

PREFACE

Among the always happy set of academic encounters is that between the SEFACIL Foundation's endeavours by Dr Yann Alix in Central Asia, the long-standing participation of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Professor Kuralay Baizakova where LexFEIM Director Pierre Chabal often visited and still visits as guest professor, and, more recently, the connection established by Dr Dildora Khodiaeva between the SEFACIL Foundation and New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University's Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies in the School of International Studies towards Professor Archana Upadhyay.

Indeed, it took only two years for Dr Yann Alix' participation to a Cabinet of Ministers' seminar in Tashkent in 2021 to bloom into a SEFACIL seminar organised in Almaty in 2023 with the participation of Chairperson Archana Upadhyay and Dean Srikanth Kondapalli, and two such seminars in 2024 in New Delhi, the second of which led to the contents of the present book. Not only was this succession of events a rapid one, but in addition it paved the way for, already, further activities among all these partners, including teaching visits and joint research.

The October 2024 New Delhi conference was in continuation of the series of *Logistics & Diplomacy* seminars organised in the last decade, focusing on the politics and economics of the logistical transformations in Eurasia. The linkages between 'logistics as a necessity' and 'diplomacy as an art' was the highlight of the 2024 conference. This aimed to explore the regional dynamics of connectivity initiatives and the role of diplomacy in enabling countries to promote their national interests through regional and pan-regional cooperation. The idea being to explore the prospects of connectivity from South Asia via Central Asia to Europe within a world of 'pan-region-centralism'.

As an emerging power, the largest democracy and the most populous country in the world, India is an important stake holder in these regions. The geoeconomic and geopolitical dynamics of these connectivity projects are critical to India's quest for external connectivity and serves its logic of strategic autonomy in pursuit of its national goals. Understanding the dynamics of the diplomatic and logistical transformations in its immediate and extended neighbourhood is therefore critical for India's regional and global outreach. In the words of the Indian Prime Minister, India's path of international engagement is focused on "rebuilding connectivity, restoring bridges and rejoining India with our immediate and extended geographies."

This book offers a continuation of past visions and anticipated analyses of some of the most relevant initiatives in the post-cold war Eurasia. In 2014 already, the 1st *Logistics and Diplomacy* seminar coincided with the launch of the New Silk Road initiative. And in 2024, the 10th such seminar closely monitors the dynamics of India and the South Corridor in reshaping the geopolitics and geo-economics of Eurasia. The 27 essays in the volume, although broad and diverse in their individual themes, individually and collectively present multifaceted aspects of the geopolitics of connectivity projects in Eurasia. The chapters have been broadly categorised into three themes.: (i) *Eurasian connectivity: historic connects and contemporary challenges*; (ii) *Globalisation and Geopolitics of Connectivity in Eurasia*; and (iii) *India's Connectivity Diplomacy and Beyond*. Thus, State specific studies woven into the volume make this book a critical contribution to the study of the Eurasian holistic space - from a distinctively Eurasian perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have seen the light of day without the original help received in organising two seminars in India (February and October 2024), thanks to the hospitality of the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi. The New Delhi Conference was preceded by a pioneering seminar in Kazakhstan in September 2023, with the welcoming encouragement of the Institute for Security and Cooperation Studies of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty, and long-time colleagues there.

We are grateful to the SEFACIL Foundation and its General Delegate, Dr Yann ALIX, for his untiring and unwavering support over the past twelve years. Thanks to his proactive involvement, twenty seminars have been organised to date in France, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Korea, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and the most recent one in India.

The Conference on “*The Logistics and Geo-Politics of Connectivity Diplomacy in Eurasia: the South Corridor*”, held during 17-18 October 2024 in the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University, was hosted by the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies.

We are grateful for the generous financial support received from the *Indian Council of Social Science Research* (ICSSR), New Delhi, that enabled the host institution, Jawaharlal Nehru University, to organise the International Conference in New Delhi on an impressive scale with active participation of scholars from India, Russia, France, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Egypt and Turkey.

To our mentors and senior colleagues, we express our gratefulness for having long drawn our attention to the meaningful evolutions of the world, pointing to the keys for the understanding of the 21st century and its many cyclical surprises. To our junior colleagues and students, we express our faith that very soon they will take over our endeavours and provide the world of the 21st century with improved understanding and analyses for an even better science of logistics and diplomacy. Their participation in the conference as paper presenters was one of the major highlights of the New Delhi Conference.

Above all, we would like to share with the forty participants in the New Delhi 2024 Conference, our admiration for their capacity to trust us with their analyses – all of their analyses! – on a subject as vast and challenging as the ‘Geopolitics of Connectivity Diplomacy’. To the 27 authors who have contributed chapters to this volume, we gratefully acknowledge the intellectual contribution of each one of them, the quality of their analyses and their positive response to suggestions for revision and updating of their paper. We greatly appreciate their patience and good humour throughout this demanding exercise. Had it not been for their trust, nothing would have enabled us to complete this pleasant task of “creating a book” as a lasting testimony of our combined efforts.

With the hope that science overcomes the world’s turmoil.

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FOREWORD

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We stand at a pivotal intersection of history and geopolitics. The historical connective tissue of the Eurasian region is rich and complex, shaped by trade routes, cultural exchanges, and political alliances. From the ancient Silk Road, which served as a conduit for goods and ideas, to modern energy corridors, these linkages have fostered mutual dependency and shared prosperity. But as we explore how these historical foundations inform contemporary connectivity initiatives, we are also witness to the multiple challenges we face in an increasingly multipolar world embedded with deep geopolitical tensions. This important study, *The Logistics and Geo-Politics of Connectivity Diplomacy in Eurasia – the South Corridor*, is an essential reading to understand the multiple factors that impact on attempts at bridging our world. The outstanding essays bring together different perspectives in a single volume, from different geographical lenses, so essential from a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

As India becomes a key stake holder in the International North South Corridor, an exponent of the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor and an observer in the EU Global Gateway Initiative, it cannot remain oblivious to the rise of geopolitical tensions, across the region particularly in terms of using connectivity as a leverage for power politics.

Unfortunately, even as we witness a new robustness in planning new routes and reviving old ones, in our current geopolitical landscape, we witness a renewed great power competition, particularly characterised by initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This initiative is not merely an economic strategy; it seems to represent a broader vision of Chinese hegemony that seeks to reshape global trade dynamics and extend China's influence across Eurasia.

From a constructivist perspective, we must also consider how narratives and ideologies shape perceptions of hegemony. China promotes the BRI as a pathway to mutual benefit and development; however, states in the region may interpret this as an encroachment on their sovereignty. In this context, India has a crucial role to play in reshaping the narrative around connectivity and cooperation.

In addressing the challenges posed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised upon the importance of a multipolar world. In his words: "India is committed to enhancing connectivity among nations, but we believe in connectivity that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations." This perspective not only highlights India's approach to connectivity but also reaffirms its commitment to a rules-based international order.

India's response has been multifaceted. Initiatives like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Chabahar Port project, and active participation in

regional forums reflect India's commitment to offering alternative connectivity options that emphasise inclusivity and mutual respect. The INSTC, for instance, connects India, Iran, and Russia through a network of rail and sea routes, providing an alternative to traditional trade routes dominated by China. The Chabahar Port project enhances India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, countering Chinese influence in the region. Both projects underline India's commitment to enhancing regional connectivity and economic cooperation while promoting a rules-based international order.

It is fascinating to see the expanse of the INSTC using ship, rail, and road route for moving freight from South Asia to Europe through, is a multi-modal transportation route that links the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and onwards to northern Europe. Goods from Mumbai, India to Bandar Abbas, Iran by sea, and from Bandar Abbas to Bandar-e Anzali, an Iranian port on the Caspian Sea, by road. From Bandar-e-Anzali, the route proceeds to the Russian port city of Astrakhan by ship across the Caspian Sea, and thereafter from Astrakhan to the other regions of the Russian Federation. From there, the goods are transported by truck or rail along the Volga River through Moscow to Northern Europe.

On the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit, leaders of India, European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, UAE and US announced an MOU on 9 September 2023, committing to work together to develop a new India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The IMEC will comprise of two separate corridors, the east corridor connecting India to the Gulf and northern corridor connecting Gulf to Europe.

The corridor will provide reliable and cost-effective cross-border ship to rail transit network that will supplement existing maritime routes. It intends to increase efficiency, reduce costs, secure regional supply chains, increase trade accessibility, enhance economic cooperation, generate jobs and lower greenhouse gas emission, resulting in a transformative integration of Asia, Europe and the Middle East (West Asia).

The IMEC corridor, which aims at integration of Asia, Europe and the Middle East, involves multiple stakeholders. It seeks to reimagine the natural connectivity of eras of the past. Historic trading links between the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and Eurasia show that long distances are no barrier to shared interests. Indeed, geographical connectivity is what channels trade. However, the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 ruptured India's historic corridors to the Middle East and Eurasia. Now, Delhi's strategic impetus is to rejig and rekindle these linkages.

Historically, the idea of connectivity has been pivotal in shaping international relations. The ancient Silk Road not only facilitated trade but also the exchange of culture and ideas, fostering a spirit of cooperation among diverse civilisations. Today, we must draw inspiration from this historical legacy as we seek to navigate the complexities of modern geopolitics.

However, while striving for positive outcomes through connectivity, we must also recognise the potential dangers that loom over us. The war in Ukraine and the escalating conflicts in the Middle East present significant challenges that can disrupt these initiatives. A realist perspective underscores the precarious nature of security in this zero-sum game, where power politics often lead to instability. Furthermore, the expanding conflicts in the Middle East, exacerbated by geopolitical rivalries, have implications for energy security and regional stability. As countries navigate these turbulent waters, the

risk of miscalculations and escalations increases, making it imperative for nations to engage in dialogue and cooperative mechanisms to address shared challenges.

This brings us to the crucial need for a paradigm shift in how we approach connectivity diplomacy. Instead of viewing the world through the lens of competition and rivalry, we must adopt a more cooperative approach that emphasises shared interests and mutual benefits. This requires a commitment to multilateralism and building partnerships that transcend traditional rivalries.

We must also recognise the importance of regional organisations and platforms that can facilitate dialogue and cooperation. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and other regional forums provide avenues to engage in constructive dialogue, share best practices, and collaborate on connectivity initiatives.

As we move forward, this invaluable volume of essays focuses not just on the challenges but also the opportunities for collaboration and partnership that exist within this complex landscape. By fostering a spirit of cooperation, we can create a more inclusive and prosperous Eurasian region, where the benefits of connectivity are shared by all.

I congratulate Professors Archana Upadhyay, Kuralay Baizakova, and Pierre Chabal for working tirelessly together in bringing out this exciting book.