

Belt and Road Initiative of China: Implications for South Asian States

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ABSTRACT

Belt and Road Initiative is China's global infrastructure program. This long-term investment strategy is aimed at improving regional cooperation, increased trade and economic integration by linking Asia with Europe and Africa through maritime and land networks. South Asia is vital for Belt and Road Initiative of China. China views South Asia as a priority zone because its geostrategic location will contribute a lot in the preferment of the BRI. This research intends to highlight the geo-strategic and geo-economic implications of BRI on security and economy of South Asian states. This study is carried out using qualitative research methodology. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources including books, journals, research papers, articles and videos of seminars and conferences on the concerned topic and interviews of experts of BRI and CPEC were also conducted. According to the research, BRI is the manifestation of Mackinder's heartland theory. BRI fortifies intra-state transport connectivity, improves international connectivity, will help to ease power shortages and facilitate economic modernization and industrialization in South Asia. The findings of this research show that China is expanding its diplomatic influence through its economic presence in South Asia causing serious challenges to India's power in the region and USA's status of global hegemon. Along with the opportunities of BRI, there are a number of risks of political instability, poor law and order situation, corruption, terrorism and extremism in South Asia, hindering the smooth functioning of BRI projects. Also there is a fear of Chinese debt trap and loss of sovereignty in South Asian states making them reluctant to fully permit the execution of Chinese led projects on their land.

Key Words: Belt and Road Initiative, China and South Asia

Introduction

Belt and Road Initiative is China's long term transcontinental plan launched in 2013 aiming at development of infrastructure and promotion of economic integration among different countries. Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road are collectively called as Belt and Road Initiative. The vision of President Xi is to connect less developed regions of China with the neighboring countries. For South Asia, BRI holds special significance as China shares a 5,000-kilometre border with SA countries (Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan). Moreover, they have enjoyed cultural, religious and commercial ties

since prehistoric days. Belt and road initiative is just a part of China's Grand Strategy which will not only increase China's influence in South Asia as a major regional power but also to counter the hegemony of United States all over the world. It enables Beijing to deal with the potential rivals, curtail the role of India as a regional player and diminish the control of United States. There are considerable obstacles in smooth functioning of China's BRI initiative for instance lack of political trust between China and other South Asian capitalist states, security threats and instability in some South Asian regions. Major interests of China in South Asian region include curbing the influence of extremism and terrorism to ensure political stability and to build energy and trade corridors throughout South Asia.

Over the past few decades as a part of its global effort to extend diplomatic and economic impact over South Asia, China has increased its economic engagement in this region through grants, loans and other development investments to secure trade and energy flows from Europe and Middle East.

Beijing's Key Objectives and Concerns in South Asian Region

- To keep a check on India's rise as a regional superpower.
- To enhance access to India Ocean to attain its economic objectives.
- To counter terrorism and religious extremism to ensure stability in the South Asia.
- To expand Beijing's economic and political influence in South Asia.

Cooperation Priorities of China's Belt and Road Initiative

- Promotion of transnational cooperation, policy exchange on multi-levels along with communication mechanism.
- Development of infrastructure for improving connectivity.
- Reduction in trade barriers and increase in regional economic incorporation.
- Coordination in monetary policies through setting up financing institutions.
- To foster people to people interactions by allowing media cooperation, exchange of dialogue, culture and academia.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the economic and security implications of BRI on South Asian countries particularly Pakistan and India.
- To explain the geostrategic implications of BRI that increase China's regional hegemony in South Asia.

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- To evaluate the transformations in the relations of South Asian states brought by China's Grand Strategy.
- To suggest policies to Pakistan in order to gain maximum benefits from China through BRI.

Literature Review

Alizada (2018) President of China Xi Jinping stated that "China will deepen relations with its neighbors in accordance with the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefits, and inclusiveness, and a policy of foreign friendship and partnership with its neighbors." South Asian nations like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri-Lanka and Bhutan have increased their diplomatic, economic and security ties with China. Long term consequences of China's growing presence in this region are a cause of concern for South Asian regions as China through its investments not only seeks to support these nations to develop but also have its own geopolitical interests behind it. China's massive infrastructure expansion and investment initiative, the Belt and Road initiative pledges massive support to South Asian nations. China seems to engage with South Asian states primarily to cater its own geostrategic interest but hardly for the purpose of mutual benefit. South Asian is a significant region to support geostrategic objective of China for instance the encirclement of India, counterterrorism in states such as Pakistan and Afghanistan and port access in states like Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka.

Chatterjee (2020) in "Promises and pitfalls of Belt and Road Initiative" writes that China Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) is a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The focus of this project is to connect China with Gwadar port of Pakistan through highways, railways and pipelines. Through China Pakistan Economic corridor, Pakistan seeks to leverage Chinese investment, increased production capacity and expertise for the purpose of upgrading infrastructure of Pakistan and carve out mechanism for sustainable economic development. China will also get benefits in return by acquiring connection to the Arabian Sea. Companies of China have attained long term contractual privileges to run energy and road infrastructure and to collect fees of electricity and tolls at definite high prices. This has put Pakistan at a disadvantage and China a greater beneficiary of profits made through CPEC projects. Developments under CPEC struggle a lot with bureaucracy and local politics of Pakistan. Then there is balance of payment crises in Pakistan hindering the smooth working of this project. The economic troubles that Pakistan faces from time to time run deeper than CPEC.

Rathakrishnan (2020) in "China's Grand strategy; A New Economic Order in South Asia" states that China is encircled by six maritime and thirteen continental neighbors. China's Institute of Contemporary International Relations has described Beijing's neighborhood in terms of three rings. The "inside ring" consisted of states sharing land borders with People's Republic of China. Middle ring consisted of the maritime states which spreads from inside ring and contains parts in the

West Pacific to Indian Ocean and even the areas of Russia and Central Asia which are not connected with China through land borders. The outer ring spreads to America, Europe and Africa. Other scholars gave more explicit descriptions of sub-regions. These are situated in bordering and nearby areas. These include Northeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Pacific and West Asia. Neighboring countries of China are very important for its vision of “Rising China”. South Asia is ranked third in importance in Beijing’s Asia policy after Northeast and Southeast. South Asia is considered as a significant region by China especially in terms of security. Belt and road initiative has reinforced the strategic significance of South Asia which is called by Chinese experts as “rediscovery of strategic status of South Asia”. South Asia and China together are entering a new phase of relations with the growth and progress of India, Western development strategy of China and withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. South Asia is not just an instable region nearby China but also significant with regard to China’s Grand Strategy.

Ehsan Ejazi (2018) in “The Belt and Road Initiative in the Shadow of competition Between China and the US” states that The Chinese government means to extend its exchange and political-social ties across Europe and Africa by building rail lines and ocean lines inside the structure of the BRI. The Chinese accept that the nations along the street have rich assets that can be utilized for improvement and high financial development. The US has depended on extreme measures to frustrate China's worldwide objectives by fortifying existing collusions with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and somewhat Indonesia and the Philippines. Fortifying associations with India is the following stage in US methodology in Asia. In seeking after this procedure, the US has given exceptional consideration to Middle Eastern nations, particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In such manner, the US is probably going to constrain nations to keep away from the BRI.

Baruah (2020) in “India’s Answer to Belt and Road: A Road Map for South Asia” states that South Asia has a great and growing requirement for infrastructure development. South Asia nations possess a tremendous capacity for trans-border cooperation for increased connectivity and infrastructure expansion. Emergence of China as a major regional economic actor is reforming the prospects for connectivity in South Asia. The new sense of political will in China and the mission of increased regional connectivity supported by Beijing’s surplus resources are seen to be a factor behind changing security environment and arrangements in India’s neighboring region. India views the increasing commercial activities of China as a means to achieve their geopolitical objectives. India also opposed the CPEC because of its concerns regarding its territorial sovereignty. India is not against the development of infrastructure and increasing connectivity but is concerned about the strategic consequences of the initiatives led by Beijing. Example of Hambantota port of Sri-Lanka can be taken here to understand the concerns of India. Sri-Lanka leased the port to China. India keeping this in view

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has to work with its partner nations in the region to find alternative connectivity resources. New Delhi has identified states like Japan as a strategic partner in formulating a response strategy.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study. Historical, analytical, exploratory and descriptive approaches have been used for this research. Case study design has been used for this research. Interviews have been conducted for analysis implications of BRI on South Asian states. An in-depth analysis approach and case study research design is used. The data has been collected from secondary sources. Different books, articles, research papers and journals were analyzed. JSTOR, digital library of academic articles, books, journals and other primary resources are consulted to have a deep insight on BRI and its implications on South Asian states. Primary resources are also utilized to ensure the validity of facts on BRI and its Implications on South Asia. Interview method is used for data collection. Structured Interviews of strategic analysts and economic experts were conducted. Chairman, Department of Economic at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, Assistant Professor in LCWU, Director, Program on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Senior Fellow, PN War College, Lahore and Retired Colonel, serving in Fauji foundation, and PhD in Geopolitics of Gwadar were contacted to have better and clear understanding of BRI in South Asia. Research aims to help the readers gain understanding regarding China's Belt and Road Initiative and its implications for South Asia. This research has highlighted the potential challenges and opportunities for South Asian countries and China in reference to the Belt and Road initiative.

Major Findings and Analysis

Chinese Perspective of BRI

As mentioned in the BRI forum speech and the "Vision Document" expressions that direct the narrative are intergovernmental coordination, win-win cooperation, connectivity of infrastructure, openness and inclusiveness, financial integration, unhindered trade, opening bottle necks, and people to people contact.

Architecture of Belt and Road Initiative and its Projects

One of the major aims of BRI is to connect the young, vibrant and underdeveloped economies of Asia to the mature and developed economies of Europe. Two vital components of this project are the following:

1. Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)
2. 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)

How is Belt and Road Initiative Funded?

The financing of BRI involves multiple financial institutions run by the state, mainly The China Development Bank, China Agriculture Development Bank and China, Export-Import Bank. It also involves multiple development institutions namely (AIIB) Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, World Bank, BRICS Bank, multiparty financing schemes and investments by Chinese private company and provincial governments of China. As a result to BRI, the Beijing dominated BRICS Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank would provide the world with a strong alternative of West dominated IMF and World Bank.

Bringing Belt and Road Initiative to Completion

BRI is written in the constitution of China as a source of china's economic development, so China will try its best to bring this project to life. However implementation of the projects under BRI is going to be a challenging task for the world. The project would be fully functional by 2049. Partner states of China in BRI will have to work in complete collaboration by connectivity of infrastructure, policy support and commitment, financial commitment, by enabling an environment free of any bottlenecks in transport system, assurance of law enforcement, easy border crossing of goods and custom clearance. The partner states will have to assure domestic support and gain political consensus to promote more and more private and public participation.

Execution of the Belt and Road Initiative

An autonomous agency named State International Development Cooperation Agency is set up by the Chinese authorities to monitor BRI. This agency will secure foreign funding for smooth running of the project and plan strategic projects.

Geo-Strategy, Geo-Economic and Geo-Politics of Belt and Road Initiative

Geo-economics is the core of Chinese ambitions which is driving geo-strategy and geo-politics of China in different states and continents. China and the other states on BRI's route will benefit from this project but at the same time dependence of South Asian states on China will increase. Economic effects of implementation of BRI projects will change economic and political future of Asia. BRI will lead to regional hegemony of China in South Asia and in a long run will bring multipolar world order, cultural diversity and globalization of economy. United States has accused China of investing in infrastructure projects in developing states to attain its goals of geopolitical influence on BRI states and to achieve competitive

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advantage over USA. American politicians view BRI as “neocolonial debt trap policy”.

Risks in Belt and Road Initiative

This belt passes through one of the harshest topographies of the world, coupled with huge cost of investments needed to be made by the stakeholder states, political unrest, conflicting interests of governments and instability in some states, maritime and territorial disputes of Beijing with the neighbor states, make BRI a risky project to undertake. China received great international criticism on the potential of BRI to generate massive levels of corruption. BRI states show patterns of bribery risks. The lack of commercial necessities behind projects of BRI suggests that it is very uncertain whether project returns will be sufficient enough to make the refunds to Chinese creditors. Till date, there has been limited focus on environmental impacts of the infrastructure projects under BRI. Projects also fail as a result of insufficient investment verdicts due to political priorities superseding economic considerations. Projects with insufficient returns result in backlash by communities. South Asian countries are becoming increasingly cautious about involvement in BRI and its implications for the region. Many governments are calling for renegotiation of BRI contracts.

Is Chinese Led Bri a Military Constructed?

There are many indicators that through BRI, China is attempting to increase its sphere of influence. China is involved in various territorial and maritime disputes with its neighboring states. Belt and Road initiative would enhance Beijing’s strategic depth and influence over claimants like South Korea, India, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. Once BRI is fully functional, it would enable China to secure control of strategically significant choke points including Malacca Straits. This in a long run would increase China’s influence all over the world. China aims to expand its power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean which are dominated by India. Belt and Road Initiative is a non-military catalyst for China through which it can accelerate decline of US influence in the world and ensure a balanced and better distribution of geo-political influence. In the recent years China, for the purpose of guarding its interests and secure power sources, particularly the IOR has increased forays by naval ships and sub-marines.

BRI in Reference with Heartland Theory

Belt and Road crisscrosses Heartland many times. It is therefore reasonable to mention that China is dignified to exercise immense geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic influence over the world, making this theory highly farsighted.

BRI in Light of Dependency Theory

China has been accused of using “Belt and Road Initiative” to form a new kind of Neo-Colonial relationships so that many developing countries have to rely on China.

Bipolarity and Belt & Road Initiative

China views itself as an emerging superpower capable of challenging the US. There are two pre-requisites to be declared a superpower:

- 1- Strong economy.
- 2- Military competency.

In order to achieve that end, the country’s leadership has turned its attention towards transforming and uplifting the economy via BRI.

Hegemonic Stability Theory

War can begin if the following conditions are met:

- 1- When the dominant position of the current hegemon erodes, granting other states the temptation to seek dominance.
- 2- When the rising superpower seeks to assert its power.
- 3- When the prevailing superpower attacks defensively to suppress a threat before it becomes too hostile to handle.

Both the US and China are wary of the destructive nature of armed conflict. China is looking for ways to connect with the Indian Ocean in a manner which would help avoid confrontation in other parts. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of the BRI, ensuring smooth passage to the Middle-Eastern market and beyond.

Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan

Pakistan’s geostrategic location plays a dynamic role in trade economy as it provides straight route and low-cost gateway for China to Middle East, Africa and Europe. Aims of CPEC are not just limited to economic development but it also aims to achieve defense and security objectives of both states.

The goals of CPEC include:

1. Pakistan’s social and economic development.
2. Gwadar: Modernization of infrastructure and construction of new sea ports, airports, schools and hospitals.
3. Increasing trade between states, aviation connectivity, constructing railways, roads and highways.
4. Connecting deep sea ports of Gwadar and Karachi to landlocked Xinjiang province of China.

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5. Overcome Pakistan's energy crises by building energy transportation systems. Energy production under CPEC includes coal, wind, hydro and solar power projects.
6. Increasing employment.
7. Minimization of Pakistan's over-reliance on West.
8. Provide China with an opportunity to overcome "Malacca Dilemma".

Belt and Road Initiative and India

CPEC can create geo-political tensions between China and India as it passes through occupied Kashmir, violating the territorial claims of India. According to India's stance its immediate neighboring states are witnessing militarization due to China's aids in form of fighter aircrafts, submarines, warships and military technology. Increased shipping congestion after full execution of BRI and CPEC also pose security challenges for India in IOR. China's dominance in financial institutions funding the projects under BRI may lead to adverse consequences on Delhi's share of global trade and its economic isolation. China may establish a new sense of political will in order to carry out regional connectivity initiatives, reinforced by China's surplus capital. India is facing challenges in sustaining its prominence in the South Asia. India expressed unwillingness to become a part of BRI, as The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic corridor, Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor and the Maritime Silk Road corridors run close to maritime and continental borders of India and have a direct effect on its security and strategic interests. India to maintain its influence in the region will have to provide the South Asian neighboring states with alternative routes of connectivity. Till now, India has not been too efficient in identifying, introducing and implementing a rational approach to connectivity in South Asia.

Belt and Road Initiative and Bangladesh

The second-most noteworthy receiver of China's military tools and engagement is Bangladesh. Bangladesh is part of BCIM (Bangladesh China India Myanmar) Economic Corridor initiated by China. Bilateral ties between China and Bangladesh are strong, military personnel of both states exercise and train together; military of Bangladesh has deepened collaboration within Chinese military. Beijing has assured that it will not provide foothold to China in the Bay of Bengal. While government of Bangladesh accepted financing from China for constructing industrial parks, roads and a port project at Payra, it has also refused several offers by China to develop ports with greater strategic potential, out of concern that accepting these offers would upset India. Bangladesh has been a conservative borrower; Bangladesh's loans have remained within its capacity to pay back. Moreover, Dhaka is not overly dependent on the PRC for support as it has managed to attract investment from India, Japan and others.

Belt and Road Initiative and Nepal

BRI can be a base for economic prosperity and development of Nepal and a gateway for Beijing to observe South Asian region specially India. Growth of industrial initiatives in Nepal will foster national economy, Nepal-China ties have been reshaping by religious and cultural standpoints too. Belt and Road Initiative can provide Nepal with an opportunity to convert from a landlocked state to a land-linked state. Nepal is sandwiched between two rival states and can play a role of a bridge between two powerful states and to have connectivity to the world. BRI can help to improve social conditions of the state. Under BRI, Nepal can progress from a least developed state to a middle-income state prior to 2030. Enhanced connectivity under BRI will promote Nepal's tourism and will help to set up manufacturing base for imports and exports to both Indian and Chinese markets. Economic collaboration under this initiative would minimize the singular dependence of Nepal on India.

Belt and Road Initiative and Sri-Lanka

China is the largest creditor of Sri-Lanka. Sri-Lanka through BRI can develop infrastructure, gain skills and resources required to put it ahead in connectivity, promote trade. There are risks attached to BRI including sovereignty and geopolitical issues, concerns about Chinese debt trap and negative impacts of infrastructure development on environment. In 2017, Sri-Lanka was unable to refund about \$1.12 billion loan to China and had to lease the port for 99 years to China Merchant Port Holding Limited (CM port). Because of this Chinese led project, Sri-Lanka is quoted as an instance of getting trapped in China's debt. Colombo is used as occasional port of call by People's Liberation Army Navy. Militaries of both states have carried out joint exercises. China has donated frigate to navy of Sri-Lanka and is building facilities at military academy of Sri-Lanka.

Belt and Road Initiative and Bhutan

Bhutan has been very cautious about bilateral relations with China. Geopolitical rivalries and conflicting territorial claims have kept Bhutan out of BRI. Under pressure from India, Bhutan does not have official diplomatic or economic relations with the PRC and has yet to get involved with BRI. The PRC is persistently persuading Bhutan, and businessmen and youth in Bhutan are increasingly supportive of establishing official ties with Beijing and joining BRI. Connectivity with global markets that BRI promises makes it an attractive initiative for remote and landlocked Bhutan.

Belt and Road Initiative and Maldives

China's engagement with these small island states has been limited due to India's dominant role in this region. The economy of Maldives is majorly dependent on imports and tourism. China under BRI offered investments concerning infrastructural projects on large scale including ports and bridges, shipping and also in tourism sector. To protect the economy of the country which was a victim of reckless development projects exercised by China, president of Maldives asked for India's assistance majorly regarding the increase in projects of infrastructure, housing, outlying islands system, sewerage and water. However, Maldives government happened to be fluctuating between inclination towards China and cutting ties with China.

Belt and Road Initiative and Afghanistan

Afghanistan can be crucial to China's interests of getting connected to the markets across Central Asia, Europe and beyond. Afghanistan views BRI as an opportunity to convert its aid-dependent economy to a self-sufficient and stable one. Afghanistan is one of the main junctions of Ancient Silk Road. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said "The United States' (US) hasty withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan is a serious blow to the peace process in Afghanistan, as well as negatively affected the regional stability." Some western mainstream media outlets had claimed that the PRC scored a strategic victory after US President Joe Biden's announcement to withdraw from Afghanistan. US withdrawal of troops and reduced terror, will bode well for China's ability to start building out BRI. Afghanistan share border with the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region of China. Afghanistan has intense security conditions and have been subject to terrorism for decades. Beijing is concerned about the spillover effects of terrorism in its Xinjiang Uyghur Region. China fears that Afghanistan will provide safe haven for fundamental Uyghur Islamists. China while planning out BRI projects in Afghanistan will have to face cross border crimes and drug-trafficking, political instability and poor governance in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

BRI is a program to leverage trillions of dollars of government loans and state enterprise investments in infrastructure projects to link China with trading centers in south and central Asia, the Middle East, Africa and even into Europe. For this, the Asian giant is looking to build links with neighboring South Asian states through long-term investment. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is designed by China to decrease its reliance on the Malacca Strait. With a booming economy, the China seeks to gain equivalence on the international throne with the United States of America, if not to dethrone the current hegemon altogether. While BRI is welcomed by most — including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives Nepal

and Afghanistan, India and Bhutan are still on the fence about the objectives and the means to be deployed for attaining them. India views China as a direct competitor, and has thus consternations related to the latter's ambitions. Despite the many advantages of BRI for local stakeholders, there exist serious grave security concerns which can prove to be a hurdle if not dealt with tactfully. China has or is building deep-water ports in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The importance of CPEC cannot be underlined enough. Gwadar port is being developed via Chinese investment, and with the inflow of foreign goods and out flux of local products, the region has the potential emerge as a trade center. In need of an economic revival, Pakistan (including the province of Balochistan) will move towards a stronger economy. Road building projects will eventually connect the area of Balochistan with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Trade from different industrialized regions of Pakistan will flow from the port, thus increasing revenues. The grand scheme will lay down gas pipelines, connecting the Central Asian countries (e.g. Turkmenistan) to Gwadar Port, thereby delivering and pumping natural gas to all deprived parts of the country. China using BRI for "debt trap diplomacy" loads struggling economies with debt they cannot repay, later forces its role as creditor to force them into ceding control over strategically important ports, resources and commercial routes. Since the Chinese companies involved in the largest BRI deals are almost always state-backed enterprises, there is concern that facilities that begin as commercial footholds could morph into military ones. Chinese naval deployments in the Indian Ocean have grown over the last several years and it appears to be building up capacity to conduct submarine operations in the region. There are apprehensions that Pakistan may eventually succumb to a similar debt trap at the hands of its neighbor. Relationship between Islamabad and Beijing is based on a mutual understanding of cooperation, supported by decades of dauntless friendship. The friendship is steeped in the ethos of international liberalism, dictating that cooperation, rather than confrontation, is the way forward. China has little to gain from subjugating its great friend, as Pakistan's support on the global front is a prized asset for the world's second largest economy in its journey to becoming a recognized superpower. Taking the Sri Lankan example into consideration, other regional actors have had their guards up. Bangladesh, in particular, has been able to glean favourable terms of agreement with China being a conservative borrower. BRI can decrease Nepal's over dependence of India and will help to transform into a land linked state from a landlocked state. China is the largest creditor of Sri-Lanka. Sri-Lanka is quoted as an instance of getting trapped in China's debt, for leasing it's port to China. Geopolitical rivalries and conflicting territorial claims have kept Bhutan out of BRI. Government of Maldives has been fluctuating between cutting of ties with Beijing and enhancing relations with China. Afghanistan views BRI as an opportunity to covert its aid-dependent economy to a self-sufficient and stable one. Even if the smaller neighbors South Asian states do not accrue instant profits, the long-term goals of the project are holistic for both parties involved, hence resulting

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in a positive sum game. Some of the many positive outcomes underdeveloped South Asian states hope to achieve through the scheme are: alleviation of poverty, increased literacy, creation of jobs, improved quality of life, decrease in crime rate, dispersion of growing population, development of the industrial sector, improved quality of exports, growth of small businesses and curb on extremism.

Recommendations

- Given the wide-ranging and upbeat consequences, the local polity would be best-advised to carry the glorious plan to completion, while taking on board the native stakeholders and keeping checks and balances in place to subvert undue Chinese influence, in order to guarantee a better future for the country.
- The primary factor which can lead Pakistan and other South Asian states down the slippery slope of a debt trap is political stability.
- Vigorous, vibrant and incisive democratic machinery is better placed to tackle the challenges presented by a project of CPEC's scale rather than a frail, insipid and witless one.
- If the BRI is to succeed, the three nuclear armed nations of Asia — China, India and Pakistan must uniformly adhere to peaceful solutions in countering regional disputes.
- Pakistan must improve its shipping line as presently ships owned by Pakistan carry only 16% of the trade value. In case of war or any naval blocked or tension, the foreign ships may refuse to carry due trade volume or may raise the freight rates.
- Pakistan must establish and make use of rail links for trade with China and South Asian states to strengthen its economy.
- Pakistan must try to gain maximum advantage from CPEC and strengthen its navy not only to secure its sea lines of communications (SLOCs) but also to dominate Indian Ocean against Indian naval threats. Timely development of SEZs for much needed industrialization closer to ports for speedy and cheap production and transportation.
- Organizations, such as SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), must be restored and restructured to allow meaningful dialogue and mediation to succeed.
- Developing South Asian states must take effective measures to improve local conditions and law and order situation that in return will help in generating tax revenues and creating jobs.
- It is in the best interest of both India and China to seek a multipolar world order by aligning their individual interests. Both states can accomplish their goals in pluralistic South Asia. A shared vision of a mutually cooperative and beneficial environment for peace and stability of the South Asian region and beyond is certainly possible.

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- Wise policies need to be embraced in order to nullify the danger posed by multiple separatist and extremist quarters residing in various countries. This should signal an end to proxy wars which hinders growth and prosperity.
- China's road to glory ought not to be paved with the unjust treatment of others; instead it should be lit by the binding forces of mutual cooperation and benefit for all.
- The arch-rivals India and Pakistan must take heed from European and Asian history by abandoning mutual hostility and historical resentment for the greater good of the continent. Even though differences persist among certain members of the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations), they have not affected trade ties, as a result of which the economies of member states are flourishing.

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