International Relations · GS - II

“China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed South Asia from a regional space into a theatre of great power competition.” Analyse the strategic implications of the BRI for India’s security and regional influence in South Asia.

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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

BRI, CPEC, Indian Ocean, strategic competition, sovereignty, debt sustainability, ports, connectivity, Pakistan, neighbourhood diplomacy, counter-connectivity

Model Answer

China’s Belt and Road Initiative has expanded infrastructure, connectivity and economic linkages across South Asia, but its strategic dimensions have also intensified competition among major powers. For India, the implications extend from territorial security to maritime influence and regional diplomacy.

First, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passes through areas that India considers part of its sovereign territory. The Government of India has therefore objected to CPEC on grounds of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Second, Chinese infrastructure and port projects in the Indian Ocean neighbourhood can increase Beijing’s economic and strategic presence close to India’s maritime environment. This has implications for India’s maritime security, surveillance requirements and regional influence.

Third, BRI connectivity can increase China’s leverage with neighbouring states through infrastructure, trade and finance. India consequently faces greater competition for influence in countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

Fourth, the BRI can alter regional connectivity patterns. India’s concerns about projects that do not sufficiently address transparency, financial sustainability, environmental standards and sovereignty have encouraged it to promote alternative connectivity initiatives. India has highlighted projects such as Chabahar, the International North-South Transport Corridor and BBIN as components of its connectivity approach.

However, BRI also creates opportunities for regional infrastructure and economic integration, and its impact varies across countries. Therefore, it should not be viewed solely through a security lens.

India’s response should combine strategic vigilance with development diplomacy: strengthen neighbourhood partnerships, accelerate transparent connectivity projects, enhance maritime domain awareness, promote resilient supply chains and deepen cooperation through BIMSTEC and other regional platforms.

Thus, BRI has added a significant great-power dimension to South Asian geopolitics, requiring India to combine security preparedness with credible economic and connectivity alternatives.

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