

## **The Belt and Road Initiative: The String Effect of World Economic Domination**

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## Abstract

This report examines the many facets of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as nearly ten years later, the project seeks to begin both infrastructural and digital transformation of the nearly seventy countries involved. Despite setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese Communist Party, led by President Xi Jinping, seems eager to revitalize the project and quickly resume work. The Belt and Road Initiative brings many possible positive outcomes to the table for countries involved, primarily within the continents of Europe and Asia. However, the project also warrants as many critics as it does supporters. Western scholars have raised concerns of Chinese “debt trap diplomacy” which could prevent countries from flourishing fiscally under the initiative. Furthermore, the initiative also warrants domestic criticisms from China and how heavy economic influence could seep into social influence, especially in Asian countries. While China wishes to become a larger influence in the international community, China needs to consider that past foreign policies do not work for a new approach. In order for the project to flourish, the Chinese government needs to consider opting for more worldwide cooperation to ensure equitable foreign and domestic policy.

However, the author of this paper seeks to make clear that any criticism in this paper is directed towards the Chinese government, and not Chinese citizens. Coming from a western society built on democracy, *people* and *government* are intertwined terms. After all, is it not in the media consumed, in the advertisements heard, that the government is the choice of the people, run *by* the people? Separating the two is a foreign idea (Zhao, 2021).

In this context, however, these preconceived notions need to be set aside when considering actions of many Asian countries, whose leaders often come into power by force. In the case of some nations, this can be unofficial power, as well, such as the social influence the Islamic State (ISIS) has on tribal areas in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Andersen et al., 2018). China is not an exception to this rule. As a one party state, where President Xi Jinping recently declared himself dictator for life, Chinese citizens have far less influence over the decisions their government makes if their families are not directly involved in politics. Opposing the Chinese Communist Party also has severe consequences in the country, and therefore is uncommon in

Chinese households (Zhao, 2021). In this context, separating the actions of the Belt and Road Initiative must be done through the lens of understanding these are the decisions of the Chinese government and Chinese citizens have had little say in their outcome. Going forward, the interconnections between these factors must be considered.

## **Definition & Significance**

During official visitations to Indonesia and Kazakhstan in 2013, President Xi Jinping from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced China's plans to build a "New Silk Road", building a set of trade routes which would further connect China to its South Asian neighbours, its allies in Africa, and European countries. Eight years later, the project is still one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects that any country has attempted. The president initially titled this project "One Belt, One Road", which would later become the Belt and Road Initiative (Feng, 2015).

The Belt and Road Initiative was to follow in the footsteps of the ancient Silk Road, a set of trade routes that connected China with other Eurasian countries and was used for centuries after its construction. President Xi announced that the plan for this initiative was double pronged, one prong entitled the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the other the "Maritime Silk Road". The aim of the Silk Road Economic Belt was to connect China with its south Asian neighbours along the paths of the ancient Silk Road, Pakistan and India both pledging their support to the Belt and Road Initiative, travelling thousands of miles over to the Netherlands and western Russia. On the other hand, the Maritime Silk Road was meant to create corridors through the Indian Ocean to expand trade to partners in Indonesia, Africa, and Italy.

The CCP's efforts, however, do not come without a cost. If the Belt and Road Initiative is completed in its entirety, analysts predict that the project could cost a total ranging from \$60 billion, of \$1.3 trillion. A notable percentage of these funds will be provided from both the infrastructure budget from the CCP and Chinese public-private banks. However, China also garners a large amount of its partners in this project. Around 60 countries have pledged their support to the Belt and Road Initiative, of which their populations combined make up two thirds of the world's population. However, criticisms of this tactic for funding the Belt and Road Initiative have launched the term "debt-trap diplomacy" to describe a country using debt as leverage over another. In China's case, this criticism often lies within winning claims to the Beijing South China Sea.

Despite all of these costs, China has still assessed that the benefits far outweigh the downfalls of the initiative. In 2013, President Xi stated that “China will actively promote international co-operation through the Belt and Road Initiative. In doing so, we hope to achieve policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity and thus build a new platform for international co-operation to create new drivers of shared development.” This outlines two main benefits to the Belt and Road Initiative for China: greater economic gain through more trade opportunities, and an opportunity to make itself an important player on the international stage (Mobley, 2019).

Intentionally or unintentionally, the sheer expansive nature of the Belt and Road Initiative also changes the way our society thinks about international relationships. Globalization in trade and organizations is not exclusive to this initiative, but it will make the process of importing and exporting goods across long distances more efficient and tangible, especially for countries with less pre-established trade relationships with economic powers on the international stage. The Belt and Road Initiative, then, brings the conversation of how important international trade, and therefore, foreign powers are to their own nation thriving to the globe. It expands the sphere of who the average citizens feels they must look after from just their own country to others.

The Belt and Road Initiative also presents opportunities and challenges to the international community. As mentioned previously, the initiative provides new trading opportunities to countries that have not had long standing economic ties to resource-rich countries, and makes it more efficient for them to transport these goods. Included in these expansive networks will be energy pipelines, which will provide sources of clean energy on a global scale. However, it also presents many concerns, such as creating further tensions between developing nations and establishing economic dominance over other countries (Cabestan, 2020).

Globalization, inevitably, will be the way in which the future of society will see the lens of the world through. Even if a citizen is not part of a country that has agreed to take part in the Belt and Road Initiative, the nature of international trade guarantees that their country participates in trade with at least one country along the initiative. Not being connected to these routes, which make the travelling and processing of goods much more efficient, puts everyone in

these countries at a disadvantage. The way national leaders will have to think about how they pursue trade and through which avenues may experience change.

Furthermore, while these new economic routes may provide economic gain for many countries involved, it also could result in furthering China's leverage over other states. This theory is known as "debt trap diplomacy", often discussed in western academic policy think tanks to discern all of China's motives regarding the Belt and Road Initiative. The theory comes into action when a powerful economic lender loans money to a group that is not economically prosperous in order to place enormous amounts of debt onto the group, therefore increasing the leverage they have over the group. China is not the only group to be accused of such policies. The International Monetary Fund Bank has been using debts amassed from developing countries during the COVID-19 Pandemic in order to increase leverage via relief funds. The International Monetary Fund has also been accused of having predatory tactics of economic diplomacy that lead to developing countries relying on support from the United States. China, however, has been the main target of criticism of "debt trap" diplomacy. Their motives for using such tactics range, however, many western political think tanks believe one of the main reasons is to regain control over the South China Sea, giving them better access to the Pacific Ocean (Cheftiz et al., 2018).

The theory comes with criticism from scholars from the east, however. The Lowy Institute was one of the first to "debunk" the theory, claiming that there is no evidence supporting these theories from United States central think tanks (Cai, 2018). Whether these effects are intentional or not, it is worth noting that China's government has placed enormous debts onto developing countries to build projects along the Belt and Road Initiative (Hillman, 2018). With these leverages, there is plenty of possibility for China to use this to further peace conversations with parts of the world in conflict, such as removing the influence of the Islamic State (ISIS) from Pakistan and Afghanistan (Andersen et al., 2018). However, there is also a possibility for China to impose their values and disdain for a rule based world order through economic domination.

However, this is not the only reason the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative should matter to others. China's lack of regard for human rights, especially of ethnic minorities within

their own borders is well known with groups such as the Uhyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. Many of the countries involved in the initiative adhere to very similar faiths, which also face repression under the Chinese Communist Party. While China claims to not be interested in occupying other countries through the initiative, there is no doubt that the possibility of them using their political and economic leverage over countries to push their religious values onto countries involved. China's presence within these states, as well, could also exacerbate certain conflicts, such as the Islamic State (ISIS) presence mentioned earlier (Andersen et al., 2018). Human empathy for these people who could be irrevocably hurt and have their human rights and dignity removed from them alone is enough of a reason to care.

The Belt and Road Initiative has the possibility for great good and long withstanding cruelty. As people who live on the Earth with people who will be affected economically and humanly by the outcome of the initiative, it is imperative that each and every person makes the decision to actively take a role in caring about the process of the initiative. Feigning ignorance because of what Chinese labour can provide in western societies is no longer an option, not when there are many already being hurt.

## Background

There is a misconception that international trade is a modern concept, and while the *speed* of international trade is new to our generation, the Belt and Road Initiative follows in the footsteps of trade routes centuries before. To understand the significance of the Belt and Road Initiative, it is necessary to understand the significance and history of the first Silk Road and its contribution to globalization in a historical setting.

While the “Silk Road” is the common name for the passages, it is misleading. The Silk Road was not a singular road of pathway of any sort, but it was a connection of passages stretching as far east as China, to midway through Africa, all the way to the south of Europe. Now, historians prefer to call the network of trade connections the “Silk Routes”, to more accurately describe the passageways, and will be referred to as such from now on within this paper (Mark, 2018).

The Silk Routes did not come about in one day. Smaller trade routes between south and central Asia were built early on for China to establish stronger, more reliable relationships with their neighbouring countries, when historically, they had been very fragile. The expansion of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great, however, was one of the milestones in China recognizing they would need to build stronger trade relationships with the west. Greece, under Alexander the Great, began to conquer mass amounts of territory spanning into central Asia, at its farthest point, and offered many resources to China that they hadn’t possessed before (Mark, 2018).

However, it was the establishment of the Roman Empire conquering the Greeks was the final push towards the expansion of Chinese trade routes that would result in the Silk Routes. In order to compete with the growing empire, the country would need to start establishing strong relationships with their neighbours and exerting their influence to make them invaluable allies (Mark, 2018).

The initiation of the Silk Routes took place under the Han Dynasty, officially in the year 130CE. Roman traders, as a result, began to first find value in the quality and craftsmanship of the silk that China was able to produce. Many old texts, referring to the Han Dynasty in the empire, refer to the country as “Seres”, translating more literally to “the land of silk”. The Silk Routes then derives the second part of its name from one of its most valuable resources (Mark, 2018).

However, it would be incorrect to assume that silk was the only resource that was transported along the Silk Routes. The routes began to expand and become more well established over the centuries, having its most eastern point in north-central Chinese region known as Xi'an (more modernly, the Shaanxi province) and stretched to what we now know as modern Somalia and along the Mediterranean Sea. At its height, the routes stretched over 6,400 kilometers (Britannica, 2020). As the Silk Routes became more widely used, western nations also came to popularize the trade of many eastern spices and teas. Some other exports that would become popular included ivory, dyes, precious stones, paper, and medicine. The trade of gunpowder along the Silk Routes would become a catalyst for the expansion of technology in the west. China was also able to bring in many valuable resources from the west, including horses, more sophisticated weaponry, textiles, and gold.

The Silk Routes did not just serve as roads for traders, but also revolutionized the possibility of international travel in antiquity. One of the most famous of these travellers included Marco Polo, who travelled from Europe to Asia from 1271CE to 1275CE. Polo was far from the first European to traverse the Silk Routes, yet his autobiography of his travels and stay in China upon returning to Italy and being held prisoner is one of the most famous records of these travels preserved today (Mark, 2018).

The death of the Silk Routes would not truly occur until the 18th century. However, the fall of the Roman Empire would serve to decline the popularity and safety of the Silk Routes. As Roman territory began to decline, this also began the decline of well organized Roman armies protecting many of the trade passageways. Threats that could have been easily thwarted now faced little resistance without the size of the empire's army. As a result, passengers along these

networks were far more susceptible to thieves. Under Mongol leadership in the 13th and 14th centuries, attempts were made to revive some of the passageways to keep trade relations between Asia and Europe strong. Historians now believe this is how bacteria from the European epidemic of the Black Plague travelled to Asia (Britannica, 2020).

The Silk Routes prove that the idea of international trade and a globalized society, while they become more mainstream in our generation, are far from a novel concept. These trade routes would help to expand the economy and variety of trade in regions, strengthen international relations between economic superpowers at the time, and acquaint both sides of the world with a better understanding of the cultures of those far from them (Mark, 2018).

The Silk Routes provided valuable resources economically and socially to both countries in the East and in the West. It is not a surprise, then, that when the Belt and Road Initiative was first announced, the Silk Routes were cited as President Xi Jinping's main inspirations for the project (Mobley, 2019).

The first prong of the Belt and Road Initiative was announced on September 7, 2013, at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan capital, Astana. Kazakhstan territories include many historical sites along the Silk Routes, and are closely allied with China in terms of trade. It is not a surprise, then, when the capital of their partner was chosen as the place to announce and ask for support in building the land portion of the Belt and Road Initiative (Clarke, 2017). He would best summarize the initiative himself, saying

China will actively promote international cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative. In doing so, we hope to achieve policy, infrastructure, financial, and people-to-people connectivity and thus build a new platform for international cooperation to create new drivers of shared development (OECD, 2018).

Known primarily as the "Silk Economic Belt", this is where the name of the trade routes gets the first part of its title. The Silk Economic Belt, more largely, follows in the footsteps of the historic Silk Routes. This belt will revive many historic passages along the Silk Routes with newer infrastructure, to not just support the trade of physical goods, but the transfer of power

through power grids throughout European and Asian countries. The Silk Economic Belt will also create new passages throughout China and current countries with strong affairs. While the historic Xi'an will still be the official "beginning" of the routes, they will include passageways to highly populated cities, such as Beijing and Fuzhou. The belt portion of the initiative will also include important stops in Moscow, Russia, Istanbul, Turkey, Rotterdam, Netherlands, Athens, Greece, and Venice, Italy (Clarke, 2017). The Silk Road Economic Belt will also include an important branch of trade routes between China and Pakistan.

The second and final prong of the Belt and Road Initiative was announced a month after their initial unveiling of the project in Kazakhstan. In a delegation visit to the parliament of Indonesia, President Xi unveils the building of the entirely new "21st Century Maritime Silk Road". In this visit, President Xi not only encouraged Indonesia to join in support of this road, but all countries in Southeast Asia to pledge their support to these passages.

While the Silk Economic Belt largely follows in the path of the historic Silk Routes, with a few deviations from the original routes to include China's strongest trade partners, the Maritime Silk Road deviates largely from the typical definition of a "road", and includes many neighboring countries to strengthen further relationships with European and African countries (Links, 2021).

Embracing modern technologies, the New Maritime Silk Road creates defined waterbound passageways and trading ports stretching just as far as the Silk Economic Belt. This prong of the Belt and Road Initiative embraces increasingly quickening boat technology and the amount of goods waterways can move around vast distances. The New Maritime Silk Road also allows for China to expand infrastructure along these trading ports, and advance hydropower technology along coastal countries (Clarke, 2017). Some notable stops along this section of the initiative include Hanoi, Vietnam, Jakarta, Indonesia, Kolkata, India, and as far west as Nairobi, Kenya.



**Figure A1:** Map of Passageways in the Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative seeks to define China's foreign policy. President Xi seeks to make China more of a forefront player on the international stage, especially with China's ever advancing technology and strong middle class. This differs greatly from his predecessors in the role, following former President Deng Xiaoping's advice to "hide one's capabilities and bide one's time." During an appeal for governmental support for this project, President Xi stated that China would "take an active part in reforming and developing the global governance system", suggesting China wishes to increase governmental cooperation internationally. (Mobley, 2019). In terms of the world stage, China plans to improve foreign relations with the Belt and Road Initiative physically, financially, digitally, and socially.

These foreign benefits do not come without interests in hand for China, as well, specifically when it comes to monetary gain. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China will undoubtedly seek more influence over neighboring countries, when trading their own goods. In return, China will be obtaining assets through other countries. Along with this, they will help work towards their goals of achieving a strong middle class since the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, and create more job opportunities for Chinese citizens along the Belt and Road Initiative (Clarke, 2017).

However, this has sparked both praise and concern. Since the unveiling of the Belt and Road Initiative, many have raised concerns about China expanding economic influence as a form of control over countries involved in the project. Many of the countries included have internal political conflict or economic weakness, many of the countries, especially in the Middle East or South Asia. These conditions make them targets for dependency of the Belt and Road Initiative economically. Out of this idea sparks the term “debt trap diplomacy”, in which China can use this economic dependency for their own gain (Mobley, 2019).

The Belt and Road Initiative, undoubtedly, is worth both praise and criticism. Its roads will touch more than just the soil, but the souls and lives of humankind.

## Role of Control

To say “it is unethical to take advantage of developing countries for economic gain” is easy. It is more difficult to ask the question of why developing countries still *need* these supposed “debt trap diplomacy” tactics. From a developed, western perspective, it is very easy to criticize countries for putting themselves in disadvantageous situations. Why would a country make themselves dependent on trade from another country? Why would they open themselves up to neighbours with consistent human rights violations?

Even this question is difficult to answer, because there is no one answer that fits every nation. Each country is vulnerable to these tactics for different reasons. It makes it doubly difficult when an outsider of the Belt and Road Initiative does not entirely understand the situations in these countries. However, there are a few factors that can be identified when it comes to what makes a country especially vulnerable to economic domination by a foreign power.

One of the easily identifiable factors in what makes a country vulnerable to Chinese influence is a weak economy. The Deloitte Insights notes that the Belt and Road Initiative spans over many countries that are listed colloquially as “junk” or “not graded” within the economic scale (Mobley, 2019). For any chance of economic prosperity, these countries will often turn to larger economic powers within the world to provide them with the chance of work for citizens. Southeast Asia, for example, has a large industry within manufacturing products for American companies. Due to being the vulnerable country in this situation in need of the work, this allows for companies to take advantage of this situation, leading to unethical working conditions, often employing children and underpaying workers (Schneider, 2021).

The Belt and Road Initiative operates under a very similar principle. China holds all the cards within this situation. Prior to the Belt and Road Initiative, China already held a vast amount of economic power within these regions (Andersen et al., 2018). If a country were to refuse advancements from the Belt and Road Initiative, when so many other countries have pledged support to the trade routes, it would not only put a country that would wish to refuse

economically behind its rivals and neighbours, but could also lead to China pulling away current economic support.

The economic situation of a country also plays into how likely they are to be a target of “debt trap” diplomacy. China is allotting billions of dollars to some countries involved in the initiative, such as Pakistan, who they have pledged \$62 billion to for their work on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. When this is taken into account with the fact that China already has economic dominance over some of these nations, it can be very difficult for these countries to be able to have a realistic possibility of paying these debts back in return. China can use this power to achieve ulterior motives as well, such as gaining more territorial control over the South China Sea (Chefitz et al., 2018). When a country is economically dependent on a more powerful nation, *refusing* simply is not an option.

Political tensions are an underlying factor in what causes some countries to be vulnerable towards some of the dangers of the Belt and Road Initiative. The War in Afghanistan, one of the countries involved in the initiative, has left the country with unstable political leadership, which has led to the rise of extremist groups such as the Taliban gaining influence. Narcotics trafficking within the Middle East also gives these drug trafficking rings political influence, primarily within Afghanistan (Singh Roy, 2017). Pakistan, another country involved in the initiative, also deals with worsening relationships with India and Afghanistan between internal protests of suppressive leadership, leaving the country in an unstable position (Mobley, 2019).

China, as a result, seems like a welcome reprieve to the conditions of the current world these citizens are living in. Governance in China, as a result of the one-party authoritarian system of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is highly controlled and maintains a firm control over its domain (Clarke, 2017). Its borders, from the image China is allowed to present, are secure in comparison to many war-torn Middle Eastern countries. Even when considering China’s recent success within their own country and internationally with promoting conflict resolution, such as in Libya, this has come at the repression of many ethnic minorities (Andersen et al., 2018).

Because of this, China's governmental control and economic dominance is not only allowed within the country, but welcome. With the added pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in late 2019, China's ability to swiftly implement mask mandates and rescue their domestic economy has been the envy of both developed and developing nations (Mouritz, 2020). In many of these nations, what developed countries may consider basic human rights are already violated. In the minds of many, it would be better to have those rights violated under a guise of safety.

This accounts for many of the reasons developing countries may fall victim to China's economic dominance over their country. However, developing nations across Europe, Asia, and Latin America are not the only countries involved in this. Many countries within the European Union, such as the Netherlands and Russia have also pledged support to the Belt and Road Initiative, and there are factors similar and different to why some of these countries have pledged their support.

Despite reservations from critics, it is worth noting one of the main factors is that the interests of China through the Belt and Road Initiative align similarly with the values and objectives of the European Union (Ghiasy, 2018). In President Xi Jinping's speech to the 19th Party Congress concerning the Belt and Road Initiative, he argues that the purpose of the initiative is shared community and international cooperation among European and Asian countries, specifically (Mobley, 2019). They further secure that they have the interests of European politics in mind with their pledge to improve the European Maritime Security Strategy. The European Union is aware that globalization is the key to the present and future of international and trade relations, and many countries in the union support China's efforts to become more accessible worldwide (Ghiasy, 2018).

However, even within the European Union, the Belt and Road Initiative is met with mixed reactions, with China already being a vast economic stakeholder in their trade. More than 35% of all European exports go to Asia, and four of its top ten trading partners, including China, are within the region. Many countries within the European Union, including nations in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe also struggle with high unemployment rates and halted economic

growth related to political unrest. At the same time, nations in Western Europe have been more skeptical of the Belt and Road Initiative and China's ulterior motives behind the project. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, for example, states that Chinese influence is one of the "greatest challenges" facing Europe (Mohan, 2018). However, it is impossible for any European country to deny that for states who have struggled economically, the Belt and Road Initiative will provide economic reprieve, and have assessed the cost of Chinese influence as a warranted risk.

It is undoubtedly unethical for any country, including China, to take advantage of nations with economic struggle or internal and external political tension. However, sometimes for these countries, the Belt and Road Initiative provides an opportunity for stability and economic growth. They see this growth as worth the risk, following in the footsteps of the Chinese in decisions such as Tiananmen Square in 1989 in interest of improving the middle class of their nation. And how could anyone in a situation where they have not known the struggle of high unemployment, poverty, or not being able to sleep at night without fear of rising extremist groups ever be in a position where they could refuse a country that safety?

## **Role of International Organizations**

A research paper may be the flour, but it is greater organizations, both national and international, that decide if that flour will become a loaf of bread or a layered cake. International organizations, in the case of the Belt and Road Initiative, have the potential to be both the scissors and the glue of the project, with the potential to be what connects every portion of the routes together or what tears apart countries and continents. It is impossible to touch on a project that spans over borders and oceans without talking about the impact differing organizations involved, as well as nations, will play within the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative.

An international organization, by definition, is a large-scale, structured arrangement of people with the same purpose in mind, to which this purpose is contributed to from or by multiple different countries (Mingst, 2016). Often, their role involves bringing countries together to consolidate a certain message in a world in which hundreds of different governments exist on one planet. In a society where countries rely on each other outside of borders, and trade and industry often becomes outsourced, international organizations become of greater importance to be a mediator between nations and keep these ties strong. When it comes to classifying these organizations, there are two distinct groups that can be recognized: intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Intergovernmental organizations are organized by heads of state who represent their countries, to which the goals of the partnership between these countries are outlined within a treaty or charter. These goals can range from economic development, social development, international cooperation in preserving the environment, or humanitarian aid. There are 250 intergovernmental organizations in the world, a few famous examples of these being the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Nongovernmental organizations differ in that they are not established by heads of state, but by individuals with a common interest in mind and drive towards making change on a local, national, and international level. Nongovernmental organizations often only operate towards one specific goal, rather than a multitude of objectives. This type of organization far outnumbers the intergovernmental organizations, with there being approximately 6,000 nongovernmental organizations worldwide (Mingst, 2016). A few of the most famous organizations of this type include the Red Cross or the World Wildlife Fund.

Both intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations have played their parts within the Belt and Road Initiative. However, it is also worth noting that many nationally based organizations have played a role within the initiative. Many organizations traditionally based in China have expanded beyond the borders of their country further due to the Belt and Road Initiative, whether it is to provide aid to close partners within the initiative or to provide loans when needed.

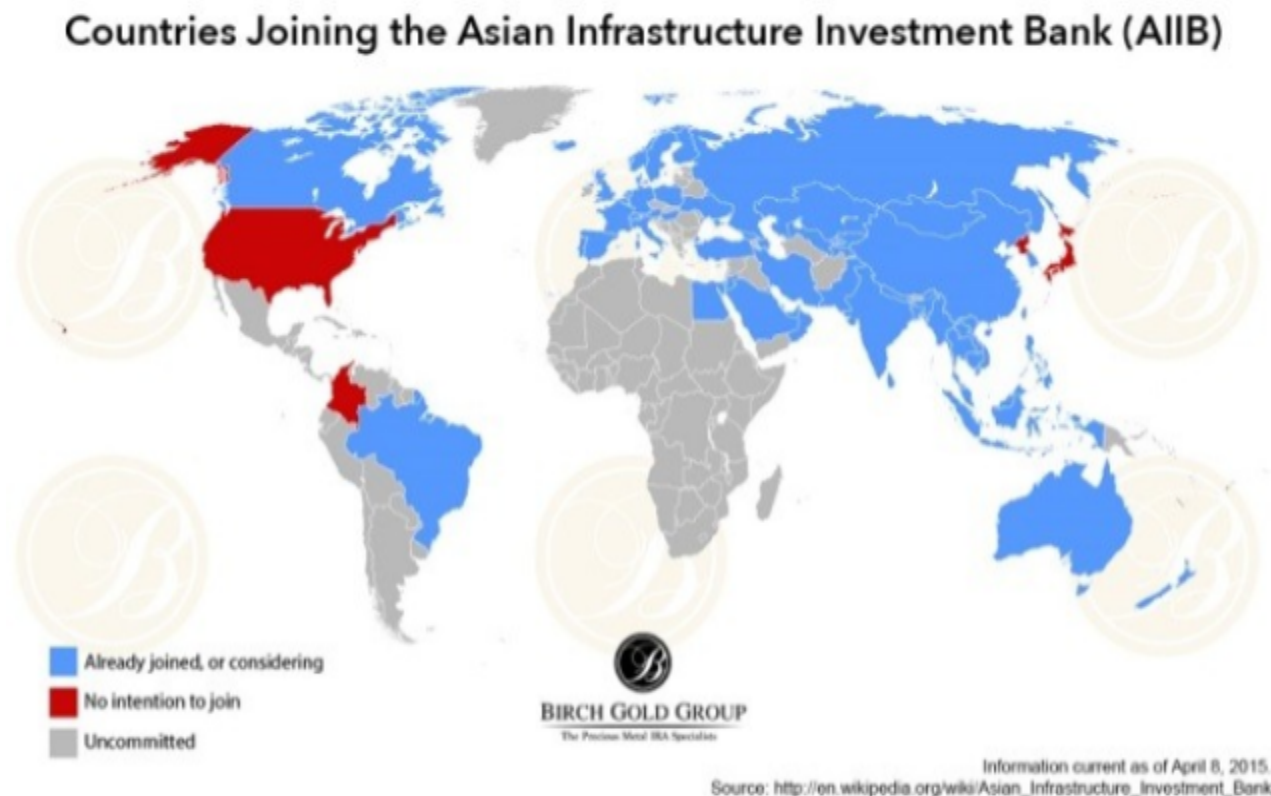
A theme discussed commonly when talking about the Belt and Road Initiative has been the funding that needs to be provided in order to compensate for the massive amount of infrastructure the project is going to require, from power grids to cell towers to international ports. Estimates of how much China has invested within this initiative vary, however, economic analysts suggest that in order to complete the project, the Chinese government could be investing upwards of 4 trillion United States dollars, of which 900 billion of these dollars is going towards international deals within other countries (Hillman, 2017).

There are two primary Chinese sources from which the financing for the initiative is going to be achieved. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was proposed in 2013, and officially established in 2015. The bank was established to help finance the continued development of infrastructure, trade routes, and technological advancements across Asia, being a wide and diverse continent of which many countries were still ranked low economically (Mobley, 2019). They describe their mission as follows:

We enable clients to build Infrastructure for Tomorrow (I4T)—green infrastructure with sustainability, innovation and connectivity at its core. We do this by unlocking finance that brings this vision to fruition. As our clients succeed in building I4T, society shares in that success. As a multilateral development bank focused on developing Asia, but with members from all over the world, our investments in infrastructure and other productive sectors seek to foster sustainable economic development, create wealth and improve infrastructure connectivity (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 2018).

While many members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are regionally Asian countries, such as India, Russia, and China, many contributors to the bank also come from non-regional countries. Some of these countries include Norway, the majority of the European

Union, and Canada. Prospective investors into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank also exist across South America and Africa (see Figure A4). In 2016, President Xi had announced that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank had pledged 160 billion United States dollars to the initiative.



**Figure A4:** Status of Country Involvement with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

The Silk Road Fund is the second major source of investment made for the Belt and Road Initiative. The fund was first announced by President Xi Jinping on April 21, 2015, in a state visit to Pakistan. The Silk Road Fund, as a result, would be one of the first grants authorized by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and therefore, fairly separate from the banks of China. Unlike the loan from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the finances from the Silk Road Fund will mainly be invested towards businesses within the countries aiding the Belt and Road Initiative and prospecting benefits from the initiative, rather than infrastructure projects (Fang, 2015). One example of this would be the Karot Hydropower Project, located within Pakistan

(Hillman, 2018). While not officially part of the initiative, the project aligns with the later developed momentum of pursuing clean energy with the initiative. The funds within this grant are estimated to total approximately 40 billion United States dollars (Fang, 2015).

Many Chinese banks have not been able to provide money nationally, but on an international level to many developing countries involved in the initiative. Loans from Chinese banks are especially attractive to many countries for their differences from loans from other large, international banks, such as those in the European Union or the United States of America. Many of these institutions require rigorous checks in order to assure the client's financial accountability and reform before offering any loans. While this makes sense from a financial perspective, this often puts developing countries at a disadvantage for getting loans in order to build new infrastructure. Chinese financial institutions, on the contrary, do not require clients to go to the same inquisitions in order to attain a loan. Instead, Chinese financial institutions trade this for requiring infrastructure projects that China has made loans to for Chinese companies to be hired to be involved (Mobley, 2019). Law specifically states in many of these contracts that "50% of materials, equipment, technology, or services" be sourced from China (Eva et al., 2018).

Many Chinese loans can also charge a high interest rate. This has become even more prominent by banks within the COVID-19 Pandemic in order to help rebuild Chinese economy (Mouritz, 2020). One of these countries has been China's partners in the initiative within the African Union. Many of these countries within the region, even before the Belt and Road Initiative, have been entrenched within Chinese loans from China's assistance in establishing the African Union in 2002, and its later membership. For example, China has provided much of the infrastructure for the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Within the Belt and Road Initiative, as well, the African Union and countries such as Kenya have agreed to provide financial aid for massive trade ports within the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The African Union and its 55 member states have then economically suffered during the COVID-19 Pandemic as the interest on China's loans increased. Zambia's debt to China has increased to 42.5 million United States dollars (Hillman, 2020).

International organizations have also played an important role in pressuring China to ensure that the energy being shared by the Belt and Road Initiative is clean, renewable energy, as well as raising concerns over areas where these corridors are to be built. The World Wildlife Fund, the world's leading conservation organization works in over 100 countries to present solutions to conserve wildlife and their habitats. As well, they work to transform world markets to become more sustainable to conserve six factors: climate, food, forests, freshwater, oceans, and wildlife. They have been one organization to publish reports on the impacts of the initiative on wildlife. Studies done by the World Wildlife Fund note that there is considerable overlap between the planned areas for important corridors within the Silk Road Economic Belt. Through these corridors, they suggest that as many as 1,739 important bird areas and key biodiversity areas are at risk. As well, 265 threatened species could be "detrimentally affected" by the corridors built (Tan et al., 2017). One example of this is a dam scheduled for construction on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. The dam, which would help provide renewable hydropower to Indonesia, heavily threatens the biodiversity of the island, specifically the threatened population of orangutans (Widodo, 2018).

Many of these concerns have also been raised over the sustainability of the energy China plans to export through the Belt and Road Initiative. Domestically, China makes efforts to attain a higher percentage of renewable energy, some research suggests that this conflicts with their goal of becoming a greater economic power on an international level, and China may begin to outsource their high-emission work to countries partnered with the Belt and Road Initiative in order to maintain both of these goals. In the initiative alone, China has planned for 240 coal related projects, 106 of which are currently under construction (Chang et al., 2017). Many of these, specifically, are along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, where China has already been establishing many factories and trade stops (Teese, 2018).

Many of the efforts of these organizations, environmentally, have been effective in China modifying the initiative in order to become more sustainable. Along with the two other funds mentioned, China created a new bank to help fund the Belt and Road Initiative: the New Development Bank. Launched in 2014, with the help of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the focus of the fund is to help finance China and other countries partnered with the

initiative in creating more renewable energy sources for these countries (Teese, 2018). China has also developed more coalitions and alliances within their government and companies working on the Belt and Road Initiative in order to minimize environmental impacts. Since announcement, alliances specifically focused have totalled 11 (Carey et al., 2019).

Another ongoing effort by international organizations has been raising awareness and concern over China's growing influence in countries allied with the Belt and Road Initiative socially, and how this affects human rights conditions within these countries. The Human Rights Watch is a nongovernmental organization which investigates and reports on violations of human rights worldwide and works with federal governments, intergovernmental organizations, businesses, and local governments or groups in order to help enact change for vulnerable groups within society, such as children or civilians in wartime. In the case of the Belt and Road Initiative, the organization has raised concerns over China pressuring countries into sponsoring infrastructure projects despite widespread opposition of the population. In Myanmar, for example, the Chinese government has pressured authorities to support a 3.6 billion dollar dam project, which was met with wide opposition. This resulted in protests where a leader would be detained by the government of Myanmar when authorities announced that the country was largely in favour of the dam (Wang, 2019).

Many also raise concerns about China's policies regarding religious minorities when they begin to expand their influence across borders. The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), who define themselves as "an international movement and organization established to empower the voices of unrepresented and marginalized peoples worldwide and to protect their rights to self-determination" (2020), have been one of these groups. Through studies, they note China's historical intolerance towards religious minority groups, such as the Tibetan monks, or more recent human rights violations, such as the ethnic separatism of the Uyghur Muslims, the largest ethnically Turkish group within China, through concentration camps in Xinjiang (Soliev, 2019). The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization also raised concerns regarding underrepresented groups within Pakistan, where Chinese influence grows with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, especially considering the majority of the population of Pakistan follow the Islamic religion (Bunche, 2020).

Unlike environmental organizations, however, organizations raising concerns about human rights violations with the Belt and Road Initiative have been less successful in making change in China's policies. On April 25-27, 2019, President Xi Jinping hosted heads of state as well as the leaders of international organizations for the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, the country's capital. However, many leaders of international organizations expressed concern over China's efforts to preserve state autonomy and human rights during the construction of the initiative to be superficial. Yaqiu Wang, a researched specifically focused on China at the Human Rights Watch and attendee of the forum stated:

Beijing claims it is committed to working with other countries to foster environment-friendly and sound development, but the practice so far has raised some serious concerns. Criticisms of some Belt and Road projects – such as lack of transparency, disregard of community concerns, and threats of environmental degradation. . . suggest a superficial commitment (Wang, 2019).

To ensure that China will minimize the impact the Belt and Road Initiative will have on underrepresented communities across the world, international organizations, specifically intergovernmental organizations, need to continue to pressure China regarding their concerns towards these groups.

Not all the interaction with the Belt and Road Initiative, however, has been negative or produced by non-governmental organizations. Views on the initiative within intergovernmental organizations trend towards having varied opinions and responses, making it difficult for these organizations to act as a whole. The European Union (EU) is one example of this. As previously discussed, the European Union is a socioeconomically diverse region, leading the group to have varied opinions on the initiative, especially when there are many economic benefits. Southern European countries, such as Serbia and Italy, as one example, see the Belt and Road Initiative to be well aligned with the values and goals of the European Union, as well as increasing economic prosperity in their respective regions. Eastern European countries share very similar sentiments, especially since many of these countries would serve as a “bridge” between Asia and Europe for communication and trade (Ghiassy, 2018). Many northern and western countries within the

European Union, however, do not share such sentiments. Germany, as one example, sees the Chinese initiative as a direct threat to the goals of the European Union, with Chancellor Angela Merkel stating the belief that one of the greatest challenges Europe will have to overcome is growing Chinese influence (Mohan, 2018).

Conversely, other intergovernmental organizations do not share the same apprehensions. The African Union (AU), as discussed earlier, has more readily accepted the Belt and Road Initiative projects across the continent. The Chinese government's more direct involvement and efforts into implementing telecommunication centres and special economic zones to bolster the African economy, many feel, has been far more successful than loose relief funds made available by organizations such as the United Nations or specific nations (Cabestan, 2020). Furthermore, China's involvement in the area is not strictly economically related, but has proved effective in helping combat violent extremist groups in the area, such as those in Libya or pirate groups off the coast of Somalia (Andersen et al., 2018). Some policy think tanks raise questions about Chinese technology in African countries, especially with the alleged hack from China into the African Union headquarters. However, the African Union has had very little to say on the matter, and have not suggested that the hack might be anything insidious to their region (Links, 2021).

The opposition faced by many western countries, seemingly, have not stopped China from growing its influence and expanding projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative. Contrary to this, the initiative seems to grow in influence and size as more concrete plans become a reality along the new and old trade routes. In 2016, the Belt and Road Initiative was officially presented to the United Nations. Consequently, in 2017, with the help of the United Nations, China officially opened the initiative to any country that wishes to join. The opening up of the project to the international community allowed for the expansion of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, and for the initiative to start working more closely with the United Nations in order for projects to comply with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the group aims to reach by 2030. The Belt and Road Initiative is now closely linked with 17 Sustainable Development Goals, one of the most prominent being to eliminate world poverty, as well as producing environmentally conscious economic trade routes. It is also now linked with 7 priority Action Areas worldwide (United Nations, 2020). Similar to the Sustainable

Development Goals, the Belt and Road Initiative share ambitious goals, which only can be achieved through breaching international borders and governments and civil society coming together to take action and change the way every citizen thinks about the world.

One voice can make the world aware of a problem, but it is the voice and hands of the group that can work together to enact change within society. Through international organizations, meaningful change is being created to ensure that the Belt and Road Initiative lives up to its greatest potential— to help developing countries grow and prosper within society while increasing international cooperation in a rapidly globalized world. Without their valiant efforts, the plans for the initiative would still look very different than they have come today. International organizations must continue to critically examine the Belt and Road Initiative and continue to raise awareness and concerns to the Chinese government in order to continue along this path.

## Expert

Talking about the Belt and Road Initiative in one singular facet is impossible. By talking about “debt trap diplomacy” within the initiative, it is impossible to not get into the security issues that warrant these details, or the political tensions within nations. It is then, impossible as well to talk about the environmental impact of the initiative, in turn, it cannot be ignored that the monetary cost of being more environmentally friendly is difficult.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), have done extensive work in order to attempt to not just explain the reasoning from President Xi behind the Belt and Road Initiative, but also to expand on the environmental, social, economic, and political consequences, positive and negative that might occur as a result. On their website, CSIS has provided many online seminars, articles, and interviews to help better understand the Belt and Road Initiative. One example of such analysis has been their work to help identify the environmental issues with the Belt and Road Initiative, especially in the early stages. The Center for Strategic and International Studies has conducted reports on not just China, but countries contributing to the initiative and how their transportation of fossil fuel energy could be detrimental to the environment (Chaney et al., 2019).

Jonathan E. Hillman works with the Center for Strategic and International Studies as a Senior Fellow within the Economics Program and is the director of the on-going Reconnecting Asia project. The focus of this team, funded by Brzezinski Institute of Geostrategy initially, and later to include National Geographic and Stanford Global Projects Center, focuses on mapping and analyzing trades routes and infrastructure through Asia. Through this, the team at Reconnecting Asia is able to explain the science, art, and geopolitical strategy behind new trade decisions and routes established in the continent. The Reconnecting Asia project also boasts one of the largest databases of information about the Belt and Road Initiative.

Prior to working at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Mr. Hillman attended the Harvard Kennedy School, with a focus on international relations. He would also go on to attend Brown University, where he would be elected to the Phi Beta Kappa, a society

honouring high achieving students in the university, and achieve the Garrison prize for best thesis in international relations. After post secondary education, Mr. Hillman served internationally with his skills, such as in Kyrgyzstan as a Fulbright Scholar, within the Council of Foreign Relations, and within the Belfar Center for Science and International Affairs. After, Mr. Hillman would begin to work towards his eventual goal of analyzing politics, serving as a policy advisor to the Office of the U.S Trade Representative in 2015, where he would contribute to the National Security Strategy, the President's Trade Agenda, and many Congressional testimonies.

While working at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Mr. Hillman has had a specialty in Asian economics, international trade, and Chinese influence on trade, which lead to him being the director of the Reconnecting Asia project. Through this project, Mr. Hillman has been able to write many articles and provide insight into large scale projects involved within the Belt and Road Initiative. Through this initiative, Mr. Hillman was able to publish a book, entitled *The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century*.

One facet of the Belt and Road Initiative, Mr. Hillman has also brought forward a new route within the initiative, often referred to as "China's digital Silk Road". While China seeks to develop physical infrastructure and trade routes along the Belt and Road Initiative, they also utilize the rising mobile technology of the internet in order to advance Chinese trade. Many of the countries involved within the initiative have also been receiving digital infrastructure, including 5G networks and data centers, providing access to the digital market to many developing countries, such as Papua New Guinea and the African Union. Mr. Hillman recognizes that China understands the importance and growth of the digital market in modern economics and trade and seeks to modernize their own trade, along with the trade of the Belt and Road Initiative with the involved nations.

However, Mr. Hillman also points out the flaws and possible concerns with China providing data centers and networks to many of these countries. Repeated security failures have been reported at the headquarters of the African Union, as well as one of the data centers reporting to have been collecting secret government information in Papua New Guinea through their data centres. These articles bring to light that while these have many benefits to developing

countries to be given access to the digital market, there is evidence that China uses this technology in a way that threatens the borders and secrets of other nations.

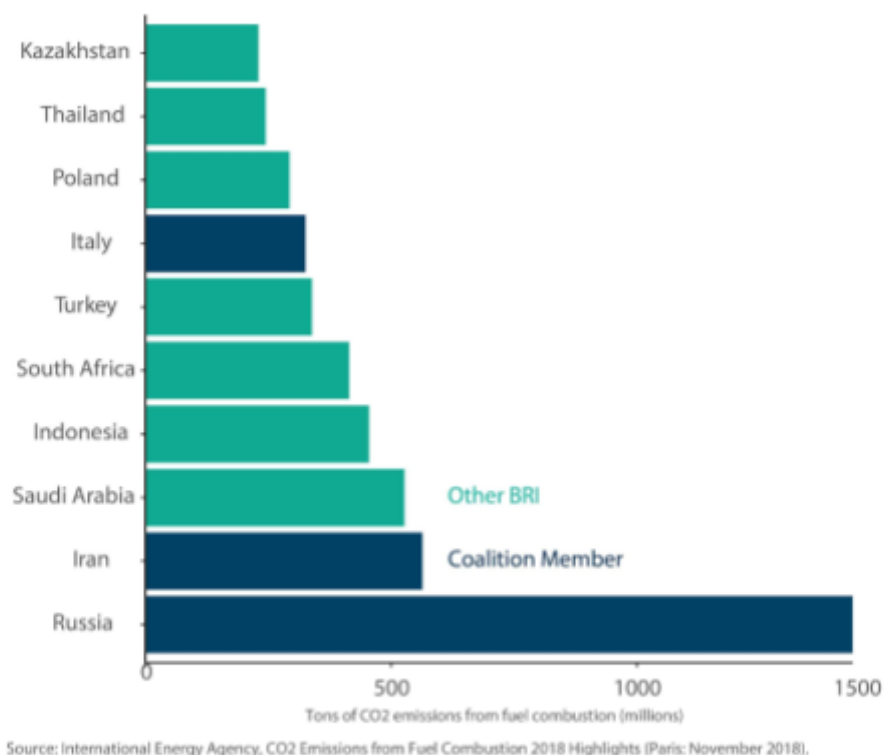
Many research reports compiled by the Reconnecting Asia project under him also seek to fuel the fear of many other security and foreign policy concerns regarding China. As a result, the debt of many African countries to China has risen, which is of special concern, considering China's active role within maintaining and establishing the African Union. Zambia, specifically, has been a country of notice within the initiative, with debt amassing to China in the pandemic era rising as well, to a grand total of owing 42.5 million United States dollars to China in debts as of 2021. Through the project, Mr. Hillman analyzes the reasons for the interest rate of Chinese loans has been going up in the pandemic and how this could be harmful to their partners within the African Union.

Much of the work done by Mr. Hillman under the Reconnecting Asia project has also been done to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the environmental impact of the Belt and Road Initiative, asking many to consider how the initiative should not be "greenwashed", a term used to describe activities done by large projects or corporations to make it seem like officials leading these organizations are concerned about the environment, when in reality, their work actually harms it.

Mr. Hillman has worked alongside Jane Nakano, a fellow colleague at CSIS to analyze these impacts. Ms. Nakano is a senior fellow in the energy security and climate change programs within this organization. Her research focuses on both American and East Asian energy markets in order to better understand the trends within these markets to try and propose solutions to the consistent consumption of non renewable energy within the world. Prior to her research done at CSIS, Ms. Nakano worked in the Office of Policy and International Affairs within the United States Department of Energy in 2010, and in 2001 and 2002, she served at the United States Embassy in Tokyo as a special assistant.

Ms. Nakano has written many pieces in her research for CSIS about the environmental impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative, along with China on a grander scale and its

environmental impacts. Even if China seeks to install more power grids that service renewable energy within many countries partnered with the Belt and Road Initiative, Ms. Nakano points out that many of the other countries of the initiative. Many of these countries, at the same time, do not have the infrastructure in order to replace these fossil fuel facilities, or the economic means to provide for it.



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Figure A2: Top 10 Emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions out of Belt and Road Initiative partnered nations

Through her articles, Ms. Nakano also points out the danger of pretending that the Belt and Road Initiative is entirely environmentally friendly, thereby “greenwashing” it. Within the Silk Road Fund alone, one of the first grants achieved by the Chinese Communist Party in order to start financing the project, China promised ninety percent of the funds devoted to the energy sector of the Belt and Road Initiative to fossil fuel energy (Zhou et al., 2018). Along with this, other investments made between 2013 and 2016 into the energy sector were made of 15 billion United States dollars into the fossil fuel industry, primarily in coal (Tan, 2018).

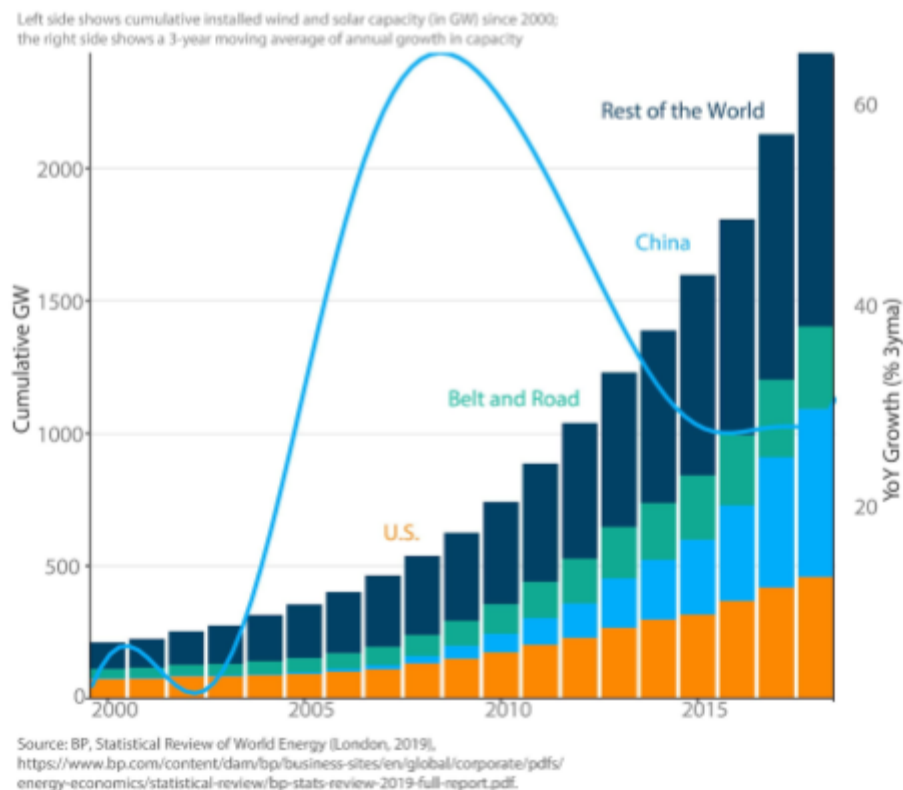


Figure A3: Graph showing growth in renewable energy capacity since 2000

Both Ms. Nakano and Mr. Hillman have played a key role in helping the public understand the Belt and Road Initiative, especially within a western lens, where the effects of the Belt and Road Initiative may be discarded as a problem that will not affect North or South America. Both of these officials have shown that as the Belt and Road Initiative expands, especially to Latin America with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, that the effects of this initiative will touch the lives of everyone, from consumer goods to those directly involved with the building and maintaining of these routes.

In order to make a positive difference within the initiative, both Mr. Hillman and Ms. Nakano call for education and awareness of the impacts this project will have on the world, and to continue to speak up and call for action to help the Belt and Road Initiative live up to its fullest potential.

### *Case Studies*

#### **Case Study One - Belarus**

Belarus-- a country still struggling for its independence 20 years after declaring themselves independent. Colloquially referred to as “White Russia”, Belarus is a landlocked country located within Eastern Europe, notably bordering Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, and Latvia and sharing the longest border with Russia. The country has a population of approximately 9.45 million, with 79.5% of the total population living in urban areas. Like their Russian neighbours, Belarus is one of the few countries to have a negative population growth rate, with 1.5 births per woman, and a life expectancy of 74 years of age. While Belarus consistently keeps a literacy rate of 99.8%, their country’s economy is still heavily dependent on Russia following the separation of the Soviet Union, most of their industry largely being provided by the refinement of Russian energy and raw materials. However, since 2017, they have begun to recover from their economic crisis with support from the United Kingdom. In 2019, their gross domestic product amassed to 181.286 billion dollars (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). As a result, the country ranked 53 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index the same year (United Nations, 2019).



Figure B3: Map of Belarus

In order to best understand the socioeconomic status of Belarus, it is important to examine Belarus' history with Russia and their road to gaining independence. The region now known as Belarus had been temporarily under Russian control beginning in the late 16th century, under the Russian Empire. Revolutionaries in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, two of the largest urban areas in Russia, had been present in Russia and began establishing the foundation for the formation for the first Belarusian political party in the late 19th century. However, agricultural reforms in 1906 had begun to split up the revolutionaries and Belarusian communities. They attempted to declare independence of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918, however, Belarus would be absorbed back into the new Soviet Union in the next year, and officially made a member of the Soviet Union in 1922. Under the Soviet Union, Russian government was able to build a strong industrial base within Belarus, which was the fuel of the Belarusian economy up

until the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Social Republics in 1991. However, at the same time, Belarusian society suffered oppression and assimilation into Russian society, including 28,000 Belarusians being executed as a part of the Great Purge from 1936 to 1940. Belarus would not gain independence, however, until 1991, when the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic would adopt the Declaration of State Sovereignty (Republic of Belarus, 2021).

True independence from Russia, however, would take many more years. Belarus' economy, as mentioned earlier, was interdependent with the Russian economy and their resources. As Belarus is a landlocked country, much of their energy and raw materials were sourced from Russia, and the resources were refined in Belarus. However, when Belarus began to separate from the Soviet Union, Russia ceased the same amount of materials to Belarus to be refined. While Russia required little from Belarus, the newly independent country still relied on their energy sources. At the same time, Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus since 1994, maintained political relations with Russia and created close relations with the Russian military (Ghiasy et al., 2017).

China's offer of economic reform through the Belt and Road Initiative, then, was appealing to Belarus. In 2015, when President Xi Jinping visited Minsk, the capital of the country, he identified the country as a critical part of the Belt and Road Initiative, serving as a bridge between Europe and Asia. As a part of the New Eurasian Land Bridge, in the same visit to Minsk, President Xi proposed an ambitious cooperation project between the two continents: The China-Belarus Industrial Park (Ghiasy et al., 2017). Sometimes referred to colloquially as "The Great Stone", the industrial area would be a special economic zone (SEZ), and would provide Belarus with the opportunity to expand its manufacturing sector and become more competitive on the international stage with high technological production (Chernogorova, 2019). The China-Belarus Industrial Park would also serve as a gateway between the European Union, despite Belarus not belonging to the union, and the Eurasian Economic Union (Ghiasy et al., 2017).

However, Belarus' involvement and success with being the "bridge" between the European Union and Asian countries relies on two distinct factors: Russia's views on the Belt

and Road Initiative, and repairing their relationship with the European Union (Ghiasy et al., 2017).

First, Russia's influence and viewpoint of the Belt and Road Initiative is predicted to be cyclical. When the project was first announced in 2013, the Kremlin first saw the initiative as a challenge to the influence of Russia in Eastern European countries, and a threat to Russia's aspiration to serve as the facilitator of integration between Europe and Asia, being the only country to span over two continents. However, following an economic crisis two years later and increasing criticism from members of the Eurasian Economic Union, President Vladimir Putin signed a declaration with President Xi supporting the initiative, in hopes of securing its regional influence. However, it is projected that the Belt and Road Initiative will have limited impact on preserving the Kremlin's control over the nation and Eastern European countries in the short term, the government could have a change of opinion (Peyrouse, 2017). By promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, Russia compromises Belarus' economic dependence on their nation and the Russian market with new industries being developed in the country. This, in effect, would challenge their influence in the country.

However, this relationship with China has proved to be beneficial in Belarus' quest in ascertaining agency from Russia. Since the signing of their agreement with the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Belarus have increased their security cooperation and have been performing anti terrorism activities and protocols. In addition, China has agreed to provide military equipment to Belarus, decreasing its reliance on Russia for military support. With the help of China, Belarusian government was able to reassess their security policies following the 2014 protests in Ukraine and the Russian annexation of Crimea. However, some critics supply the idea that China will simply fill a power vacuum that is left after the country's military and economic separation from Russia. The larger nation has yet to make any feeling of antagonization through Belarus' involvement with the Belt and Road Initiative public, proving as a positive sign for the nation (Ghiasy et al., 2017).

Belarus' relationship with the European Union is another deciding factor in the "bridge" between the European Union and Asia being a success. Initially due to President Alexander Lukashenko's willingness to cooperate and secure economic and military cooperation with

Russia, the relations between Belarus and the European Union have been turbulent. However, many of the later tensions between the two groups have been from human rights violations in Belarus. In 2004, the European Union placed bans against travel, trade, and arms with Belarus following the disappearance of two politicians opposing President Lukashenko, one businessman, and one journalist (European Council, 2020). Most of these restrictions would be lifted in 2016, at the progress to recognize more universal freedoms for citizens of the country. This would temporarily open economic and academic relations between the two countries (Eastern Partnership, 2018). However, following the 2020 election in Belarus and Russian interference, the European Union would reimpose these restrictions (European Council, 2020). Two areas of which the two groups have consistently disagreed on is the death penalty, with Belarus being the only European country to still impose it, and nuclear safety protocols proposed in Belarus and the safety of citizens involved (Eastern Partnership, 2018).

As discussed earlier, the European Union's response to the Belt and Road Initiative has been wrought with concerns surrounding security of the nations involved. German Chancellor Angela Merkel cites the influence of China as one of the "greatest challenges" facing Europe. Security concerns about trade routes, as mentioned earlier, are at the forefront of Europe's concerns (Mohan, 2018). While opinions on the Belt and Road Initiative vary throughout the European Union, the opening up to China and the Belt and Road Initiative could prove to further rifts between the European Union and Belarus. If Belarus wishes to be part of the "gateway" between Europe and Asia with the Belt and Road Initiative, Belarus may need to adjust their visions and agreements with China in order to best suit both parties involved.

International security is not the only concern with the involvement of the Belt and Road Initiative. Recent domestic insecurities have also caused China and other counterparts in the initiative to be wary of Belarus' involvement. Beginning in May of 2020, demonstrations and protests against the leadership of the current Belarusian government, and President Lukashenko, protesting the results of the 2020 election, which saw President Lukashenko reelected for the sixth time consecutively (Lee, 2020). These protests have yet to subside. If the protests continue and an opposing party were to come into power, Belarus would likely sever connections with China, including current projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative. While it would be a

show of democratic freedom, Belarus would likely lose out on any profit the initiative would offer, which would help gain independence from Russia, as mentioned earlier (Warsaw Institute, 2020).

China, on the other hand, would lose one of their aforementioned “bridges” between Europe and Asia if this outcome were to happen, along with the investments they have made in the region. Alternatively, if these protests are fruitless, Chinese projects may still face resentment from Belarusian citizens if reform groups look to the country for financial support, which would push back national interests. In turn, Belarusian citizens may hold resentment against Chinese projects as a symbol of Lukashenko’s national interests (Warsaw Institute, 2020). No side in this equation would come out without consequences for the Belt and Road Initiative’s interests over the next few years.

Belarus’ interests in their relations with China can be summarized into two main goals: the first being to continue economic revitalization within their country, and to improve their country’s security independently. However, Belarus’ current relations with Russia and the European Union could be worsened by their involvement with China, which would not only put the safety of the citizens of the nation at risk, but also compromise Belarus’ vision of being the “pearl” on the Belt and Road Initiative, as stated by President Xi Jinping (Ghiasy et al., 2017). While positively, Belarus has proved to be successful in their first two objectives of benefiting economically and militarily, unless the Belarusian government can implement considerable reforms governmentally or in their deals with China, cooperation with the European Union will be limited, if any at all.

### *Case Studies*

#### **Case Study Two - Pakistan**

Established in the land once occupied by one of the oldest known civilizations, the Indus Valley civilization, the history and people of Pakistan have a rich background and equally rich futures. Pakistan boasts the fifth largest population of any country, as of 2021 being home to 238.2 million people, and will continue to rise with a growth rate of 1.99%. Out of this, only 37.2% of the population lives within urban areas. The Punjab province, located in the east of the country, is the most densely populated out of all these provinces (see Figure B4). As a result, the largest ethnic group within the country is Punjabi, and the most common language spoken. Pakistan is also home to many tribal groups, living in the federally administered tribal areas, located within the northwest of Pakistan (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

Government in the area of Pakistan becomes more complicated than simple statistics. Formally, Pakistan has a federal parliamentary republic, currently led by President Arif Alvi, elected indirectly by an electoral college. Along with the president, Pakistan has 104 senators elected by each of the Pakistani provinces to assist in executive lawmaking in the capital, Islamabad. Much of Pakistani law is infused with law of the Islamic religion, with 96.7% of their population identifying as Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). However, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) recognize their own tribal leaders denoted as Maliks. In 2001, adults within this tribe were allowed to elect representatives to the Senate, however, tribes could not organize political parties to gain widespread influence (Fair et al., 2006).

Pakistan also struggles with issues of extremism, primarily Islamic extremism. Many of these extremist groups promote violent action both locally, in the case of groups such as the Taliban, and internationally, as in the case of prominent extremist group al-Qaeda. Many of these groups have managed to promote an “anti-Islamic” narrative to rally citizens of Pakistan to their aid. As most of the population identifies as Muslim, these narratives often emotionally resonate with people and cause for the extremist views of these groups to be part of everyday life (Khan, 2013).



**Figure B4:** Map of Pakistan

Partially as a result of these extremist groups and suppression of tribal groups within Pakistan, economic relations between Pakistan remain underdeveloped, along with little financial aid internationally. Despite creating a GDP of 1.015 trillion dollars in 2019, much of the economy and employment within Pakistan is considered informal, and unemployment continues to rise, rising past 6% since 2017, and struggling with underemployment, and nearly 25% of the population living under the poverty line. Inflation rates in Pakistan also continue to rise, reaching 9.3% in 2017. This can also be partially contributed to lack of education being common within

Pakistan. Only 59.1% of the population is considered literate, and the average years spent in school amounts to only 8 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

Many of these economic and political factors are what closely ties Pakistan to their Chinese neighbours. In the 1950s, Pakistan was the third country and first Islamic state to recognize the People's Republic of China (Zingel, 2015). In return, China aided Pakistan in sustaining its independence. Today, China is one of Pakistan's most important trade partners, accounting for 28% of their total imports (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). However, as Pakistan imports far more from China than they export, leaving many wondering if they need China more than China needs Pakistan. In 2014, imports from China to Pakistan were far higher (9.6 billion United States dollars) than exports from Pakistan to China (2.3 billion United States dollars), and the trade balance continued to become more negative (Zingel, 2015).

Nevertheless, Pakistan's role in the Belt and Road Initiative became one of interest for China. Despite Pakistan and China's close political ties, the economic relations between China and Pakistan have proved to be a weaker element of their relationship, on the part of China. A history of planned projects between the two countries had also been apparent, however, most of these projects did not come into fruition, with only 6% of China's investments in Pakistan being constructed (Small, 2017). The routes would provide China with more versatile transportation routes, along with more sources of energy to draw from (Zingel, 2015). However, there also show to be many benefits for Pakistan, such as regional and federal stability (Andersen et al., 2018).

One of the corridors planned for construction on the Silk Road Economic Belt, then, is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Briefly mentioned earlier, this corridor will stretch 3,000 kilometers over networks of roads, railways, and pipelines beginning in the Xinjiang region of China into Pakistan. Besides the planned pipelines being a transport of oil and gas between the two countries, China and Pakistan will also cooperate on coal and solar energy projects. China's initial investment in the corridor totalled 46 billion dollars, but later increased to 63 billion (Andersen et al., 2018).



The benefits of this partnership are not only limited to China. While many factors will indirectly benefit the architects of the Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistan will be at the forefront of reaping the benefits from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The foremost benefit of the corridor to Pakistan will come in an economic form. The transportation and refinement of energy in cooperation with China will bolster manufacturing and primary industries within Pakistan, which have been typically less profitable than the services industries of the country. A report published by the Association of Chartered Certified Accounts (ACCA) of Pakistan and the Pakistan-China Institute jointly found that construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have provided 60,000 jobs to Pakistanis since 2015, and is projected to create 800,000 jobs in different sectors by the year 2030 (2018). In a country struggling with underemployment and limited opportunities in terms of secular work, this is incredibly important for citizens of Pakistan and will help stabilize their country's economy. The corridor has also been cited as one of the main reasons for the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) of 5.3% in 2017, the highest it has been in ten years (Andersen et al., 2018).

Socially, there are many benefits to Pakistan, as well. An ancient Chinese proverb states “穷则思变” (*qiong ze si ban*), which translates to people think of change when they are poor (Andersen et al., 2018). As discussed earlier, a consistent problem from economic and political stability within Pakistan is the rise of extremist groups promoting an “anti-Islamic” or “us versus them” narrative, which has resonated emotionally with many Pakistanis and made these extremist groups a part of everyday life (Khan, 2013). Instead of pursuing military interventions in Pakistan, China's approach to combating terrorism and extremism has lied in the economic development of the country, which proved to be successful for the Chinese Communist Party. This same approach has helped China to become a facilitator of peace in many nations, including Pakistan, in using economic tools to support the facilitation of peace (Andersen et al., 2018).

However, despite the general support from the federal government of Pakistan, there are many international concerns over China's involvement in Pakistan with the economic corridor, both economically, claiming that the project is a “debt trap” to Pakistan, and security concerns for the majority of Pakistani citizens.

The report published by the Association of Chartered Certified Accounts and China-Pakistan Institute was met with criticism from economists and scholars from western countries along with India. Some of this criticism also came from Pakistani media. Most of these concerns come along with the “debt trap diplomacy” which China has been accused of imposing on many developing countries with the Belt and Road Initiative. Along with the 63 billion dollars that China has invested into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the debt amassed to China will also include tax concessions to Chinese companies used to build many of the infrastructure projects. Much of the economic benefit of major infrastructure projects will also go to China, such as the Gwadar Port (Andersen et al., 2018). The port is one of the projects planned in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and will be the deepest sea port in the world once construction is finished. Located along the Arabian Sea, the port would provide a more secure trade route for Pakistan to allow them to transport energy to China and other countries across waterways.

The Gwadar Port, then, would be an impressive benefit for Pakistan economically. However, because of the debt Pakistan has amassed to China, the Pakistani government has signed a 43-year lease of the Gwadar Port to China, to be reevaluated in 2059. It is projected under this lease, out of all the revenue that is gained from the port, 91 percent of it will go to the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese companies. This leaves 9 percent of the original revenue gain to go to Pakistan, which will likely go into paying off the debts Pakistan has amassed to China from the project (Andersen et al., 2018). While China’s true intentions with the debts on Pakistan cannot be commented on, the direct route to the Arabian Sea to the Chinese controlled Gwadar Port will benefit landlocked western and central China economically, which have typically been left out of Chinese economic gain due to lack of access to water trade and transportation (Zingel, 2015).

One of the main draws of loans from China, however, is that they often lack strict fees and advancements that western banks and governments often impose on loans given to foreign partners. However, China’s rules on loans have become more strict, especially on projects related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Diamer-Bhasha hydropower dam was supposed to receive monetary assistance from China, which would have gone toward building one of the

largest hydroelectric energy projects within the country. However, in 2017, the Pakistani government cancelled its 14 billion dollar deal with China that would fund the construction of the dam by providing Chinese products and workers. When asked about the reasons for backing out of the project, Pakistani government officials quoted that it was not doable with the strict regulations being attached to the loans the Chinese government were offering Pakistan to build the dam. Abdul Razak Dawood, a high official in Pakistan responsible for looking over aspects of trade, told Pakistani media that the deal with China had put Pakistani businesses in an “unfavourable position” in these projects, as most of the labour would be done by Chinese companies and built with products provided from outside Pakistan. He also expressed the view that the previous government, who has negotiated the terms of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, had given China too much control over the infrastructure projects (Andersen et al., 2018).

Economic concerns are not the only concerns that come up when discussing the trade corridor. While China has stated that it is committed to countering terrorism and helping Pakistan counteract extremism in the country, their methods have brought up concerns of creating new concerns with the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

In order to best understand the concerns this could create, looking at the relations, both historical and current, between the tribal lands and Pakistan creates a great cultural context and the concerns this procures for many Pakistanis. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas are semi-autonomous from the rest of Pakistan, and were originally used as a buffer between British and Russian empires in Afghanistan during the height of colonialism in the late 19th century. Part of the border was drawn in an area known as the Durand Lane, however, this border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has never been recognized by the Afghani government. As a result, Taliban groups residing in the tribal areas often make incursions in Afghanistan from these boundaries. While the government of Pakistan has attempted to control these incursions, they have historically and presently maintained little control over the region (Bajoria et al., 2007).

As mentioned earlier, tensions between the Pakistani government and the people living in the tribal lands also come from the lack of political presence that the tribal lands have over their own territory. While the tribes have been allowed to have representatives in the national assembly, they have not been allowed any executive members in the bureaus of the provincial governor their territory falls under. Individual tribespeople also have very little in terms of rights in Pakistan, as political agents in the area will collect and redistribute wealth in the area with little oversight. Many in the tribal lands also do not have access to proper education or healthcare (Bajoria et al., 2007). Compared to the national literacy rate, only 19.9 percent of tribespeople are considered literate, and for every doctor in the area, there are eight thousand patients (Peshawar, 2013).

Despite this, there are at least 300 Muslim schools, or massadras, in the area. The heavy focus on religion in the area is a factor in the rising extremism in the area. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas are known to be one of the main locations where extremist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan train and take refuge, such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The authority of these groups have forcefully replaced that of local tribal leaders. This has resulted in extremist views being popular within the area, which have been hard to control. The Pakistani government has attempted to move military groups into the area following the 9/11 attacks, however, the militarization of these areas had little positive effect. Peace deals with the Taliban in the area have also been ineffective, with the Taliban rejecting efforts made by the Pakistani government in both 2006 and 2007 (Bajoria et al., 2007).

With China's involvement with the Belt and Road Initiative in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Chinese Communist Party has been accused of being ignorant or insensitive to ethnic, religious, or extremist groups that already feel marginalized by the Pakistani government. Networks of trade routes pass through the northern and northwest areas of the country, which passes through the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The Pakistani government infringing on the tribal lands, many worry, could exacerbate the tensions between the government and the tribes and lead to extremist groups lashing out in the form of incursions and violent attacks (Zingel, 2015). This has also created greater tensions with Pakistan's foreign partners. The United States of America, an important export partner for Pakistan, has joined forces with India

to oppose the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on these grounds, and in 2017 attempted to install India a greater role within South Asian countries. India has also raised concerns about Chinese and Pakistani activity in the Jammu and Kashmir lands, which are currently in dispute about ownership between Pakistan, China, and India (Andersen et al., 2018).

Insurgencies from southern provinces of Pakistan have also been an issue regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Baluchistan province, the place of the earlier mentioned Gwadar Port, has had insurgent groups seeking independence from Pakistan since the country was granted agency in 1947. However, the province is incredibly important to the country, containing 44% of the total land area of Pakistan, as well as being rich in natural resources and giving Pakistan access to the Arabian Sea. Many of the insurgents, however, come from areas of the province living below the poverty line. While the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was originally met with cautious excitement from the province, many Baluch separatists now feel that the Chinese and north of Pakistan are going to benefit more rather than giving any economic gain to the Baluchistan province, following the selling of Baluch land to Chinese and Punjabi people. China has begun to hold peace talks with these groups so that the projects can continue (Andersen et al., 2018).

The transportation routes between Pakistan and China, along with the economic and political ties between the two countries, could prove to be a blessing or a curse for the Muslim population of both China and Pakistan. While Islam is one of the five permitted religions in China, in recent years, the Chinese government has become far less tolerant of religious expression by Muslims in the country. One of the clearest examples of this has been the Uyghur Muslims within the Xinjiang province, who have been forced into “re-education” camps by the Chinese Communist Party and endured physical and psychological abuse. Even the Hui Muslims, another dominant Muslim group in China, have expressed feelings of increased religious repression at the hands of the government (Albert et al., 2020).

The newfound access to transportation routes could prove beneficial to many Muslims within China, then, to escaping to a place to where their religion is more accepted and the groups may practice their religion more freely. The movement of the close ties between majority Islam

Pakistan and the atheist state of China could also foster more religious tolerance at the high levels of government. However, with many infrastructure projects being built by Chinese companies, there would be increasing influence of Chinese citizens not just internationally, but domestically as well. The ethnic divides, which are already present in Pakistan, could cause issues for the largely Muslim population of the country when China, who have historically been repressive of Muslim groups, in terms of religious expression (Zingel, 2015).

In assessing how these issues will be addressed, it is clear to see that China has demonstrated and made their goals for the Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan, primarily the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, quite clear. However, there is undeniable evidence to show that their first and foremost priority is the citizens of their own country, despite calls for foreign cooperation. The question is, then, whether these efforts will prove to socially and economically benefit Pakistan, or if the economic benefits will mainly prove beneficial for China, and extremist groups' concerns will be exacerbated in the areas, putting the ultimate test to China and Pakistan's "all-weather" relationship. Only time can tell which one it will be.

### *Case Studies*

#### **Case Study Three - Djibouti**

The Horn of Africa, as it is also known, is coincidentally one of the smallest countries on the continent by area, boasting only 23,200 kilometers squared. Djibouti is located in the east of Africa, bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The population of the country, evidently, is also quite small, with 938,413 people living within the region in 2021. 78.1% of the population lives within urban areas, mostly located in the northeast of the country along their waterways, such as the capital, also called Djibouti (see Figure B6). The majority of the population is ethnically Somali, however, smaller populations of Arab, French, Ethiopian, and Afar groups also exist within the country due to French colonization. Another effect of this has been the official languages of the country being French, along with Arabic, despite being small percentages of the ethnic population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

Djibouti has been identified as a presidential republic since their independence was granted in 1977. There are six administrative districts, each with their own governor. However, the highest recognized government is their federal government, with a president and a prime minister who presides over fellow ministers. Since 1999, Ismail Omar Guelleh has been consistently elected president, and appointed Abdoulkamer Mohamed as his prime minister in 2013. Presidents are elected for a five year term by majority popular vote (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). However, there is conflict between opposition parties in Djibouti and intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union on the freedom and fairness of these elections, with opposition parties claiming the elections are weighed in favour of the current President (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, 2021).

Economically, Djibouti is reliant on its services industry, specifically with trade throughout the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The majority of employment, specifically, comes from work involved with trade ports within Djibouti with imports, exports, and reexports. The country has a national gross domestic product of 5.388 billion dollars in 2019. However, unemployment in the country remains astronomically high, with 40% of the population being unemployed in 2017, and 21.1% of the population living below the poverty line. Major exports

within the country include agricultural products, such as legumes, fatty acids, and coffee (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).



Figure B6: Map of Djibouti

Djibouti, despite its economic struggles, is located in a specifically powerful strategic location in terms of world trade and conflict. The country is located on the Suez Canal, an important trade waterway in which 10% of the world's oil will pass in one year (Jeong-ho, 2020). Along with this, approximately 20,000 ships and 30% of all world commercial trade will pass through this area. The small country is also in a strategic position in terms of regional conflict, most notably the conflict between the Horn of Africa and the Gulf region within the Middle East, of which the latter has made attempts to increase assertiveness in the area and lay claim to the Gulf of Aden (Bereketeab, 2016). The country of Djibouti, bordering this gulf, as a result, is put

in an especially important position in this conflict. Finally, Djibouti does not just serve as a port for its own country, but the landlocked Ethiopia, which borders Djibouti with a 342 kilometer border to the north of the country. Ethiopias' landlocked position, despite being a major regional economy, means that it relies heavily on Djibouti's waterways in order to export resources and goods to trade partners. Regional connections with Djibouti, then, means access to economic gain from Ethiopia for foreign actors (Cabestan, 2020).

China's involvement in this area, then, is little surprise. The nation has been involved in assisting Africa ascertain agency in the international community, playing a role in helping establish the African Union (Links, 2021) and providing economic and technological opportunities for the continent to compete economically (Hillman, 2018).

However, China's presence within Djibouti is specifically close. China is the main source of funding for infrastructure in the country, as well as providing the most investment in their construction and trade, officially becoming the country's most important trade partner in 2018 (Cabestan, 2020). The relationship between the two countries also included a Chinese built port in the capital Djibouti in 2017, their first overseas port (Shen, 2018). China's influence in the area also helps Djibouti with social issues, such as recurring Somali piracy attacks in the area. China's military force is the largest within this area and provides security to Djiboutian ports.

President Guelleh officially joined the Belt and Road Initiative around the same time in 2018 (Cabestan, 2020). However, even before Djibouti's official joining in the project, the region of East Africa has played a key role within the New Maritime Silk Road extension of the initiative. This extension of the New Maritime Silk Road will include planned and finished ports, railways, pipelines, and power plants funded by the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese owned companies who will aid East Africa in construction of these projects. Djibouti, specifically, will be a part of an important electric railway from capital Djibouti to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The construction of this railway will be imperative into introducing renewable energy into Djibouti and the wider continent (Nantulya, 2019).

## Reviving the Silk Road

Announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Silk Road initiative, also known as China's Belt and Road initiative, aims to invest in infrastructure projects including railways and power grids in central, west and southern Asia, as well as Africa and Europe.



**Figure B7:** Map of the Belt and Road Initiative planned projects, with emphasis on African engagements.

Djibouti's engagement in the Belt and Road Initiative is not only imperative to the success of the initiative within the area, claiming to provide benefits for both China and Djibouti throughout the process. One of the reasons Djibouti struggles economically is the country's lack of natural resources, relying mostly, then, on trade services and agricultural industries within the country. Infrastructure for trade and business with the rest of the international community was stripped of the area after French colonization (Cabestan, 2020). The New Maritime Silk Road, then, would give Djibouti a larger role to play in facilitating African trade due to its strategic position along the Suez Canal, along with new infrastructure and transportation projects within the area to further connect the country to Ethiopia and Eritrea, of which the former is dependent on Djibouti for waterway access. Projects such as the Doraleh Multipurpose Port and the Ethiopia-Djibouti water pipeline will help further connections to the country, helping Djibouti to

expand its economy, and China to have greater access to trade and influence within landlocked Africa (Ragas, 2021).

One of the greatest benefits to Djibouti through Chinese influence in the area has been increased domestic security. While the nation's strategic position gives it significant political advantages within its region, it also makes it a target of many security concerns. Somalia, one of the countries that Djibouti shares a border with, has been subject to committing pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Sea as a part of the second wave in the ongoing Somali Civil War (Combined Marine Forces, 2021). China's increased military presence with the construction of a Chinese overseas military port have provided more domestic security to the nation. In 2019, no piracy attacks were reported in the country (International Maritime Bureau, 2020).

China has also been committed to facilitating treaties with Djibouti's domestic neighbours and the Middle East in order to create peace between the nations. China's role in facilitating peace most notably began with Libya in 2011 in the conflict between Libya and Yemen. As mentioned in the previous section, China focuses their terrorism and conflict prevention efforts on fixing the "root" causes of these issues. The solution, then, within their own country and internationally, has been to help improve economic situations between these countries to improve the welfare of average citizens in the nations in conflict. These efforts domestically have shown success in China, and they have proven to show signs of being effective in the conflict between Libya and Yemen (Andersen et al., 2018).

Critics of these tactics attempt to argue that China's involvement in Africa, specifically Djibouti, creates a wave of "re-colonization" of Africa at the hands of China. It is difficult to deny that in the relationship between these two countries, with China, with a population of 1.4 billion people and creating a 15 trillion dollar gross domestic product in 2019, to which Djibouti has only a fraction of either numbers. While this relationship is asymmetric, this does not necessarily lead to a colonial relationship between the two nations (Cabestan, 2020). Firstly, China has actively promoted African agency in the international community for decades. China played a key role in helping to establish the African Union in 2002, and has long been a critic of western engagement of the EU and the United States in Africa (Mbanda, 2019). Secondly,

citizens of Djibouti, in their agreements with China, are left with many options to decline Chinese intervention. Djibouti has often employed a political strategy known as “passive resistance”, where the country would strategically not fulfill the agreements that they have consented to. The country is still capable of doing this in their relationship with China (Cabestan, 2020). China’s recent military and economic engagement in Africa, then, is simply another prong in an attempt by China to promote Djibouti’s agency in the African Union and worldwide.

The economic welfare of Djibouti, then, is another benefit the country seeks to gain through the Belt and Road Initiative. Through the Belt and Road Initiative construction projects, employment opportunities for people in Djibouti in both cities and rural areas will expand, which is essential to the establishment of economic welfare and a standard of living for citizens in the country (Ragas, 2021). China’s plans to establish special economic zones in Djibouti, similar to those constructed in Belarus, will also help support the economic development and independence of Djibouti. The Djibouti International Free Trade Zone, for example, will provide an influx of new goods and services to the country. The free trade zone, when completed construction, will be the largest free trade zone in Africa. The free trade zone will also host the Djibouti Business District, in order to better establish rules and regulations for trade within the country. The creation of the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone, is estimated to create up to 350,000 employment opportunities for Djiboutians within the special economic zone alone (Clemoes, 2020). The opening up of employment opportunities as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative does not even count for the jobs created by projects such as the aforementioned Doraleh Multipurpose Port and the Ethiopia-Djibouti water pipeline (Ragas, 2021).

However, there are still many uncertainties that come out of the project that come from the history of foreign investors in Africa and current security concerns. Economic “debt traps” to Djibouti based off of the history of debt traps to neighbouring countries, security concerns as other countries oppose China’s involvement in Djibouti and scramble to insert influence in the strategic zone, and questioning of if China’s anti-terrorism policies account for ethnic tensions make up some of the worries discussed in academic and political circles for the country if the Belt and Road Initiative is to continue within the area.

Disputes between “debt traps” in Africa, and the possibility that China could be using these diplomacy tactics to gain more control over the strategic area that Djibouti engulfs often are one of the main criticisms made of China’s tactics and involvement in Djibouti. In 2017, the debt of Djibouti accounted for 77% of its gross domestic product, of which China held 91% of that debt. With this level of debt leveraged against Djibouti, China can retain control and revenue from many of the Djiboutian projects, similarly to how they have retained the majority of the revenue from major projects in Pakistan. Economic share in the country has also led China to have other influence in the country politically and militarily. The economic debt that Djibouti owes to China accounts for some of the reasons why China was able to build their first overseas military port in the country in order to relieve some of the debt brought upon them by China for infrastructure projects. Despite previously denying any intentions of building a military base in the country, this base also serves to economically benefit China. The Suez Canal sees a large percentage of Chinese imports and exports go through every year, to which China now has closer control of (Alam et al., 2020).

Furthermore, China’s involvement in Djibouti has also led to increased tensions between Djibouti and its other trade partners, primarily the United States of America. While China has been Djibouti and Africa’s most beneficial trade partner for over a decade, the United States has also enacted military incursions in the country. Initially, these reinforcements were placed to help prevent piracy in the area. However, fear of armed conflict between the Chinese and American militants within the country has become a real possibility. In 2018, American military forces accused the Chinese military of espionage in using lasers to disorient their pilots. Trade wars between the two countries, perpetuated by the American idea that Djibouti will lose agency over its assets as China gains more political and economic influence in the country (Ragas, 2021). United States fears of these issues are summarized in the 2018 National Defence Strategy Paper, which states:

As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernisation programme that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global pre-eminence in the future. The most far-reaching

objective of this defence strategy is to set the military relationship between our two countries on a path of transparency and non-aggression. ()

Despite claims of “non-aggression”, outbursts by the American military continue to happen, heightening fears of escalation of conflict in the area, causing worries among Djiboutians and international partners.

Finally, while China’s terrorism prevention method has worked throughout the history of their country, there are questions about whether it accounts for ethnic tensions within regions and how that can affect terrorist and civil war conflicts. Within China, this can be observed through the conflict between the Chinese Communist Party’s economic involvement in Xinjiang and the Tibet region. While the Belt and Road Initiative has promised economic benefits to each of these regions, however, the results of preventing extremism and anti-government acts within these territories have had mixed results in a refusal to account for religious and ethnic oppression both of these groups face under China’s current government (Andersen et al., 2018). This arises due to the ongoing ethnic tensions between the major Somali group residing in Djibouti and the smaller group of Afar people residing in the area. While Afar people make up 35% of the ethnic makeup of Djibouti, insurgency and dissatisfaction with the Djiboutian government are common as often the group feel underrepresented in lawmaking processes due to residing in rural areas as opposed to the larger cities of the country (Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2020). China’s anti conflict plans, then, could not account for the underrepresentation of Afar in government and not address one of the main reasons for ethnic tensions within the country and not effectively solve the problem by simply providing economic infrastructure.

Djibouti has the potential to be a strong political influence within its region, however, the nation is caught in a fragile strategic position that could bring the country to riches or to rags. China’s involvement in Djibouti proceeds the Belt and Road Initiative by several years, however, the project promises new economic and social benefits to the country that could help the nation ascertain greater agency in the international community (Mbanda, 2019). However, worries of Djibouti falling into a “debt trap” like many other infrastructure projects previously scripted in Africa, or security concerns regarding ethnic tensions and American intervention also loom over the head of Chinese involvement through the initiative. If the Belt and Road Initiative is to

continue involvement in Djibouti, great care needs to be taken to consider the lives of individuals in the country and how these efforts will impact them.

## *North and South American Connections*

### **Canadian Connections**

Canada is the northernmost North American country, and the second largest country in the world, boasting a landmass of just under 10 million square kilometers. Canada also is the largest country in the world to share a border with only one country, said country being the United States of America. Despite its large landmass, Canada has a relatively small population of about 37.9 million in 2021. Like many developed countries, the country has a low growth rate of 0.77%, and a birth rate of 1.57 births per woman. Out of the population, 81.6% of Canada's population live in urban areas, the majority of the population living along the border with the United States of America in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia (see Figure B8) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).



**Figure B8:** Map of Canada

It is noteworthy that Canada is closely tied to the United States of America both politically and economically. Canada's market-oriented economic system is closely modelled after that of the bordering country, and the two countries also have many trade agreements, such as the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement of 1989 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1994. Approximately three fourths of all of Canada's exports are given to the United States of America, along with 57% of total imports into the country coming from the United States. Both countries enjoy the most comprehensive trade and investment relationship, with two-way investments totalling over 800 billion United States Dollars (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

The close economic ties between the two countries mean that the two countries are also intertwined closely politically. Canada's military joined the United States in the invasion of Afghanistan following the al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001, along with being involved within international responses to counter terrorist groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and Daesh, typically active within the Middle East. Both countries also work closely together when it comes to border security, to which these controls offer increased security and economic competitiveness in both nations (Department of States, 2020). The U.S Department of States states:

The United States and Canada work in partnership at, within, and beyond our borders to enhance security and economic competitiveness [ . . . ] These efforts include collaboration along four lines of effort: addressing threats early; facilitating lawful trade and travel; enhancing law enforcement collaboration; and promoting resilience, including critical infrastructure and cybersecurity (2021).

However, Canada's close relationship with the United States of America has caused tense relationships between China and businesses allied with the Belt and Road Initiative and Canada. One prime example of this is the United States' race with China for dominance of fifth generation (5G) networks with Chinese company Huawei. China's economic and technological dominance pose a serious threat to the economy of the United States, with China developing 5G infrastructure worldwide through the Belt and Road Initiative. Additionally, The United States of

America also raises more traditional security concerns with Huawei technology, as well. Huawei's cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative jeopardizes the safety and security of United States intelligence and their cooperation with countries to provide intelligence. For example, South Korea was warned by the United States that if they installed Huawei's 5G technology, the United States would be unable to provide intelligence relating to North Korea. However, how effective this method was at dissuading South Korea was limited, as the country still chose to employ Huawei technology (Segev et al., 2019).

The withdrawal of intelligence, then, could prove to be difficult for Canada to deal with. Canada is a member of the Five Eyes intelligence community, of which besides the country, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States are a part of. Grown from the US-UK intelligence cooperation during the Second World War, and is one of the most cohesive intelligence sharing groups worldwide. Canada's involvement in the Five Eyes intelligence community is crucial to Canadian national security, and provides valuable defence intelligence and national assessments to support the Canadian military and the National Privy Council (Cox, 2012).

Despite the general cohesion of the Five Eyes intelligence community, the countries involved have yet to have a unified response to Huawei technology. The United States, as well as Australia, have banned the entry of not only Huawei telecommunications, but all Chinese and non-Five Eyes telecommunications, which includes other technological powerhouses, such as Japan. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, has decided to allow Chinese communications infrastructure into their own, but banning any core technology produced by Huawei or similar companies into the country. New Zealand and Canada have made no official statement or decision on Huawei telecommunications (Sergev, 2019). While the loss of United States intelligence could be difficult for Canada to bear in terms of national security, the country's strained political ties with China.

The recent strain between Chinese and Canadian relations worsened after previous cooperation under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau when a Canadian journalist, Nathan VanderKlippe, was detained in the Xinjiang province in 2017. While the journalist was only

detained for three hours, VanderKlippe claimed to have his computer taken from him and followed back to his hotel by Chinese authorities (Canadian Broadcasting Channel, 2017). However, these ties would become even more strained after a series of trade disagreements and the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the Chief Financial Officer of Huawei. On an extradition request of the government of the United States, Canada arrested Meng early in December of 2018, carried out by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. While the Canadian government claimed to have little involvement in the arrest, Chinese authorities protested the arrest (Feng et al., 2020).

The arrest of Meng Wanzhou would have ramifications for the relations between Canada and China when, only days later, former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig, and Canadian consultant Michael Spavor, sometimes collaboratively referred to as the “two Michaels” were detained by the Chinese government on suspicion of links to North Korea, however, few details of the reasonings for Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor’s detainment were given. Lu Kang, member of the International Crisis Group and colleague of Kovrig, said “once its staff become engaged in activities in China, it has already violated the law” (Lu, 2018). These comments from Lu gave rise to the suspicion that China’s detainment of Kovrig and Spavor could be a retaliation against Canada for the arrest of Meng Wanzhou and to urge the Canadian government to release the Huawei executive (Canadian Broadcasting Channel, 2018).

The consequences for this political strain between Canada and China could prove to be difficult for both parties involved. While China may hold the advantage economically over Canada, providing more imports than Canada does exports, Canada makes noteworthy contributions to Chinese infrastructure projects. In 2017, Canada became a core non-Asian member of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Canada holds the advantage of holding a wealth of natural resources and highly skilled labour (Alon et al., 2018).

Canada and China’s strained relationship could also contribute to Canada’s reasons for withholding official support from the Belt and Road Initiative project, and smaller Belt and Road Initiative projects through Canada being relatively small. While Canada is a member of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, showing they do have interest in projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative, Canada has yet to sign an agreement with China to be an official member of the

initiative. There is, however, the possible exception of the Arctic regions of Canada in no participation in the initiative, with plans discussed between China and Canada to make trade more accessible to territories such as the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, and to establish more marine navigation support within the area. However, these plans are still in their infancy (Alon et al., 2018).

However, the prospect might bring possible economic benefits to Canada, as well as raising many concerns. Canadian involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative would be beneficial for both China and Canada economically. Canadian companies have great experience with building infrastructure, which could provide technical and practical support that China may not have when it comes to projects in the initiative, and support Canadian businesses. Furthermore, Canadian workers also have experience working in harsh environments, which contributes to the high satisfaction rate with Canadian workers and infrastructure projects. These skills could be useful in certain destinations along the Belt and Road Initiative that operate in harsher conditions than China is accustomed to. Benefit can also come to Canada through the trading partners China could extend to Canada, bringing in a new wealth of resources (Alon et al., 2018).

The relationship between Canada and countries strongly against Chinese companies and the Belt and Road Initiative, however, make it difficult for Canada to peacefully become a member of the initiative. As mentioned earlier, Canada is both economically and politically tied closely to the United States of America, notably in trade (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021) and in support from the Five Eyes intelligence community in security cooperation. Canada's involvement with Chinese companies through the Belt and Road Initiative, while economically beneficial, could jeopardize the lines of communication between Canada's current closest trading partners and the assurance of intelligence from the Fives Eyes, which is crucial to Canadian security and defence (Cox, 2012).

The development of Canada and China's partnership, whether in trade or in the Belt and Road Initiative, is still in its infancy. The unique position Canada is put in might feel like the country is "caught between a rock and a hard place". However, there is a thin line Canada has to walk if the country wishes to reap the benefits of both the initiative and its partnership with the

United States, or ultimately, the country may have to make a definite statement on who it is allied with, and deal with the repercussions of those actions.

## *North and South American Connections*

### **Latin American Connections**

Latin America differs from the other regions discussed in that Latin America is not one country, but an area of land that consists of many. Generally, the area of Latin America is identified as countries in the Western Hemisphere where romance languages, such as Spanish, Portuguese, and to a lesser extent, French are spoken predominantly. The area consists of the majority of countries in South America, as well as countries within the region of Central America and some of the Caribbean islands, making up 33 countries across the region and islands and territories. Many of these countries share a similar history of Spanish and Portuguese colonization throughout the 15th to 18th century, and experiencing independence throughout the 19th century. While each of these countries have their own distinct culture and history, there are trends that can be noticed across the area (Lockhart, 2016).

Latin America, aside from countries, comprises approximately 652 million people as of 2020 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). As mentioned earlier, the languages spoken across this region primarily consist of Spanish, stemming from colonization, however, Portuguese is also a common language within the region and the official language of Brazil, one of the largest countries in Latin America. French is also spoken in some regions, however, primarily French speaking countries such as Suriname are typically not included in Latin America (Lockhart, 2016). While the majority of its citizens live within urban areas, the region has access to a diverse set of resources and geographical areas. Peru alone, for example, is host to 28 out of 32 identified world climates. Latin America as a whole houses the Andes mountain range, as well as rainforests such as the Amazon, and large access to both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

Economic prosperity across Latin America experiences trends of growth for some countries, but underdeveloped economies for others. As a region, Latin America has lost economic growth compared to the world average. Between 1980 and 2008, the world trade output from Latin America decreased from 9.5% to 7.8% (Baten, 2016). Latin America's largest economic centres include Brazil and Argentina. The region currently accounts for a large portion

of global agricultural output, some notable exports being quinoa, soybeans, sugar cane, oranges, and coffee (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021). Opposed to this, manufacturing industries in Latin America, with the exception of some countries, remain fairly underdeveloped (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).



**Figure B10:** Map of countries in Latin America

The Belt and Road Initiative, then, with promises of infrastructure projects and manufacturing gain, would be promising for the region. The Western Hemisphere was largely not included in the original documents of the Belt and Road Initiative following its announcement in

2013. It wasn't until 2017, with the arrival of the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held, that President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party let any ambitions of developing the initiative within North or South America show. Within these talks, the country opened up the Belt and Road Initiative to any country that wished to join. While these documents did not state Latin America specifically, the regions included did include both South America and the Caribbean, where most Latin American countries are located. However, a formal invitation for the region into the initiative would come in January 2018 during the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States Forum (China-CELAC). During this meeting, Minister of Foreign Affairs to China, Wang Yi, was quoted saying that Latin America would be a "natural extension" of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Malena, 2021).

Since the initiative was opened to Latin America, the majority of Latin American countries have officially pledged support, Panama being the first to support the initiative in November 2017. In the next two years, 18 out of the 33 countries included in the region would become official members. Some of the largest economies within Latin America, such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia, have yet to officially sign on to the Belt and Road Initiative, but have followed the progress of the initiative with interest. Nonetheless, the initiative has begun to build both digital and infrastructure projects in Latin America (Zhang, 2019).

Motives for China extending the Belt and Road Initiative, from a Chinese perspective, can seem confusing. While some Latin American countries export important resources to China, such as Mexico and Venezuela, these countries' close proximity to the United States of America, one of China's main economic rivals, make it a risk to expand pre existing deals with Latin American countries without attracting attention from the United States. Furthermore, the majority of countries in this area, with the exception of a few mentioned above, do not provide China with significant access to natural resources, nor are they promising to do so. Some policy makers suggest the reasons for China's expansion into Latin America could be for political gain to win the support of the international community in holding onto states, such as Taiwan (Oosterveld et al, 2018). Panama's declaration of support to the Belt and Road Initiative, for example, occurred only five months after its switch of support for China over Taiwan (Zhang, 2019).

When considering the motivations of Latin American countries in joining the Belt and Road Initiative, however, the reasonings become much clearer. Firstly, the Belt and Road Initiative has helped set into motion many promised infrastructure cooperations between China and Latin American countries. While China is active within bilateral trade and foreign investment in the region, accounting to be the second most important trade partner for the region with imports and exports totalling 306 billion dollars, putting them right behind the United States of America. However, China has committed far more into foreign investment in Latin America (Zhang, 2019). While there have been talks of projects built in the region, of particular significance considering Latin America's underdeveloped modern infrastructure systems, prior to the Belt and Road Initiative, many of these had yet to come into fruition. However, after pledging support or membership to the initiative, many Latin American countries went on to announce the implementation of new infrastructure projects with Chinese investment (Ferchen, 2021).

Secondly, the Belt and Road Initiative opens a gateway for many Latin American countries to further international engagement. One of the greatest allures of the initiative to many countries, not just Latin America, is the promise of more direct access to trade with far away global partners. The trade routes would open up new export opportunities to Latin America, along with opportunities for more foreign investment and external financing (Zhang, 2019). Cooperation from international partners could also provide peacekeeping aids and security partnerships with technologically advanced countries. In the case of Venezuela, Chinese involvement could prove beneficial for both parties, along with the Netherlands, another country involved in the initiative in developing close security ties (Oosterveld et al, 2018).



**Figure B11:** Infrastructure projects in Latin America with Chinese investment

Critics of the Belt and Road Initiative, however, argue that the potential risks of the initiative outweigh the positive benefits Latin America could gain. Many of the concerns echo those of similar Chinese involvement in other countries. Especially since many of the countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative are notably smaller and more reliant on China, concerns of a power imbalance between the partners exist. Latin America's involvement with the Digital Silk Road also raises security related concerns (Malena, 2018). However, there are a few problems the Belt and Road Initiative pose that are more unique to Latin America. Firstly, the new inflow of Chinese workers into Latin American countries could create rising tensions

between new inhabitants and local citizens, who may be resentful of the lack of local profit, leading to a rise of xenophobia within these areas (Oosterveld et al., 2018). Secondly, furthering relationships with China and seeking to pursue the Belt and Road Initiative could increase tensions between Latin America and the United States. While China provides a large amount of foreign investment, as mentioned earlier, the United States is the largest trading partner with the region (Zhang, 2018). Signs of tensions and wariness from the United States with the region have already shown, when the United States temporarily recalled diplomats from Panama, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, following the recall of support from Taiwan. Currently, the United States continues to push back against Chinese involvement within Latin America, which could have more consequences for the region (Ferchen, 2021).

Much like other regions, the Belt and Road Initiative shows both promise and problems for Latin America. However, the initiative does not propose new relationships between China and Latin America, only proposes to strengthen the ties between preexisting relations between both parties, in a way that would be mutually beneficial for both. The potential of the Belt and Road Initiative in the region would become more nuanced and comprehensive through further research on the subject to better understand the relationship between both regions and how the initiative will affect it.

## Logic of Evil

The difficulty with beginning to describe *evil* is that everyone has a different definition of what evil truly is. After all, how can there be a conversation about the logic behind *evil* if no one can entirely agree what evil is? When people think of *evil*, no one can agree entirely on what the concept of evil truly *is*, or what examples truly represent evil. There are events that plenty of the world's population can agree are definitely *evil*, such as the colonization of Africa, but there will always be another percentage of the population to justify that it is not. This is where the term of *evil* becomes as muddy as a puddle in spring. How can a person define a term that no one agrees on?

Evil, then, is a difficult concept to define. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy attempts to reconcile a general definition of the concept. There are two specific umbrellas that “evil” actions fall under: the *broad* concept, and the *narrow* concept. The broad concept deals with the bad state of affairs, wrong action, or possible character flaws. Within the broad concept of evil, there are two categories again. *Natural* evil refers to events that do not come from negligence of morality, such as a toothache. *Moral* evil, on the other hand, come from the ignorance to moral agents, such as murder and lying. Narrow evil, on the other hand, is purely moral, and deals with specific actions punished with moral condemnation. Often, when people talk about political, moral, and legal contexts, they are referring to narrow evil (Todd, 2017).

It would once again be simple to make the argument that the Belt and Road Initiative is inherently, undeniably *evil*. It would be in the best interests of the countries of the world involved to extract support from the initiative and to dismantle it completely. However, it would be a disservice to imply that the Belt and Road Initiative does not have economic, technological, business, and political advantages to the Chinese people, but to its partners within the Belt and Road.

An issue facing President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party with maintaining control over the provinces is the wealth gap between the prosperous eastern provinces and the western, inland provinces. For example, the Shanghai province, located in the northeast of China

along the Pacific Ocean coast, is five times as wealthy as the Gansu province, located inland west. Many of the provinces who end up lower on the economic scale also include minority groups growing increasingly frustrated under government support from the Chinese Communist Party, such as Tibet and Xinjiang. The growing rise of poverty and economic inequality in these provinces, the party believes, is one of the growing concerns of these citizens. The Belt and Road Initiative, by extension, will extend many Chinese businesses to the Chinese inland provinces and create more job opportunities within these places. With proposed economic stability, this will improve domestic and promote a unified China (Anwar, 2019).

Excess capacity is becoming a growing problem within China. In economic terms, excess capacity refers to the situation where a company or an industry is producing at a lower scale output than it is intended for (Khemani et al., 1993). While China's industries and production output have grown for decades, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the temporary shutdown of economies and disrupted global supply chains. China's restrictive lockdown measurements have already caused the shutdown of many businesses domestically, with 240,000 bankruptcies being declared within January and February of 2020 (Mouritz, 2020). With domestic excess capacity rising, one way that China can improve their domestic capacity is to be able to expand their country's companies beyond their borders. This gives state-owned enterprises the chance to expand their businesses and keep current staff in their positions, while hiring new employees to work in the technological or construction aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative (Anwar, 2019).

China is also committed to improving global conditions and connectivity with its growing role within the international stage. Improving foreign relations and promoting peace among nations, specifically, is among some of their top goals. President Xi Jinping has made it clear that the Belt and Road Initiative "is not directed against any third party. . . nor seeks to further exorbitant interests or produce colonial expansion" (Guoqiang, 2015). Every country has been offered to be a part of the initiative, and China has committed itself on the world stage to self-described responsibility to contribute to the global stage in a positive manner. One example of how they plan to do this is improving gender relations in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries by empowering women in the workforce. While it is unclear how successful these

results will be, or if this writes off China's own human rights violations, it is a part of their plan in order for the initiative to stay "culturally and academically focused" (Guoqiang, 2015).

The efforts made by the Belt and Road Initiative will also promote the economies and development of its partner countries, as well. South Asian and Middle Eastern countries will benefit greatly on an economic front. South Asian countries are estimated over the years of construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt to increase their GDP by 0.7 percent. However, even this number should increase when construction of the Belt and Road Initiative has finished, as analysis groups in Brussels, Belgium, expect the initiative's trade routes to make it cheaper to export products between Europe and Asia by at least 2 percent (Damuri et al., 2019). While these changes will bring about short term change for many of the developing countries along the initiative, China also offers access to many of these countries for higher education that is not available within their own borders. Approximately 10,000 state scholarships are handed out annually to students from countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, primarily from other Asian countries (Guoqiang, 2015).

Many of these efforts made by the Belt and Road Initiative, then, would allow countries to develop economically, empowering developing countries on the international stage and provide more to their citizens, following in the footsteps of China in order to improve everyday life for their citizens. For example, China was able to largely implement universal healthcare in 2011 with positive profits, after beginning in 1998. During this time, China made a concentrated effort to improve their middle class after the Tiananmen Square massacre (Djordjevic et al., 2020). The same studies showed that China's education system also improved within this time. It is difficult to deny a nation the ability to provide these services to their citizens, when it is clear how it has improved their own lives.

The Belt and Road Initiative undoubtedly ignores many important environmental areas and uses ethically questionable trade tactics. However, many South and Southeast Asian countries can take advantage of these situations to improve the situation of their own countries. They understand the example made by Tiananmen Square, that improving a country does not

come without a cost to someone. The question is not *if* there is a price, but what the price *is*, and if it is worth paying.

## Political Influences

Politics is a broad topic, which the mind often boils down to a set of distinct images of government buildings and people in suits giving speeches. However, politics are far more than the faces of a government. Put simply, politics are a set of activities associated with making decisions for a large group (Merriam-Webster, 2016). However, even this definition of *politics* leaves a rather broad set of interpretations. Could politics, then, refer to both the ideologies of a group making decisions, but also the decisions they make? Both of these answers would be correct. In the modern era, activities associated with politics can include conflict resolution, lawmaking, foreign policy, and exercise of power.

China's Belt and Road Initiative is inherently political by its own design. One of the main structures of the Belt and Road Initiative, according to President Xi Jinping, is to promote cooperation between European, Asian, and African governments and economies. Peace and development between countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative are not the only development promises made to policy between states. The building of the trade routes also serves to alleviate tensions between China and its states, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao. The economic benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative have also been a driving factor for many countries to join in on the initiative (Guoqiang, 2015).

However, the Belt and Road Initiative is a unique project in not just serving as the world's most ambitious infrastructure project, but for China. It marks a new era when it comes to the ideology of Chinese foreign policy, where the country seeks to take advantage of the growing phenomenon of globalization to improve their own political and economic situation, through going against protectionism of their resources and promoting new European and Asian cooperation strategies.

In order to best understand the progress made in China's foreign policy, it is important to reflect on the difference between President Xi Jinping's foreign policy and how it differs from past Chinese presidents. Past decades presidents have been largely influenced by the government style of President Deng Xiopang, who served as the paramount leader of China from 1982 to

1987. One of the more well known quotes made by Deng during his leadership of China relate to his attitude on foreign policy, where he states to “hide one’s capabilities and bide one’s time”. Leaders following Deng Xiaopang and preceding Xi Jinping, such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, often followed this principle. The policy, as the result, was part of the reason for China’s passive role when it came to the international community, practicing protectionist policies when it came to their economy and resource management (Mobley, 2019).

President Xi Jinping’s plans upon stepping into office have often been referred to as China no longer biding time. The passive language often used in addresses given by former presidents is nowhere to be found in the speeches President Xi Jinping has made regarding the Belt and Road Initiative. Some prime examples of this include speeches he has given to the 19th Party Congress of China, where he is quoted saying that China will “take an active role in reforming and developing the global governance system” as well as reiterating that “no one should expect us [China] to swallow anything that undermines our interests” (Mobley, 2019).

The timing of this assertiveness on the rise of globalization may not be entirely unintentional. Over the past decade, China has quickly risen to rival the United States of America as one of the world economic powers. Its economic position puts it in a position to self-fund most of the proposed Belt and Road Initiative projects, which will improve economic security in many of their industries, such as energy. The initiative will assure economic success in a globalizing market. This directly contrasts the United States of America, who are perceived by other countries to be resisting trends towards globalization and instead taking a nationalistic approach to distributing and conserving their resources. China, who is currently in trade wars with the United States, may be looking to capitalize on this opportunity and global dissatisfaction with the status quo in order to improve their own standing in the international community (Mobley, 2019).

Nonetheless, the initiative shows great change in the attitudes towards foreign policy in the Chinese government when it comes to globalization and cooperation between nations. Specific plans and areas of interest in their contribution can be seen throughout the titled dual “16+1” and “5+1” mechanisms used for foreign policy between Europe and Asia through the

initiative. Both of these mechanisms perform within similar groups of countries, primarily across the west of Asia and central European countries. However, the difference between the 16+1 and the 5+1 cooperation strategies lies with the countries involved in each of these. Included in the 16+1 model are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia, with China referred to as the +1 (Macaes, 2018). Bilaterally, this group is often referred to as the CEEC, or Central and Eastern European Countries. The 5+1 strategy, however, consists of countries involved in the European Economic Union (EEU), including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia (Hu et al., 2017).

Both of these initiative groups and cooperations proceed with the Belt and Road Initiative, and have shown positive results for European countries involved. Under the 16+1 mechanism, central European countries have seen an increase economically through the building of new rail lines and closer cooperation with China in terms of trade, enabling central European businesses. The direct connections between these countries has also increased travel and tourism for both central European countries and China. Between 2012, and 2017, the amount of Chinese tourists visiting central European countries went from 280,000 to 930,000, and exchange students between the regions also doubled (State Council of China, 2018).

Cooperation between central European countries and China could enable the full strategic potential of the landmass. Both countries who are a member of the 16+1 and 5+1 cooperation mechanisms have a unique position, being poised as a gateway between Europe and Asia, as well as some of the most important gateways of the ancient Silk Road, which China seeks to build on with the Belt and Road Initiative. However, extenuating circumstances have made it difficult for some central European countries to make strategic political moves to unlock the potential of this area, some being caught within power plays. The relations between these countries and China, then, could provide a solid framework on which to make strategic decisions with both Asia and Europe, as well as solidifying the area as important to trade. Central Europe could serve as a springboard and gateway, then, for Chinese investors and businesses looking to make investments in European markets (Feng, 2015).

The Belt and Road Initiative, as mentioned earlier, is inherently political. However, the politics involved in the initiative show a stark, new way of looking at the world and its political landscape, as not just borders on a map, but as one, larger world. It reflects the views within Chinese politics of dissatisfaction with the status quo, and taking an active role in the international community (Mobley, 2019). Through their investments in typically underdeveloped regions, such as central European countries, China has shown they plan to trailblaze new economic centers and foreign policies. In their rise to one of the largest economies worldwide, they have taken an opposite approach from their competitors, the United States, in order to embrace globalization. Only time will tell if this choice was a worthy one for China to make.

## Religious Influences

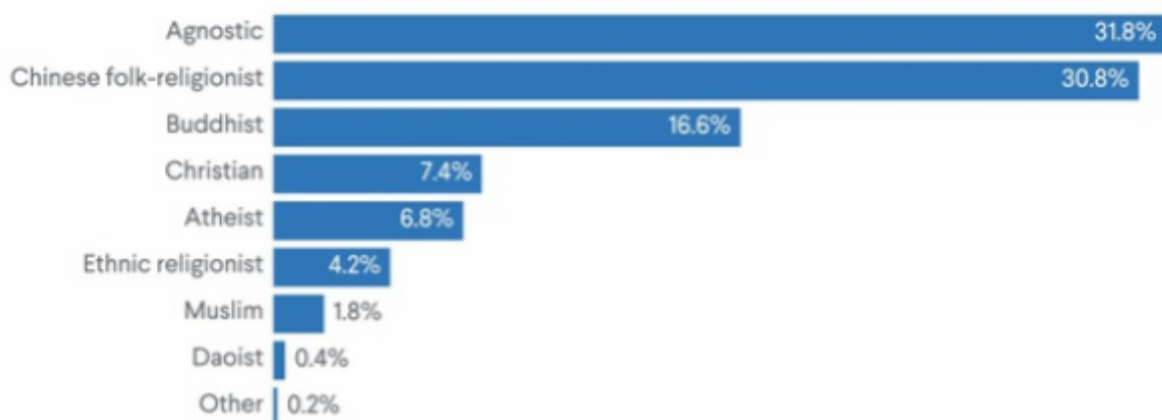
Religion is a diverse and incredibly complex phenomenon within human societies. What makes the term *religion* difficult to define, is much like the word *evil*, religion encompasses many different beliefs, ideologies, and principles across vastly different societies (Harding et al., 2010). One working definition of the term *religion* is the relationship human beings have with what they consider holy or sacred, and how they deal with the ultimate concerns of life and unanswerable questions by their own reasoning (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). Evidence shows that religion has had incredible prominence and significance in the lives of humans dating back 11,600 years, during the Neolithic period. Today, there are many more iconic buildings of religious worship around the world, such as Islamic mosques, the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Temple of Jerusalem, or Catholic churches such as Saint Peter's Basilica (Myhre, 2008). Even those who identify as irreligious in today's society have had their morals, practices, and daily lives impacted by the legacy left behind by religious eras of their societies.

Religion, however, in China, is a hotly debated topic, specifically religious freedom under the Chinese Communist Party. The state government identifies as atheist, however, in article 36 of the Chinese constitution, they identify that citizens should “enjoy freedom of religious belief”, as well as forbidding any person or group of individuals from forcing someone to practice or not practice a certain faith. There are five recognized religions in China, however, including Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Despite article 36, the Chinese Communist Party bans any religion outside of these five. Even within the five recognized religions of China, registered groups are tightly regulated. Sophie Richardson from the Human Rights Watch describes this discrepancy in that while religious *belief* is protected under the Chinese constitution, they “do not guarantee the right to practice or worship” (Albert et al., 2020).

While religion is tightly regulated in China, the country still boasts a considerable religious population. At the same time, China also houses the largest irreligious population, with 38.6% of the population identifying as agnostic or atheist, while the remaining 61.4% is majorly divided between Chinese folk religions and Buddhist.

## Religious Affiliation in China

Percentage of population in 2020



Source: World Religion Database.

COUNCIL ON  
FOREIGN  
RELATIONS

**Figure B1:** Religious affiliation in China

Despite seemingly progressive religious laws, China exerts a great amount of power over what religious groups they accept. China has one of the greatest numbers of religious prisoners out of any country. One of the most famous cases in recent years of persecution due to religion in China is the Uhyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang province. Uhyghur Muslims account for 11 million people, about half of the Chinese population of Muslims, however, the group has been targeted by the Chinese Communist Party for decades. Some of their claims to support this targeting includes claims of separatist and extremist ideologies, pointing to occasional violent acts against government workers. However, upon being surveyed, most do not support the beliefs held by the instigators. In recent years, the persecution against Uhyghur Muslims has increased. Since 2017, approximately 2 million Muslims have been detained in “re-education camps”. During their time at these camps, detainees reported torture, sexual abuse, barring from practicing their religion, and forcibly professing loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (Albert et al., 2020).

Religious repression to other groups of Muslims in China have also become more common, including Hui Muslims in the northwest, and the largest Muslim group in China. The religious repression becomes dually concerning as China seeks to influence many predominantly

Muslim countries within the Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia, three partners with the initiative, are home to large sects of the world's Muslim population, with Afghanistan having 99.7% of their population identify as Muslim (Roy, 2019). China's growing influence in these countries economically and politically, then, cannot be ignored when it comes to religious freedom.

However, religion has also been used as a tool by China in order to further integrate countries and build influence by the beliefs of the people within these countries. Buddhism in Southeast Asia has been a key example of this occurrence. China boasts the world's largest Buddhist population, with an estimated 185 million to 250 million practitioners within their borders (Albert et al., 2020). However, many Southeast Asian countries carry a large percentage of their population being practicing Buddhists, or have Buddhist as their state religion, differing from the atheist Chinese Communist Party. Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, all members of the Belt and Road Initiative, all have Buddhism as their state religion (Raymond, 2020).

Appealing to the ideals of the citizens of these countries, then, is another effective way to propel good foreign relations, besides appealing to the economic debts of many of these countries. International Buddhist promotion, as a result, has been an effective way for President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party to promote the Belt and Road Initiative and foster positive feelings about the plans. This has included engaging in international celebrations of Buddhist holidays, such as Vesak, (the day of the birth, death, and enlightenment of the Buddha) in both Chinese and Southeast Asian cities. A noted effort from China has been an international Buddhist university. Opened in 2017 in the Hainan province, the school enrolled 220 students, 20 being monks from Laos. The work of this university has focused on promoting peace between the different sects of Buddhism, conducting charity work in Southeast Asia, and creating ties between Buddhist leaders and the Chinese Communist Party (Raymond, 2020).

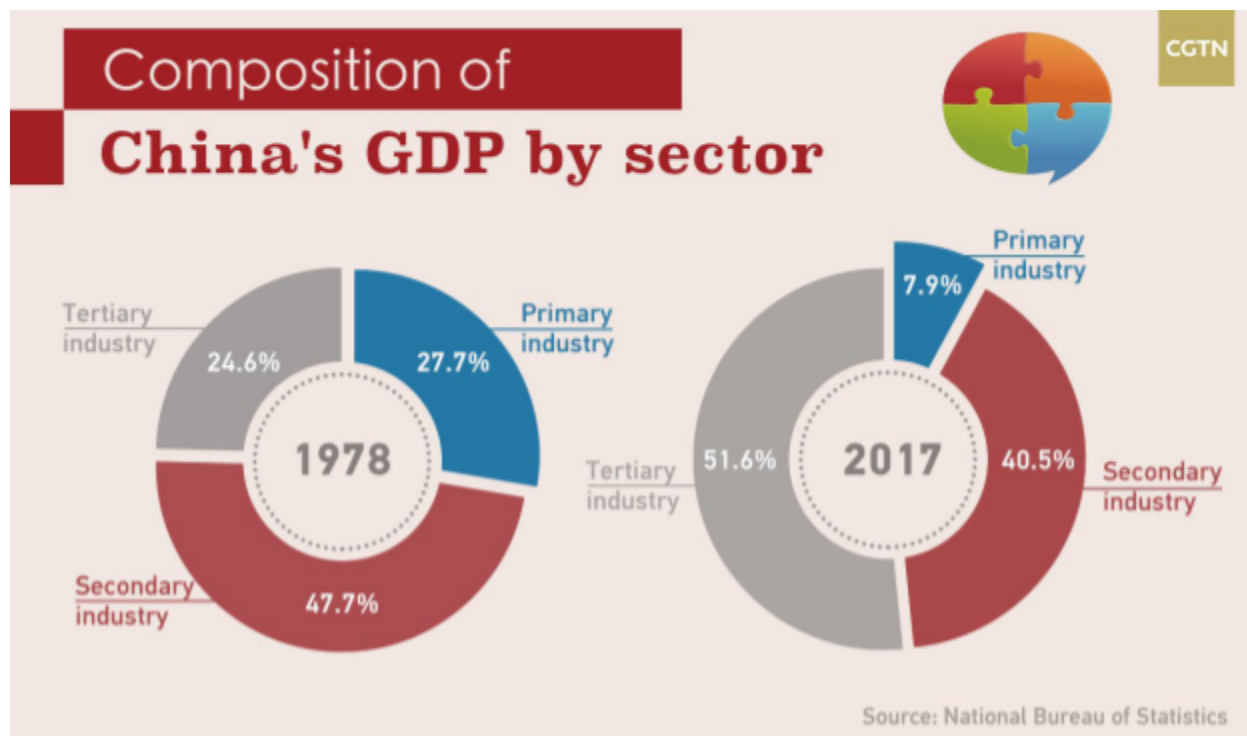
These efforts have proved to be worthwhile for President Xi Jinping's initiative. Feelings about the Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asian countries with a largely Buddhist population are generally positive (Raymond, 2020). However, historically, China has had a

turbulent relationship with their domestic population of Buddhists. In the 1980s, the Chinese government was far less tolerant of the practice of Buddhist religion, primarily Tibetan Buddhism. Within the country today, Tibetan Buddhists still practice many peaceful anti-government protests due to the rising economic disparity between Tibetan Buddhists and the Han Chinese (Albert et al., 2020). However, under President Xi Jinping, the government of China has become far more tolerant of Buddhist groups and those who practice traditional Chinese religion (Raymond, 2020).

### **Technological Influences**

China's economy has quickly grown to be one of the largest economies worldwide. In 2014, their annual gross domestic product (GDP) amassed to 10.355 trillion United States dollars. The Chinese economy by the size of their GDP is only surpassed by the United States of America, and exports the most goods to partners in trade annually (InterNations, 2019). Since 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China has been able to begin a fast growth of their economy, by phasing out a protectionist economic system with little being imported or exported from their country, to a economy with a focus on providing for the world market that is integral to the international community. This slow phaseout proved to be incredibly effective for the country, as from 2013 to 2017, the country had the fastest growing GDP in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020).

The economy of China is based largely around three main sectors: agriculture, manufacturing, and services. China is one of the main sources of agricultural output in the world, especially for dried goods such as rice, maize, and wheat. However, China's main agricultural exports also extend to many vegetables, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes. However, this only accounts for 27.7% of China's workforce and a mere 7.9% of China's overall gross domestic product. In comparison, manufacturing is a far second, producing 40.5% of the overall gross domestic product in the country. However, much like the agricultural industry, China is the world leader in industrial output, including the mining and processing of metals and energy production. Both of these industries, however, are trumped by China's services industry, which makes up 43.5% of China's workforce and 51.6% of their annual gross domestic product (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).



**Figure B2:** Composition of China's gross domestic product (GDP) by sector in 1978 vs 2017

One important facet of the Chinese services industry is their monopoly on the telecommunications sector, including radios, telegraphs, radio, telephones, mobile phones, computers, and internet. Domestically, China has the largest demand for telephones and broadcasted media, and the largest population with access to the internet. However, their influence over the technological world expands internationally, as well. China has become a global technology leader, only rivalled by the United States of America (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

Huawei, founded in 1987 by Ren Zhengfei, is one such company in China that focuses on the production of communications devices, such as telephones, but also also began a broader focus on construction of telecommunications devices and providing consulting and equipment to countries outside of China (Ahrens, 2013). In the past decade, Huawei has come to dominate the telecommunications market, and in 2017 surpassed Apple for second place in largest smartphone brands (surpassed only by South Korean brand Samsung). This is furthered with their expansion

throughout Asia and Europe, along with leading the charge to develop the 5G network as the new global standard (Kania, 2018).

However, the company's practices and activity along with the installation of their 5G networks has also brought them under scrutiny by the international community. The company has garnered criticism from politicians and academics for a lack of transparency with their business practices. Primarily, this comes from suspicions of their ties with the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army, the regular armed forces of the People's Republic of China (Kania, 2018). Additionally, the company has been accused of intellectual property theft. In 2017, a jury within the United States found Huawei guilty for theft of intellectual property from T-Mobile, and the United States Department of Justice later alleged in 2019 that Huawei had repeatedly attempted to steal a robot design from T-Mobile (Maizland et al., 2020).

While these criticisms are common, threats of security as a result of using technology produced by Huawei is one common concern among political groups opposed to using Huawei-produced technology. The Five Eyes intelligence alliance, mentioned and defined earlier, involves many members suspicious of loopholes within Chinese intelligence laws that would allow the Chinese Communist Party to purchase user information from Huawei in order to gather intelligence. However, United States intelligence agencies, the main perpetrators of this concern, have been able to leverage little evidence that this has occurred on behalf of Huawei (Maizland et al., 2020). Despite this claim being unproven within United States borders, claims of espionage and hacks by Huawei systems have happened elsewhere. Accusations of China using technology produced by Huawei being used to watch and spy on the headquarters of the African Union have been prevalent since 2018, however, in 2020, a report surfaced that presented evidence that the government of China had been filching footage from security cameras from the headquarters of the African Union in Ethiopia (Meservey, 2020). In the previous year, a report funded by the Australian government and commissioned by the Papua New Guinea National Cyber Security Centre alleged that there were major security flaws within a data center being built by Huawei. The report pointed out flaws within the design of the data center that could be easily exploited, to which Huawei denied the claims. The government of

Papua New Guinea has since tried to repeal investments from the data center but has so far not been successful (Griggs, 2020).

Despite the criticisms leveraged against Huawei, the company has become increasingly important to the overall strategy China is using for the Belt and Road Initiative. The expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative from simply physical trade routes to digital connectivity between regions has become another important facet of this plan. Titled the Digital Silk Road (DSR), the metaphorical road is marketed as a symbiotic relationship between countries who agree to be part of the Digital Silk Road and China. Many of the countries who have agreed to the initiative are developing countries, whose economic position would develop greatly from the expansion of wireless phone networks and broadband internet coverage, and being able to get such high quality technology at a relatively inexpensive price. China, on the other hand, provides benefits to international business expansion for many of their own companies. Huawei has been one of these companies, who have taken on multiple projects in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. In the interest of boosting cooperation with many of these countries, China has also helped establish research, development, and training centers to transfer technical knowledge (Economy et al., 2020).

While China has only officially signed agreements or provided investments related to the Digital Silk Road, it is estimated that up to one third of the countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative are cooperating with projects related to the Digital Silk Road. As aforementioned, many of these countries are developing countries. Some democracies worry that these countries following in the path of China with its technological development could lead to a technology enforced authoritarianism that infringes on the rights of individuals within these countries. This concern is not helped by how China has historically aided political groups in establishing surveillance that could be used against opposition groups. It is reported that through the transfer of technological knowledge, Huawei and government assisted groups have shown countries involved in the Digital Silk Road how to monitor and censor the internet in real time (Economy et al., 2020). This set of concerns does not even account for the concerns of espionage and lack of transparency in business discussed earlier.

For developing countries involved in the Digital Silk Road, the inexpensive, high quality technology from companies such as Huawei could provide great gain for the country. It can promote economic growth within the country and a more globally connected country, primarily improving foreign relations with China. The development of this technology, as much as it could prove to be a blessing, could also be a curse. Concerns of espionage and surveillancing groups are not unfounded, and neither are reports of theft of intellectual property and humanitarian issues. It is crucial to continue to monitor the development of this technology in countries allied with the Digital Silk Road and to take these criticisms into account when these projects are monitored.

## Recommendations

The Belt and Road Initiative differs from defined “world issues” in that the Belt and Road Initiative itself is not entirely something that must be *solved*. As discussed, the initiative could bring many positive changes to its members, including, but not limited to, economic growth, competition in the technological industry, greater international cooperation and role in the international community. It could be considered cruel and self-serving for developed countries to deny any chance that developing countries become more greatly involved in the world stage.

Though there is also consideration to be had when it comes to the concerns over the Belt and Road Initiative, from lack of transparency to proposed “debt trap diplomacy” methods being employed by China to expand their influence further outside their own borders, and many security concerns regarding the infrastructure and telecommunications software that China brings along with the Belt and Road Initiative.

With many different facets, one specific resolution to protect both developed and developing countries from the worst side effects of the Belt and Road Initiative involves creating widespread change throughout the current status quo of foreign policy of developing countries with a four pronged approach: economically, politically, technologically, and environmentally.

Firstly, international economic investments and criteria in order to meet the requirements to be applicable for investment from foreign actors could be reconsidered. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons Chinese loans are attractive to many countries, especially those who find themselves paying great amounts of interest fees on loans from other foreign actors, is that Chinese investments tend to have fewer “strings attached”, in that the country does not have to meet as many requirements or the same level of interest that many western developed countries require for possible investments (Mobley, 2019). Not only does China, then, provide the greatest offer of new infrastructure projects more than any other nation, but also for far better costs than many western countries have given. However, these vast loans to China can still be detrimental to a country and have to cause them to lease many of these new infrastructure back to China, leading to any economic gain back into the Chinese economy (Andersen et al., 2018). In order to

help countries escape from this situation, more attractive, transparent deals in order to help provide the infrastructure for economic growth can be made (Oosterveld et al., 2018). Malaysia, a country previously involved with projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative, have proved this to be a successful option. After growing wary of projects involved with the initiative, newly elected Prime Minister Mahatir has sought out more foreign investment from Japan, which has pledged further support to the trade and infrastructure of the southeast Asian country. India, as well, has made efforts to connect more with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in order to provide stronger, more transparent deals in trade and investment with the group (Ujvari, 2019).

Developed countries making the effort to connect more with the regional economies of developing countries through trade and investment banks would also provide support for these nations vulnerable to unbearable debts under the Belt and Road Initiative. Aside from monetary gain, consultation with the governments of developing countries involved with the initiative whose indebtedness could put them in a vulnerable position on how to mitigate and prevent such vulnerability could be an option. Some Latin American countries tied to developed European countries, such as the Netherlands, could be a provider for this information, being involved in the Belt and Road Initiative as well. This would give developing countries the chance to reap the most benefits possible while also providing counsel on how to avoid becoming vulnerable economically, creating a “win-win” situation for all parties (Oosterveld et al., 2018).

The concept of agency, then, brings the conversation to recommendations for the Belt and Road Initiative politically. A worry brought up in many academic spaces is the agency given to developing countries, primarily in regions such as Africa (Links, 2021) and Latin America (Ferchen, 2021) when it comes to being in a relationship with a power imbalance with China (Cabestan, 2020). In order to help empower developing countries to not feel vulnerable to this power indifference, there is a two pronged approach that can be taken. Firstly, current partners within the area can work in partnership with civil society organizations within these countries to help support the facilitation of fair elections and democratic leadership in place, and aid in guiding these leaders in navigating foreign policy with partners who have larger economic and political power than their country. This will help these countries maintain agency on an

international and domestic level. However, actions can be taken to empower the citizens of a developing country to become more politically aware and invested in their own agency and governance. Supporting local news outlets, primarily those which use investigative journalism in their reporting, can help keep citizens informed on what is happening in their country and their place in the international community (Oosterveld et al., 2018).

One of the greatest political concerns of countries involved in the initiative is the opposition from the United States, and the security risks that the other world economic power could put developing countries in. In order to diffuse some of the tension between these two countries, efforts need to be made by both parties in order to examine their foreign policies. Firstly, China putting priority to the Belt and Road Initiative with its neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Laos, Kazakhstan, and Nepal would help reduce these countries overdependence on American markets. The United States, in turn, might need to seriously reevaluate their strategic position on China and whether it is in the nation's best interest to classify China as such a great competitor. As China grows economically and embraces patterns of globalization into their markets and the United States pursues protectionist policies, this could put American businesses at a severe disadvantage for economic growth compared to pre established Chinese international companies. Thirdly, the two nations working cooperatively to meet the needs of both eastern and western markets and values and how to protect both of these interests would alleviate tension between the United States feeling threatened by Chinese involvement internationally (Goodman et al., 2019).

Finding common ground between nations could prove to strengthen the country's positives and mitigate the possible negative effects of the Belt and Road Initiative, especially within intergovernmental organizations. Using protectionist measures in one country, as seen through the practices of the United States, could be detrimental to a country's domestic businesses in competing in an international market (Goodman et al., 2019). However, coming up with a unified approach and vision for what intergovernmental organizations want to achieve and what they want to mitigate from the initiative would provide the framework for which these organizations interact with the Belt and Road Initiative (Ghiasi, 2018). The European Union is one example of where this solution could benefit. Currently, these organizations have yet to

come up with a definitive answer on how they wish to interact with the Belt and Road Initiative. While some members of the European Union seek to become members of the initiative, such as Serbia and Italy, others fight back harshly against Chinese influence in Europe, such as Germany (Mohan, 2018). While compromises may have to be made, understanding and putting in a framework in which to interact with the proposed projects could alleviate concerns from countries against the initiative, and not one that leaves them out of the change that seeks to change European markets drastically.

Similar techniques can be applied when it comes to common security concerns from developed nations when it comes to Chinese technology. Finding a common ground of potential benefits and consequences of employing Chinese technology such as Huawei within nations telecommunications systems can help intergovernmental organizations and individual countries to be prepared to negotiate with China to best use the technology for a “win-win” situation for both parties involved. Preemptively believing that China will use the Belt and Road Initiative technology to breach domestic security ignores the possibility of *more* secure relationships with European and Asian countries, for example, to help understand and mitigate security concerns of both sides of the initiative. This would put members of the Belt and Road Initiative on a more strategic footing to uphold domestic security (Ghiasi, 2018).

The collaboration of companies such as Huawei having an integral role in the Belt and Road Initiative is one major concern. The Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre (HCSEC) is a Huawei owned facility established in 2014 that evaluates the security of Huawei telecommunications products used in the United Kingdom to assess whether these products interfere or bring security risks to critical infrastructure within their government. While these reports do provide a body of evidence to support allegations that China has been involved in data breaches throughout different branches of the government of the United Kingdom, along with the knowledge that China has the *ability* to compel Huawei to assist them in their intelligence networks, the Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation centre is one of the leading groups in understanding tools used to mitigate cyber security. The committee has found multiple cyber security breaches within Huawei infrastructure, and has worked with the company to improve telecommunications products to ensure safety for their customers (Uren, 2018).

Using this information provided by the Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre as a framework to better understand the risks that come with Huawei telecommunications structures would help countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative understand the actual risks with Huawei technology over unproven allegations and rumours (Uren, 2018). The United Kingdom provides another example to follow if countries without needed telecommunications infrastructure in place of how to balance Huawei technology with current infrastructure. The United Kingdom is currently the only country within the Five Eyes intelligence community to allow Huawei products to be used in their country, without allowing core processing technology to be installed (Sergev, 2019). This compromise works to help countries struggling with technological infrastructure to improve their situations and begin to work on development of their own telecommunications systems while providing their domestic businesses with better access to the digital market.

The final prong of the approach to maximizing the potential of the Belt and Road Initiative is to mitigate environmental concerns. While President Xi Jinping has announced new projects as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative in order to help reach the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the part it is playing to achieve these can be overshadowed by the current environmental impacts of the initiative discussed earlier (Teese, 2018). However, the initiative still has incredible potential to revolutionize sustainable trade and development worldwide. Firstly, the involvement of private, public, and nongovernmental organizations committed to reaching Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 is a key in helping the Chinese government best understand how to work alongside environmental concerns and still achieve its goals of the Belt and Road Initiative. China has taken the steps to start only reaching out to companies committed to promoting sustainable, climate resilient infrastructure, as well as involving the United Nations Environment Team to form the International Coalition for Green Development on the Belt and Road (United Nations Environment, 2017).

Furthermore, committing to providing a more strict legal framework in which the Belt and Road Initiative will interact with environmental concerns through the development of infrastructure would ensure an international standard for which companies operating in the

initiative will employ when providing infrastructure abroad (United Nations Environment, 2017). While China is placing stricter foundations for sustainable development within their own borders, some companies may be tempted to stray from Sustainable Development Goals in counties where environmental regulations are less strict (Teese, 2018). Bringing in a strict standard to protect biodiverse areas, build sustainable economic infrastructure and cities would promote Sustainable Development goals not just in one region, but worldwide.

The Belt and Road Initiative transcends national borders and seeks to promote international development. These efforts come with tremendous opportunities for anyone who gets involved. Mitigating possible negative impacts, then, is not the job of only China or only a singular country involved, but everyone involved to ensure that the initiative reaches its full potential. These concerns must be addressed on a worldwide scale, to help developing countries and themselves. Society is becoming increasingly globalized, and governments can fight against it at the expense of their own, or embrace it and work to cooperate with others to seek a brighter future for all citizens of the globe.

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