

The Belt and Road Initiative in a Spiderweb of Conflicting Great Power Interests: A Geopolitical Analysis

Authors : Csaba Barnabas Horvath

Abstract : The Belt and Road initiative of China is one that can change the face of Eurasia as we know it. Instead of four major, densely populated subcontinents defined by Mackinder (East Asia, Europe, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Middle East) isolated from each other by vast, sparsely populated and underdeveloped regions, it can at last start to function as a geographic whole, with a sophisticated infrastructure linking its different parts to each other. This initiative, however, happens not in a geopolitical vacuum, but in a space of conflicting great power interests. In Central Asia, the influence of China and Russia are in a setting of competition, where despite the cooperation between the two powers to a great degree, issues causing mutual mistrust emerge repeatedly. In Afghanistan, besides western military presence, even India's efforts can be added to the picture. In Southeast Asia, a key region regarding the maritime Silk Road, India's Act East policy meets with China's Belt and Road, not always in consensus, not to mention US and Japanese interests in the region. The presentation aims to take an overview on how conflicting great power interests are likely to influence the outcome of the Belt and Road initiative. The findings show, that overall success of the Belt and Road Initiative may not be as smooth, as hoped by China, but at the same time, in a limited number of strategically important countries (such as Pakistan, Laos, and Cambodia), this setting is actually a factor favoring China, providing at least a selected number of reliable corridors, where the initiative is actually likely to be successful.

Keywords : belt and road initiative, geostrategic corridors, geopolitics, great power rivalry

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