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Situating Central Asia In China's One Belt One Road Initiative

Abstract

China's One Belt One Road initiative is interpreted as its quest for playing a decisive and dominant role in international political and economic order. The grand strategy is designed to enhance China's economic liberalism and hence provide it with the necessary infrastructure needed to pursue China's global ambitions. In this context China's neighborhood and the adjoining regions assume central status in projecting and protecting Chinese global ambitions. Central Asian region thus becomes very much important in this connection. The area where interests of China and Central Asian Republics converge need to be analyzed and assessed in order to gauge the degree of importance of the region to China. The areas of common interest range from energy, trade, and security. There are cultural and ethnic linkages between the two regions and a shared history above all makes a perfect scenario for fostering strong strategic relationships. This paper attempts to explore and analyze the prospects for cooperation between the two regions in the broader context of China's grand strategy manifested in its ambitious "One belt One Road" initiative.

Key words

Central Asia, China, OBOR, Strategic Interest, Maritime route.

Introduction

The significance of Central Asia can never be insignificant for any rising power whether it was USSR or China. For Central Asia relations with china could be of multitude characteristics that have to be molded by china in its foreign policy objectives. If Central Asian Republics (CARS) have a historical baggage of Russian relations and dominance China too has a similar relation of trade and dynastic superiority on the Silk Road. The significance of CARS for China is hinged upon its energy resources and trade potential. China has already surpassed the trade volume of \$ 50 billion (Wo-lap W. L., 2016), which surely tilts in favor of China. The salient characterization of economics over other interests is a continuation of what we can say Chinese foreign policy history and in Central Asia there is no deviation from it.

Security which is one of the hall mark essentials of economic development is another key factor which china has to keenly analyze. In past it was the historical and cultural affinity between the central Asian republics and Chinese predominant

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Muslim majority province of Xinjiang which made CARS area to be a point of focus for China. The rise of the Muslim fundamental states is no more a threat but in absentia the problems of border security, terrorism, and rise of ethnic riots in this region pose a threat to the stability of the region. The Chinese grand scheme envisages the region not only to be a hub of stable energy rich states but a route to Europe for Chinese future economic plans. For a long time these states have also acted as buffer zone for china as it absorbed the ethnic diaspora which could ignite into Chinese bordering (Tsui. S., 2017) special autonomous Xinjiang region.

China for a long time in the past has adopted the posture of benign neglect towards CARS. It has never interfered or even assumed its presence in Central Asia when USA and USSR were at loggers' head during cold war. Presently china in terms of trade has surpassed Russia as trading partner in the region (Jinchen, 2016). Russian economic might is no more a leverage and the Central Asian Republics are no more seen as satellite states Russia. For central Asian states China is the new oil consumer giant whose economy's thirst for oil is not going to end very soon as China has already become the world's largest oil importer owing to the fact that it has predominantly and export-based economy wherein energy acts as life line for country's growth and development. Although many scholars consider the vitality of central Asia in Chinese foreign policy as they regard this region to be a soft belly of china. China on the other hand considers the international transition of power from USA to china nothing else but peaceful and Chinese policy makers frequently give their assurances about their economic growth objectives (Yunling, 2010) as not detrimental or threatening to any other state. Chinese designs of international rise should not conflict with tensions and security related issues in the region. Its economy is moving not as rapid as few years ago. The pace of foreign direct investment and export-oriented economy is slowing now. Central Asia in this economic scenario gives a hope of new markets for China along with its economic needs of oil etc. Silk route is for China and economic means for its diplomatic objectives. For Central Asian states on the other hand China is a new investor and buyer whose companies have invested in high ways construction, telecommunication and other important economic sectors. But the spheres of security and politics still reside with Russian influence still dominating the region's geopolitics although for economic bounties CARs might look towards China. Russian suspicions towards the region also include the multilateral Organization SCO. Russia fears the dominating role of China in the SCO (Karishna, 2018) which if goes unchecked may create strategic problems for Russian security interests in the region. for china, another option could be United states to offset the Russian historical and contemporary influence in the region. the Russian influence in the region is too deep rooted and dynamic that no single state either china or U.S.A could set aside. Meanwhile Chinese priority is a good will posture for U.S and China in its new initiative of OBOR (Tsui. S., 2017) cannot sacrifice its international plans for establishing relations with this region which is further reinforced by what Joseph Nye has said about impossibility of any alliance between China and Russia.

In short, the ambitious OBOR provides an opportunity for China, Russia and U.S.A to realize the fact (Ferdinand, 2016) that an inclusive and cooperative frame work is necessary for global political order to remain peaceful, score settling and

politics of rivalry will jeopardize the political and economic benefits expected to come out of mega projects like OBOR.

Strategic importance of OBOR

OBOR initiative is a paradigm shift of economic, security, and strategic policies. It covers Central Asian states to Africa along with unique feature of maritime route. OBOR route linking central Asian states is of wide importance strategically as travelling distance via road is fast then maritime routes. It not only includes land routes but, oil conduits, power networks, Docks and many infrastructural projects (Yunling, 2010)s are base of the “One Belt One Road”. This plan gives high level of connectivity (Kennedy, 2015) to China towards all the target states and particularly Central Asian States. Following Figure 1. Is overview of OBOR strategy.

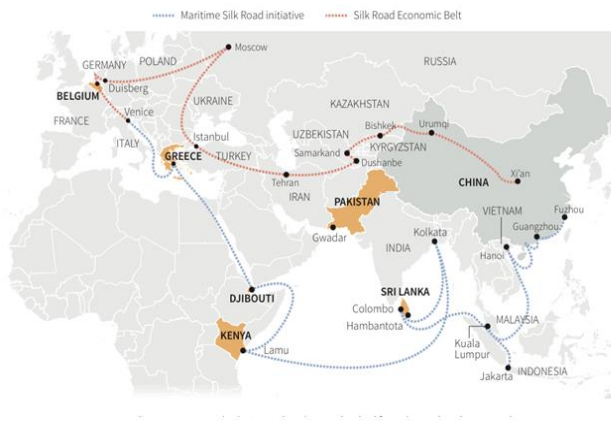


Figure 1 OBOR Routes (Source: Reuters)

OBOR routes covers following two pathways

1. **Silk Road Economic "Belt"** connects central Asia, Western and Eastern Europe to China
2. **Maritime silk "Road"** links Central Asia, Africa and South-East Asia with china

This research writing focus on Central Asian states situation in OBOR which in turns spotlights Silk Road economic belt, (Swaine, 2015) a land route connecting countries to countries and continents.

OBOR hold a wide plan of six economic corridors and a maritime route. They are as follows;

1. China Pakistan Economic corridor links South West China to Pakistan and gulf states
2. New Eurasian Land Bridge links West of China to Western Russia
3. China, Mongolia, Russia Corridor links North China to Eastern Russia through Mongolia

4. China, Central Asia, West Asia Corridor Links Western China to Turkey through route of Central and West Asia
5. China, Indochina Peninsula Corridor connects Southern China to Singapore thru Indo-China
6. Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Corridor Associates Southern China to India thru Bangladesh and Myanmar
7. Maritime Silk Road linking Coastal China to the Mediterranean thru Singapore, Malaysia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.

“One Belt one road” is a vast schema of joining more than 65 countries (Feng, 2010) to each other mainly via land routes along with maritime silk road. Republic of China has planned to invest approximately 1 trillion dollars for completing these projects and assisting countries involved in it. It is unique approach towards geo-economic development approach. China will become center of the world regarding economics, social stratum and policy deviser. Power Rex will shift from USA to China with strong balancing of power due to connectivity and cooperation among 65 countries. (Wo-lap W. I., 2016)¹

A Game changer for Central Asian Trade and Politics

Chinese foreign policy (Ferdinand, 2016)s is based on the Chinese cultural norms as this OBOR plan is based on the decisions of the Imperial Chinese dynasty and pragmatic approach follows Confucian learning methodologies (Winter, 2016). China is taking great care of the interest of each country who is partner “OBOR”. She is allowing attractive packages to the participants to converge world trade with harmonization in capital dealings. Chinese approach towards saving participatory states’ interest in two ways particularly;

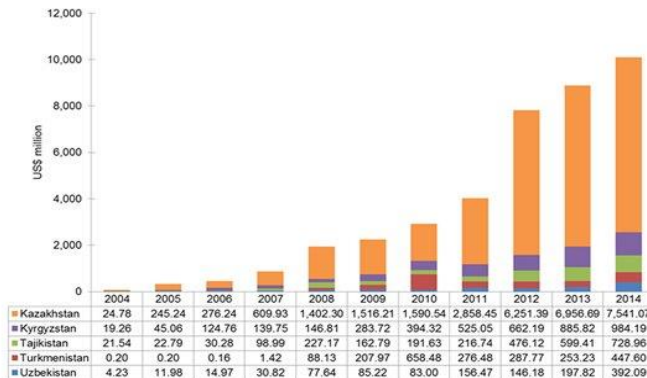
1. It avoids interfering in state’s internal affairs
2. It makes possible provision of low interest rate loans as a challenge to western pecuniary systems

Among these 65 OBOR members, Central Asian states mostly are autocratic and repellent to democracy, even china can steer market opportunities (Zimmerman, 2015) for them and could develop a new kingdom of strategic commercial and profitable aspects as it keeps blind eye towards their dealing to humanity as western nations criticize and propose sanction on such participatory states. (Er-rafia, 2017)²

Since, 2007-08 financial crisis China diverted its trade routes for commodities and resources to the west hence changing the world trade climate. Now, transnational trade and China can’t be separated due to fulcrum status (Cooley, 2016) of the Chinese Republic by defying protectionist approach. USA, Europe after Brexit poll and Russian efforts to change power cloud and China with OBOR initiative is giving Multi polar world with peculiar economic to political space. More over OBOR States are now largest customers to china and in response they receive best investment dealings (P., 2016) to maintain their strong geopolitical status in the region. Central Asia is now getting attraction in the world trade zones due to sound

and reliable Chinese investment for their prosperity which in turn will thrive China. Such an initiative is not possible for most capitalist states to as Chinese believes in serving first then to be served for getting un-detained geopolitical Actor.

China's Stock of Outward Direct Investment to Central Asia



Source: Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment

Chinese investment index in Central Asia in the fig. shows that CARs are going to be the next game changer states for all the adjoining continents with best market deals available in the zone. World economic capital (Putz, 2016) will be shifted from capitalist block to communist block with sharp rise of Asia. OBOR will affect American trade in the CARs and as Russia still also influence these states for which China is taking advantage to get impetus in the region. Despite USA has always been paving its ways through CARs but right after 9/11 situation is getting changed every day against it. US relation with CARs are also not that stable that they could be relied for the trade as comparison (Chung, Views from Northeast Asia. , 2015) to china due to military approach policy. USA is marginalized in the CARs regarding trade and political influence due to its human rights betterment responsibilities in comparison china follows non-interference policy in state's internal affairs. This is endangering USA's Business interest and catching its criticism in launching of OBOR projects in different targeted regions of the One Belt One Road initiative. (Luttwak, 2012)³

Central Asia is of great attraction of USA for oil, mining, gas, industrial and food dispensation market so it can't withhold its participation in the region. OBOR has now got support in Afghanistan and Pakistani terrains by USA with ranging benefits to the bordering states. For strengthening economic status (Putz, 2016) of china, it launched Asian Infrastructural and Investment Bank (AIIBs) to support infrastructural projects across the Asia. AIIB doesn't impose any obligation regarding human rights and political duties which create attraction for all the states who aims for investment from the bank. AIIB along with transparency, accountability, independence supports safeguarding policies which gives it worth enough then the other operating investment banks. It got attraction around the

globe for surpassing secure articles and economically promotional values from the international banking standards set by UK. (Shambaugh, 2013)⁴

Chinese Objectives in Central Asia's Investment

Saving mutual interests of all the 65 participating states in OBOR is major concern of China these days ranging from climate code to the cultural interactions. It keenly observes comparative interests of the states (Chung, Views from Northeast Asia., 2015) and promotion of applied assistance by them. Some of the spotlighted targets of china in central Asian states are;

1. Development of transnational wallop in comparison of G7 states for maintaining its influence in the region
2. Improving China's GDP for increasing trade range to new markets
3. Channelization of surplus capacity for growth to export markets
4. Boosting value of YAUN to transnational reserve currency as OBOR states will accept China as their leader state
5. Disparities among South and East China for growth and development will be alleviated as OBOR initiative will connect China to the world in far better way
6. Bridging infrastructural deficit in the under-developed countries
7. Increasing foreign direct investment and trade in the partner countries which will boost GDP of these states' too
8. OBOR plan may increase soft power image of the China around the call, as few analysts termed it as China Muster plan
9. China aims to increase its hold over the Indian ocean by the deployment of People's Liberation Army
10. Increasing regional importance as Sino-centric economic and strategic securities in Indo-Pacific Ocean.

These objectives will totally transform China's international reputé if achieved in true meaning as support of strong nations behind developing ones is always attractive. Paradigm shift of power center in Asia will also increase the status of participatory states.

Expected Challenges for China

Within this mega investment project OBOR, china may also expect various types and intensity challenges as it's not that easy to perform this plan practically when capitalist block is trying with every mode to hold Asia's weak point and nations. Following are few expected challenges for China;

1. Low solidarity and sovereignty count of the participatory states may harm China's Financial strength
2. Instability of the middle East states may jeopardize to One Belt One Road Initiative

3. Political repercussion in poor and politically troubled states would threaten the smooth working of OBOR projects in case they will perceive that they might have been exploited by China for their own interest
4. Ecological degradation and labour manipulation may also raise series of threats for the OBOR projects in different countries.
5. Loan along with the riders such as raw material would be borrowed from China only may increase the interest and return rate which overall might not benefit the target state as much as it would be only benefiting China

OBOR offer has received many practical appreciations and it is expected that least risk (Winter, 2016) and challenge levels will be faced by the participating states due to its non-interference policy in internal affairs of the states under the project.

Insinuations for the encountering of Russian economy

OBOR is touching mostly southern periphery of the Russian Federation, where old Soviet states and central Asia is focused. Russia is facing many economic problems these days relating to its trade and strategic economy which raise the question for Russian competitive (Lim, 2015) with equal level economy to make its roots stronger in the target countries for their goods market and usage of their raw resources. Despite challenging situation, Russia managed to appreciate Beijing's efforts to connect the zone economically and strategically giving win-win situation to all the participatory states. China is receiving turnover of worth \$ 1.67 Billion per day from this investment currently (Baumgartner, 2017)⁵, due to its acceptable features offer for agreements to participate in the OBOR project rather than any Russian offered project in the zone particularly in Central Asia. Comparative economic status is raising China's influence in the region ranging from political to economic sectors making China more influential state of the continent than Russia. Despite the tough competition by China to Russia in Economic progression, Beijing will never ever try to weak Russian security and stability status in the region (Minghao, 2015) because it will in turn costs OBOR, which China can't afford. At the end of the day, China is making deals with all its power equal states to be symbiotic in relationship rather than commensalistic which can ASIA, the Power center of the world (Shambaugh, 2013). It is very attractive task for both Russia and China to cover cross road of the two Continents in fact world to be highly influenced by them rather than Capital block.

Presence of 13,000 military personnel of Russia in Central Asia at various bases and Chinese absence in this sector increases importance of Russia for OBOR success in the zone. China still have large room for investment in Russia but it invests only 2 % of its investment rather than \$225 billion internationally in year 2016 (Baumgartner, 2017).⁶ Vladimir Putin reported by Cooley's said that Chinese -Russian relations took a new way right after the OBOR project leading to greater Eurasia scene over the Globe. Russia signed two agreements with China for joint working of EEU and OBOR for maintaining socialist influence in the Central Asia. EEU partners has now perceived the revenue generation (Lo, 2015) worth of the OBOR project and is making every move possible to be the part of the OBOR. This initiative by Moscow will definitely lower tariff rates for goods and commodities transport across Eurasian borders. Russia might have some

reservations as china will be only Leader with OBOR initiative. But still China can't be devalued as she is very selective Stakeholder to her investment with maximum turnout demand, although she cares for his target states needs and support.

With large ground homework behind the project, Moscow and Beijing signed an agreement of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) collaborative work with BRI (Bank Rakyat Indonesia). This accord resulted in the table talks about free trade zoness (Lo, 2015) EAEU and OBOR regions with in different parameters. Despite yet not very sound projects have been started but few are ongoing such as CNPC gas treaty with Gazprom 2014, LNG project with Yamal 2015, Highway construction between west China and west Europe and Sibur's investment (Lo, 2015) fund for silk road. Lowering of Chinese investment from 12.6% to 8.5 % in BRI countries in year 2016 depicted that Chinese investors are becoming choosier for investment and estimates of revenue turnout.

Although trade flow from china to Europe is one way practically at this point, might lowers economic efficiency, but still is largest investor around the globe. According to few analysts keeping eye on Russia and Europe, it has more political vision rather than being economically practical. Experienced and pragmatic Chinese investors (Yu, 2017) are more attracted towards well prepared plans for business rather than mere gossip plans. This side of the OBOR initiative may give tough time to Russia to make its place equal to China in Central Asia. (SPIVAK, 2017)⁷

Chance for International Anti-Terrorism Alliance

China's status being one leader via One Belt One Road initiative may pave way for opportunity for the formation of international Anti-terrorism Alliance in Particular focus on central Asian counter terrorism ongoing projects. Recent quadrilateral coalition for developing counter-terrorism alliance among Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and China is showing Chinese interest in cross border security concerns which may increase communist influence in the political and security arena (Haiquan, 2017) of the region in coming years. Corruption of the local governments and militancy has raised concerns in Pakistan and Afghanistan effecting security situation for OBOR via central Asian states, as when militants found no place to ran out they move in nearby states to hibernate them. Chinese interest in making counter terrorism alliance may give tough time to OBOR in Central Asia as USA is trying to increase its influence via Afghanistan episode in these states (Lin, 2016). In case of formation of such Alliance will definitely weaken American influence in the region which is not tolerance level of USA ever.

Only safe way for developing anti-terrorism alliance is by involving USA with its concerns and interests i.e. detainment of terrorist groups in the region, locating and arresting wanted personnel regrading senility and stability of the region. With glance over the history, USA is always in the interest of catching nominated individuals then punishing them as per there way and interests, makes way for better possibility of counter-terrorism alliance in the Central Asia indirectly saving OBOR from halt risks. Safety initiatives in wake of One Belt One Road plan (Lauridsen, 2017)swill increase security situation and stability in the participatory

states as china will never afford loss of its investment and will make ever possible move to save them from law and order threatening episodes. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and CITIC Foundation for Reform and Development Studies long list of threats may risk OBOR plans due to terrorism and social instability in countries for which local governments have to agree with the security demands of China to save its investment and regional peace too. More than ten terrorist's groups have been notices in Kazakhstan region with leading influence of ISIS in the region (DONG, 2017). Countering efforts will develop new world order in actual by the development of the political and economic justice order.

This new world order developed by China will follow UNSC terms and conditions rather than having double faced policies as many Europeans and Americans do. As being member of the UNO not a single state is free to follow double humanitarian standards with state immunity concepts and personal interest but they have to move in larger interest of the region and the public. Chinese interest in touching each and every aspect of the concern regarding OBOR will give comprehensive dealing of affairs from security to regional stability which will once become international code of conduct for dealing sensitive issues. As far as American status is concerned they do but only in their own interest not in the regional benefit where they are operating with no estimation of the cost that particular region is paying for USA's benefits. Chinese approach to deal with violence will give roots for new system of dealing with security and strategic risks. (Brletich, 2017)⁸

World's 41% uranium is produced in central Asia, Kazakhstan, which is of high importance and concern for both power blocks busy in the region. It is far more important to use this sensitive production in positive range rather than destructive aspects as it will severely effect regional to global peace (DONG, 2017)s. Chinese approach for tackling these security concerns, fights against terrorism, saving public interest, devising new rules and regulations framework to operate and building trust level among the states and on china importantly may aims to lock USA out of the Asia particularly central Asia. After OBOR initiative china is looking for new architect of the security norms for intervention; ending in Monroe Doctrine of Sino-Asian version. (Contessi, 2016)⁹

Central Asian Worries vis-à-vis OBOR initiative

Central Asian states are enjoying a lot of listed benefits but they have many unspoken worries behind it. One of the major concerns might be the use of central Asian natural resources as they happened to experience in past via Russia which tried to impose its Imperial control over the CARs to have access to the regional cotton.

More over if OBOR is critically analyzed, it clarifies that its policy framework entertains elites rather than general public of the target regions. Despite labour work jobs will be available to the labour cadre of the states but this opportunity is far less to local populaces in comparison to investing elites. Local productions and turnouts (Rahman, 2017) are far less than Chinese interest and benefits along with elite profits of the regions.

Negative climate change risk in the regions i.e. cement factories formation, industrial zones, refining units will increase pollution of the CARs as that was increased in Russian influence era. Another different but possible worry notices is looming generation change of mindset is seen as many older political elites (Er-rafia, 2017)s now doesn't agree to new terms and conditions of working even they are in their interest due to strict lines of norms following in the mental training. These worries might not be practical to level of notice but they really exist as per called surveys in the region to understand the status of OBOR in Central Asia. (Sharma, 2017)¹⁰

Turning Game of Power in Central Asia

Formerly, Russia had been operating military security force in the region is now not enjoying formerly strengthened status due to BRI concerns in Moscow. Changing Trade elite of the zone has now realized Moscow that it cannot fight with china to make its influence level higher in the CARs. Organizational initiatives and support to governing countries in the region has turned over the combat status and value (Putz, 2016). In present time, rather than confronting, Russia has joined hands with China with no uproar of Socialists superiority over Communists to govern the region, for better trade opportunities and stable and positive index under GDP tag.

In comparison to Beijing, Russia has far more external trade tariffs under EEU and BRI influence, lessen external trade and fear in the Russians for Chinese dominance of the commodity market is felt. SCO unique way of funding and lesser cross border trade tariff has created free trade zone under (Contessi, 2016)OBOR developing Chinese hegemony in the participatory states and Asia. Railways project linking China with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is another point of conflict in fact point of fear for Russia with rising Chinese influence in the Central Asia. According to observation and growth rate, Silk economic corridors' Belt will become active and shortest transit route from Asia to Europe and in turn would lower worth of Tran-Serbian Russian railways leading to lower Russian control of the region. (Sharma, 2017)¹¹

Presently, China has become preferred trade partner along with division of labour unit in the Central Asian states as compared to Russia which may raise many other points of conflicts among the socialists and communists but with no option left other than joining hands at Chinese terms and conditions with little eye on Russian demands (Brletich, 2017)s.

Conclusion

China has encircled world with its One Belt One Road Initiative with particular focus on the fulcrum point of jointed continents. Central Asia has attained very important place in the project as it gives shortest land route towards Europe. Influence in the Central Asia has changes Asian hegemon position form Russia to china. Moreover, China's non-interference policy in participatory states internal affairs is most attractive features of all. It provides maximum space to the state to work rather than tension of any meeting humanitarian and stability standards to work on the gain profits and benefits under OBOR initiative.

OBOR fear in USA, Europe, Australia, Russia and many other investing hegemony has increased Chinese political influence in the world affairs and particularly in participating states. Trade boosting infrastructural plans under OBOR will increase living standards in the participating states. This initiative will maintain balance of power among the Asian and capitalist blocks. Chances of war will be lowered to the time unless and until counter power part could maintain same influence by the power of trade and investment in the region. Such balance of power is needed after sheer ground home work on trade, investment, infrastructural, political, security and stability sectors which is not impossible but needs working by leaps and bounds as this initiative will now go on increasing power flag higher in Chinese favor all over the globe with minor possible threats and halts.

It's far better to get benefits from the OBOR initiative for world progress rather than thinking about fighting with trade and power hegemon of the time and zone.

"All states should esteem each other national veracity and sovereignty in all cases with discrimination of personal interest and gains rather than thinking in broader context of global peace and stability with increased living standards for general public."

Xi-JinPing Address to One Belt One Road forum

May 14, 2017

These words of Chinese premier are the real thought behind the OBOR project as they want to share their prosperity and flourishing techniques rather than hiding opportunities from the developing and striving class of the world facing life threatening crisis. China is not aiming for any detrimental group for the international security and progress but wants to develop entrepreneurial world with working opportunities for everyone, where it is fundamental right of every being to raise better livelihood they want with positive investments and turnouts.

With any type of analysis either positive or negative in OBOR reference, OBOR's progression speed and turnout cannot be ignored. It is an effort to lessen distances from land and sea routes to the hearts of each other. It doesn't mean only to benefit China but all participating states and Central Asia can prove its worth most of all by fully responding to the OBOR projects and plans for their larger interest of development and stability at first.

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