

# ONE BELT ONE ROAD INITIATIVE: HOW WILL INDIA BALANCE CHINA'S NEW STRATEGY?

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**Abstract:** China's One Belt One Road (One Belt One Road) Initiative was introduced in 2013 by President Xi Jinping during his visit to Central Asia and Southeast Asia. The idea was to revive the long-lost connectivity of the Silk Road that existed 200 millenniums ago between Asia, Europe and Africa. This economic initiative brought with it immense strategic connotations, as Six corridors were to be created to connect 65 countries along the entire road and belt that ranged from developed economies of Europe, to vibrant East Asian economies right up to economies with high potential for economic development. The One Belt One Road was to spread not only economic cooperation but cultural exchange to further people-to-people links amidst all the contributing nations. It is with this initiative that the position of the Indian democracy comes to play a vital role; the strategic location of the growing India economy in the Indian Ocean posits India as an essential part-taker for the success of China's One Belt One Road initiative. Thus, this paper seeks to evaluate the One Belt One Road in terms of how it effects India's position in the Asian region, how China is using it's One Belt One Road Initiative to tilt the Asian balance of power and isolate India in the Asian region. The paper is divided into three parts: the first part analyses China's One Belt One Road Initiative in order to gain an objective comprehension, the second section analyses how the One Belt One Road acts as an impediment to India's position in the region and the third section of the paper studies how India is to deal with the One Belt One Road to remain in the Asian power play. A descriptive-analytical method has been adopted in this paper to analyse and present the facts with optimum level of objectivity.

**Keywords:** India, China, foreign policy, One Belt One Road, Balance of Power.

## 1.0 Introduction

In the seventy-years of India's foreign policy, addressing confrontations with China has been recurrent. Whether it be the provision of asylum to the Dalai Lama since 1959, the border disputes that began with China's refusal to recognise the Mc Mohan Line and instead made claim over Indian territory that lies between Sikkim and Bhutan; or the 1962 Indo-China border conflict, China's consistent support towards Pakistan or the recent Dokhlam standoff India and China's economic relations may be the only positive aspect of their tensed relation over the decades. It is with this background that China's One-Belt-One-Road initiative needs to be analysed in order to comprehend China's apparent intentions as well the underlining strategy with which China wants to spread her influence in the region via her soft power methodology of regional economic cooperation. In reality India can neither be excluded nor by-passed in any major connectivity initiative in Asia. Nor can it sit out and let others take the lead in its execution because of which an analysis of India and the One-Belt-One-Road Initiative is required.

This paper is written in three sections, the first section studies the One Belt One Road and its framework, principles, and goals. The second section, analyses how the One Belt One Road acts as an impediment to India's position in the region and the third section of the paper studies how India is to deal with the One Belt One Road to remain in the Asian power play.

## 2.0 China's One-Belt-One-Road Initiative

In order to comprehend China's One-Belt-One-Road Initiative, we first need to study certain aspects

1. Background
2. One Belt One Road Initiative
3. The Principles of the One Belt One Road Initiative

### 2.1 Background

The term 'Silk Road' was first coined by German Geographer, Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877 as he used it to describe the trade routes from East to West. Now, better known as the 'Silk Route'. This 'Silk Route' was found by the Chinese traders was from the period 138BC – 484AD; where the Mongol nomads used this route

for trading purposes between China and Central Asian regions, the 'Silk Route' It had 2 main parts: a path from East Mediterranean to Central Asia, and one from Central Asia to China. So, it included a large number of other roads, which would connect to other settlements and cities.<sup>i</sup> The Silk Road was a network of trade routes, including both land and sea, that extended from the Eastern Mediterranean to China. Many people traded on it, including the Roman Empire, China, Japan, India, East Africa, and Arabia, Kushan Empire, nomads, and Mongols. Thus, the great Silk Road not only developed and enhanced trade and commerce between the East and the West, but also developed significant factor in facilitating cultural and social interaction across continents.

## **2.2 One-Belt-One-Road Initiative**

In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced in Kazakhstan China's most ambitious foreign policy and economic initiative- the revival of the ancient Silk Road, the Silk Road Economic Belt. This Silk Road Economic Belt was to roughly follow the ancient route connecting China to Europe via Central Asia. A month later in Indonesia, President Xi Jinping proposed a 'Maritime Silk Road' to link China's eastern ports to Europe via Southeast Asia. The Maritime Silk Road would pass along the Indian subcontinent, doubling back around the Bay of Bengal then across the Indian Ocean, grazing the east coast of Africa before heading straight up through the Suez Canal.<sup>ii</sup>

In November 2014, the Chinese government announced the formation of a new Silk Road Fund of \$40 billion at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting that was held at Beijing. Later in March 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce jointly announced the 'One-Belt- One-Road' (One Belt One Road) concept. This was followed by the emergence of specific policies that came about in May 2015 pertaining to the construction of the 'six international economic corridors' with an estimation of a total investment of \$890 billion or more, along with the two routes for the Maritime Silk Road was to be deployed from the centre.<sup>iii</sup>

### **The 'Six International Economic Corridors' are:**

1. **China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor-** Includes two economic corridors. One economic corridor starts in Northern China, extends through Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, and reaches Mongolia and Russia. Another corridor starts in Northeast China, extends through Manzhouli, and reaches Chita, Russia. Both rely on the Trans-Siberian Railway to connect China with Europe.
2. **New Eurasia Land Bridge (Second Eurasia Land Bridge) Economic Corridor-** A route divided into three parts that connects Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province with the Port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Said to also be possible to connect to Japan, South Korea, and Europe through Lianyungang. Can also reach from Iran and Russia to Hungary by way of Kazakhstan. Covers over 30 nations.
3. **China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor-** Starts in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, extends through the Persian Gulf, and reaches the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Peninsula. Connects Central Asian nations such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as well as Iran and Turkey, includes regions that are rich in oil and various mineral resources, and would serve as a resource/energy source for China.
4. **China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor-** Starts in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous region and Kunming, Yunnan Province and ends in Singapore. China has established an FTA with ASEAN and cooperated in developing the Greater Mekong Sub-region, but there are also tensions in the South China Sea, and establishment of this economic corridor faces great difficulties.
5. **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-** A 3000 km route connecting Kashgar, Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous Region with Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Has the role of connecting the "One Belt" with the "One Road". An agreement between China and Pakistan to cooperate broadly in areas such as energy, infrastructure, and industry in addition to developing Gwadar Port.
6. **BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar) Economic Corridor-** To be established together with Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar. Through this economic corridor, China can promote ties with Bangladesh and India, with which it historically did not have close ties.

And, finally the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road that consists of routes from the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to Europe and Asia, and routes from the South China Sea to the South Pacific. In order to establish the Maritime Silk Road, China would concentrate its investment in 15 harbour cities including Shanghai, Tianjin, Ningbo, and Zhoushan.<sup>iv</sup>

China's vision of the One Belt One Road is essentially to connect China's less-developed border regions with neighbouring countries and also to connect the fast-growing Southeast Asian region to China's southern provinces via ports and railways. With all levels of the Chinese government, ranging from the economic agencies to that of the universities, all have been preparing blueprints of their contribution for the success of the

One Belt One Road. However, President Xi Jinping announced the One Belt One Road Initiative at a point when the foreign policy of China became more assertive<sup>v</sup>, causing analysts to often interpret the One Belt One Road as a geopolitical strategy rather than an economic one.

### **2.3 The Principles of the One Belt One Road**

- **UN Charter-** The One Belt One Road upholds the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that is given in the UN Charter; mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.
- **Open for cooperation-** The One Belt One Road is not to be limited only to the area of the ancient Silk Road, but is to be open to all countries, and international and regional organizations for engagement, so that the results of the concerted efforts will benefit wider areas.
- **Harmonious and Inclusive-** It advocates tolerance among civilizations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilizations on the principles of seeking common ground while shelving differences and drawing on each other's strengths, so that all countries can coexist in peace for common prosperity.
- **Market Operation-** It will abide by market rules and international norms, give play to the decisive role of the market in resource allocation and the primary role of enterprises, and let the governments perform their due functions.
- **Mutual Benefit -** It accommodates the interests and concerns of all parties involved and seeks a conjunction of interests and the "biggest common denominator" for cooperation so as to give full play to the wisdom and creativity, strengths and potentials of all parties.<sup>vi</sup>

Therefore, on land the Initiative will focus on jointly building a new Eurasian Land Bridge and developing China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia and China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridors by taking advantage of international transport routes, relying on core cities along the Belt and Road and using key economic industrial parks as cooperation platforms. At sea, the Initiative will focus on jointly building smooth, secure and efficient transport routes connecting major sea ports along the Belt and Road. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor are closely related to the Belt and Road Initiative, and therefore require closer cooperation and greater progress.

It is in the light of the One Belt One Road Initiative that the framework puts forward Five major goals that will help strengthen cooperation among the economies that are to be part of the One Belt One Road.

- **Policy Coordination-** Promote intergovernmental cooperation, build a multilevel intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism, expand shared interests, enhance mutual political trust, and reach new cooperation consensus.
- **Facilitate Connectivity-** Countries along the Belt and Road should improve the connectivity of their infrastructure construction plans and technical standard systems, jointly push forward the construction of international trunk passageways, and form an infrastructure network connecting all sub-regions in Asia, and between Asia, Europe and Africa step by step. So, the One Belt One Road pushes for transportation connectivity, energy infrastructure connectivity and even cross-border optical cable network connectivity.
- **Unimpeded Trade-** With China adopting the principle of open market cooperation, open free trade and developing investment and trade cooperation is an important task for the building up of the One Belt One Road. So, working to facilitating trade and removing investment and trade barriers within the region and in all related countries is a vital goal that needs to be achieved.
- **Financial Integration-** Apart from depending upon the Silk Road Fund, efforts need to be made towards joint efforts to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and BRICS New Development Bank, conduct negotiation among related parties on establishing Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) financing institution, and set up and put into operation the Silk Road along with encouraging the formulation of bilateral financial cooperations.
- **People-to-People Connectivity-** This bond will help provide the required public support for implementing the Initiative. Utilising the spirit of friendly cooperation of the Silk Road by promoting extensive cultural and academic exchanges, personnel exchanges and cooperation, media cooperation, youth and women exchanges and volunteer services, so as to win public support for deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation.<sup>vii</sup>

According to China the One Belt One Road Initiative can be in two aspects, externally and internally. Externally, the One-Belt-One Road Initiative is focuses on development and cooperation. This initiative relies on the existing multilateral mechanisms between China and the relevant countries, it is to borrow the existing and effective regional cooperation platforms for developing peaceful economic and cooperative partnerships with countries along the Silk Road.<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, the Chinese government holds that, the Belt and Road Initiative matches the needs of these countries to pursue fast development and can create new windows of opportunities for these countries to identify complementary advantages and pursue opening up and development.

Internally, opening up of the Chinese economy is a strategy adopted by China in order to align bilaterally with the emerging economies along the 'Belt and Road. Most of these emerging economies and developing countries have a total population of 4.4 billion and an economic aggregate of 21 trillion US dollars, accounting for 63% and 29% of the world's total respectively.<sup>ix</sup> Thus, aligning with countries that are in the upward phase of economic development will yield mutual benefits for both China and these countries as it will not only enable the emerging economies and developing nations to enjoy higher status in China's opening-up strategy but will also promote the opening up of China's central, western, border regions, and the coastal areas to upgrade their open economy.

However, the two aspects given by China regarding the One Belt One Road in the official and authoritative document Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road has caused concern especially the second aspect of open strategy which in design seems to be a more external than internal strategy adopted by China. This is because the construction of the 'Belt and Road' Initiative aims to help develop political and economic cooperation between China and other Asian and European countries, while competition with other major countries will probably emerge and even become fierce. It is in this probability of competition increasing between China and other major countries that the second section of this paper analyses how the One Belt One Road acts as an impediment to India's position in the region.

### **3.0 One Belt One Road and India's position in the region**

China's One Belt One Road Initiative is aimed at not only generating prosperity and development for China, but for all the nations that lie along the Belt. In this context when it comes to assessing relations between India and China, it is found that the major hurdles preventing the initiative from meaningful fruition are complex and diversified, ranging from geopolitical implications, security concerns, differences in development patterns, etc. Issues of CPEC, India's oil exploration in South China Sea, in addition to the frequently visited historical topics such as the border dispute and China-Pakistan relations, bearing in mind that the reasons leading to India's current detachment from the One Belt One Road must be multifold. This calls for a close interpretation of the One Belt One Road through an Indian perspective.

### **3.1 Maritime Silk Road**

Chinese scholars believe that South Asia factors primarily on the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and its role in the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) is at best marginal, though the SREB is also designed to connect China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Against this backdrop, it is very understandable that in most cases the debates on the One Belt One Road within the Indian strategic community are focused on the Maritime Silk Road.<sup>x</sup> To begin with we analyse how India is important for the Maritime Silk Road before we go to analyse the problem with the Maritime Silk Road.

Firstly, from the point of its geographic location, India is located on the south section (the Road) and the north sections (One Belt) are countries and regions surrounding India. So, India plays an important role in the implementation of the Maritime Silk Road due to her geographic location, which places her in a position where India's active participation is required for the materialisation of the Maritime Silk Road. Secondly, India's important position in South Asia has given her the power to influence the decisions of her neighbours, especially Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, even if relations with them on some occasions are tense and bumpy. Thus, China's pragmatic move to invite India to join the One Belt One Road is simply a coupon that will enable smooth implementation of the Maritime Silk Road projects within the Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean Region.

The problem with the Maritime Silk Road, essentially, is the 'opaque' nature of its proposal. Superficially, the project is about the development of massive maritime infrastructure and connectivity in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. China has been careful to project the Maritime Silk Road as an exclusively commercial venture, trying hard to dispel any impressions of it being a cover for maritime military bases. Surprisingly, however, China has released no details about the project, and this makes many countries doubt China's strategic intentions. The lack of specifics not only makes it hard to decipher the Maritime Silk Road's real purpose, it gives credence to suspicions of geopolitical game play by China. Indeed, for a project being touted as a critical enabler of regional sea-connectivity, Chinese planners would have spent much time and effort developing the fine-print. The lack of firm plans,

proposals and timelines then does lead to a suspicion that there may be something about the Maritime Silk Road that China is hesitant to reveal quickly.<sup>xi</sup>

Even on the few details that China has released, claims appear doubtful. According to China, the Maritime Silk Road involves the development of maritime nodes that will enhance trade and sea-connectivity and will bring considerable development to local economies. China has promoted the One Belt One Road as an economic game-changer and an enormously beneficial initiative for all participating nations. However, it is hard to disregard the fact that China is the source of much of the maritime turbulence in South East Asia. China's positioning of an exploration rig in the Vietnam's EEZ, its clash with Philippines over the Scarborough reef, and the aggressive patrols off the Senkaku islands clearly shows Chinese intensions in the Western Pacific are anything but benign. With unsettled issues of sovereignty and sovereign jurisdiction over disputed Islands in the South China Sea and the East Sea, Beijing's expectation of a free-pass to create an entire infrastructure corridor in a contested maritime space, appears seriously doubtful.<sup>xii</sup>

The Maritime Silk Road's essential rationale is the leveraging of Chinese soft-power. The aim apparently is to shore-up China's image as a benevolent state. China would also conceivably use the project's commercial investments to establish its legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean. And while China can be expected to do everything in its power to force region states to join the project - including offering economic aid to potential partners - the bottom-line for it will be to make an offer to India that is hard to refuse.

Having understood the benefits that the Maritime Silk Road has to offer despite grounds of suspicion that comes along with all dealings with China, what cannot be disputed is the fact that "India, an emerging economy that shares a contested border with China, worries about containment and new pathways for aggression from Pakistan," as rightly put by Harsh V Pant, professor of international relations, King's College London. He also states, "the Maritime Silk Road reinforces New Delhi's concerns about encirclement. Beijing's port development projects in the Indian Ocean open the possibility of dual-use facilities, complicating India's security calculus."<sup>xiii</sup>

As part of the One Belt One Road, in Pakistan, there is a proposed \$1.3 billion effort to expand the Karakoram Highway as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Now this involves power plants, roads and railways that will span the length of Pakistan and link China's western region of Xinjiang to the Gwadar port, which was built with Chinese help. But the CPEC runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The establishment of a project with China in the disputed territory gives Pakistan's occupation of the area a degree of legitimacy. And India's clear stand on the issue is that Pakistan is illegally occupying Indian territory. Getting on board One Belt One Road or talking to China and Pakistan with regard to this corridor would be problematic for India as it could be seen as conceding ground to Pakistan. It would also involve a third country which goes against India's stand that this is a bilateral issue which needs to be worked out between the two neighbours.

So, while, South Asia has welcomed the One Belt One Road, and most of India's neighbours attended the Belt Road Forum held by China in 2017 but India refused to participate, maintaining opposition to China's investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, or CPEC. India, boycotted the event, and announced in an official statement: "No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity." Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar articulated this position at the 2017 Raisina Dialogue:

"China is very sensitive about its sovereignty. The economic corridor passes through an illegal territory, an area that we call Pak-occupied Kashmir. You can imagine India's reaction at the fact that such a project has been initiated without consulting us." Prime Minister Narendra Modi reinforced this point, asserting that "connectivity in itself cannot override or undermine the sovereignty of other nations."

The next matter of concern for India is whether the One Belt One Road is the culmination of the Western proposed theory regarding China's 'String of Pearls' to militarily encircle India through robust maritime contacts and cooperation with the other South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. India has its own maritime initiative on the Indian Ocean called 'Project Mausam' or 'Spice Route' or 'Cotton Route', and the SAGAR- 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'. Now, this initiative envisions India as the centre of the Indian Ocean World, while the Maritime Silk Road initiative places China at the centre. Despite attempts to make both projects work together, the strategic undertone of these projects cannot be ignored as both Project Mausam and the Maritime Silk Road on a deeper level are about expanding influence—culturally, economically, and even strategically in the Indian Ocean Region.<sup>xiv</sup>

It may be noted that Chinese experts and officials have floated the idea of "harmonious ocean" in the IOR, but, unpromisingly, not for the South China Sea or the East China Sea region. It has been noted that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has in fact tightened its position regarding the South China Sea in recent years. It is reported that, since 2013, China has commissioned seventeen new vessels in the South Sea Fleet to focus on the

South China Sea region. In fact, in January 2017, China objected to Vietnam's invitation to India to invest in oil and natural gas sector in the disputed South China Sea, saying it is firmly opposed to infringement of its rights using development of bilateral ties as an "excuse".<sup>xv</sup>

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said in this regard,

"China does not object to the development of normal bilateral relations of relevant countries in our neighbourhood". "But China firmly oppose relevant party to use it as an excuse to infringe upon China's legitimate rights and interests in the South China Sea and impair regional peace and stability,"<sup>xvi</sup>

China has been opposing India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) exploring oil in wells claimed by Vietnam in the South China Sea (SCS) for years. India has been asserting that the ONGC's exploration is a commercial operation and not connected with the dispute. Thus, continues China's claim over most of the South China sea while countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan have other claims.

It is in this current scenario that the Dokhlam issue also needs to be assessed in terms of the One Belt One Road. The Dokhlam standoff began due to the building of a road to Dokhlam by the Chinese army troops, Dokhlam lies in the Sikkim-Tibet-Bhutan trijunction, just weeks after India boycotted the Belt Road Forum. This launch of construction by China on the border areas of Bhutan and Nepal was considered by analysts as a pressure tactic into making India accept the Chinese programme. Therefore, with the recent Dokhlam issue and the continuous border issue that remains unresolved between India and China, not to forget the Tibet controversy over India's provision of Asylum to the Dalai Lama makes it difficult for India to look at the One Belt One Road as a mere economic initiative that will ensure regional economic cooperation without creating centralisation of Asian power in the hand of China.

It is with such concerns and challenges that China's One-Belt-One-Road Initiative poses before India that continues to keep India suspicious of China's economically coated attempt to tilt the balance of power in Asia towards herself. This leaves the final section of the paper to study how India is to stride her steps with the One Belt One Road in order to remain an important player in the Asian power game.

#### **4.0 India's reaction towards the One Belt One Road**

After having assessed China's One-Belt-One-Road initiative: its core principles and plan alongside India's concerns regarding the challenges that the initiative poses to India's position in the region. The possible measures that India can adopt towards the One Belt One Road also needs to be comprehended so as to ensure that India's position remains unhindered in Asia.

Strategic Affairs expert C Raja Mohan wrote in The Indian Express that One Belt One Road would involve "the export of Chinese capital, labour, technology, industrial standards, commercial benchmarks, use of the Yuan, development of new ports, industrial hubs, special economic zones and military facilities, under Beijing's auspices." He also said that the scope of One Belt One Road is bigger than the one which was undertaken by the British empire in the 19th Century. However, for India, it would be difficult to be second to China in its own region of influence. Not just India, even Japan has refused to join the project and started its own Belt and Road initiative named as "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" which would cover Indo-Pacific and Eurasian regions. Japan has also invested around \$150 billion for this project. The One Belt One Road project is expected to give China an incomparable upper hand vis-a-vis India. New Delhi aspires for a friendly neighbourhood but considering the constant security threat, it faces from Pakistan and often from China even now, India cannot afford to play second fiddle to China. And even if it decides to join One Belt One Road, it cannot afford to be a junior partner.

Therefore, India needs to speed up its own infrastructure projects and find ways to strengthen its sphere of influence. Raja Mohan suggests at least three ways in which India can tackle China's One Belt One Road challenge:

- Firstly, India should upgrade internal connectivity. Raja Mohan says that China didn't start One Belt One Road as an external initiative but it was "built upon the top of the internal "Go West" strategy that focused, over the last two decades, on unifying China's domestic market and connecting its developed east coast with the interior provinces."
- Second, the expert says that India should modernise connectivity across its land and maritime frontiers with neighbouring countries. "China is certainly not responsible for India neglecting its inherited trans-border connectivity since Independence; nor has Beijing stopped India from building road and rail links to its borders."

- Third, India should work with countries like Japan and multilateral institutions to develop regional connectivity in the Indian Subcontinent and beyond.<sup>xvii</sup> This is mainly to ensure that India remains in the Asian balance of power game and is able to exert her influence over the countries present in the region with her strong strategic support as against the economic influence that China has and seeks to enhance.

Finally, India needs a new China strategy. This is an important, difficult challenge. The Modi government seems willing to make the push that is needed to secure India's interests, even if it means opening the door to a quite different way of thinking about China. However, mere opposition to Chinese moves cannot be a strategy. Reconsidering the dynamics of India-China relations in a broader context, the choice to focus on an adversarial competition and outright strategic rivalry would be a step backward. It will be a great challenge to Indian diplomacy and business to make the complex game with China work in India's interest.

India's decision to stay away from the Belt and Road Forum should not be allowed to influence New Delhi's overall approach and strategy toward China. India must join hands with China to achieve strategic reconciliation, whose terms need not be dictated by India's response to One Belt One Road. Perhaps the Indian government is aware of this reality; that is why Modi at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, said: "It is true that we have a border dispute with China. But in the last 40 years, not a single bullet has been fired because of it."

### **5.0 Conclusion**

After having analysed China's One Belt One Road, its principles, major goals and its aim for regional economic cooperation, what cannot be ignored are the protruding concerns for India like the lurking past of Sino-Indo relations that have remained unresolved, whether it be border issues, water issues, or even the Tibet issue, India's Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) bid, and with the One Belt One Road Project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that goes through Pakistan occupied Kashmir, which if India allows would be seen as accepting that area of Kashmir to belong to Pakistan legitimately. The worrisome notion of 'String of Pearls' that was coined by the West in regard to China's expansionist tendency, which can be considered to be implemented via the One Belt One Road. This is so because looking at the map that displays the land and sea routes for the One Belt One Road, the most prominent aspect is the encircling of India by economic corridors built by China, if the project goes through, implying that China would be highly influential in the nations that are along the belt. China's policy for the South China Sea, and the manner in which China objected to Vietnam's invitation to India to invest in oil and natural gas sector in the disputed South China Sea, and the most recent Dokhlam standoff between the two major powers in Asia only goes to show that India and China have several issues that need to be addressed without which the smooth implementation of the One Belt One Road will not be seen, despite the several efforts taken by both powers to maintain bilateral relations with the various ministerial and summits held, including that of Prime Minister Modi's visit in April to China; the prevailing undercurrents between India and China will always emerge at as pertinent issues even when efforts are being made to brush them aside and focus on commonalities between the two major powers in the region.

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