

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA₄)

Topic: Assessing the global consequences of the Belt and Road Initiative

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Position: Co-chair

Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

My name is Sophia Zacharia and I'm currently attending the 10th grade at Pierce- The American College of Greece. The upcoming 8th CSMUN session will be my 6th conference and it is my honor to serve as a Co-Chair of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee. Through MUN you will have the chance to broaden your horizons, advance your way of thinking, make new friendships and create as beautiful memories as my own. In this year's agenda of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee we will be discussing issues such as the question of Puerto Rico and the Belt and Road Initiative. Both of which are of high global significance. In this study guide, I will be covering the global consequences of the Belt and Road Initiative. Since the beginning of this program, multiple countries around the world have been benefited through infrastructure, trade and investment projects. However, the real aim and impact of these projects remain ambiguous, creating multiple debates on a global scale.

Regarding your research, feel free to contact me in case any questions arise. Email: s.zacharia@acg.edu



Sincerely yours,

Sophia Zacharia

Topic Introduction

As globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon and multinational organizations are developing at a rapid pace, economic connectivity between nations worldwide has become prevalent causing foreign policies to become a country's high priority. A great number of countries have become reliant on their capacity to expand trade outside their borders, and international trade routes have been created, influencing the global economy immensely. China, already holding a determinant place in international trade, unveiled in 2013 its new transcontinental foreign policy and ambitious economic program called "One Belt One Road" and later Belt and Road Initiative.¹ This plan aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe via infrastructure and maritime development as well as the economic inclusion of countries in these continents. The Belt and Road Initiative follows the route of the historic Silk Road on both land and sea. The geographical purview of the project is constantly expanding, covering at the moment 71 countries, affecting 65 per cent of the global population and approximately one third of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The cost of the projects is estimated to reach \$1 trillion to \$8 trillion in the following years.²

Due to the vast extension of the Belt and Road Initiative, there is an on-going global discussion over its benefits and consequences on the participant nations. Most importantly, the Initiative has improved trade within the three continents as transportation of goods has become easier through the new trade routes. On the other hand, particularly Less

¹*Belt and Road Initiative* . www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/.

²*Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*. www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/belt-and-road/overview.html.



Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) such as Djibouti, Mongolia and Pakistan, in which China has invested in, will be facing great difficulties in compensating the Chinese debts in the following years. As a result of their incapacity to refund those investments, they have gone under Chinese political influence. However, LEDCs are not the only ones being negatively influenced by the Initiative. Diplomatic tensions between China and the United States of America as well as conflicts within the Chinese borders are two more serious consequences of the BRI³ marking this project as one of the most important matters of our decade.

Definition of key terms

Belt

Belt refers to the overland routes and corridors stretching from Central Asia to Europe.⁴

Road

Road refers to the maritime network of shipping lanes running from China, through Southeast Asia, Africa and all the way to Europe.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the general term for the basic physical systems of a business, region, or nation—for instance, transportation systems, communication networks, sewage, water, and electric systems are all examples of infrastructure.⁵

³Güler, Muhammet Ali. “Pros and Cons of Belt and Road Initiative, Implications for Turkey.” *Daily Sabah*, Daily Sabah, 16 May 2019, www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/05/16/pros-and-cons-of-belt-and-road-initiative-

⁴Kuo, Lily, and Niko Kommenda. “What Is China's Belt and Road Initiative?” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer.



Corruption

Corruption is dishonesty and illegal behavior by people in positions in positions of authority or power.⁶ It is defined also as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.⁷

Trade Route

A trade route is a network of a series of pathways and stoppages used for the commercial transport of cargo. A single trade route consists of long-distance arteries which may be connected in the future to smaller networks of commercial or non-commercial transportation routes in order to allow goods to reach distant regions.⁸

Shipping Lane

A shipping lane is a regularly used route for commercial ships.⁹

Economic Inclusion

The economic inclusion is based on the right to work that every citizen and non-citizen of an area obtains and aims for equal opportunities so as to be economically included in the

⁵ Chappelow, Jim. "Infrastructure Definition." *Investopedia*, Investopedia, 26 Apr. 2020, www.investopedia.com/terms/i/infrastructure.asp.

⁶ "Corruption Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary." *Corruption Definition and Meaning* | *Collins English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/corruption.

⁷ "What Is Corruption?" *Transparency.org*, www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption.

⁸ "Definitions for Trade Routetrade Route." *What Does Trade Route Mean?*, [www.definitions.net/definition/trade route](http://www.definitions.net/definition/trade%20route).

⁹ "Shipping Lane Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary." *Shipping Lane Definition and Meaning* | *Collins English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/shipping-lane.



economic life inside and outside of the domestic borders of their country in any way, including as employers, entrepreneurs and consumers.¹⁰

Economic Corridor

An economic corridor is a route along which people and goods move withholding an important role in the economy¹¹.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

“Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country’s borders in a specific time period.”¹²

Background Information

The historic Silk Road

As previously mentioned, the Belt and Road Initiative is based on the ancient Silk Road, specifically, on the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.¹³ The importance of the Silk Road dating back to the 2nd century BCE up until the 18th century. Its name originated from the major trade item of China in the ancient years, silk, which was exported through the network. Connecting East and West with a series of

¹⁰Bettcher, Kim Eric, and Teodora Eric Mihaylova. *Economic Inclusion: Leveraging Markets and Entrepreneurship to Extend Opportunity*. Center for International Private Enterprise ECONOMICREFORM, 26 May 2015,.

¹¹Petrella, Stephanie. “What Is an Economic Corridor?” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 27 Mar. 2018, reconnectingasia.csis.org/analysis/entries/what-economic-corridor/.

¹²Chappelow, Jim. “Gross Domestic Product (GDP).” *Investopedia*, Investopedia, 1 June 2020, www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gdp.asp.

¹³ “The Belt Road Initiative.” *The New Silk Road Project*, www.thenewsilkroadproject.com/the-new-silk-road.



trade routes passing through present Central Asian countries, the Silk Road withheld a determinant role in the economic, political, religious and cultural interactions of such areas. The Silk Road contributed significantly in the development of several regions some of which are China, Europe, Korea and Japan and in the exchange of knowledge and ideas between them. The significance of the Silk Road for China during numerous centuries led to the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to have a similar impact on the whole world.

Aim of the BRI

In 2013, the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a plan that would broaden the economic and political influence of China globally. According to the official outline of the project, the Belt and Road Initiative intends to connect Asia, Africa and Europe by connectivity networks and by creating partnerships among these regions in parallel with promoting sustainable development.¹⁴ The BRI is a global project, however, it is focused mainly on countries in Eastern Europe, Eastern Africa, Middle East and Asia, regions obtaining several emerging markets. The selection of the continents in which the BRI will expand was not random. First of all, China is a part of Asia meaning that the whole project was targeting the whole continent from the beginning. But Europe and Africa were chosen for different reasons. Europe withholds an important role in the international economy and has a beneficial geographical position for the development of trade. On the other hand, Africa can offer many benefits to the Chinese government. African countries are usually the “victims” of the debt-trap diplomacy. Not having the economic capacity to repay those debts, they fall under China’s political

¹⁴ “Belt and Road Initiative.” *Belt and Road Initiative*, www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/.



influence. Being dependent on China, African countries will vote according to the Chinese policies within the United Nations and its organs. As Africa has not been a popular continent for investments in the past, Chinese investments do not face many reactions but are wanted by the African governments.

Cooperation Priorities

The BRI is based on five cooperation priorities that every country wishing to be involved in the projects should abide by. These major priorities are structured to advance cross-national as well as regional cooperation between the participant states. First and foremost, it is essential for participant countries to be promoting intergovernmental cooperation and to preserve communication with other states regarding their policy coordination. Infrastructure connectivity is also important for such projects as well as unimpeded trade meaning the reduction of trade barriers and the economic inclusion of the region. Furthermore, financial integration and people's connectivity are two more priorities of the project intending to coordinate the monetary policies of the countries as well as to exchange cultural and academic characteristics and knowledge.

Benefits and Opportunities of the Initiative

Improving connectivity and trade

The Belt and Road Initiative focuses on creating new networks of transportation and improving infrastructure in Asia, Africa and Europe. Consequently, trade routes are amplified, and new shipping lanes are created, making trade faster and more efficient. The Chinese market, which has been inadequately accessible by European and African customers, will become attainable in the next decades. As the international economic activity increases and trade routes are created making the shipping of goods faster,



countries' GDP will increase according to their participation in the international market. Moreover, the connectivity with China will be benefiting many countries after the end of the Initiative, as political relations between China and the participant countries will be created. As China is one of the P5 member states, meaning that it obtains the power in the Security Council and generally is more powerful than other countries of the UN, its political support is important for other countries.

The economic inclusion of participant nations

By the establishment of ports and transportation facilities, countries apart of the Initiative will have the opportunity to be economically included and to develop trade routes outside their domestic region. Due to the great geopolitical area that this project covers; BRI countries' have almost doubled their influence over global trade allowing China to have a substantial share of those trades. Many BRI nations have inadequate infrastructure as well as economic and political instability resulting in insufficient trade transactions. Associate members will benefit if the initiative is found to be successful boosting their economic activity and achieving full integration to the global economy as well as improving their infrastructure and living standards in the process.

Consequences and Risks of the Initiative

"Debt Trap Diplomacy"

Even if the Belt and Road Initiative is presented by the Chinese government as an ambitious economic plan aiming to connect three large continents, there are many concerns about the real nature of these projects. It is believed by many that through the Initiative China intends to expand its geopolitical and economic power. LEDCs facing economic instability for many years, are struggling financially even more after the



unsustainable debts of the Initiative¹⁵. Due to their incapacity to repay those debts from those investments, their dependency on China increases greatly. Consequently, the loss of strategic assets, the creation of obstacles for their economic development or even the loss of sovereignty can be possible results. Strategic assets of such countries, such as their resources and their port access rights, get obtained by China, which turns its economic access to political. For instance, the government of Sri Lanka, is unable to repay its debt to China for the new port built in the city of Hambantota, leading them to sign in 2017 a 99-year lease for its use by China, possibly used for military purposes. Djibouti's debt has increased to 80% higher than the country's GDP, as a result of the country's financial distress; the only Chinese overseas military base is placed in the region¹⁶.

Diplomatic tensions between the US and China

The United States and China have a long history of economic conflict. In 2018, Donald Trump's administration began to question China's trade practices and imposed tariffs and trade barriers to the Chinese products, leading to the current trade war between two of the biggest economies. The trade war between the two most economically powerful countries in the world does not only affect them but puts also in danger the health of the global economy¹⁷. However, due to the great differentiation between the two countries' policies, the Belt and Road Initiative will probably escalate the conflict. The President of the U.S. has been advocating towards the promotion of domestic manufacturing, leading to the policy of the country to be more "self-centered" focusing on the trade within its domestic borders. Thus, the BRI is a policy Donald Trump opposes as the policies he

¹⁵Davidson, Helen. "Warning Sounded over China's 'Debtbook Diplomacy'." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 15 May 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/15/warning-sounded-over-chinas-debtbook-diplomacy.

¹⁶Green, Mark. "China's Debt Diplomacy." *Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, 25 Apr. 2019, foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/25/chinas-debt-diplomacy/.

¹⁷"US-China Trade War." *PIIE*, 4 Feb. 2020, www.piie.com/research/trade-investment/us-china-trade-war.



supports are more isolationist in nature. On the contrary, the Chinese trade policy focuses on external trade and aims to develop economically in a global state. As mentioned previously, the Belt and Road Initiative will benefit greatly the economic status of China and it will expand in three continents. In 2017, China's GDP slightly surpassed USA's but this difference could grow over time due to the Initiative. Thus, the economic and political power gain for China through the project is a recognized threat to the United States even if they are not directly affected. Consequently, the tensions between the two nations could be possibly intensified in the future.

Xinjiang re-education camps

Xinjiang, a province in Western China, is one of the most heavily policed and monitored places in the world in which the Uighurs, a Muslim ethnic minority, are living. Local authorities are holding hundreds of Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in re-education camps. These camps have been alleged as internment camps, meaning that prisoners are interned without trial or charges against them, together with being abused physically and psychologically. The government justifies this situation by blaming the Uighurs for being an Islamic extremist group. However, there is another more important factor to be considered. The region of Xinjiang is of high significance for the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative due to some elements originating from the area and its position along many infrastructure projects¹⁸. Due to the fact there is limited transparency in China, there is no certainty over this issue and all these remain allegations for the time being. However, it is important to keep in mind the possible scenarios and accusations against China and the potential impact that increased economic activity in Xinjiang could have on the Uighur population.

¹⁸Ma, Alexandra. "This Map Shows a Trillion-Dollar Reason Why China Is Oppressing More than a Million Muslims." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 23 Feb. 2019, www.businessinsider.com/map-explains-china-crackdown-on-uighur-muslims-in-xinjiang-2019-2.



Political tension within the participant countries' borders

Except from the global political conflicts created due to the Initiative, the domestic policies of countries have been greatly influenced as well. In many states, the BRI withholds an important role in regional politics. Politician used their approach to the project as a way to attract voters and public support. In countries in which there is high need for infrastructure, politicians use the BRI as a measure to promote development and growth to their state. However, in multiple countries, especially Least Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), the Initiative is considered a threatening plan that can lead to high debt and thus, the public opinion supports politicians against it. On a more general note, its part in foreign politics can possibly be considered negative as China seems to have an impact on other countries' political activity.

Major countries and organizations involved

China

The president of China, Xi Jinping, announced in 2013 the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative aiming for economic development in Asia, Africa and Europe. The BRI will possibly offer China many economic and political gains. The Chinese markets will expand as trade will become easier through the new trade routes. Moreover, Chinese companies that have been struggling in the past will develop as they will have the opportunity to participate in the infrastructure projects. However, the benefits for China are not only those presented. The Chinese government could be able to influence partner countries' policies due to their Chinese economic debt. Moreover, China will gain access to resources such as



oil and gas and will no longer be dependent on trade routes such as the Strait of Malacca from which they receive their main supplies of oil and gas.

Pakistan

Pakistan is an important participant nation of the Belt and Road Initiative. In April 2015, during Xi Jinping's visit in Pakistan, the new activities in the region were announced as part of the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor". The plan began in 2017 and will finish by 2030 with estimated costs up to \$62 billion. The aim of the project is to build a "mechanism for sustainable economic growth". However, India has been against the creation of the Corridor. This Economic Corridor is expected to be running through Kashmir, a region between India and Pakistan claimed by both of the nations. India is objecting the corridor and holds a negative approach towards the Initiative as it views the situation as a violation of its sovereignty. Pakistan has been facing a financial crisis for many years which escalated due to the Chinese debts. Due to these issues, the BRI has been causing devastation in the aforementioned regions.

European Union

The Belt and Road Initiative was announced in 2013, twenty years after the European Union introduced its new project aiming for the creation of a transport corridor connecting Europe with China across the Caucasus and Central Asia. Consequently, the EU and China have the same goal to re-integrate the Eurasian Continent after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the moment, there are 11 states of the EU participating in the Initiative. However, there has been an ongoing discussion within the EU about the impact of China on the region. Even if many states are in need of infrastructure development, the questions about EU's security after the collaboration with China are still in place.



Greece

The Piraeus port project is part of the Belt and Road Initiative, making Greece a participant member of the program. This project started in 2016 when a big part of the port was bought by a Chinese company and has had a positive impact on the state. The expansion and development of the main Greek port has restored its reputation on a global scale and it's a great example of the collaboration between Greece and China. The construction of the port has created approximately 10.000 jobs, contributing greatly in a decrease of the high unemployment rate from which Greece has been struggling for many years. However, in 2017, Greece was one of the countries of the EU against the Initiative criticizing China over human right violations. Consequently, the Greek position towards the BRI wasn't clear for many years. In August 2018, Greece became a participant state of the Initiative aiming to strengthen its position in the Mediterranean Sea.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The IMF is an active organization providing countries with advice and support to achieve economic stability and growth. As the BRI is an important economic plan for the 21st century, the organization has made efforts to create frameworks according to which the BRI can include participant countries. The IMF recognizes the opportunities that can be created by the implementation of the projects and urges countries to participate in the Initiative. By discussions and analysis of the project, the IMF wishes to help multiple countries become part of the BRI and provides its guidance for an efficient participation. There has not been any discussion over the possible consequences, however, through the participation of the IMF in the project, it is likely that they will be avoided.



Timeline of Events

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <u>November 2013</u> | The OBOR was announced by China's President Xi Jinping. |
| <u>April 2015</u> | The "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" project was announced by Xi Jinping in Pakistan. |
| <u>August 2016</u> | The acquisition of Piraeus port by a Chinese company. |
| <u>May 2017</u> | The first Belt and Road Forum took place. |
| <u>July 2018</u> | Donald Trump began the trade war between the United States and China. |
| <u>March 2019</u> | Italy became the first country of the G7 to join the BRI. |
| <u>April 2019</u> | The second Belt and Road Forum. |

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Due to the fact that the project has not reached an end, there are not many previous solutions targeting the consequences that were analyzed previously. Furthermore, any



negative effects of the project may take place after several decades leading to a great uncertainty in regards to their prevention. Thus, some reactions of countries can be considered as attempts to limit the geopolitical power gained by China and the consequences on some participant states.

Blue Dot Network

In November 2019, Australia, USA and Japan announced the “Blue Dot Network”, a multi-stakeholder initiative aiming to connect governments, the private sectors and civil society so as to promote high quality infrastructure development. It is believed that this program is a response from the West to the Belt and Road Initiative¹⁹.

Relevant UN Resolutions, Events, Treaties and Legislation

As the Belt and Road Initiative was introduced recently to the rest of the world and has been affecting mostly China since its creation, there are not many resolutions regarding this project. The United Nations has not acted upon this issue as the consequences are now starting to appear as more and more countries are taking part in the Initiative. It recently became a topic of discussion and will likely gain more significance in the following years.

The Second Belt and Road Forum

The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is an economical and political forum. The first one took place in May 2017 in Beijing with 130 countries and 70 organizations attending the event. The Second BaRF was held in April 2019 in Beijing and 40 country leaders participated. The purpose of these two events was to promote international cooperation and create a strong partnership network between the

¹⁹“Like an Episode of Utopia’: What Is the Blue Dot Network?” *ABC News*, 9 Nov. 2019, www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-09/blue-dot-network-explainer-us-china-belt-and-road/11682454.



governments. In the Second Belt and Road Forum, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations, expressed his opinion towards the Belt and Road Initiative²⁰. In his speech, he mentioned three reasons justifying the importance of the project. Firstly, the BRI can contribute greatly in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as its five cooperation priorities are directly connected to those goals and can have great influence on a global scale. Moreover, the financial opportunities provided by the Initiative can help the LEDCs in accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals. Lastly, as the project promotes green action and sustainable infrastructure, it holds a significant role in handling climate change.

Possible solutions

There are plenty of measures that could be taken to avoid the possible consequences of the Initiative. It is crucial for every country to be able to form their policies towards the Initiative according to their national priorities in order to avoid large debts created by expensive constructions. Analyzing the risks and opportunities of such projects can be a possible measure taken. It is also essential for countries willing to participate in the Initiative, to form policies according to their alliances in order to avoid more intense diplomatic tensions between their allies.

Moreover, providing the public with information about the domestic projects of the BRI and increasing BRI firm transparency so as to eliminate corruption, violation of human rights and exploitation of workers with the intent of achieving the best result possible.

²⁰ “United Nations Poised to Support Alignment of China's Belt and Road Initiative with Sustainable Development Goals, Secretary-General Says at Opening Ceremony | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/press/en/2019/sgsm19556.doc.htm.



Clarifying China's obligations during the project to not violate the participant countries' sovereignty and ensuring international financial aid in cases of incapability to pay the Chinese debts causing domestic economic instability are two other solutions to the topic. In order for the aforementioned solutions to be feasible, the approval of China for monitoring its actions and decisions as well as the participation of international organizations such as the IMF, are essential.

Through negotiations and discussions within the UN, the political tensions between China and the US or any other state opposing to the Initiative are necessary steps to be taken. As the UN has as its main purpose to maintain international peace, it obtains the tools to create such discussions and limit the future political conflicts.

Due to the fact that any committee of the General Assembly cannot impose measures to China regarding the Uighur issue, only suggestions and proposals can be discussed to urge China to allow investigations within its borders. In case these negotiations are allowed, international organizations and UN organs should be able to contribute in restoring stability in the region. Human rights' experts can monitor the human rights' violations and later on the UN as a whole can work upon solutions.

Lastly, as an important characteristic of the BRI is its sustainable nature, it is crucial for the international community to guarantee its sustainable development and purposes by observing and analyzing the outcome of the project and thus ensuring its sustainability with regards to the environment, pollution and handling of resources, as well as its impact on people.

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