporter to Africa in its fight for freedom. India and Africa share strong government-to-government relations. Also, "India has been awarding thousands of scholarships to African nations under the ITEC programme and has promised to invest US$ 10 billion in Africa in the near future" mentioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi (African Development Bank Group 2017). There have

been State visits by several current and former leaders of Africa. Many military chiefs and government officials have also attended educational and training programmes in India, which gives India considerable social capital that can be leveraged. Business networks of dynamic Indian diaspora can also play an important role in the AAGC. Thus, India is an important pillar of the AAGC.

India has been providing development cooperation to Africa since long. With its programmes like Pan Africa e-Network it contributing towards development of social sector in Africa. It is also helping in building technical capacities. However, India's assistance in Africa is faced with the challenge of resource constraint as India itself is a developing country. On the other hand, Japan being a developed country can provide substantial financial and technological resources. The AAGC needs to bring together these two different set of competencies. The private sector is also expected to play a dominant role in the proposed corridor. Though the AAGC have not been developed as a direct response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), however, many see it as a calculated move by India and Japan to counter-balance BRI. AAGC and BRI are subjected to comparisons by many as both involve Africa and Indian Ocean. But the fact remains that they both are different in their approaches. First, BRI is a unilateral initiative whereas AAGC is a trilateral initiative among India, Japan and Africa as Africa is also given status of the partner. Second, AAGC is based on consultations with Africa whereas that is not the case with BRI. Third, BRI is funded mainly by state whereas private-sector financing will be sought in AAGC. A

While the AAGC is an economic framework, India has a significant security presence close to the East African littoral. India has been a de facto security guarantor to island states such as Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Seychelles, and conducts regular naval exercises involving these countries (Brewster 2014). India has been working with these countries to build their capacities through military training as well as provision of necessary military equipment. Further, India has strengthened its maritime domain awareness activities in the Indian Ocean region. For instance, India is planning to operationalise eight Coastal Surveillance Radar Stations (CSRSs) in Seychelles and another ten in the Maldives, which is in addition to eight earlier CSRSs in the Maldives and six in Sri Lanka (Sen 2015). India's security cooperation in the Indian Ocean has coalesced into a larger framework called SAGAR: Security

And Growth for All in the Region. During his visit to Mauritius in March 2015, Prime Minister Modi outlined the following five principles of the SAGAR framework: (1) defending national interests in mainland and islands; (2) economic cooperation; (3) collective action through regional mechanisms for maritime cooperation; (4) responding to climate change and leveraging ocean economy; and (5) assuming "primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean".

In addition to economic and security engagement, India is also seeking to systematically reinvigorate its cultural links with East Africa and other countries in the Indian Ocean region under the rubric of Project 'Mausam'. The Project Mausam seeks to revive the lost linkages with nations, re-connecting heritage sites, redefining 'cultural landscapes' and promoting research on historical maritime routes extending from East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia (Press Information Bureau 2017).

Digital Connectivity

India finds cyber connectivity to be of particular importance in an increasingly digital world. Discussions are underway in Indian policy circles as to how to govern and regulate the present-day cyber world so that it remains a free medium, yet the government is able to protect its citizens from any cyber-security threat. In the words of the then External Affairs Minister Swaraj, "India espouses a multi-stakeholder approach aimed at preserving a free and integrated internet, but is also asking for a more democratic distribution of critical internet infrastructure and for closer international cooperation on cyber security and cyber-crime to build trust and stability among the various stakeholders" (MEA 2016b).

As a part of its commitment to digital connectivity India has been working towards the setting up of a high-capacity fibre-optic network in the region which will be supplemented by countrywide rural broadband networks and digital villages in distant areas in ASEAN nations. US$ 1 billion Line of Credit has been extended by India to finance these and other connectivity projects in the ASEAN region. Building upon its own experience of adding 800 million subscribers to the internet, primarily from rural areas, India now aims to strengthen digital connectivity in CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) countries as well (MEA 2017f).

India-Vietnam: Natural Partners

Vietnam has become India's important partner in addressing China's growing influence. The foundation of the modern India-Vietnam relationship can be traced back to their shared history of decolonisation and early nationalism, especially their mutual support for each other's national independence (Duong 2008: 339). India was considered by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's leadership as one of the most trusted friends, and Delhi was also where one of the republic's first foreign missions was established in 1948. In October 1954, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the first foreign leader to visit North Vietnam after the country was temporarily divided following the conclusion of the Geneva Accords. From India's perspective, its main policy goal in Vietnam during this early era of bilateral relations was "to extend the area of peace and of non-alignment in Southeast Asia" (Sardesai 1968: 248). Since then, India has remained a trusted friend of Vietnam, providing Hanoi with consistent diplomatic support throughout the Vietnam War as well as during its international isolation in the 1980s.

While bilateral ties have flourished comprehensively since Vietnam launched its economic reforms in 1986, Delhi and Hanoi have particularly strengthened their strategic cooperation in recent years. Indeed, as India pursues its Act East Policy, Vietnam has become a valuable partner in India's political and security engagements in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries are working together to address shared strategic concerns, such as energy security and open and secure SLOCs, and to ensure that their extended neighbourhood is free to make policy choices without undue external meddling (Prasad and Mullen 2013). As both countries have strategic concerns in the region, they are likely to benefit from a stronger relationship.

Despite their dissimilar models of governance, India and Vietnam continue to be bound by shared interests. As observed by strategic analyst David Brewster, "India is at least partly motivated by a desire to balance against China through strengthening Vietnam's military power and to challenge the perceived growth in China's naval capabilities" (Brewster 2009: 24). From India's perspective, the uncertainty surrounding Beijing's long-term ambitions in the Indo-Pacific means that India is likely to benefit from a comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam, given the latter's geostrategic location as one of China's gateways to Southeast Asia, as well as

its long history of resistance against China's expansionism. Meanwhile, "Vietnam also views its deepening ties with India as consistent with its overall foreign policy of "diversification and multilateralisation", and a helpful means to improve its strategic position vis-à-vis China" (Hiep 2013).

Above all, India has a crucial stake in the South China Sea of which Vietnam is a littoral state. Recent tensions over territorial and maritime disputes there due to China's increasing assertiveness have jeopardised regional peace and stability and alarmed not only Vietnam but also India. In particular, two incidents have deepened Delhi's awareness of its strategic and economic interests in the South China Sea as well as its desire to strengthen its engagement with Vietnam. In the first incident on 22 July 2011, when India's warship INS Airavat was coming back from Vietnamese port Nha Trang after paying a friendly visit and when it was at a distance of 45 nautical miles off the Vietnam's coast it received a warning from China. The second incident took place in September 2011, when China objected to oil exploration by ONGC Videsh (the overseas arm of India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh) in Vietnam's territorial waters (Muni 2011).

At a broader level, India's renewed interest in Southeast Asia's maritime domain in general and the South China Sea, in particular, can be attributed to five major reasons (Mohan 2012: 184-186). First, "due to India's increasing trade with East Asia, it has begun to recognise the importance of SLOCs beyond India's geographical proximity, including in the Western Pacific. Second, India seeks to be less dependent on major powers for its maritime needs in the Western Pacific. Third, India is apprehensive about China's 'new assertiveness'" (Yahuda 2013) that could turn the South China Sea into a "Chinese lake" at its discretion, including by force. Fourth, to enhance its maritime intelligence, India wants to remain in the region for tracking any developments taking place in the region that may pose a threat to its own national interests. Fifth, in the context of Indian Navy, forward maritime presence and naval partnerships are essential to deter potential adversaries. Indian policymakers are acutely aware of expectations of Southeast Asian littoral states and Delhi is willing to take a principled stand on territorial disputes in a hope to help in the stabilisation of the Indo-Pacific (Singh 2016: 17).

Through several platforms Indian policymakers have clearly explained interests and approaches of India towards the South China Sea. For example, speaking at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, the then Indian Foreign Secretary Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said, "Respect for the global commons should not be diluted under any circumstances. Much depends on the commitment of nations to uphold freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes. There should be no place for use or threat of use of force" (emphasis added) (MEA 2016c). The statement underlines three key features of India's approach to maritime issues, including the South China Sea disputes. Specifically, India has always placed freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as an essential element for bringing peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. India also emphasises the preservation of regional peace and stability and therefore has always been in opposition of use of force or threat to solve disputes . Finally, India insists that disputes must be resolved in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Such positions align closely with Vietnam's stance on the management of the South China Sea disputes.

To a certain extent, India's increasing maritime presence in the South China Sea could be seen as an indicator of India's desire to play a more active role in the region's emerging security architecture. "India believes that its strategic interests, both in handling its external threats and in meeting its aspirations to be a global power, demand a close partnership with ASEAN" (Mansingh 2012: 188-189). While India has been mindful of the China's presence in expanding its footprint in Southeast Asia, ASEAN countries, including Vietnam, also want to engage India in the region more effectively to counterbalance China's presence (Sibal 2012: 193). Such a similarity in India's and Vietnam's strategic interests has helped in strengthening bilateral ties between the two.

Strengthening Delhi-Hanoi Ties under Modi

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Vietnam in September 2016, the two sides officially upgraded their "strategic partnership" to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" (Hiep 2013: 357).[50] The move was remarkable as it is an example of how

[50] Although Vietnam has never clarified the criteria for these partnerships, it generally considers comprehensive strategic partnership as the most important, followed by strategic ones and then

the Modi government put its Act East Policy into action. In his press statement, Modi remarked, "Our decision to upgrade our strategic partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership captures the intent and path of our future cooperation. It will provide a new direction, momentum and substance to our bilateral cooperation. Our common efforts will also contribute to stability, security and prosperity in this region" (emphasis added) (MEA 2016f).

In his speech Modi has clearly stated that Vietnam is a crucial partner for India and thus their relationship has been upgraded. Modi has, time and again, demonstrated his will to engage with India's neighbours and have shown his zeal and vigour in engaging them at the highest political level. The NDA government under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh did not make much efforts to politically engage its significant partners. Modi has a clear view regarding political relations which is quite evident from his visits to neighbouring countries. He believes that political relations are as important as economic ones. Modi's visit is the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Hanoi in 15 years since the visit of the them Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit in 2001. Now, under the leadership of PM Modi the government is making all efforts to improve political as well as economic and cultural relations. To this end, the central government is actively involving state governments in international strategy moves and urging them to connect with Vietnamese counterparts in a significant way. Modi emphasised the need for "intensifying the exchanges among states of India and provinces of Vietnam" (MEA 2016f). As India's centralised foreign policymaking is faces opposition from various state governments, Modi's strategy can assist in creating a more diverse political structure that better promotes foreign policy agenda of India, in general, and India–Vietnam ties, in particular.

Second, as discussed earlier, Modi had articulated his intention to strengthen India's engagement with its eastern neighbours by replacing the "Look East Policy" with the "Act East Policy". His visit to Hanoi in September 2016 reaffirms his sincerity in pursuing this policy initiative. To add substance to the upgraded partnership, foreign ministries of both the countries, in association with other ministries and agencies have

comprehensive ones. These countries generally fall into one or more of four major categories – political powers, economic powerhouses, military powers, and countries that play significant roles in the management of the South China Sea disputes.

been tasked to coordinate the preparation of an action plan to implement the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Third, as a rising global force, India is keen to assume the greater global responsibilities. Modi wants to see India transform "from being a balancer to becoming a leader, from following rules to making rules and setting agendas" (Jaitley 2016: xi). Hence, elevating India–Vietnam ties can be seen as a move by the Modi government towards that end, which India expects to contribute to the region's stability, security and prosperity.

Vietnam and the *Panchamrit* (five-elements) of Modi's Foreign Policy

At the party level, Modi's 2016 visit to Vietnam also reflected important features of the BJP's foreign policy framework. In its resolution on foreign policy, the BJP underlined "the *Panchamrit* or the five new pillars of Indian foreign policy, namely, *Samman* (dignity and honour), *Samvad* (greater engagement and dialogue), *Samriddhi* (shared prosperity), *Suraksha* (regional and global security) and *Sanskriti evam Sabhyata* (cultural and civilisational linkages)" (BJP 2015).

First, India's partnership with Vietnam is based on strong existing trust which was forged through decades of friendship and solidarity. As the two countries offered each other mutual support and did not experience any conflict in the past, their leaders "feel totally at ease and completely trust each other" (Loc 2016). Promoting relations with a traditional, longstanding friend like Vietnam can, therefore, be seen as a commitment to "dignity and honour" in India's foreign policy, a value that the government under Modi has emphasised.

Second, in terms of engagement and dialogue, since Modi took office several two-way high-profile visits have taken place between the two nations, facilitating the growing convergence of opinions between Delhi and Hanoi on various bilateral and international issues. At the same time, both sides have agreed to "increase the exchange of high-level and other visits, step up relations between political parties and legislative institutions of both sides, establish relations between provincial/state governments on both sides, uphold established bilateral cooperation mechanisms, and effectively implement the agreements signed between two countries" (MEA 2016f). Shortly after Modi's visit to Hanoi, for example, a Vietnamese parliamentary

delegation led by Vietnam National Assembly Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan visited India in December 2016 and signed agreements on aviation, energy, and parliamentary cooperation (Times of India, 2016 December 10).

Third, to enhance shared prosperity, Modi and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc emphasised that "enhancing bilateral economic engagement is a strategic objective". In January 2015, the India-Vietnam Joint Sub-Commission on Trade identified five main sectors as thrust areas for bilateral trade, including clothing and textile, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, leather and footwear, and engineering. Currently, India is among the top ten trade partners of Vietnam, with bilateral trade turnover in 2016 reaching US$ 5.5 billion, a tenfold increase from 2006. By 2020, both sides wants to achieve a bilateral trade target of US$ 15 billion. India's major export commodities include machinery and equipment, seafood, pharmaceuticals, cotton, automobile, textile and leather accessories, cattle feed ingredients, chemicals, plastic resins, fibres, steel, fabrics, metals, jewellery and precious stones. Meanwhile, the top ten items that India imports from Vietnam include mobile phones and accessories, computers and electronics hardware, machinery and equipment, chemicals, rubber, ordinary metals, wood and wooden products, fibres, pepper, and means of transport. In terms of investment, there is ample room for improvement given the rather limited bilateral investment ties. By March 2017, Indian companies had invested in 131 projects in Vietnam, with the total registered capital of about US$ 707.95 million. Major sectors of investment were energy, mineral exploration, agro-processing, sugar manufacturing, agro-chemicals, IT, and auto components. Accordingly, India ranked 25th among 110 countries and territories investing in Vietnam. Given this low base, Indian investment in Vietnam is expected to rise in the coming years (Binh 2016: 115-116; Embassy of India in Vietnam 2017; Hoang 2014: 212-215, 221; Kumar 2014).

Fourth, in the recent years, promotion of regional and global security through defence collaboration has become one of the top India-Vietnam's top priorities. Modi said in a press statement during the course of a visit to India by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in October 2014 that "our defense cooperation with Vietnam is among our most important ones" (Press Information Bureau 2014). To further promote defence ties, the two countries signed a Joint Vision Statement on Defence

Cooperation for 2015-2020 in New Delhi in May 2015. During his visit to Vietnam in 2016, Modi reaffirmed India's significant interests in promoting bilateral defence industry cooperation and announced a new defence line of credit of US$ 500 million for Vietnam to facilitate its defence procurement from India (MEA 2016f). Although the two sides did not elaborate on what Vietnam would use the loan for, Vietnam was reportedly interested in acquiring patrol vessels and BrahMos missiles from India to enhance its maritime defence capabilities.

During the same visit, Modi also announced a grant of US$ 5 million for the construction of an Army Software Park at the Telecommunication University in Nha Trang. In addition, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cyber security and agreements on cooperation to explore the outer space for peaceful purposes and to establish a Tracking and Data Reception Station and a Data Processing Facility near Ho Chi Minh City. Defence cooperation between the two countries has brought about some concrete results. "India has already become the second largest supplier of military equipment and personnel training to Vietnam. The Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd. (GRSE) has finalised the design of a series of 140-tonne fast patrol boats for Vietnam People's Navy" (Vinh 2016: 122-123), and Vietnam is exploring the prospects of acquiring Indian-made surveillance devices such as unmanned aerial vehicles. India may also provide Vietnam with BrahMos supersonic missiles in the future. In terms of training, India is training Vietnamese submariners in "comprehensive underwater combat operations" at (Ghosh 2014), which plays an important role in improving the operational capabilities of Vietnam's newly-acquired Kilo-class submarine fleet. In addition to training Vietnamese military officers in information technology and English language skills, India is also offering training to Vietnamese Su-30MK2 fighter jet pilots.

In the coming years, new areas in the expanding defence cooperation between India and Vietnam include bilateral cooperation in UN peacekeeping missions; shipbuilding; weapons system modernisation; and research and application of hi-tech defence systems. As mentioned above, Vietnam has given green light for India to set up a satellite tracking and imaging centre in southern Vietnam. "India currently has 11 earth observation satellites on the orbit that can provide military intelligence, with existing ground stations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Brunei, Biak in eastern

Indonesia, and Mauritius" (Murdoch 2016). Vietnam highly values India's capabilities and the cooperation on tracking facilities as they will give it access to pictures from Indian earth observation satellites that cover Asia, including China and the South China Sea. This cooperation initiative is yet another prime example of how their strategic interests in the South China Sea converge.

Fifth, during his visit to Vietnam Modi underlined the cultural and civilisational dimensions of his foreign policy. He spoke about the connections between Buddhism and the monuments of the Hindu Cham civilisation in Central Vietnam. He also visited and offered prayers at the Quan Su Pagoda in Hanoi. Interacting with the monks, Modi said "while some came to make war, India had come with the message of peace – the message of Buddha, which has endured", for which he received a rousing reception (Press Information Bureau 2016). During Modi's visit, India launched a scholarship programme for members of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha to pursue advanced Buddhist studies and the study of Sanskrit at Indian universities. Modi also announced that "an Indian Culture Centre would be opened in Hanoi soon, and that the Archaeological Survey of India would start the conservation and restoration work of Cham monuments in My Son, which are a cluster of ruined Hindu temples constructed between the 4th and the 14th century in Central Vietnam" (Madhyamam 2016).

Embedding Bilateral Ties into Trilateral Frameworks

Both India and the United States are playing a significant role in promoting security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Leaders of both the nations have stressed that "India's Act East Policy and the United States' rebalance to Asia provide the United States, India and other Indo-Pacific countries opportunities to work closely to strengthen regional cooperation". The U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region affirms "the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over-flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea" (The White House 2015). There was indeed a new level of "comfort and candour" in the conversations between Indian and American leaders. Speaking at the U.S. Congress in June 2016, for example, Modi called the U.S. "an indispensable partner", adding that a strong India-U.S. partnership could anchor peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and help "ensure

security of the sea lanes of commerce and freedom of navigation on seas" (MEA 2016e). This view was echoed by the U.S. Secretary of Defence James Mattis in his remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on 3 June 2017. Mattis quoted Prime Minister Modi on freedom of navigation and the interlinked geography of the Indo-Pacific in his speech. He also described India as "a major defence partner" and underlined Delhi's indispensable role in maintaining stability in the maritime domain (U.S. Department of Defence 2017).

The U.S. under the Obama administration also planned to better secure the Indo-Pacific region by deploying different assets there, including a new long-range stealth bomber and advanced aircraft and ships (Schwartz 2015: 3). It also successfully negotiated the landmark Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with India. Under the LEMOA, India's Reliance Defence and Engineering Limited signed a major contract in February 2017 with the U.S. Navy to provide repair and alteration services for ships of the Seventh Fleet. The LEMOA and DTTI add significant substance to the bilateral strategic partnership and will facilitate future defence cooperation initiatives between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

The U.S. also worked with some regional countries, such as India, Japan and Australia, in trilateral frameworks to promote an open, balanced and inclusive security architecture in the region. Regarding the U.S.-India-Japan trilateral framework, Modi and U.S. President Barack Obama underlined the importance of cooperation between the three countries to identify and promptly implement projects of common interest. They also decided to explore the possibility of holding the dialogue among their foreign ministers (MEA 2015a). More importantly, they stressed their commitment to promote regional dialogue on key political and security issues and to invest in trilateral cooperation arrangements with other like-minded countries in the region.

As such, there is a potential for embedding the India–Vietnam partnership into the India–U.S. bilateral framework, or other trilateral frameworks in which both India and the U.S. are members. Such arrangements will be facilitated by the convergent security interests of these countries, especially in the development of open and inclusive security structures that ensure the peaceful management of regional tensions, including in the maritime domain. Indeed, certain trilateral cooperation initiatives

have been put forward. For example, India and the United States are reportedly exploring possibilities to work with Vietnam to help strengthen the country's ground forces. The milestone visit by the U.S. President Barrack Obama to Vietnam in May 2016, in which the U.S. lifted a longstanding lethal arms embargo on Vietnam, further strengthened mutual trust (Hiep 2016) and facilitated future security and defence cooperation between the two countries, including the possible inclusion of Vietnam in Washington's strategic cooperation frameworks with India and other partners.

Similarly, India and Japan are exploring a trilateral framework for cooperation with Vietnam. In fact, Delhi, Tokyo and Hanoi have reached an understanding to work in a trilateral format to coordinate positions on regional security and economic policies (Bagchi 2014). According to a senior Vietnamese scholar, "India, Vietnam and Japan have already signed a trilateral cooperation agreement in December 2014. This trilateral agreement, which is mainly focussed on defence technology cooperation and intelligence sharing, could be helpful for the technological modernisation of Vietnam's armed forces."[51] In view of India's and China's mutual maritime interests in the South China Sea, they can help Vietnam to strengthen its submarine operational capabilities.

The integration of the India-Vietnam strategic cooperation into regional mini-lateral frameworks, if successful, will not only strengthen bilateral ties but also contribute to the emergence of a "principled security network" that the Obama administration once proposed. Such a network will supplement the existing ASEAN-led regional security arrangements as well as the U.S.-led alliance systems to further bolster security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Similarly, India, Japan and the United States held their first trilateral meeting on the side-lines of the G-20 Summit in Buenos Aires. The leaders of the three countries agreed "that a 'free, open, inclusive and rules-based' order is essential for the Indo-Pacific's peace and prosperity. They also stated the importance of meeting in a trilateral format at multilateral conferences. Coined as the JAI (Japan, America, India) meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explained the significance of the JAI acronym, which translates to 'success' in Hindi. The JAI grouping is shaping up to play a key role in Indian foreign policy. India has proposed the three countries

[51] Based on interview with the Vietnamese scholar.

synergise their infrastructure projects and other efforts in the region. Tokyo and New Delhi have already agreed to deepen naval and maritime-security cooperation and collaborate on infrastructure projects in third countries, including Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, to enhance strategic connectivity in the Indo-Pacific" (Chellaney 2018).

India-China Relations: An Uneasy Bilateral Relations

India and China are two rising powers and geographical neighbours in Asia. Through the means of their fast-paced economic growth as well as through the use of soft and hard power options both countries are trying to have regional and global influence. But, an enduring territorial dispute between the two countries has resulted in an uneasy bilateral relationship between India and China. India's former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon very succinctly pointed out these elements of cooperation and competition in the following words:

> While India and China have a common economic interest in the world economy, their political relations have become more fraught in the last few years… The signs of stress are known to all. The earlier frameworks of cooperation are no longer working and the signs of stress in the relationship are everywhere from India's NSG membership application, to Masood Azhar's listing by the UN to Doklam (where Chinese behaviour differed from previous such instances but India's did not). The more we rise, the more we must expect Chinese opposition and we will have to also work with other powers, and in the subcontinent to ensure that our interests are protected in the neighbourhood, the region and the world. The balance will keep shifting between cooperation and competition with China, both of which characterise that relationship (Menon 2018).

The Naresh Chandra Committee, a high-level task force to produce a thorough assessment of India's national security environment, underlined in its report that "even when there are signs of improvement in the Sino-Indian relationship, it remains 'clouded in mistrust'. For New Delhi, this mistrust emanated out of China's 'containment of India' in South Asia and its 'growing assertiveness on the border'". The task force found that the changing military balance in the Sino-Indian relation is more threatening and recommended that India will have to be "prepared militarily to deal with an assertive China even as it seeks to build bridges of cooperation with it" (Joshi and Mukherjee 2018).

Both the countries have overlapping relationships in many regional groupings and thus there exists great potential for enhanced cooperation. However, the current regional dynamics between these two nations suggest a notable competition between New Delhi and Beijing for greater strategic access (Freeman 2018). As these two continue to push for more space in Southern Asia and beyond perceptions like this are only going to grow further. China's political, economic, and military activities have increased in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives in the recent years. This clearly shows that China is increasing its in Southern Asia. This increasing influence of China creates insecurity in the political circles of India. These trends will further increase with China's growing economy and increase in its military capabilities. "India has sought to engage with China through a mix of cooperation and competition in its shared neighbourhood of Southern Asia and the Indian Ocean. The cooperative aspect is largely focussed on the expansion of trade ties, sub-regional economic and connectivity projects, and interactions in regional and global multilateral institutions and organisations" (Chaudhury 2018). Yet, apprehension about their intentions and aspirations for a leading power and to shape the regional and global geopolitics are generating competition.

Conclusion

Chinese strategic access in Southern Asia is seen in India, to a large extent, with apprehensions. The relationship between the two countries has also seen elements of cooperation and competition, which is also described as "coopetition" by some (Schunz et al. 2017). In India, there is still ambiguity about the implications of Chinese strategic access. While routes could be used for both civilian and military purposes, this does not imply that border regions should be kept underdeveloped. When India perceived a high degree of insecurity due to the developments on the other side of the border in Chinese territory, it announced massive infrastructure projects. This clearly indicates that the need for access becomes important in the peripheral region when an external threat is perceived, where territorial integrity is undermined. Indian government has been making efforts to enhance the logistical infrastructure in the border regions. Numerous road and rail projects are underway and some have been completed also. For a long time, areas along the China were neglected fearing that better connectivity in these areas will expose them to China.. In

the last couple of years, however, the Indian state has worked on improving its strategic access.

As discussed above, India's responses to China's strategic access have been multi-pronged, combining diplomatic engagement with strategic countermeasures and hedging options. India has taken steps to restore and enhance India's influence in the region by developing and improving relationships with its neighbours under the rubric of "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" policy. It has also strengthened its defence and security capabilities and has allocated additional resources to build a stronger defence force. Further, India has explored great power diplomacy by actively promoting economic ties and pursuing security partnerships with the other major powers. Finally, an important aspect of India's responses is continued engagement with China. While standing firm on many issues directly bearing on India's national interests, it has sought to engage in diplomatic and security dialogues with China and continued to build trust and expand cooperation in areas where both countries share similar interests.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

China's transformation over the past four decades is incredible in its long and complex history. This "restless superpower-in-the-making" has raised plausible apprehensions among its neighbours and major powers about the purposes of its rise. In addition, almost all countries in Southern Asia region have a strong interest in cooperating with China economically. Indeed, China is emerging as an indispensable force in Southern Asia and increasingly important country worldwide. In order to improve its overall geopolitical position China is taking decisive steps to secure natural resources and is extensively involved in construction of transport networks including, roads, railways, ports, and energy corridors and is heavily investing in energy projects in its neighbourhood and beyond. As a result of its increasing global economic and strategic influence, China finds itself assuming a greater role in infrastructure development and connectivity projects. China's drive for greater strategic access through politics of routes is an expression of geopolitical and geo-economic efforts and huge investments that are transforming the regional landscape. It is, therefore, not surprising that acquiring strategic access and to develop dual-use infrastructure and shore facilities overseas has become essential aspects of Chinese foreign policy priorities.

Beijing is building roads, railways, port facilities and listening posts worldwide without any clear distinction between economic and strategic motives. The economic rise of China has made it more powerful allowing greater integration with the global economy. This greater participation in the global economy has led to an increase in its national interests. But, its sense of vulnerability has also increased. There are rising concerns about protecting trade routes in order to gain access to energy resources and raw materials have arisen. Therefore, China is striving for greater strategic accesses to Southern Asia and beyond. This study, with a focus on geopolitics of access, examined aims and objectives of Chinese strategic access, its perceptions in India, and India's responses to such developments. It also looked at the linkage between geography and strategy that influences the future relations.

As mentioned earlier, the objectives of the study were to understand the motives for and magnitude of expansion of Chinese strategic access in Southern Asia, India's redefined neighbourhood, India's responses to such developments and the implications of these developments for future Sino-Indian relations. In this overall context the study looked in detail at – the nature and causes of China's attempts in expanding physical connectivity to Southern Asia (India's neighbourhood); the consequences of China's strategic access to Southern Asia and its larger implications for India; the moves India has taken to counter-balance China's strategic presence in its neighbourhood; and the possibility of both the countries working together in a cooperative way in the changing geopolitical and security dynamics. And for this purpose, the study delved into the following research questions – how has China defined its interests in Southern Asia? What are the main objectives of China's strategic access to Southern Asia? What policies are being pursued by China to support its interests and its foreign policy objectives? What are the approaches that are being employed by Beijing with nations in the region to achieve its objectives? What are the implications of China's strategic access for India and on regional affairs? How has India responded to Chinese strategic access outreach to Southern Asia? The study analysed these questions in the specific context of the development of border and maritime infrastructure, and access to strategic routes and resources by the two countries as routes are a vital indicator of both countries' strategic intent and objective.

Across Southern Asia, Chinese politics of routes have begun to attract greater scrutiny and criticism, raising questions about potential security implications and the indistinguishable relationship between security and development. This study underlines that Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia does not draw lines separating economic and security objectives. It is evident from the examination of various road, railways, ports and energy pipeline projects that each dimension reinforces the other, though the economic dimension sometimes conceals the security imperative. The following paragraphs sum up the findings of this study.

Since the early 2000s, China's leaders have focussed on three important national interests: security, sovereignty, and development. As discussed in earlier chapters, these aspects encompass domestic as well as external factors. Regime security is

utmost important objective of China's leaders. Similarly, protecting territorial sovereignty and maintaining sustained economic growth are vital to garner public support. A rising China with greater economic and strategic resources has shown a keen interest to deal with global challenges and seems prepared to challenge international norms that undermine China's efforts to enhance its national interests. Under the current leadership, we are also witnessing a transition from idea of "peaceful development" to national rejuvenation and to realise "China's Dream". Chinese strategic access is aimed to create a favourable international environment for China and to enable it to continue its high economic growth. Chinese leaders acknowledge imperatives of a stable and peaceful periphery and support from neighbours. Therefore, "Beijing views Southern Asian countries as neighbours with whom it is especially important to have friendly cooperative ties, both to increase China's own economic and political influence and to lessen the ability of potentially hostile powers to injure China's interests. China views strategic links as a part of the normal repertoire of international cooperation and seeks to expand physical connectivity and strategic ties with Southern Asian countries" (Chaturvedy and Snodgrass 2013).

Broadly, the key objectives of Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia are securing national security and unity; reducing regional inequality; improving resource supplies; and ensuring economic growth and development. All these elements are vital for the regime security of the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, to tackle its own potential internal instabilities, expansion of its military facilities and strategic access, economic and commercial penetration into the huge Southern Asian market and through it to the Middle East are three unambiguous interests and objectives of China's politics of routes in Southern Asia.

Therefore, Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia has become a significant vehicle to accomplish Beijing's interests and objectives to ensure continued rule of the CCP; to maintain and defend China's sovereignty and territorial integrity; and to maintain an international environment conducive to China's continued economic growth. China's leaders have adopted a range of policies to improve their country's strategic access in recent years. Through the politics of routes, the Chinese government's vision and approach have facilitated the international expansion of Chinese

investments in roads, railways, ports, airports and energy sector developments. It has helped in diversifying energy supply portfolio. More importantly, the politics of routes has extended the reach of Chinese military forces.

The study of politics of routes elucidates regional geopolitical and geo-economic evolutions. As discussed in previous chapters, Chinese strategic access to favourable geographic locations in Southern Asia is strategically advantageous for Beijing. More importantly, such developments also help mitigate potential security vulnerabilities.

National interests in natural resources and raw materials shape international relationships, incur enmities, and underpin defence industries without which armed forces could not function. Therefore, access – controlling, expanding or restraining – remains a fundamental aspiration and a contested goal in most developing states to ensure security and development. A real or perceived high degree of insecurity has created an impetus for development and improved connectivity. As various chapters have shown, where the integrity of territory is undermined, or there are threats to investments, energy supplies and trade routes, the need for access becomes critical. Strategic geography and evolving geopolitics shape visions and decisions to build routes. Ethnic problems in China's western region, Tibet issue, China's rising dependence on energy imports, growing maritime trade and changing geopolitical undercurrents are some drivers of Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia.

China is in advantageous position over its Asian neighbours due to power asymmetry and Chinese strategic access could redefine and reinforce relations with its neighbours. China growing strategic access would give Beijing considerable economic, strategic and diplomatic influence. China's large-scale infrastructure development strategy is building economic interdependencies. Beijing has used its economic and strategic resources to draw Southern Asia countries into its sphere of influence. China's politics of routes along with its latest BRI plan is a fusion of commercial initiatives and strategic goals. China usually bundles a project to make it dual purpose – civilian and military – and not just commercial. Thus, China's huge investments in infrastructure projects in Southern Asia promise immense strategic advantages as well. More importantly, it also gets de facto control or privileged access to dual-use facilities to support PLA when needed. The vital role of ports to both security and development has enabled China to blur the distinction between economic

and military purposes. The development of ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar seeks to introduce economic progress while improving the strategic environment in the Indian Ocean. This has been clearly illustrated in earlier chapters. It must be noted that while China is trying to enhance its safety and security through strategic access to Gwadar, Hambantota and other ports, regional countries are concerned at these developments and are apprehensive of Chinese intentions.

Thus, Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia through its politics of routes is an avenue for development and expansion of its strategic reach. Chinese infrastructure projects are changing geography, geopolitics and power dynamics in the region. China's politics of routes plays to its strengths and offers insights into Beijing's long-term strategy for reshaping both the landscape and the seascape. The study looked at China's interests, objectives and plans for enhancing transport connectivity. It is clear that the perception of a high degree of insecurity has injected urgency in Chinese policies to focus more on the peripheral region. It resulted in speedy development of roads and railways in Tibet and Xinjiang. China's concern for the security of its borderlands and evolving geopolitics in the region has created accessibilities in remote places. The Karakoram Highway is a suitable example of a strong rationale of security. Though road networks in these inhospitable geographical terrains create opportunities and dynamism to socio-economic life of people, the impetus for the construction of such roads and railways is/was not driven by the demand of economy and commerce alone. The enormous risks in building and maintaining such navigable roads and costs of transportation make such projects unviable economically. But strategic and security interests have compelled China to create and control access in strategic geographies. This study demonstrates that consideration of security often plays a major role in matters of development. Further, the relationship to sea routes has long been a factor in evaluating the importance of land routes for security. This point has been apparent in China's politics of routes in Southern Asia. Indeed, as the control of the sea lanes and points of strategic egress have become increasingly pertinent to the global military rivalry between major powers, changes in pattern, structure, and direction of land routes and their control have also become more immediate concern. China's growing presence at Gwadar or elsewhere in the region, for example, is transforming the strategic and geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean.

The consequences of an absence of access to sea routes and reliance on land routes beyond the territories of the state are nowhere more visible than in the interaction between the security and development policies of land-locked states and their dependence on neighbouring states for transit shapes their economics, politics and security. Nepal is an excellent example where its search for access shapes its relationship with two big neighbours. Chinese roads and railways supply vivid testimony to primacy of political and strategic interests in Nepal, Pakistan and Myanmar. Such projects deal with Beijing's security concerns and create strategic value. For developing states in Southern Asia, it is external economic and technical assistance which facilitates the creation of physical access, promoting the integration and development of peripheral regions. Further, the broader geopolitical and security interests of major powers have led to the fashioning of channels of access. The construction of roads, railways and ports has also provided powerful, visible attractions for Chinese growing partnership in Southern Asia.

This study also shows that while China is certainly present and has significant strategic interests and goals in Southern Asia, China's influence in this region is not unconditional and is limited by several factors, including evolving geopolitics in the region, availability of alternatives and other strategic choices and national interests of recipient countries. The construction of ports and highways by Chinese companies has resulted in the accumulation of monumental amounts of debt at high interest rates. It has also raised concerns of over-dependence on one country. With increasing debate and growing alternative choices, several announced projects have been suspended or cancelled, some earlier infrastructure development agreements have been renegotiated. The study's finding can be summed up as follows:

> China is making a strong push into India's neighbourhood for its own strategic and economic reasons. In this push, it has exploited the differing degrees of alienation between India and its neighbours by offering them generous economic and infrastructural support under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. China has also systematically worked to build understanding and support with diverse political groups in each of these countries to ensure continuous support for its growing presence. The political and economic support offered by China to India's neighbours has given each country greater confidence in bargaining assertively with India on issues concerning their specific political and economic concerns. China's relations with India's neighbouring countries display three key features: first, Beijing benefits from and sometimes exploits the asymmetry in its relations; second, China has

> pursued a "package" approach in bringing economic, political and other means in a coordinated manner; and third, it advances its interests through a network of interlocking and self-reinforcing bilateral, regional, and global engagements There is a strong impression in the region that India is finding it hard to compete with this Chinese "push" (Chaturvedy 2019).

Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia has several implications for India. The study shows in earlier chapters that while Chinese strategic access presents enormous opportunities to improve infrastructure and connectivity in Southern Asia, it also brings a range of challenges and risks for India's national interests and security. In India, some scholars view Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia as an opportunity for India while others see it as one of the biggest challenges for India's foreign policy. The proponents of "border as capillaries" recognise a simultaneous flow of power and resources from inside-out, bottom-up, and periphery-centre" and focus on a more participatory, dynamic and truly globalised world politics. These scholars underline the need to take into account local understandings and the stakes involved in the peripheral region while examining the politics of routes. Beyond geography, economics, or politics, borders also encompass memory, identity, and social relations. Hence, it is essential to take into account a sustainable policy response. This perspective is also a reflection of observations from the local populace. These scholars see borders as "capillaries" – organic, multidirectional, and life-giving analogy and conceptualise borders as fluid, mobile conveyors of life. Physical arteries pass along people, goods, technology, and capital but life requires non-material assets as well, for example, memories, identities, beliefs, and social relations in general.

However, many in India see a significant risk that India and China are competing in the same strategic space and are striving for influence. Chinese port developments and China's growing presence in the IOR are shaping the maritime battlefield in India's maritime neighbourhood. China is making friends in the right places, for example, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and down below Africa. Similarly, there are increased Chinese naval activities in the Indian Ocean which are seen as a grave danger to India's interests. Many experts, however, do not see Chinese strategic access, particularly transport networks, as antithetical to India's interests. Rather, they consider that China's Southern Asia ties are determined by geography, Beijing's need for security and stability, mutual economic advantage, shared cultural traditions, the

movement of people, common approaches to the management of natural disasters and climate change, and developmental priorities.

While there is lack of unanimity in India about implications of Chinese strategic access on India's national interests, the study has demonstrated that security concerns are primary motivations behind Chinese strategic access to Southern Asia. The study finds that India's responses to Chinese strategic access are multipronged with focus on promoting economic development and internal security through enhancing connectivity; prioritising relationship with neighbouring countries; strategic partnerships with like-minded countries; bilateral cooperation and engagement with the major powers; strengthening defence and security cooperation and regional economic integration with southeast Asia and east Asia; and soft power diplomacy.

However, the infrastructure on the Indian side of the border is quite terrible. Unless India accelerates the pace of the physical border infrastructure build-up, New Delhi will face serious difficulties in any future confrontation with China. By design the infrastructure in the border areas is poor but with a change in approach, India is developing its border connectivity on a priority basis. India has focussed on strengthening infrastructure connectivity, easing restrictions to create a business-friendly environment, reducing non-tariff barriers, boosting regional cooperation, and integrating common markets. Nonetheless, the challenge for Indian diplomacy lies in convincing its neighbours that India is an opportunity and not a threat. India has also begun an active collaboration and partnership with extra-regional/major powers on infrastructure development and other areas of mutual interests.

The study finds that China cannot ignore India's rising economic profile, vast potential and strong leadership. A personal understanding and chemistry between the leaders of the two countries have inspired confidence in the relations of China and India. Relations seem to be thriving, at least on the surface, and Beijing and Delhi are striving to amplify their existing areas of cooperation. However, globalisation and a fast-changing economic and security environment have resulted in increasing competitive elements in Sino-Indian relations.

Finally, for the local populace, prospective roads, paths, bridges mean fresh possibilities of trade will open up to them, in times of scarcity they will get supplies more quickly, through the roads they will become more closely linked with the rest of India and will get to know it better. In particular, good bridges over rivers will mean a great expansion of inter-village amity in the interior. And, therefore, periphery must be well connected through routes. Also, China's expanding links are providing opportunities for India and that the benefits may outweigh the threats. India needs to demonstrate some kind of robustness, boldness, and forward looking steps. 'Strategic encirclement' and 'string of pearl' kind of thinking are excuses for inaction. India is slow in implementing its announced projects, likely due to the uncertainty in its thinking. Thus, the problem seems to be rooted in Delhi rather than in Beijing. So long as India refuses to imagine and implement policies that make economic cooperation with India attractive to our neighbours, the Chinese economic penetration in Southern Asia will continue unimpeded.

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