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To Cooperate, or Not to Cooperate: Assessing Pay-offs of the Belt and Road Initiative for India

Obja Borah **Hazarika*** Dibrugarh University, India

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the implications of China's One Belt One Road project on India. While the OBOR has generated trepidation in India with regard to the project being a cover for China's intentions to smother India's strategic space, embolden its neighbours with projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and increase China's presence in India's neighbourhood, it is argued in this paper that participation in this project could outweigh possible deleterious outcomes and would be better than sitting it out altogether. It is argued that overtures by China to India to join the OBOR should not be eschewed and instead should be consummately debated as participation in this multimodal project would make available for India an avenue to mold it in a way which is not inimical to its visions of regional balance as well as afford it with economic prospects in tune with its ambitions under the Act East Policy, while at the same time enable it to equipoise any strategic space which would be accrued by China.

Keywords: India, China, OBOR, BRI, CPEC, strategy, economy

1. The Belt and Road Initiative: An Introduction

Scripting a successful rise to hegemony in international affairs in the 21st century is even more formidable than it was in previous centuries given the fact that basing such a rise solely on hard power has been made undesirable with the evolution of rules and norms regarding the manner in which states ought to behave in the international domain. While China has been keen to dispel arguments that it seeks hegemonic status, its policies are in step with those of a rising power seeking to emerge as a dominant player in international politics whether in deciding the global agenda, framing of international norms or in ensuring that international decisions which are agreed upon ensure benefits for China. China has also undertaken some policies which reflect its desire to rise as a crucial and indisputable player both in economic and strategic matters, and one of the latest among these is the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project which is gargantuan in imagination and will be in its implementation as well. The massiveness of the project is perhaps a manifestation of China's vision of its influence given its rising economic and military profile and can thus be viewed as a reflection of the grand and perhaps hegemonic role it envisages for itself in world affairs.

Since China's economic reforms began in 1978, the country has been economically gaining strength and is currently positioned as the second largest economy in the world. The OBOR Project, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been launched with a view to ensure the continuation of such economic growth by overcoming challenges to it. The BRI consists of a "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (MSR) and will link Asia, Africa, Europe and South Pacific. The ancient Silk Routes which bore the happy burden of ideas, people and goods in the ancient times and connected Asia, Africa and Europe has been harnessed by China as

examples of mutually beneficial historical antecedents of the BRI. The "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" released by China states that the BRI aims to bring benefits to all member countries by creating a regional economic grouping based on openness, balance, inclusiveness, mutual benefit and common ideology. The document mentions the need to enhance China's development and security, improve connectivity and build infrastructure along the countries involved in the BRI (National Development and Reform Commission, MFA and MOFCOM, 2015). In order to achieve these objectives the proposed SREB will link China to Europe through Central Asia and the MSR will connect the coastal regions of China with those in Africa, and then through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea. The MSR will extend from China to the Strait of Malacca from where it will extend to ports in South Asia and then on to African ports by crossing the Indian Ocean. On the finance front, China has spearheaded several institutions and funds to facilitate the connectivity infrastructure under the BRI including the China Investment Corporation, China Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS New Development Bank and a US\$40 billion Silk Road Fund. The scheme also includes "large industrial parks and special economic zones (SEZs) coupled with manufacturing plants" and "investments in shipping, construction, energy, commerce, tourism, information technology, biotechnology and alternative energy. Beyond this, the MSRI [i.e. 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative] will encompass trade fairs, exhibition halls and other structures that facilitate and support economic activity" along the BRI (Blanchard and Flint, 2017: 227).

The BRI would thus enable commerce between commodity-rich countries and nations with large markets. The BRI in essence is a "spatial fix" as it can be comprehended as an attempt to restructure geography in order to ensure the continued economic growth of China as it envisages the creation of "economic corridors" which "are essential for building connections across the geography of countries" at different levels of capitalist development (Palit, 2017: 2).

Manuel Castells's metaphor of a "network society" is also useful in analyzing the BRI. According to Castells, flow of capital information, technology and elites between global networks of metropolitan regions have become the dominant spatial configuration instead of national spaces. The BRI can thus be seen as an attempt to increase free flow of capital, products and technology and although the BRI covers entire continents, the "configuration of these flows are to be predominantly across a network of major urban nodes" or "major urban clusters such as port cities, international airport hubs and inland cities, linked together by a network of major transport arteries" (Summers, 2016: 1636).

There are several perceptions with regard to the BRI. Chinese officials stress that the BRI is intended to build a community based on trust, economic integration, inclusiveness, commonality of interests, responsibilities and a shared future (China Daily, 1st February 2015). Others view the BRI as a plan to address China's economic interests and as a method to create China's economic dominance as it may allow "massive asymmetries that China can leverage to flood foreign markets with goods, lock participant countries into supplier dependencies, ensnare borrowers in debt bondage, control higher value-added production, and dominate countries hosting its MNCs" (Blanchard, 2017: 250). Further, the BRI has been perceived as reflecting both hard and soft power of China. Its soft power is reflected in the economic, cultural and institutional objectives of the project while its hard power objectives are reflected in the construction of "dual-use ports that berth its cargo ships and military vessels, as China constructs overseas basing arrangements and maintenance facilities in Indian Ocean region (IOR)

places such as Djibouti and Gwadar (Pakistan) that allow it to send forces to protect its nationals, ships, and investments, and as China dispatches its amphibious vessels, warships, and submarines to ensure sea lines of communication remain open and to deter or defeat threats (e.g., piracy)" (Blanchard, 2017: 251).

While falling well short of China's soft as well as hard power, India too harbours a desire to ensure that its rise continues in an unmitigated manner. There are several issues pertaining to the OBOR which can prove detrimental to India's economy, security, and more worryingly, its sovereignty. These issues will be examined in this paper with an emphasis on analysing the manner in which India seeks to address concerns arising out of the OBOR. It is argued that given India's unequal position compared to that of China and since the latter holds the key to unlocking several opportunities for India in the international and regional realms, it would be imprudent to shun overtures by China to be part of some aspects of the OBOR. It is also contended in the paper that India should delink the CPEC from the rest of the envisioned infrastructural links as India, if on board the OBOR, can reap benefits and perhaps even mold the manner in which the intricate lattice of communication and infrastructural networks are realized which would enable India to strengthen her own economy and security and create a complex interdependence with China, thereby segueing relations between the two from friction to cooperation.

2. Contextualizing the BRI

Domestic, economic and strategic concerns of China underlie the BRI. Geopolitics as well as the infrastructure building capacities of China drives the conceptualization of the BRI. The multifaceted and mutable initiative seeks to ascertain China's economic growth and geopolitical prominence in the region as well as the globe. One of the major reasons which underlie the BRI is its role in bringing a balance to the lopsided development of the different parts of China. Eastern and coastal regions of China were favoured by the opening-up strategy followed since Deng Xiaoping's rule which led its western and southern regions to lag behind in terms of development. The lopsided development in China was further buttressed by the landlocked nature of its western and southern regions and their proximity to volatile neighbouring countries. Prior to the BRI, China had attempted to close the gap between its east and west by emphasizing on the development of its western regions in the form of promoting greater investment as well as sub-national diplomacy of these landlocked regions. The BRI thus can be seen as partly reflecting the extension of previous policies of China such as 'Develop the West' and 12th five-year plan whereby the development of the west and south of China was being promoted (Summers, 2016: 1632). The BRI is an upgradation of these frameworks whereby the opening-up of areas such as Yunnan and Xinjiang would be pursued by creating "institutional and infrastructural linkages with neighbouring provinces in China" and linking them with markets of West Asia, South Asia and beyond with a view to achieve development (ibid.: 1633).

China's economy is also facing certain challenges which are sought to be met by the opportunities which are expected to be opened up by the implementation of the BRI. The challenges to China's economy include slower economic growth due to excess capacity in industry, burden of debt, and property market challenges. The projects to be implemented under the BRI, it is assumed, would alleviate some of these economic roadblocks faced by China and accelerate employment and the production of goods and services in the country as well as provide markets for China's firms. The BRI would also enhance China's resource security by enabling China to gain access to resources as well as ensure that "there is sufficient production of the resources China needs" (Blanchard, 2017: 256). Further, the BRI would provide opportunities for China to invest its US\$4 trillion worth of foreign exchange reserves. The initiative will also promote the internationalisation of the Yuan which will enable the issue of Yuan bonds by China's firms to fund the project. China's clout in the international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund is expected to grow as the demand for the Yuan increases with a rise in trade carried out through the routes envisaged under the BRI. The involvement of China Investment Corporation, China Development Bank, AIIB and BRICS New Development Bank in financing the BRI will also promote the internationalization of the Yuan.

Strategic concerns form yet another significant motive behind the BRI. China is interested in maintaining a large presence in the Strait of Malacca through which much of its trade passes. The BRI will enable China to diversify its trade routes over and above the Strait of Malacca. China is also interested in ensuring that its influence is maintained in its surrounding regions as well as its extended neighbourhood such as the Indian Ocean, which is straddled by important trade routes as well as the energy-rich region of West Asia. Since the new administration in the United States of America under Donald J. Trump has all but made redundant the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership and the rebalance to Asia, the BRI can no longer be viewed as a counter to these projects which were seen to be aimed at isolating China. Nonetheless, a successfully implemented BRI which excludes the US but includes several of its allies may elevate China's status as a regional as well as a global power while ensuring the relative decline of the US.

Regional integration though the BRI intends to further boost economic cooperation between member countries and China. China stands to benefit from the BRI amidst demands for greater exploration of minerals and diversification of China's exports and imports due to the identification of new drivers of trade. The BRI is intended to increase the reach of China's technology and investment which is expected to yield greater exploration of resources which in turn would cater to increasing energy demands of China. China's BRI would allow it to increase its economic as well as political influence in the countries along the project.

Through the BRI, China intends to posit itself as a bridge between resource-rich developing economies and the capital, advanced technology, and know-how from the developed world (Zhao, 2015: 103-104). The BRI will also enable China to cultivate better relations with its western neighbours which it intends to do by way of "creating jobs, bettering infrastructure, upgrading transportation, diversifying exports, enhancing economic competiveness, and financing local innovations" in these countries (Zhao, 2015, p. 104).

3. Implications of the BRI

The prime implication for those countries involved in the BRI is expected to be an improved trade relationship between them and China. For most of the member countries, China is already the dominant market and investment and trade partner. The BRI would further entrench China's economic as well as political presence in these countries. The BRI was initially met with trepidation by many countries. Although China has been able to allay concerns of most countries, there have been some hurdles to its projects. For instance, Sri Lanka which was unable to pay its debts to China had to enter into a debt equity swap which allowed China to gain a 70 percent stake in the Hambantota Port by paying US\$1.12 billion for a lease agreement of 99 years. This swap has been interpreted as effectively ceding the country's sovereignty to China. Moreover, Pakistan terminated the plan to build the Diamer-Bhasha dam which was a part of the CPEC due to concerns over financing terms laid down by China. In another instance, a BRI-related project – the 1200 MW Budhi Gandaki hydropower plant which was estimated to cost US\$2.5 billion – was scrapped by Nepal over bidding irregularities.

Despite such disconcerting events, none of these countries have avowedly dismissed their involvement in the BRI possibly due to the benefits they would receive by participating in such a multimodal network. First, it is contended that the BRI would also provide opportunities for the member countries to access better markets, investments and enhance trade with the rest of the countries in the initiative and beyond as the project would ensure improved connectivity and infrastructure in these countries. Further, countries along the BRI due to a greater convergence in their policies of trade may also promote closer political ties between them. Moreover, a shared platform will be provided by the BRI and its institutions to a heterogeneous group of countries thereby promoting closer cooperation and understanding between them. In addition, the BRI will provide a milieu for resourcerich but infrastructure-deficient countries to bridge this gap. Countries with large markets but lacking in industrial development will also be provided opportunities through the BRI to address such challenges. Countries along the BRI would also benefit from multimodal connectivity. Landlocked countries along the BRI would also be provided with connectivity which offers them outlets into sea routes as envisaged under the project. Such investments are plausible as they will benefit China's industries as well. Countries with relatively poor development such as Cambodia and Laos and others in Africa could achieve economic benefit from the BRI as they could become preferred locations for China's investments for constructing steel and cement plants and they could also reap the benefits from possible resource

exploration technology provided by China. New industries, greater technology, multimodal connectivity and new markets are but some of the benefits awaiting those countries along the BRI scheme.

4. Divergent Views in India on Joining the BRI

India and China have had a tumultuous history, which continues to cast its shadow on present ties as well. Garver (2001) points out that India and China's search for accommodation has been ruptured by "one limited but intense war, a half a dozen militarized confrontations, dozens of instances of hard political-diplomatic struggle, chronic conflict over national policy, and layer upon layer of mutual suspicion". Frankel and Harding (2004: 40) succinctly sum up four broad perceptions harbored by circles in India with regard to China: one view perceives China as a threat as it could emerge in a much more assertive manner; a second view opines that while some convergence between India and China exists yet certain calculations of strategic interest differ from India's which amounts to security problems for India; thirdly, it is viewed that China may not be prone to accepting India's rise as a regional and world power; and fourthly, it is perceived in India that there is ground for India and China to avert future problems through diplomacy and other action.

There are also divergent views with regard to BRI's implications for India. Some are of the view that it would be prudent not to be a part of the BRI as it is nothing but a Chinese veneer to increasing its influence in the Indian Ocean and South Asia at the cost of India's (Chellaney, 2015). It has been contended that China is a revisionist power seeking to establish its hegemonic status by restructuring the existing maritime status quo (Chellaney, 2016). It has also been pointed out that India's sovereignty would be adversely impacted if it accepts parts of the BRI such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which has been planned in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). There are others, however, who argue that it would be economically as well as strategically prudent to be a part of the BRI in order to reap the benefits of infrastructure and communication links envisaged under the scheme. Infrastructure cooperation with China is deemed essential for India (Saran, 2015). As India cannot block other countries from joining the BRI, India should also seek to positively influence it (Mohan, 2015). They contend that as part of the BRI India could shape the eventual trade, financial and transportation architecture, which emerges under the BRI. As a part of the BRI, India would be able to influence its evolution in terms favourable to it, which will not be possible if it decides to shun China's overtures to join it. Nonetheless, officially India has refused to cooperate or be a part of the BRI, despite welcoming overtures from China.

On 25 May 2017, in what has been construed by many as a response to the BRI, India and Japan launched a vision document for Asia-Africa Growth Corridor or AAGC at the African Development Bank meeting in Gujarat which outlined four aims of the project including development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, capacity and skill enhancement and people-to-people partnerships. It was enunciated in the vision document (2017) that the AAGC intends to create "new production channels, expanding and deepening the existing value chains, ensure economic and technical cooperation for enhancing capacities, facilitate a greater flow of peoples between the two continents, and achieve sustainable growth over the longer term. The AAGC will be developed through quality infrastructure and complemented by digital and regulatory connectivity." Digital connectivity will also support the growth of innovative technology and services between Asia and Africa.

The AAGC has certain differences in comparison to the BRI. It has been pointed out by Panda (2017) that the BRI is a unilateral initiative whereas the AAGC is a bilateral one and that the latter is founded on a consultative basis while the BRI does not have a similar multi-partybased decision-making basis. The funding structure of the BRI and the AAGC are also not similar as the former is based primarily on funds from China's banks while the AAGC will be based on funds from private, government, and also international banks. The BRI is also much more extensive compared to the AAGC. Nonetheless, there are conceivable overlaps between the two schemes as both are connectivity schemes to accelerate economic development. It has been contended that the AAGC "currently neither poses a challenge to China's BRI, nor is its mandate as comprehensive" (Panda 2017: 9). China, in the state-run *Global Times*, has enunciated that India and Japan are free to embark on any new connectivity issue but it should not be designed in a way that seeks to counterbalance the BRI as the routes of the two projects have a considerable overlap (Xiao, 2017).

5. Should India Cooperate or Not Cooperate? – A Prisoner's Dilemma

Currently, according to India's official position it has sought not to cooperate with China on the BRI. In May 2017, India articulated its position on the BRI in a response to a query on the participation of India in the BRI Forum, which China had invited India to attend. India's Ministry of External Affairs (2017) outlined that India was keen to ensure that connectivity projects were based on "international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality", and India's Ministry of External Affairs also outlined that "Connectivity initiatives must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burden for communities; balanced ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards; transparent assessment of project costs; and skill and technology transfer to help long term running and maintenance of the assets created by local communities. Connectivity projects must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity". Such rationalizations have been provided as justifications of India's stance not to cooperate on the BRI with China.

This section alludes to game theory, or more specifically the "prisoner's dilemma" model, to show what underlies India's move not to cooperate. It is also contended here that changing a strategy from not cooperating to cooperating would render India with greater pay-offs. The "prisoner's dilemma" model is one kind of game under the game theory, which implies a formal structure used to comprehend interaction between humans or states. Game theory helps make prediction of human behavior and outcomes of their behavior and is supposed to help in strategizing by helping a player make best decisions by anticipating others' decisions. A game consists of a set of players and a set of strategies for each player, such as "to cooperate" (C) or "not to cooperate" (NC). Game theory assumes that the players are rational actors who understand that their actions affect the actions of other actors and that they tend to maximize utility and make decisions in pursuit of their own interests. Each strategy a player chooses would give them certain pay-offs and in the "prisoner's dilemma" model it is contended that rational actors would choose that option which provides them with maximum pay-offs or benefits. In the "prisoner's dilemma" model it is contended that the behavior of others influences the choices of a player. A Nash equilibrium (NE) is said to have been reached if the strategy of the other is kept fixed and the player changes his/her own strategy to see if they have any incentive to change their strategy; if they do not have any incentive to change their strategy then a Nash equilibrium is said to have formed.1

While a pay-off matrix for the BRI is difficult to design given that India and China are unequal actors, yet the overall schema of the "prisoner's dilemma" model can be used to assess which option would lead to better pay-offs. Out of the two options available to India of cooperating and not cooperating, according to the official positions of India, it calculates maximum pay-offs in not cooperating while China, which had invited India to join the BRI, sees maximum pay offs in cooperating. Such a stand leads to two NE. One when India and China do not cooperate (NC,NC) and the other when they cooperate (C,C). However, despite the emergence of two Nash equilibriums, as India has decided to not cooperate, it implies that it views that NC,NC would lead to greater pay-offs than C,C.

While India and China are unequal actors, given the economic, military and other differentials, these two players and their responses is represented in a prisoner's dilemma in this article to provide a model of their behavior. The next section uses theories of cooperation in an attempt to show that keeping China's strategy of cooperation fixed if India changes its strategy to C it is benefitted with much better payoffs than NC. Thereby, I contend that the NE of C,C outweighs the NE of NC,NC for India.

6. Factors Underlying India's Refusal to Join the BRI

It has been pointed out that although the BRI would bring much needed investments into India, India's general wariness of China leads it to be sceptical of the initiative (Sakhuja, 2014). There are several security concerns of India arising from the BRI. India is concerned about China's intense network of connectivity corridors planned around India. Such connectivity is of concern for India as it is felt that China will use such connectivity lines to increase not only its trade with these countries but also its strategic influence in these countries thereby possibly undermining India's economic and security relationships with them. Of particular concern to India are China's claims over certain regions in Northeast India such as Arunachal Pradesh as well as overall increase in China's influence in India's turbulent North Eastern Region (NER). The series of multimodal connectivity planned around the countries neighbouring the North Eastern Region of India provides a basis for India's concern pertaining to China's intentions with regard to the region as they would enhance China's access to this region.

Another security concern of India pertains to China's growing presence in Pakistan. China's intention to increase its strategic presence in Pakistan is manifested in the form of the plan to construct the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Such a corridor would impinge on India's sovereignty, embolden Pakistan's claims on the territory and increase China's influence in the region. China's presence in Pakistan would also be bolstered if it goes ahead with its plan to supply eight type 039 A submarines to Pakistan (Nataraj and Shekhani, 2015: 69). Such weaponry being delivered to Pakistan would further militarize the region and could result in the spread of an arms rivalry in South Asia and beyond. China's maritime facilities which have been planned in Pakistan would obligate Pakistan to serve the security interests of China, which would be adversative to India as such presence could be leveraged by China to increase its presence in the Indian Ocean as well. Greater Chinese presence in Pakistan would enable China to use Pakistan as a conduit for channeling its weaponry into the region in case of a conflict in the region which would be detrimental to India and would prohibit India from being able to ward off possible incursions along Indian regions which are claimed by China (ibid.).

India is also concerned with regard to the fact that "the 'Southern Corridor' through Myanmar would involve several new connections to the Indian Ocean, including the Kunming-Yangon road and river route, new links to the Myanmar port of Kyaukpyu, and potentially, the 'BCIM Corridor" (Brewster, 2017: 282). India's concerns pertain to the issue that the "trans-Myanmar and trans-Pakistan projects, if completed, will have major economic and strategic implications for the region" as these "connections could stimulate considerable economic development in the land-locked provinces of Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, and lead to an expansion of China's economic and political influence in Pakistan and Myanmar and other neighbouring states" (ibid.: 284). Development of Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan could also be detrimental for Northeast India if simultaneous development of this region is not achieved as it would not have the economic clout to mold decision-making or influence agenda-setting in regional organizations such as the Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) which has the subregions of Yunnan and Northeast India as stakeholders.

7. Why India Feels Cooperating Will Lead to Fewer Pay-offs

This section seeks to explain the rationalizations of India as mentioned above which prevent it from cooperating with China on the BRI. Cooperation between states in international politics has been theorized as having occurred if states change their behavior to the preference of other states by coordinating their policies (Keohane, 1986). This implies that state behavior is altered to ensure the negative consequences for other states is mitigated and is geared towards certain goals; and amounts to the actors involved getting some gains. Cooperation is understood as opposed to conflict or unilateral behavior, which does not taken into consideration impact on other states. Cooperation, thus, is considered achieved in international politics if there is mutual policy coordination to realize joint gains. Given that India has continued to shun China's overtures to join the BRI it can be assumed that cooperation, which includes mutual policy coordination to realize joint gains, does not yet exist.

Cooperation between states has been theorized to occur between states in different ways. Axelrod (1984) posits that states cooperate to realize absolute gains as they seek to maximize their utility. However given the prevalence of anarchy in the world, Axelrod (1984) asserts that reciprocity cannot be maintained due to cheating and lack of sanctions. Thus the tit-for-tat approach, which means changing a player's strategy to one which is an optimum response to the strategy of the other player is the best approach to ensure cooperation of parties involved. Furthermore, Axelrod (1984) posits that the assumption that states exist in an anarchic world signifies a non-cooperative "prisoner's dilemma" approach. Following Axelrod's theorization, given the domination of a realist understanding of the world where anarchy predominates the worldview of those in power, where sanctions and cheating cannot be prevented, may underlie India's refusal to cooperate in the BRI.

Keohane (1986) asserts that cooperation is achieved by reciprocity as states are rewarded for cooperating while punished for defecting. In the "prisoner's dilemma" model, cooperation is achieved when the game is repeated and expectations of actors converge. In realistic social situations, Keohane (1986) opines that reciprocity contains elements of contingency and equivalence, which means that it involves the exchange of approximately equivalent values of benefits and costs and the lack of such equivalence would amount to misunderstanding, which would prevent cooperation and instead lead to alternate arrangements, which are seen as counter-measures. Following Keohane's (1986) understanding of equivalence, India's disinclination to join the BRI can be explained to be based on its perception of a lack of equivalence with regard to gains and losses, which are to be accrued by China and India. For instance, the fear of the CPEC running roughshod on India's sovereignty is not matched with similar costs on China's part. The gains for China in terms of being the preeminent transport node, the possibility of converting its economic presence into strategic advantages as well as being the principle architect of the BRI cannot compare with any equivalent gains which India can accrue out of the initiative.

Grieco's (1990) theorizes that states do not always pursue absolute gains but also relative gains, in which they compare their absolute gains with those of others and cooperation thus becomes difficult as no state wants to realize absolute gains which are fewer than others. India's refusal to join the BRI, perceived from Grieco's conclusions, can be viewed to be an outcome of India's assessment of pay-off from the BRI from a purely relative gains lens instead of opting for a perspective which is more germane to its relative size, power projection, economic and infrastructural wherewithal compared to China.

8. Why India Should Join the BRI: Cooperation Leads to Better Pay-offs

This section seeks to argue the ways in which cooperation with China on the BRI would yield better pay-offs for India with the help of theories on cooperation, as well as enumerating several benefits which India would avail by participating in the initiative.

According to Grieco (1990) only a distribution of gains between two or more cooperating states, which is balanced, can lead to cooperation. Balanced exchange can mean benefits which are equally distributed to all states or proportionally to some value, such as investment amounts, power projection ability, size of economy etc. While Axelrod (1984) posits that payoffs are balanced only if they are symmetric towards each player, Grieco (1990) however states that any agreement producing benefits can be said to be balanced if side benefits are possible. India's stand not to cooperate according to such a formulation based on balanced payments can be seen to be a reflection of its apprehensions that its participation will not lead to symmetric payoffs; however, given that India and China are not equal players, payoffs seen to be proportional to their relative size and investment are more practical in a world where states are only legally equal. In addition, side benefits of infrastructural overhaul and complementariness with projects such as Act East Policy and Project *Mausam* can render the pay-offs roughly balanced.

It is also argued by realists that states believe in self-help as other states cannot be relied upon for tomorrow a friend may turn into a foe and such reasoning underlies lack of cooperation between states. India's refusal to partake in the BRI can thus also be explained as stemming from such a calculation based on self-help. However, it has been contended that when several states are in a system, cooperation may be far more effective than going it alone. Snidal (1991) contends that the inclusion of more players increases the likelihood that groups will cooperate to enhance their security. In the BRI case, if "security" is broadened to include "economic" as well as other benefits, then cooperation on India's part will increase its economic benefits given that 65 or so nations have committed to the BRI. It has also been contended that relative gains of others will enhance one's own security, thereby benefits from the BRI to nations surrounding India would consequently lead to benefits for India.

India's official position, which is antithetical to joining the BRI, seems to be based on the calculation that minimizing relative gains of others maximizes its security. However, power should be seen as fungible and the positive-sum nature of power should also be kept in mind. Baldwin (1980) stresses that power in an interdependent relationship flows from asymmetry which means that the one who gains more from the relationship is more dependent. Following from Baldwin's argument, since the BRI is primarily China's brainchild, its dependence on it and on the partners in the BRI will be much more than that of any other country participating in the BRI. India therefore should not shun overtures to join the BRI on the basis of becoming dependent on the BRI as it is China, which will end up having more at stake and thereby providing more leverage to India and other participating countries.

Apart from these, there is a gamut of benefits which India will accrue if it joins the BRI. These provide rough equivalence for India in terms of benefits compared to those that will be gained by China. Despite security concerns there are other implications of the BRI for India which pertain to possible gains which could be accrued by joining the initiative. The BRI would enable India to reap economic benefits of greater market access, investments, technical expertise, connectivity and trade as envisaged under the scheme. Endeavours such as the Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor of which India is a part would be enhanced by its link with the BRI. It would allow India to leverage its own soft power in the countries along the scheme. Although the CPEC is seen as riding roughshod on India's sovereignty, India's involvement in the rest of the BRI could enhance her influence in the decision-making to construct the CPEC along lines which are suited for both India and Pakistan. It could perhaps bypass the disputed territory so as to countermand the sovereignty issue of both nations or two corridors could be fathomed, one each in Pakistan and India. A flourishing trade link in this region could also have positive bearings for the ongoing turmoil in this region and could also possibly

address some of the economic reasons behind the chasms thus alleviating the conflict to some extent. The CPEC could bring India some other benefits as well as it could act as a conduit to increase the efficiency of the Indian market and will enable India and Pakistan to trade directly through it rather than through third countries. Thus, a shift from a purely national security framework to one in which human security of the people suffering from the precarious situation in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and adjacent regions could be a more fruitful basis for comprehending and implementing an economic corridor around the region, rather than using the concept of "sovereignty" and refusing to engage with possible ideas which could bring greater prosperity to the region.

Being a part of the CPEC as well as the rest of the routes envisaged under the BRI would also enable India to direct trade in the oceans to a larger degree which it has not been able to do with the existing infrastructure. It is also important to note that China is keen on bringing India on board the BRI and in this regard Kolkata has been identified as a key port in the MSR of the BRI. India could leverage its involvement in the BRI by acquiescing to China's overtures in order to mould the CPEC on its own terms and at the same time India could use its presence in the financial institutions as well as the BRI to influence China to be more favourably disposed to India's bid for entry into the Nuclear Supplier's Group as well as seek a revision on China's stand on Masood Azhar. India could also use its influence if it joins the BRI to include more Indian ports to act as central nodes in the initiative. Further, India could use its influence to bring other regional architectures like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as well as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) into the ambit of the BRI thereby decentering the China focus of the BRI into a more shared and regional project. Further, as China is keen to have India on board the BRI, it could use its influence to push "Pakistan to pursue a more dedicated focus on economic objectives and regional trade linkages rather than a security-centric agenda", which may lead to India potentially becoming "the greatest beneficiary other than Pakistan itself" (Small, 2016: 17).

India is also an important trade partner of most of the countries under the BRI and thus being a part of the BRI will enable India to enhance such partnerships given the trade benefits which the BRI is supposed to initiate. By not being a part of the BRI, India would run the risk of dwindling trade with its neighbouring countries, most of which are part of the BRI. China on the other hand would then be free to shape its relations with India's neighbourhood thereby improving its bilateral ties with these countries as well as improve its regional presence in South Asia which would be detrimental to India's economic as well as security calculations. If the BRI is built, China will become a preferred destination for countries seeking investment and trade as opposed to India as the former would be better connected to them than the latter and also because of increased Chinese presence in the countries which would act as an added motivation for countries to divert trade away from India. Thus, by not being a part of the BRI, India endangers its trade with countries with which it currently has trade ties greater than or similar to China's.

Other adversarial fallouts of India eschewing its chance to participate in the BRI pertain to the even greater use of the China card by its neighbours which would further isolate India which would be pernicious to its already complex presence in the neighbourhood. It has been noted by Garver (2001: 17) that "links with China are often attractive to India's South Asian neighbours precisely because of perceived Indian efforts at domination." A greater Chinese involvement in port-building activities in India's neighbourhood would embolden China by increasing its sphere of influence in the region thereby undermining India in her own backyard. China's investments would give it "... control over the new infrastructure assets enabling their potential utilization for military and strategic purposes" (Palit, 2017: 2). By being a part of the BRI, India could increase its own presence in the member countries so as to offset such a rise in China's influence.

By eschewing the BRI, India would also run the risk of neglecting its dire need for infrastructural changes which can be achieved by accessing the financial help from the gamut of institutions being created for the implementation of the BRI. Scepticism of Indian businesses towards their abilities to exploit the new external infrastructure of the BRI "given the inadequate and inefficient infrastructure" of India and the rest of South Asia has been an impediment to India's acceptance of the BRI (ibid.: 7). However, by shunning the BRI altogether would not be pragmatic as the initiative intends to create infrastructural lifelines across the South Asian region, which if on board the BRI, would benefit India. Being a part of the BRI could also help India in attracting greater investments from China which could enable it to correct the trade imbalance between the two countries as well as help India meet its deficits in infrastructure (Chhibber, 2017: 36-37). As with China, the BRI will enable India to access greater markets, satiate its demands, and attract investments at a faster rate and in a more efficient manner, making it prudent for it to consider its options of joining the initiative rather than dismissing it outright.

By being a part of the BRI, India would also be able to increase its own presence in port cities along the route which will also allow it to bolster its presence in these regions. India's presence in key locations such as the Chabahar port in Iran would provide India with a springboard into West and Central Asia while the BRI would provide other connecting routes and gateways for increased flows to and from India. India would also benefit from greater contact between citizens of different nationals and a uniform transnational financial system. Most significantly, the BRI can become yet another significant and more tangible platform, after BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), for India and China to increase convergences and build trust and stability in their ties. The growth of such a shared framework between the two countries could then segue into alleviating other bilateral issues such as border and riverwater sharing. India's participation in the BRI could also help bring financial and security coordination with the other member countries and in so doing become a harbinger of greater regional cooperation. Other factors which should impel India to join the BRI include the fact that it "is an open mechanism for regional economic cooperation" which "does not set an access threshold, nor has it established multilateral international organizations" (Li, 2016: 25).

Being a part of the BRI would also enhance India's engagement of its neighbours as envisaged under its extended neighbourhood vision as well as its Act East Policy. It would signify the commingling of policies of India and China with regard to their regional ambitions. Since ties between China and India have been held ransom by numerous obdurate bilateral issues on which common ground has been unattainable, India's participation in the OBOR could help generate common visions and combined participation in actions with regard to the regional dynamics which could form an indomitable framework to be harnessed by the two countries to find solutions to intractable bilateral issues.

It has also been argued by Garlick (2017: 7) that China has a good record of realizing improbable goals, for instance, apart from building high-speed rail networks across difficult terrain, entire villages under special economic zones in China have been transformed into financial hubs. Such transformations make for solid evidence of China's ability to

realize the gargantuan goals envisaged under the BRI. Another reason pointed out by Garlick (2017) in support of India backing the BRI relates to the fact that despite global slowdown, China's GDP growth continues to be higher than any of the developed countries.

Garlick (2017: 9) offers an interesting way to circumvent the overt fear in some circles in India with regard to the String of Pearls strategy of China by suggesting that India "start with a single major port development using Chinese capital and know-how, just as other countries have done, hoping to kick-start their economies with a megaport and surrounding developments. This can easily be encompassed within the Sagarmala project. Port facilities, factories and road and rail infrastructure go naturally together, and Chinese companies are expert in financing and constructing all of these. By virtue of an Indian port becoming part of the 'string of pearls', the feeling of possible threat and encirclement which negatively influences Indian thinking about China and prevents cooperation could be defused."

One way in which India and China has come to agreement with regard to the issue of CPEC is to follow the framework set in the Chinaled Asian Infrastrutre Investment Bank (AIIB) regarding disputed areas. India is one of the members of the AIIB. Funding for 24 projects related to infrastructre has been funded by the AIIB, out of which five of them are in India. Total loans for these projects in India amount to US\$1.074 billion which accounts for nealy 28% of money lent by the AIIB. India became the first country where the AIIB committed financially more than US\$1 billion. India's participation has continued in the AIIB despite serval contentious border issues with China. Such participation of India despite contentious issues with China can be explained by referring to the clauses in the charter of the AIIB which clearly state that in case of funding in disputed areas it will be granted only if the parties concerned are in agreement: "Financing for a Project in a territorial area that is claimed by two or more countries only if it is satisfied that each of the governments concerned agrees that, pending the settlement of the dispute, the Financing proposed may proceed without prejudice to its claims to the disputed area", which prevents the AIIB from funding projects in areas which are claimed by more than one state (AIIB, 2017). As India has already agreed to such a clause in a China-led initiatve, a similar framework can be provided for the BRI as well.

Not to board the BRI would thus mean that India's neighbourhood would become more militarised; India would be encircled by China; it would lose access to greater trade, markets and infrastructure and would be faced with an increasingly emboldened and less acquiescent neighbours, while losing an opportunity to collaborate on regional issues which could help in generating a framework which could alleviate bilateral issues. These developments make it pertinent for India to join the BRI and influence the way in which it is realized. India would also be aided by the BRI as it could complement India's own transnational visions including the projects envisaged under the Act East Policy, the Spice Route and the *Mausam* Project. Member countries could enjoy fruits of institutional engagement such as greater cooperation and convergence of interests which in turn would enhance stability in the ties between the nations.

When Deng Xiaoping took over from Chairman Mao in 1978, he aimed to quadruple China's standard of living by the end of the century. In order to do this China attempted to normalize relations with India, held down expenditures on defense, extended economic contacts of China internationally, and reduced chances of conflict which would impede China's development (Garver, 2001: 216). Picking a leaf from Xioaping's strategy, given the Narendra Modi government's intention of developing for all, India would do well to cooperate with China on the BRI, while at the same time continue with other plans such as AAGC so as to diversify aid avenues while ensuring that China also assists India in its *Vikas* agenda. India-China relations should not be held ransom by an assessment of ties based only on *realpolitik* and "[w]hile the border issue and regional security rivalry may not find an easy way out, it should not impede the leaders of the two countries from expanding the areas of cooperation and building up strategic trust between the two peoples" (Hu, 2017).

9. Conclusions

The above-mentioned explanations highlight the possible ways in which India's official position, which is heavily based on relative gains, may be counterproductive to its own absolute gains. While keeping China's strategy to "cooperate", if India changes its strategy to "cooperate", both countries would have the outcomes or pay-offs which bring more benefits to them, as seen from the arguments presented in the earlier sections, than if they do not cooperate. While the major issue of India has been the CPEC, in practice India has little control over what happens in that region. Harping on national sentiment that the region through which the CPEC is to run, which India terms Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, is an integral part of India and thus India should not enter into negotiations on the BRI, misses the plethora of economic, infrastructural and other benefits, which its involvement in the BRI would bring to India.

Thereby in order for India to realize that cooperation is a better strategy than not cooperating, it is required to envision international politics not simply from a relative gains or a zero-sum position which is solely based on power calculations but from an absolute gains position or non-zero-sum position which ensures comparative advantages to all involved in cooperation. Morganthau's (1973) definition of power as control of man over man (state over state) or as domination should be replaced by power as defined by Arendt (1969) as the ability of humans to act in concert with others, in order to enable countries to switch from expecting greater pay-offs from not cooperation to cooperating.

Despite the above-mentioned merits of the BRI, it cannot be a panacea for all ills which plague the 65 and counting countries which are a part of this initiative. Other challenges to the BRI pertain to the feasibility of China's plan to invest and build infrastructure lines and then protect them in regions along the BRI, some of which are volatile, unstable and at varying levels of development. The BRI would need to reconcile the vast differences "in infrastructure capacity and trade performance ... between Europe and most other parts of the MSRI, particularly Africa and South Asia" (Palit, 2017: 6). The amount of time and money which will be needed for the implementation of the BRI which is still mutable is also a cause for concern for the partner countries. The immense investment which China is seeking to undertake in the BRI may not yield favourable results if the member countries are unable to provide the stable circumstances required for the completion of the BRI. The initiative also needs to accommodate existing bilateral institutional frameworks and existing rules of origin between countries seeking to join the BRI. Existing trade agreements and rules of origin which give preferential treatment to trade in goods will make it difficult for countries seeking to join the BRI to choose between preferential tariffs of existing agreements and more efficient new routes and incentives of institutions planned under the BRI (ibid.). Civil wars, border disputes, terrorism, piracy, corruption, change of political parties in member countries, local opposition to foreign investment and resentment over possible loss of jobs, and uneven development of countries along the BRI may also cripple China's efforts at implementing the BRI which may lead to financial losses for China. The

framework with which the BRI intends to bring cooperation between sixty-five or so countries, through coordination of trade, communication, policies, infrastructure, finance and people of the member countries, can help in alleviating some of the abovementioned problems which plague the member countries. Given the mutable nature of the BRI, it is possible for all countries to coordinate their ideas and visions regarding the initiative which would provide a foundation built by all member countries making it less probable for bilateral or regional tensions to hold it ransom. India's involvement in the OBOR/BRI would help in resolving some of the issues regarding local resistance to projects in countries like Myanmar and Vietnam, as Indian projects have not been met with similar protests in the past unlike China's projects which are seen as detrimental for local communities as they are not benefitted in the form of basic income or employment.

In a nutshell, the BRI is a project aimed to ensure the continuation of China's economic growth; it is an exercise in soft power undertaken by China by harnessing the concept of the ancient Silk Routes which straddled much of the same areas as will the BRI and it is a project with security ramifications for China as its presence in key economic and strategic regions will increase once the BRI is implemented.

If India decides to stay out of the BRI it may hamper India's economic growth as China will be leading the emerging architecture and framework for trade between the BRI countries on terms which may not be favourable to India. While India's current infrastructure needs a boost, if India remains a non-member to the BRI, it may end up having infrastructure as well as financial wherewithal and rules which will be at odds with the rest of the BRI nations. In addition, by staying out of the BRI India would also lose strategic space to China whose influence in the BRI nations would increase with a rise in its economic cooperation with them. By being a part of the BRI, India could act as a mediator between China and the West; it could mould the BRI on lines which are more favourable to it; it could counter China's increased economic and strategic presence in India's neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood while at the same time increase its own economic and strategic footing along the BRI. This article has therefore not contended that cooperating may lead to a simplistic win-win for both India and China but it asserts that cooperating may lead to better or more favorable terms for India – in terms of accruing benefits for economic growth and connectivity, providing a space for India's involvement in decisionmaking, influencing other members involved in the region, increasing presence in the region, preventing China from further encircling India in its own neighbourhood, possible positive implications on bilateral issues between India and China – than if it decides not to cooperate on the BRI.

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Notes

- * Obja Borah Hazarika received her M.Phil. in American studies from the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 2012 and also a Master in politics (with specialization in international relations) from Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2010. She is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University, Assam, India. Her research interests include Indian foreign policies, especially sub-national diplomacy and trans-boundary riparian relations. <*Email: obja11@gmail.com*>
- Lecture delivered on game theory by Professor Dr. Surajit Borkotokey (Mathematics), in the Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, on 21 March 2018.

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