China’s One Belt One Road Strategy: Its Implications for India

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Abstract

China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) Strategy or the new Silk Route is a ambitious approach towards global challenges and opportunities. This outward-oriented strategy of China attempts to encourage new trade and connectivity throughout Asia with road and maritime links to Africa, the Middle East and on towards Europe. China’s Belt Road Initiative is a recourse towards making investment abroad and build diplomatic, economic and strategic links. The President Xi Jinping introduced the concept of ‘Silk Route Economic Belt’ (SREB) and the ‘21st century Maritime Silk Route’ (MSR) were major initiative initially packaged and labeled under the overarching term ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) or ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI). India has strongly criticized the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) policy; a major element One Belt One Road (OBOR). CPEC passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and it violates India’s sovereignty. Hence the paper seeks to analyse the One Belt One Road Strategy of China and it’s implications towards India. The purpose of this paper is also to explore implications of One Belt One Road initiative for global future development.

Keywords: Silk Route, Belt and Road Initiative, Strategy, China, PoK, CPEC and Maritime Silk Route

Introduction

The One Belt One Road initiative is a brainchild of Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, which aims at improving connectivity and cooperation among different countries of Asia, Africa and Europe. The One Belt One Road strategy was announced in the year 2013 with an objective of restoring the ancient Silk Route that connected Asia and Europe. The belt and road initiative includes new territories and development initiative such as building road and railway networks, building ports and erecting power grids, oil and gas pipelines. Through OBOR and its outward-oriented approach, China attempts to encourage new trade and connectivity throughout Asia with road and maritime links to Africa, the Middle East and on towards Europe (Chhibber, 2015). The Silk Route Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st century Maritime Silk Route (MSR) are two major pillars of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s ambitious plans of asserting China’s presence at global level. These two major initiatives were initially packaged and labeled under the overarching term ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) or ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI). India has strongly worries about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); which is a part of One Belt One Road (OBOR) and passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The One Belt One Road strategy is also known as Modern Silk Road as it is a revival of the old land based Silk route which connected China to Central Asia, the middle East and Europe. It is also known as Maritime Silk Route is planned to connect Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The One Belt One Road strategy aims to connect Asia, Europe and Africa through strengthening partnerships among the countries. The Belt and Road

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Initiative also aims to develop underdeveloped western regions in China by connecting them to Central and South Asia. The eighteen western regions of China have been identified as part of this initiative. These initiatives, now termed as ‘One Belt, One Road’ were seen as part of an overall Chinese attempt to “leverage China’s growing economic power and influence in order to strengthen and expand cooperative interactions, create an integrated web of mutually beneficial economic, social and political ties, and ultimately lower distrust and enhance a sense of common security” (Sarker et al, 2018).

The One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and other economic policies of China are seen as it’s approach towards political influence and security scenario. Beijing’s increasing capabilities could deepen concerns in some quarters that China might eventually use the initiative to establish unwelcome spheres of influence or generally dominate its neighbours. Since its announcement the One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy is seen as a important Component Chinese foreign policy.

Major Goals of One Belt One Road (OBOR)

The OBOR initiative aims at promotion of connectivity, trade, financial integrity, policy coordination and to build trust among people across boundaries. By embracing the trends towards a multi polar world, economic globalisation and greater usage of Information technology, China have proposed its policy of One Belt One Road. It will lead to promotion of orderly and free flow of economic gains, deepening of market integration and strengthen regional economic cooperation (Haggai, 2016). Some analysts consider China’s Belt Raid Strategy as a geopolitical and diplomatic offensive strategy as it seen as reaction towards US policy of Pivot of Asia. It is also observed that through its Maritime silk route approach, China is aiming to encircle India and have dominant position in Indian Ocean region. However Chinese officials are of opinion that OBOR is “an ambitious economic vision of the opening-up and cooperation”, a “systematic project, governed by the Silk Road Spirit”, and to make a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility” (Ionela Pop, 2016).

- One Belt One Road (OBOR) as an economic and strategic approach can have a significant impact on Asia and parts of Europe.
- With its burgeoning economy and strategic location in Indian Ocean, India’s active participation is a necessary condition for the success of OBOR.
- While being more assertive in its approach to have a global presence, China needs to be more accommodative and sensitive towards its neighbors. An example would be coming to an agreement on India-China border disputes.
- India’s participation in OBOR will be significant; especially in terms of infrastructure development. However, it poses a challenge as it could result in India’s isolation South Asian and Indian Ocean region.
- By having access to maritime facilities in the Indian Ocean, OBOR will grant strategic advantage to China.

Implications for India

India has looked at China’s OBOR with both admiration and suspicion. India is concerned that it violates international norms, undermine India’s sovereignty as China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through Pakistan administered Kashmir. For China, CPEC is a benchmark to have strategic access in Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. Some analysts say that China’s OBOR initiative is beneficial for India as it will open more links of trade between India and other countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. India can also have a check on China’s Strings of Pearls policy (Girisanker 2018). India’s concerns about strategic implications of China’s OBOR constitute of four specific corridors and run through India’s neighbourhood: the CPEC, the Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM), the Trans-himalayan Economic Corridor and the Maritime Silk Route (MSR). These corridors have a direct bearing on India’s security and strategic interest (Baruah, 2018).

Suggestions for India to take on China’s OBOR initiative: (i) In order to develop more connection and communication links with countries of Indian Ocean region, the Ministry of Culture, Govt of India launched SagarMala programme. The SagarMala vision focuses on ‘port led development’ and is based on four pillars such
as port modernization, port connectivity, port-led industrialization and coastal community development (Accessed on www.sagarmala.gov.in). (ii) Strengthening of India’s IOR-ARC initiative and Act East Policy. (iii) India should take infrastructural development programme in its neighbourhood to strengthen bilateral ties and build trust. (iv) India think-tank should explore avenues of financial of prospects along OBOR and closely watch its implementation. (Nayyar, 2017). India need to respond with its own projects, build partnership with friendly and neighbouring countries, and build its strategic and maritime accepts (Malik, 2017). India needs to proactive in its approach to deal with bilateral issues in its neighbourhood. India needs to take a lead in initiating developmental projects in other countries rather than being reactionary on China’s policy.

Conclusion

Through its OBOR strategy China wants to fulfill its geo-political and economic ambitions and assert its position at global level. The OBOR is a way for China to develop new investments opportunities, to promote export markets and to check the US policy of ‘Pivot of Asia’. China also aims to develop its western province of Xinjiang and boost economic linkages neighboring countries in Central Asia and extend it to Middle East. China is developing Gwadar port in Pakistan and will connect it with Kashgar in Xinjiang in China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an important part of OBOR strategy and Gwadar port will serve as a trans-shipment point for China’s energy supplies, to accommodate its submarines and aircrafts carriers.

India has raised objections over One Belt One Road strategy on grounds of territorial sovereignty as China’s flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through Pakistan administered Kashmir, which is a disputed territory and is an integral part of India. India also opposes One Belt One Road strategy as it is a part of China’s ‘Strings of Pearls’ geo-economic strategy and its political clout.

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