

THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

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Abstract. Launched in 2013, the Belt and road initiative proposed new land and sea corridors to enhance global logistics connectivity. China presented this initiative as a new cooperation framework in international affairs, grounded in openness, inclusiveness, and mutual advantage. At the same time, the declared objectives and operational scope of the mentioned initiative have raised concerns regarding its potential to project Chinese hegemony, which presents significant implementation challenges. Competition from established regional economic integration projects constitutes a further obstacle. These initiatives encompass multilateral associations such as the EAEU and the ASEAN, alongside national strategies like Mongolia's «Steppe road», Indonesia's «Maritime axis of peace», and South Korea's «K-Silk Road». Regional disputes compound these difficulties, particularly the India–Pakistan conflict and civil wars across the Arab world. This study examines these impediments and evaluates China's proposed strategies to address them.

Keywords: ASEAN; EAEU; India–Pakistan conflict; Chinese hegemony; competition between the USA and China; Maritime Silk Road; Belt and road initiative; Trans-Pacific partnership; Silk Road economic belt.

О ПРОБЛЕМАХ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ ИНИЦИАТИВЫ «ОДИН ПОЯС, ОДИН ПУТЬ»

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Аннотация. Си Цзиньпин в 2013 г. выдвинул инициативу «Один пояс, один путь», предполагающую строительство сухопутного и морского путей вдоль ключевых границ мировой логистики. Китай заявил о начале создания нового формата международного сотрудничества, основанного на приоритете принципа открытости, толерантности и взаимной выгоды. Вместе с тем заявленные руководством Китая цели инициативы «Один пояс, один путь» свидетельствуют о том, что в ней имеются признаки китайской гегемонии. Это обстоятельство представляется одной из значимых проблем реализации данной инициативы. К иным проблемам относятся соперничество с уже существующими проектами региональной интеграции экономического пространства, среди которых ЕАЭС и АСЕАН в рамках отдельных международных объединений, а также национальные стратегии «Степной путь» (Монголия), «Морская ось мира» (Индонезия), «Корейский шелковый путь» (Южная Корея) в рамках отдельных стран. Наличие разногласий в Южной Азии и на Ближнем Востоке (индийско-пакистанский конфликт и гражданские войны в арабском мире) тоже затрудняют реализацию рассматриваемой инициативы. На основе детального изучения обозначенных проблем выявлены инструменты, которые могут быть использованы китайским руководством для их преодоления.

Ключевые слова: АСЕАН; ЕАЭС; индийско-пакистанский конфликт; китайская гегемония; конкуренция США и Китая; Морской шелковый путь; инициатива «Один пояс, один путь»; транстихоокеанское партнерство; экономический пояс шелкового пути.

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Introduction

The Belt and road initiative (BRI), launched by President Xi Jinping, commemorated its 11th anniversary in September 2024. The concept, envisioning a revival of ancient Silk Road connections within contemporary international relations, was first articulated at Nazarbayev University in Astana in September 2013. The Chinese leader emphasised that two decades of dynamic engagement between China and Eurasian states had renewed economic ties and created conditions conducive to expanded collaboration. Consequently, Xi Jinping proposed the Silk Road economic belt, an overland corridor to facilitate extensive regional cooperation and coordination between the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Community¹.

One month later, in October 2013, Xi Jinping visited the ASEAN Secretariat headquarters in Jakarta. Addressing the Indonesian Parliament, President Xi Jinping introduced the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road: «China's development brings opportunities, not threats, to Asia and the planet as a whole, and China intends to share [the benefits] with ASEAN»². Historically, Southeast Asia has served as a trading hub along the Maritime Silk Road, its revitalisation is presented as essential in today's context. Together, China and ASEAN represent one quarter of the global population and possess the capacity to build what Xi Jinping termed a community of common destiny.

The land and maritime components of the Silk Road are collectively known as the BRI, a symbol of unity among Asian and European peoples. On 28 March 2015, China's National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China published the first official policy document «Vision and actions on jointly building Silk Road

economic belt and 21st-century Maritime Silk Road», authorised by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. It presents the Chinese government's vision for achieving global peaceful development, economic prosperity, and enhanced cultural exchange. As a significant economic power, China declared its commitment to making substantial contributions towards realising the document's shared aspirations. Section VII outlines China's concrete actions and early achievements. These include high-level diplomatic engagements to explain the initiative's principles, dedicated exhibitions promoting its value, the signing of bilateral cooperation frameworks, the development of long-term trade and economic plans, and the establishment of dedicated financial mechanisms, notably the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The text further stresses the BRI's inherently open and inclusive nature, reflected in China's active outreach to all nations and international bodies along the proposed routes. China expresses readiness to collaborate in establishing timelines, roadmaps, and modalities for cooperation³.

Consequently, China has advanced ambitious proposals for the construction of integrated land and maritime routes along strategic global logistical corridors. It represents a new framework for international cooperation, emphasising openness, tolerance, and mutual benefit. However, the BRI exhibits clear markers of Chinese hegemony, which critics readily identify. Negative perceptions of Chinese dominance in Eurasia represent just one challenge facing the initiative. Equally significant obstacles include competition from established regional economic integration projects and ongoing conflicts in South Asia and the Middle East.

This article examines the principal challenges confronting the execution of the BRI.

Materials and methods

The research draws substantially on publicly accessible data from key official sources, including the Belt and road portal, the China Internet Information Centre, and the press centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. The Belt and road portal, established by the National Development and Reform Commission in collaboration with Xinhua News Agency as the primary platform for disseminating information about the BRI, reports on recent developments and policy directions and facilitates timely and effective communication among participants. For the purposes of this research, the portal has provided essential access to policy statements and official commentary.

In addition to these sources, the works of S. G. Luzyanin [1], Dinh Le Hong Zang [2], Wan Juntao and D. E. Lubina [3], Zhang Zehua and Li Yanjie [4], F. T. Kukeeva, D. K. Dyusebaev, A. K. Ordabaev and M. A. Utegenova [5], V. E. Vasilevskaya [6], V. S. Kovalev [7], Vang Leping [8], A. A. Dikikh [9], S. N. Kamenev [10] offer critical perspectives on the contemporary issues confronting the BRI. For example, Dinh Le Hong Zang [2] contends that China, seeking enhanced global stature, proposed the BRI as a major strategy to deepen Eurasian integration. The scholar further suggests that the initiative aims to counterbalance Western geopolitical dominance. Scholars such as F. T. Kukeeva, D. K. Dyusebaev, A. K. Ordabaev and

¹Speech by President Xi Jinping at Nazarbayev University [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rus.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/36777.html> (date of access: 22.01.2025) (in Russ.).

²President Xi Jinping outlined China's policy of developing good neighbourliness and friendship with Indonesia and ASEAN [Electronic resource]. URL: http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2013-10/04/content_30197002.htm (date of access: 22.01.2025) (in Russ.).

³Vision and actions on jointly building Silk Road economic belt and 21st-century Maritime Silk Road [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/1084.html> (date of access: 22.01.2025).

M. A. Utegenova observe that analytical frameworks for studying the BRI are still developing. Nevertheless, two contrasting analytical approaches have emerged. The first interprets the initiative primarily as a means for China to expand political influence through economic power. Conversely, the second emphasises the BRI's global ambitions, highlighting its poten-

tial to deepen economic integration across Asia and Europe.

This study employed a range of research methods, including structural and functional analysis, comparative approaches, observation, and general scientific techniques such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, abstraction, and generalisation.

Results and discussion

A significant challenge facing BRI implementation involves mitigating concerns over perceived Chinese dominance in Eurasia. This apprehension is largely fuelled by China's vigorous investment strategy under the initiative. Indeed, during the inaugural presentation of the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road concept to Indonesia's People's Representative Council in 2013, Xi Jinping immediately stressed that establishing major maritime corridors demands substantial financial commitment, through multibillion-dollar Chinese capital flows. Concurrent targets included raising China–ASEAN bilateral trade to 1 trln US dollars and increasing Chinese investment in ASEAN nearly threefold⁴ by 2020. These economic commitments underlie arguments that advancing BRI objectives consolidates China's regional dominance.

Analysing early expert commentary, historian S. G. Lutzanin notes the consistent invocation of «mutual benefit» in relation to both BRI land and maritime components. Chinese leadership clearly intends this concept to attract participating states. The researcher further contends, based on expert assessments, that the BRI can be interpreted as integral to China's strategy of becoming a superpower, with the revival of the ancient Silk Road functioning as a symbolic restoration of Chinese civilisation's historical stature. The scope of China's strategy extends beyond trade, economic, and investment projects, encompassing currency initiatives aimed at promoting the yuan as an alternative to the US dollar [1].

Overall, the launch of the BRI signalled China's intention to enhance its international influence while simultaneously challenging existing patterns of dominance.

Scholar Dinh Le Hong Zang analyses the initiative through a geopolitical lens, arguing that it directly threatens Western hegemony whilst strengthening China's power and enabling competition with America's pivot to Asia strategy. Consequently, the US and its allies seek ways to counter this challenge [2, p. 116]. In October 2015, the US established the Trans-Pacific partnership (TPP), an agreement designed to reduce trade barriers amongst twelve Asia–Pacific nations. This agreement aimed to establish a free trade area that deliberately excluded China. Its objectives included lowering approxi-

mately 18 000 tariffs on goods traded between members, effectively marginalising a major portion of Chinese exports. The researcher contend the TPP served as a US instrument for China's economic containment: «The TPP is a key component of the US rebalance to Asia strategy, driven by both economic and geopolitical motives, chief among them the deceleration of China's growth» [3, p. 45]. Significantly, all TPP members are key military allies of the US while also maintaining substantial trade relations with China: for three of twelve member states, China is their second-largest trading partner, and for the remaining nine, it is the largest [4, p. 4].

However, shifting towards protectionism and prioritising the domestic market, the US president withdrew from the TPP in January 2017 [3, p. 49]. Wan Juntao observes that the TPP and the BRI represent contrasting approaches to regional economic cooperation in the Asia–Pacific. The former embodies Western exclusivity, whilst the latter reflects Eastern philosophy, prioritising openness and pluralism [3, p. 50].

Diverse theoretical perspectives on the BRI are analysed by Russian scholars F. T. Kukeeva, D. K. Dyusebaev, A. K. Ordabaev and M. A. Utegenova. They argue that concerns regarding Chinese hegemony in Eurasia often reflect scepticism about the underlying objectives of the BRI. They propose that the BRI functions not merely as a geopolitical instrument for reshaping the international order, but also as a potential debt trap for participating states. Western analysts frequently criticise the initiative, despite its ostensible openness and flexibility. Conversely, Chinese scholars emphasise its conceptual framework, presenting this megaproject as an effective unifying strategy. They describe it as an innovative concept establishing novel mechanisms for mutually advantageous cooperation, highlighting its current status, interim achievements, and future prospects [5, p. 112]. This perspective receives strong governmental endorsement within China. Chinese authorities conduct extensive information campaigns to cultivate a favourable perception of the BRI. Since 2017, high-level forums on BRI international cooperation have been convened. These gatherings serve as primary venues for signing agreements, enhancing exchanges, facilitating training, advancing financial integration, and coordinating policy.

⁴Commentary on the speech of President Xi Jinping at the the People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rus.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/36817.html> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

The third of above mentioned forums, held in October 2023, drew leaders from 20 nations and representatives from over 150 states. A defining characteristic was its thematic focus: promoting the consensus that economic interdependence represents a developmental opportunity, not a risk (a direct response to intensified American efforts to reassert Western global dominance) [6, p. 99]. In his keynote address opening the forum, Xi Jinping articulated guidelines and specific measures for the BRI's continued development, including following points:

- China's commitment to enhancing its railway infrastructure towards Europe and establishing a new logistics corridor in Eurasia to improve cargo transportation;
- China's lasting commitment to an open global economy, with trade volumes projected to reach 38 trln US dollars by 2028;
- advancement of the BRI projects, providing of China Development Bank and the Export – Import Bank of China of financing worth 350 bln yuan;
- China's intent to intensify cooperation in critical sectors including sustainable energy, transportation networks, and infrastructure development;
- scientific and technological collaboration between the BRI partner states that will be strengthened through the establishment of up to 100 joint laboratories within five years;
- China's aiming to foster greater civilisational exchange, enhancing cultural and people-to-people contacts;
- receiving by the projects operating under the principles of good faith of continued encouragement;
- China's development of cooperative mechanisms in energy, finance, environmental protection, and culture in partnership with BRI member states⁵.

Separately, Xi Jinping's keynote address at the 3rd Belt and road forum articulated China's stance on unilateral sanctions, particularly those imposed by the West. He explicitly rejected policies of economic coercion, reaffirming China's dedication to the BRI's unifying agenda of mutual support and enhanced connectivity. Xi Jinping called for the abandonment of political and ideological confrontation, asserting that such divisions are incompatible with the vision of a shared future for humanity.

Addressing another strategic challenge (potential competition with existing Eurasian economic integration frameworks) the BRI prioritises diversifying continental transport and logistics infrastructure. Project coordination, particularly with the EAEU, is actively pursued. This approach aligns with the 2015 Russia–China

joint statement signed during Xi Jinping's Moscow visit, which clarified that the Silk Road initiative complements rather than conflicts with prior agreements. Both parties acknowledged that the project supports their shared objective of creating an open economic space across Eurasia. Section IV of the statement commits the parties to coordinate regional economic integration processes within the EAEU⁶. This provision initiated negotiations between the EAEU and China, culminating in the May 2018 Agreement on trade and economic cooperation.

Experts suggest that while this agreement established a solid legal foundation, its character was primarily that of a framework, lacking specific binding commitments. Project coordination, particularly at the regional level, has proven challenging, partly due to the Eurasian Economic Commission's constrained mandate. Nevertheless, tangible progress has emerged through bilateral engagement. China has successfully aligned its strategy with national development programmes in key EAEU member states: Kazakhstan's Nurly zhol plan, Uzbekistan's Long-term development strategy until 2035, and Tajikistan's National development strategy until 2030. Belarus–China cooperation exemplifies this, evidenced by their 2017 intergovernmental agreement on cargo transportation and a 2018 memorandum between their respective economics and commerce ministries for joint development through strategic programme integration.

The agreement's preamble explicitly recognises the importance of expanding economic integration across the Asia–Pacific region and Eurasia, highlighting the necessity of linking the EAEU with China's BRI to secure stable trade flows. Eurasian Economic Commission trade minister A. A. Slepnev reports that implementing the agreement's provisions has increased mutual trade and enhanced project connectivity. Indeed, total trade turnover doubled between 2019 and 2023. A. A. Slepnev also notes that both parties now seek to advance cooperation in transport corridor digitalisation, a topic addressed by the Joint commission meeting in Beijing in April 2024. He further stressed that China–EAEU collaboration now extends significantly beyond the current agreement's scope: «Beyond transport, critical areas include digitalisation and climate action, fundamentally driven by technological transformation. These are vital fields where our alignment with China is strong; we are jointly advancing them within BRICS and SCO frameworks to prevent new trade barriers»⁷.

A notable example illustrating the effectiveness of integrating the EAEU and the BRI can be observed

⁵Full text of Xi Jinping's keynote speech at 3rd Belt and road forum for international cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rus.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/news/news/334507.htm> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

⁶Joint statement on deepening partnership between Russia and China [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://newchina.mid.ru/upload/iblock/21d/21d5615ad8e7d0ce327c40447f6b75a0.pdf> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

⁷EAEU jointly with PRC promotes major elements of cooperation in digitalisation and climate at leading international platforms [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eec.eaeunion.org/news/eaes-sovmestno-s-krupneyshikh-mezhdunarodnykh-ploshchadkakh-vazhneyshie-elementy-s/> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

in the cooperative outcomes of 2020. Despite the global pandemic and Western sanctions, trade between EAEU member states and China intensified significantly within the union's market that year. China emerged as the EAEU's dominant external trading partner, capturing 20 % of its foreign trade volume, equivalent to 79 bln US dollars. As noted by V.S. Kovalev, adviser to the Chairman of the Eurasian Economic Commission, this reflects an active shift in EAEU trade flows away from the historically dominant EU market towards China. The EU's share of EAEU trade fell from 46 % in 2015 to approximately 36 %, a substantial 10 % decline. Consequently, China is now the principal trading partner for all EAEU members except Belarus, where Russia holds the largest share [7, p. 18].

The relationship between the BRI and existing regional economic integration projects also requires examination, particularly China's cooperation with ASEAN member states. Xi Jinping declared China's intention to collaborate with ASEAN on the initiative when he first introduced 21st-century the Maritime Silk Road to the international community in 2013. By then, China and ASEAN had maintained strong relations for over two decades, especially in trade and economics. The BRI catalysed a new phase of cooperation. ASEAN members promptly endorsed the initiative, motivated by their shared ambition to deepen integration and establish what China termed a «community of common destiny» in October 2013. During a Southeast Asian visit that month, Xi Jinping stated that future ASEAN relations should prioritise building this community alongside the Maritime Silk Road [8, p. 11]. Consequently, infrastructure development and trade facilitation became central cooperative priorities.

Chinese scholar Wang Leping observes that ASEAN members such as Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, and Singapore strongly advocate 21st-century the Maritime Silk Road initiative. Conversely, infrastructure development for this maritime corridor faces significant obstacles in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam, primarily due to territorial disputes and internal ethnic conflicts. Malaysia adopts a more cautious stance towards China's initiative, citing domestic political concerns and fears over escalating public debt. Furthermore, Wang Leping notes that Southeast Asian academic and media discourse often perceives the BRI's conceptual framework as underdeveloped, resulting in limited comprehension of its objectives [8, p. 11].

Competition between the BRI and pre-existing regional integration projects is evident not only among international organisations but also at the level of individual states. For example, Mongolia introduced its strategy «Steppe road» in 2014, proposing five distinct transport and trade development schemes to capitalise

on its geography. Politically, this initiative represents Mongolia's attempt to position itself within evolving Eurasian integration dynamics. However, its success remains contingent on Russian and Chinese cooperation, given Mongolia's reliance on their shared transport network for mineral exports. Recognising this interdependence, Chinese officials have frequently emphasised aligning the BRI and strategy «Steppe road» within their broader Eurasian infrastructure strategy.

Similarly, Indonesia proposed its project «Maritime axis of the world» in 2014, linking the Indian and Pacific oceans. President Joko Widodo justified this initiative by citing the geopolitical and geo-economic shift from the West to East Asia, where Indonesia holds a strategic geographical position. This reflects Indonesia's ambition to emerge as a major maritime power. Yet, this goal confronts substantial challenges, including the geographical fragmentation of its archipelago and the critical need for foreign investment. At the November 2014 APEC summit, Indonesian president invited foreign investors to participate in the project «Maritime axis of the world». China showed the greatest interest, as it was already implementing its 21st-century Maritime Silk Road objectives. Beijing proposed that Indonesia integrate these strategically complementary projects, and Jakarta readily accepted this cooperation, particularly given China's substantial investment in marine infrastructure development.

In June 2024, during an official state visit to Kazakhstan, South Korean president Yoon Suk-Yeol announced the launch of the K-Silk Road initiative, the country's first diplomatic strategy tailored for Central Asia. The term «road» encompasses core areas of cooperation: resources, development assistance, strengthened partnerships, and deeper bilateral relations. Under the K-Silk Road, South Korea aims to expand cooperation with each Central Asian nation. For instance, collaboration with Kazakhstan focuses on the energy sector, with Kyrgyzstan on water resources and tourism, and with Turkmenistan on construction.

Current relations have reached significant levels. Bilateral trade between South Korea and Kazakhstan alone exceeds 1 bln US dollars. Approximately 700 Korean companies currently invest in Kazakhstan, creating employment opportunities, advancing industrial development, and modernising infrastructure. During June 2024 meeting with his Kazakh counterpart, Yoon Suk-Yeol announced plans to elevate bilateral ties to an enhanced partnership level through the K-Silk Road initiative. Similar commitments were made during subsequent presidential visits to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan⁸.

Political disputes continue to impede the BRI's implementation in certain regions. A significant example is the enduring Indo-Pakistani conflict in South Asia.

⁸The Korean Silk Road: results of the South Korean president's visit to Central Asia [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eurasiatoday.ru/korejskij-sheikovyj-put-itogi-vizita-prezidenta-yuzhnoj-korei-v-tsentrالنyuy-azyu/> (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).

Since the partition of British India in 1947, recurring disputes, primarily over Kashmir [9, p. 47], have hindered fuller cooperation with Pakistan under the BRI. Territorial constraints impede the development of the China–Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC), a project valued at 75 bln US dollars [10, p. 69]. Economist S. N. Kamenev observes that China prioritises CPEC within its broader initiative, motivated not only by long-standing Sino-Pakistani relations but also by Pakistan's strategic geography. Situated at the convergence of South Asia, Central Asia, the Far East, and parts of Southeast Asia, Pakistan serves as a crucial network hub for the Silk Road [10, p. 70].

India views the deepening strategic partnership between these two nuclear-armed states with apprehension, perceiving it as intensifying Indo-Pakistani tensions. New Delhi remains cautious regarding China's efforts to deepen its economic and political footprint across South Asia and has withheld explicit endorsement of the initiative. Furthermore, India disputes Pakistan's sovereignty over Gilgit-Baltistan, the territory traversed by CPEC. Indian leaders also regard the Chinese-supported modernisation of Gwadar port with concern, mindful of its potential future use as a Chinese military facility [10, p. 71].

In the Middle East, political instability and ongoing civil conflicts complicate the BRI's implementation. This volatility renders the construction of overland transport links with Arab states exceptionally challenging. Consequently, China actively seeks to prevent foreign military intervention in Syria, providing Damascus with financial, military, and diplomatic backing. During an August 2016 meeting in Damascus between Syrian defence minister Fahad Jassim al-Frej and major general Guan Youfei, head of the Office for International Military Cooperation under China's Central Military Commis-

sion, Syrian officials expressed gratitude for Chinese military assistance. Guan Youfei reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to a political resolution of the Syrian crisis and support for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity⁹.

China's engagement in Syria is largely motivated by the country's strategic location. Syria lies at a critical junction on Silk Road routes connecting to Asia minor and Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

China has recently intensified its engagement in the Middle East, evidenced by growing investments in commercial and financial projects with key partners such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. These relationships have strengthened through collaborative efforts that align the BRI with each country's national development programmes. In January 2016, Xi Jinping visited Cairo, headquarters of the Arab League, where he presented China's vision for Middle Eastern politics. In discussions with Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail, he advocated for accelerated bilateral relations, identifying BRI collaboration as a catalyst for stronger ties. Xi Jinping specifically affirmed Chinese support for Egyptian enterprises participating in major joint industrial projects. Sherif Ismail reciprocated, confirming Egypt's commitment to deeper cooperation under the BRI framework. More recent developments demonstrate expanding cooperation between China and the UAE. At the UAE–China Business forum's closing session in September 2024, Chinese Premier Minister Li Qiang urged enterprises from both nations to deepen cooperation and actively capitalise on BRI opportunities¹⁰. Li Qiang highlighted the UAE's strategic position as a transportation hub linking Asia, Europe, and Africa, emphasising its significant potential gains from integrated production and distribution networks¹¹.

Conclusions

The BRI exhibits several distinctive characteristics. Foremost is its explicitly open nature, as articulated in China's foundational policy document «Vision and actions on jointly building the Silk Road economic belt and 21st-century Maritime Silk Road». This document reaffirms China's commitment to engaging all interested countries and international organisations in constructing the Silk Road. It further expresses China's readiness to collaboratively establish timelines, roadmaps, and modalities for participation. Secondly, the initiative champions inclusive cooperation. This is demonstrated through a commitment to tolerance, respect for the diverse developmental paths of partner na-

tions, and peaceful coexistence. Crucially, within the BRI framework, China explicitly adheres to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of participating states and actively supports their efforts to safeguard national sovereignty. Thirdly, mutual benefit is paramount. China seeks to establish equitable conditions for all parties engaging in BRI projects. As highlighted in the analysis, both land-based (belt) and maritime (road) components emphasise reciprocal advantage, which Chinese policymakers view as a catalyst for deepening socio-economic collaboration among participants.

The BRI's extensive scope enhances China's geopolitical standing. Its novel cooperative model with Central

⁹Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense of Syria met with the PLA delegation for international cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: https://russian.news.cn/2016-08/16/c_135601137.htm (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).

¹⁰On the meeting of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail in Cairo in January 2016 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://russian.news.cn/2016-01/21/c_135031114.htm (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).

¹¹Chinese premier urges China, UAE enterprises to seize new cooperation opportunities [Electronic resource]. URL: http://russian.china.org.cn/international/txt/2024-09/13/content_117425353.htm (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).

Asia, Europe, and the Middle East not only strengthens the economic capacity of partner countries but also facilitates a perceived expansion of Chinese political influence across the region. This perception, however, fuels apprehensions among some actors, occasionally manifesting as resistance to potential Chinese dominance in Eurasia. Consequently, a significant implementation challenge involves countering scepticism regarding hegemonic intentions. Strategic competition with the US forms the core of this problem. To mitigate such concerns, China employs multiple strategies, including substantial informational efforts to cultivate a favourable view of the BRI. Platforms like the SCO serve as demonstration cases. Furthermore, China established the dedicated Belt and road forum for international cooperation. The third forum in October 2023 notably advanced the collective stance that economic interdependence represents a developmental opportunity, not solely a risk (a position directly countering US-led efforts to reassert Western supremacy).

Competition with established regional economic integration projects presents another substantial challenge. This paper analyses how the initiative connects with existing frameworks, particularly the EEU and the ASEAN. Regarding integration with the EAEU, both parties agree that the Silk Road initiative enhances rather than obstructs cooperation. It aligns with their shared objective of fostering an open economic space across Eurasia. This commitment was formalised in the May 2018 agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the EAEU and China. The agreement's pre-

amble explicitly acknowledges the significance of expanding economic integration across the Asia-Pacific region and Eurasia. It also emphasises the need to align the EAEU with the BRI for stable trade relations. Within ASEAN, the BRI has catalysed a new phase of collaboration. Most member states swiftly endorsed the initiative, reflecting the bloc's collective ambition for deeper economic integration. However, China's bilateral BRI engagements with specific ASEAN nations reveal divergent perspectives. Infrastructure projects for maritime corridors in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam have encountered obstacles, including sovereignty disputes and internal ethnic tensions. Malaysia adopted a cautious stance, partly due to domestic political dynamics and concerns over public debt complicating joint ventures.

Implementation challenges also arise from regional instability in South Asia and the Middle East. The protracted Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir limits the scope for productive cooperation with Pakistan. Concurrently, India remains wary of the BRI's potential to amplify Chinese economic and political influence in South Asia and has withheld definitive support. In the Middle East, civil conflicts and political volatility across the Arab world present major hurdles, particularly for developing overland transport routes. Despite these complexities, China is expanding its role in the region, partly through profitable commercial and financial investments in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Collaboration with these states increasingly involves aligning BRI objectives with national development programmes.

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