



# The Road to a Fair International Order

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# BRIQ

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## Principles of Publication

At a time when US ambitions for a unipolar world order have lost their appeal, a new order is taking shape thanks to the multipolarization of world politics and the acceleration of cooperation between developing countries, rejecting the globalism of imperialist states. Under these conditions, the new agenda of global cooperation should respond to the needs and aspirations of developing countries seeking joint development and solidarity under the guidance of public-driven projects. In particular, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) -put forward in 2013 by Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China- provides a suitable opportunity and a sound foundation for the implementation of this new agenda of global cooperation.

BRI is an epoch-making move to re-implement the concept of the Silk Road, which dates back 2,000 years, to a time when China was immensely contributing to global prosperity and the development of trade and cooperation. The revival of this concept entails a much more comprehensive approach that also incorporates rail and sea transport, and digital systems.

BRI proposes to bring together over 60 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America –together accounting for nearly half of the world's gross domestic product– for prosperity and development at the initiative of China. Unlike the Western-centered world order, BRI seeks peaceful collaboration for improving global trade and production towards common goals for humanity. It firmly rejects crude imperialist exploitation. Two thousand years ago, the Silk Road was a conduit for the flow of gunpowder, spices, silk, compasses and paper to the world. Today, it offers artificial intelligence, quantum computers, new energy and material technologies, and space-age visions to developing countries. In addition, the New Silk Road provides incentives and opportunities for the development and implementation of bio-economic schemes in stakeholder countries against the threat of climate change and other environmental threats that bring the entire ecosystem to the brink of extinction.

Turkey has a significant role –real and potential– in accelerating South-South cooperation. Turkey is conveniently located as Asia's farthest outpost to the West. It assumes a critical position as a pivotal country on BRI's North-South and East-West axes. However, China's development and BRI's contribution to the future of humanity have remained to a large extent underrecognized and superficially evaluated in Turkish academia, media, and politics. This is mainly because Turkey's academics, media professionals, and policy makers have been observing China using Western sources. In the same manner, China and BRI's other potential partners have been viewing Turkey through a Western lens.

BRIQ has committed itself to developing an in-depth understanding of the present era, with a particular emphasis on the new opportunities and obstacles on the road to the New Asian Century.

BRIQ assumes the task of providing direct exchange of views and information among Chinese and Turkish academics, intellectuals, and policy makers. In the meantime, this journal will serve as a platform to bring together the intellectual accumulation of the whole world, especially developing countries, on the basis of the Belt and Road Initiative, which presents a historic opportunity for the common future of humanity.

BRIQ is also devoted to publishing research and other intellectual contributions that underline the transformative power of public-driven economies, where popular interests are upheld as the basic principle, ahead of individual profit. The fundamental tasks of BRIQ are to demonstrate how BRI can contribute to the implementation of this public-driven model, and to help potential BRI partners -including Turkey- to realize their real potential.

BRIQ stands for the unity of humanity and a fair world order. It will therefore be a publication for the world's distinguished intellectuals, especially those from Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas: the defenders of a new civilization rising from Asia on the basis of peace, fraternity, cooperation, prosperity, social benefit and common development.

## Submission Guidelines

BRIQ features a broad range of content, from academic articles to book reviews, review essays, interviews, news reports, and feature articles.

The Editorial Board can issue calls for papers for special issues and invite authors to contribute manuscripts; however, it also welcomes unsolicited submissions.

Submissions are invited in English or Turkish. All submissions are to include a short biography (150-word limit) and should be sent as Microsoft Word attachments to [briq@briqjournal.com](mailto:briq@briqjournal.com) Articles or other content that have been previously published or are under review by other journals will not be considered for publication.

BRIQ follows American Psychology Association (APA style, 6th edition, <https://www.apastyle.org>) and uses American English spelling.

BRIQ applies a double-blind review process for all academic articles.

Academic articles should be between 5000 and 9000 words in length, including abstracts, notes, references, and all other content. Please supply a cover page that includes complete author information, and a fully anonymized manuscript that also contains an abstract (200-word limit) and five keywords.

Book reviews should not exceed 1,000 words; review essays covering two or more works can be up to 3,000 words.

News reports consisting of brief analyses of news developments should not exceed 1,500 words; feature articles combining reporting and analysis can be up to 3,500 words.

Please contact the Editorial Board for interview proposals.

# EDITORIAL

On the verge of the Second World War, the Great Revolutionary Mustafa Kemal Atatürk used the following words to stress how the world would be shaped in the new age: "Look at the sun rising from the East. I see the rising of Eastern nations as I see the break of dawn today. Colonialism and imperialism will disappear from the face of the earth, and they will be replaced by an era of harmony and cooperation between nations, in which discrimination with respect to color, religion and ethnicity will not exist."<sup>\*</sup>

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks the beginning of the East's rebellion and victories against imperialism. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, developing countries from West Asia to Far Asia and from Latin America to Africa are rising to demand a just international order.

As the East develops and progresses, the West is increasingly shrinking and strained. With its position as an intercontinental bridge connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa via the Mediterranean, and thanks to its thousand-year old state tradition and its vast cultural heritage, Turkey will play a key role in the construction of this new order. Moreover, Turkey experiences a cycle in which the necessary conditions and opportunities have emerged for this potential to be actualized.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Silk Road, the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), Turkey comes together not only with China but also with the rest of Asia and with Africa and Latin America. Turkey is starting to take its honorable place among the emerging Asian nations and getting the opportunity to establish equal relationships with European countries and the United States of America (USA).

Standing out for its aspirations for common prosperity and shared development, the BRI is developing a new kind of cooperation model that has the potential to shape the world order beyond the economic benefits it provides to the participating countries.

BRIQ would like to invite academics, researchers, writers, artists, decision-makers and the business community from all across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe to discuss this opportunity. BRIQ is a platform that is supposed to ensure that intellectual knowledge produced in Turkey will make a prominent contribution to the developing world's effort to establish a just order. Indeed, BRIQ will be the voice and breath of Turkey as much as of other developing countries.

We are ambitious. Because we believe in Turkey and its people, and in the developing world's history-making potential.

**FIKRET AKFIRAT**

Editor-in-Chief

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<sup>\*</sup>Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 26 March 1933, Saying to the Egyptian Ambassador Ahmet Remzi, (The Complete Works of Atatürk, v.26, p. 144; World, 20 December 1954, Number: 1007, p.1,7)

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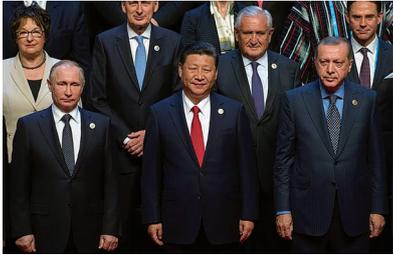
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# Building a Fair World Order in a Post-American Age



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**EFE CAN GÜRCAN**

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## ABSTRACT

Much has changed over the last three decades since George H. W. Bush's call for a so-called "New World Order". US leadership in the post-Cold War era has not only failed to provide global stability; it has also sharpened socioeconomic inequalities on a global scale. This situation has greatly facilitated the emergence of a multipolar world order. In political science, "world order" describes a system of global governance that draws its legitimacy from certain standards of fairness for global cooperation. The present article proposes to revisit the notion of world order from the lens of Rawlsian political philosophy on fairness. The aim is to assess how the American world order has addressed fundamental fairness issues and to understand how the newly emerging alternatives to this order tackle the challenge of fairness in a post-American age. The article uses process tracing to advance a threefold argument. First, US global leadership cannot maintain reciprocity and mutual trust as the driving values of global governance. Instead, developing countries are taking the lead in forging alternative values and principles for fairer cooperation. Second, US global leadership continues to rely on exploitative and coercive practices such as neoliberalism and military interventionism, which arrest international development. In contrast, contending countries in the developing world emphasize the practice of peaceful and sustainable human development. Third, and relatedly, US global leadership cannot prevent the crisis of its own institutional arrangements. This crisis is met by the initiatives of developing countries to create alternative institutions of global governance.

**Keywords:** fairness; global governance; international cooperation; military interventionism; neoliberalism; world order

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MUCH HAS CHANGED OVER THE LAST three decades since President George H. W. Bush's call for a so-called "New World Order". During a speech in the runup of the First Gulf War, Bush had declared the birth of a US-led new world order, which would be "freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace" (Bush, 1990, par. 6). He asserted America's credibility and reliability, urging that "there is no substitute for American leadership" (Bush, 1990, par. 9). In another speech, Bush went on to designate the Gulf War as America's first successful test on the path to the New World Order (Bush, 1991). As such, he made no secret of the fact that the American dream of a new world order was to be built on belligerence and the negation of basic global justice principles, which were in fact inherited from the long history of Western colonialism and

imperialism. History shows that the vast majority of major wars since the birth of capitalism – including the two world wars – were initiated by Western powers, which wanted to establish a world order of their own making (Ray, 1999). The history of the US does not diverge from that of other Western powers. It is therefore no surprise that "the largest number of actual wars involved the US, either directly or by proxy" since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ray, 1999, p. 1369). Bush's belligerent rhetoric, then, was not exceptional by US standards and has been adopted into continued practice by succeeding administrations.

The term "world order" was not coined by George H. W. Bush. Nor does it necessarily convey a negative meaning. Quite the contrary; its intended meaning expresses the ways in which global prosperity and stability can be sustained through international cooperation. A widely accepted defi



notion of “world order” in political science is provided by Anne Marie Slaughter: “a system of global governance that institutionalizes cooperation and sufficiently contains conflict such that all nations and their peoples may achieve greater peace and prosperity, improve their stewardship of the earth, and reach minimum standards of human dignity” (2004, p. 26). On this view, world order is portrayed as a value-laden notion that draws its legitimacy from certain standards of fairness governing global cooperation (Slaughter, 2004). “Legitimacy” can be understood in the present context as “the degree to which institutions are valued for themselves and considered right and proper” (Lipset, 1959, p. 71).

Looking more closely, one can see that the standards of legitimacy encapsulated in Slaughter’s definition strongly resonate with the notion of peaceful and sustainable human development, the underlying principles of which are deeply rooted in modern political philosophy on fairness (Brock & Moellendorf, 2005). For example, according to philosophers working in the Rawlsian tradition (e.g. Bertoldi, 2009; Kokaz, 2005), the basis of fair international cooperation primarily lies in a state of mutual agreement on the benefits and burdens of

cooperative arrangements. John Rawls’s work draws on the traditions of political liberalism and distributive justice to argue that social justice should primarily address the basic structure of society as it relates to education, taxation, and basic liberties. In Rawls’s lexicon, the re-ordering of society’s basic institutions should aim at ensuring “fair equality of opportunity”. Socioeconomic inequalities should be relieved “to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged members of society” – without, however, compromising individual liberties (Rawls, 1999, pp. 63, 72). Rawls has been criticized for his overemphasis on individuals rather than collectivities as the main unit of analysis, and also for overlooking global justice issues. In his later work, he attempted to engage with global justice by proceeding from the assumption that distributive justice does not apply to the international context. Rawls reasoned that national poverty and inequalities stem from the political culture of each nation rather than such external factors as colonialism and imperialism. As will be discussed below, contemporary interpretations of Rawls’s work in the context of international relations tend to transcend his individualistic and culturalist approach by taking a more radical direction (Chatterjee, 2011).

In Nancy Bertoldi’s (2009, p. 64) Rawlsian interpretation, “certain global circumstances and cross-border cooperative practices call for the regulation of the inequalities they generate in light of principles of global distributive justice”. According to her, such regulation requires the creation and sustenance of fair institutional arrangements based on the principle of reciprocity; that is, a mutual acknowledgement of the underlying principles of cooperation (Bertoldi, 2009). In other words, the constituents of a fair world order should come in the first place to a reciprocal understanding that the rights and duties of cooperation are fairly distributed (Principle 1, or P1) (Kokaz, 2005). Additionally,

no arbitrary distinctions should be made between the involved parties in the implementation of these rights and duties (Rawls, 1999, p. 5). In particular, a fair world order should allow no room for the international exploitation and coercion of weaker or smaller communities. On the contrary, these communities should be provided with adequate opportunities for political self-determination and social justice. In certain accounts, the scope of social justice is extended to ecological justice (Principle 2, or P2) (Dahbour, 2005; Pogge, 2005; Risse, 2005; Sterba, 2005). Finally, and relatedly, moral reciprocity encapsulated in the principles of mutual agreement and equal treatment is to be protected by a strong institutional setting that includes effective regulatory mechanisms (Principle 3, or P3) (Kokaz, 2005; Risse, 2005).

**"...developing countries are taking the lead in forging alternative values and principles for fairer cooperation."**

This article resurveys the notion of world order through the lens of Rawlsian political philosophy on fairness. The aims are to assess how the American world order has addressed fundamental fairness issues and to understand how the newly emerging alternatives to this order tackle the challenge of fairness in a post-American age. This article uses process tracing to advance a threefold argument with reference to the three underlying principles of fair global governance derived from Rawlsian philosophy: mutual agreement on the terms of cooperation (P1), equal treatment of all the parties involved with a social-justice perspective (P2), and institutional regulation overseeing the previously agreed rights and duties as well as the availability of opportunities for greater social justice (P3). This article's first argument is that US global leadership cannot maintain reciprocity and mutual trust (P1) as the driving

values of global governance. Instead, developing countries are taking the lead in forging alternative values and principles for fairer cooperation. Second, US global leadership relies on exploitative and coercive practices (P2) such as neoliberalism and military interventionism, which arrest international development. In contrast, contending countries in the developing world emphasize the notion of peaceful and sustainable human development. Third, and relatedly, US global leadership cannot prevent the crisis of its own institutional arrangements (P3). This is met by the initiative of developing countries to create alternative institutions of global governance.

A few words are in order regarding process tracing as the methodological guideline of this article. This method heavily relies on logical reasoning and evidence gathering. Therefore, the research process is structured just as in detective work: piecing the clues together with reference to suspects' means, motives, preferences, perception and opportunity to have committed the crime in question (Vennesson, 2008; Bennett, 2010; Collier, 2011). The "interpretivist" mode of process tracing (Vennesson, 2008) allows for a more flexible narrative structure without compromising empirical robustness. The combination of this interpretivist mode with an actor-centered approach is very useful for international relations and strategic analysis, which both involve understanding the preferences, goals, values, and perceptions of global actors (Gürcan, 2019e).

The next section of this article will study the American world order, with special focus on economic and military issues as the mainstays of US global leadership. The focus will then shift to the emerging alternatives to America's disintegrating world order, featuring an overview of global governance mechanisms in a post-American age: the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),

the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

### Eroding American Leadership in Global Governance: Economic and Military Issues

The explosion of the US subprime bubble in 2008 triggered a worldwide economic crisis that shook the American world order to its very foundations. In the United States, increasing rates of unemployment and homelessness eventually culminated in one of the worst economic crises in US history. An important consequence of this crisis was the serious erosion of the credibility of America's global economic leadership (Gürcan, 2019a; 2019b). The 2008 crisis also paved the way for the occupation movements of 2011 (the largest popular mobilization in recent US history), and brought socialism – and, later, the far right – into the mainstream of US politics (Ross, 2016). The waves from this crisis were also strongly felt in Europe, with a sudden disappearance of economic growth, accompanied by rising unemployment levels (Gürcan 2019a; 2019b). Germany, Italy, and Ireland saw the most drastic economic contraction, with respective rates of 5.62%, 5.48%, and 4.57% in 2009. In 2011, Greece's slump of over 9% shook the entire European economy. In 2013, unemployment levels reached record highs, soaring to over 26% in Greece and Spain. In the same year, youth unemployment rates were over 57% in Spain, 39% in Italy, 37% in Portugal, and no less than 58% in Greece (World Bank, 2016). In the final analysis, the Euro-American economic crisis revealed the exhaustion of US-patented neoliberal policies, and their cost to the Rawlsian principle of social justice (P2). "Neoliberalism" is understood here as a set of economic prescriptions that includes trade and financial liberalization, privatization, and

deregulated labor markets (Gürcan & Mete, 2017; 2019). In Europe, as with the US, the crisis of neoliberalism produced a reaction in the form of the rise of far-right movements and anti-austerity protests, as well as historic increases in the frequency of general strikes, in countries such as Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Greece. This protracted socioeconomic crisis was accompanied by another crisis, this time of a political nature, which helped to paralyze the European integration process: the Brexit (British Exit) referendum result in 2016. As a result, the EU has lost much of its attractiveness as a role model for global governance. This has undermined the Western-centric world order, at the expense of the principle of institutional regulation (P3) (Gürcan, 2019a; 2019b).

The crisis of global economic governance was particularly noticeable in the 2017–2018 NAFTA dispute, during which the United States insisted on renegotiating NAFTA and threatened to withdraw from the agreement. Regardless of the US attitude towards NAFTA, one should remember the destructive outcomes of the agreement for Mexico, where NAFTA neoliberalism led to the destruction of the industrial sector (Gürcan, 2019a). In the 20<sup>th</sup> year of NAFTA's implementation, Mexico's performance in annual real GDP growth per capita ranked 18<sup>th</sup> among 20 Latin American countries. Agricultural liberalization under the NAFTA regime caused the displacement of almost five million rural families, and Mexico became wracked by narcotrafficking, human trafficking, and arms trafficking, making it the deadliest conflict zone after Syria (Weisbrot, Lefebvre, & Sammut, 2014; Laurell, 2015; Persio, 2017). All of this gives room to international exploitation and undermines the Rawlsian principle of social justice, a key principle for the fairness of a world order (P2). Moreover, NAFTA introduced certain mechanisms that allowed foreign corporations to sue their host country if it was believed to

be imposing policies harmful to corporate interests (Gürcan, 2019a). These mechanisms have led the Mexican and Canadian governments to pay out millions of dollars in damages. By October 2010, Canada and Mexico had been subjected to 11 and 19 NAFTA disputes, respectively. Interestingly enough, although the US was subjected to 19 NAFTA disputes, it suffered no penalties at all, whereas Canada and Mexico had to pay CA\$157 million and US\$187 million, respectively. Even more striking is the fact that the US failed to comply with several of NAFTA's arbitrary decisions (Castro-Rea, 2014). US non-compliance and its avoidance of NAFTA penalties have seriously undermined the legitimacy of

**"This dispute has undoubtedly caused irreparable damage to US hegemony in global governance as NAFTA was considered to be a worldwide symbol of American leadership in free trade."**

American global leadership. This situation contradicts an underlying principle of fairness in Rawlsian philosophy: that of the equal treatment of all the parties involved (P2).

Eventually, NAFTA was replaced by the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), but the new agreement remains unratified by the former NAFTA members. This dispute has undoubtedly caused irreparable damage to US hegemony in global governance as NAFTA was considered to be a worldwide symbol of American leadership in free trade. Similarly, the United States had proposed to create the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was intended to become the world's largest trade deal, as a US-led countervailing measure against China's growing influence over the Asia-Pacific region (Pham, 2017). However, in 2017 the Trump administration decided to withdraw from the agreement, leading many countries to further question

US global leadership. This situation contradicts the Rawlsian principle of institutional regulation as an underlying principle that defines the fairness of a world order (P3).

US regional military leadership is also at its lowest level. Even US strategists such as Anthony H. Cordesman and pro-US periodicals such as *Foreign Policy* magazine are now forced to admit that the United States has lost the war to the Taliban in Afghanistan after nearly 20 years since the US invasion (Cordesman, 2019; Young, 2019). Furthermore, the US invasion has turned Afghanistan into a global hub for narco-production, with opium production having increased more than fourfold since 2001 (Rowlatt, 2019). The same goes for the US invasion of Iraq. Despite a heavy US military presence, Iraq served as the geographical origin of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which later extended to Syria and caused the gravest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. Interestingly, an influential study of the US invasion of Iraq, published by the US Army War College, admits that Iran has been the war's only victor (Rayburn & Sobchak, 2019, p. 639). According to *The Atlantic* magazine, China is another victor of the Iraq war thanks to its peaceful approach, unconditionality and increasing economic cooperation with Iraq (Schiavenza, 2013). China has already become Iraq's top trading partner, and Iraq has turned into China's third-largest source of oil imports (Calabrese, 2019). In a similar vein, the United States has failed to topple the Assad regime in Syria, losing the war to Iran and Russia. Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria and leave the Kurds unprotected has also been interpreted as a critical blow to America's reputation as a reliable ally (Page, 2019). The Brookings Institution is frank enough to admit that "the US no longer matters in Syria" (Alaaldin, 2019, par. 1).

Added to this is the fact that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is currently undergo-

ing one of its deepest crises since its creation in 1949. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently stated that the United States is “fully prepared” to confront Turkey -which happens to be a key NATO member-through military means (Higgins, 2019, par. 1). Turkey is not the only concern when it comes to the psychological, if not physical disintegration of the NATO alliance and consequently the erosion of US global leadership. US President Donald Trump is known to have bullied Germany and other countries to contribute more to the NATO budget and even threatened to withdraw the United States from the organization (Stracqualursi & Acosta, 2019; Taylor, 2018). The severity of the NATO crisis has been explicitly acknowledged by President Emmanuel Macron of France, who observes: “What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO” (The Guardian, 2019, par. 2). He specifically refers to the lack of coordination of strategic decision-making between the US and its allies (The Guardian, 2019). In the final analysis, one could argue that America’s excessive reliance on military interventionism and bullying of its NATO allies severely contradict the underlying Rawlsian principles of a fair world order, as described in the introductory section. Perhaps most important is the fact that the US approach values coercion over mutual agreement, with excessive emphasis on military solutions in other countries and bullying tactics within NATO (P2). The NATO case also reveals the ways in which the United States undermines the legitimacy of its own world order by propagating a widespread view of the inequitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of military cooperation (P1).

### Emerging Alternatives in the Post-American Age

US leadership in the post-Cold War era has not only failed to provide global stability; it has also sharpened socioeconomic inequalities on a global scale (Ray, 1999). In the long term, the implosion

of global governance in almost every sphere of cooperation has made developing countries question the fairness of the US-led world order. A case in point is the first BRICS Summit, which was held following the 2008 crisis. This summit “signalled that the resolution of the 2008 economic crisis was too important to be left in the hands of the G8 countries, and that the Global South had to have a say in how to address this crisis” (Gürcan, 2019a, p. 51). As the locomotive of South-South cooperation, the following BRICS Summits served as a platform to voice the member countries’ claims to boost their involvement and decision-making power in global governance. Meanwhile, the BRICS also went on to institute their own instruments of global governance, which could challenge unipolar tendencies in a post-American age (P3). As such, the BRICS have not only become the strongest voice for carrying out a comprehensive reform of the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund; they have also created a BRICS development bank that rivals hegemonic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They have even started to question the US dollar’s hegemony in global trade, creating an autonomous contingency fund and credit rating agency. In the face of eroding US military leadership, the BRICS countries sided with Syria against US interests in the region (Gürcan, 2019a). As such, one could argue that the BRICS initiative lays the groundwork for the emergence of a post-American world order by providing a new institutional framework of international cooperation (P3). This framework systematically rejects the exploitation and coercion of developing countries by US-led institutions (P2).

BRICS is not the sole agent of renewal in global governance. In a similar direction, the SCO has emerged as an important actor in regional governance by addressing military, energy, education, and economic cooperation in concert. Drawing on the

failures of the US-centered world order, the SCO set its own priorities of struggle around the concept of the “three evils”: terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. In redressing global governance, it called for the implementation of the “Shanghai spirit”, which rejects the misuse of Western-promoted values such as democracy, human rights, and supranationalism for expansionist and interventionist purposes. Instead, the shared values represented by the Shanghai spirit promote mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for cultural diversity (and national sovereignty), and the pursuit of common development as the core principles of global governance (P1). As a key contributor to an emerging post-American world order, the SCO rejects the exploitation and coercion of Eurasian countries by US-led values and institutions (P2). In this context, it is also relevant to note China’s proposal to merge the SCO with the EEU in 2015, which could be seen as a strategic attempt to expand the scope of the Shanghai spirit towards a fairer world order. The EEU is a Russian initiative of economic cooperation whose normative framework strongly chimes with the Shanghai spirit (Gürcan, 2019a; 2019c; 2019d).

Introduced in 2013, the BRI is a landmark in the emergence of a post-American world order. This China-led initiative consists of infrastructure, resource, and investment development networks intended to be active over 152 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. The initiative prioritizes five main areas: intergovernmental policy cooperation and consensus-building, infrastructure and technological connectivity, trade connectivity, financial integration, and people-to-people exchanges for cultural cooperation (P3). In these areas, the BRI also seeks to mobilize the already existing networks and resources created by alternative governance institutions such as the BRICS and the SCO.

It is possible to argue that the BRI responds to the failure of the unipolarizing framework of Amer-



The heads of state and heads of government of the five member states at the eleventh annual BRICS summit in 2019.

ica’s New World Order: it is premised on the idea of re-boosting economic globalization by respecting the world’s cultural diversity and promoting a multipolar vision of world order. The BRI expresses an unfaltering ambition to reflect the common ideals and pursuits of human societies, based on a new model of global cooperation and governance. This ambition is driven by the so-called Silk Road Spirit: peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit (P1). The Silk Road principles have since been supplemented by a strong vision of “high-quality development”, which consists of promoting low-carbon investments, sustainable development projects, local community development programs, and inclusive social development (Camdessus, 2017; China Daily, 2018; China Center for International Economic Exchanges, 2017; Calabrese, 2019; National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). The BRI’s social and community development focus brings to the fore an important principle of a fair world order, which was severely neglected by America’s New World Order: the principle of providing adequate opportunities for political self-determination and social justice (P2).

Finally, Latin America was no exception to the implosion of US-led global governance. In the late 1990s, neoliberal policies resulted in a deep-seated economic crisis experienced by major Latin Amer-

ican countries such as Brazil and Argentina. Latin America witnessed a historic resurgence of left-wing governments that rejected NAFTA-modeled free trade agreements and US-promoted neoliberal policies. Therefore, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the rise to power of self-designated leftist governments in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Uruguay, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Most of these governments were also behind the development of new governance initiatives such as ALBA and UNASUR (P3). These initiatives put forth alternative mechanisms of cooperation that revolve around core principles like social justice, social developmentalism, and anti-imperialism (P1 and P2). ALBA and UNASUR's new mechanisms included development banking, fair trade, infrastructural development, public health, regional university cooperation, welfare programs and community support services, and media mobilization (Gürcan, 2010; Gürcan & Bakiner, 2015; Gürcan, 2019a; Gürcan, 2019c).

### Review and Discussion

The US-centered world order has failed to maintain its legitimacy. This situation is perhaps most evident in the erosion of American leadership in global economic and military governance. First and foremost, there is no longer a strong consensus that the United States can be trusted to ensure the proper functioning of cooperative arrangements where the rights and duties of its allies are fairly allocated. In the field of military cooperation, NATO's current crisis provides a striking example of eroding reciprocity and mutual trust in US-led cooperative arrangements. The same goes for economic governance: America's sudden withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and its insistence on renegotiating NAFTA reflect a loss of faith in the fair distribution of rights and duties within its own institutions. Meanwhile, there is a growing consensus among developing countries on the need for creating alternative cooperative arrangements

independent of America's overwhelming influence. The rights and duties of international cooperation are being renegotiated along the lines of such values and principles as mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, inclusiveness, openness, consultation, respect for cultural diversity and national sovereignty, and peaceful development.

Second, the US-centered world system is cracking and disintegrating, largely due to America's arbitrary approach, which feeds off exploitative and coercive practices that arrest international development. The crisis of neoliberalism – not only in Latin America and other parts of the developing world, but also in advanced capitalist areas such as North America and Europe – is perfectly illustrative of how US-patented economic policies have backfired to undermine American leadership in global economic governance. Similarly, America's arbitrary behavior within NAFTA and that neoliberal agreement's destructive effects on the Mexican economy reveal the exploitative and coercive faces of the so-called “New World Order”. This situation is even more apparent in the US approach to military governance, as can be observed in the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, to name but a few. The erosion of America's global leadership in economic and military governance finds a strong echo in the BRI and the SCO's emphasis on peaceful and sustainable human development. These developments are complemented by the BRICS' reaction to the 2008 crisis and Latin America's refusal of neoliberalism.

Third, and finally, America's unreliable, arbitrary, coercive, and exploitative attitude towards global governance has led to serious institutional decline to a degree that threatens the political cohesion and well-being of the world order. Free trade agreements such as NAFTA and Western governance organizations such as the EU have lost their appeal in the face of a growing tide of protectionism and trade wars. On the other hand, regional alternatives to US-led institutional arrangements have emerged, led by such organizations as the SCO, the

EEU, ALBA, and UNASUR. On a global scale, the BRI offers a concrete roadmap that focuses on key strategic areas, including intergovernmental policy coordination, techno-economic connectivity, and cultural cooperation. 🌍

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# The Belt and Road Initiative is Opening up New Horizons



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**The once “Oppressed Nations” are now in the process of constructing a developing alternative to the Atlantic System in all spheres of life. The economic struggle is led by the People’s Republic of China, while an armed struggle is continuing in West Asia with Syria, Turkey, Russia and Iran at the forefront, and all this is reflected politically in the increasing centrifugal forces against the Atlantic System in Europe as well.**

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THE NEOLIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER dictated to the world by the Atlantic System has come to an end. The world is now in search of a new and more egalitarian international order based on mutual benefit and respect for national sovereignty. The last three decades have not only witnessed a shift of the center of weight of production from the West to the East, but also the rise of a Developing World in Eurasia accompanied by struggles in the economic as well as political and armed spheres. The once “Oppressed Nations” are now in the process of constructing a developing alternative to the Atlantic System in all spheres of life. The economic struggle is led by the People’s Republic of China, while an armed struggle is continuing in West Asia with Syria, Turkey, Russia and Iran at the forefront, and all this is reflected politically in the increasing centrifugal forces against the Atlantic System in Europe as well.

### **The Nation-States are the Main Building Blocks of the Developing World**

The construction of an alternative system representing the common future of humanity requires a thoughtful design of international relations, through which each country can efficiently benefit from international cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative first put forth by China in 2013 and now underway with its implementation provides a suit-

able ground for achieving this aim. The success of this initiative in creating a new globe on which all countries, which the belt embraces and the road connects, can interact in a cooperative and constructive manner will mark a historical turning point. In history, the 21<sup>st</sup> century might even be partitioned into “before the Belt-Road” and “after the Belt-Road”. The very design and implementation of such a historical project itself doubtlessly requires an intense interaction and cooperation between the countries involved, perhaps even more intense than the interaction and cooperation it aims to create.

The ancient continental as well as maritime Silk Road linking the East with the West was mainly an Asian project, as also is the modern Belt and Road Initiative. The centralized and long-lasting feudal empires of the East furnished the then existing culture with elements reflecting a public and sharing spirit within their own historical context. They brought about a dignified stance among the people in the territories they reigned. The silk routes enhanced both economic and cultural welfare through the interaction and cooperation they induced. All this doubtlessly belongs to the common legacy of human civilization today. Turning this valuable legacy into a current social and economic power, which opens up the way to the construction of a common future of humanity, can only be achieved through the “nation-states”, which form the main building blocks of the Developing World in our era.

**"The new kind of globalization aims at globalizing cooperation, and not to create a single global market in the absence of national borders."**

The Developed World of the Atlantic System is much more monolithic than is the Developing World of Eurasia. The Eurasian countries span over a very broad spectrum concerning both the levels and contents of their nation-building as well as economic development processes. Thus, the priorities these countries are faced with are strongly diversified. In fact, this is the main reason of the lack of a ready-made, one-size-fits-all recipe for economic development and social progress in these countries. That is precisely why each country is to find "its own way" fitting its "own characteristics" for development and progress strategies. The key to the success of the Belt and Road Initiative is the ability to harmonize the priorities and strategies of different countries, thereby rendering the economic and social consequences of the Initiative widely acceptable to the societies in those countries.

### **"Inclusiveness" Requires a New Kind of "Openness"**

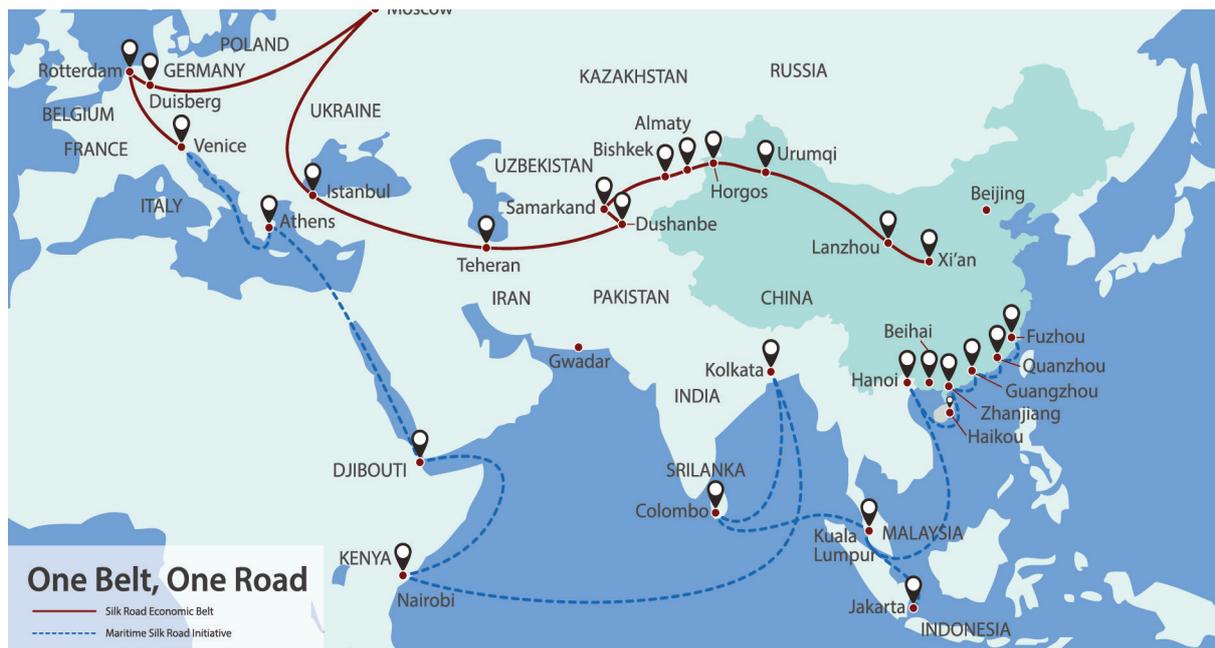
Markets are myopic in the sense that they can only internalize short-term interests of the parties involved. Development strategies, however, are to be farsighted. Thus, their implementation cannot be left entirely to the workings of the market. On the other hand, the current level of the production forces renders the usage of markets indispensable. Hence, the gist of economic development lies in aligning the workings of the markets with strategic targets. The need to ensure the sustainability of development, nevertheless, makes it necessary to also take into account the limitations the market forces

impose upon the strategic goals. In the last analysis, however, it is the market forces that are to be made subject to the strategic development goals rather than leaving the formation of a development strategy to the spontaneity of the market forces.

Economic growth is just one quantitative aspect of economic development. Two countries may have similar growth rates with quite different impacts upon their productive powers. It is the qualitative content of growth reflected in productive power, which matters in the medium and long run. A sustainable economic development involves a continual adjustment and readjustment process between the production forces and the relations of production. Thus, an optimal route of development has to be designed, planned and endowed with suitable economic means of implementation. This aim cannot be achieved on an economic stage, which is turned into a playground of market forces.

Optimal routes of development of different countries are to be diversified. For example, the adoption of an advanced technology in some industry requires having reached a threshold level in manufacturing in that area. Full openness to market forces is destined to keep a country in a passive recipient's position in sectors below that threshold level. Interaction, no matter how strong, cannot automatically lead to the internalization of advanced technologies in such sectors. In industries and agricultural sectors that are regarded to possess a strategic importance for either national security or economic and social development, the formation of special protection, incentive design and support policies will be needed.

Under the "globalization" model dictated to the world by the Atlantic System, "openness" was to be provided to the flow of capital and goods under the sheer domination of market forces. As the nation-states of the Developing World were considered to be the main obstacles to such a "free flow",



the whole effort was focused on the liquidation of the nation-states in order to open up the way to “free circulation” of capital and goods.

“Openness” is one of the most crucial notions that has to be “redefined” for the success of the Belt and Road Initiative. To strengthen interaction and cooperation, countries should, of course, be “open” to cooperation. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, to the contrary of the Atlantic approach, “openness” is to be brought about by “voluntary participation” based on “mutual gain”. Being “openminded” rather than promoting “openness” will naturally help “open up” the way to more interaction and cooperation. However, it is not just the wishes, but the means that bring about the consequences. Thus, the success of the Belt and Road Initiative strongly depends upon the introduction of effective means to align openness with the development strategies of the countries involved, thereby increasing their willingness to interact. The new kind of globalization aims at globalizing cooperation, and not to create a single global market in the absence of national borders.

Finance is the lifeblood of production. In other words, finance is there to serve the needs of produc-

tion. Thus, the way it circulates should accord with a smooth and qualitatively well-balanced growth in production. In case finance starts to dominate and shape production, however, it becomes a parasitic activity not promoting production, but forming an obstacle to improving production.

One of the major reasons why the center of production shifted from the West to the East within the last three decades was, in fact, that the domination of finance capital - as the main source of profits under the capitalist system - over production of goods and services became stronger than ever in the West, while finance was treated just as the lifeblood of production in the East. In the West, the shaping of the relationship between finance and production was entirely left to market forces, while in the East the state authority entered the scene as a strategic planner along with designing the means needed to implement the plans. While in the West the state had been turned into an apparatus serving the interests of finance capital, the broader national interests played a relatively more weighted role in the East.

For the Belt and Road Initiative to “include” all the countries along the Belt and the Road in an ef-

fective and voluntary manner, “openness” to “market forces” should be harnessed. As such, market forces will be recalibrated to boost economic development. However, the strategic goals will inevitably go unnoticed under any interaction between private enterprises oriented by “profit maximization” only. It is only through interaction between states and state interference by participation, orientation and regulation that the workings of the market can be aligned with the countries’ strategic goals.

It is also true that the optimal level of openness of an economy in harmony with its strategic objectives will rise as the economy develops further in a healthy way. As the gap between the development levels of different countries narrows down, the formula will become more and more that “the more open an economy becomes, the more will it gain from international interaction and cooperation”. The new kind of globalization that the Belt and Road Initiative promises to humanity is something that has to be constructed step by step and cannot be reached immediately in one shot.

### **The Creation of and the Need for Peace and Stability**

It is not only that the Belt and Road Initiative will contribute to peace and stability, but the very construction of the Initiative itself also requires a peaceful and stable environment. It is not accidental that the map of terror, disturbance and conflict manipulation in Eurasia governed by forces from outside mostly parallels the routes of the Initiative. One of the regions where terrorism is mostly condensed is West Asia, particularly the region around Syria. Turkey has been leading an armed struggle simultaneously against several terrorist organizations as PKK-PYD, ISIS and the Fethullah Gulen Organization, the common source of all of them being the Atlantic System. It is engaged in close cooperation

with Russia and Iran regarding the Syrian Issue, which has generated successful outcomes in Turkey’s struggle against terrorism.

The reestablishment of peace and stability in West Asia will greatly facilitate the success of the Belt and Road Initiative. This part of Asia played a major role of the Ancient Silkroad. Its absence today will render the Modern Silkroad one-legged. The construction of peace and stability in Eurasia is at least as important as constructing the infrastructure of the Initiative. They complement each other in that one provides safety and the other prosperity to the ground on which the Eurasian economy as a whole can flourish further.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century terrorism is not an individualistic phenomenon any more, as it was in the 19th century. Terrorism now is rather a global and “industrialized” activity, whose different branches have a common international source. Thus, terrorism against Turkey is terrorism against China, and terrorism against China is terrorism against Turkey. But today under the Belt and Road Initiative, it has become even more so. Defeating terrorism requires also a close international and multi-tier cooperation, ranging from diplomatic, political, ideological to armed forms of struggle.

### **A Vision to Construct the Common Future of Humanity All Together**

The coexistence of different cultures is widely regarded as a source of richness – a vision that can hardly be denied. In case these cultures continue living side by side without any interaction, however, the kind of richness they reflect would not go beyond the richness of an exhibition in a museum. The yardstick of social richness in history of civilizations is the ability to produce something new out of what exists. Thus, the genuine richness of different cultures lies in the potential to create a socially

more advanced common culture by interaction. It is “peace of mind” under which such an interaction will induce the richest flow of ideas and values. The Belt and Road Initiative will not only contribute to peace and stability in general, but it will also pave a social ground on which peace of mind prevails.

**"Although the Belt and Road Initiative is mainly a project on the economic plane, it will undoubtedly be helpful in paving a ground, on which a Eurasian Alternative to the Atlantic System can be constructed."**

The digitalization of technologies along with scientific and technological progress towards artificial intelligence opens up new horizons for economic and social improvement. The arising question now is whether the benefits and gains accruing from this progress will be shared collectively or lead to concentrating power further in the hands of the largest monopolies history has ever witnessed. At this turning point of history, the Belt and Road Initiative will help solving this problem in favor of the international collective to the extent it succeeds to increase the number of countries endowed with the ability to employ and develop these advanced technologies.

The technological advances our world has been going through recently have the potential of both serving to the economic and social progress in an unprecedented way and being turned into an unprecedented destructive power. It all depends upon the social system under which they will be employed. Although the Belt and Road Initiative is mainly a project on the economic plane, it will undoubtedly be helpful in paving a ground, on which a Eurasian Alternative to the Atlantic System can

be constructed. As the level of development of the productive forces seems to become increasingly incompatible with the capitalist system, history seems to get closer and closer to a turning point as well.

Capitalist relations of production had been born under the feudal system by themselves. They were not designed by anyone. It was the widening of production of goods, which triggered the change in the production relations. Thus, everything that has been written about capitalism, be it by classical or neoclassical economists or by Marxists, was written by observing an already existing system that had reached a certain maturity level. The findings about capitalism were discoveries, rather than inventions. Socialism, on the other hand, was put forth by Marx and Engels as a historical foresight in the 19th century, before it became a reality anywhere on earth. Socialist relations of production do not get born by themselves under the capitalist system. They have to be designed, and the economic and social means to implement and further develop them have to be created. On the economic plane, this amounts to a continual adjustment and readjustment process between the productive forces and the relations of production in each country.

This means that any attempt to go beyond the capitalist system concerning economic and social progress requires the guidance of science and philosophy to be successful. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative is based on forming a network between states, between economic and financial institutions and agents, between nations themselves and their various organizations. This historical attempt will stay incomplete in the absence of a close and permanent international cooperation on the side of science with a focus on drawing continual lessons from this huge social and economic experiment to shed light on its roadmap. 🌸

# Starting a New Journey for High-Quality Development of the Belt and Road



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**WANG YI**

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Minister of Foreign Affairs of  
the People's Republic of China

*Wang Yi was born in 1953 in Beijing. He graduated from the Institute of Asian and African Languages affiliated to the Second Foreign Languages Institute in Beijing. He holds also a master's degree in Economics. In 1981, Wang Yi became a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Between 1982 and 1989, he worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (MFA) as an attache, assistant manager and manager consecutively. After serving in various senior positions in MFA in the following years, he served as Ambassador of Japan between 2004-2007. Wang Yi continued his work at the (MFA) as Deputy Secretary of CPC Committee from 2013 until 2018 when he was promoted to the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> People's Congress, he has also been a member of the CCP Central Committee.*

**The purpose of the BRI is to highlight connectivity, deepen pragmatic cooperation, build unity in responding to the various challenges that face humanity, and bring about mutual benefit and shared development. The Second BRF provided an important opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made in joint development of the Belt and Road.**

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THE SECOND BELT AND ROAD FORUM FOR International Cooperation (BRF) was held from April 25 to 27, 2019 in Beijing. This was the most important diplomatic event held by China this year, which also marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). President Xi Jinping attended the opening ceremony of the BRF to deliver a keynote speech, chaired the Leaders' Roundtable, held a series of diplomatic events, and presented the outcomes of the forum to Chinese and foreign media outlets. A total of 40 heads of state, government leaders, and representatives of international organizations met together, and more than 6,000 foreign guests from 150 countries and 92 international organizations took part in the event. During the forum, a high-level meeting, 12 sub-forums, and an entrepreneur conference were held. The success of this BRF has started a new journey of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, injected new vigor into China's pursuit of open development, voiced our strong determination to uphold multilateralism, and marked another milestone for China and the world in building a global community with a shared future together.

In 2013, President Xi introduced a major proposal for international cooperation – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This proposal was based upon his overall assessment of global trends, as well as the objectives of creating a new pattern in China's com-

prehensive opening up and building a global community with a shared future. The purpose of the BRI is to highlight connectivity, deepen pragmatic cooperation, build unity in responding to the various challenges that face humanity, and bring about mutual benefit and shared development. The Second BRF provided an important opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made in joint development of the Belt and Road.

Over the past six years, total trade between China and BRI countries exceeded US\$6 trillion, while China made more than US\$90 billion worth of direct investment in these countries. A connectivity framework involving six corridors, six types of routes, multiple countries, and multiple ports has essentially taken shape. A large number of cooperation projects have taken off, and the decisions made at the First BRF in 2017 have been implemented smoothly. The success of international cooperation through the Belt and Road has created new platforms for international trade and investment, and unlocked new potential for world economic growth.

Over the past six years, the BRI has upheld the Silk Road spirit of peace, cooperation, openness, inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. It has advocated a global governance philosophy featuring mutual consultation, joint development, and benefit sharing, taken concrete steps toward the establishment of an open world economy, and outlined a new vision for building a fairer and more equitable global governance system. As UN Secre-

tary-General Antonio Guterres pointed out, the BRI aims to make globalization healthier.

Over the past six years, China has built 82 overseas cooperation zones with BRI countries, contributed to host countries by paying over US\$2 billion in taxes and creating nearly 300,000 jobs, and brought more convenient living conditions, better business environments, and more diverse development opportunities to the people of various countries. Thanks to the BRI, some countries have built their first expressway or modern railway, some have developed their own automobile manufacturing industry for the first time, and some have resolved their long-standing electricity shortages. The fruits of Belt and Road cooperation have effectively improved the living standards of people in various countries, and contributed significantly to advancement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to the World Bank, the BRI has accelerated global poverty reduction.

Our success over the past six years is ample proof that, although the BRI originated in China, its opportunities and benefits belong to the world. The initiative has thus become the most well received international public good and the largest platform for international cooperation.

## II

The theme of the Second BRF was “Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future.” Participants in the forum conducted in-depth discussions on “boosting connectivity for new sources of growth,” “strengthening policy integration to build closer partnerships,” and “promoting green and sustainable development to implement the UN 2030 Agenda,” reaching a number of important outcomes with landmark significance.

*First, we drew a blueprint to guide our future course of action.*

At the opening ceremony, President Xi delivered a keynote speech entitled “Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future for Belt and Road Cooperation.” He also conducted in-depth exchanges with heads of state, government leaders, and representatives of international organizations attending the Leaders’ Roundtable. Together, they reviewed past experiences, looked to the future, and drew up plans for going forward, reaching new agreements on a number of important issues in the process. They also explicitly identified high-quality development of the Belt and Road as the central theme for future cooperation, thus defining the plans and direction of Belt and Road cooperation more clearly.

High-quality Belt and Road cooperation is an important concept that President Xi has introduced in consideration of the needs of the world as a whole. High quality is absolutely necessary for drawing a meticulously detailed blueprint of cooperation, and will undoubtedly push the BRI to achieve deeper and more practical significance and progress steadily over the long term. This important concept is in tune with the common wishes of our BRI partners, and points the way for countries involved to move forward together. It has thus won recognition and high praise from all participants.



The Leaders’ Roundtable at the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, April 2019.

**"To achieve high-quality development of the Belt and Road, it is imperative that we uphold the principles of mutual consultation, joint development, and benefit sharing."**

To achieve high-quality development of the Belt and Road, it is imperative that we uphold the principles of mutual consultation, joint development, and benefit sharing. The essence of these principles is the practice of multilateralism, which stresses that all countries should engage in collective discussion of major issues that affect the group and make incremental progress on these issues by each exerting their respective strengths and working to the best of their abilities. The most fundamental point is ensuring that cooperation conforms to the common interests of all parties and meets their common needs, thus making cooperation more effective, appealing, and sustainable; this is an integral part of "high quality."

High-quality Belt and Road cooperation must uphold openness, integrity, and environmental friendliness, reach toward high standards, sustainability, and the improvement of public wellbeing, and focus on the core task of ensuring that the fruits of cooperation benefit the people of all countries involved. All BRF participants endorsed the concept of people-centered development and agreed to actively align themselves with universally accepted international rules, standards, and best practices. They were unanimous in the belief that doing so will lead to more effective connectivity between nations, more robust economic growth, closer international cooperation, and better lives for the people.

*Second, we made practical gains by pooling our strengths.*

The Leaders' Roundtable of the Second BRF released a joint communiqué that was unanimously

adopted. It brought together the political consensus of all participants on Belt and Road cooperation, and became the most important outcome of this forum. In its role as host country, China also issued a list of 283 deliverables, thus sketching a picture of great promise for future Belt and Road cooperation.

China signed a series of inter-governmental agreements on practical cooperation projects such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and launched new cooperation funds as well as third-party market investment and financing projects with Italy and other countries. Enterprises from various countries reached numerous agreements on industrial capacity and investment cooperation.

BRF participants released a number of major cooperation proposals and reports. China released a report entitled "The Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, Contributions, and Prospects," exhibiting the consensus and achievements reached by participants in Belt and Road cooperation, and setting forth proposals and suggestions for high-quality development. China and other participants published the Debt Sustainability Analysis Framework for Participating Countries of Belt and Road Initiative to provide guidance for financing cooperation. The BRF Advisory Council submitted a report to the forum, putting forward policy recommendations regarding the future priorities of Belt and Road cooperation and the direction of the forum's development. Relevant parties also jointly launched the Beijing Initiative for the Clean Silk Road and the Cooperation Initiative on Silk Road of Innovation, and issued the Green Investment Principles. These outcomes expounded the principles of mutual consultation, joint development, and benefit sharing, and embodied the concepts of openness, integrity, and environmental friendliness.

The entrepreneur conference attracted business leaders from more than 80 countries and regions, who signed cooperation agreements on projects worth more than US\$64 billion.

**"This partnership is not a geopolitical tool, but a proposal for cooperation that seeks shared development through concerted efforts."**

*Third, we developed partnerships to deepen connectivity.*

Over the past six years, more than 150 countries and international organizations signed agreements on Belt and Road cooperation with China. As a result, the BRI's circle of friends is constantly expanding and an interconnected cooperation network is taking shape.

At the forum, President Xi put forward a proposal to build a partnership for global connectivity, calling on all participants to make connectivity their focus as they build stronger partnership through international cooperation on the Belt and Road. During bilateral meetings, President Xi had in-depth discussions with international guests on opportunities for cooperation under the BRI framework, and broader consensus was reached on the issue of boosting connectivity.

The concept of a partnership for global connectivity represents a continuation and development of the Silk Road spirit in the new era. This partnership is not a geopolitical tool, but a proposal for cooperation that seeks shared development through concerted efforts. Instead of scrapping the old system, it serves to consolidate and complement existing cooperative relationships, and therefore is conducive to forming synergy by pooling strengths. This partnership is not for the exclusive enjoyment of a certain few; instead it is a broad platform for open cooperation that welcomes more interested coun-

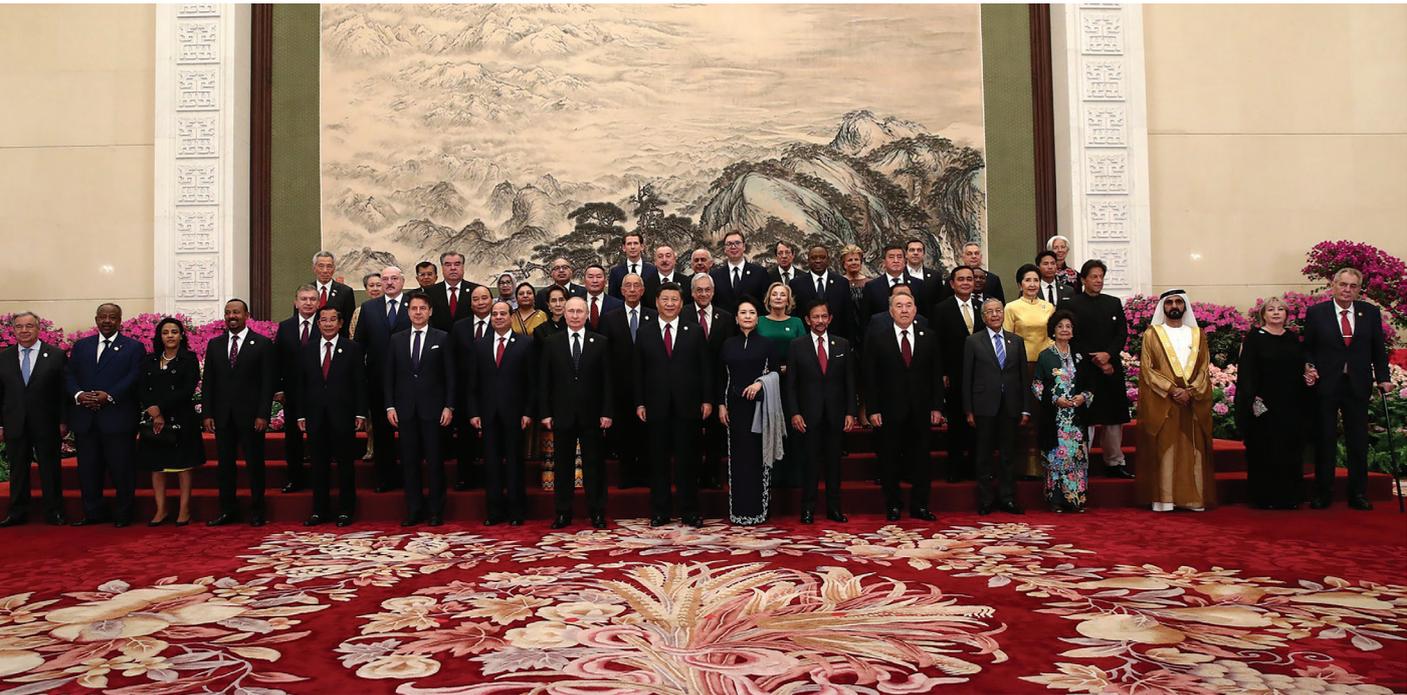
tries and international organizations to take part. As soon as it was introduced, the proposal to build a partnership for global connectivity was immediately met with an enthusiastic response from the international community. It is their hope to strengthen coordination of development policies, plans, and initiatives with China and other countries on the basis of connectivity in order to achieve shared development and common prosperity.

*Fourth, we jointly established mechanisms to provide strong support.*

Through six years of joint effort, we have seen a basic framework for international Belt and Road cooperation take shape that is guided by the BRF and supported by multilateral and bilateral cooperation in various fields. This has provided effective institutional guarantees for long-term development of the Belt and Road.

The BRF is the most high profile platform for cooperation under the BRI framework. At the Second BRF, participants worked together to enrich ideas, identify priorities, and create achievements of cooperation, and clearly defined the blueprint and objectives for high-quality development of Belt and Road cooperation. All participants praised China for its efforts in holding the first and second forums, and expressed their hope that the BRF will continue to be held.

Third-party market cooperation has become an important new platform for Belt and Road cooperation. It aims to achieve the effect of building something greater than the sum of its parts by encouraging participants to exert their strengths and form synergy together. During the BRF, China signed a number of documents on third-party market cooperation with countries and international and regional organizations such as Austria, Switzerland, Singapore, and the UNDP. The Silk Road Fund and the European Investment Fund announced the



The Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, April 2019.

establishment of various co-investment schemes for third-party markets. Such moves have given international cooperation through the Belt and Road even fuller and more powerful meaning.

Important progress was made during this forum with regard to multilateral cooperation through the Belt and Road. Working together with our partners and upholding the principles of openness, inclusiveness, and transparency, we improved and developed a number of platforms for multilateral dialogue and cooperation in specialized fields, and launched several initiatives for multilateral cooperation covering multiple issues such as transportation, development financing, taxation, environmental protection, intellectual property rights, and clean governance, thus providing strong backing for broadening and deepening cooperation in these areas.

*Fifth, we upheld openness and demonstrated China's sense of responsibility.*

Belt and Road cooperation is a grand stage upon which China and the world are becoming

more connected to each other. During the forum, President Xi delivered several important speeches to national leaders and public figures from various fields. Looking back at China's extraordinary course of development over 70 years since the founding of the PRC, he emphasized that China will continue to advance on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, remain committed to comprehensively deepening reform, pursuing high-quality development, expanding opening up, and following the path of peaceful development, and strive to build a global community with a shared future.

Meanwhile, the president earnestly declared that China will adopt a whole series of important new measures for reform and opening up, including easing market access for foreign investment in more areas, stepping up international cooperation on intellectual property rights protection, increasing imports of goods and services even further, engaging in international coordination of macroeconomic policy more effectively, and putting greater emphasis

on the implementation of opening up policies. He stressed that China's policy to expand opening up is a choice that it has made of its own accord in light of objective requirements for the country's reform and development. He also called on countries of the

**"Belt and Road cooperation has begun a new journey toward high-quality development, transforming from an abstract overall outline into a meticulously detailed blueprint."**

world to create favorable environments for investment and give equal treatment to Chinese enterprises, students, and scholars. President Xi's rousing words conveyed to the world the critical message that China is dedicated to expanding opening up across the board, exhibited China's sincere desire to make greater contributions to humanity, demonstrated China's resolve to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests, and made the world more confident about pursuing shared development with China.

### III

Belt and Road cooperation has begun a new journey toward high-quality development, transforming from an abstract overall outline into a meticulously detailed blueprint. We will act in accordance with the ideas and objectives raised in President Xi's opening address, strengthen coordination and cooperation with all parties in line with the agreements that we have reached, promote implementation of the BRF's outcomes, actively build a partnership for global connectivity, and promote consistent progress for international cooperation through the Belt and Road.

*We will strengthen infrastructure connectivity.*

President Xi pointed out that infrastructure is the cornerstone of connectivity. Working together

with all parties concerned, we will accelerate the development of high-quality, sustainable, hazard-resistant, affordable, inclusive, and accessible infrastructure, and focus on ensuring the sustainability of Belt and Road cooperation in the economic, social, fiscal, financial, and environmental domains.

By doing so, we will create cooperation projects that will stand the test of time and win popular approval. We will build a network of connectivity guided by the flows of economic corridors, built on major transportation routes and information highways, and supported by railways, ports, and pipelines so that we may bring about interconnected development more effectively.

*We will uphold openness and mutual benefit.*

President Xi pointed out that if man stopped the river from flowing into the ocean, then eventually there would come a day when the ocean dries up. Though the world economy is facing grave challenges, we must not stop the river from flowing; we must uphold openness and cooperation, unequivocally oppose protectionism, vigorously promote liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment, and support the circulation of goods, capital, technology, and personnel. This will provide powerful momentum and vast potential for growth of the global economy.

*We will focus on innovation-driven development.*

President Xi pointed out that innovation is the source of productive strength, and that it is necessary for enterprises to be competitive and countries to thrive. In conformity with the trend of the times, we will continue to deepen cooperation and exchange on innovation and drive forward the development of digital, network-based, and smart technologies. We will work together to explore new technologies and new ways of doing business, and seek out new growth drivers and means of development. We will advance the Belt and Road Science, Technology, and Innovation Cooperation Action Plan, implement

the BRI Talents Exchange Program, and build the Digital Silk Road and the Silk Road of Innovation.

*We will promote balanced development.*

President Xi pointed out that the greatest imbalance in the world today is imbalanced development. We will uphold the philosophy of people-centered development and ensure that the fruits of Belt and Road cooperation benefit the people in order to satisfy the yearning of people around the world for a better life. We will see that the concepts of green and sustainable development are incorporated into the selection, implementation, and management of Belt and Road cooperation projects, and work with those concerned to implement plans and initiatives for cooperation including the Belt and Road Sustainable Cities Alliance, the BRI International Green Development Coalition, and the Green Investment Principles for the Belt and Road, with a view to creating more opportunities and potential for the growth of developing countries.

*We will deepen exchange and mutual learning.*

President Xi pointed out that we must build

bridges for different cultures to learn from each other and create a pattern of multi-faceted people-to-people exchanges. To do so, we must deepen cooperation in fields such as education, science, culture, and sports, bolster exchange between parliamentary bodies, political parties, and non-governmental organizations, and promote communication between social groups such as women, young people, and the disabled. By doing so, we will fill the annals of the Silk Road with more brilliant tales of intercultural interaction.

Belt and Road cooperation is a great initiative aiming at achieving common prosperity through consultation and collaboration. Looking toward the future, it will undoubtedly unlock glorious new prospects for China's open development, bring new opportunities for improving the wellbeing of people around the world, and make important new contributions for building a global community with a shared future. (From: English Edition of *QiuShi Journal*, April-June 2019, Vol.11 No.2 Issue No.39) 

# Political-Economic Reconfigurations in Global Power Systems: From the 18<sup>th</sup> Century up Until Today



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**UFUK TUTAN**

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Prof. Dr.

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines political-economic strategies followed by the major countries that shaped the historical course of capitalism. Special attention will be paid to how these strategies have affected the configuration of power in the world. The aim is thus to understand the effect of global power systems on the world political economy and to make certain estimations regarding the course of the cooperative mechanisms that are being formed in today's environment under the initiative of People's Republic of China. As such, the article will undertake a geopolitical-economic analysis based on incorporated comparison and process tracing. This analysis is based on the case of Britain and the United States, which illustrates how unipolar power systems –characteristically underpinned by (neo)colonial exploitation, zero-sum policies, cyclical economic crises and belligerence– are doomed to long-term instabilities. The article also argues that a requisite condition for a stable system of multipolarity is to rely on nation-states as the primary political entity in world affairs, creating independently planned National Innovation Systems in selected strategic sectors, and providing an adequate educational system that responds to the requirements of these sectors. Economically weaker countries would not be able to fully benefit from multipolarity unless they satisfy the abovementioned three conditions, which also explains the historical success of countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea. The article maintains that, as the world is marching towards a multipolar system, leading economies of the Global South seem to establish closer partnership with peripheral economics based on socio-economic and political strategies inspiring humanitarian and peaceful values. However, peripheral economies can maximize the benefits of comprehensive partnerships such as the Belt and Road Initiative, only if they deepened their participation having fully determined their real necessities and aspirations.

**Keywords:** China, multipolarization, world system, globalization, unipolarity

IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, IONIANS BELIEVED that the entire world consisted of the Mediterranean and its hinterland, while for Chinese living around the Yellow River the world was oceans at one end and great deserts on the other. Both cultures built their commercial, political and social networks according their worldview, with their respective founders using the boundaries of their world networks to conceive of a global world (Landes, 1998). Similarly, the Roman Empire had established a unipolar global world, which it perceived within the boundaries of its commercial, political and social networks. After its collapse, such a unipolar world did not emerge again until the 18th century when, following the discoveries of the Americas and the linking of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the per-

ception of a global world was reshaped to embrace the entire world. In the latter half of the 18th century, after the Seven Years' War, the United Kingdom re-established a unipolar world power system (Arrighi, 2010).

The 18th-20th century period is referred to as Pax Britannica. This continued until World War II, following which the world entered the bipolar phase of the Cold War period, when it was shaped by the life or death struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar world order temporarily gave way to the 1990s' Pax Americana. However, the brief time of this period has resulted in the persistence of political and economic instability and paved the way for uncertainty on a global scale. Driven by

such circumstances, we have witnessed the developing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (collectively known as BRICS) trying to develop various alternatives to this unipolar global power (Gürcan, 2019a).

**"..a requisite condition for a stable 'system' of multipolarity is to rely on nation-states as the primary political entity in world affairs, creating independently planned National Innovation Systems in selected strategic sectors, and providing an adequate educational system that responds to the requirements of these sectors."**

This article examines political-economic strategies followed by the major countries that shaped the historical course of capitalism. Special attention will be paid to how these strategies have affected the configuration of power in the world. The aim is thus to understand the effect of global power systems on the world political economy and to make certain estimations regarding the course of the cooperative mechanisms that are being formed in today's environment under the initiative of People's Republic of China. As such, the article will undertake a geopolitical-economic analysis based on incorporated comparison and process tracing. This analysis is based on the case of Britain and the United States, which illustrates how unipolar power systems –characteristically underpinned by (neo) colonial exploitation, zero-sum policies, cyclical economic crises and belligerence– are doomed to long-term instabilities. The article also argues that a requisite condition for a stable “system” of multipolarity is to rely on nation-states as the primary political entity in world affairs, creating independently planned National Innovation Systems in selected strategic sectors, and providing an adequate edu-

cational system that responds to the requirements of these sectors. Here, “world system” describes the economically, socio-culturally and politically interdependence and mutual interactions of actors such as classes, states and companies, while “power” describes the influence of actors in giving direction to the general course of dependence and mutual interactions (Amin 2000; Chase-Dunn & Grimes 1995). In turn, National Innovation Systems can be defined as (Freeman, 1987, page 1) “the network among institutions which create, import, modify and spread new technologies in public and private sectors through their efficiency and interaction”.

Based on case studies, this article goes on to argue that economically weaker countries would not be able to fully benefit from multipolarity unless they satisfy the abovementioned three conditions (i.e. the strengthening of the nation-state system, the creation of National Innovation Systems, and the existence of a strong educational infrastructure), which also explains the historical success of countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea. The article maintains that, as the world is marching towards a multipolar system, leading economies of the Global South seem to establish closer partnership with peripheral economics based on socio-economic and political strategies inspiring humanitarian and peaceful values. However, peripheral economies can maximize the benefits of such comprehensive partnerships as the Belt and Road Initiative, only if they deepened their participation having fully determined their real necessities and aspirations.

The first section of the article introduces its theoretical and methodical framework. The section that follows addresses the global power strategy of the United Kingdom during the Pax Britannica. The third section focuses on the Cold War period, and the final section discusses the crisis of the United States' (US) unipolar strategy and China's central role in the shift towards multipolarity.

### Theoretical and Methodical Framework

Geopolitical economy is a school of international relations established by Radhika Desai (2013) and developed by Efe Can Gürcan (2019a). This school's underlying argument is that international politics is shaped primarily by interstate struggles for economic power, which thus increases the importance of states as principal actors in globalization. The critique of imperialism and neoliberal capitalism is a defining element of geopolitical economy, which focuses on the manifestations of class struggle in the international arena (Desai 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Gürcan 2019a, 2019b, 2019d).

In geopolitical economy, Gürcan highlights the concept of multipolarization rather than the concept of multipolarity because the United States still continues to maintain its economic, military and cultural superiority. Organizations such as BRICS have yet to provide a consistent alternative to American-patented neoliberal policies or establish a consistent political, economic and military unity among themselves (Gürcan 2019a, 2019b, 2019d). In this context, multipolarization is defined as “the increasing parity in the global distribution of political, economic, cultural, and military power” (Gürcan 2019d, page 557). Hence, the multipolarization struggle exists between “dominant states (for example, today's United States) and “contender states” wishing to lay claim to global governance. Thus, geopolitical economy provides a framework to understand global power struggles, which is the main focus of this article (Desai 2013; Gürcan 2019b).

Methodologically, geopolitical economy often uses incorporated comparison and process tracing. As is implied by the name, incorporated comparison addresses similarities, mutual interactions and dependencies across cases, alongside their temporal and spatial differences, specificities and tensions. The purpose is to comprehend the (re)configuration

of global phenomena (McMichael 1990, 2000; Gürcan 2019b). Case selection is made in accordance with the principle of historical relations and mutual determination (McMichael 1990, 2000; Gürcan 2019b). As discussed in this article, China's rise in the global power system during the transition from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana provides a sound example of the aforementioned historical relations and determination.

While making incorporated comparison, the article uses process tracing as a qualitative and interpretative technique. Process tracing aims to reveal causal processes in a narrative manner. It often resorts to logical inferences and refers to important historical developments (Gürcan 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). While doing this, process tracing gives primacy to understanding the tools used by key political actors, including their motives, priorities, perceptions and opportunities (Gürcan 2019d). Indeed, the actor-centered approach of process tracing is strongly compatible with the tradition of geopolitical thinking (Gürcan 2019d).

### Unipolar Systems and the Strategy of Aggressive Capitalism

As a result of the Renaissance and Reform movements in the mid-16th century, inter-religious warfare brought political and economic chaos to Europe. In these circumstances, individual-based Protestant financial capital in Western Europe gravitated towards re-organising its guilds and entrepreneurial bourgeois groups around a nation-state ideology, while England's Queen Elizabeth decided to minimize foreign dominance in finance by nationalizing the country's Catholic capital. With the Spanish attempt to occupy the United Provinces Union (today's Holland), England's economy entered a new era (Arighi, 2010), as individual Protestant capital fled the seemingly endless wars in Europe and sought refuge

in the economies of various countries, but primarily in England's. Thus, towards the end of 16th century, the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of the United Provinces Union introduced new knowledge in the fields of finance and production to the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of many countries. The United Provinces was essentially an agglomeration of individual international capital, and even though it appeared to be a nation-state governed by a Republic, it was not a mercantilist nation-state. As a consequence of its costly wars against Spain and its conception of competition advocating free trade at the international level, by the time the Westphalia Peace Treaty was signed in the mid-17th century, the inevitable collapse of the seemingly powerful United Provinces Union was already underway (Israel, 1989).

Following the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), the second milestone to transform the United Kingdom socially, economically and politically was the Westphalia Peace Treaty. This brought sectarian wars in Europe to an end and introduced a new concept of international relations based on the concept of sovereignty as a dominant paradigm. Consequently, European empires started to evolve towards a nation-state system. Following Britain and the United Provinces, countries like Russia, Prussia and France strengthened their national entrepreneurial bourgeoisie as collective entities and joined the trade revolution, which was to spread across Europe. States-supported national entrepreneurial bourgeoisies entered into a process of becoming both internationally-operating entities and a national class, continuing to trade at a global level. The Puritan leader Cromwell, who seized rule in Britain immediately after the Westphalia Peace Treaty and the English Civil War, incorporated the British colonies in all aspects of nation-state sovereignty with practices such as the Cabotage Law, and implemented radical "national-economy" policies. English



Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping at the first round of the Leaders' Roundtable at the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, April 2019.

joint stock and commandite companies controlled by the national entrepreneurial bourgeoisie began trading under the political and military protection of the nation-state, not only in its colonies, but all over the world. In their own sphere of sovereignty, Spain, France and even the United States received an aggressive response from English pirates when they took a stand against this aggressive and expansionist British entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, and from time to time, there were regional wars with the English Royal Fleet. In the name of maintaining itself as an expansionist and global power, the British bourgeoisie and the state's military often acted and fought together in overseas regions. In 1707, England had established the United Kingdom, in which Wales and Scotland were included under the leadership of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of these countries. Thereafter, the coalition wars, which had been occupying Europe since the 1660s, meant the United Kingdom was able to gradually seize control of the Atlantic Ocean and North America trade. Thus, until the Utrecht Peace Treaty of 1713, it reached across the Atlantic Ocean to any trade regions it wished from both France and Spain. With the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, the United Kingdom

**"While a unipolar system has the ability to forcefully constitute its own global commercial, political and social networks wholly in its own interest, and to control these networks, it does not mean that, in practice, it can achieve global stability and order."**

began to take control of other countries' colonies in North America and trade across the Atlantic. As of the third quarter of the 18th century, the British nation-state and its entrepreneurial bourgeoisie had snatched the Far East and Pacific colony trade from its global rival France and from the previous global power, the United Provinces. Thus, England established its unipolar system during this period (Arrighi, 2010).

While a unipolar system has the ability to forcefully constitute its own global commercial, political and social networks in its own interest, and to control these networks, it does not mean that, in practice, it can achieve global stability and order. The United Kingdom, for example, has been a leading player in a capitalist globalisation process that continuously struggled with economic crises (Polanyi, 2001). This being said, as in previous periods, one of the most dynamic forces of the global economic system has been the entrepreneurial class. This class initially emerged as an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, and by commandeering the nation-state government, came into power in various countries, but especially in Britain. Moreover, through its efficiency and dynamism, the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie has made significant contributions to maintaining the capitalist production system by bringing about social and cultural transformations at a global level (Hirschman, 1961), and the British entrepreneurial bourgeoisie has played a key role in making Britain a unipolar power since the mid-17th century. (An-

derson, 2013). In fact, by gradually expanding its areas of influence over time, the British entrepreneurial bourgeoisie has become one of the most efficient players, not only in the global economic system, but also in the global political system (Braudel, 1993). England's Civil War (1642-1651) and Glorious Revolution (1668), led to an understanding among the bourgeoisie of England, Wales and Scotland of the importance of unifying themselves under the umbrella of a British entrepreneurial bourgeoisie despite differences in belief and culture. With the Utrecht Peace Treaty, it was then able to test whether it could be efficient at a global level with its united and supra-national Britain entrepreneurial bourgeoisie identity.

When the British entrepreneurial bourgeoisie took control of nation-state government towards the end of 17th century, it began seeking solutions to some of the fundamental problems of the capitalist production system. In order to delay or overcome successive economic crises in a milder manner, it sought investment areas where growing capital could be absorbed and new markets to sell its stream of products. It transformed its currency into reserve money for international trade, and thus began using its overseas colonies for both investment and market purposes. In order to engage in production and investment outside its homeland, the British bourgeoisie created large scale commercial joint stock companies, which were vested with legal privileges and capable of doing business at the global level. By building railway and telegraph networks across North America and India within the first three quarters of the 19th century through these large scale companies, it established commercial, political and social network systems by means of which it could both liquefy its capital and market its products, and meet its need for natural resources. However, the economic interests of its colonies, and especially their needs for goods and services, were

not adequately taken into account while establishing these network systems. This unilateral growth strategy was able to prolong the existence of the United Kingdom as a unipolar global power for just over a quarter century (Dobb, 1967). Although the greatest economic crisis experienced by the United Kingdom was the global crisis in 1870s, it was observed that it experienced large and small crises every fifteen to twenty years between the 1760s and the 1870s. A significant portion of these large and small economic crises occurred in one or two areas of the “holy trinity” that was capital, investment and market, or, as in the 1870s crisis, in all three. The first signals of these global economic crises were decreases in the profit rates of the leading economies or secondary global economies (Tutan, 2003).

### The Experience of Multipolarity and Bipolarity: Aggressive and Friendly Capitalism Strategies

The 1870s global economic crisis marked the beginning of the end for the United Kingdom’s adventure as a unipolar power, and the comeback of a multipolar system occurred towards the end of 19th century as states such as Germany, the United States and Japan challenged the United Kingdom, both politically and economically on the global stage (Hobsbawm, 1996).

A number of commonalities can be noted in examining how these three contending economies became competitors of the United Kingdom in a very short time. Firstly, all three economies began the process of becoming a nation-state immediately prior to or following the 1870s crisis by uniting economically, politically and socially. Secondly, in order to make a technological breakthrough, they first planned their industrialization program via a maximum of two industrial sectors by preparing their National Innovation Systems in the last quarter of 19th century, and then immediately prepared

their long-term education program according to the industrial sectors determined in the National Innovation System. The industrial sector common to all three of these economies was steel and its by-products. At the time, industrialisation was first and foremost considered in terms of steel and its sub-industries, and steel production was also one of the main inputs of many industrial sectors. (Freeman and Soete, 1997).

With the technological breakthrough in the sectors determined by the National Innovation System and its spread across the sub-sectors in the early 20th century, Germany, the United States and Japan had in fact fully established a multipolar system, but each acted as a unipolar power when the opportunity arose. These three economies, which began to face difficulties in meeting their market, investment and natural resources needs, decided to cooperate with some neighbouring independent economies to find solutions to these problems based on mutual interests in sectors such as goods movement,

**“However, when these regional collaborations became insufficient for their increasing production capacities and capital generated as a result of their technological breakthroughs, the two great wars of the 20th century were the inevitable outcome.”**

transportation, logistics and mining. The mutual-interest principles were based on cooperation in various fields in line with the needs of these three large economies, but also took into consideration the needs and demands of the neighbouring independent economies.

However, when these regional collaborations became insufficient for their increasing production capacities and capital generated as a result of their technological breakthroughs, the two great wars

of the 20th century were the inevitable outcome. Their ability to continue their collaborations with certain regional economies in various areas during the World Wars was also about respecting and remaining faithful to the mutual-interest principles as much as possible (Landes, 1993 and 1998).

The question comes to mind of why certain economies in South East Europe, the Middle East, Central America and South East Asia –who collaborated with Germany, the United States and Japan in this manner during the first half of 20th century– failed to match the technological development which these three economies achieved in the last quarter of 19th century.

**"In the years following the 2008 economic crisis, it was understood by all that the United States could not fully re-establish its own unipolar system."**

Part of the answer lies in the National Innovation System. Most of the former preferred to prepare mid-term industrial development plans instead of constituting their own National Innovation System. Moreover, various collaborations with the three major economies were determined according to the latter's cyclical needs, rather than according to industrialization programs. In other words, these regional economies did not spend much effort on long-term laborious work, but tried to achieve the goals of technological development by cutting corners (Lundvall, 1992).

Following World War II, the multipolar system evolved into a bipolar one, the two poles of which were the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. These actors transformed their currency into reserve money in economies within their sphere of influence, and collaborated with specific regional economies to meet their own market, investment and natural resources needs. For example, while the United States maintained multiple collaborations in

accordance with the principles of mutual interest in order to militarily and economically strengthen South Korea against North Korea, South Korea made good use of these collaborations and determined its own National Innovation System objectives in the early 1970s. Subsequently, it prepared its mid-term industrial development plans. Indeed, over time, South Korea chose to collaborate with United States in fields the former determined in accordance with its National Innovation System objectives. One such area was the steel sector and its by-products, still at that time one of the most important indicators of industrialization and one of the main inputs of many industrial sectors. The other area was the shipping sector, one of South Korea's historically strong sectors. In short, South Korea made long-term plans for use of its limited resources and capital in the most productive manner in order to make a technological breakthrough, carried out technology transfers in accordance with this plan, and shared its market under these conditions (Hobday, 1995 and Lundvall, 1992).

Towards the end of the 20th century, this bipolar system came to an end, as the world transitioned once again to a multipolar power system (Amin, 2000), despite the United States intention to re-establish its unipolar system. Its plans were stymied by the European Union under the leadership of Germany, the new Russian Republic of Vladimir Putin, which emerged after the disintegration of the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and China, which rapidly grew and developed. In the years following the 2008 economic crisis, it was understood by all that the United States could not fully re-establish its own unipolar system.

### **Multipolar Global Power System: Belt and Road Initiative Project**

The United Kingdom, together with its entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and commercial joint stock companies was the unipolar leader of the 18th and

19th centuries. It satisfied its own demand for raw materials and further increased its capital by setting up railway and telegraph networks in its colonies and making large scale investments in various sectors. While making these investments, it ensured its own currency was used in those economies within its sphere of influence, and made it obligatory for loans necessary for investment in these economies to be provided from its own financial resources. This leadership strategy became the starting point

**"The European Union, the United States and China are the leading economies of the multipolar system of the 21st century. However, many economic, political and social strategies followed by the former two resemble the aggressive capitalism strategies that were the hallmark of the 19th and 20th centuries."**

of aggressive capitalism. Its investment, for example, in India's railways and telegraph lines in mid-19th century was to serve its own needs and debts without taking into consideration the real needs of India and others (Hobsbawm, 1998). On the other hand, towards the end of 19th century, we see Germany, having been one of the leaders of multipolar system, providing financing under favourable conditions and taking into consideration the real needs and demands of independent economies and turning towards collaboration for various investments. The construction of railways by Germany for the Ottoman Empire at this time with the low-interest loans it provided under favourable conditions and taking in consideration the needs of the Ottomans, is one example of the so-called "friendly" capitalism strategies implemented by leading economies in a multipolar system (Hobsbawm, 1996). It has been observed that while the main heir of the United

Kingdom's historical aggressive capitalism was the United States in the post-WWII bipolar system, there were occasions when, in order to limit the sphere of influence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it has provided relatively better investment and financial conditions in various sectors that did take into account the needs and demands of independent economies. Its above-mentioned relationship with South Korea provides one example of such "friendly" capitalism strategies (Hobsbawm, 1994).

The European Union, the United States and China are the leading economies of the multipolar system of the 21st century. However, many economic, political and social strategies followed by the former two resemble the aggressive capitalism strategies that were the hallmark of the 19th and 20th centuries. In addition, it has been seen that leading economies and their immediate followers adopting these aggressive strategies have, from time to time, interfered in the economic, political and social sovereignty of other countries in the system, and turned towards "post-modern colonization", with operations focusing on capital-investment- and market-related fields. These range from capturing the markets of economically weak nation-states through multi-national companies, to ensuring that, via global financial institutions, those nation-states with insufficient capital remain indebted, and limiting investment by these nation-states to sectors that they, the leaders, deem necessary. Thanks to such operations, the leading economies have found a way to exercise economic, political and social control over the economically weak nation-states without physically occupying them.

China was recognised as one of the leading economies of the multipolar system towards the end of the 20th century. As of 2018, China's economy was the world's largest in terms of purchasing pow-

er, and second only to the United States according to other financial criteria. China is the leading world economy in terms of direct investment, and is also the economy that makes the most national resources available to other economies. Yet, its economy

**"At a global meeting held in Beijing in April 2019 attended by leaders of thirty-seven countries and representatives of one hundred and thirty countries, it was signaled that the BRI could become something greater than a post-modern Silk Road Project."**

does not appear to have reached the peak of both existing and potential capacity. Indeed, it has been observed that the slowdown in China's economy in recent years is not due to its internal dynamics, but rather to its need to reduce its production capacity and slow its growth rate due to the ongoing recession in many global economies (World Bank, 2019).

China has for a long time been in commercial and financial relationships predominantly with other global leading economies such as United States of America and Germany. However, it is understood that, in the near future, the demands both financially and for goods and services, of these leading economies will remain under China's potential economic capacity. Moreover, in today's multipolar system, these economies are China's main rivals. These and other similar reasons lie behind China's launching of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) at the end of 2013, which primarily aims to assist development in economies in Eurasia and the African continent through creating new markets, new investment areas, new raw materials resources and new social and political cooperation.

The BRI initially appeared to have been prepared to carry out infrastructural investments with

Africa and Eurasian economies through land and sea transportation routes, and then trade goods and services. However, at a global meeting held in Beijing in April 2019 attended by leaders of thirty-seven countries and representatives of one hundred and thirty countries, it was signaled that the BRI could become something greater than a post-modern "Silk Road" Project.

In order to correctly understand the BRI, it is useful to examine it in two different contexts: China's existence as a leading world economy within the multipolar system with the potential to improve its existing position through new economic and political relations, and its declared intention to follow a smoother and more sharing leadership strategy rather than through use of the strategy of aggressive capitalism.

As for the first point, we see that China has succeeded in becoming a leading economy in the multipolar system within a very brief period, and has done so operating well below its potential capacity. China has also understood that its economy will be unable to reach its potential capacity in the long-term with the industrial, commercial and financial collaboration it has undertaken in the last quarter century with other global leading economies. For this reason, it has implemented the BRI to reach out to a wider area in order to meet the raw material, energy, investment and market needs for sustainability of the rapidly growing capital and production capacity in the future. The BRI embraces two-thirds of the world's population and one-third of the world's annual Gross Domestic Product. However, rather than implementing colonization or making use of post-modern versions of the colonisation tactics, China's BRI proposes partnerships, collaborations and sharing networks in which everyone will gain, and through which China itself hopes to reach the long-term potential capacity of its economy.

The second context reveals that China has correctly come to the conclusion that as a leading economy within a multipolar system, not only is it in need of many economies within its new sphere of influence in order to gain superiority over other leading economies and to reach its potential capacity, but also that these many economies are also in

**"It has also become clear that the choice of strategy does not lie only with China. It also depends on joint decisions to be taken by dozens of economies in Africa and Eurasia. "**

need of China. It has understood that employment of the aggressive capitalism strategy by previous global leaders proved unsustainable in the long term. Armed with this knowledge, in 2013 China first invited many of Africa's and Eurasia's economies to join its BRI. The question is now whether it will employ a friendly capitalism strategy or friendly socialism strategy in establishing these new global partnerships, collaborations and sharing networks.

It has also become clear that the choice of strategy does not lie only with China. It also depends on joint decisions to be taken by dozens of economies in Africa and Eurasia. These are, for the most part, economies which are either underdeveloped or developing, economies which have never engaged in any long-term National Innovation System preparation and who have accepted inward foreign capital and investment flows throughout the last century based on their own mid-term industrialization programs and the demands of leading economies, and taking into consideration the needs of the moment.

The BRI is much more than the former Silk Road. Those who wish to implement this project

have made it clear that they want to take new steps to have policies different from the Marshall Aid, IMF programs or regime change of previous periods. Those who will decide on BRI strategies are the developing and underdeveloped economies in Eurasia and Africa, all of whom must first determine their wishes and needs to be set out in a long-term National Innovation System that each will prepare. Subsequently, they should put into practice their mid-term industrialization program in compliance with their National Innovation System. Only then, will these economies should decide whether they will sit at the table with China to participate in its BRI in accordance with the principles of mutual interest and equality.

## Conclusion

Any political or economic rebuilding of the unipolar system in the near future seems unlikely, as does a resurgence of the recent bipolar system. Instead, we understand that the historical process has evolved towards a multipolar system in which leading economies form their own peripheral economies based on the political, economic and social strategies they will follow. The last two centuries of global power relations have demonstrated clearly to us the need for these strategies to be "friendly" and in accordance with the principle of mutual interest, whether they are in line with socialist or capitalist ideologies. Historical events have also taught us that today's world is rejecting aggressive strategies at the international level, and negatively reacts to global powers implementing these strategies at the first opportunity. With both unipolar and bipolar systems having a structural tendency to apply aggressive strategies, it is clear that a multipolar system will continue to grow for the foreseeable future.

The BRI is China's proposal for collaboration in a multipolar system. It has been prepared in accord-

ance with the principle of mutual interest, and while logistics, production, economy and trade connections between different economies within the BRI have been ensured, it is also clearly specified that its leading economy, China, will provide the necessary technology and finance to the participant economies. However, China is not the key to the BRI's success. This mostly depends on how much added value will be provided by its participant economies. Hence, each needs to determine one's expectations and needs and prepare a National Innovation System. BRI participants need to find ways to incorporate their designated industrial and commercial areas into the BRI in line with the principle of mutual interest. In other words, those economies who choose to sit at the table with China, the BRI sponsor, will decide on the seating arrangements themselves. 🌸

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# Building the New Silk Road in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Belt and Road Initiative from a Sino Turkish Perspective



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the respective positions of China and Turkey with reference to the general cooperation framework, principles, priorities, and mechanisms set out in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The study relies on an analysis of BRI-related documents prepared by the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China. Of the many documents which reflect each country's perspective on the BRI, the following two are of particular significance: the Action Plan issued by China's National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce, and a 2019 report entitled 'Locating Turkey in the Belt and Road Initiative', issued by the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey's Ministry of Commerce. Methodologically, this study is based on qualitative content analysis. Analysis results suggest that China aims at utilizing the BRI to open itself up to the external world in order to achieve an integration into the global economic system. Turkey, on the other hand, is aware of the fact that playing an active role in the BRI could increase its diplomatic maneuvering capacity, both regionally and globally. If Turkey fails to play an active role at the early stages of the Initiative, however, it could possibly lose its chance to assume an influential position at later stages.

**Keywords:** Eurasia; China; Silk Road; Belt and Road Initiative; Turkey

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BELT AND Road Initiative (BRI) by Chinese President Xi Jinping during a series of visits to Central and South-east Asia in 2013 created a new atmosphere of international cooperation. With China leading the way in this initiative, Turkey quickly emerged as one of its strategic partners. In order to gain a deep understanding of the new opportunities for cooperation in such an environment and to anticipate the difficulties that may arise in the evaluation of these opportunities, it is necessary to systematically grasp both countries' perspectives on the BRI. This study thus examines the unfolding of the BRI process and the resulting position of each country. In this context, the main purpose of this study is to examine the general cooperation framework, principles, priorities, and mechanisms of the BRI as well as China's and Turkey's respective positions in the Initiative.

The study relies on an analysis of BRI-related documents prepared by the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China. Of the many documents which reflect each country's perspective on

the BRI, the following two are of particular significance: the Action Plan issued by China's National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce, and a 2019 report entitled 'Locating Turkey in the Belt and Road Initiative', issued by the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey's Ministry of Commerce. Methodologically, this study is based on qualitative content analysis. This technique is a widely used tool for textual analysis. For the purpose of this analysis, the data retrieved from official documents were coded based on research aims in order to enable a systematic categorization (Neuman 2014).

The first section of this study provides a general outline of the BRI, followed by a presentation of its general framework and basic principles in the second section. The third section examines the main cooperation priorities and mechanisms of the BRI. "Five areas of cooperation" are defined within the BRI's framework: policy coordination, enhanced connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and deepening people-to-people bonds. The

fourth section will discuss China's role in the BRI. In the fifth and final part of the study, Turkey's potential policy strategies within the BRI will be evaluated with respect to the country's trading, foreign direct investment and logistics strategies.

### China's BRI in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In Eurasia, the cradle of civilizations, various trade routes have historically been formed based on economic and social necessities. Through these routes connecting Asia and Europe, exchange, peace and cooperation have guided the progress of human civilization (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Chatzky & McBride, 2019; Kuo, Kommenda, 2018). In the Action Plan on the BRI, these historical routes are described as reflecting the Silk Road Spirit, which "has been passed from generation to generation" and symbolizes "communication and cooperation between the East and the West" (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid several visits to Central and Southeast Asia. During these visits, he raised the issue of "jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road" (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; *China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; *Chronology of China's Belt and Road Initiative 2015*; Chatzky & McBride, 2019; Keyvan, 2017; Durdular, 2016: 77). At the invitation of President Xi Jinping, the presidents of 29 countries, including President Erdoğan of Turkey, attended the BRI International Forum on Cooperation, which took place on May 13-15, 2017 (Keyvan 2017). Advocates of the BRI maintain that it will contribute to world peace and prosperity if countries can build an inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit (*China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*). Within such a framework that is orient-

ed towards encouraging regional cooperation and political harmony in the broadest sense among the countries involved, the BRI has the following aims (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*):

- Integrating the development strategies of the countries involved;
- Promoting highly efficient allocation of resources;
- Promoting deep integration of markets;
- Promoting orderly and free flow of economic factors;
- Tapping market potential;
- Promoting investment and consumption,
- Creating demands and job opportunities; enhancing people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and mutual learning among the peoples of the relevant countries, and enabling them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity.

Geographically, the BRI unites Asia, Europe and Africa. According to the Action Plan, the BRI "focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe". In this respect, the plan is to develop overland economic corridors between "China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia and China-Indochina Peninsula" as well as maritime economic corridors between China and "the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia" and "from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other" (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Chatzky & McBride, 2019; Durdular, 2016: 81 – 82; *China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; *China pledges trans-regional customs co-op for Belt and Road, 2015*; Kuo, Kommenda, 2018; Keyvan, 2017). Therefore, the BRI seems to cover the area of the Ancient Silk Road,

but it is not limited to this geographical area. In fact, the Action Plan makes it clear that it is open to cooperation with all countries and even international and regional organizations (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; China's Belt and Road plan 'open' to all nations, 2015*).

### Basic Framework and Main Principles

According to the Action Plan on the BRI, the Initiative “advocates tolerance among civilizations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilizations” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Durdular, 2016: 81*).

The BRI abides by five basic principles. These are the principles of “mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual noninterference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Durdular, 2016: 90 – 81*). On the basis of these principles, the BRI “promotes practical cooperation in all fields, and works to build a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility featuring mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

Following the principle of mutual benefit, the Initiative “accommodates the interests and concerns of all parties involved, and seeks a conjunction of interests and the ‘biggest common denominator’ for cooperation so as to give full play to the wisdom and creativity, strengths and potentials of all parties” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Durdular, 2016: 81*).

In line with the fundamental political aims of the BRI (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*) countries are expected to

- “work in concert and move toward the objectives of mutual benefit and common security”;
- “improve the region’s infrastructure”;
- “put in place a secure and efficient network of land, sea and air passages”;
- “further enhance trade and investment facilitation”;
- “establish a network of free trade areas that meet high standards”;
- “maintain closer economic ties, and deepen political trust”;
- “encourage different civilizations to learn from each other and flourish together; and promote mutual understanding, peace and friendship among people of all countries.”

### Cooperation Priorities and Mechanisms

The BRI is expected to promote international cooperation in five key areas, “policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Durdular, 2016: 83; China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

### Policy Coordination

Within the context of policy coordination, the BRI strives to “promote intergovernmental cooperation, build a multilevel intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism, expand shared interests, enhance mutual political trust, and reach new cooperation consensus.” In this vein, countries located within the Initiative’s area:

- “may fully coordinate their economic development strategies and policies”;
- “work out plans and measures for regional cooperation”;

- “negotiate to solve cooperation-related issues”;
- “and jointly provide policy support for the implementation of practical cooperation and large-scale projects.” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Durdular, 2016: 83)

### Facilities Connectivity

Facilities connectivity is regarded as a priority area for the Initiative. In this field, the Action Plan expects countries to show mutual respect for each other’s concerns regarding sovereignty and security. It specifies that countries should:

- “should improve the connectivity of their infrastructure construction plans and technical standard systems”;
- “push forward the construction of international passageways and junctions” (for land, sea, and air routes), “ensure the security of oil and gas pipelines”, and “jointly advance the construction of cross-border optical cables and other communications trunk line networks”;
- “promote green and low-carbon infrastructure construction and operation management, taking into full account the impact of climate change on the construction.” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Durdular, 2016: 81; DEİK, 2019: 15)

### Unimpeded Trade

With respect to unimpeded trade, the aim of the Initiative is “to improve investment and trade facilitation, and remove investment and trade barriers for the creation of a sound business environment within the region and in all related countries” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

In the pursuit of these goals, the BRI seeks to open “free trade areas so as to unleash the potential for expanded cooperation”, “enhance customs cooperation such as information exchange [and] mutual recognition of regulations”, “consolidate and expand conventional trade” and “explore new growth areas of trade”, “develop modern service trade” and “promote trade through investment” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

In line with these plans, the Action Plan emphasizes the need to “speed up investment facilitation, eliminate investment barriers, and push forward negotiations on bilateral investment protection agreements and double taxation avoidance agreements to protect the lawful rights and interests of investors” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

Regarding investment, the Action Plan underlines the necessity to “expand mutual investment areas, deepen cooperation in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries, agricultural machinery manufacturing and farm produce processing, and promote cooperation in marine-product farming, deep-sea fishing, aquatic product processing, seawater desalination, marine biopharmacy, ocean engineering technology, environmental protection industries, marine tourism and other fields” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*). It moreover mentions the need to “increase cooperation in the exploration and development of coal, oil, gas, metal minerals and other conventional energy sources; advance cooperation in hydropower, nuclear power, wind power, solar power and other clean, renewable energy sources” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Durdular, 2016: 83 – 84; *China pledges trans-regional customs co-op for Belt and Road, 2015*; *China beefs up tax services to spur investment in Belt and Road, 2015*).

## Financial Integration

The objectives to be realized in the field of financial integration can be listed as follows:

- “make more efforts in building a currency stability system, investment and financing system and credit information system in Asia... [and] expand the scope and scale of bilateral currency swap and settlement”;
- “open and develop the bond market in Asia”;
- “make joint efforts to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and BRICS New Development Bank”;
- “conduct negotiation among related parties on establishing Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) financing institution”;
- “put into operation the Silk Road Fund”;
- “strengthen practical cooperation of China-ASEAN Interbank Association and SCO Interbank Association”;
- “carry out multilateral financial cooperation in the form of syndicated loans and bank credit.” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Durdular, 2016: 84)

The Initiative further wants to strengthen cooperation in the area of finance by “establish[ing] an efficient regulation coordination mechanism in the region... build[ing] a regional financial risk early-warning system, and creat[ing] an exchange and cooperation mechanism of addressing cross-border risks and crisis” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*; Durdular, 2016: 84).

## People-to-People Bonds

In terms of cross-cultural connections, the Action Plan introduces the following topics as the BRI’s major objectives (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*):

- promote cooperation and media cooperation in the field of cultural activities;
- promote exchanges of personnel, students and academics and jointly run education programs;
- “hold tourism promotion weeks and publicity months in each other’s countries; jointly create competitive international tourist routes and products with Silk Road features; and make it more convenient to apply for tourist visa in countries along the Belt and Road. We should push forward cooperation on the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road cruise tourism program. We should carry out sports exchanges and support countries along the Belt and Road in their bid for hosting major international sports events”;
- “strengthen cooperation with neighboring countries on epidemic information sharing, the exchange of prevention and treatment technologies and the training of medical professionals, and improve our capability to jointly address public health emergencies.”
- “provide medical assistance and emergency medical aid to relevant countries, and carry out practical cooperation in maternal and child health, disability rehabilitation, and major infectious diseases including AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.”;
- “establish joint labs (or research centers), international technology transfer centers and maritime cooperation centers, promote sci-tech personnel exchanges, cooperate in tackling key sci-tech problems, and work together to improve sci-tech innovation capability”;

- “integrate existing resources to expand and advance practical cooperation between countries along the Belt and Road on youth employment, entrepreneurship training, vocational skill development, social security management, public administration and management and in other areas of common interest”;
- “promote friendly exchanges between legislative bodies, major political parties and political organizations of countries along the Belt and Road”;
- “encourage major cities in these countries to become sister cities”
- “increase exchanges and cooperation between nongovernmental organizations of countries”;
- “organize public interest activities concerning education, healthcare, poverty reduction, biodiversity and ecological protection for the benefit of the general public.”

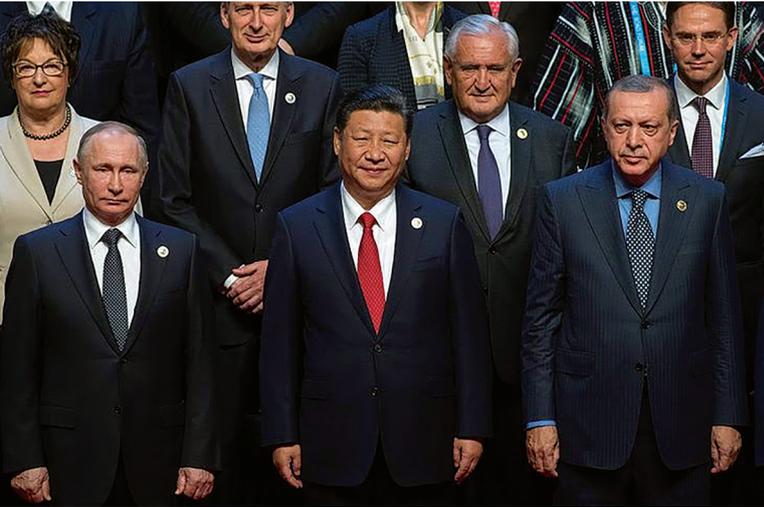
### China’s Role and Position in the BRI

In 1978, led by Deng Xiaoping, China embraced a policy of opening-up to the rest of the world, which connected the country’s economy to the global economy. Pioneering the BRI, China today aims to instigate a new opening and to integrate itself further into the global economic system (*China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Chronology of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; DEİK, 2019:4*).

The Initiative aims to further amplify China’s economic expansion and to achieve a strengthening of mutual benefit cooperation relationships with the rest of the world, particularly with

Asia, Europe and Africa. In this context, China is committed to taking more responsibility and contributing to world peace and social development. China’s policy is to encourage companies in different countries to invest in China and Chinese businesses to invest in other countries along the Belt and Road. The Chinese government actively promotes the construction of the Belt and Road in order to strengthen the exchange and cooperation between the Eastern, Western and Central regions of China, and to achieve a comprehensive expansion of the Chinese economy (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Chatzky & McBride, 2019; Durdular, 2016: 80*). Within this framework, the BRI is described as the construction of a network of interests under the leadership of China (*DEİK, 2019:8 – 14; Chatzky & McBride, 2019; Durdular, 2016: 79 – 80; Kuo, Kommenda, 2018; Keyvan, 2017*).

In the context of the Belt and Road, China aims to establish bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms in the areas mentioned in the previous sections in order to strengthen regional cooperation. For this purpose, President Xi Jinping and Chinese State Council Party Secretary Li Keqiang conducted various meetings. As a result of these negotiations that were conducted within the scope of the BRI, China has signed cooperation agreements with various countries regarding regional, economic and commercial areas and development plans. Based on these plans, China has developed stronger interest in enhancing communication and consultation with countries along the Belt and Road. By the same token, the country promotes “a number of key cooperation projects in the fields of infrastructure connectivity, industrial investment, resource development, economic and trade cooperation, financial cooperation, cultural exchanges, ecological protection and maritime cooperation” (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).



Belt and Road International Forum in Beijing in 2017.

### Turkey's Potential Policy Strategies in the BRI

Although it was developed under the leadership of China, it is possible to say that the BRI serves the common interests of Eurasian countries. On this basis, the countries involved in the Initiative need to cooperate and develop policies in line with their national interests.

In this framework, the Republic of Turkey has carried out and been continuing to carry out a variety of collaborations. Different agreements signed with the People's Republic of China such as the "Strategic Partnership", the "Agreement on the Harmonization of the Silk Road Economic Belt, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road and the Central Corridor Initiative", and the "Turkey-China Railway Cooperation Agreement" can be referred to as examples of this cooperation. In addition, the "Agreement with the People's Republic of China on the Mutual Establishment of Cultural Centers" was signed in 2018, and a Turkey Tourism Year event was organized the same year in China (Keyvan, 2017; Durdular, 2016: 90). In a similar direction, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway and the Edirne-Kars high-speed train projects are being realized in such a way that they will be in-

tegrated with the Marmaray rail line. In this context, "the train, which had taken off in China and arrived in Turkey via Kars, on November 7, 2019, became the first freight train to move on to Europe using Marmaray" (Anadolu Agency, 2019).

The BRI can only exist on the basis of cooperation. For a consensus regarding policy cooperation based on common interests, it is necessary for the countries to formulate plans on the basis of their national interests. If it wants to benefit from the opportunities that the BRI intends to generate, Turkey is required to develop a comprehensive plan and strong policies. In this respect, the report "Locating Turkey in the Belt and Road Initiative" prepared by the Turkish Ministry of Commerce's Board of Foreign Economic Relations in 2019 reveals Turkey's potential contributions to the BRI.

The report mentions that "the world's center of gravity is changing and that it is important for Turkey to map its needs on a complex network of corridors and poles" (DEİK, 2019: 14). It is stated that taking an active role in the BRI "will provide Turkish diplomacy with a wider radius of action in the region and in the world" (DEİK, 2019: 22).

In his introduction to the report, Turkish Minister of Commerce Ruhsar Pekcan describes the BRI "as an important initiative that turns our countries that lay on opposite ends of the historical Silk Road into each other's neighbors" (DEİK, 2019: Introduction, paragraph: 3). Pekcan also indicates that the BRI would be "one of the most important mechanisms for Turkey in capitalizing on the potential and the opportunities of the global economic conjuncture" (DEİK, 2019: Introduction, paragraph: 3). In this regard, it is put forward that "Turkey should play an active part in the BRI in order to benefit from economic and political opportunities (DEİK, 2019: 3)". It is argued that "in case Turkey fails to play an active role at the early stages of the Initiative, it will be difficult for the country to assume an influential position within the Initiative at later stages" (DEİK, 2019: 5).

The report lays out the target for Turkey to use its geographical position to its advantage and to “become a logistics center in the Initiative” (DEİK, 2019: 41). According to the report, Turkey should develop projects that particularly position its ports along the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea within the Maritime Silk Road (DEİK, 2019: 16). Another target put forward in the report is for the country “to seize the opportunities provided by the Belt and Road market in order to attract foreign investors, especially Chinese investors, in tech-intensive areas, to increase commercial relations with other BRI member countries and to establish Turkey as a bridge between Europe and China” (DEİK, 2019). According to other objectives defined in the report, “Turkey has to increase its efficiency in existing markets, reach new markets within the scope of the BRI, diversify its export market and reduce its economic dependence on the EU” (DEİK, 2019).

By way of conclusion, the report also conveys some general policy recommendations. These policy recommendations are as follows (DEİK, 2019: 46):

- “Turkey’s attractiveness with respect to Chinese investment should be increased;
- Turkey should engage in joint production and development of technology with China;
- It should be a priority for Turkey to become a logistics center;
- In concert with China, Turkey should prioritize and enter other markets;
- Turkey should prioritize areas of trade that are likely to grow through the BRI.”

In the report, Turkey’s potential economic strategies within the BRI are grouped under three headings. These headings specify the strategies as “Turkey’s potential trading strategies, Turkey’s potential foreign direct investment strategies and Turkey’s potential logistics strategies” (DEİK, 2019: 23; 41; 48).

## Turkey’s Potential Trading Strategies

Turkey’s potential trading strategies within the BRI are divided into three sub-headings: “Increasing trade with China”, “Increasing trade with BRI countries”, and “Protecting Turkey’s position as a bridge between China and Europe” (DEİK, 2019: 24 - 27).

As regards to increasing the trade with China, the report includes the following observations (DEİK, 2019: 24):

- “According to the results of a five-stage analysis that filtered different products, China allows Turkey to impact its market in 225 out of 4914 products;
- Machine-electricity, food, transport, chemicals, textiles and metals are among the product categories in which Turkey is involved in the competition;
- Within the scope of the Turkish Trade Centers that will be opened in Asia, the introduction of Turkey’s producers and their products on the Chinese market through special programs and institutions may be part of the policies that help increase trade with China.”

With respect to increasing and facilitating trade with BRI countries, the report points out the following strategies (DEİK, 2019: 24):

- “In order to convert the harmony in the trading structure into an increase in trade, it is important to seek an even stronger integration with the BRI countries and to communicate within an economic framework;
- It will be beneficial to speed up digital customs processes and accelerated customs clearance processes as well as the reduction of trade barriers between BRI countries and to develop strategies to strengthen logistical ties with these countries.”

With respect to protecting Turkey's position as a bridge between China and Europe, the report includes the following indications (DEİK, 2019: 24):

- “Since the BRI is expected to strengthen and pluralize potential commercial corridors between China and Europe, this situation represents a threat to Turkey's geopolitical position in the region and in particular investments in Eastern Europe enhance the competitive power of potential routes;
- Turkey needs to assume an active role in the BRI and in this respect also needs to strengthen its relations in Eastern Europe”

### Turkey's Potential Direct Foreign Investment Strategies

Turkey's potential direct foreign investment strategies within the BRI are divided into two sub-headings: “Attracting direct investment from China to Turkey” and “Attracting global investments from BRI countries and those targeting these countries to Turkey” (DEİK, 2019: 34 - 39).

The following possibilities are outlined in the report with respect to attracting direct investment from China to Turkey (DEİK, 2019: 34):

- “Turkey's industrial production capabilities could be advanced by drawing Chinese direct investment and through the knowledge and technology transfer gained from these investments;
- Increasing capital flows to middle-low-tech production areas that China has begun to move abroad, thereby integrating with global value chains and opening the way for the production of complex production technologies and products of the future.”

With respect to attracting global investments from BRI countries and investments targeting these

countries to Turkey, the following is stated in the report (DEİK, 2019: 34):

- “BRI markets will attract new investments due to a developing logistics infrastructure;
- attracting investments to Turkey can be rendered possible through effective and integrated logistics, customs and low political risk;
- foreign direct investment should be targeted under different headings such as administrative centers with not only local but also regional and global connectivity, production, and logistics.”

### Turkey's Potential Logistics Strategies

Turkey's potential logistics strategies within the BRI are divided into three sub-headings: “Improving Turkey's logistics infrastructure with the BRI”, “Increasing Turkey's competitiveness as a logistics center”, and “Increasing the potential and efficiency of the Turkish logistics industry” (DEİK, 2019: 41).

With respect to improving Turkey's logistics infrastructure with the BRI, the report presents the following requirements (DEİK, 2019: 41):

- Completion of ongoing railway investments and the connection of high-speed railways on the East-West axis;
- identifying new possible investment requirements for participation in the BRI and attracting Chinese investors for infrastructure investment needs;
- increasing links between national logistics centers.”

With respect to increasing Turkey's competitiveness as a logistics center, the following is mentioned in the report (DEİK, 2019: 41):

- Reaping higher benefits from the potential of the new Istanbul Airport by developing an air transportation connection within the framework of the BRI;

- integrating recently completed and ongoing infrastructure investments with BRI corridors;
- consolidating Turkey's role as an opinion leader in Central Asia and the Caucasus in order to increase logistic connections in the Central Corridor;
- improving performance in border crossings and international crossings and bringing process improvements to customs."

With respect to increasing the potential and efficiency of the Turkish logistics industry, the report outlines the following possible policies (DEİK, 2019: 41);

- The possibility of promoting Turkey's position as an international transit route for the landlocked countries of the Central Corridor;
- Turkey should aim to solve logistical problems with BRI countries within the scope of its BRI projects and targets or while defining its BRI projects and targets;
- The reach of the Turkish logistics industry in third markets such as Africa, where Turkey's presence is limited, can possibly be increased through operations in China."

### Conclusion

To conclude, the BRI, advanced by China, is an initiative that could protect common interests, increase social welfare and exchanges between different cultures within a multipolar world order by promoting regional cooperation between Eurasian countries (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*). In line with these goals, the BRI is based on five basic principles: "mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and

mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence" (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*). The BRI defines "policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds as [its] five major goals" (*Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015*).

The BRI is an initiative developed mainly under the leadership of China. On the basis of this initiative, the Chinese economy is devising a new policy of opening-up. However, both the principles dominating the initiative and its objectives and policy instruments require the participation of other countries. As a matter of fact, the future of the initiative will be determined by policies that countries will work out according to the principle of mutual benefit.

As indicated in the report published by the Foreign Economic Relations Board of the Turkish Ministry of Commerce, assuming an active role in the early stages of the BRI will allow Turkey to assume a strong position within the Initiative and to expand of its radius of action in the diplomatic sphere. In this context, the report presents policy recommendations regarding the following topics: "Raising Turkey's attractiveness with respect to Chinese investment; promoting joint production and technological development of Turkey and China; prioritizing the development of Turkey into a logistics center; entering new markets in concert with China; prioritizing areas of trade that are likely to grow through the BRI". (DEİK, 2019: 46) These policy recommendations are compatible with Turkey's economic development strategy and the BRI's basic principles, purposes, and policies.

Next to discussing the BRI's general cooperation framework, principles, priorities, and mechanisms alongside China's leading role in the Initiative and Turkey's potential policy strategies, this study further had the aim of lighting the way toward future research regarding the BRI. The need for re-

search concerning the BRI's future, its principles, the determination of mutual benefits and, in this very context, the economic and political design of the BRI as well as China's role and Turkey's potential policy strategies in the Initiative is likely to further increase in the coming period. 🌱

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# China's Potential Role in the Remaking of Regional Order in the Middle East: Motivations, Opportunities and Challenges



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## ABSTRACT

Can the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provide a remedy to current problems in the Middle East? What are the driving forces, opportunities and challenges for China to play a constructive role in the Middle East? These are some of the questions that this article will attempt to answer. Domestic academia in China had extensively discussed the “westward strategy” before the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward. At that time, this strategy was conceived of as a hedge against the “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” of the United States. However, under the Belt and Road Initiative, China is also engaged in strengthening its interactions with Middle Eastern countries, which will be an important way to further strengthen China’s Western front as an extension of China’s opening up to the outside world, a further acceleration of Eurasian linkages, and an effort towards further strengthening globalization. The “Belt and Road Initiative” faced severe Western criticism. Yet in fact, this initiative is not modeled on the post-World War II Marshall Plan as a Chinese conspiracy. The initiative is not a geopolitical tool, but it is intended to serve as a practical cooperation platform. The Middle East is an important site on the strategic roadmap of the Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, achieving regional stability is in line with China’s overseas strategic interests. Without getting on the train, however, China will not learn how to drive. It is through participation in the practical process of addressing these problems that China can accumulate greater experience in managing international conflicts and improve its ability to deal with complicated international disputes.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road, Turkey, Middle East, globalization, geopolitics

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE WORLD witnessed the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of World War I. Both of these two events had an epoch-making influence on the Middle East. Nowadays, the regional order in the Middle East has changed quite significantly, especially after the Arab Spring in 2011. The Syrian war has entered its eighth year; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has once again become a hot issue under Trump’s pro-Israel “biased policy”; the Yemen crisis still cannot see any hope for resolution; the sectarian conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has become more intense; and the importance of regional countries has grown. There is no doubt that even though one hundred years have passed since World War I, the Middle East is still trapped in the dilemma of war and peace.

In retracing and exploring the transformation of the Middle East over the past 100 years, we are

compelled to ask ourselves how the geopolitical order of the modern Middle East has evolved in this particular way. Why has this order presented itself as so awry since the Arab Spring? Is it possible to achieve a transition from turmoil to peace in the Middle East? What role can China play for the reconstruction of a stable and peaceful order in the Middle East? Can the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provide a remedy to current problems in the Middle East? What are the driving forces, opportunities and challenges for China to play a bigger role in the Middle East? These are some of the questions that this article will attempt to answer.

### The Centuries-Old Evolution of the Middle East Order

The Ottoman Empire’s history stretches across 623 years, if it is considered that the Ottoman Dynasty started in 1299 and the last Sultan was dethroned

in 1922. Alternatively, the Ottoman Empire has a history of 465 years, if the year of 1453 as the fall of Constantinople is counted as the beginning and the year 1918 as the year of the empire's disintegration (Sanyi, 2018, p. 1). Whether it lasted 623 or 465 years, the Ottoman Empire achieved a so-called "Pax-Ottomanica" in the vast areas of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and North Africa.

Just as Bernard Lewis argued, "the Ottomans had erected a political structure which endured and a political system which worked. They had also created a political culture which was well understood and in which each group and indeed each individual knew his position, his powers and limits and, most important, what was due from him and to him, to whom and from whom. The Ottoman system had fallen on bad times, but despite many difficulties, it was still functioning. It had lost the loyalty and acceptance of most of its Christian subjects, but it was still accepted as legitimate by most of the Muslim population. During its last decades, the Ottoman order was beginning to show signs of recovery and even of improvement. Any such development was, however, diverted and terminated by the Ottoman entry into the First World War and the resulting end of the Empire — the collapse of the state and the fragmentation of its territories." (Lewis, 1995, p. 342)

As a result of World War I, the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire collapsed following military defeat, while Tsarist Russia was conquered by the storm of the October Revolution. Britain and France continued to rule the world as winners. During the Paris Conference in 1919, the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and other related predatory treaties were signed after fierce quarrels. Thus, the so-called new order of the "Versailles System" was established by imperial countries in Europe after World War I. According to the Treaty of Sevres, the countries, which were newly established after the dissolution



Anti-government demonstrations during the Tunisian revolution, 23 January 2011.

of the Ottoman Empire, became the mandated territories of Britain and France. However, the Turkish War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk interfered with the Allies' intention to carve up the Ottoman Empire and made the Treaty of Sevres abortive. At this time, the United States' presence in this region cannot be compared to that of the European powers and the principal contradiction in that era was that between the peoples of West Asia and North Africa and British and French imperialism.

Over the following 20 years, Germany gradually gained a foothold in Iran and Afghanistan, and Italy's influence expanded into Ethiopia and Yemen, gradually advancing toward the Fertile Crescent, the core areas of British and French influence.

However, World War II ended with another victory for the Allies, and the fascist forces of Germany and Italy were completely driven out of the Middle East. Unfortunately, the Allies would later continue to compete quietly in this region. This is mainly manifested in three aspects. The first is the confrontation between Britain and France in Syria and Lebanon. The second is the competition over the Middle Eastern oil between Britain and the United States. The third is the opposition between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union in Iran, where the competition for Iran is due not only to political and economic, but also to ideological reasons. Unsurprisingly, some would therefore argue that, earlier than anywhere else in the world, the Cold War began in Iran. The rivalry between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union in Iran unraveled as a prelude to the post-war global struggle between the East and the West, and once again pushed Iran to the forefront of this global conflict.

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union began a cold war for global hegemony, which resulted in a bipolar world order. In the eyes of the United States, the Middle East was a cornerstone in both military and economic terms to the survival of the United States, Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Therefore, any attempt by outside forces to control the Persian Gulf was regarded as a serious attack on the vital interests of the United States. In the Soviet Union's view, the Persian Gulf region was the main target and site for a breakthrough in the Soviet Union's endeavors to achieve its South Strategy. It was also an important strategic goal for the Soviet Union to flank Europe and contend with the United States. Therefore, both the United States and the Soviet Union regarded the Middle East as an important strategic region for global hegemony. Competition has thus been fierce for decades. The presence and competition of foreign forces in the Middle East after World War II

marks the history of the two competing powers in the Middle East.

After the collapse of the bipolar order, the United States was eager to extend its influence across the entire Middle East in order to maximize its global hegemony. It hoped to politically control the Middle East and to achieve US-led stability so as to obtain more realistic and long-term economic benefits. The strategic goal of the United States was to establish a new order in the Middle East guided by the American model first and then to institute a new world order dominated by the US. To this end, the underlying policy of the United States at that time was to "promote peace talks in the west, contain Iraq and Iran in the east, and strengthen allies." (Zhao, 2000, p. 365) Meanwhile, the turbulent domestic political situation in Russia and the impending collapse of the country's economy have left Russia unable to pay more attention to Middle East affairs. It is possible to say that the United States has assumed a dominant position in the Middle East, so that it was able to arbitrarily launch the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Therefore, a retrospective of the past 100 years of the Middle East shows that since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the people, nations and countries in the Middle East have never become the masters of this region. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has always been the Westerners who have ruled. The old order collapsed, but a new order has never been established.

### Disorder in the Middle East After the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was triggered by the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia. On December 17, 2010 Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit vendor, set himself alight in order to protest unemployment. As a high-school dropout who had to carry his family's financial burden, Mohamed Bouazizi was unable to find a job. As a street vendor, he was treated brutally

by the local police. Subsequently, the revolutionary tide swept the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisian Prime Minister Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had to step down, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh handed over power to his deputy, and Syria descended into civil war. Later, the formerly oppressed Islamic forces came into power, causing fierce political games in the region. When the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, won the elections on June 24, 2012, the “Arab Spring” turned into the “Islamic Spring”. The conflict between Islamic forces and secular forces thus became more and more intense. In Egypt, this led to a military coup through which Mohamed Morsi was overthrown. In this chaos, an extremist Islamic group called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) came into being, recruiting a large number of young people from all over the world, collecting a large amount of money by selling oil, and occupying a large part of land in northern Iraq and Syria. With Russia’s strong intervention in Syria, fighting ISIS became the main concern of the international community. In the meantime, extremist Islamic forces have been weakened. Currently, with Turkey’s strong presence in northern Syria, new difficulties and challenges seem to have their share in shaping the future of the Middle East.

After this round of uprisings and turmoil called the Arab Spring, the geopolitical order of the Middle East has undergone significant changes, mainly resembled in the following characteristics: First, the ability and willingness of major powers, especially the United States, to control the Middle East have diminished. The aim of the US now is to intensify the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, even expecting direct war between the two countries. Second, after the weakening of the great powers, regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, Israel,



Protesters marching to Sanaa University in Yemen, 1 March 2011.

and Saudi Arabia have started to play a more active role. This is a phenomenon not seen in the past 100 years, and the autonomy of regional countries has continued to increase. These countries began to compete for regional dominance. Third, proxy wars continue to ravage this region. For example, armed forces supported by foreign powers continue to fight in Syria, Yemen, and Libya and there is no sign of an end to these conflicts. Fourth, extremist forces such as ISIS have declined under the attack of major powers, especially Russia. Fifth, Russia’s strong intervention in Syria through military means has increased its legitimacy, not only because Russia was invited by the Syrian government, but also because Russia was able to defeat a common enemy of the international community. Therefore, Russia was able to occupy a high moral ground. At the same time, Russia strengthened coordination with Turkey and Iran through the Astana process, thereby gaining a steady foothold in Syria. Sixth, a new wave of nationalism is emerging in the Middle East. In the context of political instability, economic decline, and constant wars, the Middle East is facing a greater crisis.

What are the underlying reasons for this series of changes in the Middle East? Professor Yang

Guang, the President of the Chinese Association of Middle East Studies, commented that “peace” and “development” are still the two main themes in Middle Eastern politics and that none of them has been solved despite a 100 years of effort. This is mainly due to the following: First, the long-term persistence of socio-economic problems; second, the large number of younger population of the Arab region; third, the economic and social problems of Middle Eastern countries are further exacerbated in the era of globalization; fourth, the significant impact of information technologies on political movements; fifth, Western countries have long advocated Western-style “democracy and freedom”, which are not compatible with the reality of Middle Eastern countries. (Huang, 2016, pp. 227-238)

The Syrian war has entered its eighth year and the civil war seems to continue despite Russia’s success. So how can we evaluate the changes in the Middle East since the Arab Spring? The only criterion for judging whether social revolutions such as the “Arab Spring” have promoted social progress or caused social decline is the following: Is there a relative improvement in the people’s standard of living after the “revolution” compared to the situation prior to the “revolution”. In Tunisia, it can be observed that the unemployment rates across the country currently are above 20% in 2018, thereby far exceeding the pre-revolutionary average. (Wang, 2018)

Moreover, what can the Western countries learn from this transformation? The Western intervention and the “color revolutions” they promoted did not allow these countries to reap the fruits of “democratic transformation” and plunged the region into endless chaos. Under political turmoil, economies further deteriorated, and sectarian and tribal conflicts became even more prominent. The whole world has been affected by a global refugee crisis and terrorist attacks.

## China’s Expanded Presence in the Middle East

China’s Middle East diplomacy is an integral part of its overall diplomacy. For a long time, however, the Middle East does not figure as important as the “big powers” and the “neighboring countries” in China’s diplomatic layout. In his talk *Our Diplomatic Policies and Tasks* on April 30, 1952, Premier Zhou Enlai had made the comment that “with respect to the countries in the Islamic world, we are less engaged in the relationships and have less influence. We should work to gradually change this.” (*Selected Works of Zhou Enlai’s Diplomacy, 1990, p. 54*) Yet in fact, since the Bandung Conference in 1955, China has successively established diplomatic relations in the vast regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, especially with major countries in the Middle East. This undoubtedly broke the diplomatic isolation and greatly enhanced China’s international prestige. Now, with the Belt and Road Initiative and China’s increasing interest in the Middle East, Middle Eastern affairs will have a greater impact on China. Middle Eastern peoples and businesses have already started to grow a keen interest in China’s increasing global presence. Although China is still unwilling to intervene in the region, it has to respond to the current situation as its status rises and its interests expand.

First, from the perspective of political interests, China has become more active in the region, and its role has been increasingly valued by all parties involved. The contribution of Eastern wisdom has been well received, which has also enhanced China’s influence. China’s position on issues such as the Palestinian issue, the Syrian crisis, the Yemen crisis, and the Libyan crisis, can be exchanged for regional countries’ positions on key issues such as Taiwan, the One-China policy, and the South China Sea. In addition, as one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China’s position

on many international issues can win greater support and respect through its constructive role in regional affairs.

Secondly, in terms of strategic interests, the “Western Front”, which concerns the Middle Eastern countries, can serve as a strategic backing for China, allowing it to contain Western expansionism and calmly meet challenges from the sea on the

**“Domestic academia in China had extensively discussed the “westward strategy” before the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward. At that time, this strategy was conceived of as a hedge against the “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” of the United States.”**

“Eastern Front”. Domestic academia in China had extensively discussed the “westward strategy” before the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward. At that time, this strategy was conceived of as a hedge against the “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” of the United States. However, under the Belt and Road Initiative, China is now engaged in strengthening its interactions with Middle Eastern countries, which will be an important way to further strengthen China’s Western Front as an extension of China’s opening up to the outside world, a further acceleration of Eurasian linkages, and an effort towards further strengthening globalization.

Third, in terms of economic benefits, the Middle East is the world’s largest region for energy exports and the main source of China’s energy imports. Today, oil from the Middle East accounts for more than 50% of China’s imported oil. The Middle East is increasingly important for China’s energy needs. At the same time, the development of energy transport routes from the Middle East to China will have a significant impact on China’s oil import and energy security.(Gao, 2014, p. 45) The deterioration of the

situation in the Middle East will not only directly harm China’s national interests. In September 2019, the drone attacks on Saudi oil fields also sounded an alarm regarding China’s energy security.

In addition, the bilateral trade volume between China and the Middle Eastern countries is rising. At the beginning of 2016, it was close to US \$300 billion, making China the largest trade partner of many Middle Eastern countries. The bilateral trade volume is likely to increase to US \$600 billion over the next 10 years. (Gao, 2015, p. 14) This shows that there is great potential for cooperation between China and Middle Eastern countries. Specifically:

1) The consumption potential of Middle Eastern economies is huge because young people dominate the regional demographic structure. Regional infrastructure construction is developing rapidly, and expanding markets need stable capital inflow for continuous output. China’s banks and enterprises have large capital reserves and possess many business contacts in Turkey, Iran and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Continuous capital flow will bring considerable financial benefits.

2) Strong Chinese military enterprises will greatly contribute to arms sales to the benefit of regional stability.

3) The development and utilization of fossil energy (oil, natural gas) and new energy (solar energy, nuclear energy) will help China’s advanced energy technology to be employed for new uses. The intended cooperation with Egypt, Iran and Turkey will blow the horn of China’s energy technology to the world.

4) In terms of security interests, the situation in the Middle East is complex in the sense that the region faces both traditional and non-traditional security threats. Especially in recent years, extremist forces and terrorists have taken advantage of continued regional instability, extremist ideologies and

terrorist activities. This can easily cause damage to China's overseas interests, to people's lives and properties, and to the security of Western China. It greatly increases risks associated with China's endeavors to promote the construction of the "Belt and Road" in the Middle East.

With respect to securing China's interests in the Middle East, there are two kinds of approaches to the region in China: the "soft defense" position and the "hard defense" position. "Soft defense" is based on "demilitarization" and seeks to maintain good relations with the countries of the region and to maintain legitimate rights and interests; the "hard defense" approach emphasizes the strengthening of military forces in the Middle East in defense of national interests. Whether China's presence in the Middle East will take the path of "soft defense" or "hard defense", eminent questions for the future are: if and how one can adhere to the "non-interference policy" in the new situation; and if it is ever possible to participate in Middle Eastern affairs by way of "creative" or "constructive" intervention.

### China's Role in the Reconstruction of Order in the Middle East

The current regional situation is still increasingly dynamic. Middle Eastern countries seem to be transitioning "from chaos to order". However, there is still uncertainty given that great powers and regional forces have also been adjusting their strategic policies to the ever-changing situation since the Arab Spring. Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative in the Middle East is therefore a challenge for China, but it simultaneously comes with a lot of opportunities.

First, China's foreign policy towards the Middle East is being increasingly recognized by the region. Since the Arab Spring, however, the domestic situation in these countries has varied greatly. Coun-

tries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen are still suffering from frequent crises and wars. So far, their economy still performs badly, and it is difficult to find a way out of the crisis. There is also another group of countries, which are in a period of transition (e.g. Egypt and Tunisia). Politically, these countries have achieved relative stability, but they are still trapped in serious economic difficulties and cannot find any solution to get out of the crisis by themselves. The third group of countries is composed of GCC countries, for example Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whose stability is challenged due to the adverse effects of the Yemen crisis and oil price fluctuations, although they are relatively stable as a whole. In this cycle of transformation in the Middle East, China has always adhered to the solution of political dialogue and "development for stability". Although it was not fully recognized by Middle Eastern countries from the very beginning, the eight years since the Arab Spring have proved China's proposition right.

Second, China's development road is being increasingly respected by Middle Eastern countries. In the course of 70 years of development, China has always adhered to the principle of "gradual reform" and maintained a basic level of social stability. In economic terms, China has carried out a reform of the economic system at home, consolidated the relationship between the government and the market, reduced the government's excessive intervention in the economy, promoted the healthy functioning of the private economy, and strengthened the development of its infrastructure and human resources, thus laying the foundation for steady economic development (Guang, 2019) Moreover, China will continue to increase the depth and breadth of its opening to the outside, constantly attract foreign investment, and strengthen trade dependence with other countries in the world. Interestingly, a com-

parison of the development paths taken by China and Turkey shows that both countries share similar experiences in terms of political and economic development, which can also provide useful lessons for cooperation between China and other Middle Eastern countries.

Third, China's Belt and Road Initiative is being increasingly accepted by Middle Eastern countries. Since the day the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward, many countries and forces in the West have attempted to defame this initiative through various arguments, including the "geo-expansion theory", the "economic predatory theory", "neo-imperialism" and the "environmental destruction theory". In particular, the negative reports of the US think tanks can easily increase the doubts of Middle Eastern countries, especially the Gulf States, concerning the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the great role of Middle Eastern countries in the initiative must be rooted in the profound understanding of the initiative itself. Recently, the opening of the Sino-Euro train between China and Turkey has played a greater exemplary role in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative in the Middle East.

China's diplomacy in the Middle East has achieved a lot of things, but this is rarely acknowledged. Therefore, China has been criticized for not having a great impact on the settlement of issues in the Middle East. Compared with the United States, Europe, Russia and other large countries or regions with deeply intertwined historical trajectories and extensively interlinked interests, China's diplomatic resources in the Middle East are still limited (Ding, 2016, p. 154). This being said, in recent years China has done a lot of work to solve the Middle East's current problems, while the principles embodied by China are increasingly being accepted. First, the fairness of China's position is coming to light. China has

always adhered to the policy of non-alignment and non-interference in internal affairs and has maintained good relations with Palestine and the Arab world. Therefore, China is not led by selfishness or self-interest in promoting the settlement of difficult challenges in the Middle East, and its position is acceptable to all parties involved. Second, the stability of China's policy is to be acknowledged. Although there may be short-term fluctuations in the relationships between China and the Middle East, a simple change of government will not lead to dramatic changes in basic diplomatic principles, and China can be trusted by Middle Eastern countries, which is in sharp contrast to Western countries. Third, interference by great powers, especially US intervention, constitutes the root of many problems in the Middle East. China however does not intend to replace the United States, but seeks to carry out balanced and neutral interactions between all parties concerned and wants to play a greater constructive role.

### **Opportunities, Challenges and Limits of the BRI in the Middle East**

In 2017, Xi Jinping's report at the 19th CPC National Congress included the development and implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" as an important part of China's overall layout of economic development and all-round diplomacy. In addition, the 19th Congress passed a resolution regarding the constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment), including the development of the Belt and Road Initiative into the party constitution. This means that the Belt and Road Initiative will become a long-term policy, which fully demonstrates that under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, China attaches great importance to the development of the Belt and Road Initiative and firmly promotes international cooperation.

There are 65 countries along the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt” in the Belt and Road Initiative, of which 31 countries are Muslim countries. Eighteen of these are Middle Eastern countries, thus approaching 1/3 overall. Of course, the initiative has currently expanded into Africa, Europe and Latin America. More importantly however, these Middle Eastern countries serve as a bridge to link China to Europe and have an important influence for the smooth progress of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The “Belt and Road Initiative” faced severe Western criticism. Yet in fact, this initiative is not modeled on the post-World War II Marshall Plan as a Chinese conspiracy. The initiative is not a geopolitical tool, but it is intended to serve as a practical cooperation platform. It is not a foreign aid plan, but a joint development initiative in order for countries to jointly build and share prosperity. Finally, the initiative is not to replace the existing mechanisms for regional cooperation but to promote the coordination of development strategies among various countries and to achieve complementary advantages.

Besides, there are important internal reasons for its initiative. Since 2010, the United States has been implemented the strategy of “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” (or “Returning to the Asia Pacific Strategy”), which aims to confront China directly. By enhancing its military and diplomatic presence in the Asia Pacific region, the US seeks to dilute and inhibit China’s growing strength, contain its strategic development as much as possible, and curb its rise. Hence, a group of experts on international issues represented by Wang Jisi proposed that China, located in the center of the Asia-Pacific region, should not confine its vision to coastal areas, traditional competitors and partners, but should consider the strategic plan of moving westward to promote the rebalancing of China’s geo-strategy.

As a matter of fact, the “westward strategy” has long been carried out by China. Prof. Fei Xiaotong, a prominent political scientist, has put forward a macro model of China’s development, taking Shanghai as the leader, Jiangsu and Zhejiang as the two wings, the Yangtze River as the backbone, the Southern Silk Road and the Eurasian land bridge going out of Yangguan in the West as the tail. He also put forward the idea of “two markets, hit with both hands”, which means paying equal attention to the domestic market and the international market. The idea here is to address China’s unbalanced development between the East and the West, especially the remaining gap after the policy of opening up. In contrast to “Western development”, which has always been an official policy of China, due to the vagueness of its motivations, goals, paths and means, the “westward strategy” has not become a national policy, i.e. it has not

**"At present, no country, not even the United States, can control the Middle East."**

been upgraded to the status of a national diplomatic strategy yet. Moreover, it is to be noted here: Xinjiang’s stability and development are not only related to China’s territorial and energy security, but also ensure the smooth progress of the three economic corridors of China-Pakistan, China-Central Asia-West Asia and the new Eurasian Continental Bridge.

In terms of the geopolitical order of the Middle East, the world’s big powers still play an important role in shaping the region, even though the desire and ability of Western powers to intervene is significantly reduced as compared to the past. At present, no country, not even the United States, can control the Middle East. For 100 years since World War I, regional countries have not been able to decide their fate independently, but now they have joined

as players on the Grand Chessboard. Two opinions are being voiced now. One is that the influence of the United States is declining, the other that it is gaining strength. Objectively speaking however, the United States still plays a leading role, and it is still the most important factor affecting developments in the Middle East (Zhang, 2013, p. 45).

Two recent events help to illustrate the present situation. First, in 2018, the United States announced that it would move its embassy to Jerusalem, causing a great uproar. However, while the Israelis were grateful to the United States, the Arab League led by Saudi Arabia did not actually condemn it loudly, but acquiesced to the situation. Second, on May 8, 2018, the United States announced its withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement, which also brought great pressure to bear on both the European Union and China. The current US strategy is not only to put pressure the Iranian government, but also to crack down on all companies cooperating with Iran, which shows that the US still has a strong influence.

### Conclusion

At present, there are voices in the world calling on China to rise to the occasion, proceeding from the observation that the United States has failed to solve the Middle Eastern problem. Can China use its wisdom to contribute and propose its own plan? If in fact, the United States cannot solve the region's problems, then how can China solve them? Moreover, countries concerning themselves with the solution of the Middle East's problems need to show political determination, wait for the right conditions, and act with the support of the international community. In their attempt to solve the region's problems, foreign countries cannot act on behalf of the region's countries. If the Middle Eastern countries cannot unite and agree upon a unified position,

then no one can solve these issues. Therefore, China's support has to base itself on the premise of mutual interest and acceptance by these countries. On this basis, China will support any useful proposals and suggestions. China will offer its support in the absence of objecting voices in the region.

Today, the Middle Eastern countries, the European Union, and other countries increasingly have come to realize that China's position is correct, which further strengthens China's position in the Middle East. Simultaneously, the improvement of its international standing will lead China to face even more challenges. The promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative could be met with controversy, misunderstanding, slander and even condemnation in international public opinion. This is a necessary stage for China on its way to becoming a great power, a stage the country must put up with. However, China is required to act. There is urgent need for China to reinforce its presence in the Middle East in order to enhance its "soft power" and to demonstrate its "hard power". The Middle East is an important site on the strategic roadmap of the Belt and Road Initiative. Achieving regional stability is in line with China's overseas strategic interests. Without getting on the train, however, China will not learn how to drive. It is through participation in the practical process of addressing these problems that China can accumulate greater experience in managing international conflicts and improve its ability to deal with complicated international disputes.

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# The World Needs the Belt and Road, and the Belt and Road Needs Poetry



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**HÜSEYİN HAYDAR**

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**It may prove most difficult of all to uproot enmities and reactionary ideas and prejudices that in some cases have been nurtured over hundreds of years. In working towards resolution of these conflicts, we must look to culture and the arts and make use of their potential.**

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TAKING ITS INSPIRATION FROM THE historical Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) sets out China's aims for the future and its methods of achieving these, while at the same time providing Asian nations on the rise with the potential to realise their economic and cultural dreams. It is especially the latter notion that has served to arouse the interest of many historically oppressed nations who are now developing economically and who view the BRI as a pathway to fulfilling their needs and aspirations. As the BRI takes ambitious steps towards spanning continents, the philosophy on which it is founded overlaps closely with the notions of sharing and inclusiveness that have traditionally been a feature of human society in Asia. Indeed, at the very moment when the West's imposition of policies of exploitation, aggression and discrimination is failing, the BRI appears to offer a peaceful, unifying and communal vision of the world based on these Asian values. From its beginnings, the BRI has garnered the attention and trust of many great intellectuals, and in the eyes of many nations is seen as a path by which they may deliver themselves from the hegemony of the West.

Primarily, the BRI invites developing nations and oppressed peoples who feel the need for revolutionary change to come to agreement on fundamental shared interests. This, of course, is a challenging process, given that there exist conflicts of interest both materially and non-materially. The former may be more easily overcome, but it is the latter that

pose the greater risk. It may prove most difficult of all to uproot enmities and reactionary ideas and prejudices that in some cases have been nurtured over hundreds of years. In working towards resolution of these conflicts, we must look to culture and the arts and make use of their potential.

### **The World Needs the Belt and Road Initiative**

In these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are witnessing many Asian nations struggle to free themselves from the West's meddlesome and exploitative practices, and it would appear that the launch of the BRI in 2013 by China's President Xi Jinping offers hope to oppressed peoples and developing nations that a path can be forged through the 'iron mountains' they face.

At the time of the Maoist revolution in China, Mao himself referred to the Ergenekon of Turkish mythology when he declared; "We will cross over the iron pass", and we can echo this mythology in explaining the events of today, as oppressed peoples engage in an international movement to break the chains that have bound them. Indeed, we may refer to the BRI in terms of an 'International Ergenekon'.

The BRI is a call for revolutionary change. It is historically rooted, yet deeply relevant today and, as such, has found itself many supporters in the intellectual world. Among these is myself, and my poem 'The Awaited Call' is a celebration of my heartfelt belief in this project:

*The awaited call has come, and made tyrants sheathe  
their swords.  
Come! Open your doors and extend your hands.  
Do you know from whom, from which hero,  
the call has come?  
It is a comrade's letter, a scorched letter of love,  
that has come,  
passing over the bones of fallen heroes that shine on stony  
mountainsides,  
over the heights and rivers of the steppe,  
not from the hands of mortal gods, but from  
immortal people.  
The awaited call has come, and it is from our  
comrade-in-destiny China.  
The commander-in-chief of armies flowing with  
the Yellow River  
speaks to us not of starstruck, but of earthbound plans  
to lift the rock of death from Asia's breast.  
Speaks to us of homes reliant on each other, with dreams  
from door to door.  
Speaks to us of the shared happiness we can embrace  
along the paths beneath our feet as the children of a  
greater family.<sup>1</sup>*

China's President Xi Jinping has spoken to us sincerely of how his nation hopes to forge "a greater family with shared goals", and it now falls on us to transmit his message to millions of others. We must respond to the call of the BRI, and in doing so take ownership of its concepts and message with openness, honesty and truth.

Enriched with multi-faceted opportunities, the BRI has appeared on the world stage at a turning point in history, offering both intellectual value and solutions to the needs of the developing world.

Associated with the notion of a socialism specific to China, the BRI also provides a chance for national democratic revolutionary movements to fi-

**"By placing harmony, fellowship and the transmission of friendship to future generations at the core of its principles, the BRI also serves notice to warmongers."**

nally come of age<sup>2</sup>, and nations to usher in an era in which imperialism has ceased to be, the powers of production have been liberated and societies move towards the principles of socialism.

By placing harmony, fellowship and the transmission of friendship to future generations at the core of its principles, the BRI also serves notice to warmongers. In a September 2013 speech in Kazakhstan, President Jinping's words were of particular significance to Turkey and Turkic peoples of Asia:

"Through peaceful development, China is determined to maintain its policy of independence and peace in all its foreign relations. China respects the freedom of all nations to choose the domestic and foreign policy paths they follow as they develop. We will never intervene in the domestic affairs of any Central Asian nation. We neither seek to establish Chinese spheres of influence nor to impose any directional will on regional affairs. Instead, working alongside Russia and all Central Asian countries, we are ready to tirelessly engage in efforts to develop communication and coordination with the ultimate goal of regional harmony."<sup>3</sup>

The BRI also offers oppressed and developing nations the opportunity to make revolutionary changes on the national level. Hence, it leaves no space for any potential notions of hegemony, but instead offers a platform on which nations can discuss and develop shared interests in a shared destiny.

<sup>1</sup> The Awaited Call will appear in its entirety in the Culture & Arts section of upcoming issues of BRIQ. (Ed.)

<sup>2</sup> Perinçek, D. Yüzyılın Tecrübesiyle Ekim Devrimi'ne Bakışlar. *Teori*. Nov. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Xi, Jinping. (2017). *Çin'in Yönetim*. İstanbul: Kaynak Yay. p. 338.

## The Belt and Road Needs Poetry

This international enterprise needs too to find expression through artistic endeavours. As poets, we may provide a helping hand in resolving challenges that the BRI faces, some of which may appear to be beyond the world of politics. The poets of the Belt and Road must play their part in awakening consciences.

In times of struggle, the job of poets and their works is to stir the conscience with which we all come into this world and which lies at the heart of our living together as individuals in societies throughout the world. Hence, in the progress of any society, conscientious responsibility plays a central role in defending truth, and it is both the job and power of poetry to awaken instincts of sound judgement and the human conscience.

**"The aim of poetry and words is to use their power to bring about a world in which peace reigns, in which no human being is exploited or killed by another; a war-free, exploitation-free unified world."**

The aim of poetry and words is to use their power to bring about a world in which peace reigns, in which no human being is exploited or killed by another; a war-free, exploitation-free unified world. This is the role indeed that all art forms have played throughout human history.

This, then, is why poets must have this aim at the heart of their creative endeavours during their lifetime. Protecting today's world of nation-states will mean protecting the 'One World' of tomorrow, our world, which Yunus Emre<sup>4</sup> has described as "a



Yunus Emre

red and green adorned bride on whom we never tire of gazing”.

In reflecting the human spirit, poetic works reflect reality, and thus allow us glimpses of the future. As the BRI seeks to win people's hearts and minds, the revolutionary change it brings and the human consciences it wishes to awaken must be clearly reflected. The human conscience is revolutionary, and poetry, as one of its products, is a revolutionary virtue. Indeed, this is what has granted poetry its special place throughout human history.

For all that they can bring to this project therefore, art and poetry are of great value and importance to the BRI. It is true that bringing together peoples of differing understandings, faiths and cultures to a common goal is no easy task. Throughout history, all great revolutions and transformational social movements have come about only by means of revolutionary war and revolutionary cultural and art going hand in hand.

The Chinese revolutionary leader, Chairman Mao said; "In our struggle for the Chinese people, there are several fronts, among which are the pen

<sup>4</sup> Yunus Emre (1238-1321): One of the greatest poets of Turkish language. He lived during the Crusades to West Asia, the Mongol invasions spreading to Anatolia and the long wars caused by the establishment of the Ottoman Empire.

and the sword, in other words, the cultural and the military fronts. In order to defeat the enemy we must rely on the army. But the army by itself is not sufficient. We must combine our efforts and to truly defeat the enemy we must also have a cultural army.”<sup>5</sup>

There is now great urgency to the work of poets of the Belt and Road, and that is the driving force behind our call to come and create together a Community of Poets of the Silk Road.

With democratic, revolutionary and communal culture and the power of poetry, we can fend off

**"We must remember that no great historical mass movement has succeeded when lacking the support of art and poetry."**

any cultural and artistic attacks by imperialism and reactionary ideas in their attempts to make us fail. Poetry must especially work to awaken the human conscience. It must work to cleanse it of any selfishness or fear and replace these with courage and joy. Poetry gives direction and courage to people as they move towards the future, it brings forth virtuous thinking and action, and without its power the BRI will remain soulless and stunted. We must remember that no great historical mass movement has succeeded when lacking the support of art and poetry.

Only with its own literature and poetry, can the BRI 'body' feed itself and grow healthily, with a heartfelt unity throughout its many variations. If we fail in this task, the result inevitably will be a 'body' that is truncated, awkward, lacking harmony in its various operations, and with its dream unfulfilled.

For many years now, globalist imperialism has spread only by working to undermine the development and even destroy the accumulated cultural and artistic capital of peoples, and draw them into

the ethno-cultural trap. The BRI organises itself in such a way as to encourage each nation to stand together in a united defence against these reactionary attacks. Our job as poets is to confront these attacks at their origin by creating the artistic and cultural 'belt' for this new world.

“Long live One Road, One Belt, One Thousand Poets!”

### Time for Poets to Come Forward

News, good and bad, arriving each day from different regions in Eurasia tells us that the BRI is a growing influence in the world as peoples recognise the need for such a movement. The path towards power and resource sharing for nation states is being opened up and secured by the BRI.

It is only through art, literature and poetry that long-standing, long-nurtured prejudices between peoples can be overcome. If great Russian literature and Turkey's national literature had not been penned, then Russia and Turkey would still be at the mercy of Tzar and Sultan, with the mind-sets of that age, and their respective revolutions having never come about.

Inspired by the BRI, the natural love of poetry among Asian nations can become a transformative power in the hands of poets. This is why we poets must now formally organise ourselves so we can come to the fore and unite peoples.

Just as great social movements throughout history have needed poetry, so too does the BRI now. If we as poets are trying to do what President Xi Jinping says is the need “to grow the soft power of culture and provide moral support to the world”, then the “The Poetry Belt of the Silk Road” gives us this opportunity. Poetry can enter hearts in ways that politics cannot. If we want to weave a silken path to a more free and ethical future for humanity, then as poets we must set to work.

5 Mao, Z.(1999). *Kültür Sanat ve Edebiyat Üzerine*. İstanbul: Berfin Yay. p. 36.

## A CALL TO POETS ON THE BELT AND ROAD

I write from Turkey, the greatest bridge in Eurasia, to poets of the East and the West. I call on the armies of poets living within the borders of Belt and Road countries, poets who serve and are masters of the poetic tradition, to collaborate. Now more than ever are poets needed as humankind strives to emerge from the shadows of imperialist hegemony. With the power our peoples have granted us, let us work together do what we must for the future of humankind.

In the words of the greatest poet of Asia, Yunus Emre: “Come let us know each other and make our lives easier”. Let us all listen to his sacred words and remain faithful to their call for collaboration. Let us come together from the cities of the Belt and Road and create an assembly in which we can get to know each other and look each other in the eye. We’ll soon see that we can overcome challenges. Eight hundred years ago as he witnessed battles between East and West, Yunus summed up the knowledge we can search for in a thousand books by telling us simply; “Let us love and be loved. The world will belong to no one”.

A Turkish proverb tells us; “Lives end, but journeys never end”. It does not encourage us to take each day as it comes, but refers instead to the ceaseless human struggle to reach fulfilment and create the future. Today, we are taking our first determined steps towards the future along the New Silk Road, and we will be moving along this path for generations to come.

This is the new path which lies close to the heart of President Xi Jinping; “The path towards the building of a shared future for humanity”. Does anyone know of another path that can lead us to peace, well-being and tolerance rather than fear, poverty and contempt? As songs are sung and poems read, and people embrace each other on the Belt and Road, journeys will be pleasant, distances will be diminished and lives will be extended.

We share a language; that of the heart, poetry and humanity. It’s not a difficult language. We can all speak and understand it perfectly, so come and let us make

use of this language of humanity. We don’t need to attend courses or schools because our minds and hearts understand it.

We can create wonderful land, sea and air pathways from continent to continent and it is important that we do so. Along these, peoples and cultures will travel, so come and let us make these pathways of the heart, come and let us make lives easier. Come and let us add wings to our hearts and fly towards our shared future. This is how pathways from heart to heart can be created, and it is how mountains and seas can be crossed.

All along these pathways people will need the language of poetry and the heart, and we call on the poets of the Belt and Road to play their role by establishing themselves in. Come and let us express our joys and sorrows in the healing language of poetry. Let us have apple trees blossoming in winter and streams flowing in the dry steppe.

We aim to have world poets come together in the Silk Road Poetry Associations in order for us to open doors and create mountain passes to a shared future. Let the Silk Road be the road to our house and our village. Come let us hold the hand of our future childhood and set off on a journey to a ceaseless eternal life.

I call poets of the Belt and Road to duty. It’s time for poets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to emerge. Come and let us set to work bracing ourselves with the spirit, bravery and goodness of the great Eurasian poets. Come and let us set up the Silk Road Poetry Belt. Come, Li Bai, Rudeki, Yunus, Goethe and Shakespeare. Come, Pushkin, Nazım and Lu Sun.

Let hearts take flight and distances diminish. Let longing come to an end. If we cannot make the Silk Road the road to Paradise, then let us all be damned together. Long live “One Road, One Belt, One Thousand Poets”. 🌸

