

SECURING THE DEVELOPMENT: THE NATURE OF SECURITY THREATS AND RESPONSES IN BCIM-EC

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Abstract

This paper surveys the major security challenges to BCIM-EC, including ethnic insurgency, drug trafficking, arms smuggling and transnational terrorism. Employing the qualitative method of social research, it argues that, all these security problems are interconnected as well as rooted in diverse geographic and demographic features of the region. Therefore, these challenges need to be highly emphasized in various platforms of BCIM in order to ensure a better economic cooperation among the member states. However, BCIM institutional framework has, so far, done a little in this regard, which this study finds insufficient compared to the severity of the threats. Given this context, the study prescribes several policy imperatives in order to address key regional security challenges through the joint efforts of BCIM countries. Secondary literatures have extensively been used to generate data for the research along with few expert interviews.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, isolationism has no longer been a realistic way for the countries of the world to maximize their national interests. Certain variations among the countries in terms of their geographical settings, demographic conditions, and the accessibility to the resources have led each country to become specialized in different dimensions. Therefore, they can only maximize their national interests through mutual collaboration.¹ In this regard, regional and sub-regional frameworks of cooperation among the countries have been proved effective in the contemporary age. Since the later half of the twentieth century, for instance, a number of successful practices of regional and sub-regional integrations in various parts of the world, such as the European Union (EU), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have greatly encouraged other countries to go for further regional, inter-regional and sub-regional cooperation in all the

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¹ Arthur A. Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate: Circumstance and Choice in International Relations*, USA: Cornell University Press, 1990, p.7; see also, Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* USA: Princeton University Press, 2000, p.114.

possible areas.² Given these developments, a grand initiative of sub-regional cooperation among four neighbouring countries located in three subcontinents of Asia–South, East, and Southeast Asia–was also commenced in 1999 under the heading of ‘Kunming Initiative.’ The initiative has, so far, entered into an advanced institutional framework namely ‘Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar–Economic Corridor’ (BCIM-EC).³

BCIM sub-regional framework contains numerous practical significances, including the integration of China and India, two most populous economic giants, and Myanmar and Bangladesh, two fast-growing developing countries, under a single platform of cooperation.⁴ However, after more than one and half decades, the full-fledged trade promotion and economic betterment by the presence of physical connectivity among BCIM countries has not been achieved yet.⁵ It is due to a number of practical problems that the initiative has been going through right from the beginning. One of the key problems is the continuation of non-traditional security threats in BCIM sub-region. Each of the four member states is confronted with a number of security problems, such as ethnic insurgency, drug smuggling, arms trafficking, and transnational terrorism.⁶ Resolving major regional security problems has, therefore, been a prerequisite to ensure better economic cooperation among BCIM member states.

² See, Edward D. Mansfeld and Helen V. Milner, “The New Wave of Regionalism,” *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3, Summer 1999, pp.589–627; Louise Fawcett, “Regionalism in World Politics: Past and Present,” in *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, edited by Louise L’Estrange Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.1.

³ Ren Jia, “The BCIM Economic Corridor is the Next Pragmatic Step for BCIM Cooperation,” *BCIM Newsletter* – Selected Material from the 11th Conference of BCIM Forum, Kunming: Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS), February 2013, pp.69-72.

⁴ *Task Force led by Institute of Economic Research, National Development and Reform Commission*, “Joint Study on the BCIM Economic Corridor: Country Report of People’s Republic of China,” December 2014, p.3.

⁵ For example, BCIM countries have been facing trade gap with each other. Bangladesh has huge trade deficit with China and India. In 2012-13 fiscal year, Bangladesh imported goods worth US\$ 4.2 billion from India, while exporting goods to India only worth about US\$563 million. See, Harun ur Rashid, “Bangladesh-India trade talks,” *The Daily Star*, March 08, 2015. Trade imbalance between China and Bangladesh was also US\$ 5.87 billion in the same fiscal year. See, Refayet Ullah Mirdha, “Bangladesh seeks expanded trade privileges from China,” *The Daily Star*, March 31, 2014. Trade gap between China and India was about US\$ 37.8 billion in 2014. See, Embassy of India, Beijing, China, “India-China Bilateral Relations,” available at: [<Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.>](#) (accessed on 12 July 2015); Myanmar’s trade deficit with China increased from US\$ 1.4 billion in 2008 to US\$ 2.5 billion in 2010. See, Hong Zhao, *China and India: The Quest for Energy Resources in the 21st Century*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p.123.

⁶ Rupak Bhattacharjee, “BCIM-EC: Problems and prospects,” *The Daily Star*, October 29, 2014; Pravakar Sahoo, Abhirup Bhunia and Sonali Dhankar, “BCIM Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges,” *e Social Sciences*, July 15, 2014.

In this milieu, the major objectives of the study are to focus on the major security threats in BCIM sub-region, to assess the role of BCIM institutional framework in addressing the security problems, and to offer policy imperatives based on the key findings. The paper develops in several stages. After a brief discussion on BCIM-EC, it examines the major security problems in this sub-region. Here, the paper offers a detail scrutiny on the major security threats by analyzing each of them into individual subsections. Next, it identifies the role played by BCIM, so far, as a multilateral framework to deal with these challenges. Subsequent to the discussion of the major findings, the paper suggests a bunch of policy recommendations for the readers before it draws concluding observations at the last part.

BCIM-EC: A SHORT OVERVIEW

Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar-Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) is a sub-regional framework with a set of common objectives of enhanced sub-regional integration through improved physical connectivity, trade facilitation, energy cooperation, socio-economic development, people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges etc. BCIM sub-regional framework was first conceptualized in China's Yunnan Province in the late 1990s and later formally inaugurated by 'Kunming Declaration' in 1999. Under the process of the continuous evolution, in 2013, four member states officially launched the inter-governmental process for the BCIM Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) and, later, the formal definition of the organization was achieved, as follows:

"BCIM-EC is a sub-regional economic cooperation mechanism that rests on the multimodal transportation system linking major nodes, such as Kunming, Mandalay, Dhaka, and Kolkata. It covers the south-western region of China, the whole territory of Myanmar and Bangladesh, and the eastern and north-eastern regions of India. It encompasses the coordination and cooperation in the fields of transportation, energy, and information infrastructure, trade and investment, industrial development, people to people contact, cultural exchanges, social and sustainable development."⁷

Hence, by definition, BCIM-EC includes the geographical presence of three sub-continent of Asia; South Asia (Bangladesh and India), East Asia (China), and Southeast Asia (Myanmar). However, in the generalized explanation, the territorial scope of the organization could be expanded to cover the whole territories of China and India.⁸

⁷ *Task Force led by Institute of Economic Research, National Development and Reform Commission, 2014, op. cit.*, pp. 3-5; see also, Patricia Uberoi, "The BCIM Forum: Retrospect and Prospect," *ICS Working Paper*, No. 1, New Delhi: Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), 2013, p.2.

⁸ Liu Jinxin, "The Research Report about Building Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor," Kunming: China Kunming Opening-Asia Transportation Logistics Research Institute, November 29, 2013. p.4.