

Interwoven Realities: The Interface of Geopolitics and Geo-economics in Asia

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The global political order is changing from an older order to one propelled by connectivity where there is a juxtaposition of economic corridors against traditional alliances. However there remain complexities that any research on this new global order needs to take note of. Connectivity opens doors to flows that are often viewed negatively. In addition since the focus remains on industrial development social aspects like displacement and environmental concerns remain unnoticed. Similarly, it is important to take note of Chinese compulsions in proposing the corridors. Chinese economy had been growing rapidly for a long time, the important shift in growth pattern occurring at the time of the global economic crisis. China's response to this changing growth dynamic was partly external and partly internal. This period of excess capacity at home was the moment when China launched expensive new initiatives like the AIIB, the BRICS Bank and the One Belt One Road Initiative.

Currently, China is preparing to hold its first OBOR global summit and it expects to see all world leaders lined up to become part of this post-American China-led globalization. Only two prominent nations are likely to be conspicuous by their absence: The US that will soon have a president who remains wary of China but also whose actions seem to be creating a vacuum for Chinese interventions like the RCEP and India, who remains reticent about OBOR, especially with respect to the project's offshoots into the Indian Ocean and South Asia. India had sought to counter OBOR with Project Mausam and Sagarmala projects but these have remained a fiction as Indian foreign policy became obsessed with 'isolating' Pakistan.

With Beijing's rising global stardom, India has lost the race with China, but New Delhi remains equally unaware of the fast-shifting sands in South Asia. As part of OBOR, China remains busy promoting (a) the Bangladesh China-India- Myanmar or BCIM Economic Corridor and (b) the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) both promising China access to the Indian Ocean, from the east and west of India. Dr Manmohan Singh had finally reconciled to India's

participation in the former but there has been no response to the same from the Modi government. But it is the CPEC which has lately picked up momentum. Both China and Pakistan are now inviting all other stakeholders including their newfound strategic partner Russia into CPEC. If Russia, China and Pakistan hold parleys with Afghanistan in the future, it portends increasing centrality of Pakistan and further marginalisation of India.

Then, what are India's options? It is interesting to note that while the Indian state has pulled away from the limited interest it showed in the BCIM economic corridor and keeps absolute silence on CPEC, Indian society is fast integrating with China. India's businessmen are getting entrenched in Chinese capital, equipment and consumer products. There is a bit of China in all top Indian start-ups, from ecommerce platform Snapdeal to mobile wallet giant Paytm, to cab service company Ola and travel portal MakeMyTrip and so on. Same is the trend for other Indian travellers to China, be it politicians, academicians, journalists or tourists. On the other hand India has had serious objections to the very nature of the China-Pakistan axis and to China investing in infrastructure in disputed territories of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. CPEC remains a classic example of how sovereignty and territoriality are being redefined.

Also one needs to take note of domestic corridors of connectivity and their linkages to transnational corridors and it is at the intersection of these connectivities that the interface of geopolitics and geo-economics become crucial.