

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Members, Map, Criticism, UPSC Notes

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The **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** is China's major international connectivity and infrastructure programme. Announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, it seeks to connect Asia, Europe, Africa, and other regions through ports, railways, roads, energy corridors, industrial zones, digital networks, and trade links.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has significant economic and geopolitical implications. Supporters view it as a means to bridge infrastructure gaps and expand trade, while critics raise concerns about debt, transparency, environmental effects, and China's growing strategic influence.

Belt and Road Initiative Meaning

The **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** is China's flagship global connectivity and infrastructure initiative, launched in 2013 to enhance connectivity, trade, investment, and economic integration across Asia, Europe, Africa, and other regions by reviving the ancient Silk Routes.

- Initially known as **One Belt One Road (OBOR)**, it was later renamed **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** to reflect a broader and more inclusive vision.

- Comprises two components:
 - **Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB):** Land-based connectivity across Eurasia.
 - **21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR):** Sea-based connectivity linking Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- Focuses on developing transport, energy, and digital infrastructure to strengthen regional connectivity, trade, investment, and economic cooperation.

Belt and Road Initiative Objectives

China's BRI seeks to strengthen connectivity, expand economic cooperation, and support China's long-term economic and strategic interests through infrastructure-led development.

- **Improve Connectivity:** Develop transport, energy, and digital infrastructure through **roads, railways, ports, pipelines, and economic corridors** linking Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond.
- **Promote Trade and Investment:** Expand trade, cross-border investment, industrial cooperation, and regional economic integration.
- **Address Domestic Economic Needs:** Utilise surplus industrial capacity and capital while creating new overseas markets for Chinese enterprises.
- **Enhance Energy Security:** Diversify energy supply routes and reduce dependence on traditional maritime chokepoints.
- **Expand Global Influence:** Strengthen China's economic, diplomatic, and strategic engagement through long-term connectivity partnerships.

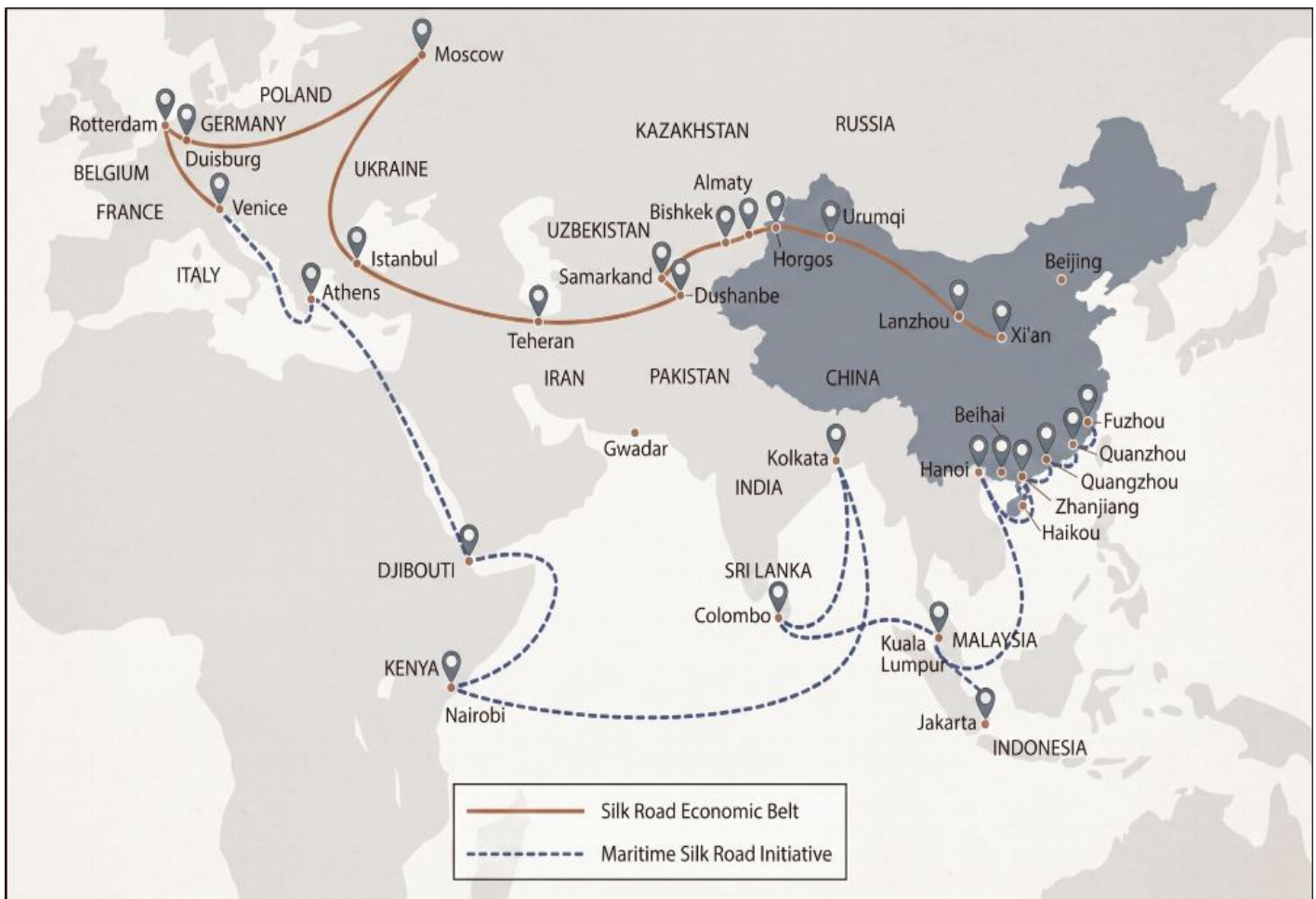
Belt and Road Initiative Members

Around 146 to 150 countries have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). These participating nations span across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Oceania.

- **Major BRI Participating Countries:** Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kenya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Greece, Hungary, Serbia and others.
- **Countries against Belt and Road Initiative:** Most G7 nations (such as the United States, France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Canada) have not joined. Italy joined earlier but officially exited the initiative.
 - India has consistently refrained from joining due to sovereignty concerns regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

China's Belt and Road Initiative Map

China's **Belt and Road Initiative** maps a vast global infrastructure network. It links Asia, Europe, and Africa via land corridors (the **Belt**) and strategic maritime ports (the **Road**).



Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Criticism

Despite its wide geographical reach, **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** faces economic, political, environmental, and governance-related challenges that have affected its implementation in several countries.

- **Debt Trap Diplomacy:** Large infrastructure loans have increased debt burdens in some participating countries. Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port is often cited in this context. The **World Bank** (2019) noted that 12 of the 43 corridor economies faced elevated debt risks.
- **Sovereignty and Geopolitical Concerns:** Projects such as the CPEC have raised sovereignty concerns, while several countries view BRI as expanding China's strategic influence.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Concerns remain over project selection, financing arrangements, procurement practices, and governance standards.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Large infrastructure projects have been criticised for their impact on ecosystems, biodiversity, and local communities.
- **Political and Security Risks:** Political instability, internal conflicts, and security challenges in some partner countries have delayed or affected project implementation.
- **Global Scepticism:** Countries such as India, the United States, and several European nations have expressed concerns over the long-term strategic and economic implications of the initiative.

Belt and Road Initiative India's Stand

India has not joined **China's Belt and Road Initiative** (BRI). It maintains that connectivity initiatives should be transparent, financially sustainable, consultative, and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.

- **Opposition to CPEC:** India opposes the CPEC as it passes through **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir** (PoK), which India considers a violation of its sovereignty.
- **Principles of Connectivity:** India maintains that connectivity projects should be transparent, financially sustainable, environmentally responsible, and based on equal consultation among participating countries.
- **Non-participation in BRI:** India has not participated in the Belt and Road Forums and has consistently conveyed its position at bilateral and multilateral platforms.
- **Selective Engagement:** India continues to support multilateral infrastructure financing through institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) while remaining outside the BRI.

Belt and Road Initiative Impact on India

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the primary driver of friction in **India-China relations**. India firmly opposes the BRI, most notably because its flagship project—the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), which India views as a severe violation of its sovereignty.

- **Strategic Security:** Chinese-funded ports and infrastructure in the **Indian Ocean** Region (IOR) have raised concerns over China's expanding maritime presence.
- **Regional Influence:** China's growing economic engagement with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar has increased its influence in India's neighbourhood.
- **Economic Competition:** BRI has strengthened China's role in regional trade, infrastructure financing, and supply chains.
- **Neighbourhood Diplomacy:** The initiative has increased competition for regional connectivity and development partnerships in South Asia.
- **Economic Potential:** Better regional infrastructure can improve trade and connectivity across Eurasia if concerns relating to sovereignty, transparency, and financial sustainability are addressed.

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