

Crisis Communication on One Belt and One Road Initiative of China: A Geo-Political Change

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Abstract: In the ancient past, much of East Asia and China was connected to different trading regions of the world through Silk Road. It got its name on the main export item of the then China: Silk. Now China has taken the initiative to rebuild the Silk Road through its OBOR initiative. OBOR has two components in the shape of two projects: over land SREB and a 21st century MSR. Later, merging these two projects under one canopy, OBOR has been termed as BRI of China. This study attempts to answer the research question: One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR) of China as the primer to a new geo-strategic hegemony for building the competitive Chinese world order would stabilize? A content analysis was performed on pivotal media coverage about OBOR. Since the ever first speech of the President of China, Mr. Xi Jinping in 2013, a media debate is there, on this Chinese initiative. OBOR is an effort to increase the regional connectivity to embrace a China oriented future. For them, this brighter future in the shape of an economic move for Chinese domination in the global affairs, while being the centre of global trade network. China would be celebrating its hundredth anniversary in 2049 and this is exactly the target date of completing the OBOR. A keyword analysis yielded through the speeches of Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping on the global media networks alongwith the messages conveying Chinese aspirations of its coming out as the global economic lynch pin by the new Chinese geo-strategic hegemony under the canopy of connectivity and cooperation is the pivot of these well telecasted speeches.

Keywords: Geo-strategy, Chinese geo-strategic hegemony, competitive Chinese world order, foreign policy, economic pivot, maritime, overland, port projects, infrastructure, connectivity, people to people contact.

1. INTRODUCTION

The east-west trading web has been known as “Silk Road” since centuries. This trading web comprised on over land and maritime silk routes across Indian and the regions in Indian Ocean. This is not the nostalgia of china, but it is present day Chinas’ economic and geopolitical dream which had been publicly presented by Xi Jinping in October 2013. It has been launched as China’s most ambitious initiative as OBOR, while the SREB had already been launched earlier to that year and a MSR, which stretches from Xinjiang up to Baltic Sea. The term OBOR is a combination of these two Chinese initiatives or projects. Now OBOR has been re-baptized as BRI.

OBOR is a signature push of Xi Jinping for infrastructure and investment, connecting Asia, Europe and Africa mainly. BRI was initially the OBOR initiative of china. Debut of BRI was made for international cooperation in April, 2019 at the first Belt and Road Forum. Following 2017’s inaugural summit, China’s President again spoke at Belt and Road Forum in April 2019. Present on the occasion were: heads of the states and governments from 37 countries.

Themes of OBOR are to facilitate trade and connectivity. It is a move for regional cooperation and

connectivity to strengthen the trade infrastructure, trade and investment links. This is an open arrangement of china in which any country and organization can take part. However, there does not exist any final official list of OBOR participating organizations and countries. However, it is said that there are 71 countries geographically located along the six overland corridors of Maritime Silk Road. This covers almost 60m percent of the world population and 30 percent of the world GDP. By spending some trillions of USD on this over land and maritime project, China intends to connect the trade links by the construction of modern ports and linking them to high speed roads and rail corridors.

China has started to develop the international development finance institutions on the pattern of IMF and World Bank by establishing the AIIB and NDB. The assumption is this that china may resort to develop its own economic, financial, geopolitical and geostrategic block on the pattern of NATO and defunct Warsaw Pact Countries.

OBOR is taken as arguably the most ambitious project ever envisaged by a single country as the global infra structure project. This brews the suspicion that is it only an economic project? Or OBOR is a geo-political initiative of China to establish its geostrategic competitive hegemony as one of the two world leaders?

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2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

To conduct this study, a conceptual framework has been developed as to how the media coverage has focused the Crisis Communication on OBOR of China through the speeches of Chinese president Xi Jinping, focusing the Geo-Political Reshaping as Competitive World Order.

Theoretical Framework of this research is based on agenda setting theory. This study is focused on OBOR objectives with its impact on geopolitical reshaping as its competitive world order with its latent geopolitical hegemony. The pivotal three speeches of Xi Jinping in this regard have been reviewed as being the secondary data. The agenda setting theory was first used by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 [1]. This theory focuses on the influence of mass media on making any specific issue as a public agenda as a concern of public. Agenda Setting Theory establishes the equation or relationship between the emphasis of mass media on certain issue and the response of the society or public on that very issue (Littlejohn and Foss: 2009) [2]. This theory in its beginning explains the effect of mass media in changing the behavior of public in regard to their political behavior (Cohen: 1963) [3]. Agenda Setting Theory lead to many explorations on mass media framing and coloring of any specific issue for their audience (Matsaganis and Payne: 2005) [4]. Therefore the responsibility of making an issue as an agenda and public opinion towards their political behavior is on the influence of mass media. This influence of mass media could be intentional or unintentional (Iyengar & Kinder: 1987) [5]. This influence of mass media influences the approach, opinions, merits and de-merits of their audience as their agenda Littlejohn and Foss: (2009) [2].

2.2. Sources of Data

A detailed review of literature has been conducted for this study with an extensive usage of secondary sources of data, mainly focusing on context of origin of OBOR and future global acceptance of it. For a better understanding of this crisis communication through the speeches of Xi Jinping, the most recent secondary data has been used.

2.3. Search Strategy

Detailed search of data has been made from authentic and reliable database, like data weblinks on

OBOR and BRI, European and some Chinese databases, Google scholar, learning-theories.com, social learning theory website, using important keywords like: "Speech content analysis, media, economic pivot, competitive world order, 100th anniversary, etc. to obtain the authentic and reliable data during July, 2019.

Literature review has significantly helped in the development of field. This review had helped in synthesizing the information and also provided a reflect on earlier researches conducted and thus have provided the ample and secure ground for advancing this study.

2.4. Data Analysis

Different aspects of OBOR have been taken into account for the analysis of data, Content Analysis, strategy, Agenda Setting, for implementation, involvement of partner organizations and countries.

3. REVIEW OF RELATED WORK

Researchers are suggestive that the practitioners of public relations and politicians set up the agenda setting (Walgrave & Aelst, 2006) [6], (McCombs and Shaw, 1993) [7], (Roberts & McCombs, 1994) [8]. Governments do have their role in advancing their policies on mass media for agenda setting, especially at the time of elections (Walgrave, Soroka & Nuytemans, 2008) [9], (Dearing & Rogers, 1988, May) [10]. As a result of these scholarships the researchers have broadened the agenda setting scope. This included the cognitive aspects to the functions of agenda setting, for example agenda structuring by mass media and influence on perceptions of the audience as to how they consider or feel on the agenda, which is possible by framing and priming. So that the framed and primed issue is immediately noticed by the audience and their response is judged (Scheufele, 2000) [11], Tewksbury & Scheufele (2007) [12].

OBOR would globally be connecting the population of different demographics economically, politically and culturally by OBOR bringing the larger part of the world under one canopy through historic development of infrastructure. It would cause a tremendous economic impact by reviving it (Ferdinand: 2016) [13]. To few researchers the sole initiative is the "Go West" policy of China though with a great global impact on economy (Aris, S. 2016) [14], (Huang, Y. 2016) [15] and Mishra, R. (2016) [16].

The notion of Comparing Chinese BR Initiative with USA's Cold War period Marshal Plan got momentum on mass media after Xi's first speech on OBOR in 2013 (Mayer & Dreyer, 2018) [17]. In 2015, Financial Times mentioned that "The shaping up of this initiative of New Silk Road appears to use economic treats as a way to address other vulnerabilities like Marshal Plan (Times, F. 2015) [18]. Marshal Plan was of much lesser impact of OBOR (NA, N. 2016) [19]. In 2016 Bloomberg referred the OBOR as "China's Marshal Plan" (Shen, S., & Chan, W. 2018) [20] as reported in South China Morning Post, 2017 "without war" Tobin, L. (2018) [21].

Both the components of OBOR, i.e. MSR and SREB would make China the geo-economical and geo-political hub of the world and China is aspiring to have an opening for its companies to invest the Chinese capital in OBOR participating organization's country's projects. Thus, AIIB and OBOR would change the Asian arena by transforming its geo-politics and economy be leveraging Chinese infrastructure development, its manufacturing capacity and financial power Yu, H. (2017) [22].

Rationale of Marshall Plan could be compared with OBOR, but after seeing it on the ground along with its geo-political and geo-economic motive, while economy being the bate for politics or the political agenda for the sake of economy. Though some of the economic, political and strategic commonalities between OBOR and Marshal Plan are there Shen, S., & Chan, W (2018) [23].

Continuity and upsurge of Chinese developmental and economic growth through reconfiguration of Chinese export is dependent on OBOR. This ambitious global initiative would cover almost two third of the globe in three continents and thus would share thirty percent of the global GDP. Therefore, this is a holistic initiative. It involves trade, economy, international finance and international financial markets and cultural aspects. Though this being a recent phenomenon, it would be quite early to analyze its impact. Its impediments, road blockers, dichotomies of politics in the region and viability in different demographics are to be smothered for the success of the initiative. This would tantamount to foreign policy shifts, geo-economic and geo-political adjustments (Huang, Y. Q., Liang, C. H., He, L., Tian, J., Liang, C. S., Chen, X., ... & Liu, Z. Y. 2016) [24]. This depicts Chinese transgression in the economy, politics and strategy matters of the world to develop the connectivity between geographies and their people, while China

being at the central point. (Yu, H. 2017) [25]. OBOR has a developmental agenda for all the participating organizations and 150 plus countries.

Chinese leadership including the CPC and government is committed to its MRI and SREB since the launch of initiative in fall 2013. It traverses .from Chinese west to Baltic Sea. The OBOR is based on its development projects which jointly make and known as OBOR. The Chinese companies involved in these projects are either government owned or have their connections with the government Van der Putten, F. P., & Meijnders, M: (2015) [26].

OBOR would help the participative countries towards opting the type of reform and investment to fulfill their appetite of development under this initiative (World Bank 2019) [27]. This would help in poverty alleviation at a gross level if the participative nations proportionately resort to the equivalent ambitious reform and investment agenda (Hurley, J., Morris, S., & Portelance, G. 2019) [28]. Transferring the excessive production capacity and forex accumulation and excessive human resource to capitalize it globally is the target of OBOR (Lanjian, C., & Wei, Z. 2015) [29]. OBOR has a personified signature of Xi. He is gearing up the pace of his initiative to engrave his seal on the foreign policy of China Johnson, C. K. (2016) [30].

4. OBOR: OBJECTIVES, CONTEXT, VISION, AND GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE AND COVERAGE

4.1. Objectives of OBOR

- **Connecting Markets for Chinese excess capacity** in the manufacturing and construction industries, especially: cement, steel, machinery and equipment for the construction of ports, roads, railways for OBOR project.
- **Boost Trade with Europe** through developed transportation connectivities.
- **Developing Western Regions of China**, to deal with ethnic vulnerability through balancing the development in Xinjiang.
- **Building alternative Energy Supply routes.**
- **Chinese investment opportunities** to utilize the large amounts of accumulated Chinese capital.
- **Internationalization of Chinese Currency** like US Dollar, due to heaviest investments.

- **Strategic Response** to power balancing of USA in Asia, which is commonly known as Asia-Pivot Strategy.
- **Creating Chinese Block** in western and eastern hemispheres both to become a maritime super power,
- **Developing a new political and financial regime** on the pattern of NATO or defunct Warsaw Pact countries in competition to IMF and World Bank, as the Chinese have already established the AIIB and NDB. These two Chinese banks to help and assist the financial and investment regime of OBOR have been well acclaimed globally.

4.2. The Context

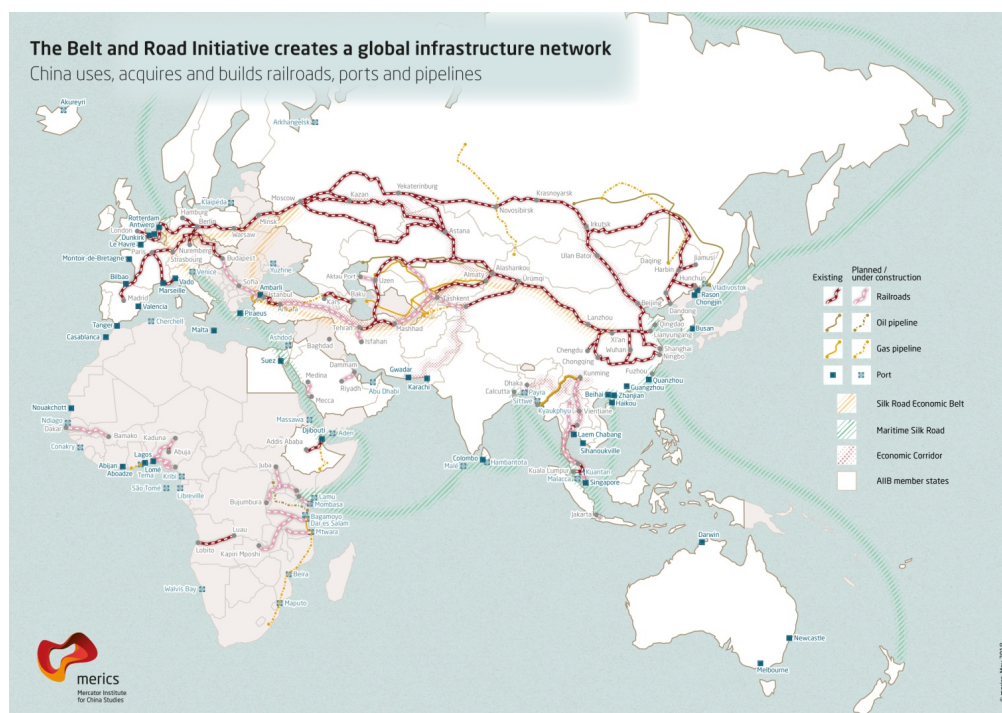
OBOR would be a conduit towards absorbing the massive and excessive capacity of Chinese industry because it has become a serious concern of Chinese economy to sustain this excessive capacity. Through OBOR projects, the state owned Chinese industry overburdened by debt would be able to access to fresh capital (C. K. 2016) [30]. Therefore, this study is to assess the CPC plan towards establishing the role of China as global leader by geo-politically and economically shaping up the world as competitive new world order of Chinese geopolitical hegemony.

4.3. The Vision

Countries, participating in OBOR would be required to open up their markets, economies, financial markets, trade and investment regime in favor of China. This would be under the veneer of people to people connection, culture and connectivity of the participating countries and organizations and sharing the projects for development.

It is the survival of only socialist country in the world after the collapse of Communist Russia: USSR. It is to continue the rule of CPC in China. Present initiative of OBOR is to expand the Chinese economic cycle domestically and internationally towards continuous increase in the living standards of common Chinese. This requires: transformation of Chinese export to high value industrial items instead of low value exports, curbing the security threats of Muslim unrest in Xinjiang province of China in its west which connects China to the rest of the world since centuries old Silk Route, utilizing the enormous volume of Chinese foreign exchange reserves towards their OBOR for bringing China in the global arena not only as a development player but as a geo-political player through this initiative of establishing China's new geo-political hegemony for geo-strategic reshaping of the world.

OBOR has a futuristic approach towards the new role of China as would be development leader of the



Source: Mercator Institute for China Studies: MERICS's OBOR Database.

world. Therefore, it is also said that China is driving OBOR as a futuristic geopolitical intent of China, which is not contented to downplay its role of upcoming leader of “developing” world. Thus, OBOR depicts the future international order as to how the world would be governed. This speaks of a direct threat towards present world order. Therefore OBOR is the competitive hegemony of Chinese geopolitics and geostrategic moves through SREB and through MSR components of OBOR.

4.4. Geographical Scope and Coverage

OBOR does not seem to limit itself to economic goals. The startup target regions of OBOR as the geographical scope of this Chinese initiative are continuously expanding. Starting from East Asia, to south East Asia, Tibet, Mongolia, Indian Ocean Regions, Sri Lanka, Strait of Hormuz, Far East, South China Sea, Africa, Israel, Europe up to Dunkirk and Valencia. Its over land and maritime routes cover the globe as an economic passage. Following map shows that China has started messaging to further extend the OBOR to Latin America. This might give rise to some security concerns as well.

The above map shows Maritime Silk Road, port projects, maritime routes, Economic Corridor, over land routes, roads, railroads, pipelines, AIIB member states itself are deliberative to Geo-Political Reshaping as Competitive World Order through OBOR.

5. CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS OF OBOR

Maritime trade routes of China towards European Union Countries have a bearing on the enroute countries from Asia to Europe, infrastructure and transport companies in business with EU countries and. This would have a great negative consequence on the role of Europe as the maritime hub. This consequence aggravates with the fact that China is world leader as a ship building nation. China has third largest fleet of cargo vessels in the world. Maritime companies of China in the transporting business of containers are included in world's top twelve companies.

With this background, in international maritime domain, Chinese ambitions go beyond shipping. Therefore, along the Asia, Europe and African shipping routes the Chinese Government has embarked upon an ambitious program of maritime infrastructure, developing the ports in and around the Indian Ocean,

build a port city in Colombo and construction of Hambantota Port at Sri Lanka, the eastern Mediterranean Region, Strait of Malacca, Far East and the Suez Canal, east coast of Malay in Africa, expanding Kenyan for Kenya-Ethiopia maritime corridor, expanding the Port of Sudan in Sudan, as well as China's cooperation with Israel to connect the_its Eilat port with its Ashdod port by laying a railway line between the two ports of Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea.

Besides Singapore and Hong Kong, Chinese port operating companies or such companies, having Chinese shareholding are operative in the maritime corridor between Asia and Europe. Including Karachi and Gawader port of Pakistan on the CPEC route of MRI.

Under OBOR canopy, this “above all” certainly requires cooperation and connectivity with the fullest Chinese “naivety” and “friendship” to yield the geopolitical re-shaping for a New Competitive World Order.

6. CRISIS MESSAGING

Kelly, P. (2017) [31] Classical geopolitics highlights as a reasoning that the status of a State is depicted by control over territory and control over natural resources of that territory. These controls generate the rivalry between two states. This reasoning fused with the concept of balance of power between the states and had become the tradition of realist geopolitical scholarship. Saul Cohen divided the world into two regions according to geopolitical and geostrategic designs and dimensions in the new political geography. Thus he regionalized the world into two geopolitical and geostrategic blocks. These regions have their own typical form and nature, systems and a prescribed or dictated course as the characteristics of such regions. This division ended with the end of cold war, after the demise of USSR. Now, China is the only Socialist country in the world.

Now, the OBOR and its intended connectivity with the territories of participating nations along with their natural resources and systems would be open to China. Would this give an interface to Chinese geopolitical and geostrategic hegemony as well is a big question after the end of cold war? In a published article of Diplomat, it claimed that it is a policy intention of China towards establishing a new geo-economic block and a new order in Asian geopolitics. This is

symbolic cultural and person to person friendly communication with the participative nations towards Chinese geopolitical reshaping in the region and later in the world. In one of his lectures, John Mearsheimer from University of Chicago talked about pushing back of USA from Asia, if Chinese development continues. Therefore, OBOR may be perceived as Chinese effort of establishing its hegemony, with the Chinese characteristics such as harmony, stability, cooperation, etc., but finally a hegemony.

China had already outlined its interests in Arctic Region by announcing in January 2018, its first Arctic policy”, Presenting China as a “near Arctic state”. China showed her concerns on climatic change and “argued that it should be involved in addressing these global challenges as a responsible international actor”. OBOR, SREB and MSR are beyond the developmental projects and have Chinese foreign policy and diplomatic orientation towards the goals of OBOR.

Chinese message is loud and clear after establishing AIDB, SRF, MSR and the recent FTAAP. These four instruments would serve as the special purpose vehicle to establish Chinese economic, political and strategic hegemony in the world through OBOR. This would be a challenge to the US notions of “pivot Asia” and Trans Pacific Partnership, making China as the only challenger to United State’s hegemony.

7. CHALLENGES RELATED TO OBOR

- **No single definition of OBOR or BRI exists** is the most challenging aspect of it.
- **Ethnic vulnerability** in western China’s Muslim Xinjiang region may be a primary threat to Beijing, as the Chinese eastern and western region disparities to connect the world through western region may complicate the development of OBOR.
- **Developing Western Regions of China** to deal with the ethnic vulnerability through balancing the development in Xinjiang. Building alternative Energy Supply routes.
- **Suspicion regarding OBOR Follows** in many countries, including Pakistan that majority of contracts of contracts and employment will be given and are being given to Chinese firms and people.

- **Debt Burden /Debt Trap** of Chinese loan to different OBOR participating countries like Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, etc. are pushed to seek Chinese loan for OBOR projects.
- **Transparency Issues** are there in China and in many OBOR participating countries due to strict deals and close tender process conditions in many countries. Governance risks in the shape of corruption and procurement.
- **Probable Largest market of Chinese products, India’s Opposition to OBOR**, because of the flagship project of OBOR: CPEC.

8. CONCLUSION

It was difficult to interpret and understand the concept of “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” as the two components of OBOR, when it was first time announced by the Chinese state and party leader Xi Jinping, in the fall of 2013. Later, during fall 2013 to 2019, the detailed policy deliberations through the three most important speeches of Chinese president have crystallized the concept, which is now called as BRI instead of OBOR. It has unfolded the key concept of China, that by capitalizing its voluminous reserves of foreign exchange and excessive industrial capacity transforming the country from low value exporter to industrial high value exporting country, improving the living standard of Chinese common man, this initiative of Belt and Road is much beyond the regional economic connectivity and trade and energy supplies. It is clear now that BRI is to stay as policy initiative of CPC and as a signature initiative of Xi Jinping with its long term global perspective, wider global role and as a security component of Chinese foreign policy with the increased number of Chinese expatriates into the participating countries, Chinese security company industry is rapidly establishing alongwith Chinese military capabilities to the OBOR participating countries.

Securing the trade routes, energy supplies and OBOR projects alongwith the tremendous Chinese investment require greater foreign policy design of China with increased Chinese influence in participating countries. Xi’s signature initiative of Belt and Road carries the theme of its broader goals. These goals are to be achieved in short and long term, as the CPC wants to safeguard the continuity of socialism and the rule of CPC because China feels threatened after the

demise of USSR. This target is to be achieved by the improvement in living standard and personal economy of every Chinese in the shape of stabilization and continuity in strong economic growth model through development and industrial export of high value. OBOR therefore is not only the ambitious initiative for trade but it is to secure Chinese socialist regime.

It is not there to only secure the trade routes of China and energy supplies with cultural cooperation and connectivity or to export its excessive industrial capacity, but it has CPC's designed foreign policy push on global level; now.

OBOR would be a tool to establish Chinese currency renminbi internationally, as the competitive currency to US Dollar. This chemical shift of renminbi from a currency of low value exporter to the currency of capital exporter would bring the global financial market into a divide, having its own market, dynamics, its own trading rules, its own financial, economic and development banking institutions, its own trading houses which may lead towards its own financial markets and stock exchanges in competition to the present day economic, trade and geopolitical arrangements.

Voluminous investment of China in OBOR projects would be requiring a foreign policy push of China into OBOR participant countries. And who would not be participative, directly or indirectly. This push and policy initiative would expand the scope to global arena. This would not restrain itself to economic and trade spectrum with an increased security concerns along the SREB and MSR routes. China would certainly be wanting to have the strategic control of these cob web trade corridors irrespective of over land or maritime.

Therefore, OBOR policy goals are a strategic priority for China. This has raised suspicions about the Chinese Global agenda through OBOR, which underlines that China is using OBOR as Chinese foreign policy framing and marketing tool towards establishing Chinese competitive geopolitical hegemony and geostrategic reshaping as per the requirement of China towards becoming the competitive world leader and global development leader. It has provoked the increasingly assertive counter-initiatives by US and European Geo-strategic hegemony to make china an active player in the world affairs as world leader with competitive hegemony as one of the two world leaders.

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Received on 15-07-2019

Accepted on 25-08-2019

Published on 17-09-2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31907:2617-121X.2019.03.01.4>

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