

New Spice Road, Regional Rival to the New Silk Road

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Abstract: With the Belt and Road Initiative, China is at the forefront of players seeking regional links and connectivity between Asia and Europe. However, China's presence in this arena is not exclusive, and the competition for infrastructure across Eurasia is multifaceted.

India is another Asian giant that has quietly entered the mega-infrastructure projects of this supercontinent, seeking to revive the dormant plan for a north-south international transport corridor. The New Spice Road is a metaphor that narrates India's resurgence and its competition with China for control of the routes for the movement and transportation of goods and energy.

The aim of this article is to explore India's main motivations and objectives for the revival of the North-South International Transport Corridor (New Drug Route) after nearly 15 years of its inception. The article shows that India's efforts to rebuild the North-South International Corridor and promote the New Drug Route are primarily focused on security goals and motivations, including confronting the changing situation in Jammu and Kashmir in Pakistan's favor; denying opportunities for China's geopolitics-geostrategy in the Indian Ocean region; creating a gap between Pakistan and its neighbors, especially Afghanistan; and geopolitical linkage with its new partners in Central Asia and the South Caucasus through Iran.

Keywords: *New Drug Road, North-South International Transport Corridor, Belt and Road Initiative, Structural Realism (Neorealism), and Central Asia*

INTRODUCTION

China has been experiencing rapid and sustained economic growth since the late 1970s, overtaking Japan in 2010 to become the world's second largest economy. China is now a major player in the international political economy, and it is not far-fetched to expect that it will overtake the United States in the global economic power rankings in the near future. To this end, China needs to create and maintain economic dominance in Southeast Asia and expand it to neighboring regions, especially Central Asia, and make every effort to attract overseas markets. Therefore, the country's efforts in recent years have been focused on creating and properly utilizing infrastructure and transportation routes to ship goods and receive raw materials.

China's connection to the Americas, Africa, and Oceania is largely by sea (and to a lesser extent by air). However, its access to the various regions of Eurasia is more important and diverse, and Beijing is strengthening its sea routes and ports by creating and strengthening land infrastructure, including roads and railways, to connect to the far reaches of Asia. (Konings, 2018:2) and Europe (Gleave, 2018:62) have also attracted significant investment both in the mainland and in many other countries on these two continents; in particular, Central Asia has become the most important external economic player in the region by importing large volumes of capital, technology and goods.

Beijing has also been pursuing its global goals in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). One Belt, One Road (including the Silk Road Economic Belt megaproject, of which Central Asia forms an important part)

(Tisheyar and Toviserkani, 2017:3). However, China's presence in Central Asia is not exclusive and the competition for infrastructure creation across Eurasia has many players. According to the Asian Development Bank, developing Asian countries need to spend \$1.7 trillion annually on infrastructure between 2016 and 2030 to "sustain their growth momentum, eradicate poverty, and respond to climate change" (ADB, 2017). Thus, the Belt and Road Initiative is indeed part of a larger 21st-century challenge. The Great Game of the 19th century is a global game that is taking place across Eurasia, especially Central Eurasia, including the Central Asian and South Caucasus regions.

Unlike the Great Game of the 19th century, which was based on territorial conquest, the new Great Game is based on building bridges and involves more players. China is at the forefront of these players with its New Silk Road initiative, but the move to build infrastructure in Eurasia is merely an attempt to China is not leading. Creating connectivity in this supercontinent is an international desire pursued by many players, large and small.

In addition to China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, India, and Turkey also have plans and projects to create infrastructure to connect their countries to labor, capital, and energy markets in Europe-Asia. Even smaller international players like Kazakhstan or large sub-regional players like the United States have their own specific infrastructure programs in the region.

In all these competitive scenarios, the construction of railway lines is clearly more common, and various infrastructure projects are being rapidly implemented and operated according to nature and needs of the investor and host countries (Mardell, 2017). Thus, while all eyes are on China's progress in the Belt and Road, other countries are also quietly entering into the grand Eurasian infrastructure projects, and the same They pursue the goal of connecting Asia and Europe.

However, for various reasons, not all of these projects receive the attention of the media or even the scientific community in terms of their importance or impact and are called silent projects. For example, the beginning of the movement of the other Asian giant (India) in this direction has been silent compared to the brightness of China's New Silk Road initiative. India is seeking to join Russia and Short, fast and cost-effective access to European markets through the practical implementation of the North-South international transport corridor is pursuing similar goals to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (Devonshire-Ellis, 2017).

The North-South International Transport Corridor (NSTC) project agreement was signed in St. Petersburg in September 2000 between Russia, Iran, and India, 13 years before the announcement of China's New Silk Road Initiative (NISRI). (INSTC, 2018) Although this program was not seriously pursued and did not reach the operational stage until 2018, 10 other countries joined it during this period, and the operational achievements of this program in the years have recently shown promising signs of its high potential to accelerate the development of Eurasian infrastructure and trade.

In February 2019, the governments of India and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Operational Cooperation to Design a North-South International Transport Corridor via Iran and emphasized the facilitation and acceleration of its implementation (Chaudhury, 2019). Earlier, in May 2016, The leaders of India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a strategic and historic agreement to pave the way for a section of this corridor, known as the Chabahar Agreement, in Tehran (Roy,2016).

The MoU on the transfer of management of phase one of the Shahid Beheshti Chabahar Port from Tehran to New Delhi for a period of 18 months was also signed during the visit of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran to India in February 2018 and was signed on 7 Implemented in January 2019 (Iran, 17

December 2018) The North-South Corridor is based on combined transport (sea-land) and is the shortest transport route compared to the traditional Asia-Europe trade route, which is based on sea transport and passes through the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, the Suez Canal, and the Strait of Gibraltar. This route connects the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to Europe via Iran and Russia.

Therefore, it is not without reason that Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, has described the Chabahar Port as India's golden gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia and speaks of New Delhi's serious determination to exploit the benefits of the North-South International Transport Corridor to connect with Afghanistan, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Russia and Europe (PTI, 2018). India is in the process of implementing the North-South Corridor project step by step. It has attracted regional players.

Delhi, as the main architect of the initiative, also hopes to leverage the increased participation of states in China's Belt and Road Initiative to its advantage by seeking more foreign partners. While the New Silk Road aims to revive the ancient Silk Road and reshape the global economy from east to west, India's North-South Corridor project is Building infrastructure and strengthening trade, finance and technology exchanges is a top-down process.

Like Beijing – but at a lower level – Delhi seeks to capitalize on historical narratives and metaphors to embellish and facilitate the acceptance of its project by regional societies. Given its extensive capabilities and advantages in software and information and communication technology, Delhi prefers the metaphor of the silicon valley to describe the link between India and the Central Asian republics.

The metaphor was first used in September 2018 by Sooraj Prabhu, the Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry, during a visit to Uzbekistan to invite the country to join the International North-South Transport Corridor (ET Bureau, 2018).

However, the metaphor is much more connected to technology than to infrastructure and trade routes, and the search for a historical equivalent for it has also been fruitless. In contrast, the present article uses the metaphor of the road it proposes a new spice to introduce and promote the international North-South transport route in the scientific literature. The spice routes refer to a set of maritime and land trade routes that were established over long periods from ancient times to the 18th century AD with ups and downs between the East and the West.

The most important spice route, also known as the Cinnamon Route, ran from about 2000 BC along a maritime route from the Malay Archipelago (in southeast Asia) to the island of Madagascar (in southeast Africa) and also included India. There is abundant evidence of the Achaemenids' attention to the seas south of their territory and the use of the ports and trade routes available to them.

In the early period of the Parthian kings' rule (130-140 BC), trade between the East and the West, which was mostly carried out by land routes, became their monopoly, and they did not allow the Westerners (Romans and Greeks) to use sea routes to compete with land routes. For a long time, most of the goods that reached the Persian Gulf from India and via the Oman Sea route were transported by land routes to the Mediterranean coast and from there to the markets for consumption were in Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor, and Greece. However, the use of the maritime route of the spice routes that passed through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal flourished again (Bahrami, 2005: 2-1).

In this context, there is also much evidence of Iranian seafaring in the 5th century AD (Sasanian period) and their role in the flourishing of the ancient spice trade route. In Iran, after Islam, during the Afsharid

rule, Iranian trade in spice routes flourished again, and a variety of spice herbs and other goods entered the Iranian ports of the Persian Gulf from India in significant quantities, of which a significant part undoubtedly came through the routes of The land of Iran was sent to other lands (Bahrami, 2005: 5-3).

By referring to historical narratives from this hand, the metaphor of the new spice road can be introduced to highlight the plan of the North-South corridor. Of course, there have also been previous attempts to use this metaphor to reconstruct the ancient spice sea routes for the development of Africa, symbolizing in electronic commerce (Turse, 2012), or even the attendance program (Bhana, 2015), but none of them were sustainable, either due to a lack of economic justification or a lack of connection to the infrastructural and transport nature of the spice routes, or both.

In contrast, the use of the metaphor of the new spice route for the North-South corridor is in many ways logical, meaningful, and historically authentic. The New Spice Route is not exclusive to one country and, like the ancient spice routes, can be used to move goods between the East and the West. The most important difference and, of course, the superiority of the New Spice Route over its ancient maritime version is that this route is shorter and traders can travel more efficiently through it, bypassing the territory of Iran.

Today, India has taken the lead in reviving this route, and other Asian countries, especially Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, and Bangladesh, can also participate in it, significantly reducing the costs and time of access to Europe and North Asia and vice versa.

The new drug route is also considered the shortest access route to Central Asia and the Caucasus for the southern Persian Gulf countries. With these descriptions, the present article, considering the extraordinary importance of this project for the comprehensive development of Iran and also the awareness of the power of narratives and words, has used the metaphor of the path of new spice with the aim of its dissemination in scientific literature inside and outside the country.

Although the analysis and evaluation of the benefits of this plan for Iran and Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this article, even with these few references, it can be argued that it has greater benefits for Tehran compared to China's New Silk Road. In terms of symbolism, the New Silk Road is considered to be an ancient version of the same name, with China's own unique design. However, the ancient spice routes are not only associated with the name of a specific country, and despite the prominence of the names of China and India, they refer to several societies.

The initiative of the new spice route can also refer to Iran's historical role in intercontinental trade, due to the unique and unparalleled geopolitical and geoeconomic location of the port and the territory of Iran within it. In addition, the combined route of the New Spice Route, using sea routes to the Iranian coast in the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf and then using rail lines and roads to reach Central Asia, the Caucasus, Asia Minor, Russia and Europe, is shorter and more economical for all South Asian countries and most Southeast Asian countries than the New Silk Road.

Most importantly, the new spice route is designed to pass through Iranian territory and use Iranian ports, and no alternative route is conceivable for it. Meanwhile, the New Silk Road could bypass the Caspian Sea and beyond to connect Central Asia to the South Caucasus and reach Europe, effectively bypassing Iran. This possibility, although very small and economically unreasonable given Iran's strong relations with its neighbors and China, cannot be ruled out.

Iran is considered the safest, shortest, and cheapest route for energy pipelines from the Persian Gulf and Central Asia to South Asia, Turkey, and large parts of Europe, but in the past few decades, many countries have been forced to use longer and more expensive alternative routes due to pressure from Washington. Therefore, wherever such a possibility exists, it must be included in the strategic calculations.

While the geopolitical map of the region has been drawn in such a way that the New Spice Route cannot but pass through Iranian soil, and New Delhi has also shown its serious determination to implement this route. In addition, the development of the New Spice Route will not only jeopardize Iran's interests in the New Silk Road, but will also increase Tehran's bargaining power with New Delhi and Beijing.

As can be seen, many questions have been raised regarding the revival of ancient spice routes and the creation of a new spice route centered on the Iranian territory and led by India, which are often intertwined with China's New Silk Road plan. However, the first issue that needs to be addressed is the analysis and assessment of India's main goal in its efforts to strengthen this route in recent years.

Until this issue is clarified, the discussion about the opportunities and challenges of participating in the North-South Corridor project compared to the Silk Road Economic Belt, or the possibility of participating in them simultaneously, will be without tangible and credible achievements for the governments of the region.

Therefore, despite the importance of the new drug route for Iran and the significant impact it could have on the development of infrastructure and trade, especially in the southeastern region of the country, understanding the dynamics and regional and global competitions affecting the creation and strengthening of this route is a priority.

The reason for this is also the lack of sufficient research literature at the academic level due to the novelty of the topic under discussion and the rapid developments surrounding it. India is a major critic of China's New Silk Road initiative, and the New Spice Route is a competitor and alternative to the New Silk Road.

The nature of this competition is not only economic, and security concerns are an important part of New Delhi's motivations for introducing and trying to revive the Spice Route. For India, the dependence of the region's weak economies on the Chinese economy is unacceptable; But China's Silk Road Economic Belt has far more serious security implications from India's perspective.

Most of New Delhi's opposition to the New Silk Road Initiative is related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. India's concerns about this part of China's Silk Road Initiative are multifaceted, and from New Delhi's perspective, most of its aspects are considered a serious threat to India's security, defense, and strategic interests. As mentioned above, the aim of this article is to explore India's motivations and primary objectives for the revival of the North-South International Transport Corridor (New Spice Route) after almost 15 years of its construction.

The corresponding question is "What is India's primary motivation and objective for the revival of the North-South International Transport Corridor and the promotion of the New Spice Route?" In answering this question, first of all, the statement that "New Spice Route the competitor and alternative to the New Silk Road is China. It is assumed and, in place of the hypothesis, it is stated that "India's efforts to reconstruct the international North-South corridor and promote the New Silk Road are primarily focused on security objectives and motives, including confronting the changing situation in Jammu and Kashmir in favor of Pakistan; negating China's geopolitical-geostrategic opportunities in the Indian Ocean; Creating a

gap between Pakistan and its neighbors, especially Afghanistan; and a geopolitical link with its new partners in Central Asia and the South Caucasus through Iran.

The type of research in this article is descriptive-analytical and the research method is library and documentary. On this basis, the necessary information was obtained through the study of first-hand sources, including bilateral or multilateral agreements, announced and implemented policies, interviews and statements of officials and Reliable news sources and second-hand sources, including books, articles, virtual space sources, and analyses, were obtained and attempted, using the most reliable and up-to-date statistical and descriptive information from regional and international research centers. This information was then categorized and analyzed, mainly using qualitative reasoning and analysis methods, within the framework of structural realism theory (neo-realism).

Conceptual Framework

India's security objectives and motivations for promoting the new spice path, as mentioned in the opening hypothesis of the article, are focused on the concept of relative distribution of power based on the theoretical approach of structural realism(neorealism).

The most consistent logical and empirical model of international politics for structural realists is a system based on anarchy, consisting of one-third sovereign states, rational and integrated as units of the system and, on the other hand, it defines a structure that is determined by the relative distribution of power among these units (Waltz, 1979:79-88).

On this basis, by limiting the behavior of states, structure is considered the only determining factor in international politics, and internal factors such as the type of political system, cultural differences, ideas, or individual actions at great distances have little effect (Mearsheimer, 2006:72). The approach also places particular emphasis on the fundamental assumption of the realist school that the most important factor in international politics is power.

In fact, structural realism seeks to explain international relations in terms of structural pressures resulting from anarchy. However, structural realism is not a unified approach, and neorealists are not unanimous in their assessment of the amount of power that states require under anarchic conditions. On this basis, neorealism is often divided into two sub-branches, defensive realism and offensive realism, which are distinguished from each other by the implications of the anarchic international system for the optimal behavior of states.

Defensive realists argue that states should strive to acquire the appropriate amount of power necessary for their success, but in no case should they maximize their relative power with the aim of achieving hegemony.

Defensive realists—such as Kenneth Waltz, the founder of structural realism—believe that self-restraining, conservative policies are optimal for great powers because overly aggressive behavior pushes others to form balancing coalitions against their threat, ultimately reducing the security of developing actors (Walt, 2017: 7). Similarly, aggressive realists—including John Mearsheimer—believe that in an anarchic system where the intentions of states are ambiguous and military capabilities often have both defensive and offensive capabilities, maximizing aggressive power is the only optimal behavior for great powers to ensure their survival (Mearsheimer, 2001:30-31). They maximize their influence and wealth (as the basis of military power) to enjoy greater security in an anarchic system.

From this perspective, the best way for a state to increase its chances of survival is to become the most powerful state. Simply put, a state with more power enjoys greater stability and security than a state with less power. From the perspective of aggressive realists, the structure of the anarchic international system strongly encourages states to strive to maximize power with the ultimate goal of becoming a global hegemon (Lobell, 2017:4). Thus, a great power does not strive to maintain its equality with its other counterparts, but rather strives to be the most powerful “hegemon.” The goal of states is to maximize power, and therefore They are always competing with each other for more power.

However, for Mersheimer, geography, and especially the power to hold the seas, means that no single state is capable of achieving global hegemony. The dominant great power can at best become a regional hegemon, meaning it is the only great power in that part of the world and will probably control other regions as well.

States that they seek to prevent the expansion of great powers in other regions in order to preserve their gains. They monitor aspiring or potential hegemon elsewhere because they fear that a rival great power dominant in their region will become their most powerful enemy (Mearsheimer, 2001:29). A structural realist approach to understanding the potential shift in the distribution of structural power in favor of China and India underlies these initiatives, and therefore, in order to formulate the conceptual framework of the article, there is no need to take a position for or against any of its defensive or offensive sub-branches.

Indeed, since this article focuses on the question of whether the relative position of China and India in the international structure will change with the initiatives of the New Silk Road and the New Spice Route, it is sufficient that the conceptual framework of its proponents accepts the basic assumptions of structural realism regarding the state-centered and anarchic nature of international relations.

However, it will also be necessary to further clarify the concept of power, which is the subject of another debate among the various approaches of the realist school of international relations. Mearsheimer assumes power to be equivalent to military capabilities and, given the deterrent power of the seas, considers the ability of land forces to exert power to be limited.

Economic output is also considered in Mersheimer's model only as a latent indicator of potential military power and has no independent effect on the acquisition and increase of power. In contrast, Waltz believes that each of the five factors of population size, area, resources, economic capacity, and political stability and competence (governance capacities) are, if not equally, then all important components of state power and cannot be weighed separately (Trembeczki, 2018:14).

Following Trembeczki (2018), the concept of power in this article is derived from a combination of elements of both Waltz's defensive realism and Mersheimer's offensive realism, but at the same time it is adapted to the requirements of analyzing the impact of the New Silk Road and New Spice Route initiatives on the relative power status of China and India.

On the one hand, according to Waltz, it is assumed that power actually has several important dimensions, and it is also assumed that the initiatives of Beijing and New Delhi have no significant impact on the population size, area, and governance capacity of these two countries, and as a result, these three dimensions have been deliberately ignored in the analyses.

Waltz's concept of resources has also been extended to include access to strategic resources located far away, such as energy or export markets. On the other hand, the concept of power in this article is framed within the geopolitical constraints on the projection of power that Mearsheimer has addressed.

However, the concept of restraining power has been applied not only to the vast expanses of water, but also to the high mountain ranges, vast deserts, and dense forests that separate the Indian subcontinent from the Asian mainland.

Meanings of the Belt and Road Initiative - A Road for India

The concept of the Belt and Road entered the media and then the literature of international relations, especially since September 2013, during the visit of Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, to Kazakhstan and the description of Beijing's ambitious plans to rebuild the ancient Silk Road and connect the East and West through the Silk Road Economic Belt.

His explanations in this regard focused particularly on the importance of roads, railways, air and sea links, and the construction of a transport corridor along the ancient trade routes connecting China to Europe via Central Asia (Tisheyar and Toviserkany, 2017:4). Less than two years later, Jinping also presented the completed Maritime Silk Road plan during his trip to Indonesia has proposed that the eastern port of China will connect to Europe via the South Asian route. This sea route in South Asia would cross the Indian subcontinent, skirting the Bay of Bengal and skirting the eastern coast of Africa before entering the Suez Canal (Blah, 2018:316). The Belt and Road, which Beijing has used the metaphor of the New Silk Road to introduce, is a giant leap forward. It aims to connect 65 percent of the world's population and 30 percent of global GDP, and to date, about 60 countries have signed agreements with Beijing to participate in parts of this ambitious project. According to estimates by the China Development Bank, by 2017, China will have about 900 projects worth more than \$1 trillion to realize the Silk Road dream. The new one is being implemented or is in the pipeline since the beginning of the 21st century. (Amin and Naseer, 2017:13)

Beijing has also invited New Delhi to join the Belt and Road Initiative, and China calls India its natural partner in this project, but views in India have been very cold. Undoubtedly, China's foreign policy, especially in the way the Belt and Road Initiative has addressed the Indian issue, has been very unsettling for India. Initially, the BRI was to include Kolkata as one of its main nodes. The famous map of the BRI published by Xinhua, the official Chinese state news agency, in 2013 also featured the city and port of Kolkata.

Just as the Maritime Silk Road traversed the Bay of Bengal in a round trip, it did not exclude Kolkata. But Kolkata was subsequently removed from the list of New Silk Road transit cities, and China's leaders neglected the vital task of preserving the face and prestige of their larger neighbor.

It is not clear to what extent this concession has been made to China's Belt and Road Initiative, but it has certainly increased New Delhi's criticism of China's geopolitical initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative (Macaes, 2019). India's opposition to China's New Silk Road Initiative goes far beyond its displeasure over the removal of Kolkata from the route. China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Indian Ocean is the biggest challenge to India's efforts to dominate the region. Of these, Indian policymakers and strategists, despite China's call, are in favor of staying out of the Belt and Road Initiative and are maintaining their position as a major power in the Indian Ocean region. Delhi is watching China's growing interests in the Indian Ocean after the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative with great caution.

Some Indian commentators are even concerned about Beijing's seemingly friendly policies in India's backyard (Indian Ocean). And they do not tolerate China's economic presence in the region (Naseer, and Amin 2017:14). New Delhi is concerned about its competition with China for access to markets and resources at the regional and global levels.

Indian leaders also seem to believe that New Delhi has sufficient power to influence the outcomes of the most important vital issues of the twenty-first century, including Asian stability, providing a model of political and economic governance to The Republic of Central Asia and the South Caucasus enjoy effective management of globalization.

Therefore, India is not ready to share its influence with other players in the Indian Ocean as a gateway to world commodity and energy markets, or to give up the existing capacities in Central Asia and the South Caucasus to advance its interests and establish links with Russia and Europe.

Delhi's urgency in pursuing this path is intensified when faced with a player like China, which has made a relentless effort to expand its sphere of influence from South Asia to Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and even Africa, which means bypassing India or even encircling it.

Thus, India's foreign policy underwent a dramatic transformation after the Cold War, transforming the country from an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement to an active Asian counterweight to the emerging China. This issue also became an important issue for the United States and other great powers after India achieved nuclear status and became a market economy. However, New Delhi's concern for the security of the Indian Ocean is intrinsic and India's protection of this region is not done on behalf of another state.

India's ambition to dominate the Indian Ocean region is deep-rooted and all political parties in India, including the ruling elite and the opposition parties, agree on this foreign policy goal (Naseer, and Amin 2017:13-14).

Therefore, China's return to the Indian Ocean region, as well as Delhi's failure to prevent a larger Chinese presence on India's borders in the wake of the Belt and Road Initiative, carries a reputational and security burden for the Indian government.

In addition, Delhi sees efforts to gain influence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus and establish closer ties with Moscow as vital to breaking the BRI encirclement around India. In the same vein, Beijing has been developing its port in the Indian Ocean region to ensure the security of its vital supply lines and to provide the prerequisites for establishing links with Central Asia and the South Caucasus. From a security and geostrategic perspective, Delhi does not welcome China's port development in the Indian Ocean region.

Both countries want to increase their security advantages in the Indian Ocean region, but India, unlike China, is not willing to engage with the other. However, Delhi's concerns have not prevented Beijing from expanding its military and security presence in the Indian Ocean region, alongside its economic and trade presence. The presentation of the Belt and Road Initiative and the port network in the Indian Ocean region implies both economic and security dimensions.

In contrast, India has sought to use its capabilities in the Indian Ocean to link with Central Asia and the South Caucasus, thereby establishing a foothold in China's new sphere of influence. Or rather, one way to redress the lost balance in the Indian Ocean region in Beijing's favor is for New Delhi to have a more prominent presence in China's new spheres of influence, especially Central Eurasia.

However, China's powerful presence in the Indian Ocean region is much stronger and has more decisive consequences than India's push for a presence in Central Eurasia. Since the early 21st century, China has shown a growing interest in its presence in the Indian Ocean region, and the Maritime Silk Road has also added a new dimension to the Sino-Indian security puzzle after the Tazhai Sea.

Previously, India's main source of insecurity was a relatively continuous network of naval facilities built by China in India's immediate vicinity. Initially dubbed the "String of Pearls" by American analysts, this network quickly became popular in the Indian media and literature, and later around the world.

Today, some indications also suggest that even if the primary rationale for port development in the Maritime Silk Road Initiative is trade, Beijing will use this opportunity to try to strengthen the operational capabilities of its naval power in the String of Pearls (Trembeczki, 2018:38). (China's Port Expansion on the Indian Ocean Coast in the String of Pearls, Although to Protect the Beijing's maritime interests and security are designed, but they are also attractive to India's neighbors (besides the coercive factor).

The Belt and Road Initiative – an economic blueprint for India's neighbors like Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka to strengthen their cooperation with Beijing in the form of a String of Pearls project – will further narrow the field for India.

India is also well aware that the participation of the governments of African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Djibouti are being linked to China as nodes of the Maritime Silk Road transport network, meaning they could become Chinese military bases in the western Indian Ocean region.

Delhi does not see China's access to the entire Indian Ocean via Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and African countries in the form of the Maritime Silk Road as merely a sign of Beijing's intentions to penetrate deeper into South Asia. Rather, Beijing's attempt to encircle the Indian Ocean and exert influence in the Indian Ocean region is seen as a major player to the extent of its acceptance. China, despite its strategic assertiveness in international relations, especially in its relations with its neighbors, since the late 1970s, is not prepared to compromise on its strategic objectives in the Indian Ocean, even at the cost of New Delhi's irritation.

Beijing has attempted to achieve these goals under the guise of economic initiatives such as the Maritime Silk Road, in order to keep the backlash against it balanced and manageable. Beijing has made it clear that it will not allow the Indian Ocean to become the Indian Ocean, which suggests that China is only willing to accept a limited sphere of influence for India in the Indian Ocean region (Chitty, 2018:9).

Of course, China's strategies to limit Delhi's influence in the Indian Ocean are less negative and more positive, which means Beijing's effort to demonstrate a broader presence in the region compared to India. Moreover, China's presence in the Indian Ocean region, it is mostly based on economic and trade coverage; that is, exactly the same pattern that this country followed to gain influence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

China does not endorse perceptions of its hegemonic ambitions and even justifies Beijing's pursuit of rhetorical power vis-à-vis the United States as a counter-hegemonic rather than pro-hegemonic measure.

China seeks to reassure others of its benevolent and honest actions in international relations. Although these actions are associated with the concept of hegemony in international relations theories, China views hegemony negatively and sees it as dependent on hard power instead of soft power. Therefore, China's

proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative, including the Maritime Silk Road, was intended to alleviate regional and international concerns about its intentions.

Yet even Beijing cannot deny that China's ports in the Indian Ocean will have dual economic and military uses. Such a development would further complicate India's security calculations in the region. To further strengthen its military presence and control in the Indian Ocean, China is quietly setting up a new military base in Jiwani, Pakistan, located 80 kilometers west of Gwadar Port.

Previously, Beijing had established its first military base on the Silk Road maritime route in Djibouti in August 2017. The Maldives and Tanzania are also mentioned as other possible candidates for hosting new Chinese naval bases (Brewster, 2018).

If Beijing's plan to establish a military base in Jiwani is successful, it will be used as a joint air and naval facility to support Chinese forces. In the meantime, a group of 16 officers from the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) in a meeting with a number of Pakistani military officers in December 2017 aimed to pave the way for this cooperation. Chinese military officials say the new base is necessary to prepare and support Chinese naval and merchant ships in the region (Blah, 2018:319).

However, despite the dual uses of the Maritime Silk Road and its nodes and Beijing's efforts to justify its military actions in the guise of economic activities, China's conduct of such activities in the region, especially near India's strategic port, is clearly seen as a threat to Delhi's security.

China's Belt and Road Initiative has also posed serious challenges to India's maritime – and perhaps more importantly – land security. Ignoring India's concerns, especially its territorial and border disputes with Pakistan, Beijing has proposed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The China-Pakistan Corridor is the most important sub-route of the Silk Road Economic Belt, which, while boosting Pakistan's economy, could transform Gwadar Port into a trade hub between Africa, West Asia, and South Asia, and fundamentally change the game between India and Pakistan.

The stated goal of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is to ensure the prosperity of production and economic growth in Pakistan through links to other regions, including Afghanistan and Central Asia, while also seeking to improve and strengthen communications and the presence of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in the region.

Therefore, Delhi is strongly opposed to this plan, but Chinese and Pakistani officials say that the presence of Chinese forces is necessary to provide security cover for the mega-projects of the New Silk Road and Chinese workers in Pakistan, given the unstable security situation in the region (Blah, 2018:319). Beijing is said to have deployed around 30,000 military personnel to protect its economic interests in occupied Kashmir. Pakistan will settle down (PTI, July 12, 2018) This comes at a time when any increase in foreign forces along India's borders is seen as a serious and immediate threat to Delhi's security.

The \$46 billion China-Pakistan Corridor project was launched in April 2015 (Hourelid, 2015). A look at its performance over the past four years shows that the project has great potential to bring about change in The geopolitical discourse of the region is tense.

This corridor connects the maritime and land sections of the Belt and Road Initiative, connecting northwest China (Kashgar) to Pakistan's ports on the Gulf of Oman (Gwadar and Karachi) via road and rail routes,

providing China with the shortest and fastest access to the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean region (Figure 1).

Figure 1: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor



The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will significantly expand the existing land connectivity between China and Pakistan.

Therefore, it is likely that this plan will seriously threaten India by upsetting the military balance in Jammu and Kashmir (a disputed territory between India and Pakistan and also to some extent China) to the detriment of Delhi.

Hence, Delhi's initial opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative has focused on this plan. This corridor poses a threat to India from three perspectives: (a) territorial sovereignty, (b) security, and (c) deepening the China-Pakistan strategic partnership.

All these issues are also acutely felt in Kashmir, where the borders of China, India, and Pakistan intersect. China has always tried to maintain neutrality on the Kashmir issue while using the existing capacities in both India and Pakistan to expand its links with regional and sub-regional markets.

To the extent that Beijing has proposed its Myanmar-India-China-Bangladesh Economic Corridor before The Belt and Road Initiative had proposed a path. However, India's concerns have made it very difficult to imagine New Delhi linking its regional infrastructure initiatives to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. India's opposition to the China-Pakistan Corridor stems primarily from concerns about maintaining the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly in Kashmir.

The available evidence, however, suggests that these concerns have not only not abated or diminished, but have also reached a dangerously high level with the military conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir in early 2019.

The intensity of the conflict in Kashmir, due to its connection with the issues of identity and status of the claimant states, makes it very difficult to resolve this dispute in the near and medium term. New Delhi considers any change in the situation in Kashmir to be to its detriment because it is in conflict with the other two states with interests in this region, namely Pakistan and China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor could, in itself, increase powerful China's support for Pakistan, and at the same time, given the connectivity nature of this corridor, the possibility of internationalizing the Kashmir issue is not far-fetched.

Moreover, given Kashmir's proximity to Central Asia, New Delhi is seriously concerned about the spread of extremist and separatist tendencies to the region through the China-Pakistan corridor. Therefore, Delhi's opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative is primarily due to concerns about disrupting the geopolitical balance to India's detriment, and concerns about Pakistan's progress and its economic benefits for Islamabad are of secondary importance. In fact, if we remove the Kashmir issue from the equations of the three countries of India, Pakistan, and China, there is no longer any reason for New Delhi to oppose China-Pakistan trade and economic cooperation, and one can even speak of the possibility of joint cooperation between these three countries, at least in the fields of trade, economy, and energy.

In this case, the playing field will also be much wider, and the possibility of a joint presence of China, India, and Pakistan in Afghanistan and Central Asia will be provided. However, the importance of the Kashmir issue for these three countries is so great that it makes their interaction in neighboring regions very difficult.

China's apparent disregard for territorial sovereignty in India's neighborhood is considered a major challenge to greater cooperation between China and India in the field of communication and infrastructure development. This long-standing concern dates back to the late 1970s, when India objected to the construction of the Karakoram Highway (which would connect China's western territories with Pakistan) through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (Aneja, and Haidar 2018). China's recent initiatives, including the New Silk Road, have forced New Delhi to reiterate these concerns. There is a widespread misconception that the dispute The region over Kashmir is shared by only two parties (India and Pakistan), while China has always been a major party to this dispute (Baruah, 2018:15-16).

The then Indian Defense Minister had reminded them in 2012 that "the Indian territory under Chinese occupation in Jammu and Kashmir since 1962 is about 38,000 square kilometers. Furthermore, under what the 1963 Sino-Pakistani Boundary Agreement Pakistan has illegally ceded 5,180 square kilometers of Indian territory (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) to China, it reads (IE, September 3, 2012). In fact, India's fear of a Chinese military presence in the disputed region of Kashmir, even in the economic and trade sphere, far outweighs New Delhi's concerns about Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

India's biggest concern about the China-Pakistan Corridor is the continued presence of the Chinese military in the Jammu and Kashmir region, which has serious security implications for Delhi and is a major obstacle to India's expansion into Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Beijing and Delhi went to war in 1962 over a border dispute in the Himalayas in northern and eastern India.

Today, if China were to have a more permanent military presence on India's northwest border via Pakistan, this would affect Delhi's security and defense priorities. In this case, there would be no room left for New Delhi to formulate and implement its plans for expansion into Central Asia and the South Caucasus. India

is already engaged in regular border clashes with Chinese forces along its eastern border in Arunachal Pradesh.

In addition, the 2017 standoff between Indian and Chinese soldiers on the Doklam plateau along the Himalayan border severely strained Sino-Indian relations. There have also been sporadic reports of Chinese military presence on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control (the unofficial border between the Indian and Pakistani parts of Kashmir) (Baruah, 2018:16).

However, Beijing claims that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor does not reflect its position on the Jammu and Kashmir issue. Beijing has repeatedly stated that the corridor is merely an economic project that has no bearing on the Kashmir issue. It will not target a third party in the region. It claims to view the Kashmir issue from a historical perspective and that India and Pakistan should jointly find a meaningful solution to it.

The Chinese, meanwhile, have defended the Belt and Road Initiative proposal, describing it as a major investment based on the principle of broad consultation, mutual benefit and mutual benefit cooperation.

According to Chinese officials say the Belt and Road Initiative is designed to promote regional peace and prosperity, not to promote conflict between neighboring countries. Beijing claims to have always entered into regional and global interactions with an open and inclusive attitude, seeking more participation, increased development and prosperity in the region and elsewhere in the world.

In particular, China claims that it has always welcomed India's participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Beijing has also dismissed India's objection to the megaproject, citing the broad international support of more than 100 participating countries and organizations.

Moreover, China's position on this grand initiative has been strengthened, especially after the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution approving China's infrastructure investment plans, including the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. The Security Council has welcomed such Chinese initiatives that seek to strengthen regional economic cooperation, connectivity, trade and transport by land and sea (Blah, 2018:320-321).

This comes as Delhi is clearly witnessing a change in the situation in Kashmir following the presentation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as the most important part of the Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative.

This is a symbolic project of the deepening strategic partnership between China and Pakistan is seen as a threat to Delhi's interests, security, and prestige. This threat becomes even more apparent when we consider the China-Pakistan Corridor project alongside Beijing-Islamabad's cooperation in the form of the Maritime Silk Road and China's port facilities on the Pakistani coast.

The project has shortened Beijing's access to India's eastern and southern coasts. and accelerates China's military presence in these regions. Both the New Silk Road land and maritime initiatives could collectively challenge India's growing interests in South Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and the Persian Gulf, and weaken its role as a regional maritime power.

On the other hand, China's New Silk Road, and especially the China-Pakistan Corridor, has so preoccupied New Delhi that it prevents India from focusing on expanding its sphere of influence towards the valuable regions of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. With all this, Delhi has tried to disrupt this game by

presenting alternative initiatives and restore the regional balance by planning to link Southwest Asia to Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Russia, and continue it to Northern Europe.

New Spice Road, Game-Changing Initiative

The adage that “when the dragon sneezes, the world catches a cold” found a whole new meaning with the loud announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative by Xi Jinping during his visit to Kazakhstan in 2013.

This initiative is seen as a "silk-like gauntlet to China's iron fist" given its increasingly aggressive posture in the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean region, and Central Asia. China's Belt and Road Initiative has sparked understandable concern among the world's major powers, but this fear is alarming for Delhi as the flames of the dragon's fire engulf the country's backyard (Pandya, 2017).

However, Delhi is not discouraged as India is now an important part of the multipolar Asian architecture. Transit and Ready Scenarios in Asia from India's Perspective, as At first glance, it does not seem hopeless. Delhi has brought together a number of stable partners in West Asia, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, whose cooperation with each other has the potential to transform the region's economic and geopolitical landscape to India's advantage and ensure collective benefits. Even before the effort to revive the North-South Corridor, Delhi was also at the center of some regional transport projects such as The 2002 India-Iran-Afghanistan Agreement for Joint Transport Capacity Enhancement through the Mumbai-Chabahar Port Link and the Memorandum of Understanding for the Construction and Use of the Milk-Zaranj-Dalaram Corridor were drafted with the aim of facilitating trade and movement of goods to Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics.

But India's most important and largest transportation project is the international North-South Corridor, known as the New Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, and the above projects are actually its branches. The North-South Corridor is a combined sea-rail-road transport route that was established on September 12, 2000 by its three founding members, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of India, and the Russian Federation, and became operational on May 16, 2002. This corridor was the result of strengthening relations between India and Iran on the one hand, and between Iran and Russia on the other.

Within four years, 10 other states (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Ukraine, and Syria) also joined this agreement, and Bulgaria remains its only observer member (2018:124) (Sarma, 124; 2018: Khattak). The main objectives of the North-South International Transport Corridor Agreement are also as follows. (2019:2 :Gogna)

1. Increasing the effectiveness of transport links for the organization of transport and passengers along the North-South International Transport Corridor.
2. Promoting the access of the Contracting Parties to international markets by rail, road, sea, river and air transport.
3. Cooperation in Increasing the volume of international passenger and cargo transport.
4. Ensuring travel security, cargo safety and environmental protection based on international standards;
5. Coordinating transport policies and legislation in the field of transport with the aim of implementing this Agreement.

6. Establishing equal and non-discriminatory conditions for providers of all types of transport services for all parties in the transport of passengers and cargo in Framework for the North-South Transport Corridor.

Despite the attractiveness of the North-South Corridor and the novelty and interest of the members in its implementation, this project progressed slowly and with difficulty in the first decade after its formalization due to serious doubts and hesitations of its founders due to the sanctions of the United Nations Security Council against Iran and the sanctions of the European Union against Russia, as well as uncertainties about its durability. The most significant effort to sustain and promote the project came from New Delhi, which, driven by India's need to access regional and global commodity and energy markets, has attempted to keep it alive by offering some smaller initiatives. The North-South Corridor received its first impetus in 2003 with the Delhi Declaration.

In this joint statement, both India and Iran reaffirmed their commitment to “expand all potential capacities of the North-South Agreement, its infrastructure, customs coordination and related approvals, expert studies and regular evaluations to help its growth.” The two sides also emphasized the implementation of the objectives of the 2002 India-Iran-Afghanistan Trilateral Agreement (Gogna, 2019:2-3).

Furthermore, with the accession of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the North-South Corridor Agreement in 2005 (Mammadova, 2018), efforts to continue this project continued and its operational area expanded to the South Caucasus. The conclusion of the Ashgabat Agreement on 25 April 2011 between Iran, Oman, Qatar, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which became a member in April 2016, also had a direct impact on the development of the New Drug Road Initiative, while also connecting the Central Asian republics to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

One of the main objectives of this agreement was to coordinate the member states with other corridors located in the Eurasian region, with a special emphasis on the North-South Transport Corridor, which, by joining a larger number of parties, The North-South Corridor Agreement, was strengthened by the latest agreement. Qatar left the Ashgabat Agreement in 2013 and was replaced by Kazakhstan in 2015, Pakistan in November 2016, and finally India in February 2018 (AMTOI, 2018:8).

The North-South Corridor or New Spice Route is actually a multi-modal transport network that connects the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea, then to Russia and finally to northern Europe. The route starts in the Indian port of Mumbai and ends in St. Petersburg, Russia, a distance of 7,200 kilometers (4,478 miles). Two successful test runs¹ have already been conducted along the new route.

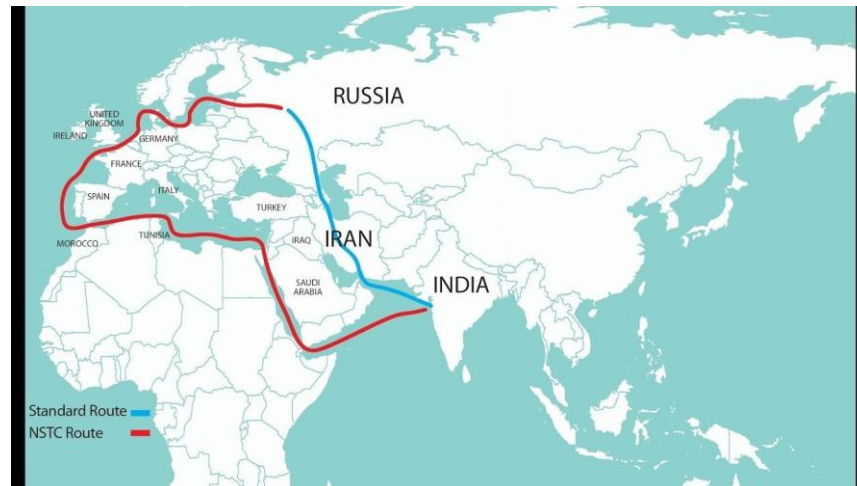
The results show that compared to the traditional route from India to Russia via the Suez Canal, the cost of transporting goods along the new route could be reduced by the rate of \$2,500 per 15 tons of cargo was reduced, and the travel time was reduced from 40-60 days to 25-30 days (Menezes, and Sarma 2018).

The traditional route introduced here is consistent with the ancient maritime route of the Spice Route, which used the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to connect the Middle East and the West. Thus, the new Spice Route has lower costs compared to its ancient maritime counterpart (the traditional route for Middle East-West trade today). It reduces transportation by 30 percent and travel time by 40 percent.

For example, the distance between Mumbai and Moscow on the traditional route is 16,112 kilometers (8,700 nautical miles), which takes 32-37 days to travel. While this distance is reduced to 7,047 kilometers (4,074 nautical miles) by sea and 3,000 kilometers (2,200 nautical miles) by land via the new route, and takes only 19 days. It takes a long time. For the return trip between Delhi and Helsinki, while the traditional sea route

is 16,129 km long and takes 45 days, the combined route of the new drug route with a length of 9,389 km takes only 21 days. (Sarma and Menezes, 2018)

Figure 2. shows the difference in these two routes. Figure 3 also shows the main and secondary communication routes of the New Spice Route that enter Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Asia Minor.



Source: Achmadi et al., 2017:153.

Many governments have contributed to the implementation of the NMDC, especially those located along the route. However, India, as the main investor in the project, has the largest share in financing it.

India has taken the lead in conducting a study on the ground situation of the NMDC and in coordinating among the interested governments. The Federation of Indian Transport Associations conducted the first trial run of the Mumbai-Bandar Abbas (Iran)-Baku (Azerbaijan) and Mumbai-Bandar Abbas-Amirabad (Iran)-Astarakhan (Russia) routes via the Caspian Sea in August 2014.

This study provides detailed information on issues related to transport operators, infrastructure, documentation and banking and insurance at the stages of various types of goods movement were collected.

The Government of India, in collaboration with this federation, has also organized several annual conferences of stakeholders of the North-South International Transport Corridor to share information on the progress of this project with the participation of government officials, business representatives and trade associations with a view to receiving their experiences and recommendations in the field of effective implementation of issues related to Trade and transportation have been established along this route (Gogna, 2019:3).

Figure 3: Main and secondary transportation routes of the new Spice Road.



Source: IRU, 2018:8

The latest step towards realizing the dream of a new spice route was taken in Tehran on May 23, 2016, with the signing of the Chabahar Agreement between the heads of the three countries of India, Iran, and Afghanistan (Iran, June 20, 2016). Chabahar Port, as Iran's first deep-water port, is at the center of India's transport and trade interests, and New Delhi is looking to use it to access Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. South, Russia and Europe. In fact, Chabahar port plays the same role in India's eyes as Pakistan's Gwadar port does for China.

At the signing ceremony of the Chabahar agreement, which was broadcast live on the Times of India television network, Narendra Modi, while emphasizing the importance of this port, announced that his country would spend \$500 million on the development of Chabahar port and New Delhi is determined. It is possible that the implementation grounds of this agreement will be provided in the shortest possible time.

Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also said during the ceremony that "Today's document is not only an economic document, but also a political document and a regional document, and the message of this document is that the countries of the region should take advantage of regional opportunities for the development and strengthening of the entire region" (ibid.).

Implementation document of the agreement Chabahar was signed on November 22, 2018, and the Memorandum of Understanding on its operational strategies was signed on December 24, 2018, in Tehran by the authorities of the three countries: India, Iran, and Afghanistan. (Iran, December 3, 2018; Iran, 1 Aban 1397)

This cooperation entered a new phase on January 7, 2019, with India assuming responsibility for the implementation and execution of economic and trade operations and activities related to Chabahar Port in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding of December 24, 2018.

In this context, the Indian government announced in a statement that "the physical handover of the goods trading equipment at this terminal as well as the administrative building will be completed by December 29, 2018."

India's economic activities in this port also began with the docking of a ship under the Cypriot flag with 72,456 million tons of corn on December 30, 2018" (ISNA, 18 December 2018). India's taking over the economic and trade activities of Chabahar Port is the first presence of this country in managing port operations outside its territory.

The strategic Chabahar Port is the most important node along the The New Spice is, and since this initiative is considered a competitor and alternative to India's New Silk Road, the Chabahar Port is also seen by this country as a competitor and alternative to Pakistan's Gwadar Port.

Although Tehran and possibly other partners of the New Spice Road initiative do not accept this dichotomy and do not use the competitive literature to describe the North-South international transport corridor, The South insists, but cannot expect such things from New Delhi.

As Hassan Rouhani said during the signing of the Chabahar agreement, Tehran wants other countries to join this agreement and strengthen the new path of spice. Pakistan is also a party to the Ashgabat Agreement, one of the objectives of which is to strengthen the New Drug Road Initiative (NDR).

Although India welcomes the idea of comprehensive cooperation between states on the NDR, it is more likely to want them to be separate from China's New Silk Road Initiative or to have a more prominent presence in the NDR compared to its Chinese rival.

For example, Minister During a visit to Uzbekistan in September 2018 to invite Central Asian republics to join the North-South Corridor agreement, the Indian Commerce and Industry Bureau had said that "Uzbekistan was one of the countries on the ancient Silk Road that connected the Far East to Europe and we are now keen to turn this country into a part of the Silicon Corridor" (ET Bureau, 2018). Although these statements or similar statements by Indian officials do not explicitly indicate the withdrawal of states from the New Silk Road and their joining the New Spice Road, the content of their words reflects New Delhi's competitive interpretation of the New Silk Road-New Spice Road duality. New Delhi has also taken advantage of the absence of the South Caucasian republics on the main route of the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the New Spice Road has been designed in such a way that the city Baku is one of its main hubs.

The main goal of implementing the New Pharmaceutical Road initiative is to move goods at lower costs and in less time than the traditional route. From this perspective, unlike many other transport corridors where policy has been the main driver, the main driver of this initiative is economic. This analysis was largely acceptable before the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative and the opening of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in 2015, but since then the political-security weight of the new corridor near New Delhi has become more prominent. To the extent that the operationalization of the North-South Corridor after about 15 years of inactivity can be attributed to India's political motivations to compensate for its backwardness compared to China and Pakistan's high share of regional transport, which affects the geopolitical balance between India and Pakistan.

One of the benefits of using the metaphor of a new drug route for the North-South Corridor, in addition to efforts to brand the corridor regionally and globally, is the emphasis on India's competitive incentives, which illuminates the boundary between the corridor's stagnation and momentum (pre- and post-2016). In examining India's competitive motivations for developing the North-South Corridor, one cannot draw a precise line between political, security, economic, or even cultural motivations.

In today's world of international politics, there is a complex interdependence not only between players but also between thematic areas, and the impact of any thematic area on other thematic areas cannot be ignored. For example, a rival player's rapid economic progress can easily and quickly lead to a leap in military technology, upending the existing distribution of power.

India's competition to replace the New Spice Products Initiative with the New Silk Road Initiative, although at first glance it is focused on the economic and trade sphere, New Delhi's objectives for this competition are located in the sphere of strategic analysis.

There are no significant political tensions between the countries along the New Spice Route. Relations between the members of the North-South Corridor have also been peaceful and non-confrontational over the past decades.

Therefore, the interested parties can engage in strategic partnerships and long-term planning with peace of mind, as borders along the New Spice Route are not closed. India expects to take advantage of this advantage (or prerequisite) to realize its efforts to gain a greater share of markets, especially in the energy and transport sectors, in Central Eurasia.

The country has strong incentives to follow this path, above all the establishment of the New Silk Road to the Kashmir region and its connection to the Indian Ocean region.

CONCLUSION

Asia has become one of the most important factors in the construction of the global economy and is a region that is being pulled in several directions, especially by two powerful, vast, and populous driving forces: China and India. Therefore, "competition" and "substitutability" are two key concepts for understanding the Asian political ecosystem and analyzing the interactions between the players in this region.

While China has been quietly building the New Silk Road since the early 2000s, another multinational international initiative called the New Spice Route has been launched with much less enthusiasm, led by India and centered on the territory of Iran.

Like the New Silk Road, the New Spice Products Road Initiative also seeks to increase trade volume, reduce barriers, and strengthen the economic power of participants. If successfully implemented, India could assert its position as a global maritime and trade superpower and witness the transformation of its previously underdeveloped ports into regional and global trade hubs. India's expansion into Central Asia and the South Caucasus, which are also China's new sphere of influence, has the potential to tip the balance in New Delhi's favor.

This project could also have many benefits for the landlocked interested states, as it would provide access for the republics of Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Afghanistan to the thriving shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Indian Ocean and beyond.

The two grand schemes of the New Silk Road and the New Spice Route can be analyzed from various perspectives. This article emphasizes the competitive aspect of the issue and examines the impact of the two powers, China and India, on their regional and global positions.

The relations between these two Asian giants in modern history have always been complex and multifaceted, shaped by economic interdependence as well as deep distrust and power rivalry. It is here that,

given the article's reference to the power competition between two major players, one can analyze one's theoretical approach in the form of a relatively limited structural perspective called structural realism.

A look at the strategic concepts and perceptions of the New Silk Road and the New Spice Road for China and India, and its combination with the basic components of structural realism (relative power, anarchy, self-centeredness), will shed light on the concerns of New Delhi and Beijing.

India is concerned that by strengthening China's trade ties through the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing could gain control over its foreign policy choices. Influence the countries of the region and align them around its axis with economic tools.

In this regard, the Gwadar port is seen by India as a potential base for Chinese naval power in the Indian Ocean, adding to this country's concerns. Also, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which passes through some parts of Kashmir claimed by India, may be a concern for New Delhi to destabilize the Kashmir dispute while also internationalizing it by opening up the path for China and other interested states to take.

The infrastructure development programs and maritime projects associated with the Belt and Road Initiative provide Beijing with a valuable opportunity to deploy additional forces and sufficient offensive and defensive hardware in the geographical spaces adjacent to India, which it can deploy in the A possible military confrontation between China and India or India and Pakistan would severely upset the balance to the detriment of New Delhi. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor would lead to the deployment of more Chinese forces in the regions adjacent to India, especially Kashmir, which is considered a serious threat by New Delhi.

Islamabad, which is also considered a long-term strategic ally for China vis-à-vis India, is a key player in both parts of the Belt and Road Initiative (the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road) and a major player in the growing India. The least likely consequence of Pakistan's full involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative for New Delhi is China's growing maritime presence in the Indian Ocean.

The Belt and Road Initiatives are therefore The New Silk Road and the New Spice Route play a crucial role in the balance of power between China and India. Therefore, Beijing and Delhi are not acting in the Asian infrastructure game based on completely clear objectives based on purely commercial and economic interests but rather have embarked on a more ambiguous game to change the distribution of regional and global power in their favor or to prevent it from collapsing to their detriment.

Consequently, in response to this question, the article asks: "What is India's primary motivation and goal for reconstructing the North-South International Corridor and promoting the new pharmaceutical route?" We can refer to the same hypothesis at the beginning of the article and say that India's efforts to reconstruct the North-South International Corridor and promote the new pharmaceutical route are primarily focused on security goals and motivations, including confronting the changing situation in Jammu and Kashmir in favor of Pakistan; The negative side of China's geopolitical-geostrategic opportunities in the Indian Ocean region is creating a gap between Pakistan and its neighbors, especially Afghanistan, and its geopolitical alliance with its new partners in Central Asia and the South Caucasus through Iran.

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