

## 21st Century Maritime Silk Road - UPSC Notes

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is an important topic for the GS-III and GS-II papers of the UPSC exam. This is an important part of the International Relations and Economy sections of the [IAS syllabus](#).

### 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

The “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (also known by its shortened version - the Road and Maritime Silk Road - MSR) is a modern version of the ancient Maritime Silk Road that connected China with Western Asia and parts of Africa. Similar to its parent initiative - [One Belt One Road](#) (OBOR), the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is a strategic initiative to encourage growth in investments and foster economic collaboration between member nations.

It was announced by Chinese Premier Xi Jinping in October 2013.

It is the sea route part of the OBOR initiative, which is a strategic investment venture that is aimed at fostering economic cooperation across the entire historic Silk Road region. The [China -Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) (CPEC) is just one of many extensions to the new Silk Road.

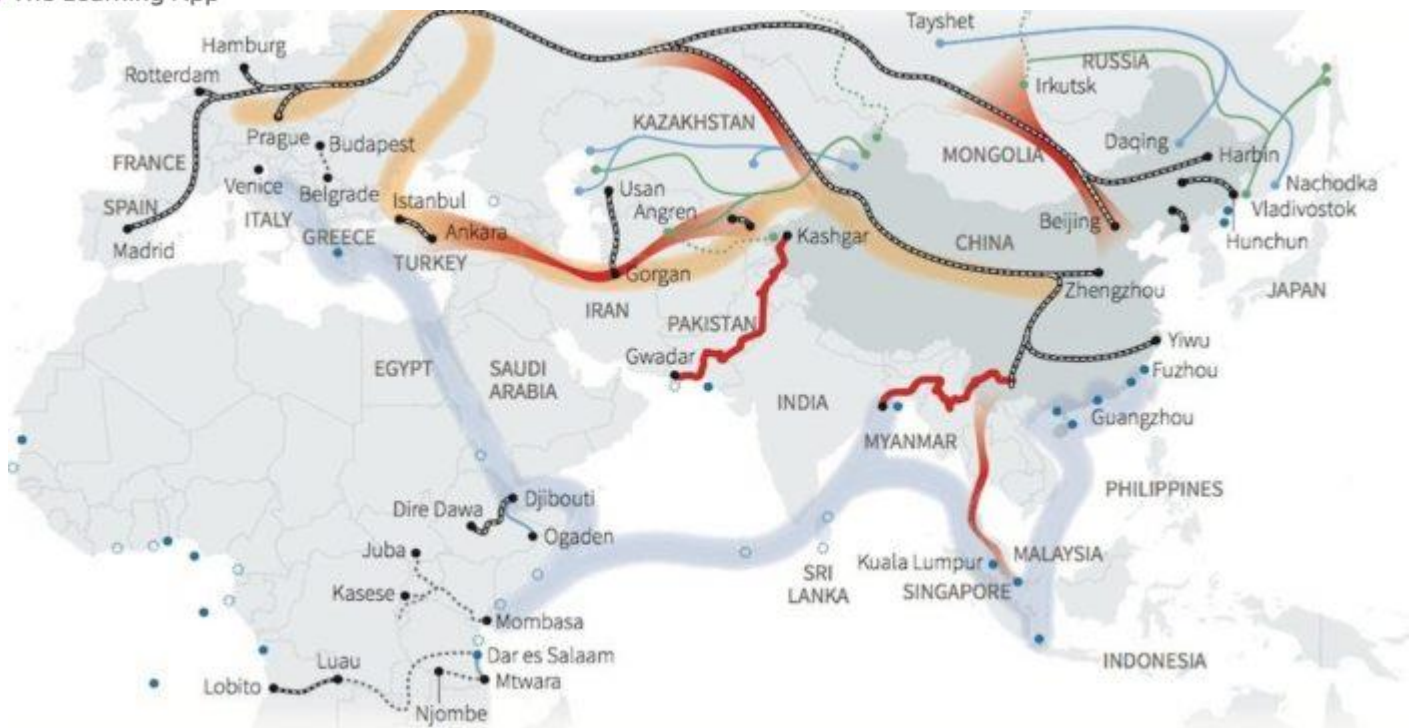
To this end, China has invested in many ports in the ensuing years, along with some of them being leased to Chinese companies as part of the development and reconstruction program. These ports will play a crucial role in projecting China as a pre-eminent maritime power.

Some of them are as follows:

- Gwadar, Pakistan: 40 years
- Kyaukpyu, Myanmar: 50 years
- Kuantan, Malaysia: 60 years
- Obock, Djibouti: 10 years
- Malacca Gateway: 99 Years
- Hambantota, Sri Lanka: 99 years
- Muara, Brunei: 60 years
- Feydhoo Finolhu, Maldives: 50 years

The proposed routes of the Road are given in the image below:

### 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Map



### Key Points of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

- The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road will serve China's core interest, eventually leading to a renaissance of Chinese maritime power. Some of these interests include the expansion of China's \$1.2 trillion maritime-based economies, advancing food and security and improving sea-based communications. This initiative will expand China's maritime capabilities and strategic goals far beyond its own territorial waters.
- Along with the [Silk Road Economic Belt](#), the Maritime Silk Road will be the bridge that will close a huge global terrestrial-maritime connectivity gap. This will lead to more positive development and mutual cooperation agreements. The main concern, however, is that this initiative can be used by the Chinese government for political leverage and demand concessions through the investments made.
- The South China Sea is a hotbed for territorial disputes between China and its neighbours. It is believed the Road will rekindle some of these strained relationships. The tensions currently are leading to an arms race in the region but are being eased at the same time by the development of maritime economics and resolving territorial disputes.
- With regards to the Indian Ocean Region, the Road will encourage competition over development and connectivity, along with increasing the militarization of an already sensitive region. It is still possible that there is a chance of the very nature of the Indian Ocean Region being transformed as an interconnected global round in lieu of its previous role as an enclosed security space.
- In the medium and long term, the Road in its current form might pose security challenges instead of solutions for the [European Union](#). The contemporary maritime disputes and tensions, the multi-stakeholder nature of the South China Seas and the Indian Ocean Region, and some of the security implications of the Road to date than its stated objectives.

### Challenges to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

There is a long list of unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea and South-East Nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei etc. The routes proposed most likely will lead to even more tensions between these nations. Analysts, however, are optimistic that the Road initiative can resolve these disputes by presenting an opportunity for mutual gain.

It is also speculated that the future of the Road will largely depend on the economic conditions of the

participating nations. China will have to foot the bill for the economic development of nations who are in poor economic conditions. Thus China will have to see to it that the loans given in this regard are put to good use. At the same time, China might leverage political clout and demand concessions, some of them unfair ones, in lieu of the money invested. This will prove a deterrent to those nations about joining the MSR initiative.

The other key challenge is getting India's support in order to bring the initiative to a fruitful conclusion. India represents a strong deterrent to the MSR's objectives in the Indian Ocean primarily as an economic force. Keeping its own security interests in mind, the Indian government is likely to prefer to develop the regions within its sphere of influence on its rather than letting some other nations do it. Although China's investment could solve most of India's maritime infrastructural woes, the Indian government is sceptical of such an offer as there is a possibility that it is mainly for driving China's territorial and economic ambitions

India has also expressed circumspection in participating in a similar initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor.