

Countering China's Infrastructure in Asia: Opportunities for Türkiye amid the U.S., India, EU, and South Korea's Strategic Projects



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Abstract: This paper explores the strategic competition over infrastructure projects in Asia, focusing on the countermeasures taken by the U.S., India, the EU, and South Korea against China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While China's BRI has created significant economic opportunities and expanded its influence, it has also triggered concerns among other major powers, leading to the launch of multiple counter-initiatives. Türkiye, strategically located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, faces both challenges and opportunities in this evolving landscape. By analyzing the geopolitical dynamics and the various infrastructure projects in play, this study highlights how Türkiye can navigate these complexities, leveraging its unique position to benefit from competing global interests. The research employs a postpositivist approach, utilizing diverse secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the emerging "clash of infrastructures" in Asia and its implications for Türkiye's strategic choices.

Keywords: BRI, B3W, AUKUS, Silk Road, AAGC, BBIN

Introduction

Samuel P. Huntington wrote the *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* in 1996, while Peter Frankopan authored *The New Silk Roads: The Present and the Future of the World* in 2019. Huntington predicted that the post-cold war conflicts would occur between cultures and religious identities. Frankopan, on the other hand, suggests that the world after 2013 (the launching of Belt and Road initiative) would be shaped by infrastructure and its related policies. Drawing on the propositions of these two books, I hypothesize that the future conflicts will centre around infrastructure and corridors, just as Huntington derived the concept of the Clash of Civilizations from Basil Mathews' 1926 book *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clashes of Civilization*. Mathews also authored "The clash of Color, livingstone the pathfinder, torch-bearers in China."

Türkiye and India have already begun bypassing

each other in the race to establish Infrastructure corridors in Iraq. India started the India-Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC), while Türkiye, along with Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, launched a comprehensive connectivity project called the Development Road Project. IMEC is a shipping corridor supported by India in Iraq to bypass Türkiye and reach Europe (Halligan & Mahmoud, 2024). India is not only challenging Türkiye but has also initiated around twelve infrastructure and corridor projects to counter China in Asia. These infrastructure projects are Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectorial Technical and economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal Initiative (BBIN), International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), Look East or Act East Policy (LEP), India-Iran-Afghanistan Corridor (Chabahar), The "Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (India), the Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor (India),

the Amritsar Delhi Kolkata Industrial Corridor (India), the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, East Coast Economic Corridor (India-Bangladesh-South East Asia), and the Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor(Majid Ali, 2023).

Similarly America is also at odds with China, having launched more than 10 infrastructure projects across Asia aimed at containing China. These projects include BDN, B3W, C5+1, Obama's New Silk Road, Trump's New Silk Road, TAPI, The BUILD Act, MCC, ACTI-USAID and the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999. Additionally, the EU's strategy of connecting Europe with Asia, Australia's AUKUS, and South Korea's Eurasian Initiative are other infrastructure initiatives by countries countering China. On the other hand, China has relied solely on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since 2013. Pro-Socialist scholars with Chinese characteristics and proponents of multipolarity are making a hubbub about the success of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These scholars' claims hold some truth, as they point to China's tripling of exports to the partner countries since the BRI's inception in 2013.

The real issue is the global race of Infrastructure projects among major powers and their participants. Who will align with whom? How can one decide, or avoid confrontation, while signing projects with others? For example, countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were initially tied to the U.S, through Silk Road strategy Act of 1999. Later Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were integrated into the C5+1 project. Additionally, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan became involved in the INSTC, the BRI, various European projects, Russian projects and Turkish projects. .

The geographical-economic position of Asia is major attraction for these powers to expand their products and businesses. When China was declared the world's second-largest economy in 2010, it caused uneasiness among other major powers. According to some scholars, this led them to initiate measures to counter and halt the

BRI on certain fronts(Shang, 2019). For major powers, it was easy to forecast the success of the BRI, but the countermeasures taken by these powers made it challenging (Lukonin, 2020). This study will highlight those countermeasures that have created a hostile environment for the BRI in Asia. The BRI has sparked fears that China will monopolize natural resources and control production and transportation across the Asia. These powers accuse China of acquiring resources as a crucial part of its foreign investment strategy, with its investment in natural resources being a long-term strategy(Zhang, 2017).

This study employed a Postpositivist approach, which collects knowledge through various perspectives and triangulations. It is not confined to a single source but instead draws information from multiple sources, making it well-suited for this research. The study utilized secondary sources, including governmental and non-governmental reports, organizational documents, published articles (both journalistic and research-based), books, conference proceedings, blog discussions, press releases, conference papers, and third party evaluations of BRI in Asia. The limitation of this research is that it relies solely on available secondary data sources, creating figures and facts from them, as Postpositivism allows the use of any source until satisfaction is achieved. However, it did not incorporate primary data.

The American Countering BRI Measures

The Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999 was initiated after the fall of Soviet Union to control or influence newly independent countries of Central Asia and South Caucus. These countries were full of natural resources. The story of the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999 initiated in 1991 when Lyndon Laroche and Helga Zip-la Roche propelled a pro support campaign of developmental link between Europe and the outside world, which is called "Eurasian Land-Bridge (ELB)". The ELB predecessor is Paris-Berlin-Vienna triangle, which purpose was to invest in Europe and use skilled labor to build transporting corridors connecting Europe and Russia based on the idea of transporting the ancient Silk Road between Europe and China.

The very founder and initiator of the Act of 1999, Brownback remarked that to avoid the area (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) from the reign of dominant powers of the region (China, Russia, and Iran), we have to institute a Multinational Corporation of controlling this region. Conservative figures, British Geopoliticians and Heritage foundation equally criticized this act, on the basis of its looting nature(Rose, 1999). It is in the nature of American polity to engage in transcontinental politics for her survival as she did during European wars(Brzezinski, 2001). Beside that it is written in the purpose of the bill that this act will serve the interest of America in the region which can yield in an enormous economic gains from the presence of oil and gas reserves in the region(Senate, 1999).

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is an American aid program started in 2004 to address to the global poverty. Its addressing sectors are institutionalization, financial growth and improvement of declining deficit for a specified time. MCC is also serving American interest in the region beside stability of its partner countries(MCC, 2021). In South Asia Sri Lanka and Nepal are MCC recipients. The earlier partner left MCC due to unknown reason while Nepal remained intact till 2017. In any case, there was an apprehension of opposing parties about MCC awards in Nepal, 'Nepal shouldn't acknowledge MCC because it is a piece of the Indo-Pacific strategy belittled by the US countering rising China's BRI(Wagle, 2019). It shows that MCC is also perceived by one out of two nations as a counter to BRI and Chinese interests in Asia. Nepal had before marked the MCC, the U.S. award worth of \$500 million to foster its hydroelectric transmission foundation. Yonghong added that political flimsiness is the justification for the less execution of BRI projects. "There is a political unsteadiness in Nepal and the political strategies are not reliable in the country," Prof Yonghong said. He underlined the quicker execution of the current arrangements and said the main thing for the public authority is to peruse the financial

necessities of the Nepalese public and carry out the BRI agreements(Murarka, 2021).

Biden and Japan Anti- China Rhetoric: Biden followed Trump's footings in anti-Sino rhetoric by avoiding Tweets Biden's meeting with Yoshihide Suga of Japan on 16 April 2021 is counted by policy analysts as one of the anti-china moves. Jonathan Wood positioned the Suga-Biden meeting as the "Reconstruction of the US alliance and competition with China is at the heart of Biden's foreign policy(Lee, 2021a). The meeting resulted in projects of high-speed 5-G internet facilities provision, clean energy, and infrastructure plans. These were obviously countering BRI measures, rephrased by Neil Thomas an analyst "Biden wants an excuse to stop the BRI, so he could fence the Indo-Pacific policy around BRI and its containment(Lee, 2021a). But officially Whitehouse is of the view that "We are committed to working together on the challenges of China and North Korea to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific future (WhiteHouse, 2021b).

Counter measures under the banner of USAID: US announced \$14.4 million for connectivity for ASEAN countries in 2013. The Project U.S.-ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI) is a program, initiated in 2007, for political, economic, and socio-cultural, interconnectivity. In this regard, Cambodia, Laos PDR, and Myanmar which are jointly called "CLM" Countries went some steps ahead and signed a trade facilitation project with the US, in 2017. Under US-ASEAN-CLM single-window cargo system was proposed to establish(ASEAN, 2017). ACTI is a platform that provides technical assistance in the fields of trade and investment for small and medium enterprises, as well as in energy sector. To enhance trade and investment, its framework and arrangements for strengthening economic engagements and partnerships, a single-window connectivity mechanism has been proposed multiple times among ASEAN partner countries, from 2007 till 2021(USAID, 2015, 2021). Considering its history, one might not observe much activity before 2013, but after 2013, its proactiveness became increasingly noticeable, especially as China's next focus for

connectivity shifted from South Asian countries to ASEAN countries, which contribute \$200 billion to American trade. This study found that prior to the U.S. CLM-ASEAN initiative, another project was launched in the same CLM countries in 2015, supported by the Republic of Korea and Asian Development Bank (ADB), aimed at accelerating economic integration through mobility of skilled labor. Under this project, ASEAN countries were required to manage skilled labor migration-including high, low, and medium-skilled workers-under Mutually Recognized Skills (MRS) framework, with technical assistance from the International Labour Organization (ILO) from 2013 to 2017(ILO, 2017).

The Better utilization of Investment Leading Development (BUILD) Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in March 2018 to help developing countries build their infrastructure, energy sectors, businesses, and job creation efforts, while also reducing their dependency on U.S. Aid. Through this initiative, the U.S. aims to engage with developing countries as partners. Under the Development of Finance Corporation (DFC), less developed countries will receive more grants, loans, and other guarantees for anticipated projects, which are expected to support poverty alleviation endeavors(Urban, 2018).This Act consolidates the Development Credit Authority (DCA) with USAID and the Overseas Private investment Corporation (OPIC) to form the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (USIADFC). The USIDF will drive market-driven, private-sector growth, and encourage economic development in the least developed countries, while also advancing U.S. foreign policy interests in these regions(GREEN, 2018).

The MCC of the USA highlighted the mechanism developed for the BUILD Act, which aims to encourage private sector investment in developing countries, particularly by American businesses and institutional investors. The BUILD Act drew inspiration from the European Union's External Investment Plan (EIP), which also promotes private sector investment in developing countries for sustainable development(MCC, 2018). The

BUILD Act will also assist these countries with modernization and demonstrate how America participates in their development journey. For a long time, both political parties Republicans and Democrats in Congress have sought to significantly shift U.S. involvement in developing nations from charity to partnership. As a result, foreign aid programs have been improved and modernized to ensure that every dollar invested in international development is spent productively. The BUILD Act represents the next step in this effort work, leveraging America's private sector to create economic opportunities and diminish the need for taxpayer-funded citizen-financed unfamiliar assistance(Urban, 2018). Finally, Washington has concentrated its focus on the Indian Ocean area by replacing the conventional "Asia-Pacific" emphasis with the new "Indo-Pacific" idea at the highest levels. This shift was evident in the renaming of the U.S. Pacific command to The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Additionally, the United States is following the lead of India and Japan with the AAGC by adopting a more aggressive approach. This methodology was further solidified with the passage of the BUILD Act in 2018, which intends to transform American advancement finance tools and establish the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation to support overseas undertakings(Samaranayake, 2019).

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline has the potential financial benefits to Afghanistan and is a key component of U.S. strategy. Turkmenistan, which possesses the world's second-largest natural gas reserves, could use these resources for international collaborations. TAPI will enable Turkmenistan to expand its energy supply to Islamabad and New Delhi. However, without the opportunity for equity shares something Turkmenistan has so far refused to grant to foreign companies, major Western oil corporations have withdrawn from the deal. "What really matters is how genuine the Turkmen government is," says David Goldwyn, a former special envoy for energy affairs at the U.S. state department (McBride, 2015). The United States began aligning with energy projects in Afghanistan

around 2010. The State Department has invested more than \$2.2 billion in 1,800 miles of public roads, and a portion of the \$62 billion spent on Afghan security forces has also supported these initiatives. In 2011, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) helped establish the Almaty Consensus, a framework for regional cooperation among Central Asian countries. Its objectives include reducing trade barriers, increasing export potential, and aiding Afghanistan's integration into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Key initiatives include the Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kazakhstan Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) and the CASA-1000 Power Framework, which will enable Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to supply hydropower to Afghan and Pakistani consumers. Additionally, the Transit Trade Agreement allows Afghanistan to send duty-free goods to Islamabad. Washington has pledged \$15 million for the CASA-1000 project, but its role unlike China's substantial investment in Central Asia focuses more on strategic efforts (McBride, 2015), as U.S. interest in engaging China through the NSRI and Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project (CASA) is partially aimed at containing China's influence. Through CASA, the U.S. has invested \$1.2 billion in an electricity transmission grid to supply power from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan (Zimmerman, 2015). These initiatives are viewed by observers as anti-China because they represent U.S. efforts to minimize dependency on the Chinese market and government. They are also seen as a continuation of the United States NSRI, which began in 2015 (Zimmerman, 2015).

The Trump Administration's Initiative: The New Silk Road (NSR), periodically advanced by various U.S. administrations to serve their respective interests in the Indo-Pacific region against China, was recently revived by the Trump administration. Under Trump, the NSR was carved out to enhance connectivity between the Indo-Pacific, South Asia, and South East Asia with Central Asian Republics (CARs), to support Afghanistan's economy. During the Obama administration, Hillary Clinton linked the NSR with the TAPI pipeline (ZeeNews,

2017). John Kerry further connected the NSR and the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor through India in 2013-14, aligning it with the U.S. "Asia Pivot" policy. The purpose of NSR is similar to that of BRI, which involves major infrastructure investments in these regions (Maini, 2016). The documents of these initiatives did not show that it will link China with other countries like its predecessor Silk Road strategy ACT 1999, the NSR under Trump is perceived as operating within an anti-China framework.

During Obama's presidency, the rise of China was welcomed. He clearly stated during his visit to Beijing in November 2014 that "The United States welcomes the continued rise of a peaceful China that is prosperous and stable and can play a responsible role in the world" (CRS, 2014). Lynne M. Tracy, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia and Central Asian affairs in 2013, delivered a speech in Washington organized by James Foundation. She expressed her gratitude to the organizers, stating "it is a great pleasure to share the United States' efforts in promoting regional economic cooperation, or what he call the 'New Silk Road' in the context of the anticipated withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. She further emphasized "Afghanistan's landlocked status doesn't mean it should be disconnected or vulnerable to extremism and poverty. Therefore, the vision of regional economic connectivity, which the United States first articulated in 2011 and termed the "New Silk Road", is crucial as a guiding principle for our collective endeavors to economically anchor Afghanistan in the region. Additionally, she welcomed China's BRI for its potential to advance the region's development (Tracy, 2013).

The C5+1: This is a US-driven initiative aims at linking South Asia with Central Asia to strengthen economic ties. The participating countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (C5), and Pakistan (+1) have pledged to work together. In a joint statement issued on July 11, 2020, they expressed their confidence in America's commitment to resolving the Afghan issue and in creating opportunities. Earlier, in May 2020, America, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan reviewed

several key projects aimed at enhancing connectivity and economic prosperity. Observers believe that the U.S. Intends to involve Pakistan in its efforts to connect Central Asia with South Asia as an alternative to China's trade routes, which pass through Iran. The C5+1 participants discussed various topics in detail, including economic resilience, regional security, the illegal trafficking of goods and persons, nuclear and radiological safety, and border security(A. Iqbal, 2020). While the C5+1 initiative is ostensibly for the benefit of the participating countries, it also provides the U.S. with an opportunity to advance its strategic interest in the region, particularly in monitoring Russia, Iran, and China.

Build Back Better world (B3W), The Biden administration, in collaboration with the G-7, introduced the B3W initiative as a strategic move to compete with China, which has made significant strides in meeting the infrastructure needs of low-income countries under its BRI(Murad Ali, 2021).While they agreed to launch this new globe framework, there is no definitive figures on the funding components or a standardized methodology yet. However, B3W is widely seen as response to China's BRI. The partnership between the G-7 and B3W aims to support allies and partners globally in areas such as climate, health, IT, gender equality, and equity by mobilizing investments and resources. As part of Washington's commitment to countering BRI, the U.S. has brought together agencies like Development Finance Corporation (DFC), USAID, the Millennium challenge Corporation (MCC), EXIM, and the US. Trade Development Agency (USTDA), with the goal of creating jobs both abroad and domestically (WhiteHouse, 2021a). Under Biden, the G-7's alliance with B3W seeks to provide alternative plans for agro-based economies, countering the influence of the BRI(Murarka, 2021). Biden's statements, such as those made in Cornwall in June 2021, clearly indicate that B3W is intended to compete with BRI by better addressing the needs of all nations(Murad Ali, 2021). Despite this, the Argentinian administration has dismissed B3W as a joke, even though it was initially considered as a

potential alternative to the BRI in Ibero-Americana(Rush, 2022).

Blue Dot Network (BDN): Announced in Bangkok in November 2019, BDN is a collaborative initiative between America, Australia, and Japan (with India joining in February 2020) aimed at evaluating projects, including infrastructure, to determine whether they are market-driven, socially, and environmentally viable, financially sustainable, transparent, accountable, open, and comprehensive. If a project meets these criteria, it will be certified as a standard project. During its first steering committee meeting on January 31, 2020, Japan, Australia and other participating countries send their representative. According to the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (DFC), BDN brings together governments, civil societies, and private sectors in a consortium to define quality infrastructure and openness, and then issue certificates to global infrastructure projects based on these defined criteria, which will be recognized as a quality certification. e Projects that meet BDN's principles and standards can receive certification(DFC, 2020). However, BDN is also viewed as a US driven infrastructural initiative designed for like-minded partners to counter China's BRI(Hansbrough, 2020).

In 2019, LaRouche presented a comprehensive picture in response to the growing questions about BRI. She stated, "Xi Jinping announced the New Silk Road in 2013 and subsequently made treaties with more than 112 countries. This led to enormous growth, with six major industrial corridors, making the BRI the largest infrastructure project in history. The strange thing is, since 2013, there was practically no reporting on the BRI in the mainstream media in the United States and Europe. Then, all of a sudden, in an obviously coordinated way, the major think tanks in Europe and the United States started a series of attacks, claiming that China is causing countries to fall into a debt trap, that it's an effort to replace the United States as the dominant global force, to become Chinese imperialists, that the BRI projects are not viable, and that China is an authoritarian system with Xi Jinping is

a dictator. So suddenly, there was a barrage of attacks on this concept (Zepp-LaRouche, 2019).

India's countermeasures strategies

Trans-Transport Agreement (TTA): New Delhi is aligning with the U.S. in opposing the BRI and has adopted a competitive counter-approach under different names. In response to the BRI, India signed transport agreements with Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh and resolved its territorial disputes with Bangladesh. New Delhi is also focused on developing its infrastructure and military capabilities to create obstacles for BRI partners in South Asia. India strategic efforts also target Burma, Bangladesh, Iran, and Indonesia under the guise of projects and connectivity, with New Delhi seeking French assistance. In 2018, the French government agreed to support India's navy in reaching the Gulf, Djibouti, and other strategic locations (Kliman & Grace, 2018).

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC): New Delhi is strengthening its relationships with powers that are also skeptical of BRI. It was successful when Japan issued a diplomatic statement emphasizing a shared commitment to a "free and open Indo-Pacific" while launching the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor AAGC. Both countries mobilized their companies for infrastructure projects in Colombo and Dhaka. In its efforts to contain the BRI, India did not leave no stone unturned and sought partnerships with the U.S. France, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (Kliman & Grace, 2018). In South Asia with the help of the U.S. and Sri Lanka, with the assistance of Tokyo, established the AAGC, which serves as a tool for India to extend its influence over the Indian Ocean (Wagner, 2019). After assessing the terms and conditions of support, India and Japan shaped their narrative by claiming that BRI is less transparent, while the AAGC is more transparent. Their biased thinking and actions led them to unite in rivalry against the BRI (Samaranayake, 2019).

It is not clear where former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif coined the phrase "A Game Changer" but the AAGC, which is widely seen as a counter to the BRI is also using the same phrase (Bharati, 2020). The AAGC

emerged from a joint declaration made during the meeting of the Indian and Japanese Prime Ministers meeting in 2016. It was designed to support development and cooperative projects, focus on "quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capabilities and skills, and people-to-people engagement." Its format is not significantly different from BRI; however, it includes additional components such as health, agriculture, disaster management, and skills development (AAGC, 2020).

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC): It is a coalition that excludes Pakistan, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and India. It came into existence to overshadow SAARC and BRICS and to set a politico-economic agenda for South Asia and South East Asia. It is one of India's tools for placing India on the global map and supporting India's Act East Policy. These countries will benefit from transportation and connectivity through the BIMSTEC coastal shipping agreement and its Motor Vehicle Agreement. These countries will work together on trade and investment, counter-terrorism, transnational crimes control, energy, agriculture, and tourism (TheTruePicture, 2018). The slogan of BIMSTEC highlights its focus on promoting and deepening the Buddhist tourist circuit. By excluding China and Pakistan, it parallels the Abraham Accords of 2018, which were specifically only for countries with Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, while excluding other religions. Some scholars believe that, in addition to border connectivity and hydro-electric power generation, it serves as an alternative to SAARC due to the ongoing India-Pakistan rivalry (Paul, 2019). It does not seem likely that India will adopt any geopolitical countermeasures across the entire spectrum, from geo-economics to military alliances (Khurana, 2019).

Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal Initiative (BBIN): The name itself identifies the countries involved in BBIN, which serves as a gateway to India's sub-regional initiatives (Kaura & Rani, 2020). However, author Kukreja believes that Modi has adopted Xi Jinping's concept of the

community of Shared future (CSF) for BBIN, emphasizing shared prosperity with India's neighbors. It is essentially old wine in a new bottle, as it also offers connectivity, transportation, electricity, and grids stations. On other hand, it signals to Pakistan and Sri Lanka to move beyond political suspicions and reshape their economic realities(Kukreja, 2020). India has again intentionally tried to exclude China and Pakistan from this initiative. Meanwhile, China Involved India in BRI by extending BCIMEC and in BRICS. Commenting on BBIN, Chief Economist and freedom fighter professor Rehman of Bengal said stated "The BBIN initiative can only achieve its envisioned trade alliances if it has a structure framework among its members, a clear vision for the future, and if China is involved". He further noted that today, every BBIN member country is a trading partner with China, which is a reality, we accept. If we do, it will be beneficial; If not, we will be detached from the reality in which we live(Sobhan, 2021). The notion that Pakistan lacks the potential for goods production it not valid; it is more about fears and political differences that hinder regional connectivity in South Asia. After independence, India imported 70% of its goods from Pakistan, and now the figures is less than 5%(Price, 2016).

International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC): In South Asia, along with the aforementioned and forthcoming initiatives, India has embarked on numerous interconnectivity initiatives, including the INSTC. This initiative aims to boost trade, strengthen regional connectivity, and facilitate cargo movement among its partner countries, which include Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Iran, Tajikistan, Russia, Oman, Syria Türkiye and Ukraine(Singh, 2020). On one hand, it earned the status of a 'Game Changer" while on the other hand, it garnered criticism as anti-BRI initiative. India, as the major investor, has a strategic purpose; to exclude Pakistan from the Inland and sea connectivity of INSTC, as Pakistan is the launching pad for BRI and CPEC. INSTC was tested in 2018 with its first cargo consignment sent to Russia from Bandar Abbas

port. India is actively investing \$500 million to extend its reach to Afghanistan and CAR. In 2018, a scholar noted that INSTC is maturing just as its rival, BRI, is gaining momentum(Sarma & Menezes, 2018). The mentioned sources suggest that INSTC is gaining importance on par with BRI. However, some sources also claim that it is part of the U.S. NSRI(Zimmerman, 2015).

Look East or Act East Policy (LEP): Ever-changing geopolitical dynamics often reshape the outlook of countries and regions, as seen in the post-cold war era. This shift redirected the global focus towards the Asia-Pacific region, prompting India to rebrand its "look east" policy to the Act East Policy under Modi's leadership. Modi strategically aligned BIMSTEC with the Act East policy to enhance connectivity and build trust across the region. The aim appears to be fostering interdependence among East Asian countries on India, rather than China, as the policy counters Chinese influence in the region. New Delhi is extending its diplomacy reach, particularly with Japan and Vietnam, as these nations are perceived by the media as skeptical of BRI and cautious in their engagement with China. China's Maritime initiative under BRI has caused discomfort in both India and Japan, leading them to unite in countering Chinese economic influence and maintaining the balance of power in the region. Japan is also willing to support India's initiatives by providing funds and resources, pledging to invest \$33.5 billion in Indian infrastructure and smart cities over the next 5 years(Kukreja, 2020).

Indian scholars are also suggesting that India needs proactive diplomacy. New Delhi should accelerate connectivity projects in South Asia and provide financial support, including loans or grants, to South Asian countries for the execution of these projects(Kumar, 2019). Western writers believe that in response to regional powers imbalances, New Delhi will not only promote connectivity but also support partners in both in South Asia and Africa(Wagner, 2019). Initially, LEP was considered to be in the India's best interest, promoting Asian solidarity(Barua, 2020). However, the priorities have since shifted, with

Northeast India becoming the launchpad for countering Chinese initiatives in the Southeast Asia, particularly the BRI (Barua, 2020).

Chabahar: India-Iran-Afghanistan Corridor, this corridor was the result of long-term planning and was officially announced in 2016 during Narendra Modi's visit to Tehran. It was a move driven by India to counter its rivals, Pakistan and China, which is why New Delhi invested a substantial amount of 6.4 billion dollars for the completion of its first phase. Additionally, India was keen to invest \$50 million in industrial plants, cultural exchanges, trade agreements, and scientific cooperation. One Indian scholar commented on the importance of Chabahar, stating that it offers an alternative to Pakistan or a counter to the Gawadar port (Abraham, 2016). It is India's choice to adopt any approach for its development, but the political objectives tied to Chabahar project cannot be excluded, as most studies view it an alternative to, if not rival of, the BRI and CPEC (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2022). Due to its underlying objectives, India successfully gained covert support from the U.S. and aims to create its own connectivity network, including the establishment of 'Afghanistan-India Air Corridor' and the development of the 'Chabahar Port' in Iran which are apparent counter-strategies against CPEC (N. U. J. Iqbal, 2020). Plans to contain China's growth are not new. As early as May 2007, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe established the "Quad" but it was short-lived due to Australia's fear of economic risks, leading to its withdrawal. Although the Quad dissolved, the underlying intentions of containment were revealed ten years later, in 2017, during the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in Manila. This dialogue among diplomats from Australia, the United States, Japan, and India, gave rise to a "Minilateralistic" approach (Wuthnow, 2018). For Chabahar's implementation, India did not limit itself to Iran and Afghanistan alone; it also signed an agreement with Singapore to use the Changi naval base, which observers believe is intended to offset China's presence in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean (Wang & Ye, 2019).

The "Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (India),

the Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor (India), the Amritsar Delhi Kolkata Industrial Corridor (India), the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, East Coast Economic Corridor (India-Bangladesh-South East Asia), and the Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor (India, Myanmar, Nepal, Tibet, China), among others are the India's initiatives (Wolf, 2020). This network of corridors led one scholar to question whether the Indian government could realistically stop the initiatives sponsored by the BRI and the Chinese government. The scholar suggested that if an alternative course of action is not feasible, the ground realities might compel the Indian government to join the BRI to maximum benefits and avoid potential obstacles (Trembeczki, 2018). Another scholar holds a similar view, stating that "the initiation of BRI is so appealing that even many Indians see it as important for their country's economic uplift, especially since India is in dire need of developing its own infrastructure for future growth (Khurana, 2019). India, Iran, Japan, and South Korea have introduced their own initiatives for transnational connectivity, although the BRI, a Chinese initiative, has spurred other major powers into actions. ASEAN has followed China's lead with the BRI in connecting South-East Asia to Central Asia (Contessi, 2016). If one looks closely at Japan's initiatives, they may find that Japan is also expending a huge amount of \$250 billion on its route to Djibouti across the Indian Ocean (Maçães, 2018).

EU Strategy of Connecting Europe with Asia

Apart from the U.S. and India's initiatives, the EU also devised its own plan aimed at enhancing interconnectivity with Asia, called "The European way to connectivity". It presents its own international connectivity principles, which emphasize sustainability and comprehensiveness based on clear rules (Wolf, 2020). It is also a reaction to the BRI, as the EU is concerned about the 17+1 cooperation between China and 17 Central and Eastern European countries. They fear that the 17+1 initiative could undermine the EU's common position. An EU think-tank clearly stated in its official report that "Analysts welcomed this

initiative as a response to China's BRI (Enrico, 2021). The EU, along with other plans, is also creating "Little Europes" in Eurasia to enhance connectivity and promote economic and cultural integration(Maçães, 2018).

Australia Countermeasures

AUKUS is a new trilateral association of involving Australia, the UK, and the U.S., announced on Sep 15, 2021, with a focus on defense. It has received both appraisal and criticism from within and outside the partner countries. For example, Jeremy Corbyn, a UK parliament member, criticized it as "an association of the Cold War era that will not strive for human rights, justice and peace globally(Jha, 2021). This is all directed against China, as its clear goal is to supply Canberra with nuclear submarines for a "free and open Indo-Pacific". Although Biden did not name China, Chinese embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu responded to the establishment of AUKUS by stating, "Countries should not create external blocs that target or harm the interests of third parties. In particular, they should shed their Cold War mentality and ideological bias(RT, 2021). Peter Jennings, the Executive Director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, commented that the partnership among the UK, the U.S., and Australia is clearly directed against China. He stated that it is a reaction to Beijing's increasing activity (Lee, 2021b). The common perception arising from AUKUS is that England and Washington will support Canberra in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. This support aims to enhance Canberra's Navy, particularly to counter Chinese nuclear powered Vessels in the region(Macias, 2021). AUKUS is not well-received among Chinese netizens. One user remarked that AUKUS means "Australian cries to death", while some scholars have referred to it as interference in internal matters(Wen, 2022).

Eurasian Initiative (EI) of South Korea strategic arrangements

It was proposed in 2013 following the MSR announcement by Park Geun-Hye, the president of South Korea, at a conference in Seoul. Its objectives are to develop approaches for

revolutionizing the global economy, national security, and diplomacy. The core slogan was "one continent, creative continent, and peaceful continent, with a focus on Eurasian economies. The mutual interests are similar to those of the BRI, including the development of a unified system of transport, energy, trade, cultural exchange, economic cooperation, migration of science and technology and improvement of inter-Korean relations based on trust(Day, 2017). Scholars are of the view that while the pattern may be the same, it doesn't mean the objectives are identical. They suggest that it is not a rival to BRI but rather a regional balancer, as it connects all the mentioned countries, which could play an important role in development from Busan to Europe. This route will pass through North Korea, Russia, China and Central Asia, from there, it will extend to Europe(Day, 2017). The argument of cordiality is similar among scholars regarding this project. One of them mentioned, "This South Korea-North Korea-Russia triangulation could contribute to the amelioration of inter-Korean relations(Contessi, 2016).

They signed a trilateral memorandum of understanding in 2014 to link Iran with two Central Asian states while expanding rail and cargo cooperation. It is assumed that this will not only speed up the exchange of goods but also foster trade and cooperation(Abbasova, 2021). This initiative strives to revive Iran's Ancient Silk Road (ASR) by connecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran via railways. This doesn't imply that it is against the BRI, as Iran itself plays a dominant role in China's BRI. Its success, however, is contingent on lifting of sanctions, which could then unlock its potential benefits for Tehran(Contessi, 2016)

Lessons for Türkiye:

This study highlighted various counter-BRI and counter-china infrastructure projects but intentionally overlooked those initiatives that, while alternative to BRI, are not antagonistic towards China. One such example is the North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC) by eight countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), which was designed to connect China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia

as a transport corridor to enhance economic activities (ADB, 2010). Turkish speaking and culturally affiliated countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye, along with other similar ethnic nations, established a cooperation council focused on “Tourism Cooperation”. They refer to this initiative as “the Modern Silk Road” aiming for mutual cooperation and development, as well as the promotion of Tourism along the Ancient Silk Road and in conjunction with the BRI (ModernSilkRoadTour, 2014).

Lei, noted that after the end of the Cold War, the United Nations, the United States, Russia, Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Iran, South Korea, and Japan all proposed their own versions of a “New Silk Road (Lei, 2018, p. 3). On one side, Türkiye launched Development Project as a “New Silk Road” initiative in Iraq (Kenez, 2023), while on the other hand, it started the Tourism Cooperation project. Türkiye must distance itself from political antagonism; otherwise, its projects may face opposition similar to what BRI has encountered (Majid Ali, 2023). Türkiye should leverage its cultural ties to encourage people to people contact among Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu speaking countries, akin to how China has facilitated numerous scholarships and cultural events. As Türkiye established the “World Turkish Business Council (DTIK)” to promote Turkish made products in partner countries, these Councils should also encourage cultural ties alongside business enrichments.

There is no harm in utilizing religious links among Turkish speaking countries. For instance, BIMSTEC promotes and deepens connections through Buddhist tourist circuits. Excluding China and Pakistan from these initiatives is akin to the Abraham Accords 2018, which focused only on Christianity-Islam-Judaism, excluding other religions.

Conclusion:

This study has thoroughly examined the evolving geopolitical landscape, where major powers are increasingly focused on enhancing their influence through ambitious connectivity and infrastructure projects. The Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) by China stands as a central pillar of this global shift, prompting a series of countermeasures and alternative strategies from other nations, particularly India, Japan, the United States, and the European Union.

India's proactive efforts to establish initiatives like the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), and the Chabahar Port project illustrate its determination to carve out a significant role in regional and global connectivity. These initiatives, while presenting themselves as alternatives to the BRI, are often motivated by geopolitical concerns, particularly the desire to counter Chinese influence. However, the study has shown that India's approach sometimes lacks inclusivity, especially towards neighboring countries like Pakistan and China, which could limit the long-term success of these initiatives.

Similarly, Japan, South Korea, and other regional actors have also sought to create their own pathways to connectivity, balancing economic interests with strategic objectives. Japan's extensive investments across the Indian Ocean and its collaboration with India in the AAGC reflect a shared vision to maintain regional stability and counterbalance China's growing presence.

The European Union's "The European Way to Connectivity" initiative further underscores the global response to the BRI, emphasizing sustainability and comprehensive rules as guiding principles for its engagement with Asia. This approach reveals the EU's concerns over China's influence in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly through the 17+1 cooperation format.

Despite these competing initiatives, the study suggests that the most effective strategies for regional and global development are those that embrace inclusivity and cooperation rather than exclusion and rivalry. Projects like the Greater Mekong Subregion's North-South Economic Corridor and Türkiye's efforts to revive the Ancient Silk Road through tourism and cultural cooperation offer models of development that do not inherently oppose the BRI but rather

complement it, fostering a more interconnected and prosperous Eurasian region.

In conclusion, while the geopolitical competition surrounding infrastructure and connectivity initiatives is likely to persist, the path forward should prioritize collaboration and mutual benefit. Nations like Türkiye have an opportunity to position themselves as neutral players, leveraging their cultural and historical ties to bridge divides and contribute positively to regional development. The success of these endeavors will depend not only on political will and economic resources but also on the ability to foster genuine partnerships that transcend narrow strategic interests.

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