

Belt and Road Initiative: Emerging World Order

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Maryum Tamoor¹

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is regarded as a transformative project by the Chinese, positioned as an endeavour with the potential to revolutionise the contemporary global economy, notably from the eyes of Western observers. This widely prevalent perception is premised on the extensive and comprehensive contours of the BRI, encapsulating a broad spectrum of projects covering the development of rail, roads, infrastructure, technology, knowledge, and energy. In “Belt and Road Initiative: Emerging World Order,” Talat Wizarat focuses on the BRI, illustrating it as more than just the reincarnation of the ancient Chinese Silk Road. She seeks to outline a world order based on economic cooperation and development for all. While the analysis presented in the chapters, imbued with historical profundity of the project and in-depth exploration of its focal undertakings, is suggestive and informative, it under-evaluates the link between the BRI and its influence on the global order and amplifies China’s rise as ostensibly unthreatening, overlooking the nuanced dynamics and complexities.

By dividing the volume into seven chapters, Wizarat analyses the old trade routes, critically examines multiple facets of the BRI and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Gwadar as the economic pivot of Pakistan, and the maritime dimension of the BRI.

¹ Reviewer is a Assistant Research Associate at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Pakistan.

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In the opening chapter, the author sets the stage by offering a meticulous description of the ancient trade routes, their role in shaping history, nurturing civilizations, serving as conduits of connectivity and trade, mediums of exchange of ideas, and technology. She skilfully creates a cohort connection between the general old trade routes and China's ancient Silk Road in its panoramic entirety. The apogee of this chapter is reached as the author acquaints the readers with the concept of anti-routes, their multifaceted dimensions involving their *raison d'être*, utilisation by the states, and their prospective relevance in the future.

Building on the historical intricacies of the trade routes, particularly the Silk Road, the analysis transitions to a detailed exposition of the BRI, elucidating its revival, scope, features, projects, criticism, and contextualising its significance in the contemporary geopolitical landscape. However, the author's discourse reflects conventional and generic critiques levied against the BRI, indicating a predilection for widely known perspectives that lack novelty. Moreover, there is a conspicuous deficiency in the examination of the anticipated failure of the United States' antagonism towards China.

In the succeeding chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, despite the indicated theme in the title, the focus leans towards the flagship project of the BRI, CPEC, in Pakistan. The author conducts a thorough scrutiny of the phases and collaborative ventures across diverse sectors, including energy, industrial development, tourism, and knowledge, infrastructure, and resource development. Moreover, the analysis encompasses a brief historical expanse of the Karakorum Highway and Special Economic Zones (SEZs), their significance in general, and Pakistan in particular.

In chapter 5, dealing with the SEZs, the salient feature is marked by the methodical approach of a forward-looking trajectory, encompassing policy prescriptions that can be crafted to actualise the potential harboured within SEZs. The recommendations, inclusive of

adept negotiations, are accompanied by a premonition that, though transformative, SEZs are not a panacea for all the developmental ills of Pakistan. It underscores the importance and need for a comprehensive policy framework incorporating health, water, environmental sustainability, and food security.

Chapter 6 dedicated to Gwadar traces the strategic significance of this area, traversing various historical tangents from the time of Alexander to subsequent conquests, British dominion, the post-partition great game, and the ultimate transfer to Pakistan on December 8, 1958 (page 196). The author delves into, with ample documentation, the challenges such as the security threats involving hybrid warfare by India, foreign involvement, sponsored terrorism, and other political and governance challenges.

In the succeeding chapter, the author surveys the maritime aspect of the BRI and argues about China's "two oceans' policy' (page 245). There are references to China opting for the Blue Water Navy (page 246), with emphasis on the importance of the South China Sea and Indian Ocean amid the ongoing competition engineered by the United States and its allies against China. However, the author's viewpoint exhibits skewness, positing only the commercial and economic purposes of the bases and islands. The intricate military and strategic dimensions of China's maritime and naval strategy are marginalised and underestimated, with the suggestion that China's establishment of the bases is contingent upon external pressures.

The concluding pages highlight the expanding influence of China in global politics, as signified by its recent instrumental role in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran's rapprochement. Moreover, China's initiatives towards de-dollarization, promotion of Yuan-based transactions to reduce dependency on the dollar, and vision of "shared prosperity" (page 297) portray the increasing prominence of China in the global landscape.

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Overall, this study is an insightful resource for students seeking to gain a glimpse of the BRI, CPEC, and the historical utilisation of trade routes for plethora of purposes—political, knowledge exchange, economics, cultural, and social. The text also deserves attention from scholars well-versed in the area with a critical prior perspective. While the description of the BRI and CPEC lacks dynamism at some points, and the United States and India are depicted as the potential disruptors of the BRI, the study serves as a valuable textbook for the civil services aspirants, students from various fields, and policymakers. Despite some shortcomings, the author offers a laudatory view of China and details requisite strategies and measures to overcome challenges in the countries participating in the BRI. ■