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Chapter 8

India and the Belt and Road Initiative

From Critic to Competitor

Ian Hall

On May 13, 2017, on the eve of the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) in Beijing, a spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs issued a blunt statement on the People's Republic of China's (PRC) Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹ It noted New Delhi's long-standing concerns about the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which runs through territory administered by Pakistan as Gilgit-Baltistan, and which India claims as part of Jammu and Kashmir.² Then, in a departure from India's approach to the BRI up to that point, the statement also offered a detailed and pointed critique of the wider endeavor. It observed that, in India's view,

connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. 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.³

Since these principles were not in operation, in New Delhi's view—and because India believes that the PRC is refusing to “engage in a meaningful dialogue” on the BRI—the spokesperson confirmed that an Indian representative would not attend the BRF.⁴

This Indian statement was both unanticipated and unusual.⁵ It deviated from New Delhi's typical approach to Sino-Indian bilateral diplomacy since the normalization of relations in the late 1980s, which has been to handle significant disagreements quietly and privately.⁶ New Delhi's public rebuff

to Beijing and its refusal to participate in the BRF also set it apart from like-minded Indo-Pacific states with reservations about the initiative, including Australia, Japan, Singapore, and the United States. Unlike India, those states all sent representatives to Beijing—albeit not heads of state or government—and issued lukewarm statements following the event that generally eschewed overt criticism. Australia, for example, sent its Trade Minister, Steven Ciobo, who subsequently expressed support for the idea of improved connectivity, as well as the hope that the BRI would employ a “transparent, collaborative and planned approach” in attempting to achieve it.⁷

Moreover, the May 2017 statement was followed by a welter of criticism from Indian observers of the BRI. Many argued that the BRI was a neo-imperial scheme to facilitate the imposition of a Beijing-centric regional order, brought about by the imposition of chronic indebtedness on weaker states. For all this criticism, however, this chapter observes that this Indian response was not a function of some kind of reflexive anticapitalist sentiment. While New Delhi did not issue any new statements that extended or elaborated upon the May 2017 statement,⁸ and began to discuss both strategies for dissuading regional states, especially in South Asia, from engaging too deeply in the BRI, to also started to engage more positively and urgently with alternative infrastructure initiatives, including those to be delivered in bilateral partnership with Japan, and more recently with the other three “Quad” states: Australia, Japan, and the United States.

This chapter explores the grounds for India’s opposition to the BRI, which is expressed in unusually strong language when seen in the wider context of Sino-Indian relations, and the reasons for the emergence of India as a putative competitor to China in the delivery of regional connectivity. It argues that while India has a mixed record in delivering high-quality, affordable, and functional infrastructure, both domestically and internationally, these new moves are significant and could well be consequential. There is evidence that India’s ability to build infrastructure and improve connectivity is improving and that it may be able to deliver better results in partnership with others, notably Japan, which are leading players in regional development.

To make this case, this chapter is divided into four parts. The first traces India’s responses to the BRI as it evolved between September and October 2013, when it was first proposed by Chinese president Xi Jinping, and the BRF in May 2017. The second takes a step back to explore India’s wider approach to the various challenges that China poses, putting its BRF statement into context. The third section looks in detail at the arguments that undermined and accompanied India’s official response to the BRF invitation. And the fourth and final part explores some of the alternative infrastructure and connectivity projects India is now working on with various regional partners.

WRESTLING WITH OBOR

The “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) scheme, later rebranded the BRI, emerged at an inopportune time for India, in late 2013.⁹ A General Election loomed in April and May of the following year,¹⁰ and Manmohan Singh’s Congress-dominated United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, beset by accusations that it had badly underperformed in office, as well as multiple corruption allegations, was tired and lackluster.¹¹ New Delhi did, however, convey a guardedly positive response to Beijing’s initial approaches on improving regional connectivity. In December 2013, India signed up to the BCIM corridor intended to link Kunming to Kolkata via Mandalay and Dhaka, at that point conceived as a discrete (that is, non-OBOR/BRI) project. During a meeting with Chinese special representative Yang Jiechi three months later, in February 2014, Singh also welcomed the idea of the overland New Silk Road Initiative.¹² The prime minister (PM) and his officials were not drawn, however, on the question of the maritime component of the BRI, offering no public comment on the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) during or after the meeting.¹³

The advent of the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in May 2014 did not bring any immediate change to these positions, despite, on the one hand, public prompting from the Chinese ambassador in a newspaper editorial published during the election campaign,¹⁴ and on the other, signs that Narendra Modi and his team were more skeptical about China and its intentions toward India than their predecessors.¹⁵ Instead, for the first few months of Modi’s term in office, India kept its counsel and delayed making decisions. In late June 2014, during Vice President Hamid Ansari’s visit to China, Beijing again sought India’s backing for the MSR but was met with a polite request for more detail on its plans.¹⁶ Another plea—this time for an endorsement of the full BRI—was made by the Chinese foreign ministry in August 2014, in interviews given to Indian journalists in Beijing, in advance of Xi Jinping’s state visit to India the following month.¹⁷ This approach was also rebuffed, with no mention of the BRI made in the lengthy joint statement issued following the meeting, apart from a reference to the two countries’ shared commitment to the BCIM project.¹⁸

This refusal to endorse the BRI occurred at a time in which there was a marked cooling of bilateral relations, during the second half of 2014. In the run-up to Xi’s trip to India that September, as Kanti Bajpai notes, Beijing and New Delhi both assumed tougher stances toward one another.¹⁹ On the Indian side, this was achieved by way of a series of high-level visits to states with their own differences with China: Modi went to Japan from August 31 to September 3, while External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and then-president Pranab Mukherjee went to Vietnam. On the Chinese side, the signaling was less subtle: a week before the Xi visit, units of the People’s

Liberation Army (PLA) entered Indian-controlled territory claimed by China in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir. This intrusion met with a sharp response from New Delhi. Modi ordered three battalions of Indian troops into the area and then—in an unusual move for an Indian PM—he publically criticized the PLA incursion during a joint press conference held with Xi during the latter’s visit.²⁰

The final straw for New Delhi was, however, yet to come. In April 2015, Xi made a state visit to Pakistan. There he unveiled the US\$46bn CPEC project (now valued at some US\$64bn),²¹ and confirmed that it was a central component of the OBOR/BRI scheme.²² This announcement cast a pall over Modi’s reciprocal trip to China the following month.²³ In response, in Beijing, the Indian PM reportedly lodged a formal protest about the CPEC, noting that the planned road and rail corridor passed through territory India regards as its own.²⁴ In the weeks that followed, New Delhi also began to draw unfavorable contrasts between BRI and other Chinese-led initiatives that it supports, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and BRICS projects like the New Development Bank (NDB). In comments made in Singapore in July 2015, for example, then-Indian foreign secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar argued that unlike the AIIB and the NDB, which were created by multilateral negotiations, and which are governed multilaterally, the BRI is a unilateral, “national Chinese initiative” “devised” to serve its “national interest.”²⁵

This pattern of Indian behavior did not change between mid-2015 and the eve of the BRF in May 2017, despite considerable Chinese efforts to woo Indian scholars and think tank analysts over to more positive assessments through a series of BRI-focused dialogues and conferences. A lively discussion about the initiative did occur outside government, with some prominent voices urging that India try to find a way to use it to its advantage.²⁶ But at the official level, India mostly “maintained coy and studied silence,” criticizing the BRI only indirectly, aside from formulaic protests about the CPEC and the road and rail corridor through Pakistani-administered Kashmir.²⁷ Modi, his external affairs minister Swaraj, and foreign secretary Jaishankar remained diplomatic, but firm, continuing to welcome for greater “connectivity” in South Asia and the Indian Ocean but insisting that it be developed “through consultative processes,” not unilateral decisions, and arguing that connectivity initiatives should not become exercises in “hard-wiring” designed to limit the autonomy of involved states.²⁸

MANAGING CHINA

New Delhi’s highly critical public statement of May 2017 extended these specific criticisms of the BRI and added to them. It also signaled the end of

India's three-and-a-half years of fence sitting on the Chinese initiative, begun by Manmohan Singh's government in late 2013. And just as importantly, it demonstrated the Modi government's willingness to air differences with Beijing freely and openly, in contrast to long-established Indian practice.

Since the late 1980s, when bilateral ties were finally normalized after more than twenty years of estrangement after the 1964 border war, India's China policy has been characterized by caution and restraint, reflecting the power differential between the two.²⁹ During the post-Cold War period, New Delhi has practiced its own version of "conengagement"³⁰—working to nurture trade and investment ties, within limits, and cooperating to advance shared interests in key areas of global governance, like climate change but also balancing Beijing's military and diplomatic heft through military modernization at home, the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent, the forging of strategic partnerships with old friends (like Vietnam) and new ones (like Australia, Japan, and the United States), and greater involvement in regional institutions, from the East Asia Summit to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Throughout, it has also tried to avoid disagreeing with China in public, aiming instead to manage differences them quietly, through conventional diplomatic channels, behind closed doors.

Why, then, did New Delhi issue such a strong statement as it did on the eve of the BRF in May 2017? Part of the answer obviously concerns the CPEC project, since it directly impinges upon territory that India considers its own. But this is not the only reason. The other part of the answer runs deeper, connecting with New Delhi's growing mistrust of Beijing's intentions toward India, and indeed the wider Indo-Pacific region, and its mounting concern about Chinese assertiveness in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, especially after Xi's elevation to the presidency in late 2012.³¹

India's political elite has of course long harbored worries about the effects that China's rapid economic development might have on its independence, prosperity, and security, and New Delhi has tried to hedge against possible security challenges arising from China in various ways, including acquiring nuclear weapons and new delivery systems after 1998.³² But during the 2000s, many respected and influential Indian analysts were still cautiously positive about the prospects for building a "wide-ranging and healthy bilateral relationship."³³ This mood began to change toward the end of the decade, however, as a series of Chinese actions undermined New Delhi's confidence. In April 2009, China blocked an ADB loan for a project in Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing claims as "South Tibet," highlighting both that claim and China's ability to use regional institutions as a stick with which to beat India. In October, China issued a formal diplomatic protest about a prime ministerial visit to that Indian state. At the same time, Beijing also began to issue "stapled" visas, instead of regular ones, to Indian residents of Jammu

and Kashmir visiting China, arguing that because that area was in dispute, it should be recognized as such. The PRC also intensified the building of dual-use infrastructure up to and along the disputed Sino-Indian Line of Actual Control (LAC). In parallel, it stymied attempts to put pressure on Pakistan to release those responsible for orchestrating the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks.³⁴ By the early 2010s, as a result, influential Indian analysts began to talk of China less as a putative partner in the management of the emerging multipolar order, and more of a “challenge” that “impinges directly on India’s geopolitical space.”³⁵

During this period, in Manmohan Singh’s second term as leader of the Congress Party-dominated UPA government, China policy also began to divide Left and Right in Indian politics. Criticism of Singh’s approach from the Opposition BJP became increasingly vocal, and was taken up by Modi himself when he emerged as that party’s candidate for the prime ministership in the long run-up to the 2014 election.³⁶ Indeed, although many argue—rightly—that core elements of Modi’s foreign policy builds upon positions established under the Congress-led coalition,³⁷ it was clear that even before the election his government was going to adopt a bolder China policy than its predecessor.³⁸ During the campaign in late 2013 and early 2014, Modi made robust public comments about China, most clearly in calling on Beijing to set aside its “mindset of expansion.”³⁹ He also made a series of moves intended to demonstrate his—and India’s—independence, including inviting the leader of the Tibetan government in exile, Lobsang Sangay, to his swearing-in ceremony as Prime Minister.⁴⁰ Modi’s first three state visits outside of South Asia—to Japan, the United States, and Australia—were also clear signs of intent, signaling that his government was not going to allow Beijing to bully India or circumscribe its ties with like-minded partners in the region.

For the most part, Modi’s government has stuck with this more robust approach since 2014, despite mixed views in New Delhi about its effectiveness, especially in countering Chinese influence over India’s regional neighbors.⁴¹ Its response to PLA incursions in Ladakh during Xi’s visit to Gujarat in September 2014 has been mentioned—Modi sent troops to the LAC and publically called out the transgression. This set the tone for further acts of “defiance,” as Bajpai has observed. Some of these have been merely rhetorical, including comments made by Indian officials and ministers about India’s sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh, visas, water sharing, the trade deficit, and Beijing’s refusal to allow India into the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group and to put accused Pakistani terrorists on UN lists.⁴² Modi has also reiterated his earlier statements, made on the campaign trail, about China’s supposedly “expansionist” tendencies and its need to change its behavior toward bordering states.⁴³ Other acts have been more tangible. New Delhi’s willingness to see the mid-2017 Doklam standoff—in which the PLA and

Indian troops confronted each other in an area of Bhutan Beijing claims as its own—through to the end, despite dire threats of punishment aired by the Chinese media and foreign ministry, is one example of this changed attitude.⁴⁴ Others including India's efforts to deepen and broaden ties with key strategic partners, especially Japan and the United States, and to reconvene the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the "Quad"), despite concerns about Australia's wavering China policy, in particular.⁴⁵

DEBATING THE BRI

The evolution of the BRI from late 2013 onward, and its emergence as Xi's "signature policy,"⁴⁶ exacerbated existing worries in New Delhi and placed even more pressure on Modi's government and its preferred approach to managing Beijing. In particular, the BRI generated anxiety about China's intentions toward India and the wider Indo-Pacific, especially about its use of "economic statecraft" to achieve its objectives, and about its potential impact on India's political and strategic autonomy and that of neighbors.⁴⁷ These concerns tapped into long-standing and deeply rooted beliefs about the causes of India's subjection to British imperial rule and removal of its political autonomy—beliefs which underpin a persistent skepticism in Indian politics about free trade and cross-border flows of investment, and about connectivity, clear in both secular- and Hindu nationalist policy agendas.⁴⁸

In the run-up to the BRF, these latter beliefs came to the fore in India's public debate over the BRI, as critical voices grew louder and more positive Indian assessments of the initiative and the opportunities it might hold for the country were sidelined.⁴⁹ The title of Ashok Malik's op-ed in the *Daily Pioneer*, published a few days before the forum and reprinted by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), a leading Delhi think tank, reflected this new mood: "OBOR: For India it's a road to subjugation." Malik—who on August 1, 2017, became Indian president Ram Nath Kovind's press secretary—argued that

It is facile to believe the Chinese are seeking to build infrastructure in other countries only because they themselves have excess infrastructure capacities and are looking for ancillary manufacturing locations...and new markets for their products outside China. [. . .] [N]obody makes such ambitious investment decisions at a time when global demand is in a slump. [. . .] Far from being a force for stability, One-Belt-One-Road is disturbing domestic and regional political balance[s] and weakening democratic institutions in the countries it enters. It is already producing a series of client states. Their very existence is dependent on furthering Chinese interests.⁵⁰

These arguments were echoed by a series of other prominent commentators. In the *Economic Times*, for instance, Dhruva Jaishankar of Brookings India also argued that the commercial logic of the BRI is questionable, pointing to the “white elephant” of the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, dubbed the world’s “most underused,”⁵¹ and the development of “dual use” facilities, especially ports. Connectivity should be achieved in transparent ways through multilateral engagement, he argued, because “drawing lines upon a map in a unilateral fashion” strikes many as “sinister.”⁵² Writing in *Outlook India*, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan from ORF was even blunter: the BRI was an “imperialistic plan” that would plunge regional states into debt traps from which they would struggle to emerge, if at all.⁵³

Other influential analysts drew comparisons with earlier European imperial projects. At a forum hosted by the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore that coincided with the BRF, C. Raja Mohan outlined parallels between the BRI and European colonial infrastructure projects, arguing: “[w]hat China is doing today is exactly what the British were doing in the nineteenth century, of creating new ports, creating new commercial nodes, setting new licensing standards.” The ambition of this initiative, however, dwarfed its British equivalent: “unlike in the past, [where] it is said that Britain built an empire in an absent minded fit . . . here it is being done by design. . . a conscious deliberate program to link the world under the auspices of the Chinese.”⁵⁴ These views chimed with official perceptions and helped justify India’s stand on the BRI on the eve of the Beijing Forum—with Modi’s assertion that the present Chinese government is inherently “expansionist” and with the broader argument that the initiative is a Chinese project designed for Chinese ends, insensitive to the concerns and needs of others.⁵⁵

FROM CRITIC TO COMPETITOR

In the past, these kinds of worries about the limits that economic connectivity have in the past imposed on political autonomy, and might impose in the future, have stymied India’s engagement in regional infrastructure projects and deeper integration into regional markets.⁵⁶ Interestingly, however, since the advent of the BRI New Delhi has also moved to accelerate a number of preexisting infrastructure development projects and to begin new ones. These include projects targeted at building or upgrading domestic infrastructure and those to be delivered in partnership with South Asian states or others beyond the immediate region, notably Japan, and, more recently, the other two Quad states, Australia and the United States. These projects complement or extend past or existing initiatives, including long-standing Africa-India health-care projects that embed telemedicine and involve the creation of Internet

connections in remote areas.⁵⁷ And they build on India's developing expertise in the on-time and on-budget completion of major domestic infrastructure projects, such as the ten urban metros in existence or under construction; the solar power plants and rooftop installations slated to deliver 100 GW by 2020, funded in part by the World Bank; the major new airport terminals in Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, and so on; Gujarat's Gujarat International Finance Tec-City; the US\$10bn "Sagar Mala" port upgrade program; the US\$15bn Japanese-funded and Japanese-supported Ahmedabad–Mumbai high-speed rail link; and the US\$100bn Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, also progressing with Japanese assistance.

Across South Asia and beyond, into east Africa and South East Asia, India has now engaged in a series of major infrastructure projects that, while dwarfed by the declared scale of the BRI, run in parallel or compete with components of China's initiative. These include road and rail building under the auspices of the South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), and important measures to improve trade facilitation, which will better connect India to South East Asia; the nascent Asia-Africa Trade Corridor concept New Delhi is beginning to develop with Tokyo; the substantial investments made in Chabahar Port in Iran, and the associated rail link intended to run into Afghanistan that is part of the bigger so-called International North South Transportation Corridor into Russia and onwards into Europe; and the nascent discussions among the Quad states about how they might collaborate on regional connectivity.

CONNECTING WITH SOUTH EAST ASIA

The SASEC grouping, now involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, was first formed in 2001 to find ways to cooperate on economic issues beyond those being explored in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, long deadlocked by differences between India and Pakistan. Working with the ADB, SASEC works on discrete projects, successfully delivering some forty of these infrastructure and development initiatives up to mid-2016, at a cost of US\$7.7bn.⁵⁸

SASEC is now part way into delivering a new set of initiatives detailed in the ten-year operational plan it published in 2016. These include joint projects that align with those of other regional forums, including the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Together, they aim to upgrade cross-border roads and rail connections, develop better port infrastructure, and improve regional airports but also to address regulatory issues concerning trade facilitation, build better energy infrastructure, and establish cross-border trade corridors. In 2016–2018, SASEC was

coordinating the expenditure of another US\$16–17bn on new and upgraded roads, enhanced port infrastructure, and improvements to airports in Bhutan and Nepal, and an additional half a billion dollars on trade facilitation.⁵⁹ It was also discussing another \$58bn in energy projects.⁶⁰

Some of these schemes have great potential for India and for the broader region. The 1,360-kilometer India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway between Moreh, in Manipur state, and Mae Sot in Thailand, for example, should open up new opportunities for greater overland trade with South East Asia, which already accounts for almost half of India's trade, especially for businesses in the poor North East of the country. It ought also to lessen India's dependence on shipping routes through the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea, at least for moving goods into mainland South East Asian markets, especially in the Mekong region.⁶¹ Begun in 2012—a decade after it was first proposed—the highway has been part funded by the ADB, which sees it as an integral part of the broader “Asian Highway Network,” but the Modi government has given it a new impetus in recent months, partly out of concern about the BRI. In August 2017, it approved more than \$250m in additional finance for the scheme, reportedly in response to competing Chinese initiatives, having earlier announced funding for the widening and improvement of the Imphal to Moreh highway linking the capital of Manipur to the border town, also in collaboration with the ADB.⁶² While it is unlikely that it will be completed by the promised date of 2020, the Trilateral Highway should be finished by the mid-2020s, at the latest.

Connecting to Africa

Like the various SASEC schemes, the AAGC also predates the BRF, but it is clear too that China's unfolding connectivity plans have injected energy into the initiative. The AAGC was prefigured in the joint statement issued after the November 2016 Tokyo summit between Modi and his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe.⁶³ Yet it was not until the late May 2017 India-Africa summit and African Development Bank meeting held in Gandhinagar in India that the AAGC was described in any detail. Intended to deliver “development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, capacity and skill enhancement and people-to-people partnerships,” its aims echo at least some of those of the BRI.⁶⁴ Its slated geographical coverage, however, is narrower, involving India, Japan, and a number of South East Asian states (notably Myanmar, Singapore, and Thailand), Indian Ocean states (Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritius, and the Seychelles), and East African littoral states (Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), as well as Bangladesh and Mongolia.⁶⁵

Indian analysts like S. D. Pradhan, a former deputy national security advisor, are keen to emphasize that, unlike the BRI, the AAGC is properly

multilateral and collaborative, aiming at local employment and following international standards for financing.⁶⁶ It is also conceived as an extension of long-established partnerships and projects, including India's pioneering and broad-based International Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, launched in 1964, and the Africa-India Framework for Cooperation launched at the first India-Africa Forum Summit in 2008 that also encompassed a wide range of education, health, capacity-building, peace, and governance initiatives.⁶⁷ The AAGC is being sold, moreover, as a means of tying these various programs up with India's "Look / Act East" policies directed at South East Asia, and Japan's so-called "Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure", outlined at the G7 meeting in May 2016, and its broader development program, recently repackaged to fit with its Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept. The bulk of the funding, however, will likely come from Japan, which has promised US\$200bn to the AAGC, supplemented by loans from India's Exim Bank.⁶⁸

Chabahar

India's interest in Iran's Chabahar Port is also long-standing, dating back to the early 2000s, and deep-rooted, since it potentially gives India access to move goods north to Afghanistan and into Central Asia on the International North South Transportation Corridor, bypassing overland routes through Pakistan. It could also provide New Delhi with a strategically useful temporary or even permanent naval facility close to both Pakistan and the Persian Gulf. However, until a deal was struck with Tehran in July 2016, India was unable to make a substantial investment in the port and related infrastructure because of UN sanctions imposed on Iran as a result of its nuclear weapons program. Under the terms of that deal, New Delhi pledged around US\$500bn to upgrade the port, build a rail link, and develop a special economic zone.⁶⁹ New Delhi has since struck a transit agreement with Tehran, while India Ports Global Private Limited has acquired short-term rights to operate the port, with others, including the Adani Group, interested in a longer-term deal.⁷⁰

The Quad and Indo-Pacific Infrastructure?

Aside from these various initiatives already under way, India has also reportedly been involved in discussions—albeit tentative—with Australia and the United States about other infrastructure projects in the region.⁷¹ Connectivity was apparently on the agenda for the Manila meeting of Quad country officials on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in November 2017.⁷² Since then, their "consultations" have apparently evolved toward a putative plan for the four countries to help coordinate infrastructure funding,⁷³ as well as other projects, such as the so-called "ASEAN-Australia Infrastructure Co-operation

Initiative” announced in Sydney in March 2018.⁷⁴ Modi has also discussed bilateral cooperation aimed at “bolstering regional economic connectivity” with the Trump administration.⁷⁵ Exactly what these would entail, however, individually and collectively, is so far unclear, with few concrete proposals or mechanisms outlined.

CONCLUSION

Despite an attempt to “reset” Sino-Indian relations in the aftermath of Doklam New Delhi remains both outside the BRI and critical of it. Rightly or wrongly, Modi continues to resist Chinese pressure to endorse the BRI in some way, as he did at his “informal summit” with Xi in Wuhan in late April 2018.⁷⁶ New Delhi’s objections to the initiative, this chapter has argued, are deeply rooted, and go beyond the issue of the CPEC project and Kashmir, arising from growing concern about China’s intentions generated by Beijing’s attempts to build influence in South Asia, project military power into the Indian Ocean, and coerce its neighbors, especially those with which, like India, it has territorial disputes.

These concerns are also driving New Delhi to accelerate connectivity initiatives to which it was already committed, like the SASEC road, rail, and facilitation projects, and toward new one, to be delivered in collaboration with multiple partners in varying combination. Whether these succeed is yet to be seen, but it should be observed that India’s capacity to develop effective programs in bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral settings is improving, and while its domestic infrastructure remains often dire, its capacity to deliver good-quality results is also getting better. Within India, new airports and metro systems—most notably in Delhi—have been constructed well and within budget, on occasion with Japanese financial and technical support. Outside India, there are also successes, including the ADB-funded rail line between Mazar-e-Sharif and Hairatan, completed in ten months by an Indian-led team.⁷⁷ These efforts are, of course, small scale compared to the stated ambition of the BRI, but they indicate a willingness to compete with China, bilaterally or in partnership with others.

NOTES

1. The best short analysis of the BRI and its drivers remains Peter Cai’s “Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative,” *Lowy Institute for International Policy Analysis*, March 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative>. For a longer study that puts the BRI into a wider context, see also

Yong Wang, “Offensive for Defensive: The Belt and Road Initiative and China’s New Grand Strategy,” *The Pacific Review* 29(3) (2016), pp. 455–463.

2. On the CPEC, see especially Andrew Small, “First Movement: Pakistan and the Belt and Road Initiative,” *Asia Policy* 24 (2017), pp. 80–87.

3. Ministry of External Affairs, India, “Official Spokesperson’s Response to a Query on Participation of India in OBOR/BRI Forum,” May 13, 2017, <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/28463/Official+Spokespersons+response+to+a+query+on+participation+of+India+in+OBOR+BRI+Forum>.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Suman Bery, “India’s Economic Diplomacy in the Belt and Road Era,” *East Asia Forum*, July 5, 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/07/05/indian-economic-diplomacy-in-the-belt-and-road-era/>.

6. Ashley Tellis, “China and India in Asia,” in Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding (eds.), *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 141. See also Manjeet Singh Pardesi, “Modi’s China Policy—Change or Continuity?” in Sinderpal Singh (ed.), *Modi and the World: (Re) Constructing Indian Foreign Policy* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2017), p. 4. China and India broke off diplomatic relations in 1962, as a result of their border war. Although they reestablished formal diplomatic ties in 1979, most analysts agree that normalization of relations did not occur until Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to Beijing in 1988, which produced a joint statement reaffirming shared principles and promising cooperation in a range of areas.

7. Steven Ciobo, “Belt and Road Forum,” May 14, 2017, http://trademinister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2017/sc_mr_170514b.aspx.

8. When comment has been offered on the BRI by Indian spokespeople, it is to reiterate the points made in the May 2017 statement. See, for example, Ministry of External Affairs, India, “Response to Question No. 2735 Belt and Road Initiative of China from Shri A. K. Selvaraj, Rajya Sabha,” August 10, 2017, <http://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/28857/question+no2735+belt+and+road+initiative+of+china>.

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