From the point of view of China's neighbors in Asia, it is inconceivable that even a China severely weakened by economic slowdown, howsoever one might define "weakened" or "slowdown", will cease to be a significant political and military actor in the region.

Chinas economic and political rise offers several opportunities for its Asian neighbors and at the same time poses major challenges. Most Asian countries wish to partake in China's economic growth and bounty while simultaneously countering its political and security challenges. In the new issue of the Asia Policy Brief, Jabin T. Jacob, Assistant Director and Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) in Delhi, India, looks at the interactions of some key
Asian countries with China in the context of both the centrality of China's economy to Asian growth and its military-backed assertiveness in the region.

Emphasising China's continuing economic might, he argues that the current slowdown does not appear to have affected its interest in building economic links with its Asian neighbors or its willingness to brandish its military might in territorial disputes in the region. One of the major manifestations of China's continuing self-confidence and creativity in the face of the economic downturn is its launch of the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) infrastructure development and investment initiative. This plan has actually helped divide the opposition to China in many countries and/or provided additional incentive for other countries to deepen engagement with China.

More than anything else, it is China's assertiveness in the East and South China Seas that has convinced many of its neighbors that, slowdown or no slowdown, China remains a strong power, even a threat, to be reckoned with. In the case of many countries such as India and Japan, this only confirms existing fears about China, while ASEAN has turned into a divided house under pressure from the twin Chinese approaches.

China's economic slowdown does not appear to have affected its external military ambitions either. On the contrary: "If anything, if the downturn gets worse", Jacob concludes, "China's leaders might rely still more on military threats to stoke nationalism and to deflect attention from domestic problems." China's neighbors in Asia would not be surprised.

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