

Modi's Strategic Concerns and China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI): A Realist Perspective



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Abstract: This article provides a conceptual and theoretical framework to analyze motivations of China in BRI, which is conceived as a project of the 21st century for the revival of erstwhile Asian values, this paper is not a critique on BRI, but it securitizes India's concern whose policymakers consider that it can harm the strategic interest of India. This paper investigates why Indian policymakers have demonstrated reluctance to join BRI. Moreover, the study also explores the major reasons behind India's belligerent policy against BRI because they conceive it as a danger for their national sovereignty. Besides, this research has applied realist theory as an investigative tool to prove Indian concerns. As a whole, the paper analyses that how far the rivalry between both states can harm regional peace if they fail to find any suitable solution considering the BRI project.

Key Words: India, China. Strategic, BRI, Security

Conceptual Background

'Realism' is a word that is used in diverse topics, but it is more common in the study of International Relations (IR). This theoretical context has seized the central position since the end of World War II in IR. Likewise, in the discipline of IR, realism is the only theory that can explain the importance of national sovereignty since the beginning of political geography in human history. It is a deep-rooted hypothetical viewpoint in IR that elucidates IR in terms of state-centric power. As the function of power by nations toward each other which is occasionally named 'realpolitik or 'power politics' and also recognized as 'Political Realism' (Garst, 1989). It is a regularly accepted theory in IR by the radical predictor. Among its main proponents have been Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes (Spegele, 1996).

Thucydides, in his classical works, wrote on 'Peloponnesian wars', the simple suppositions of realism can be outlined in his conventional judgements (Lebow, 2001). He has pondered the predecessor of a coterie of political realism. He highlighted the notion of power politics. One of his key influences is that the

powerful governed over the feeble as the former has the power to do (Crane, 1998). According to him, the worldwide scheme is lawless, and where there is a leading influence, the merely way to preserve command is through the equilibrium of supremacy; otherwise, the robust exercise their control over the poor (Forde, 1992). He also elucidated the safety quandary, equalization of rule and room for fairness and ethics in IR. In fact, transnational policymaking is determined by the scuffle for dominance, which has its ancestries in humankind justness, regulation, and citizens have either no room or are limited (Forde, 1995).

Following the same ideas, another researcher in 16th Century added significantly to the growth of the scholarship of IR as a political forecaster he scripted about the "real government and the general philosophy of his period" (Machiavelli, 1982). Machiavellianism is a canon that repudiates the significance of decency in policies and claims that to attain firm political conclusions and whatsoever is suitable for a nation; all patterns are acceptable (Machiavelli, 2008). By

maintaining civic welfares as the primary importance, states should practice in a means which will profit the countries ([Machiavelli, 1983](#))—emphasizing that a wise parliament of the nation is to encourage civic virtue and not his personal goods. He observed the state as a prearranged power and highest in its jurisdiction of extraterritorial matters. Countries are ultimate in their own land and follow a mindful strategy of advancement in its dealings with other nations” ([Baron, 1961](#)). The protection of the state in an anarchistic World is one of Machiavelli’s leading dreams ([Machiavelli, 2009](#)). By triumphing, safety for the people is the only method in which a state can defend its dominion. The supporters of Machiavellian practicality in the Nineteenth Century relate it to IR. By declaring that “the sophisticated responsibility of the state is to uphold itself” ([Hulliang, 2017](#)). Another prominent realist scholar in the 17th century offered an adequate sample of robust realism ([Gauthier, 1969](#)). One of his recognized notions is the revolutionary state of description connecting a state of conflict ([Craig, 2013](#)). Following his understanding, world policymaking was considered by a conflict of all against all, and he originates his idea of the situation of combat from his interpretations of equally humanoid type and the condition in which people survive ([Sreedhar, 2010](#)). Nonetheless, states for ‘their own safety’ increase their supremacy, control the hazard of assault or support that may be specified to attackers and pacify and deteriorate their nationals ([Ikenberry, 2011](#)).

Besides, the 20th-century realist researcher advanced wide-ranging intercontinental dealing in realism theory ([Morgenthau, 2004](#)). Explaining that worldwide governments are a battle for supremacy because of the yearning of supremacy or its wish to rule is a key origin of skirmish ([Morgenthau, 1973](#)). As a predecessor of Realism, Hans Morgenthau, 2,500 years later, had to express the description of IR in an identical manner: ‘IR similar to all policymaking, is a clash for authority (Ibid). What policies organize states chase to advance command or to uphold it once another extreme power bullies to hurt the equilibrium of power? Threat and conflict are the chief approaches that states engage in obtaining control; harmonization is the primary approaches that huge supremacies practice to preserve the division of control at what time confronting a perilous enemy ([Kaplan, 2013](#)). With matching, the endangered state receives the problem of discouraging its opponent and pledges capitals to accomplish that purpose. With buck-

passing, the threatened great power attempts to acquire another state to accept the weight of discouraging or conquering the menacing state ([Campbell & O’Hanlon, 2006](#)).

In this context, realism is the hypothetical opinion of the parting of this scholarship, and Realist truth-seekers claim that an increasing power has an extraordinary probability of disrupting the stability of that force in a specific framework, which can make probably suggestion to disagreement ([Kaplan, 2011](#)). Conferring to Realist specialists, developing great influences frequently help to ‘strength’ (warfare, armed arrangements) to alter the current situation in harmony with its own nationwide benefits. On the other hand, prevailing hegemonies sense defenceless by such exploit and consequently are generally firm to reserve their position within the global amphitheatre ([Sheppard, 2016](#)). Some academics fluctuate by affirming that economically industrialized area is the range for “multifaceted interdependence” amongst states. These composite interdependencies can occasionally encourage teamwork ([Marsh & Dreyer, 2003](#)).

From this notion, it can be argued that China is charming progressively into the greater capitalist organization and universally extra symbiotic with other states. They maintain that, thus, China cannot be demarcated as a pragmatic authority that needs to fundamentally transform the existing universal steadiness of dominance ([Pillsbury, 2015](#))—claiming that China’s modifications have progressively biased its foreign policy from communist Maoism to an activist strategist. In unfolding ‘essential Realism’, Dunne and Schmidt put onward three basics mutual to all Realist machineries: ‘statism, survival, self-help’ ([Zhao, 2003](#)). This makes the government an important part of attention and investigation. While the state, which has domination on genuine might, specifies for the safety of its peoples, intercontinental the lack of an over-arching physique hints to unacceptable that ignites states to contest with one another ([Nye, 2004](#)). Eventually, this is a struggle between states for their persistence which is essential before they can transport their other accountabilities. Within do-it-yourself, a state at a worldwide level can accomplish safety, but ambiguity about states purposes can crack security competencies into apparent coercions. Precisely, For many Realists, a dignity of power is essential for permanency in IR ([Wang, 2009](#)).

Keeping in view this realist perspective in IR, the

article investigates that why India is demonstrating some reservations in BRI Project. What are the Indian state-centric factors because of which New Delhi has no confidence in Beijing in terms of BRI? What the policymakers of China should do to gain the confidence of its rival being a responsible upcoming power. These are the questions that this study tries to answer using qualitative methods. Moreover, explaining the primary data through interpretation, description and argumentation, whereas facts have been incorporated from the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India Foreign Office of India and Beijing

BRI and China's Stance

Let me now clarify Chinese perspectives on the BRI. Indeed, when Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the unveiling of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, he laid the framework for growth and speculating businesses that span East Asia and Europe (Tiezzi, 2014). The scheme, ultimately labelled the BRI, nonetheless, occasionally recognized as the New Silk Road, is one of the most determined infrastructure developments ever considered. In retrospect, the Silk Road originated throughout the westward development of China's Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), which copied commerce systems during what are currently Central Asia and contemporary India and Pakistan to the south (Bremzen, 2019). Those roads protracted more than four thousand a long way to Europe. When President Xi proclaimed the enterprise during certified stays to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013 (Ministry of the foreign affairs of the people's republic of china, 2013). Its goal, according to popular Chinese narratives, was to build a massive system of trains, energy tubes, highways, and upgraded border checkpoints both westward—through the rugged former Soviet states—and southward, to Pakistan, India, and Southeast Asia as a whole. They believe that a deal like this would improve Asian connectivity. (Arora, 2015). Likewise, China's complete determination for the BRI is astonishing. Therefore, approximately sixty states accounting for two-thirds of the world's demography—have contracted on to projects or designated an awareness in doing so (Zheng & Tok, 2007). So, it can be anticipated that Beijing has a frank posture on BRI that Beijing doesn't have any erroneous tactical and imperialist targets under the umbrella of BRI, but Beijing only wants to

bring harmony and economic stability along all the stakeholders amalgamated under the umbrella of BRI (Xing, 2016).

But interestingly, New Delhi has serious worries about China's mega-project that China is trying to expand its territory with hidden designs and ambitious policy; therefore, India has demonstrated few reservations to become part and parcel of the BRI. As Indian Policymakers issued in official speeches and statements that New Delhi can't join BRI at the cost of its national interests. In this context, now the paper investigates India's stance keeping in view BRI's basic agendas which have made India cautions at the regional as well as global level.

Modi's Concerns: Realism at the Center Stage

Explaining New Delhi's viewpoint, it is very clear in Indian narratives that India has real apprehensions on China's BRI project; Indian policymakers have worries about China's activities near the Indian Ocean as they conceive it as a strategic challenge against Indian nationalist interest⁰. They think China has been encircling India through its naval existence by constructing groundworks in South Asian states and through the "String of Pearl" strategy (Kaplan, 2009). This tactic is concentrated on snowballing China's armed, ambassadorial and administrative influence in Asia (Iizuyama & Kurita, 2017). Every treasure in this string symbolizes a scope of dominance, which China is frustrating to safe along the deliberately situated only 240 miles from the Straits of Hormuz (Pehrson, 2006). In Sri Lanka, the Hambantota harbor is of countless meaning as it is roughly 6 nautical miles away from the main Indian Ocean's east-west transporting direction. China is also engrossed in the advancement of the Chittagong port capacity and to determine its relation to Yunan province in China via Myanmar. Myanmar has an abundant tactical position as an ocean opening, which would simplify the current of possessions (oil in certain) to China without fleeing through the defenseless waters of the Malacca Passage (Kahandawaarachchi, 2015). The 20th-century strategist and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan had forecast that "whoever pedals the Indian Ocean controls Asia (Andrea, 2014). The goal of the globe will be clear in these seas, as this ocean is the major of the seven oceans in the twenty-first century." India's coastal waters run from the Bay of Bengal, between

Myanmar and Indonesia (the eastern Indian Ocean), the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia to the east, and Europe to the West, with the Asian landmass to the east and Europe to the West. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which is believed to be replete with energy assets, accounts for more than half of the world's marine oil industry. (Lehr, 2002). The IOR is the center of most significant tactical chokepoints in the worldwide nautical occupation, formulating naval safety and entry to water vigorous to a state's authority and improvement. China needs to realize maritime dominance, therefore, demanding to contest the US and its situation as a global giant (Nye, 2015). The foremost unprejudiced of this policy is the strategic settlement of these treasures in order to make a shackle of hearts that can help as equally economical and military aptitude in the IOR. In the 21st century, a competition has been commenced for economic struggle and supremacy over the trade paths, exclusively with regard to maritime safety in the IOR, as it is deliberately very imperative and presently controlled by the US, India and its allies and China on the other hand which has been looking for to expand its focus in the IOR by engaging the region under the umbrella of BRI (ACCA Global, 2017).

Furthermore, most Indian and foreign narratives construe the "BRI" projected by China is made from a strategic viewpoint, then an economic angle (Sachdeva, 2018). For India, to avert China from constructing an economic scheme that is devoted to China in its courtyard is extra significant than building a local economic procedure conquered by itself (Cheong, 2018). Therefore, this clues to the outcome that India manages to assume a pre-emption strategy rather than a settlement strategy in distributing with the medium and small-sized states in its neighboring territory (Rana, 2017). In exercise, India's plan concerning the South Asian Region (SAR) has been wavering between open-handed assistance and founding circumvention, and India continuously decides the prevention dogma as its foremost rule (Sahasrabuddhe, 2015).

In states where India has solid backing is Nepal and Sri Lanka, India favors generating dynamic incomes to show its hegemony and disgust China's provocation, and it even does not hesitate to interfere in interior legislation of these countries (Schaffer, 2011). With respect to those countries where India doesn't have enough impact, i.e. Bangladesh and Pakistan. India promises to an opponent with China by

many-sided and two-pronged teamwork so as to avoid these states' wide-ranging hold of China (Baruah & Mohan, 2018). Considering Pakistan, India has reservations because of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); also, India expresses very fine that it is unbearable for Pakistan to distance itself from China just because of India's anticipation (Jamal, 2016). Nevertheless, meanwhile, while the two countries' prime ministers shake hands and talk graciously, India never undisturbed its armed restriction over Islamabad (Wenwen, 2018). This is an evidence that, in India's understanding, the resolution with Pakistan should never be accomplished at the cost of its own safekeeping and hegemony being opposed (Small, 2014). Perceptibly, India doesn't partake the competence to start the supreme and high-class device in the SAR on the basis of mere neo-realist benefit. And New Delhi's interference in Sri Lanka and Nepal—two gears in which India has recycled its force most vehemently with the greatest willpower is not very fruitful (Mukherjee, 2014). India doesn't desire victory over medium and small-sized countries in the zone by bountiful economic and cultural paybacks; nonetheless, it prospects to force these kingdoms to be passive by exhibiting their armed might (Baruah, 2018). This is owing to that India's complete tactical task is to form and equalize against Beijing and avert much development of China's possibility of authority. Besides, it is also owing to that the temporary price of discouragement is moderately trivial and doesn't necessitate India to display much friendliness (Ruan et al., 2019). In India's interpretation, its approach to SAR can be measured as a triumph only if it avoids China's presence in the region or confines or deteriorates China's actions in the belt (Djankov & Miner, 2016). The SAR bordered with India is not only very vigorous in leading ambassadorial actions, but also very strongminded; because it doesn't vacillate to capitalize abundant labors, and even is not frightened of disrespecting intercontinental rules when essential, which confirms that a strong boldness of India to chase the goals of sophistication. What's additional, in fact, India even didn't brand labors to conceal its search of exclusivity in directing diplomatic undertakings in SAR (Sakhuja & Chan, 2016).

An overall appraisal about the sensitivities of Indian academics on the ground of approach and program learning about China's BRI. Plus, he celebrated that these Indian researchers pressure that, even if India contributes to the BRI, India nevertheless

desires to bound China's effect in the IOR ([Garofano & Dew, 2013](#)). Indian policymakers grip diverse thoughts toward the BRI. However, Indian narratives have one view collectively that India should be very watchful about China's entering into SAR and the IOR, which have always been restrained by India to be its range of sway ([Khalid, 2013](#)). The solitary transformation between their interpretations is that one group backs challenging China and jamming China's growth in the area, and the other cluster counsels appeasement with China by permitting China's restricted contribution in difficulties in the SAR ([Michel, 2012](#)). Furthermore, once India supposes that the external strategy of a nearby SAR might root it to outflow out of India's device, India will directly modify its overseas strategy concerning that country to unchallenged local hegemonism ([Cheng, 2010](#)).

Moreover, Modi's management, the procedures of every government of India, what preserves unaffected is India's approach of reflecting SAR to be its private land. No doubt, such a stance is not reproduced in India's plans observing Southeast Asia and Central Asia. India has not recognized China's BRI, which it outlooks with misgivings. Tanvi Madan, director of the India Project at the Brookings Institution, appeared to the Commission that many Indian politicians condemn Beijing's "unilateralist" tactic to BRI ([Kulkarni, 2017](#)). Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar labeled BRI as a "nationwide enterprise developed with domestic concentration," noticing, "The Chinese invented it, fashioned a draft. It wasn't a transnational ingenuity they deliberated with the whole world, with countries that are absorbed or exaggerated by it ([Krishnan, 2018](#)).

Scholars and analysts who met with the Commission in India highlighted that the Indian administration is chiefly concerned with CPEC, the flagship of China's BRI. In June 2015, India professed that CPEC was "not suitable" because it would passage through the land India asserts in the doubtful Kashmir region ([Khan, 2012](#)). Likewise, forecasters at the Observer Research Foundation, an Indian think tank, said that an official signal to CPEC would assist as an actual legitimization to Pakistan's claims on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir ([Behera, 2007](#)). Meanwhile, India is participating in substitute connectivity agendas that evade China and Pakistan. In May 2016, India used a contract to develop a transit corridor between Kabul and Tehran, which is connected to Iran's Chabahar

port, which is located across the border from Pakistan's Chinese-backed Gwadar Port ([Khetran, 2018](#)). Indian speakers told the Commission that India is implementing the harbour agreement with Iran in part to avoid the safety and financial risks that China's BRI programmes, particularly CPEC, would bring. ([Qingxin, 2006](#)).

Whereas the Modi Administration's approximately three years tenure, in which one of its chief triumph tiers are pondered its overseas strategy. There is barely a significant world trailblazer with whom Prime Minister Modi has not met face to face and not advanced a level of tolerant ([Chandra, 2017](#)). More crucially, excepting very few exceptions, such private calculations have produced outcome. In what way is it, then that previous Prime Ministers, demonstrating the very similar India with its huge economic possibility and geo-strategic connotation, flopped to surprise the international society or gain over its uninterrupted provision? In problems that fear this state ([Tharoor, 2011](#)). But it does not mean that the entire world has unexpectedly awakened towards the massive marketplace in India; this understanding had begun after the prominent monetary liberalization in the initial 1990s ([Gupta et al., 2008](#)). It also cannot be considered that the West, particularly the US, has only now revealed India's prominence as a 'neutralizer' to China's rise in the Asian territory. Likewise, India's physical location hasn't transformed since independence, nor has China's determinations industrialized immediately, so to speak ([Rana, 2017](#)).

Indeed, the variance is that for the first time in contemporary periods, the nation has such a Prime Minister who is so decisive. Modi and his Government are not reliant on either partners or extra-constitutional power hubs and can yield choices without any interference. The international public has assumed this opportune truth and communicated its gratitude ([Lim et al., 2016](#)).

Moreover, Modi approached to dominate the Prime Minister's space with a standing of being a realistic organizer. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister's overseas strategy could not have been a success only on the foundation of his identity or on the countless rewards India deals. To advance recognition among the individuals, it had to be understood as dynamic Indian benefits at every stage ([Simbar & Rezapour, 2020](#)).

This could also apply to strategic settlements and

financial gains. Three years later, the arrangement is still working perfectly. Modi Management's external programme is divided into four sections. The first is to establish relationships with traditional partners such as Moscow, Kabul, Damascus, Ramallah, Kathmandu, Thimphu, and Port Louis ([Schaffer, 2011](#)). The next is to belligerently follow greater connections with comparatively latest acquaintances, Washington, the Gulf States and the West ([Singh, 2017](#)). The additional is to extend collaboration with the adjacent locality. Besides, it is to uncover mutual ground with states that protect approaching in and going out of the Indian relationship circle Male, Colombo, Dhaka, Tehran, Ankara. But interestingly, both China and India are on the same page on the issues of climate change and economic interest, but BRI is a real hurdle among the two nations, particularly for India ([Tendulkar, 2012](#)). As Beijing's exposed help to Pakistan in the face of Pakistani engrossment in extremist happenings in India has continued a contest for New Delhi. The more important element in Pakistan, and no Administration — surely not a 'powerful' Modi one — is in a place to make a trade with China as long as Pakistan agrees to restore its behaviors. Even now, the Modi Government has achieved in isolating Islamabad globally; excluding China, none actually believes Pakistan (The world financial review, 2018). The shape in the Modi Government's foreign policy is not just obvious but practical too for the national interest of India. Furthermore, it would be easier to understand in theoretical expressions that why Modi Government has not taken any interest in the sensation of BRI as a major investor. Realists, on the other hand, emphasize "power politics" and the pursuit of "national interests" ([Sachdeva, 2016](#)). In contrast, the Idealist believes in a sweet-smelling view of world diplomacy, in which a nation's global affairs endeavor should be guided by goodness and beliefs. Whatever the conflicting viewpoints, there is widespread agreement on the three core ideas of realism, and the Modi government has made a success of its foreign policy with realist measures. The first is National Focus, the second is National Strength, and the third is Domestic Harmony. ([Chacko, 2013](#)).

Therefore, as they enter their fourth year in office, Prime Minister Modi and his government have a long list of unresolved foreign policy projects ([Hall, 2019](#)). The goodwill is there, the aim is clear, the international community has a high level of trust in India, and the policy direction is clear ([Karnad, 2018](#)).

Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy has remained rooted in realism because it is the only tactic that can move the country forward in these unsettled times, and it is this tactic that is the root of Indian suspicion of the BRI, which they see as a welcome death or invitation to trouble for their nationalist agendas. ([Hall, 2016](#)).

Conclusion

This paper has explored that India's reservations about Chinese-sponsored schemes through the BRI eventually revealed a few important apprehensions. India has concerned that Chinese-funded infrastructure schemes may track indecent or recognized intercontinental principles and customs. Besides, it can destabilize Indian authority rights on uncertain boundary grounds and other sanctuary securities, exclusively China and Pakistan; and allow China's bigger geopolitical stimulus and unwarranted commercial and diplomatic influence over the policymaking choices of India's nationals in ways that detriment India. Their stance on the BRI was indicated by its absence from the Belt and Road Forum. The Indian government's declaration in May 2017 reflects India's view that the BRI is not based on ideals such as equal supremacy, the rule of law, and transparency. It also claims that in some beneficiary countries, creativity leads to unsustainable debt obligations. For example, Colombo's growing Chinese debt is causing concern about an unmanageable balance issue. Similarly, as a continuation of its response to the meeting, India exaggerated its concerns in a June 2017 joint meeting with Washington. According to Indian narratives, CPEC and Kashmir are a disputed areas, which is a destruction of its dominion, and partaking in the BRI would challenge New Delhi's situation on the fight, as China chains Pakistan's interpretation of the disagreement. Whereas, on the flip side, some advocates of Indian contribution sharp to exact habits that India could advantage from the BRI. The most understandable sample is that the BRI would deliver a technique to assist the state's internal substructure developments. To those concerned about Indian involvement in the BRI, the fact that connectivity is gaining traction in the Indo-Pacific underscores the need for New Delhi to consider how to strengthen its own monetary policy on commerce and trade issues in order to avoid falling behind. Despite these potential repercussions, Indian opposition to the BRI appears to have gained ground.

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