

China and Eurasia in the New World Order

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Abstract

The paper aims to discuss the Chinese- Eurasian relations in the emerging world order. The rise of China in the post cold war world order is causing serious concern to the international community. The decline of dominant powers and new rising powers are giving way to multilateralism and polycentrism which does not fit in the Chinese grand design of world wide domination. The Chinese Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and its policies to engage small nations in the debt trap, acquisition of various territories in Asian and African continents, developing strategic installations in these newly acquired ports and territories clearly reflect Chinese traditional strategic thinking of winning war without fighting it. Europe is perceived to be the final stage of China's hegemonic designs and focus is on Eurasia. The Chinese geo economic outreach with a focus on FDI in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia is leading to conflictual relations between US, Russia, China and European Union. The Chinese expansion in Central Asia is perceived as a route to Europe.

Introduction

The Paper, aims to discuss the Chinese geo- political interests in Eurasia. Some of the pertinent issues to be analyzed in this context are: The dilemma European countries are facing to maintain balance between economic and security interests.; how and why do different European countries respond differently? How Chinese strategy of bilateral relations with Eurasian nations is implicating the functioning of the EU on the one hand and US - Eurasian relations on the other ? How China projects BRI as global development plan but several countries like US, Europe, India and Japan perceive it differently and take several initiatives to counter Chinese hegemonic designs.It is interesting to note that some of the Eurasian countries continue to show their interest in BRI against the US wishes but continue to show allegiance to NATO. The European nations are facing serious challenges of how to control

the escalation of tensions and build constructive relations with China. In this context, it is observed that China gives more importance to some of the countries which are on its border and are strategically located and fits into its security interests as compared to those which are having only economic interests.

China's foreign policy in the last decade focussed primarily on its relations with Eurasia that consists of countries located in Europe and Asia. Most of these countries include Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Peter Braga & Kaneshko Sangar, 2020)

Chinese presence in Eurasia

Since 2013, China has been trying to increase its presence in Eurasia through the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) to interlink with Central Asia, Russia and Europe across the landmass of Eurasia. China's strategy of creating economic belt aimed to create and occupy economic corridor for trade, industry and also to create people to people contact. (Macaes, 2018) Though SREB does not clearly define the purpose or specific kind of relations China seeks to maintain through Belt Road but it encompasses all kind of relations ranging from strategic, security, economic and diplomatic relations. SREB is central to China's BRI strategy. It is usually understood that the basic purpose of BRI is to connect maritime shipping lanes (the road) with overland transit infrastructure (the belt) from Asia to Europe. China is using BRI to develop bilateral relations with Eurasian countries which is known as partnership diplomacy. Under BRI, China is developing relations with different countries bilaterally. Bilateral partnership is an indicator of a strong partnership with China. In other words, China values these countries the most as they address China's security concerns which include its defense, security of key resources like the energy, metals and agriculture and access to market resources. Therefore, BRI has become one of the key determinants of China's reactions with Eurasian nations.

Though BRI was initiated by China and the bilateral partnership was not imposed, nations joined it on their own free will as they were attracted to China's investment for development in their countries. Most of the countries joined BRI as they were enthusiastic about it in their own countries. However, recently the BRI has earned serious criticism world wide. It is due to the increasing indebtedness of those nations involved in BRI connected projects. It is noted that the main purpose of

China was not the development of these nations who joined BRI but to protect its access to overseas resources and goods upon which the Chinese economy is increasingly dependent. By controlling sea lanes, China seeks to ensure its own territorial sovereignty and integrity; Survival of communist party of China and also to ensure sustainable economic and social development. (P.D.W.D, 2011)

The Chinese government established its bilateral relations with Eurasian countries through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The countries having strategic partnerships with China are closer friends as they impact China's defense on the border as well as supplies of strategic resources and also access to economic markets. Russia for instance enjoys the status of comprehensive strategic partnership. Several countries on the border of China like Kazakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Belarus etc enjoy the status of comprehensive strategic partnership and they have economic partnership as well as the military level meetings also for strategic purposes.

China is having a strategic cooperative partnership with Afghanistan as it is strategically located and important for security purposes but not important for economic interest. Turkmenistan also has strategic partnership whereas several other countries like Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova have non strategic partnership with China. Pakistan enjoys the status of "All Weather" Strategic cooperative partnership relations. Several South East Asian nations like Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam have special Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership with China for historical, economic and defense purposes. A country like Singapore is not a strategic partner as it does not impact China's border security nor access to strategic resources. So, it may be called a business partner but not a strategic partner therefore not as important as the strategic partners like Russia and other Central Asian countries. (Peter Braga & Kaneshko Sangar, 2020)

The BRI Project

The countries with strategic partnership with China have shared borders with China and their BRI partnerships were executed as it did not contradict the interest of the partner nations concerned. These nations perceive China as Eurasia's most attractive foreign development and investment partner. (Olcott, 2013) Chinese politicians describe BRI goal as a "community of common destiny" (Zhang, 2018) China also considers BRI significant for development projects in the province of Xinjiang. (Cooley, 2016, 4), China also developed an economic corridor in Pakistan but it has not led to strong economic partnership of these

two countries. Joint security and stability are the eminent factors of their partnership. The Chinese Government has continuously and constantly emphasized the ‘win-win’ and cooperative nature of BRI for all parties involved. The Chinese Vice president Wang Qishan in the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum considered BRI as a new platform for international cooperation. He argued that China is open to connect with all the countries for joint negotiations and joint use of benefits in order to give momentum to the collective development of the nations on the planet. (The Kremlin, 2018) China promoted BRI projects with the hope of repayment from the development itself platform of international cooperation initiated by China. By 2019, China financed BRI projects of about US \$ 350 value. to improve its physical connectivity at global scale. (Walker, 2018) China, pursued the policy of “Value for Money” for aid and loans, however, it did not work as expected. The finance and aid aimed to continue development in the short term to ensure debt sustainability in the long term. The BRI strategy unexpectedly resulted in debt trap diplomacy and several countries had to mortgage their territories, strategic assets and resources.

Several BRI partners therefore mortgaged their sovereignty for Chinese financing. Brahma Challeaney, 2017 interpreted BRI as a platform for bad investments to serve Chinese geopolitical ambitions. India’s neighboring countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan got implicated by Chinese debt trap which led to increasing instability in these countries which in turn implicated regional stability and security. Eurasia, however, continues to be enthusiastic of SREB as they need large scale investments and they consider the BRI as the only option available. (Hashimova, 2018) Therefore, they completely ignore the debt trap fears. In their understanding, the inability to pay debts might lead to renegotiations of terms than the failure of BRI projects. The best option to avoid debt trap and execute development plans, countries should have joint agreements of shared aims. But the aim of BRI initiated by China is to expand its sphere of influence and control to provide an alternative to western domination.

The Chinese BRI alarmed several nations like US, India, Germany as they feel that China’s main aim is to hegemonize the global politics and economy by expanding its influence and control in these countries. US Secretary of Defence, Mattis in a speech at Rhode Island Naval War college (2018) had interpreted BRI as a strategy of China to rewrite the existing global order to replicate their authoritarian domestic model’ on international stage while using ‘predatory economics of piling massive debt on others” (Mattis, 2018) In January 2018, French

President , Emmanuel Macron observed that BRI can't be the roads of a new hegemony that will make the countries they traverse into vassal states.”(The Economist,2018)

Resistance to hegemonic designs

It shows that China is facing resistance from several fronts. For instance Japan's efforts to create “East-West ” networks to align ASEAN more closely with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). To counter Chinese hegemonic designs through BRI, India initiated an International North-South Transportation Corridor that would connect the Indian Ocean economic zone with Europe through the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. According to Michaël Tanchum, “India's . . . Arab-Med Corridor to Europe is an emerging multi-modal, commercial corridor that could radically reconfigure trade patterns between the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East and Europe by creating an arc of commercial connectivity spanning Eurasia's southern rim from India's Arabian Sea coast to Greece's eastern Mediterranean coast. For India, this new connectivity constitutes a strategic paradigm shift of enormous geopolitical consequence that could reshape its role in the Eurasian economic order”.(Michaël Tanchum, 2021, 4)

India's new Arab-Med initiative, welcomed by several Gulf Cooperation Council and Mediterranean countries, will not only project India as a competitor to China's BRI but also make transit across Asia more competitive and thus create numerous opportunities for India and its trading partners to serve Eurasian markets more easily and quickly. In Tanchum's words, “India has a new strategic map. A new multi-modal, India-to-Europe commercial corridor is emerging from the interlinkage of the Arabian Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean that could radically reconfigure trade patterns between the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East, and Europe. One of the early fruits of the 2020 diplomatic normalization between the UAE and Israel is the rail connection being established from the UAE via Saudi Arabia and Jordan to the Port of Haifa on Israel's Mediterranean coast. Combined with the trans-Mediterranean maritime link from Haifa to the European mainland at the massive transshipment port in Piraeus, Greece, India's maritime connectivity with the UAE will soon form part of a larger arc of commercial connectivity that extends from India to Greece. Freight rail service from Piraeus through the Balkans and Central Europe means that Indian goods can reach Austria, the Czech Republic, and Germany—connecting India to major markets and manufacturing centers of Europe.

Linking India's Arabian Sea coast to Greece's Eastern Mediterranean coast along Eurasia's southern rim, India's Arab-Med Corridor to Europe carries the potential to transform the connectivity architecture of Eurasia and India's place in the global economic order. (Michaël Tanchum, 2021,7) India, as a member of the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) of democracies, can count on the support of the West as well as its Asian partners in making the Arab-Med project a reality.

Conclusion

To counter Chinese hegemonic designs, the EU too has been developing plans for Eurasian connectivity traversing the Middle East and continental Asia. The EU's interest in building Eurasian networks began at the end of the Cold War, when Russia was weak and China was not so developed. The intergovernmental Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) was launched in 1993 and Europe promised to finance the development of east-west transport corridors from Central Asia all the way to the North Sea. (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia). Europe initiated the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy in 2018. The strategy focused on land, rail, sea, air, and digital networks to provide sustainable and efficient access across Eurasian economies. The strategy aimed to provide the basis for connection between Europe and Asia. (European Commission, 2018) The purpose of the European initiative was clearly reflected in the launch of a much greater project, namely the •300 billion Global Gateway strategy (GGG) on December 1, 2021 (European Commission, press release, 2021). The GGG is planned as a public- and private-sector-funded project to invest in "global infrastructure." This "roadmap for investment in the developing world" is the EU's follow up response to China's westward Eurasian march and it purposefully centers European values as the GGG driving force. It clearly shows that the European Commission considered China as a "systemic rival" and "economic competitor" in 2019. However, due to the close economic relations between EU and China, the EU may not pose a direct strategic challenge to China's Eurasian role. (Pepijn Bergsen, 2021)

The major issue emerging in the new world order is how Europe faces a dilemma to check Chinese expansionist designs that clearly challenges international status quo and world peace while trying to pursue diplomatic efforts for economic cooperation with China.

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