The Belt and Road Initiative 一带一路 The Revived Strategy for China's Supremacy

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Abstract *This comprehensive study examines China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure development strategy aimed at enhancing connectivity and economic cooperation. The analysis explores the BRI's historical context, key components, and global reach, with a particular focus on its implementation in the Arab world.*

The study investigates the economic implications of the BRI, including its potential to reshape trade patterns and stimulate growth in participating countries. It scrutinizes the initiative's geopolitical dimensions, considering its impact on international relations and regional power dynamics.

A dedicated section employs a theoretical framework combining neorealism, constructivism, and political economy to analyze the BRI's manifestation in the Arab world. This approach illuminates China's strategic motivations, Arab states' responses, and broader regional implications. The analysis highlights the hybrid governance model used in BRI projects and examines the initiative's influence on economic diversification, infrastructure development, and power structures in the region.

By providing a nuanced examination of the Belt and Road Initiative, with specific attention to its implementation in the Arab world, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of one of the most significant economic and geopolitical developments of the 21st century.

Keywords*: Belt and Road Initiative, China, International Affairs, Economy, and Investment.*

Introduction

China has faced a problem with sluggish economic growth in recent years, and China's government has yet to take steps to curb credit that is growing dangerously, stop its support for state-owned and unviable enterprises, and thus accept the accompanying slowdown in GDP growth (Wright, 2022). Despite the relative decline in China's economic growth, these figures remain high compared to the rest of the world. Because of this Chinese success, the global economy and political center of gravity has shifted from the West to the East, specifically to East Asia (Bader, 2005).

In 2011, Chinese President Jinping began to examine the diversity of energy sources, and together they approved the initial map of the "New Silk Road," consisting of three ways: two main roads; a sea route that includes strategic ports (Yan, 2016). "The Economic Belt of the Silk Road," which is accompanied by programs to build infrastructure such as railways, airports, and gas and oil pipelines (Harutyunyan, 2021).

The first road crosses China from east to west before crossing into Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands (Jakubowski, 2020). The second route passes south to include Uzbekistan, Iran, and Türkiye (Colakoğlu, 2019). Since late 2014, the railway has traversed more than 10,000 kilometers-the longest in the world-passing from the Chinese city of Yiwu to the Spanish capital of Madrid by train to transport goods through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, and Spain (Elsinga, 2014).

The Silk Road was able to develop a triangular economic structure between Russia, Mongolia, and China via the Siberian Train, becoming a transport corridor between Europe and Asia (Bondarchuk,

2021). The implementation of this China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor will link the economic heart of the Silk Road to a network of intercontinental railways and promote the establishment of a free trade area, thus integrating Eurasia into the initiative.

The starting point is Shanghai, China, and the journey ends in Berlin, Germany (Chazan, 2019). It can reach the Iberian Peninsula in Spain to connect the Asian continent with the European continent. The importance of the Silk Road lies in the possibility of connecting the world, the Asian, African, and European continents, to a vast economic network that benefits the countries along the corridor.

1. The ancient Silk Road

The concept of the Silk Road dates back to the first industrial and commercial renaissance of China during the Han Empire era, 300 years BC, when China rose as a prominent industrial power that provided the world with a lot of high-quality and unique industries and goods for many eras (Beckwith, 2009). The name “Silk Road” was given to the wilderness trade routes that connected the countries of the world for many eras, generating a fixed transport and communication line that contributed to the flow of goods and industries and the exchange of cultures between the countries of the three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. However, the name of the Silk Road, developed by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877, is not accurate in describing the importance of this route (Chin, 2013).

This route was not limited to Chinese silk exports but extended to include several varied materials such as paper, animals, gunpowder, pepper, and various industries that existed in Asia. The Silk Road's close and rapid interdependence not only transported material goods but also cultural and religious heritage. This is seen in the spread of

Buddhism and Chinese culture throughout the surrounding Asian region (Kurin, 2002). There is no doubt about the importance of this road as a trade initiative that contributes to consolidating the Chinese economy. This road contributes to establishing control over the market for physical goods and capital as well as consolidating economic ties with its surroundings to consolidate its hegemony. In part, this has been due to the rapid growth of modern China (McBride, 2020). As a result, China is reviving the old road in a stronger and more tightly woven form than it appeared at the start of the Belt and Road Initiative.

2. The Silk Road Initiative: A Modern Version

2.1. China's Motives in Establishing the Silk Road: There are two fundamental and complementary reasons for China to establish the Silk Road:

2.1.1. China wants to get closer to its Asian partners in Central Asia and its European partners, as these areas are rich in natural resources. The Silk Roads also enabled China to improve how the land was used for efficient, productive investment and to serve the needs of the Silk Roads (Hui Lu, 2017).

2.1.2. China's annual trade surplus increased from about $30 billion during the 1990s to $300 billion between 2000 and 2010, and from $400 billion to $600 billion between 2015 and 2017. This has contributed to the accumulation of foreign reserves, from $159 billion in 2000 to more than $3 trillion in 2017 (Manyika, 2019).

2.2. Countries involved in the Silk Road: Belt and Road Initiator: 65 countries, and after the development of the Silk Road, the countries participating in the initiative increased because of their importance in the process and the desire of countries for growth and development (Hofman, 2015). Countries along the Belt and Road will form a “zone

of economic cooperation"—in the presence of interest-controlled competition—stretching from the Western Pacific to the Baltic Sea (Umbach, 2022). The Belt and Road Initiative's official action plan is an open platform for countries and international and regional organizations to contribute to this global initiative.

President Xi Jinping has often emphasized that the initiator is an open, diversified, and win-win project, ready to offer many opportunities for China's and many other countries' development. The enormous and rapid economic renaissance led by China raised it from a country that suffered famines and wars after the Second World War to the second most powerful world economy, with the size of its products and exports making it the factory of the world, and it tightened its control over its surroundings to become the controller of the largest economy in the world.

In 2013, China's leader Xin Jiping announced to the world the "Economic Belt of the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century," which has come to be known as the "Belt and Road Initiative," as a giant long-term initiative to enhance international cooperation. In accordance with the principle of peaceful coexistence and unlike the previous route that was mainly based on trade, the updated project offers a broader strategic horizon through international partnership in multiple fields such as health, education, telecommunications, and infrastructure for the exchange of oil, energy, and communications in all their forms and communications. Two-thirds of our planet's population can be reached through agreements and political cooperation involving more than 60 countries, with more than 100 countries interacting positively, and it is planned to complete the project by 2049 (Glantz, 2019).

Although the Chinese president announced it in 2013, it was officially included in the work of the government on March 28, 2015, when the National Development Committee and the Ministries of Trade and Foreign Affairs published the "Vision for Action and Advancing the Joint Building of the Economic Belt of the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road for the Twenty-first Century," (国家能源局, 2017) where the implementation of the initiative was divided into three stages:

The first phase, the strategic mobilization phase, took place between 2013 and 2016.

The second phase, the strategic implementation phase, is between 2016 and 2019.

The third phase, the strategic evaluation phase, is between 2019 and 2049.

3. The form of the initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative replaces the previous Silk Road with a massive strategic dimension that extends beyond shipping and transport routes and the exchange of goods; the project includes the construction of oil and gas pipelines, channels, and infrastructure for telecommunications between countries; an air bridge; and the establishment of joint political, cultural, and linguistic relations between the project's countries. The physical form of the infrastructure

3.1. The Land Belt: it is a network of paths that connects six major economic corridors (SCIO, 2020):

3.1.1. A route connects southwest China and Pakistan.
3.1.2. A route from southern China to India via Bangladesh and Myanmar

3.1.3. The corridor runs from western China through Central Asia and down to Türkiye.

3.1.4. The corridor starts from southern China to Singapore through the Indo-Chinese region.

3.1.5. The new Eurasian bridge connects western China and western Russia.

3.1.6. The Silk Road Economic Corridor runs from northern China to eastern Russia via Mongolia.

3.2. The Sea Route (Robbins, 2017)**: It** includes two main lines with three added routes announced in 2018:

3.2.1. The first route starts from the China Sea and passes through the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, and from there to the Mediterranean Sea.

3.2.2. The second route connects China's coastal ports with countries in the South Pacific.

3.2.3. The third road, called the Arctic Road, which connects China to the Arctic region, was announced in a white paper document issued by the State Council of China in January 2018 in which it stated that "China, as a responsible major country, is ready to cooperate with all parties concerned to seize the historic opportunity in the development of the Arctic and to address the challenges caused by changes in the region" (China's Arctic Policy, 2018). Stressing that this route will play a key role in facilitating and accelerating trade linkage with Europe through the Arctic region on the understanding that its contribution shall be in accordance with the principles of respect, cooperation, and mutual benefit.

3.3. Oil and natural gas pipelines: About 80% of China's oil imports pass through the geopolitically volatile Malacca Road area

(Myers, 2021). This is a source of concern for China, so it must look for new sources of access to oil and energy and include this goal, which represents a sensitive goal for any industrialized or non-industrial country, which is what it has worked to include in the Belt and Road Initiative to extend a network of energy routes through neighboring countries, which can be limited. Within the initiative, there are two categories of energy methods: the first is for the transportation and import of oil, and the second is for the use of natural gas (Jaybhay, 2020).

3.3.1. First, the methods of transportation of oil are planned within the project:

3.3.1.1. The inter-China oil pipeline reaches the port of Gwadar in Pakistan.
3.3.1.2. The oil pipeline between China and Kazakhstan.
3.3.1.3. The oil pipeline between China and Myanmar.
3.3.1.4. The oil pipeline between China and Russia.

3.3.2. Second, natural gas transport methods:

3.3.2.1. The China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline.
3.3.2.2. The China-Turkmenistan natural gas pipeline.
3.3.2.3. The natural gas line between China and Russia.
3.3.2.4. The natural gas line between East and West China.

3.4. Communication and Digital Connectivity: The Belt and Road Initiative has a technological component called the Digital Silk Road (Agbebi, 2022). It includes the construction and equipping of the electronic infrastructure necessary to create a more direct form of connection between China and the countries of the world. As a result of progress, cyberspace has made remarkable progress. The NA-EU Workshop on Digital Cooperation was held in Brussels in July 2015,

and the Chinese President announced in 2018 that the project was about to begin. The officials of the project stated that it will help other countries improve their digital infrastructure, while Deputy Minister of Industries and Information Technology Zhaoxiong Chen said the project aims to build a "community with a common vision in cyberspace," and Beijing aims to promote X'an to become the digital center and compete with Silicon Valley (Rush Doshi, 2021).

The project aims to open new commercial electronic markets for Chinese companies because there is a significant opportunity for the development of these markets for Chinese businesses, particularly as investments in the digital side of the initiative in countries where Internet access is low will boost their users in the younger age group and offer them a new market for the promotion and marketing of Chinese goods. The pivotal role in this initiative is played by leading Chinese telecommunications companies such as Huawei, which signed a 2017 agreement with the governments of Pakistan, Djibouti, and Kenya as the "Pakistan-East Africa Cable" (Writer, 2022). The line could extend to more than 13,000 kilometers to include Egypt and South Africa. Beijing is studying the construction of another cable across the Arctic to connect Finland, Norway, and Russia with Japan (Ryall, 2018).

4. Executive Obstacles to the Silk Road Ambition

The Belt and Road Initiative includes the development of air connectivity between China, its local provinces, and the countries in the region. This was done by applying a more liberal and flexible aviation policy. A report by the State Information Center, published at the end of May 2017, showed that China succeeded in connecting 26 local areas by air with 43 countries along the Belt and Road Initiative with the

opening of 240 air routes (Writer A. L., 2018). The most critical obstacle to the project would be the Silk Road.

4.1. Central Asian countries, such as those of the South Caucasus, suffer from internal and external challenges that hinder their integration into the Silk Road. Due to the identity conflict and the economic underdevelopment of those countries, a state of chronic poverty and a lack of basic infrastructure for health and education have emerged.

4.2. The huge financial cost of the project, as most of the countries passing through the Silk Road are geographically located between Europe and Asia.

4.3. The route will impose China's presence on the countries participating in this assembly, giving it influence not only in the economy but also in politics. This could provoke a provocation and challenge the exile of other countries, such as the United States and the Russian Federation.

4.4. The twenty-first-century version of the Silk Road will see competition diminished by conflicts of interest and cooperation when pragmatism is imposed under globalization with interconnected systems.

4.5. There are consequences for the construction and restoration of basic infrastructures such as roads, bridges, airports, water and electricity supplies, the establishment of irrigation and sewage networks, and others, and this requires huge efforts.

5. International partners participating in the Belt and Road Initiative

In addition to being a project for economic development, the New Silk Road is also a strategy for dominating the countries that

participate in the economic belt. This strategy includes not only third-world countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America but also first-world countries in Europe.

5.1. China in Africa:

There is a comprehensive government strategy that serves Chinese demand for raw materials from Africa as well as African demand for "Made in China" goods (Murphy, 2022). China has the top five shipping firms and maritime terminals, with two-thirds of the world's fifth largest ports being financed by China (Donnelly, 2020). In addition to investments in the maritime merchant sector, China also has ambitions to develop its naval power from facilities and ports that have dual-use, commercial and military cooperation (Miller, 2022).

Djibouti has China's largest military base abroad (Blanchard, 2017), along with São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, and Walvis Bay in Namibia. These facilities should be completed by the end of the year, including a Chinese military base, freedom boats, and security at the port (James Kynge, 2017).

The process of encircling the continent with Chinese-funded ports is commensurate with the economic belt, with imports and exports passing through the African Sea. For example, Dorian in South Africa and Port Said in Egypt are two of the largest ports in Africa. Also, the Silk Road will enhance China's presence and influence in Africa through the availability of transportation and logistics services (Shinn, 2021).

The most prominent African countries in the economic belt are in East Africa, specifically Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. China invested $3.4 billion to connect Ethiopia to Djibouti and another

amount to establish a railway network (Blair, 2016). More than half of China's investments along the new Silk Road concern Africa.

5.2. China in Asia:

In October 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a high-level conference on China's relations with neighboring countries, where he emphasized more contemporary diplomatic principles, intimacy, honesty, benefit, and inclusiveness, in dealing with neighboring countries (Xinhua, 2013).

China seems willing to respond to those countries' demands in terms of job creation, improving infrastructure, upgrading transport, diversifying exports, enhancing economic competitiveness, and financing domestic innovations. However, serious challenges and internal political turmoil are significant, particularly in the Middle East. This could lead to the obstruction of the Silk Road and thus limit energy security in this region. This could prompt a debate in public policy circles in Beijing on how to deal with crises. China should pay closer attention to the region's political and economic dynamics (Sidlo, 2020). It should also make creative contributions to the emerging agenda by resolving emotional issues and easing tensions.

5.3. China in Europe:

For several years, the Chinese government has encouraged business travelers to invest in Europe. This has increased the volume of investment from $6 billion in 2010 to $47 billion in the next four years. The cumulative BRI engagement since the announcement of the BRI in 2013 is US$932 billion, consisting of US$561 in construction contracts, and US$371 in non-financial investments (Wang, 2022). The EU has also welcomed these initiatives, especially as the economic crisis has hit some member states that do not have a large budget. It is because

Central and Eastern European countries pool skilled and cheap labor to provide expanded markets for Chinese industries. China is always pushing to win contracts.

For example, to ensure long-term stability for the areas adjacent to Greece, Beijing has adopted a fundamentally different approach: investing in the economic belt, engaging in profitable relations with neighbors, and expanding common ground (Erik Brattberg, 2021).

6. Foundations of international cooperation during the initiative

6.1. Political coherence:

One of the most basic foundations necessary for the success of the initiative linking more than 60 countries on three continents is to promote mutual understanding and mutual trust between China and the countries participating in the initiative and between the countries themselves at the regional level to achieve common policy and economic visions. To achieve this, we should work on building mechanisms to coordinate communication and build political and economic partnerships. Among the countries participating in and supporting the Belt and Road Initiative, this cooperation is manifested in the form of memoranda of understanding and intergovernmental cooperation. They are used to establish effective partnerships and resolve problems and obstacles to cooperation through consultation. This is to reach the stage of practical cooperation and project implementation.

It is envisioned that all countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa will work together to build joint infrastructure that will enable the establishment of communication networks between them. This is provided, that is, that this is done in accordance with the principles of

respect for the sovereignty and security of nations. Infrastructure includes basic projects such as highway construction and building roads, as well as constructing commercial ports, strengthening commercial ports, and promoting airports and air travel. As part of the Digital Silk Road initiative, pipelines connecting oil and gas with China, electricity transmission lines, and an international maritime and land network are required to realize the initiative's objectives (Dorff, 2020).

As an instrumental component of the Belt and Road Initiative, China works diligently to facilitate investment and trade between countries; work to remove obstacles and barriers to trade and investment movement; and then expand forms of trade across countries; provide the required cooperation to establish an effective trade environment within the regional and international region; consult with countries to build a free trade zone; and strengthen customs cooperation to control trade and avoid trade movement. Double taxation is in addition to the exchange of information and coordination for protection, security control, documentation and metrology systems, and the facilitation of cross-border movement.

Cooperation in the fields of mutual investment in agriculture, livestock, and mining for the extraction of coal, oil, and raw materials; cooperation in the fields of hydropower, nuclear power, wind, solar energy, and other clean energy sources; as well as cooperation in the fields of environmental protection, biodiversity, and countering climate change to build the so-called “Green Silk Road,” should also be developed (Xiaoming, 2020).

The Chinese president, Xi Jinping, detailed the initiative in detail at a press conference, which intends to inject giant capital into the “Belt and Road Project Fund” and into the “Asian Infrastructure Investment

Bank" and move forward to create the Development Bank to support infrastructure projects for developing countries, especially those on the initiative, including investment systems and investment systems. Cross-country financing; settling bilateral accounts in local currencies; strengthening the Association of Chinese and Asian Banks; urging countries to issue bonds in Chinese currency to the Belt countries; strengthening financial control between countries; and high-level cooperation in early detection, redressing, and addressing financial risks.

6.2. People's Understanding and Cultural Exchange:

In his speech in 2013, President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of strengthening friendship among people and establishing love among them (中华人民共和国外交部驻, 2013). He also stressed that the depth of relations between people is based on mutual understanding and concern for a common destiny. As a result, China works within the Belt and Road Initiative to promote cultural exchange through Chinese language and culture education and competency exchange. China has pledged to provide 10,000 paid scholarships annually to foreign students from countries along the initiative line (Editorial, 2019). China also encourages joint feminist youth activities with the establishment of festivals and cultural activities such as the revival of the cultural year; film and art festivals; book fairs; and the promotion of the translation movement, in addition to the development of tourism and the increase in the volume of tourism by facilitating the establishment of tourism and sports events (Liu, 2020).

China has worked in partnership with health organizations such as the World Health Organization to combat zoonotic epidemic diseases in many countries along the Lancang-Mekong River (中华人民共和国驻蒙古国大使馆, 2021). In addition to cooperation with West Asian

countries in the field of prevention of various diseases, China has also sent medical teams to various countries, including Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos, as well as to Pacific Island countries, resulting in the establishment of centers for traditional Chinese medicine and drugs in many of the countries involved in the initiative (Lin, 2018).

China contributes to the provision of humanitarian aid to support relief and the fight against poverty in the countries of the Initiative. It has provided equipment for seismic monitoring and disaster control in Laos and many other countries, accompanied by cooperative activities to protect and study the effects in other countries (中华人民共和国驻, 2019).

7. Chinese Objectives from BRI

Silk Road project financing was centered on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2013. The initiative to establish the bank was launched in October 2014, when representatives of 22 countries signed a memorandum of understanding (Chin G. , 2016).

By March 31, 2015, deadline for submitting membership applications, 57 countries had submitted their applications and become founding members of the Bank. Of the 57 founding members, 37 are from Asia and Oceania, and the rest are from Europe, Africa, and Latin America. As of December 31, 2015, all these countries have signed the terms of the agreement that forms the legal basis of the Bank. The bank's headquarters are in Beijing, and the Asian Commercial Investment Bank is available for business. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has become one of the tools of Chinese influence and the key financial shield for Beijing to undermine geopolitical influence in Asia (Haga, 2021).

7.1. Geopolitical goals

7.1.1. Strengthening Chinese influence and hegemony:

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China aims to strengthen its presence as an economic power around the world, particularly on the European and Asian continents. This is through its huge investments and the introduction of an alternative development model to the Western model, especially in Asian countries where China is making exceptionally large investments (Müller-Markus, 2016).

7.1.2. Strengthening its presence in the Eurasian region:

The Eurasia region is one of the areas of national importance because it has huge economic potential. This is because of its large area and the raw materials it contains. Also, it is protected from external interference on all sides by its natural protective properties. These qualities have made it of particular importance to China at the economic and security levels (Remyga, 2018).

7.1.3. Multipolarity:

The initiative seeks to change the unilateral international order dominated by the United States and its allies. This is to support their own interests in establishing a multipolar world in which China represents an extremely significant global economic pole. China believes that this pole will create stability, peace, and prosperity through the establishment of two political and economic systems centered on rational equality and justice (Nicolas, 2016).

7.2. Economic goals

7.2.1. Benefiting from the growth of global trade:

China aims to capitalize on the significant growth in global trade. This is part of the initiative to export its products and goods around the world and sustain their flow while providing investment opportunities in regions within China (Woetzel, 2017).

7.2.2. Enhancing the position of the Chinese Yuan

China is working to raise the profile of its local currency, the yuan, to make it the main currency of global trade in the so-called "internationalization" of the currency and to use it to settle trade dealings with the member states of the initiative (Caudevilla, 2022).

7.3. Oil and Energy Insurance:

China is the second-largest energy consumer in the world after the United States of America and may become the first by 2030. To maintain the industry's wheel, the initiative must ensure that oil is pumped into China through the pipelines and lines within the initiative from exporting countries (Sarkar, 2018).

7.4: Reduction in the duration of goods transportation:

It is the goal of establishing trans-country land and sea lines and supporting infrastructure, through which the time for transporting goods from China to the EU will be reduced by almost half, and the polar route will reduce the time required to deliver commercial goods by 20 days compared to the old road passing through the Suez Canal (Soyres, 2018).

7.4.1. Strengthening the influence of Chinese technology companies:

In the Belt and Road Initiative, China is developing technology services and communication technologies and establishing digital international trade platforms. The technological development of connectivity and infrastructure in these countries is conducted by leading Chinese companies in the technology fields, such as ZTE and Huawei (Brown, 2017). These companies take over the supervision and provision of the required logistics services. This will increase the control of Chinese enterprises over international technological systems and increase their share of the global market.

7.4.2. Deepening financial cooperation:

Through the initiative, China aims to build a financial system that facilitates the process of investment and financing to achieve monetary stability in the countries of the region and facilitate the flow of funds through funds from the initiative or advanced banking linkages between countries, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund and seeks to establish a body for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Hubbard, 2016).

7.4.3. The fear of increasing the size of GDP:

China's GDP has reached its saturation point. This may cause imbalances like those that occurred in the Japanese economy during the 1980s. This may also cause a reduction in GDP due to a reduction in demand for Chinese goods. This may also result in a reduction in the prices of Chinese goods until the goods are unable to support themselves. This may lead to a debt bubble, a recession, or a direct economic collapse. Through the initiative, China seeks to gain time for its industries as well as improve the conditions of the economy. So,

people in these regions can buy products manufactured in China or increase domestic consumption. As far back as the rule of its former president, this was one of its main economic pillars (Ylander, 2017).

7.5. Security Objectives

7.5.1. Project Security:

This mega project led by China requires significant security support, especially in conflict zones and African countries, where security companies have begun working there to secure Chinese companies, projects, ships, and oil tankers passing near the Somali coast, as well as entrusting China with protecting its companies in Kenya and opening military bases in Djibouti, in addition to the introduction in 2015 of an anti-terrorism law that allowed them to carry out military missions for units of the People's Liberation Army of China (Nantulya, 2020).

7.5.2. Diversification of power supply outlets:

The US presence in the Indian Ocean, especially near the Strait of Malacca, through which 80% of China's oil needs pass, represents a threat to the Chinese energy supply, especially if the relationship between the two countries is strained (Caesar-Gordon, 2016). To avoid this scenario, China has established two additional corridors. One is from Pakistan's port of Gwadar and through the Chinese province of Xinjiang, and the other is from the port of Zhapu. In Myanmar, it passes directly through the Chinese city of Yunnan (Yang Jinghao, 2022).

7.5.3. Increasing naval power

China believes that the promotion of trade traffic is tightly coupled with maritime security along transport and sailing lines and

ports. Therefore, it is strengthening its military presence near major trade traffic areas and in the main straits and corridors of the Indian Ocean, through which world trade passes. This is to protect its interests and strengthen its presence as an effective maritime military force in the ocean connecting countries (Andresen, 2019).

A few people have reacted to this huge initiative, including what some see as an effective and positive economic initiative that serves our collective interests. On the other hand, some see it as China attempting to impose its hegemony over its region.

8. The Belt and Road Initiative: A Catalyst for China's Global Ascendancy and a Challenge to International Dynamics

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), unveiled by China in 2013, represents an ambitious and multifaceted framework designed to enhance global trade, stimulate economic growth, and expand China's geopolitical influence across Asia and beyond. This comprehensive literature review examines the various dimensions of the BRI, including its strategic, economic, geopolitical, security, and technological aspects, to provide a nuanced and holistic understanding of China's far-reaching global project.

8.1. Strategic Dimensions of the BRI

The strategic significance of the BRI is underscored by China's concerted efforts to secure critical maritime and land routes. Caesar-Gordon (2016) elucidates the concept of the “Malacca Dilemma,” highlighting China's profound concern over its heavy reliance on the narrow Strait of Malacca for energy imports. This strategic vulnerability has catalyzed initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti (Blanchard, 2017).

These developments illuminate China's multifaceted approach to safeguarding its energy supplies and enhancing its strategic reach, particularly in the Indian Ocean region and beyond. The CPEC, for instance, not only provides an alternative route for energy imports but also strengthens China's presence in South Asia, potentially altering the regional balance of power. Similarly, the Djibouti base serves as a strategic foothold in the Horn of Africa, enabling China to project power and protect its interests along vital maritime trade routes.

8.2. Economic and Financial Aspects

The economic scope of the BRI is vast and multifaceted, encompassing a wide array of infrastructure projects, trade agreements, and financial investments. Hofman (2015) provides a comprehensive overview of the BRI's economic objectives, emphasizing its potential to reshape global trade patterns and accelerate economic development in participating countries. Hubbard (2016) delves into the pivotal role of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in financing BRI projects, highlighting how this institution reflects China's broader ambition to reshape global financial governance and challenge the dominance of Western-led financial institutions.

Jakubowski (2020) offers a valuable European perspective by analyzing Poland's role as a key hub in the Silk Road Economic Belt. This analysis illustrates the BRI's expansive reach into Europe and its potential to reconfigure Eurasian trade dynamics. Wang (2022) provides a more recent assessment of BRI investments, meticulously detailing both the significant achievements and the myriad challenges faced in implementing this colossal initiative.

Recent developments have introduced new challenges for the BRI. An unexpected drop in revenue from strategic infrastructure projects has created obstacles, particularly for high-profile endeavors such as the

international airport in Sri Lanka, railways and road transport in Indonesia and Kenya, the Gwadar seaport in Pakistan, and mega projects in Zambia. These setbacks are largely attributed to the global coronavirus crisis and the rise in fuel and food prices associated with the Russian-Ukrainian war, which have led to increased inflation and economic depression in participating countries.

In response to these challenges, China is adapting its approach. There is a noticeable shift from large-scale projects to smaller, more productive initiatives such as hydroelectric and solar energy projects. Additionally, there is a transition from government-led initiatives to increased private sector involvement. In its foreign relations with developing countries, China is also moving from a lending-focused approach to providing more aid, potentially influencing the dynamics of international development assistance.

8.3. Geopolitical Implications

The geopolitical ramifications of the BRI are profound and far-reaching, influencing China's relations with countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe. Colakoğlu (2019) explores the intricate compatibility of the BRI with Türkiye's Middle Corridor initiative, shedding light on the complex geopolitical interplay between regional actors. This analysis reveals how the BRI is fostering new alignments and partnerships, potentially reshaping traditional alliances, and spheres of influence.

Sidlo (2020) further examines China's burgeoning influence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, extending beyond purely economic interests to encompass strategic and diplomatic dimensions. This research underscores how the BRI is serving as a vehicle for China to expand its soft power and cultivate strategic partnerships in regions traditionally dominated by Western influence.

8.4. Security Concerns and Military Aspects

The BRI's security dimensions are particularly pronounced in strategically significant regions such as the Red Sea and East Africa. Shinn (2021) and Murphy (2022) provide in-depth analyses of China's strategic interests and activities in these areas, emphasizing the multifaceted security implications of China's growing presence. The establishment of military bases and the negotiation of security agreements under the BRI framework illustrate China's dual focus on economic development and strategic security.

These security initiatives raise important questions about the changing nature of global power dynamics and the potential for increased military competition in key regions. The BRI's security component also highlights the initiative's role in enhancing China's ability to protect its overseas interests and citizens, a growing concern as Chinese investments and expatriate communities expand globally.

8.5. Technological and Digital Expansion

The BRI extends beyond physical infrastructure to encompass significant technological and digital components. Agbebi (2022) and Dorff (2020) explore the Digital Silk Road, a critical aspect of the BRI focused on enhancing digital connectivity and fostering technological cooperation. This initiative aims to set future global tech standards and integrate emerging markets into China's digital ecosystem, potentially reshaping the global technological landscape.

The Digital Silk Road encompasses a wide range of projects, including the development of 5G networks, smart cities, and e-commerce platforms. These initiatives not only promote economic integration but also raise important questions about data security, digital

sovereignty, and the potential for technological dependencies on Chinese systems.

8.6. Critical Perspectives and Future Outlook

A comprehensive understanding of the BRI necessitates consideration of critical perspectives. Umbach (2022) and Blanchard (2017) highlight the myriad challenges and criticisms faced by the BRI, including concerns over debt sustainability, transparency, and geopolitical resistance. These works provide a balanced view, acknowledging the potential benefits of the BRI while also scrutinizing the risks and controversies associated with its implementation.

Issues such as the "debt-trap diplomacy" narrative, environmental concerns, and the potential for increased political influence through economic means have sparked debates about the long-term implications of the BRI for participating countries and the global order.

9. Belt and Road Initiative in the Arab World: A Multifaceted Analysis

9.1. Theoretical Framework

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Arab world can be comprehensively understood through an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes neorealism, constructivism, and political economy. This multidimensional approach elucidates China's strategic motivations, the nuanced responses of Arab states, and the broader implications for regional and global dynamics.

9.1.1. Neorealist Perspective

From a neorealist standpoint, China's engagement in the Arab world via the BRI represents a calculated strategy to enhance its relative power

within the international system. This approach encompasses several key objectives:

9.1.1.1. Counterbalancing the influence of other major powers, particularly the United States (Sidlo, 2020).
9.1.1.2. Establishing strategic footholds in geopolitically significant regions (Blanchard, 2017)
9.1.1.3. Securing access to critical energy resources (Sarkar, 2018)

9.1.2. Constructivist Lens.

Constructivism illuminates the normative and ideational aspects of the BRI in the Arab context:

9.1.2.1. China's emphasis on "win-win cooperation" and "mutual respect" resonates with Arab states seeking alternatives to Western-dominated development paradigms (Nicolas, 2016).
9.1.2.2. China's non-interference policy aligns with the preferences of many Arab regimes (Sidlo, 2020).
9.1.2.3. The BRI narrative of reviving ancient Silk Road connections appeals to shared historical and cultural ties between China and the Arab world (Beckwith, 2009).

9.1.3. Political Economy Approach

The political economy perspective reveals the economic drivers and consequences of the BRI in the Arab world:

9.1.3.1. Arab states view the BRI as an opportunity to diversify their economies, attract investment, and upgrade infrastructure (Harutyunyan, 2021).
9.1.3.2. For China, the BRI serves as an outlet for excess industrial capacity and a means to internationalize its currency (Caudevilla, 2022).
9.1.3.3. The initiative creates new patterns of economic interdependence, potentially reshaping regional economic structures (Woetzel, 2017).

9.1.4. Hybrid Governance Model

The BRI in the Arab world exemplifies a hybrid governance model that integrates:

9.1.4.1. State-led development strategies.
9.1.4.2. Market-oriented mechanisms
9.1.4.3. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks (Hubbard, 2016)

This theoretical framework suggests that the BRI in the Arab world is a multifaceted phenomenon with significant implications for regional dynamics, global power structures, and economic development paradigms. It reflects China's growing influence and the evolving nature of international cooperation in the 21st century.

9.2. Future Implications and Critical Questions

As the BRI continues to unfold in the Arab world, several critical questions emerge:

1. How will the BRI impact regional stability and existing power structures in the Arab world?
2. Can the economic benefits of the BRI be equitably distributed, or will they exacerbate existing inequalities?
3. How will other global powers, particularly the United States, respond to China's growing influence in the region?
4. What are the long-term environmental and social implications of large-scale BRI projects in the Arab world?

The answers to these questions will shape not only the future of the Arab world but also the broader global order. The BRI's engagement with the Arab world represents a profound shift in the global economic and political landscape, offering both opportunities and challenges.

Concluding Remarks

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has faced unexpected challenges, particularly a decline in revenue from strategic infrastructure projects. This downturn has been evident in projects like the international airport in Sri Lanka, railway and road transport systems in Indonesia and Kenya, the Gwadar seaport in Pakistan, and various mega projects in Zambia. The stagnation of these projects is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which led to increased fuel and food prices, inflation, and economic depression in the affected countries. The overall recovery has been slow, posing significant challenges for the initiative's success.

In response, China is exploring several strategies to mitigate these challenges, including the initiation of new, substantial projects in countries such as Russia and Egypt. Additionally, there is a noticeable shift from large-scale projects to smaller, more productive ventures, particularly in renewable energy sectors like hydroelectricity and solar power. This transition includes a broader involvement of the private sector in place of government institutions.

A notable shift in China's approach to foreign relations with developing countries is the transition from primarily offering loans to providing more aid. This approach contrasts with the United States, which typically provides more aid relative to loans. China's strategy, characterized by offering nine dollars in loans for every dollar in grants, may influence the United States to reconsider its aid distribution to developing nations. Nonetheless, this strategy potentially allows China to indirectly benefit from the economic recovery and deficit management of these countries.

As the BRI continues to evolve, future research should focus on several key areas:

a. The adaptation of BRI strategies considering recent economic challenges and shifts in project focus.
b. The environmental and social impacts of BRI infrastructure projects, and the effectiveness of sustainability measures.
c. The geopolitical consequences of the BRI, particularly in regions where it intersects with the interests of other major powers.
d. The long-term economic impacts of BRI projects on participating countries, including debt sustainability and economic growth outcomes.
e. The potential for the BRI to evolve in response to global challenges, such as climate change and public health crises.
f. The role of the Digital Silk Road in shaping global technological standards and its implications for digital governance.

Continued monitoring and analysis of these aspects will enable scholars to develop a nuanced understanding of the BRI's evolving dynamics and its profound impact on global governance, regional stability, and international relations in the 21st century. The BRI's ability to adapt to changing global circumstances and its potential to reshape the international order make it a critical subject for ongoing research and analysis.

In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative represents a multifaceted and ambitious strategy by China to expand its global influence and reshape international economic and political landscapes. This literature review highlighted the initiative's strategic, economic, geopolitical, security, and technological dimensions, providing a comprehensive understanding of its scope and implications. The BRI not only serves as a platform for economic growth and connectivity but also as a strategic

tool for China to assert its supremacy on the global stage. As the initiative evolves, it will be crucial to continue examining its impact on global dynamics and the responses it elicits from the international community.

Appendixes: Belt and Road Initiative Study

Appendix A: BRI Participating Countries

Table 1: Selected BRI Participating Countries by Region	
Region	**Countries**
East Asia	China, Mongolia
Southeast Asia	Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore
South Asia	Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan
Middle East	Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey
Europe	Greece, Italy, Poland, Hungary
Africa	Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, South Africa

Appendix B: Key BRI Infrastructure Projects

Table 2: Major BRI Infrastructure Projects			
Project Name	**Country/Region**	**Type**	**Status**
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	Pakistan	Multi-sector	Ongoing
Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway	Indonesia	Rail	Under Construction
Hambantota Port	Sri Lanka	Port	Completed
Piraeus Port	Greece	Port	Operational
Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway	Kenya	Rail	Completed
Budapest-Belgrade Railway	Hungary/Serbia	Rail	Under Construction
Gwadar Port	Pakistan	Port	Operational
Khorgos Gateway	Kazakhstan	Dry Port	Operational

Appendix C: BRI Funding Mechanisms

Table 3: Major BRI Funding Institutions			
Institution	**Established**	**Capital Base**	**Focus**
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)	2016	$100 billion	Infrastructure
Silk Road Fund	2014	$40 billion	Various BRI projects
China Development Bank	1994	$2.4 trillion (assets)	Long-term financing
Export-Import Bank of China	1994	$620 billion (assets)	Trade finance

Appendix D: BRI Economic Corridors

Table 5: Six Major Economic Corridors of BRI	
Corridor Name	**Key Countries/Regions**
New Eurasian Land Bridge	China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Europe
China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor	China, Mongolia, Russia
China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor	China, Central Asia, Iran, Turkey
China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor	China, Southeast Asian countries
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	China, Pakistan
Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor	China, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar

Appendix E: Digital Silk Road Initiatives

Table 6: Key Digital Silk Road Projects		
Project Type	**Description**	**Key Countries/Regions**
5G Networks	Development of 5G infrastructure	Southeast Asia, Middle East, Africa
Fiber Optic Cables	Submarine and terrestrial cables	Pakistan, East Africa, Europe
Smart Cities	Urban digitalization projects	Various BRI countries
E-commerce Platforms	Cross-border e-commerce initiatives	Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe
Satellite Navigation	BeiDou Navigation Satellite System	Global coverage

Appendix F: BRI Environmental Initiatives

Table 7: Green Silk Road Projects		
Initiative	**Description**	**Key Areas**
Green Investment Principles	Guidelines for green investment in BRI	All BRI regions
Renewable Energy Projects	Solar, wind, and hydropower investments	Africa, Southeast Asia, Central Asia
Green Finance	Promotion of green bonds and sustainable finance	Various BRI countries
Ecological Conservation	Protection of biodiversity and ecosystems	BRI ecological corridors
Sustainable Transportation	Electric vehicles and clean energy transport	Urban areas in BRI countries

Appendix G: BRI Challenges and Criticisms

Table 8: Major Challenges and Criticisms of BRI		
Challenge/Criticism	**Description**	**Affected Areas**
Debt Sustainability	Concerns over unsustainable debt levels in recipient countries	Developing countries in Africa and Asia
Environmental Impact	Worries about ecological damage from large infrastructure projects	Various BRI project sites
Lack of Transparency	Criticisms regarding opaque project agreements and financing terms	Multiple BRI countries
Geopolitical Tensions	Concerns from other powers about China's growing influence	Indo-Pacific region, Central Asia
Labor and Social Issues	Criticisms about use of Chinese labor and social impacts	African countries, Southeast Asia
Quality and Standards	Concerns about the quality and standards of some BRI projects	Various infrastructure projects

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