

India's "Connect Central Asia" Strategy Will Heighten Regional Competition

India has plans to expand the eastern branch of the North-South Transport Corridor to Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia.

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Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

This possibility was [discussed](#) in mid-November during the bilateral Investment Forum and signifies the natural outgrowth of India's connectivity investments in Iran. Reaching the Russian marketplace is the prime reason why India's investing in the Islamic Republic's infrastructure, but it would be strategically irresponsible not to take advantage of the opportunity for advancing its "[Connect Central Asia](#)" policy too given that the country is New Delhi's geographic gateway to the region. Apart from partaking in the race for natural resources there, India is interested in tapping into new export markets and correspondingly expanding its influence in this increasingly important part of the world.

As it stands, Russia and China treat Central Asia as a condominium of sorts whereby Moscow provides security while Beijing is gradually becoming its top trade partner, but an influx of Indian commercial activity there could shake up the state of affairs and proverbially give China a "run for its money". Concurrent with this, Pakistan is also poised to play a greater role in this region too if China's CPEC+ initiatives succeed in connecting Beijing's top ally [with the Central Asian states](#), interestingly opening up the possibility for the Indo-Pakistani rivalry to extend to this part of Eurasia and advance the concept of "[Greater South Asia](#)".

It can be all but certain that this will result in geopolitical changes as locals' livelihoods become more dependent on trade with China, India, and/or Pakistan, with their regional and national elites also profiting from these various arrangements but shifting their countries' loyalties in the direction of their preferred and most profitable partner. [Uzbekistan](#) is literally right in the middle of these processes and borders each of the Central Asian states and Afghanistan, which could accordingly give the most populous nation in the region a shot at realizing its long-held leadership ambitions if it can deftly "multi-align" between these Great Powers.

Although India is independently promoting its own interests as it sees fit, it can't be forgotten that its Central Asian dreams could have been dashed had the US not [waived its sanctions](#) on the joint Indo-Iranian port of Chabahar and its [corresponding corridor into the region](#), suggesting that America has an unstated reason in wanting New Delhi's plans to succeed. It can only be speculated what this may be, but it probably has to do with indirectly helping India compete with China all throughout Afro-Eurasia and possibly one day extend its joint Indo-Japanese "[Asia-Africa Growth Corridor](#)" into Central Asia for offering an alternative to the [New Silk Road](#).

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