

Eurasia: Opportunities and Challenges for India

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Abstract

The term 'Eurasia' refers to non-Western Eurasia, that is, excluding the EU. Indian policymakers and scholars believe that the Eurasian region's strategic location, culture and civilization offer great opportunities for the development of energy resources, trade, and other fields. However, the enormous Eurasian landmass, covering China in the east to Europe in the west, and the Arctic in the north to India in the south, embraces various powerful countries that are facing serious security and strategic challenges. For the most political scientists, the term Eurasia is commonly invoked after collapse of the Soviet Union and is used to discuss the economic and political integration of Russia and Europe. Russians on the other hand, initially conceived of Eurasia as coinciding with boundaries of imperial Russian on the eve of World War I, including portions of eastern Europe. Modern day Russians view Eurasia as comprising central and western Russia, -Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and part of the Caucasus.

Introduction

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU or EEU) is an economic union of several post-Soviet states located in Eurasia. The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union was signed on 29 May 2014 by the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, and came into force on 1 January 2015. Apart from being a counterbalance to the EU, the EAEU is also seen as a Russian initiative to balance the growing influence of China in the Central Asian region. Thus, the initiative provides Russia with a platform to showcase itself as a great Eurasian power. With the EAEU, Russia has sought to restore Russia's influence in what the country considers as its traditional sphere of influence, which had been impacted post the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For the remaining member countries, a union with Russia provides greater political support, cheaper energy,

as well as security guarantees, given that these countries also form part of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia's interests in Eurasia are not new. According to the renowned Diplomat and scholar of International Politics Henry Kissinger "Since then, Russia has played a unique role in international affairs: part of the balance of power in both Europe and Asia but contributing to the equilibrium of the international order only fitfully. It has started more wars than any other contemporary major power."

If we were to take the population residing in this area into account, this region is home to about 5 billion people, i.e., more than 72.5% of the world's population, which makes it the most populous region. And when we consider the size of the area, Eurasia consists of 36.2% of the Earth's total land area. Historically, it is well known that the two most significant modern civilizations, i.e., the Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley civilizations, also can be found in the Eurasia region. Besides, the Eurasian countries were also famously linked by way of increased trade and cultural exchanges through the *Silk Road*, which had ensured significant economic and political gains compared with other countries of that period. Now China wants to revive new 'Silk Road' with the sole objective of its unparalleled dominance in the region. The strategic importance of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) intended to build a link to Eurasia pushes India to get more involved in the Eurasian region. "The Central Asian region was traditionally perceived as "India's extended neighborhood," an area extending beyond South Asia, which, due to geopolitical and geoeconomic importance, has historically been the object of a tussle for great powers."

It is undeniably true that there exists long existing strong civilizational and historical links between India and the central Asian countries, in our extended neighborhood, which over the years had rightly led to a close relationship in the past. Though the region in the post-Soviet period has unfortunately been witness to numerous conflicts within the region, the geo-political importance of this region yet is of great significance and as such it has now attracted the attention of the big powers to secure their presence in this Eurasian heartland, for its growing strategic importance in today's real politic. As far as India is concerned, the Eurasian region certainly promises scope for more closer ties, but one is pained to see the level of intense engagement having slowed down. This paper attempts to analyze the Indian policies of engagement in the region. It also argues strongly at why appropriate policies need to be put in place to secure India's both strategic and politico-economic interests vis-à-vis the other regional and big powers.

Historical Connections and Geopolitics

There exists long and strong civilizational and historical links between India and the central Asian countries, in our extended neighborhood, which over the years had rightly led to a close relationship in the past. Though the region in the post-Soviet period has unfortunately been witness to numerous conflicts within the region, the geo-political importance of this region is of great significance. Therefore, it is not surprising that it has become the epicenter of big powers politics, which testimony for its growing strategic importance. As far as India is concerned, the Eurasian region certainly promises scope for more closer ties. It goes without saying that the kind of attention and investment required for an impressive presence by India, is missing. India started to build ties with the countries of the region in early 1993 when then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and later Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

In April 1995, India, Iran, and Turkmenistan signed a memorandum of understanding to build transport corridors for facilitating trade between each other. Most significantly, in 2000, India, Iran, and Russia signed the International North-South Trade Corridor (INSTC) agreement, which was ratified and came into effect in 2002. In 2012, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan agreed to extend their support to the INSTC. “The Indian policymakers then pushed to expand and implement India’s Connect Central Asia policy in 2012, which was reinforced by incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to all these states between the 6th and 13th of July, 2015. Importantly, over the years, India not only maintained a privileged position in partnership with Russia in Eurasia but also signed strategic partnership agreements with Kazakhstan (2009), Uzbekistan (2011), Afghanistan (2011), and Tajikistan (2012). India’s participation in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2017 (the start of its official membership) is yet another dimension of its growing involvement in Eurasian politics.

However, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the struggle for the balance of power in the region apparently arouse concern among Indian policymakers. India traditionally sees Eurasia as an area of strategic and economic engagement where it can emerge as an attractive market for some of its prominent partners, focusing on Central Asia, the INSTC, and the Russian Far East. Connectivity is a popular trend in international relations. The term ‘connectivity’ refers to “the physical, institutional and people-to-people linkages that comprise the

foundational support and facilitative means to achieve political-security and the economic and socio-cultural pillars towards realizing the vision of an integrated community. Asian leaders have constantly sought to boost new ways of regional connectivity. India has always been keen on maintaining connectivity underlined in the international Raisina Dialogue of 2016, in which the theme “Asia: Regional and Global Connectivity” focused specifically on Asia’s physical, economic, human, and digital connectivity. In 2017, Prime Minister Modi stressed the necessity to rebuild connectivity, saying: “Only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved, can regional connectivity corridors fulfil their promise and avoid differences and discord” (ORF Raisina Dialogue, 2017)

To understand India’s present-day interaction with Eurasia, it is worth looking at India’s connection with the Old Silk Road of the Mauryan times of about 2,400 years ago. Ancient Indian scholar Kautilya in Artha-Shastra coined the Sanskrit term ‘cinapatta’ to describe silk merchants’ travels from China (Sichuan) to India and the spread of Buddhism from India to China. These routes expanded trade and interactions, with the northern route going through Chang’an (Xian) across the Gobi and around the Taklamakan Desert to Kashgar, Samarkand, Bokhara, Afghanistan, and Persia (Iran), and around the Caspian Sea to Europe. The southern route covered Sichuan, Yunnan, and northern Burma to reach India. The Silk Road was not a real road, as many would think, but a network of trade connections used by merchants to carry goods from the Eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia and from Central Asia to China. The Silk Road also used maritime routes as many goods reached Rome via the Mediterranean, and goods from Central Asia were brought to the Pacific.

Since 1990 the revival of the Silk Road has been discussed at all levels—by states and organizations, scholars of culture and business groups. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has got engaged in the initiative to revive the Silk Road by repairing the road connection to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China with Central Asia and Iran. The Europe-Caucasus-Asia corridor (TRACECA) is still referred to as the ancient great Silk Road. The Asian Highway (AH) network, 141,000 kilometers long, crossing thirty-two Asian countries and linking them to Europe, is another mega project that since 1959 has been encouraging the revival of historical connections. The initial AH routes AH1 and AH2 aimed to link Bangkok with Tehran through Yangon, Dhaka, New Delhi, Rawalpindi, and Kabul, further connecting to Turkey and E-roads system in Europe. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC),

connecting India with Iran and linking other countries, places more emphasis on the idea of reviving the Silk Road.

Later, the idea of the Silk Road connecting Eurasia transformed into China's grand strategy that since 2013 has been referred to as One Belt, One Road (OBOR). This 21st-century Silk Route economic belt is to connect China to Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean, while the Maritime Silk Route is designed to connect Asia with Europe and Africa. As China promoted OBOR together with aid, loans, and infrastructure development, it caused concern among neighboring states, such as India, and the Western World. For these countries believe that the true goal of China goes far beyond economic gains proposed to be accruing from OBOR (BRI). If successful, it will serve as a global trade hub and as a tool for projecting China's military capabilities and its influence on the political decisions of the countries involved. China is using the BRI to exert undue influence over the world, especially because the initiative mostly funds infrastructure rather than the social sector projects, such as health or education initiatives, that are often favored by large multilateral donors and Western nations. Critics worry that China will be able to seize control of these assets for military use or use them as leverage in future negotiations. Chinese OBOR is rightly termed as another name for *debt trap diplomacy*. The term originated in 2017 to describe a deal that saw Beijing receive a 99-year lease for the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka after the country fell behind on debt payments and has since been more widely applied to any Chinese project that conflicts with Western interests, especially those under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Many commentators viewed BRI as a response to Obama's "Pivot to Asia" aimed at countering U.S. foreign policy initiatives by rebalancing its strategy. The New Silk Road Initiative (*NSRI*), announced in 2011 in Chennai by then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as promoting regional integration between Europe and East Asia, was perceived by China as a sign of encroachment on Afghanistan and Central Asian states. At the initial stage, BRI's key strategy was improving China's energy and food security. BRI was also meant to resolve the so-called Malacca Dilemma. Considering China's limited control over available sea routes that account for 80% of its energy imports and the growing geopolitical tension with India, China seeks to diversify its supply routes by investing in the pipelines in Central Asia to connect China with the Indian Ocean via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (*CPEC*). This is viewed as a solution to China's blockade by the U.S.

Opportunities and Challenges for India

BRI challenges India's strategic "Extended Neighborhood" initiative ("Connecting Central Asia Policy" developed in 2012), forcing India to look for alternatives. At first, India's attitude towards China's seeking a connection to its neighbor was rather lukewarm, New Delhi got really outraged when the CPEC was included in BRI: India saw it as a violation of its sovereignty. In the BRI projects, part of the CPEC runs through Gilgit Baltistan (Pakistan-occupied part of Kashmir), which is entirely claimed by India. Another part runs through Kashmir, which India says Pakistan illegally ceded to China in the 1960s. When New Delhi was invited to participate in BRI, the official response from the Ministry of External Affairs read: "We are of the firm belief that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency, and equality. Its projects must be pursued in a manner that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity".

India has got many concerns regarding BRI. The foremost among them is that it is increasing footprints of China in South Asia, leading to more of China's influence in the region; the Chinese interference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, its expansions and land grabs from South-China Sea to Indian Ocean; and the BRI's links to the West-Asia to create a new power block. India fears the opening of a third front from the Arabian Seaside, besides North and South-East. The Chinese challenge propelled India from the deep slumber. "The Central Asian countries see India as the fastest growing economy, an influential actor in international politics, and an investor in the region. On January 13, 2019, foreign ministers met at the India-Central Asia Dialogue in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) to strengthen cooperation between India and the Central Asian countries. The Central Asian countries welcomed India's provision of \$1 Billion line of credit for development projects such as connectivity, energy, IT, healthcare, education, agriculture, etc.

India's enmity with Pakistan limits the transit of its goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Under the current conditions, to provide access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, India is intensively developing the *International North-South Transport Corridor* (INSTC), the key link of which is Iran. In the INSTC agreement, Mumbai is chosen as the main port in India and Chabahar in Iran. In the long run, the INSTC aims to connect India with Iran, Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Northern Europe. The INSTC was launched in 2000 as an agreement signed in St. Petersburg by Russia, India, and Iran, and later joined by

other eleven Central Asian and Eurasian countries. It fore sees a 7,200 km indicating greater regional connectivity. Apart from reducing the time and costs, the INSTC helps both India and Russia boost their bilateral trade, which is to reach \$30 billion over the next ten years from \$7 billion in 2016 (Singh and Sharma, 2017). In total, 69% of the railway infrastructure has been completed, with two of the three sections of the Chabahar-Zahedan line launched recently. The 628 km rail project is expected to be completed in 2024. This connects the Chabahar port through the existing Iranian railway to Turkmenistan in the north, and to Afghanistan—from Zabol through the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, and from Khaf (South Khorasan Province) to Heart.

Although due to its follies in attacking Ukraine, Russia is not only heavily imbedded to China but also playing a second fiddle to it. Just like India, Russia, too, does not want any hegemony in this landmass of Eurasia on the part of China. Russia has always considered Eurasia as its backyard “when asked to define Russia’s foreign policy, the mid-seventeenth-century Czar Alexei’s minister Nashchokin offered a straightforward description: “expanding the state in every direction and is the business of the Department of Foreign Affairs. His political philosophy, like that of all Russians, seemed fixed on the single idea that Russia must roll-must, by her irresistible inertia, crush whatever stood in her way. When Russia rolled over a neighboring people, she absorbed their energies in her own movement of custom and race which neither Czar nor peasant could convert, or wished to convert, into any Western equivalent.

Russia and India have decided to enter into an agreement to reduce the huge distance hampering their trade. The distance covered by the current route running through the Suez Canal to St. Petersburg is 10,000 nautical miles and India is looking for a separate maritime route that would connect it to the Russian Far East. India was the first country to establish a consulate in Vladivostok in 1992. In 2019, India was invited as the chief guest to the 5th summit of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) held on September 4-6, 2020, in Vladivostok, where Modi pledged a \$1 Billion line of credit for the development of the region. India’s INSTC can connect the Russian Far East to the Indian Ocean. This corridor runs through Aktau in the Kazakh area of the Caspian-Sea and could be connected to the Trans-Siberian railway in the Omsk Region via a road and the railroad network. The opening of a sea route is likely to help the project. Compared to the existing route from Mumbai to St. Petersburg, which is 8,675 nautical miles long, the proposed route from Chennai to Vladivostok will be only 5,647 nautical miles

long, much shorter and faster. The route will run through Vladivostok to Chennai via the Sea of Japan (passing the Korean Peninsula), pass Taiwan and the Philippines (in the South China Sea), through the Strait of Malacca to the Bay of Bengal, and pass Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Chennai. This route is about 10,300 km (about 6400.12 mi) long, and large ships will cover the distance in ten to twelve days, traveling at the normal cruising speed of 20-25 knots or 37-46 km (about 28.58 mi)/hour (The Times of India, 2019). This maritime corridor will not only allow India and Russia to establish economic links but will also possibly connect Southeast Asia. Today the Russian Far East is heavily dependent on East Asia, particularly China. Russia is aware of its neighbor's presence and wants India to play a bigger role in counterbalancing China in the Far East.

India's (Re)Connection to Eurasia

Mackinder's Heartland is an area that was once ruled by the Russian Empire and was part of the Soviet Union. He argued that Central Asia had long been the geographical pivot of history and would 196 RUSSIA IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS Mapping India's (Re) Connection to Eurasia remain pivotal to world politics. One of Mackinder's key ideas is the importance of control over Eurasia. Mackinder emphasized that the geographical pivot of history would remain important even if Russia were to be subordinated to another power, such as China. Many political analysts tend to limit Mackinder's theory to geopolitical domination without giving due attention to its socioeconomic dimension. As the analysis shows, India's political interest in Eurasia and efforts to counterbalance China in the region do not match reality. There must be economic gains to sustain political reality. India's approach towards Eurasia is based not on economic benefits but on a certain level of political hype. So, the debate around the feasibility of the Indian connectivity initiatives boils down to the premise that "everything depends on the markets." This implies a set of questions to answer: What is India importing and what is India exporting? What will determine the connectivity in a free-market globalized world? Should we build a road where there is no business, and build a railway where there are no people to use it? (Guruswamy, 2020)

In terms of market principles, trade will be where there is supply and demand. India cannot compete with China even in the inner part of Central Asia, India's manufacturing industry is weak and there are no profit margins. To find a market for international trade, economic freedom is needed (incidentally, the Old Silk Road was little controlled

by the state (formally empire)). The Heritage Foundation relates economic freedom to four main factors that can be under government control (to a greater or lesser degree) and can influence the economic environment: 1) rule of law; 2) government size; 3) regulatory effectiveness; 4) the degree of market openness (Gulaliyev et al., 2017). It was only in the recent years that India gained access to Central Asia, but still falls behind China in this respect. Thus, India's market must be, first of all, competitive and collaborative with China. India is not able to compete with China in Central Asia for the mere reason that China directly adjoins Central Asia. China is interested in a railroad network to export goods to Tajikistan. It will also connect it to Russia, which is the major trade partner of China.

Where does India fit in the current marketplace? In the old days, India had a political reason: the Soviet Union was there, and India had established trade with the USSR which imported lots of goods like coffee, tea, spices, textiles and tobacco from India. Unfortunately, that cash-lucrative market is gone. Unlike India, China's position is very different: it has got reserves of \$3 trillion, and it has to invest this money somewhere in order not to have it devalued. China has devised a new method: it gives the BRI money in loans to the “-stan” countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, so that they could buy Chinese goods with those loans— cement, steel, equipment. And then these countries have to repay the Chinese loans. Of course, China does not give anything for free; it gives everything at a high rate of interest. It has been lending money to Pakistan at 5%, which is higher than the World Bank's and IMF's rates.

India's enthusiasm for the Indo-Pacific stands in contrast to Delhi's drift towards a Eurasian coalition in the aftermath of the Cold War. Afraid of the unipolar moment, Delhi warmed up to the Russian proposal for a strategic triangle with China and India. In the late 1990s, Russia, India and China came together to form a tri-lateral group at the initiative of the then-Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who called it, “a counterbalance to the Western alliance”. In 2001, Jim O'Neill, a British economist at Goldman Sachs, came up with the acronym “BRIC” – Brazil, Russia, India and China. The first BRIC summit was held in 2009 and with South Africa joining in 2010, the acronym changed to BRICS. India now finds itself in a very different place. Its relations with the US have significantly improved; its ties with China are heading South and its traditional partnership with Russia is in a stasis. Today India's strategic troubles stem less from American power and a lot more from the growing imbalance with Beijing, China's political assertiveness

on bilateral disputes and its growing penetration into the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean, where Delhi claims primacy.

Hidden beneath the seemingly benign economic merits of BRICS expansion lies a larger geopolitical game being played by Russia and China. By expanding BRICS, they hope to project an effective counterweight to the US. China has made no bones about the need for a new world order and is working to position itself as its leader. Under the garb of multipolarity, Beijing and Moscow are attempting to undermine the liberal international order. Russian interest in expanding BRICS stems from reducing its isolation due to sanctions, diluting opposition to its illegal occupation of Ukrainian territory and co-opting the Global South to help keep its beleaguered economy afloat. The inclusion of Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude oil exporter in a group with the world's largest crude oil importer (China), has deep ramifications on the geopolitics of the global oil market. The inclusion of Iran will add to the anti-US axis in BRICS. Chinese mediation helped Saudi Arabia and Iran end their mutual hostility paving the way for both to join BRICS. They will be beholden to China. In return, China will extract its pound of flesh — at the cost of the US and India. Four of the six new members are in West Asia where China has expanded its economic, military, and political ties.

In realpolitik, the new members of BRICS will be courteous towards India, but most will align with China's worldview. To make matters worse, India's current trade deficit within BRICS will increase from \$125 billion to \$180 billion in the expanded BRICS. Make no mistake, Xi Jinping's long-term goal is to change the world order into a Sino-centric one. In the geopolitical chess board, China has made its move by successfully expanding BRICS. India must strategize well and ensure BRICS does not degenerate into an anti-West bloc. To begin with, it must ensure minimal consensus on marginal issues. But for now, it is advantage China.

That in turn rests on Delhi's better appreciation of the two geopolitical concepts – Indo-Pacific and Eurasia. Although Russia might be the geographic heart of Eurasia, it is China that appears poised to define the new geopolitics of this vast landmass. Its rapid economic growth and the massive accumulation of exportable capital have translated into an ambitious program to develop trans-regional infrastructure across Eurasia. Beyond connectivity, China has become a major economic partner for most European countries. With growing economic interdependence has come unprecedented political influence in key capitals of Western Europe. Even as it sets its own terms for engagement

with the European Union China is widely seen as undermining the EU by setting up a separate group (C-CEEC) to promote China's Cooperation with sixteen Central and East European Countries.

Equally significant has been China's effort to cultivate the Central and East European countries. Beijing has launched a forum called C-CEEC that promotes cooperation between China and sixteen Central and East European Countries. It is more popularly known as 'sixteen plus one'. That India has hardly shown any interest in this new forum underlines the problem it has in dealing with a changing Eurasia.

To be sure, China is not about to supplant America's large military footprint, Russia's political weight or European Union's economic heft in Central Europe. But in exporting large amounts of capital for infrastructure development, drawing its economies eastward, and creating new political groupings, China has begun to undermine the western hubris and Russian self-regard in Central Europe. It also widens the strategic options for Central European states. Fed up with bullying from both Brussels and Moscow, the Central Europeans are quite happy to play ball with China. With a solid strategic partnership with Russia, growing political and economic influence in Central Asia as well as in Eastern and Western halves of Europe, China has emerged at a pivotal position in Eurasia. While there are many elements to an Indian strategy towards Eurasia, three of them stand out. One is to put Europe back into India's continental calculus. Before independence, many Indian nationalists turned to Europe to secure the nation's liberation from British colonialism. After independence, Delhi's drift towards an alliance with Moscow saw India neglect Europe's strategic significance. As India now steps up its engagement with Europe, the time has come for it to begin a strategic conversation with Brussels. This will be a natural complement to the fledgling engagement between India and Europe on the Indo-Pacific.

There is substantive Indian collaboration with both Persia and Arabia. If Persia's location makes it critical for the future of Afghanistan and Central Asia, the religious influence of Arabia and the weight of the Gulf capital are quite consequential in the region. India's partnerships with Persia and Arabia are also critical in overcoming Turkey's alliance with Pakistan that is hostile to Delhi. According to C Raja Mohan, "India will surely encounter many contradictions in each of the three areas between and among America, Europe, Russia, China, Iran, and the Arab Gulf. As in the Indo-Pacific, so in Eurasia, Delhi should not let these contradictions hold India back."

Eurasia: Opportunities and Challenges for India

The current flux in Eurasian geopolitics due to the unilateral Russian aggression of Ukraine, will lessen some of the current contradictions and generate some new antinomies in the days ahead. But the key for India lies in greater strategic activism that opens opportunities in all directions in Eurasia. All in all, the war in Ukraine and the growing rivalry between China and the United States has produced a fluid situation for countries outside the United States and Europe. For some larger and more powerful middle powers, there are new opportunities in this uncertain world. India, for example, can work with neighbors to build the peaceful and more prosperous periphery that its own development demands. It can participate in the remaking of the rules of the international system now underway, particularly in new domains such as cyberspace. And it can reengage economically with the dynamic economies of Asia, participating in global value chains, to further its own transformation. But many smaller states are more vulnerable than ever. And overall systemic risk is higher than it has been for many decades. That heightened risk is less about the prospect of a direct great-power conflict: as the first year of the war in Ukraine and the aftermath of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August have shown, the United States and other great powers are capable of avoiding direct conflict among themselves. But their ability to contain local conflicts, or even to get their way in their own neighborhoods, has been constrained by their rivalry and by the demands of a globalized economy. It is also limited in Asia in particular by the fact that power in the region is much more evenly distributed than it was during the Cold War or the subsequent unipolar moment of U.S. dominance.

According to Shiv Shankar Menon "with India chairing the G-20 in 2023, New Delhi may be tempted to try to mediate between Ukraine and Russia, though that seems unlikely to produce results for now. A more fruitful way ahead would be for India to bring the concerns of the global South to the forefront of the international agenda. For the time being, however, it seems likely that the international system will continue to drift. Amid a prolonged war and continued great-power rivalry, the coming year is unlikely to see more than incremental progress in addressing the urgent issues that preoccupy much of the developing world."

Conclusion

India is historically embedded in Eurasia: in ancient times it was broadly engaged in Eurasian connections through the Silk Road and to Eurasia

today through the Indian government's efforts to maintain cooperation with Central Asian countries in economic, trade, and science and technology fields. Historical ties must not be neglected, and finding any linkages will be helpful for the future development of India and entire Eurasia likewise. India's geographical position and its pivot to Eurasia remain highly appealing. To improve economic cooperation with Eurasian countries, India should continue its search for new innovative ways and work for multidimensional relationships. Reviving the Silk Road connectivity and focusing on the development of the transport corridor can secure the country's economic and trade development. Economic connections are the root of political connections and of a geo-strategy where economic gains are not the key goal. Transport corridors may provide a platform for improving cooperation and communication as indispensable conditions for multilateral relations. This will facilitate regional cooperation and help shape a new geopolitical and security environment.

India has realized the importance of connectivity and the limitations of its oppositions to BRI of China. The negotiations emerging the sidelines of recently concluded G20, points in the direction. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was announced on the sidelines of the recently concluded G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi. The project, if completed, could act as a foil to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure project that has fuelled concerns over Beijing's extensive footprint across at least three continents. The IMEC is a transnational rail and shipping route spread across two continents, which the United States expects to energize economic development through improved connectivity and economic integration between Asia, the Arabian Gulf and Europe. It will include two separate corridors — the eastern corridor connecting India to the Arabian Gulf and the northern corridor connecting the Gulf to Europe. "This will give the whole world connectivity and development a sustainable direction," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said when announcing the project. "It will drive sustainable development for the entire world." European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said during her annual State of the European Union speech on Wednesday that the corridor will "be the most direct connection to date between India, the Arabian Gulf and Europe: With a rail link, that will make trade between India and Europe 40% faster." "People talk about the silk route, the spice route of India through the Arabian Peninsula, but this is going to be more significant and relevant because it's going to be about new energy, data, connectivity, human resources, aviation routes and it's about aligning countries that are of the same

mind and same vision,” said Al-Falih. The corridor will include a rail link, as well as an electricity cable, a hydrogen pipeline and a high-speed data cable, according to a document prepared by the European Commission. The declaration document also called the project “a green and digital bridge across continents and civilizations.”

In terms of objectives, both the mega transnational projects are similar, although China’s BRI is larger in terms of scale. At the G7 leaders meeting in May in Japan, the world’s seven richest countries pledged to collectively mobilize \$600 billion (•558 billion) by 2027 to counter the BRI. The total proposed budget remains unannounced, which will be decided in about two months.

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