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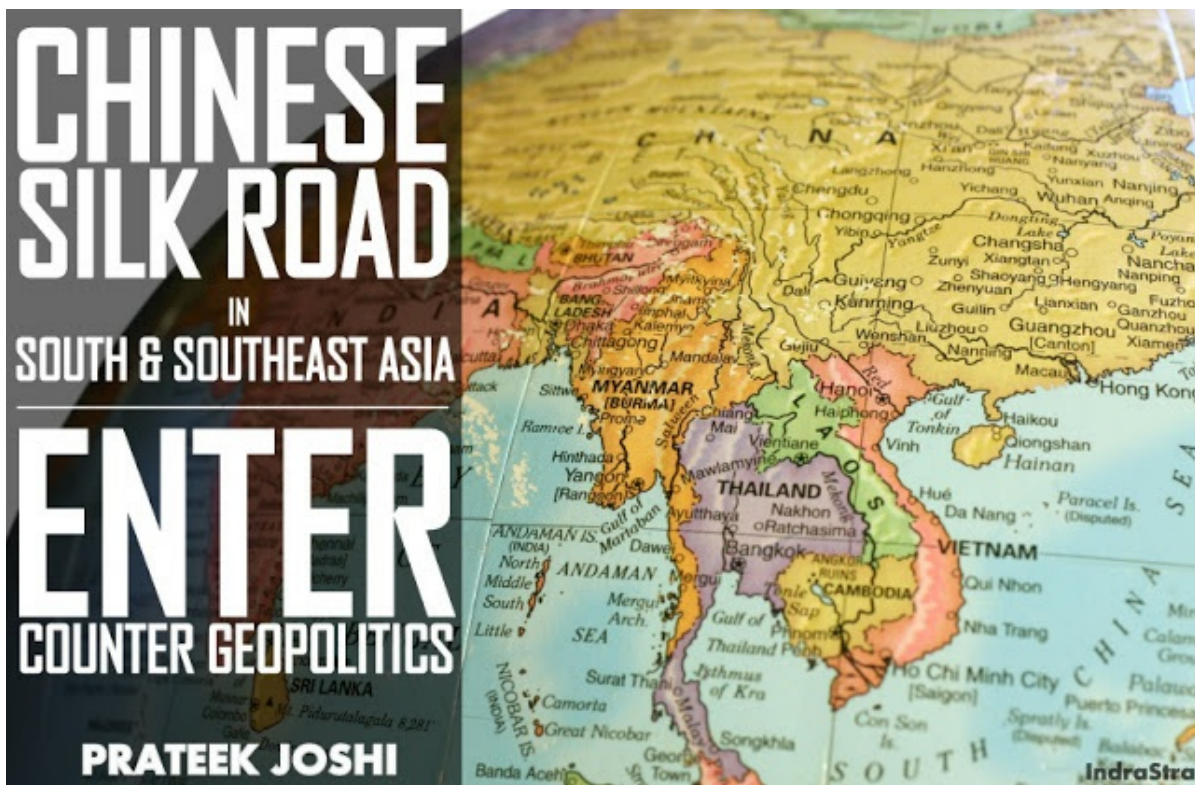
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OPINION | The Chinese Silk Road in South & Southeast Asia: Enter "Counter Geopolitics"

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The Chinese Silk Road projects signal towards a new era of the changing geopolitical order with infrastructure corridors that would span across the Asian landmass in the form of highways, railways, industrial parks, Oil & gas pipelines connecting the landlocked regions of hinterland China with the sea ports.

Considered from the economic point of view, the projects aim to utilize the contiguity of Asian landmass to setup a network of infrastructure projects poised to benefit the vast expanse of the Asian territory and further extending westwards, knocking the door of European markets. The linkage of industrial hubs to ports via efficient transportation will ease the connectivity of hinterland industrial products.

Specifically in the case of South and Southeast Asia, these developments depict a clear pattern of a counter Geopolitical game which is manifesting gradually. For instance, by investing in Myanmar, the China has successfully evaded the American geopolitical strategy of controlling strategic maritime chokepoints which oversee a huge volume of maritime trade. By Increasing connectivity with India and Bangladesh, a new era of trans border cooperation has begun, which is aimed linking the economies South Asia with ASEAN economies in the long run. However, with regard to India, the Chinese Silk Road offers a case of cooperation and counter cooperation at play at the same time.

Three of the Silk Road's projects shall be examined in this case:

1. Myanmar-China pipeline
2. Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar(BCIM) Economic Corridor
3. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Myanmar-China Oil Pipeline



Image Attribute: Sino-Myanmar Energy Corridor - [Read](#)

In early 2015, this project was completed, which involved the construction of an oil terminal at the coastal Maday Island from which a 2,400 Kilometre long oil pipeline runs through the Burmese territory, terminating at the Chinese province of Yunnan. The project has challenged the American hegemony by bypassing the Malacca straits route, where the Sixth Fleet of the US Navy has an overwhelming presence. Previously, 80% of Chinese hydrocarbon shipments crossing the Malacca straits made the Chinese way of the US domination of this strategic chokepoint but the Myanmar option is a Geopolitical victory for the China in its quest to secure the supply routes of resources most vital for running its economy. At present, oil shipments are offloaded at the Maday Island crude oil terminal which transports it to Yunnan province. A railway corridor from Myanmar's Kyaukpyu has been shelved for the time being but it may soon be a reality, as the Chinese shall leave no stone unturned in linking the neighbouring economies with that of their own.

The Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor:



Image Attribute: BCIM Corridor Map / Source: SCMP

Conceptualized in the 1990s as the 'Kunming Initiative', the BCIM Corridor was officially announced in 2013 with the aim to enhance sub-regional connectivity between these four nations. Besides connecting the Chinese markets with other Southeast and South Asian markets, BCIM Corridor, again gives China a Geopolitical advantage of reduction of reliance on the Straits of Malacca. In a way, India is being used by China to balance against the US. Added to this, this initiative brings at forefront the economic progress of the natural resource rich Northeast Indian region, whose resources will find a ready market in China, ASEAN economies and an international market when the sea link southwards to Burmese ports will be fully operational. Moreover, Chinese investments in the BCIM corridor and its vicinity will propel the economic progress of the region, enhancing trade, along with capital and labour mobility.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)



Image Attribute: CPEC Map as depicted in Pakistani Media

The latest strategic manoeuvre from the Chinese is the \$46 billion CPEC, which was unveiled in April 2015 as a symbol of all-weather Sino-Pak bonhomie. The CPEC aims to extend the only existing overland link between Pakistan and China, that is, the Karakoram Highway to Pakistan's Gwadar port, providing the Chinese with unhindered access to the Arabian Sea. In the long run, the proposed projects are said to link Pakistan to Xinjiang through a vast network of railways too. Directly linking Arabian Seaport of Gwadar to China's Xinjiang will enable China bound shipments to circumvent the long maritime route used currently, which has to pass through the waters surrounding the Indian peninsula, a domain of the Indian Navy. The strategic circles in India have viewed the CPEC as a Chinese move to secure its trade routes from India's interference. Here, China is utilizing Pakistan to balance against the Indian domination of Indian Ocean region's Sea Lanes of Communication.

Besides expanding the reach of its markets, these projects have given a new geopolitical thrust to the Chinese strategic ambitions where each project comes with a strategic advantage of its own plus a counter to existing geo-strategic leverages held by powers like India (at a regional level) and the US on a wider landscape. Also, as classic cases of a Geopolitical game, these projects are designed to alter the conventional Anglo-American Geopolitical understanding which rested on the ideas of the founding fathers of Geopolitical thinking, which include scholars like Halford Mackinder, who gave the idea of supremacy of land power and Alfred Mahan, who theorized the supremacy of sea power. This is because the Chinese Silk Road comes as a combination of both land power and sea power, where the infrastructure corridors of the Asian hinterland lead to the ports, thereby establishing not only transnational cooperation, but most importantly defining a new era of 'Counter Geopolitics'.

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