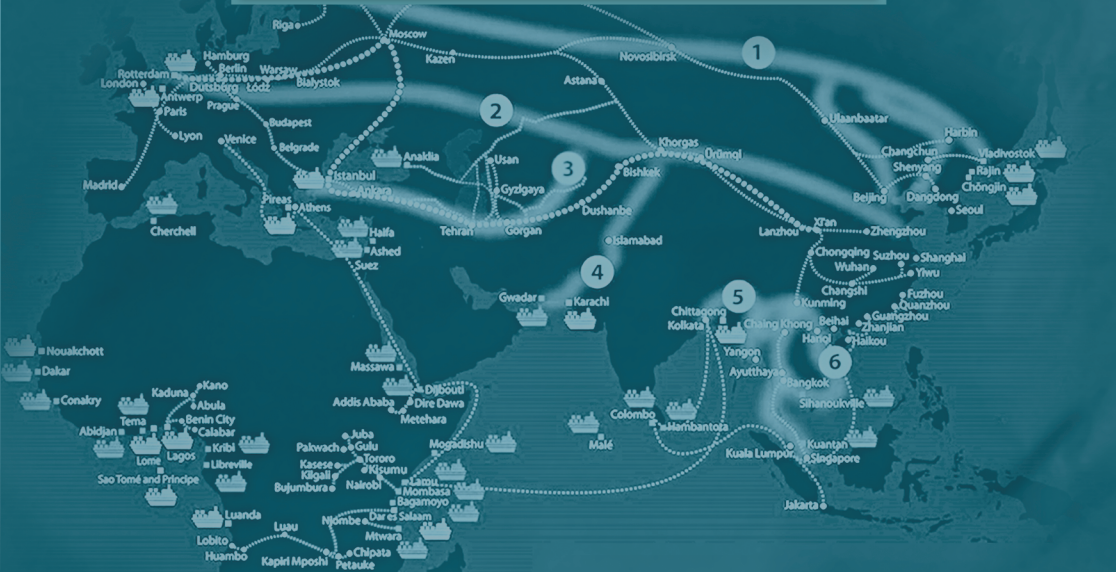


AGHAVNI A. HARUTYUNYAN

CHINA'S ONE BELT, ONE ROAD INITIATIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



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Տպագրվում է ՀՀ ԳԱԱ հայագիտական
ուսումնասիրությունները ֆինանսավորող
Համահայկական հիմնադրամի հովանավորությամբ

Իրականացվել է միննույն հիմնադրամի՝
**«Չինաստանի Նոր Մետաքսի Ճանապարհի նախաձեռնության
իրականացումը Մեծ Մերձավոր Արևելքի տարածաշրջանում»**
թեմատիկ ծրագրի շրջանակում



**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES**

HARUTYUNYAN AGHAVNI ALEXANDER

**CHINA'S ONE BELT, ONE ROAD
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AND NORTH AFRICA**

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The monograph is devoted to the study of Beijing's geopolitical and geoeconomic interests and aspirations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. An attempt has been made to investigate the vitality and strategic importance of the MENA in the implementation of the Chinese New Silk Road (NSR) or “One Bel, One Road” initiative on the basis of extensive scientific literature and international media, to analyze the tools of the NSR in the MENA at different times and their transformations, as well as to predict their consequences on the process of forming a new world order.

The book also discusses the growing influence of Beijing as an important regional and global player and the role of the Chinese factor in modern international relations in general.

The monograph is intended for sinologists, orientalist, international scholars, political scientists, historians, diplomats and for a wide audience.

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ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ
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ՆԱԽԱԶԵՌՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ
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ՀՀ ԳԱԱ «ԳԻՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ» ՀՐԱՏԱՐԱԿԶՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ
2021

Տպագրվում է ՀՀ ԳԱԱ արևելագիտության ինստիտուտի
գիտական խորհրդի որոշմամբ

Պատասխանատու խմբագիր՝
պ.գ.թ., փիլ. գիտ. դոկտոր **Ա.Վ. Բայբուրդյան**

Գրախոս՝
պ.գ.թ., դոցենտ **Ա.Ա. Փաշայան**

Հարությունյան Ա.Ա.

Զինաստանի «Մեկ գոտի, մեկ ճանապարհ» նախաձեռնությունը
Մերձավոր Արևելքում և Հյուսիսային Աֆրիկայում/Եր., «Գիտու-
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Մենագրությունը նվիրված է Մերձավոր Արևելքի և Հյուսիսային Աֆրի-
կայի (ՄԱՀԱ) երկրներում Պեկինի աշխարհաքաղաքական և աշխարհա-
տնտեսական շահերի և հավակնությունների ուսումնասիրությանը: Գի-
տական լանյաձավալ գրականության և միջազգային մամուլի նյութերի
հիման վրա փորձ է արվել ուսումնասիրել չինական «Նոր Մետաքսի
ճանապարհի» (ՆՄՃ) կամ «Մեկ գոտի, մեկ ճանապարհ» նախաձեռնության
իրականացման գործում ՄԱՀԱ-ի կենսական և ռազմավարական նշանա-
կությունը, վերլուծել ՄԱՀԱ-ում ՆՄՃ-ի իրագործման գործիքակազմերը
տարբեր ժամանակահատվածներում և դրանց փոխակերպումները, ինչ-
պես նաև կանխատեսել դրանց հետևանքները նոր աշխարհակարգի
ձևավորման գործընթացի վրա:

Գրքում քննարկվում է նաև Պեկինի հարաճուն ազդեցությունը որպես
տարածաշրջանային և գլոբալ կարևոր խաղացող և ընդհանրապես
չինական գործոնի դերը միջազգային արդի հարաբերություններում:

Մենագրությունը նախատեսված է չինագետների, արևելագետների,
միջազգայնագետների, քաղաքագետների, պատմաբանների, դիվանագետ-
ների և ընթերցող լայն հասարակության համար:

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INTRODUCTION

With the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the abolition of the bipolar world order in a number of regions led to new geopolitical and geo-economic realities, providing a competitive opportunity for countries with ambitions to dominate and then gradually emerge in a multi-polar world order. For the People's Republic of China (PRC), the undisputed leader among these countries, from the long-term strategic perspective, highlighted the growing and purposeful expansion of relations with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries.* As a growing superpower with a special place in the global governance system, Beijing has gradually increased its influence over the MENA, which has long been a competitor between the major powers, to provide the energy resources it needs.

The main purpose of the research is to show the vital and strategic importance of the MENA in the Chinese initiative of New Silk Road (NSR) or One Belt, One Road (OBOR) as a key hub connecting the land and sea routes of Asia, Africa and Europe. The study examined in detail OBOR projects in the fields of energy, infrastructure, investment, finance, trade, transport and telecommunications, science and technology in the countries of the **Persian Gulf (PG)**,¹ **Levant**,² **North Africa (NA)**,³ as well as **Ethiopia**, **Gjibouti** and **Yemen**.

* The following countries are typically included in **MENA**: *Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Palestine, and Yemen. Ethiopia and Sudan* are sometimes included.

¹ Iran, Iraq and Persian Gulf monarchies - Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain.

² Israel, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan.

³ Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan.

During the research, an attempt was made to show the transformations that took place in different significant periods of the implementation of the OBOR at the MENA, to predict their consequences on the processes of the formation of a new world order. From this, the relevant steps for Armenia's foreign policy are derived, in particular, the possible participation of Yerevan in the NSR programs in the context of cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the construction of transport corridors. As an important part of the historic NSR, crossing the North-South and East-West geopolitical vectors, Armenia can also successfully cooperate with Beijing in the construction of the MENA transport corridors. Using the cooperation established between China's NSR and Russia's EEU, Yerevan, as a member of the EEU, can contribute to the deepening of cooperation between the EBSR and the EEU, and include its railway and highway projects in the EBSR projects.⁴

In this regard, we consider it very important and urgent to study the role and impact of the NSR strategy in the formation of a globalizing and multipolar new world order, in geopolitical and geoeconomic processes, the implementation of the NSR in the MENA, as well as the obstacles and difficulties, which Beijing is facing on the way to the realization of NSR.

Before presenting the current state of study of the topic in Armenia and abroad, let us first mention that the study of the foreign policy of the PRC in Armenia is a new branch of science. Today this topic is in the interest of international scholars, political scientists, orientalist and historians.

Yitzhak Shichor, Chris Zambelis, Guang Pan, John Calabrese, Jonathan Fulton, Christina Lin, Jon Alterman and others are well-

⁴ At the 2015 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, the prospects of establishing a unified transport system within the organization were highlighted and the EEU and OBOR conjugation programs were discussed. In this context, the interim agreement on the establishment of a free trade zone between Iran and the EEU, which entered into force on October 27, 2019, is important.

known foreign scholars of China's MENA policy.⁵

Among the Chinese researchers studying this topic are Guang Pan, Wang Yi, Lei Wu and others;⁶ among the Russians are M. Pakhomova, I. Batirshin and others.⁷

⁵ **Yitzhak Shichor**, *"The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy 1949-1977"*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1979; **Chris Zambelis**, *"Bottom of Form Sino-Turkish Strategic Partnership: Implications of Anatolian Eagle 2010"*, China Brief, Vol. 11, Issue 1, The Jamestown Foundation, 14.01.2011; **John Calabrese**, *"The Risks and Rewards of China's Deepening Ties with the Middle East"*, China Brief, Vol. 5, Issue 12, The Jamestown Foundation, 24.05.2005; **Jonathan Fulton**, *"China-Saudi Arabia Relations Through the '1+2+3' Cooperation Pattern"*, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Vol. 14, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020; **Christina Lin**, *"The New Silk Road China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East"*, Policy Focus No. 109, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2011; **Dan Blumenthal**, *"Providing Arms China and the Middle East"*, Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 12, No 2, Spring 2005; **Jon B. Alterman**, *"China's Soft Power in the Middle East. Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States"*, The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 11.03.2009; **Mordechai Chaziza**, *"The Significant Role of Oman in China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative"*, Contemporary Review of the Middle East, No. 6(1), 2019; **Yoram Evron**, *"Between Beijing and Washington: Israel's Technology Transfers to China"*, Journal of East Asian Studies, Vol. 13, Issue 3, December 2013; **Emma Scott**, *"China's Silk Road Strategy: A Foothold in the Suez, But Looking to Israel"*, China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 19, The Jamestown Foundation, 10.10.2014; **James M. Dorsey**, *"China and the Middle East: Venturing into the Maelstrom"*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2019.

⁶ **Guang Pan**, *"China's Success in the Middle East"*, The Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 4, December 1997; **Lei Wu**, *"The Middle East Oil and the Sino-US Relations"*, The Middle East Oil and the Sino-US Relations, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 3, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009; **Yao Kuangyi**, *"Arab Countries: Reform and Development of China-Arab Relations"*, China International Studies (CIS), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, Winter 2005; **Jin Liangxiang**, *"Energy First. China and the Middle East"*, Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 2, Spring 2005; **Hu Jianyi**, *"Energy Development in China and Its Cooperation with the Gulf Area"*, A Presentation Collection for Seminar on "International Energy Security and Cooperation", June 24-25, SIIS Publication, Shanghai, China, 2004; **Mo Chen**, *"Exploring Economic Relations between China and the GCC States"*, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 5, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011; **Qian Xuewen**, *"Sino-Arab Economic and Trade Cooperation: Situations, Tasks, Issues and Strategies"*, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in

Armenian orientalist-historians and international relations experts have published a number of books, articles on China's Middle East (ME) policy, and the Chinese New/Great Silk Road in the MENA.⁸ Aghavni Harutyunyan's monographs are dedicated to Chi-

Asia), Vol. 5, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011; **Wu Sike**, *"The Strategic Docking between China and Middle East Countries under the 'Belt and Road' Framework"*, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 9, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015; **Yufeng Mao**, *"China's Interests and Strategy in the Middle East and Arab World"*, in Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell (Eds.) *China and the Developing*. Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, NY, 2007.

⁷ **Пакхомова М.А.**, «Особенности политической культуры Китая в источниках по политике КНР в отношении государств Арабского Востока (2014-2019)», Востоковедение: История и методология, Вып. 1, ИВ РАН, М., 2019; **Батыршин И.М.**, «Место Стран Совета Сотрудничества Арабских Государств Персидского Залива на Меняющемся Рынке Нефти», Востоковедный Сборник, Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 2006; **Глазунов О., Савченко Ал.**, «Особенности и приоритеты внешней политики Китая в странах Ближнего Востока», Издательский дом «Хорс», 2018; **Дегтерев Денис**, «Китай – Африка: важные аспекты отношений», Мировая экономика и международные отношения, № 5, ИМЭМО, РАН, 2005; **Задонский С.М.**, «Современное состояние ирано-китайских отношений», Ближний Восток и современность: Сборник статей, Ин-т изучения Израиля и Ближнего Востока; Отв. ред. М.Р. Арунова, А.О. Филоник, М., 2003; **Ильминская М.Ф.**, «Регион Персидского залива как зона геополитических интересов Китая», Серия Международные отношения, № 1, Вестник РУДН, 2015; **Комаров И.**, «Китайско-Израильские Отношения: Проблемы, Достижения, Перспективы», История Международных Отношений и Мировой Дипломатии. Вестник Нижегородского университета им. Н.И. Лобачевского, 2013, № 2(1), Нижегородский журнал международных исследований, Нижний Новгород, Осень-зима 2009; **Михайличенко К.М.**, «Роль Африки в инициативе Китайской Народной Республики 'Один Пояс и Один Путь'», RUDN Journal of Political Science, Том 20, № 1, 2018.

⁸ **Мартirosyan А.**, «На Великом Шелковом пути», Ереван, 1998; **Harutyunyan А.**, *"China-Turkey Strategic Partnership in the Modern Period"*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2013; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, *"China's Soft Power Policy in the Middle East and North Africa"*, Collection of Papers from the Fifth International Conference on Chinese Studies 'The Silk Road', Organized by Confucius Institute in Sofia, 30-31 May 2019, Confucius Institute in Sofia, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, *"Chinese 'Belt and Road' Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa"*, Казанский (Приволжский) федеральный университет, Институт международных отношений, Институт Конфуция КФУ, 2019; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, *"Middle East and North Africa as a Part of Chinese String of Pearls*

na's foreign policy and the study of the New (Great) Silk Road.⁹ Recently, a number of articles by Armenian authors have been published on the study of China's policy in the South Caucasus, particularly in Armenia.¹⁰

Strategy”, Orbis Linguarum, Vol. 18, Issue 3, Езиков свят, Филологическа факултет при ЮЗУ “Неофит Рилски”, Благоевград, България, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*The Lion and the Dragon: A New Stage in Sino Iranian Strategic Partnership*”, Modern International Studies, International Science Journal Issue: 2, Vol. 3, Kazan, 2021; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and Turkey’s Middle Corridor*”, Международный научный журнал “Современные востоковедческие исследования”, Казань, International Science Journal “Modern Oriental Studies”, Vol. 2, No. 5, Kazan, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*China and Israel: Evolving Relationship Within the Belt and Road Initiative*”, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Vol. 14, Issue 3, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*The Arab Spring as a New Challenge and a New Opportunity for China’s Middle East Policy*”, Armenian Political Science Journal, 1(1), Center for Perspective Studies and Initiatives, Yerevan, 2014; **Khachatryan A. G.**, “*The Transformation Period of Sino-Turkish Relations and the Neutralization of the “Uyghur Issue” (Late 20th - Early 21st Century)*”, “Region and World” Scientific-Analytical Journal, № 4, Yerevan, 2020; **Khachatryan A. G.**, “*Three Evils’ Factor in the Context of PRC Management and Security Challenge*”, “Alternative” Scientific Journal, Yerevan, April-June, 2020; **Khachatryan A. G.**, “*The ‘Uyghur Issue’ - in the Context of Challenges to the Management of China’s Foreign Policy*”, “Alternative” Scientific Journal, Yerevan, July-September, 2020.

⁹ **Harutyunyan A.**, “*Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative: Challenges and Opportunities*”, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, 2017; **Harutyunyan A.**, “*From China’s Concept of Peaceful Rise to the Chinese Great Dream*”, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*On Some Obstacles and Challenges to the Implementation of the Chinese Initiative One Belt, One Road*”, Orbis Linguarum, Vol. 17, Issue 2, Езиков свят, Филологическият факултет при ЮЗУ “Неофит Рилски”, Благоевград, България, 2019; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*Chinese One Belt, One Road and the European Countries*”, Manas: Cultures and Societies of South, East and Southeast Asia: Traditionalism, Dynamics and Globalization, the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (CELC), Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2018; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*Chinese Policy of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy*”, The Countries and Peoples of the Near and Middle East, Vol. 31, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2018.

¹⁰ Манасерян Т., «Китай-Армения: Возрождение традиций великого Шелкового Пути», Այլընտրանք եռամսյա գիտական հանդես, Ереван, 2013; Егизарян А., «Геоэкономические приоритеты Китая в Кавказско-каспийско-центральноазиатском регионе», 21-ый ВЕК, No. 3(5), НОФ Нораванк, Ереван, 2004;

However, a complete study of China's foreign policy, particularly the study of the essence of Beijing's policy, developments, transformations, and tools in the MENA, has hardly been conducted in Armenia. This fact underscores the importance of conducting serious research on China's foreign policy.

The study was carried out using descriptive, historical-analytical, historical-comparative and content analysis methods. These methods have made it possible to present the topic in detail, to penetrate the deepest part of the document and to reveal all the problems. During the writing of the work, the main principles of historiography were preserved: historicity, scientific objectivity, comprehensiveness, materials synthesis approaches.

It should be noted that before the 1980s, the MENA had no priority on China's foreign policy agenda. In the first half of the 1950s, communist ideology, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and national liberation movements, as well as the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*,¹¹ which were widely welcomed by the MENA, contributed to the establishment of mutual diplomatic relations.* In the late 1950s, Beijing showed sympathy for both anti-Western and anti-Soviet movements in the region due to the retreat from the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the emergence of nationalist and anti-Soviet leftist tendencies within the Chinese leadership.

In the first half of the 1960s, to avoid the bipolar rivalry

Бабаян Д., «Роль и место Южного Кавказа в геополитической повестке Китайской Народной Республики (II)», 21-й ВЕК, No. 2 (18), НОФ Норавапк, Ереван, 06.09.2011; **Агаджанян М.**, «Китай на Южном Кавказе: экономическая экспансия и политический прагматизм», Научное Общество Кавказоведов, 14.01.2013; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Sino-Armenian Relationships and Armenia’s Participation in the Chinese Initiative of Economic Belt of Silk Road”, Collection of Research Papers of the Visiting Program for Young Sinologists, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), Shanghai, 2017.

¹¹ Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, exclusion of aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence.

* See APPENDIX. Table 1.

between the United States of America (USA/US) and the Soviet Union (SU) during the Cold War, Beijing put forward the "*Three Worlds*" theory or "*Third World*" solidarity strategym,¹² which emphasized the role of the MENA as a springboard for expansion of the influence of Beijing and the spread of Maoism. Meanwhile, during the "*Cultural Revolution*" of 1966-1976, Beijing's international isolation and limited diplomatic relations with the MENA, lack of political influence and military power, and insufficient economic development had a negative impact on China-MENA relations. Moreover, due to the "*military threat*" of the SU in 1970-1976, Beijing's policy in MENA was directed against the Soviet "*hegemony*".

The situation changed after the end of the "Cultural Revolution" and the historic session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the China (CCCPC) in 1978, when the ideology of Beijing's foreign policy gave way to practical diplomacy in order to create a favorable international environment for Deng Xiaoping's* policy of *modernization, reform and openness*. China, which has since embarked on the path of modernization, began to distinguish between its "*enemies and allies*", including the MENA, not by the nature of relations with Washington and Moscow, but by the imperative of providing international support for reforms in the country.

In the 1980s, relations between China and MENA intensified due to two "**favorable circumstances**": *the export of large quantities of Chinese weapons to the MENA and the import of unprecedented*

¹² According to this theory, all the countries of the world were divided into three groups: *superpowers, small and medium-sized developed countries* (the main part of the Western European and "socialist camp" countries), the *third world – developing countries*. In the struggle against US and Soviet hegemony, the PRC sought to occupy the position of ideological and political leader of the "*Third World*" peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

* Chinese revolutionary and statesman, the paramount leader of China from 1978 until his retirement in 1989.

amounts of energy from the region. While showing some economic activity, Beijing nevertheless maintained some political passivity, assuming the dominant positions of the US and the SU in the region. However, the unipolar world order and new geopolitical realities formed after the collapse of the USSR created a fertile ground for the emergence of Chinese influence and supremacy in the MENA.

China became an oil importer in the early 1990s, and in 2017, bypassing the US, PRC officially became the world's largest importer of crude oil. Despite its efforts to diversify its energy sources, China has begun to meet 50% of its oil demand through the MENA countries, in which securing the strong position of Chinese oil companies has become a foreign policy priority. Political, economic, cultural, scientific and technical ties between China and the MENA became more intense and effective at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. China's foreign policy agenda focused on establishing a strategic and comprehensive partnership with the MENA, including non-energy countries, when the region was seen not only as a source of energy imports but also as a huge market for Chinese finished products and capital investment.

The strengthening of relations with the MENA countries was facilitated by factors such as the absence of China's *colonial past* in modern history, the skillful application of "*soft power*" policy and the principle of "*non-intervention*" (or minimal intervention), the attractiveness and efficiency of the *Chinese development model*.

It should be noted that in the mid-2000s, Beijing formulated its own concept of *soft power with Chinese characteristics* in the context of the development of national culture and the country's long-term policy. It was based on the core values of *socialism* (modern Marxism) and *traditional Chinese culture*, especially *ancient Confucianism*. The focus of China's academic and leadership circles was on the combination of *hard* and *soft* power as well as the development and application of the soft power toolkit in foreign policy.

In order to pursue a *soft power* policy outside the country, to increase the country's role and prestige, as well as to create a positive image, Beijing also turns to *public diplomacy*. It is implemented through the ideological and political propaganda machine – publications, international broadcasts and cultural exchanges, the global network of educational and cultural centers, the Confucius Institutes. The mission of the latter is to spread Chinese art, education, science and culture abroad through Chinese language teaching.

The "**Beijing Consensus**" or **China's development model** as a new alternative development model combining *liberal or market economies* and *authoritarian political systems* has become widespread, mainly among the authoritarian or semi-authoritarian MENA countries. This was particularly appealing against the backdrop of the "**Washington Consensus**" model of uniting *free market economies* backed by *Western financial institutions* and *Western democracies*.¹³

It is no coincidence that the overwhelming majority of the MENA countries, which have both allied or complex relations with the US, regard China as a factor in counteracting Washington's influence in the region. These countries share with Beijing a common desire to limit the influence of the West on their internal affairs and to implement forced democratic reforms in the logic of their national internal realities and values. That is why Beijing internally endorses the efforts of the MENA to circumvent US pressure. Meanwhile, the "Beijing Consensus", as an effective tool of soft power, retains its attractiveness, despite the fact that the MENA countries are significantly inferior to the Chinese model in the pace of modernization and the level of development of institutional structures.

¹³ The "**Washington Consensus**" is a series of standards set by the World Bank, the US Treasury and the International Monetary Fund in 1989 for the recovery of economies in Latin America during the economic and financial crisis of the 1980s. It reflects the refusal of these countries from the leading economic model of economic development of the 1960s-1970s (the policy of active intervention in the management of the economy by the state) and the adoption of general principles of economic policy following the example of developed countries.

Beijing's influence in the MENA can be strengthened, especially through the implementation of the geopolitical and geo-economic strategy of the NSR, initiated by Chinese President Xi Jinping* in 2013. Geographically, the *land* (Economic Belt of Silk Road - EBSR) and *maritime* (21st Century Maritime Silk Road - MSR) corridors of the NSR intersect in the MENA, at the crossroads of land and sea routes connecting Asia, Africa and Europe. EBSR consists of *three communication routes* (north, middle, south) and *four coastal economic corridors*,¹⁴ and the MSR consists of *two economic corridors*.¹⁵

The goal of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) is to unite a number of *maritime*¹⁶ and *land*¹⁷ regions and sub-regions through large infrastructure projects¹⁸, to bring pan-Asian and Eurasian cooperation to a new level. Beijing expects that multi-billion dollar investments in large infrastructure projects in more than 70 countries, which are part of the MSRI, can enhance Beijing's role in the global economy by providing access to new markets, energy resources and accelerating economic development in western and other peripheral regions of China. NSR can also be used to implement the national concepts of the "**Digital Silk Road**", "**China Dream**" and "**Made in China-2025**".

* General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) since 2012, and President of the PRC since 2013. Xi has been the paramount leader of China, the most prominent political leader in China, since 2012.

¹⁴ China - Mongolia - Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC), New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELB), China - Central Asia - West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC), China - Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

¹⁵ China - Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC) and Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM - EC).

¹⁶ South China Sea, Persian Gulf and Mediterranean Sea.

¹⁷ Central and Western Asia, Eastern and Western Europe.

¹⁸ The NSR aims to connect Asia and Europe through intercontinental highways, railways, pipelines, ports, airports and other infrastructure projects in the ME, Africa and Central Asia.

FIRST CHAPTER

ONE BELT, ONE ROAD AS A MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING THE "CHINESE DREAM" AND "MADE IN CHINA - 2025" CONCEPTS

1. China's Role in Geo-Economic and Geopolitical Processes: Transition to the Principle of "Shared Responsibility"

The steady and rapid growth of the Chinese economy, begun in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping and driven by a policy of reform and opening up, has become one of the most important milestones in the global economy.¹⁹ After the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th CCCPC in 1978, China pursued socialism with Chinese characteristics through economic reform and peaceful development.²⁰ Beijing has taken serious steps towards transforming a traditionally agricultural country into a modern industrial country.²¹ Since the middle of the first decade of 21st century, China has become a significant player in the global economy, ranked second in the world in size and is the largest, fastest growing and most actively involved in international business and investment.²²

In the early 1970s, China established normal diplomatic relations with many countries, including some developed ones, and it paved the way for a policy of "openness to the outside world".²³ This

¹⁹ Yin Wenquan, "China's Road to Development in a Global Perspective", China in Peaceful Development, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2007, p. 37.

²⁰ Gong Li, "Peaceful Development: Interpreting China's Diplomatic Principles", Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 2016, p. 3.

²¹ "Narration of China: The Chinese Economy", Beijing Language and Culture University Press, 2013, p. 64.

²² Yin Wenquan, "China's Road to Development ...", op. cit., p. 37.

²³ Zhang Baijia, "Interpreting China's Reform and Opening Up", Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 2014, p. 74.

allowed China to complete its historic transformation from a semi-closed society to a fully open one with an unprecedented level of integration with the outside world and the global economy.²⁴ The latter made China the main force and champion of globalization and the strategic center of the "World Factory", which produces goods that are consumed all over the world, primarily in the centers of global capitalism.²⁵

The rapid growth in China's exports has been driven by its own advantages in the form of low labor costs and the international division of the mode of production. China imported intermediate goods, processed and collected them using its surplus labor, and then exported the final products. This form of trade is processing, and China's exports are also known as "Made in China".²⁶ The Chinese leadership believes that China, as the largest trading country, can provide the world with a huge market, and the country's growth can contribute more to the global economy.²⁷ So, "World Factory" and "Made in China" were once the two globally recognized brands in China.²⁸

²⁴ "China: Questions and Answers", Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2008, p. 25.

²⁵ Arif Dirlik, "Post-Socialism Revisited: Reflections on 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'. It's Past, Present and Future, Seeking Changes", Culture and Social Transformations: Theoretical Framework and Chinese context / edited by Cao Tianyu, Zhong Xueping, Liao Kebin, Wang Ban, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2014, p. 263.

²⁶ Zheng Xinli, "Seeing the Real China in the Economic Perspective", Understanding China's Real National Conditions Comprehensively and Accurately Through Comparative Analyses, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 2014, p. 158.

²⁷ Han Qingxiang, Huang Xianghuai, "What can China's Road Contribute to the World", 13th Five-Year National Key Publication Planning Project Recognizing and Understanding China Series, China Renmin University Press, Beijing, 2017, p. 7.

²⁸ Zheng Xinli, "Seeing the Real China ...", op. cit., pp. 160-161.

"Created in China" has gradually become an important feature of China's recent economic development. "Made in China" is characterized by high export growth, low technology, low productivity, low product quality, generic branding, and the lack of independent marketing. "Created in China" is characterized by low export growth, high technology, high production efficiency, good quality, propriety brands and independent marketing networks. China's quickly developing high-tech industry

Beijing's *Go Global Strategy* is an incentive program that encourages Chinese firms to invest heavily overseas. Prosperity over the years of double-digit economic growth has not only made China attractive to foreign investors, but also provided China with the capital to be a major consumer in the global market. China has become one of the world's largest destinations for foreign direct investment (FDI) and a vital link in global supply chains.²⁹ Since the early 1990s, China has absorbed about half of FDI to developing countries. In some years in the early 21st century, China's exports or imports accounted for about half of the growth in world trade, and its output accounted for about half of the growth in world production. So far, China has provided most of the growth in demand for some industrial raw materials over the century.³⁰

China's economic influence is being felt everywhere in the world, with China buying more expensive things and continuing to sell goods at cheap prices to global markets. Measured using purchasing power parity (PPP), China overtook the US as the world's largest economy in 2014.³¹ The performance of the Asian economy is highly dependent on the performance of the Chinese economy, as

is making this transition from “*Made in China*” to “*Created in China*”, which is widely recognized by the world. “*Created in China*” is no longer reflected in the simple manual labor, but a higher level of creative mental activity. However, shedding China's image as a country of mental workers does not happen overnight. Earning the title of “*Created in China*” will require creative and mentally talented workforce.

²⁹ **Denise E. Zheng**, “*Chinese Soft Power and its Implications for the United States. Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*”, A Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative, N.W., March 2009, p. 1.

³⁰ **Ross Garnaut**, “*Thirty Years of Chinese Reform and Economic Growth: Challenges and How it has Changed World Development*”, The Political Development in Contemporary China, Central Compilation and Translation Press, Beijing, 2011, p. 169.

³¹ **Huang Yiping**, “*The Silk Road Initiative: China's New Economic Diplomacy*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, March/April 2015, p. 48.

China accounted for more than half of Asia's economic growth. PRC is the largest trading partner of 128 countries by 2014.³²

China's economy is not only large, but also growing at an extremely fast pace. At nominal prices, China's economy nearly doubled every five years, or, at constant prices, every seven years.³³ Until recent years, China's economy has maintained an average annual growth rate of nearly 10% since the beginning of reforms and opening up.³⁴ China had maintained its position as the world's largest trading nation in goods during the past five years, with its imports and exports taking up a record-high share in the global market. China's foreign trade accounted for 12.8% of the world's total during the first 10 months of 2020, rising from 11.9% in 2015 and hitting a historic high. The country's total imports and exports rose 17.2% to reach 146.37 trillion yuan (about US \$ 22.57 trillion) during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020).³⁵ Having weathered the virus test and the domestic and international challenges, the PRC's economy ended 2020 on a solid footing, becoming the only major economy to achieve positive growth in a pandemic-ravaged year.³⁶

³² **Wang Yi**, “*Peaceful Development and the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, January/February, 2014, p. 19.

³³ **Zhang Jun**, “*How Long Can the Chinese Economy Continue to Grow*”, Qiushi, Vol. 5, No. 4, Organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, 01.10.2013, p. 113.

³⁴ **Wang Yiwei**, “*The Chinese Model: Spurring China Forward and Benefiting the World*”, Qiushi, Vol. 7, No. 2, Issue No. 23, Organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, April/June 2015, p. 17.

³⁵ “*China Remains World's Largest Trading Nation in Goods*”, China International Import Expo Bureau, 29.01.2021.

³⁶ “*Factbox: China's Economic and Social Progress in 2020*”, Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 28.02.2021.

Here are some related facts and figures from the communiqué issued by the National Bureau of Statistics in February 2021:

- ❖ GDP grew 2.3% year on year to hit ¥ (CNY) 101.6 trillion (about US \$ 15.7 trillion) in 2020. From a 6.8% contraction in Q1, 3.2% expansion in Q2, 4.9% recovery in Q3 to a 6.5% rebound in Q4, the V-shaped trajectory made China the only major economy to log positive growth.

However, despite great development achievements, China also faced many difficulties and challenges. The Chinese economy, which has entered a new stage of development and is undergoing a profound transformation of the growth model, as well as structural transformations, requires constant overcoming of difficulties and solving complex problems.³⁷ The government-led economic growth model more was suitable to the trend of expanding economic aggregate in the economic takeoff period, but has become an outstanding

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- ❖ *New economic drivers continued to grow, with the tertiary industry accounting for 54.5% of GDP.*
 - ❖ *Final consumption pulled down whole-year GDP by 0.5% points.*
 - ❖ *A total of 11.86 million new urban jobs were created in the whole year, with the surveyed urban unemployment rate at 5.2% by the end of 2020.*
 - ❖ *China's consumer price index (CPI), a main gauge of inflation, rose 2.5% year on year in 2020. The producer price index (PPI), which measures cost of goods at the factory gate, fell 1.8%.*
 - ❖ *China's foreign exchange reserves expanded to US \$ 3.2165 trillion at the end of 2020. Yuan's average exchange rate against the US dollar came in at 6.8974, appreciating 0.02% from a year earlier.*
 - ❖ *China lifted its remaining 5.51 million impoverished rural residents out of poverty in 2020.*
 - ❖ *Per capita disposable income of rural residents in poverty-stricken areas stood at ¥ 12,588, a 5.6% year-on-year rise in real terms after deducting price factors.*
 - ❖ *Of the 337 monitored cities, 59.9% saw air quality up to standards.*
 - ❖ *China's grain output reached nearly 670 billion kg in 2020, up 5.65 billion kg or 0.9% from a year earlier.*
 - ❖ *China's total imports and exports of goods expanded 1.9% year on year to ¥ 32.16 trillion in 2020.*
 - ❖ *FDI into the Chinese mainland, in actual use, expanded 6.2% year on year to about ¥ 1 trillion in 2020.*
 - ❖ *Research and development expenditure increased 10.3% to over ¥ 2.44 trillion, accounting for 2.4% of GDP.*
 - ❖ *The number of successful space launches came in at 35, including China's Chang'e-5 probe that brought back lunar samples.*

³⁷ **Xi Jinping**, "How to Deepen Reform Comprehensively", The Party Literature Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 2014, p. 55.

There is a saying that no mountain is too high to climb and no road is too long to walk. No matter how high a mountain or how long a road, if only we advance with perseverance, we will eventually achieve our goal.

factor to the increasing risk of "growth trap" today:

- 1) *increasing the risk of locking economic structure at low end;*
- 2) *increasing social contradictions and social risks;*
- 3) *increasing political risks in economic and social transition.*³⁸

China is now entering a period of opportunity to move from an upper middle income country to a high-income country and is entering a difficult phase of institutional reform.³⁹ To ensure the country's sustainable, rapid and healthy development, China is committed to developing its economy and addressing issues that directly affect people's livelihoods, such as prices, social welfare, housing, health care, food and drug safety, environmental protection, education and health. China aims to solve social problems, to close the gap between rich and poor-income inequality, as well to narrow the development gap between urban and rural areas and between regions.⁴⁰

There are many problems affecting the direct interests of people in the field of employment, workplace safety, public safety, law enforcement agencies, and the administration of justice. Unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable development remains a big problem on the way of its development, the country is weak in the field of scientific and technological innovations. The industrial structure is imbalanced and the growth regime remains extensive. Formalities and bureaucracy, as well as hedonism and wastefulness, are a serious problem. Certain industries are prone to corruption and other types of misconduct, and fighting corruption remains a major challenge for

³⁸ "Consumption-Led Growth: Strategy for China's Transformation of Development Models", Chief Editor: Chi Fulin, China Institute for Reform and Development. China Reform Research Report, 2012, pp. 288-290.

³⁹ **Liu Wei**, "Upgrading China's Economy", Qiushi, Vol. 5, No. 4, Organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, 01.10.2013, pp.72-73.

⁴⁰ "China. Questions and Answers", op. cit., p. 3.

China. The key to solving these problems lies in deepening reforms.⁴¹

However, looking back on the development of China and its impact on the world, China is becoming more and more confident in its growth in strength and power, as well as in its achievements in changing the global balance of power and configuration of power, which gives full opportunity to express itself.⁴² China's dynamic economic growth and successful reforms have significantly influenced the self-esteem of the Chinese nation and its leadership. Demands for a more decisive foreign policy and determined leaders who speak more decisively to the world have gradually changed the very quality of China's foreign policy, and Beijing has become more confident and purposeful. Many Chinese experts argue that Deng Xiaoping's policy of "*keeping a low profile*" no longer works because "*an elephant can no longer hide behind a big tress*",⁴³ and that some of Deng's guidance is irrelevant and does not correspond to the increased global influence of modern China. From now on, Beijing needs new "*innovative hieroglyphs*" that radically renewed the principles of Chinese foreign policy. Today, China is "*able to safely step out of the shadows*", offering the world its own initiatives or concepts, and even has the right to claim world leadership.⁴⁴ Hence, Deng Xiaoping's dictum "*the lie low, bide your time*" is no longer relevant, and has been replaced by Xi Jinping's more ambitious and aggressive policies.⁴⁵

⁴¹ **Rong Xinchun**, "Trends in China: Strengthening Construction of the CPC", Chief Consultant Zhang Zhuoyuan, Chief Editor Wu Li, Beijing Times Chinese Press, 2014, p. 5.

⁴² **Ruan Zhongze**, "Toward a New Type of International Relations: Transcending History to Win the Future", China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, March/April 2015, p. 35.

⁴³ **Huang Yiping**, "The Silk Road Initiative ...", op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁴ **Лузянин С.**, «Китай между жесткостью и мягкой силой», МГИМО, 18.10.2012.

⁴⁵ **Brahma Chellaney**, "China's Silky Indian Ocean Plans", China-US Focus, Hong Kong, 11.05.2015.

Beijing has set itself an ambitious goal of quadrupling its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita by 2020 compared to 2000. In the process of building an innovation-oriented country, China's new central leadership has put forward scientific views on development.⁴⁶ In line with the general goals of improving and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics and modernizing the management and administration system, China seeks to improve systems in which the market plays a decisive role in the allocation of resources and the government also plays a more important role.⁴⁷ The top leadership at the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012 confirmed the official status of China as a "*big developing country*", assuming that in the coming years the thesis of "*China - Developing State*" will continue and will have to declare China a superpower only to the 100th anniversary of founding of the PRC (2049). However, in the Chinese expert community the country figures as "*a great nation*", "*a great power*" and "*a great regional power*".⁴⁸

China's development lies in the promotion and implementation of the essence of traditional Chinese culture, which has been preserved for several thousand years, contributing to the world community in ideology and cultural level.⁴⁹ According to Beijing, China is pursuing development through its own efforts, while striving for mutual benefit and common development with other countries in line with the trend of economic globalization, and it must work together with other countries to build a harmonious,

⁴⁶ "China. Questions and Answers", op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁷ "Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Recommendations for the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development", Central Compilation and Translation Press, Beijing, 2015, p. 9.

⁴⁸ **Лузянин С.**, «Китай и XVIII съезд КПК», Внутренние и внешние ориентиры, Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель Observer», № 1(276), Институт диаспоры и интеграции (Институт стран СНГ), 2013, с. 59.

⁴⁹ **Cheng Tanquan**, "The Road of China. Recognizing and Understanding China Series", China Renmin University Press, Beijing, 2013, p. 190.

lasting peace and common prosperity.⁵⁰

Multi-Pivot Diplomacy and Principle of "Shared Responsibility". In the new millennium, China has gradually become a superpower, geopolitically competing with the US in the Asia-Pacific region (APR), Central Eurasia, the PG, Africa and Latin America.⁵¹ Since 1994, China has been actively involved in multilateral and regional economic cooperation organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has been in dialogue with the Group of Eight (G-8) and the Group of Twelve (G-12), and strengthened macro-policy coordination with major economic actors and dialogues in areas such as finance, foreign exchange, industry, trade and energy.⁵²

China has become as a part of the global governance system, taking part in global and regional forums such as the United Nations (UN), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the Russia-India-China (RIC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),* as well as in the Group of Twenty (G-20), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and others.⁵³

⁵⁰ "China's Peaceful Development", Information Office of the State Council, Beijing, September 2011, p. 3.

⁵¹ **Лаумулин М.**, «Центральная Азия в зарубежной политологии и мировой геополитике», Том 5, Центральная Азия в XXI столетии, КИСИ при президенте РК, Алматы, 2009, с. 164.

⁵² **Jin Po**, "Understanding China. Introduction to China's History, Society and Culture", China Intercontinental Press, Beijing, 2008, p. 230.

* The SCO, or Shanghai Pact, is a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance, the creation of which was announced on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter, formally establishing the organization, was signed in June 2002 and entered into force on 19 September 2003. The original 5 members, with the exclusion of Uzbekistan, were previously members of the Shanghai Five group, founded on 26 April 1996. Since then, the organization has expanded its membership to 8 states when India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members on 9 June 2017 at a summit in Astana, Kazakhstan.

⁵³ **Лузянин С.**, «Китай и XVIII съезд КПК ...», укр. соч., с. 59.

China has made positive progress in negotiations aimed at facilitating trade and investment through regional economic cooperation mechanism of the SCO, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asian-European Conference (AEC), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (10 + 3), Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation and Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), etc. Through events such as ASEAN-China Cooperation (10 + 1), Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum (SACF), the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum and the China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum, China has done much to promote regional economic cooperation with their respective countries and regions.⁵⁴

Beijing facilitated dialogue among the region's defense ministers through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), an idea previously pushed by US diplomats at the ARF prior to the opening of the IISS (International Institute for Strategic Research) annual ministerial summit on Asian security in Asia (the Shangri-La Dialogue) in 2002. China also played a behind-the-scenes supporting role in the establishment of the East Asia Summit, which first met in December 2005.⁵⁵

China participates in UN affairs, protects the authority of the UN, and is committed to strengthening international cooperation in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, strives to maintain neighborhood and regional security and stability, actively promotes regional dialogue and security cooperation, and constantly expands its participation in the UN peacekeeping, and is also actively involved in the fight against global terrorism.⁵⁶ Except for France,

⁵⁴ **Jin Po**, "Understanding China ...", op. cit., p. 230.

⁵⁵ **Bates Gill, Yanzhong Huang**, "Sources and Limits of Chinese 'Soft Power'", Survival, Global Politics and Strategy, Vol. 48, No. 2, Taylor and Francis, Summer 2006, p. 22.

⁵⁶ **Jin Po**, "Understanding China ...", op. cit., pp. 237-245.

China sends more peacekeepers to UN missions than any other permanent member of the United Nation's Security Council (UNSC) by 2009.⁵⁷

China became the second largest contributor (10.2%) to the UN peacekeeping budget for 2016-2018, only after the USA. Beijing intends to establish a permanent peacekeeping police squad and a reserve peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops, as well as train 2,000 foreign peacekeepers and implement 10 demining assistance programs. From 1990 to 2016, more than 30,000 Chinese peacekeepers served overseas in more than 20 UN peacekeeping missions. More than 2,400 Chinese peacekeepers are active in seven African regions, including Mali, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁵⁸ Since 2006, China has maintained a peacekeeping force, a total of about 1,860 military personnel, in southern Lebanon as a part of the *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* (UNIFIL), tasked with missions such as mine-sweeping, project construction, medical rescue and humanitarian assistance. The 16th Chinese peacekeeping force to Lebanon includes a multi-functional engineer detachment, a construction engineer and a medical detachment.⁵⁹ In addition to its three observers, Beijing's 182-member engineering battalion - its first peacekeeping contingent sent to the ME - includes minesweeping, engineering and logistics companies and a field hospital,⁶⁰ explosive ordnance disposal, construction and repair of roads, helicopter sites.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Denise E. Zheng, "Chinese Soft Power ...", op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁸ "China's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Missions", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 02.06.2016.

⁵⁹ "Chinese Peacekeepers to Lebanon Awarded UN Peace Medal of Honor", Xinhua. English.news.cn, 07.04.2018.

⁶⁰ Yitzhak Shichor, "Silent Partner China and the Lebanon Crisis", China Brief, Vol. 6, Issue: 17, The Jamestown Foundation, 09.05.2007.

⁶¹ «В Ливан прибыла очередная ротация китайских миротворцев», Жэньминь Жибао, 17.06.2010.

Health Diplomacy is another important Chinese-sponsored aid program. As of 2009, more than 15,000 Chinese doctors have been deployed to more than 47 African countries, treating more than 180 million African patients.⁶²

By providing military support to war-torn regions, China is showing its rise on the world stage as it no longer limits its power to regional affairs. The Chinese government believes that the increase in the size of the peacekeeping force is commensurate with the expectations of the international community for China's more active participation in promoting peace and stability.⁶³

Indeed, China is more active in promoting a diplomatic strategy with multiple pillars, taking new measures and ideas, creating a new image, and acquiring a more global perspective with a more entrepreneurial and innovative spirit in the new era.⁶⁴ In addition to expanding the geography of its national and regional interests, as well as acquiring global dimensions in foreign policy and economic strategy, Beijing acknowledged that "*the future destiny of contemporary China is increasingly closely linked to the future fate of the world*", and agreed, albeit with reservations, with the principle "*shared responsibility*" of the country for the fate of the world.⁶⁵ Chinese experts believe that Beijing's interests are deeply integrated with those of the entire world, and that internationally, the world expects China to play a more significant role, be it in promoting economic development, in resolving various crises and conflicts.⁶⁶

⁶² Denise E. Zheng, "Chinese Soft Power ...", op. cit., p. 4.

⁶³ Emma Campbell-Mohn, "China: The World's New Peacekeeper?", The Diplomat, 08.04.2015.

⁶⁴ Ruan Zongze, "Winning the Next Decade: China's Multi-Pivot Diplomacy", China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, July/August 2013, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Лузянин С., Мамонов М., «Китай в глобальных и региональных измерениях. Ресурсы и маршруты 'возвышения'», Китай в мировой и региональной политике. История и современность, Вып. 16: ежегодное издание, ИДВ РАН, М., 2011, с. 7.

⁶⁶ Ruan Zhongze, "Toward a New Type of International ...", op. cit., p. 35.

Moreover, for continued peace harmonious development and sustainable growth in contemporary globalized world, Beijing is trying to provide a favorable international and regional environment by implementing the geopolitics of *eastern* or *new open Chinese regionalism* of "go outside",⁶⁷ and by *open border* or *cross-border regionalism*.⁶⁸ China continues to prioritize the surrounding region in its diplomacy, and changes in China's relationship with the world can be seen primarily in Beijing's relationship with its neighbors.⁶⁹ Not incidentally that President Xi Jinping calling for a "*right look on debt and benefits*" in international relations, suggested to create a positive atmosphere first of all with Chinese neighboring countries, bringing tangible benefits to them and in response gaining their strong support.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Арутюнян Агавни, «Китайская концепция 'Экономического пояса Шёлкового пути' в контексте политики 'нового регионализма'», Россия – Китай: История и культура, Сборник статей и докладов участников IX Международной научно-практической конференции, Изд. "Фэн" АН РТ, Казань, 2016, с. 18-30.

⁶⁸ Ярыгина О., Кучинская Т., «'Новый регионализм': Социокультурные практики Китая», Материалы V Международной студенческой электронной научной конференции «Студенческий научный форум», Российская Академия Естествознания (15 февраля по 1 апреля 2013 г.), М., 2013, с. 2.

Based on the principle of unity of internal and external component, the Chinese border regionalism assumes consideration of the outlying territories as a contact space for projecting their global strategies. They are implemented through the political mechanisms of diversification of forms of cross-border cooperation in the framework of the policy of "*reform and openness*", the policy of "*go outside*" and programs to build "*cross-border belt of openness*".

⁶⁹ Wang Yi, "Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics", China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIIS), Beijing, July/August 2013, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁰ Ломанов А., «'Китайская мечта' как идеологический символ руководства Си Цзиньпина», Китайская Народная Республика: политика, экономика, культура. К 65-летию КНР, ИД «ФОРУМ», М., 2014, с. 53.

2. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy – a Toolkit for the “Chinese Dream”. Beijing's Vision of a New World Order

"If the state does not have enough material 'hard power', then it may be defeated with a single stroke. But if the state lacked cultural 'soft power', it will be defeated without any stroke".

Zhang Guoji

China's ancient history and traditional culture are viewed by most scholars and policy makers as a valuable source of soft power for attracting not only East Asian neighbors with whom China shares a Confucian heritage but also the wider international community. China sees its culture fundamentally as a world culture, which also has a long history of holding great attraction to the West. In imperial times, China's high civilization and accompanying values were not imposed in any way on the outside world, but wherever foreign traders and envoys told their stories about the Middle Kingdom, people felt attracted. China has some unique advantages in expanding nation's civilization influence. For more than 3,000 years, the splendors of China drew a continuous stream of traders, emissaries, scholars and holy men in quest of riches, power, guidance and inspiration. Loosely defined as mixture of Confucian social and political values, folk and high customs and art, and the Chinese language, culture is widely considered to be a core component of China's soft power.

One of the productive levers to implement Chinese new regionalism policy is a *soft power*,⁷¹ into arsenal of which are actively involved the peaceful foreign policy, economic altruism, the values

⁷¹ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese Soft Power: Cultural and Public Diplomacy", Understanding China. Inclusive Sinologies and Diverse Civilization, The 5th World Conference on Sinology, Abstracts, Renmin University of China/Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), Beijing, November 2-4, 2018, p. 20.

and attractiveness of spiritual and material culture of traditional and modern China.⁷² Beijing actively promotes the *cultural soft power* of China, spreading contemporary Chinese values and showing the world the charm of the heritage of Chinese culture, combining it with modern culture and society.⁷³

China's interest in soft power more concretely dates back to as early as 1993, when Wang Huning,* a current member of the CCP Political Bureau and the concurrent head of the Central Policy Research Office, introduced an American political scientist Joseph Nye's soft power theory to China.⁷⁴ According to Nye's theory, soft power is a directing, attracting and imitating force derived mainly from intangible resources such as national unity or solidarity, culture, ideology and influence on international institutions; it is the "*ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion, enforcement or payments*".⁷⁵

Wang Huning evaluated Nye's theory and focused on culture as the main source of a state's soft power: "*if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it... It does not have to use its hard power which is expensive*

⁷² Клиентов М., Кучинская Т., «'Мягкая сила' китайского 'нового регионализма' в социокультурном пространстве мира», Успехи современного естествознания, № 5, Российская академия естествознания, 2012, с. 125.

⁷³ "Xi: China to Promote Cultural Soft Power", English.news.cn, 01.01.2014.

* Wang Huning was handpicked by former President Jiang Zemin to serve as deputy director of the Policy Research Office of the Chinese CCP and under Hu Jintao was promoted to head the office and also appointed to the powerful Secretariat of the CCCPC.

⁷⁴ Osamu Sayama, "China's Approach to Soft Power: Seeking a Balance between Nationalism, Legitimacy and International Influence", Occasional Paper, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), March 2016, p. 4. This was at a time when China needed to counteract China "threat theory", which had gained traction overseas after China introduced its 1992 Territorial Sea Law formally claiming much of the East and South China seas and many of their islands. For Joseph Nye, soft power is when "*one country gets other countries to want what it wants*". It is about attracting other states to your side by getting them to want the outcomes you want, because they admire your values, culture or foreign policy.

⁷⁵ Bates Gill, Yanzhong Huang, "Sources and Limits ...", op. cit., p. 17.

and less efficient".⁷⁶ The country has almost reached the limit of growth of its influence in the international arena and further strengthening of *hard power* without the development of *soft power* threatens to lead to negative consequences, as it would have contributed to the spread and consolidation of the China "threat theory", rooting of social biases and prejudices regarding PRC and its politics.⁷⁷

The 18th CPC National Congress report regards the significant improvement of cultural soft power as an important goal of building a moderately prosperous society, indicating that the CCCPC has become more aware of the significance of cultural construction in sense of taking the commanding elevation in the future international competition.⁷⁸

Soft power, especially in the form of foreign aid (about two-thirds), is used to deepen relations with all regions of the world, mainly low-income and developing countries in Asia, the ME, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Oceania and Eastern Europe.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Bonnie S. Glaser, Melissa E. Murphy, "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics the Ongoing Debate, Chinese Soft Power and its Implications for the United States", Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World, A Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative, March 2009, p. 12; Wang Huning, "Culture as National Soft Power: Soft Power", Journal of Fudan University, March 1993.

⁷⁷ Михневич С., «Панда на службе Дракона: основные направления и механизмы политики 'мягкой силы' Китая», Вестник международных организаций, Том 9, № 2, НИУ ВШЭ, 2014, с. 96.

⁷⁸ "The Formation and Development of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics", Hotspots of the Report to the 18th CPC National Congress, CCCPC Party Literature Research Office, Sichuan People's Publishing House, Chengdu (PRC), 2015, p. 155.

⁷⁹ "China's Foreign Aid, Information Office of the State Council", Beijing, April 2011, p. 18.

By the end of 2009, China had aided 161 countries and more than 30 international and regional organizations, including 123 developing countries that receive aid from China regularly. Of them, 30 are in Asia, 51 in Africa, 18 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 12 in Oceania and 12 in Eastern Europe. Asia and Africa, home to the largest poor population, have got about 80% of China's foreign aid.

According to former Chinese President Hu Jintao, with the increase of its national strength, Beijing should increase its foreign aid in tandem and especially support developing countries to speed up their development and improve their people's living standards. By 2006, Chinese government included foreign aid into the overall framework of enhancing its national soft power.⁸⁰

In order to project the influence of soft power on the international environment, form a positive image and contribute to the achievement of its interests and goals, Beijing actively uses *public diplomacy*,⁸¹ which is implemented mainly through building relationships between individuals and groups, dialogue and communication, cultural and scholarly exchange programs, publishing information as ideological and political propaganda, state-supported international broadcasting services to foreign audiences, etc.⁸²

Priority in the ideological and political propaganda of public diplomacy in China and beyond is given to Xi Jinping's new initiative - the *Great Chinese Dream* or *Great Dream*,⁸³ the main

⁸⁰ **Zhao Lei**, "The Present and Future of China's Soft Power", Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 2015, p. 77.

⁸¹ For more see **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese Policy of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy", The Countries and Peoples of the Near and Middle East, Vol. 31, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2018, pp. 171-194.

Over the past decade, however, a new public diplomacy perspective has developed, which refers to activities that are beyond state actors. It has become a more fluid concept in the context of the new media and Internet environment.

⁸² **Шарко С.**, «Публичная дипломатия как инструмент внешней политики Китая», Вековой путь Китая к прогрессу и модернизации: К 100-летию Синхайской революции, Тезисы XIX Международной научной конференции «Китай, китайская цивилизация и мир. История, современность, перспективы (19–21 октября 2011 г.)», ИДВ РАН, М., 2011, с. 71-73.

⁸³ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "From China's Concept of Peaceful Rise to the Chinese Great Dream", Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, 2017, p. 46; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "The Chinese Dream' as a Vision of PRC's New Phase of Modernization", Eastern Asian Studies, Vol. 3, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2018, pp. 28-48; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese Concept of 'One Belt, One Road' and the National Development Strategy of 'Chinese Dream'", China's Reform Opportunities for the World, The 6th World Forum on China Studies, Abstracts and Bios, Shanghai

components of which are a strong and wealthy state, people's happiness, democracy, national revival and a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.⁸⁴ On November 29, 2012, Xi Jinping came to the *National Museum of China* with other central leaders to watch the large-scale exhibition "The Road to Rejuvenation", made an important speech, and interpreted the concept of the Chinese Dream for the first time.⁸⁵

The General Secretary described "The Road toward Renewal" as a retrospective on the Chinese nation, a celebration of its present and a declaration on its future. It is the road of *socialism with Chinese characteristics*. Xi believes that by the time when the CPC marks its 100th founding anniversary of new China, the goal to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects will be inevitably achieved - the goal of building an affluent, strong, civilized and harmonious socialist modern country will certainly be fulfilled, and the dream of great renewal of the Chinese nation will inevitably be accomplished.⁸⁶ The *Chinese Dream* is the dream of the whole nation and every individual, and by being closely dependent on the people and constantly benefiting the people, the country can succeed.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the *Chinese Dream* should become more tangible for ordinary people with a clearer description of how to create a consensus in Chinese society - a balance between the interests of the state, groups and individuals.⁸⁸ According to Presi-

Academy of Social Sciences and Information Office of Shanghai Municipality, November 20-21, Shanghai, 2015, p. 23.

⁸⁴ **David S. Pena**, "Comparing the Chinese Dream with the American Dream", International Critical Thought, Vol. 5, Issue 3, 2015, p. 277.

⁸⁵ "Panorama of Reform and Opening-up in China, 1978-2018", Compiled by China Institute for Reform and development, Chief Editor: Chi Fulin, China Inter-continental Press, 2018, p. 815.

⁸⁶ "Xi Pledges 'Great Renewal of Chinese Nation'", Xinhua. English.news.cn, 29.11.2012.

⁸⁷ **Tao Xie**, "Opinion: Is President Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream Fantasy or Reality?", CNN, 14.03.2014.

⁸⁸ **Cui Honjian**, "China under Xi Jinping: Scope and Limits Efforts to Deepen

dent Xi, the *Chinese Dream* is the dream of contributing to the world: “*Improve yourself when you are in adversity; help others when you succeed*”.⁸⁹

To realize the *Chinese Dream*, Beijing considers it necessary to develop the national-patriotic spirit and the spirit of the era of Chinese reforms, emanating from the desire to build a strong state,⁹⁰ to create the preconditions for ongoing and even more complex economic reforms and further modernization of the country, as well as to ensure internal stability and maintain control and legitimacy within the country.⁹¹ Stability and a peaceful external environment are the cornerstones of the two centenary goals.⁹²

In fact, Xi Jinping connects the idea of “*community of common destiny*”⁹³ or “*common destiny*” with the *Chinese Dream*⁹⁴ and suggests that domestic and foreign policies are properly presented to the outside world and that the *community's awareness of a common destiny* should take root in neighboring countries.⁹⁵ As a large Asian country with 14 neighbors by land and 8 by sea, China knows all too

China's Reform”, Analysis No. 209, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), November 2013, p. 4.

⁸⁹ **Xing Liju**, “*Traditional Chinese Culture and China's Diplomatic Thinking in the New Era*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, May/June 2015, p. 35.

⁹⁰ **Yang Jiechi**, “*China's New Foreign Relations for a Complex World*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, January/February, 2014, p. 10.

⁹¹ **Camilla T. N. Sørensen**, “*The Significance of Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' for Chinese Foreign Policy: From 'Tao Guang Yang Hui' to 'Fen Fa You Wei'*”, Journal of China and International Relations (JCIR), Vol. 3, No. 1, Aalborg University, 2015, p. 56.

⁹² **Ibid**, p. 61.

⁹³ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*Chinese Initiative 'One Belt, One Road' and the Idea of 'Community of Common Destiny'*”, Eastern Asian Studies, Vol. 3, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2018, pp. 48-62.

⁹⁴ **Ломанов А.**, «*Китайская мечта* ...», укр. соч., с. 47.

⁹⁵ **Yao Yao**, “*Promoting Neighborhood Public Diplomacy: Problems and Solutions*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, November/December, 2014, p. 59.

well that it depends on neighboring countries for peace and development.⁹⁶ So, the emergence of a *community with a common destiny* is a process of interaction and a win-win partnership, the creation of an interconnected node of economic interests, the joining of corridors based on mutual trust in security, culture and development.⁹⁷

According to Wang Qishan, Vice President of the PRC, China should jointly respond to new challenges facing humanity, strive to achieve the greatest possible common ground, improve the international legal system and global governance mechanism, and expand international cooperation into new areas such as Internet, artificial intelligence, outer space, deep sea and polar issues. China must fulfill common responsibilities to implement the international consensus on climate change, strengthen international cooperation in poverty reduction, disaster relief and health care, and combat transnational crime and terrorism in all its forms.⁹⁸ Beijing's sense of responsibility is fundamentally aligned with the theme of world peace and development, and demonstrates alignment of goals in the interests of China and the international community.⁹⁹

In the Chinese proverb, “*a lonely tree cannot withstand the pressure of the cold wind*”, you can find the embodiment of new economic prospects for a community of common destiny. Countries need to manage large, necessary and promising businesses through joint development and cooperation, in the process of which it is necessary to find a point of intersection of interests, exert a positive influence

⁹⁶ **Liu Zhenmin**, “*Laying the Foundations of Peace and Stability for an Asian Community of Shared Destiny*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, November/December 2014, p. 18.

⁹⁷ «*Один пояс и один путь*» становится проводником для Азии», russian.china.org.cn, 01.04.2015.

⁹⁸ **Wang Qishan**, “*Upholding Peace and Cooperation and Building a Community with Shared Future for Mankind*”, Collected Speeches at the 8th World Peace Forum, July 8-9, Foreign Affairs Journal, Issue 133, The Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), Beijing, Autumn 2019, p. 1.

⁹⁹ **Cheng Tanquan**, “*The Road of China ...*”, op. cit., p. 192.

on each other and jointly confront the dangers and risks posed by the international economy.¹⁰⁰

Xi's diplomatic thought has written a new chapter in Chinese diplomatic theory, and opened up a new situation for Chinese diplomatic practice. In the face of historical changes in the balance of power in international relations, Xi Jinping, with the overall strategic thinking and active and enterprising spirit of innovation, made a far-sighted Chinese initiative to lead the global governance system reform, and proposed to the world the Chinese framework of the *NSR Initiative*, drawing a new blueprint for development and progress of the international community.¹⁰¹

3. Xi Jinping - Architect of the New Silk Road (NSR) or One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative: Land and Sea Corridor Strategy

Xi Jinping's concept of Chinese Dream became an ideological basis for proposal of the Chinese initiative of New (Great) Silk Road (NSR/NGSR) or "*Economic Belt of the Silk Road*" (EBSR) and the "*21st Century Maritime Silk Road*" (MSR). They referred to as "*Economic Belt*" and "*Maritime Road*", also are known as the OBOR. The different sub-branches of the EBSR (a series of land-based infrastructure projects, including roads, railways, and pipelines) and the MSR (comprising ports and coastal development) would create a multi-national network connecting China to Europe and Africa via the ME.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ «Пообещать миру более прекрасное будущее», Ежемесячный журнал «Китай», № 10(120), Пекин, Октябрь 2015, с. 42.

¹⁰¹ **Chen Yue, Pu Ping**, "*Building a Community of Shared Future of Mankind, New Concepts, New Ideas and New Strategies of Xi Jinping's Thought on the Governance of China*", A RUG Book Series (A 10-Volume Set), Vol. 10, Diplomacy, China Renmin University Press, Beijing, 01.09.2017, pp. 196-197.

¹⁰² "*The Belt & Road Initiative — 一带一路*", Background, Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), October 2016, p. 1; **Mordechai Chaziza**, "*China-*

Together, these two projects are usually talked about as a part of China's global economic strategy. They were mentioned in a document unveiled after the 3rd Plenary Session of the 18th CCCPC held in Beijing in mid-November 2013.¹⁰³ Of particular importance is that since the Party's 18th National Congress, the CCCPC headed by Xi Jinping has remained committed to upholding and developing socialism, with Chinese characteristics, has been bold in putting ideas into practice and adept at making innovations, and has deepened its understanding of the principles governing the CPC's governance, the development of socialism and human society.¹⁰⁴

In the Chinese government, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), with the authorization of the State Council, the highest echelon of the Chinese Government, have been tasked to deliver OBOR, with the NDRC playing a coordinating role.¹⁰⁵ Other agencies and ministries also participate as needed.¹⁰⁶ On March 28, 2015, three Chinese agencies, the NDRC, the MFA and the MOFCOM, with the permission of the State Council, published the "*Vision and Action for Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st - Century Maritime Silk Road*".¹⁰⁷

Bahrain Relations in the Age of the Belt and Road Initiative", Strategic Assessment, Vol. 23, No. 4, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), October 2020, p. 71.

¹⁰³ **Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar**, "*China's New Silk Road Diplomacy*", Policy Paper, No. 34(82), The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISMP), December 2013, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ "*Central Committee of the Communist Party of China ...*", op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ **Barbara Woodward, Stephen Phillips**, "*One Belt One Road. 一带一路, A Role for UK Companies in Developing China's New Initiative. New Opportunities in China and Beyond*", China-Britain Business Council, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2015, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ "*One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland*", Team Finland Future Watch Report, Takes – the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation, Helsinki, January 2016, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ "*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*", Issued by the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's

In 2016, the NSR/OBOR strategy was officially renamed the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) or *Belt and Road* (B&R) and was written into the constitution of the CPC, showing how dedicated Beijing is to developing the project as a way to ensure China's economic influence.¹⁰⁸

In 2015, China hosted an Asia-Europe Meeting where it provided more details on the structure of the BRI and announced the creation of six economic corridors,* which are designed to pass through:

1. *China - Mongolia - Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC);*
2. *New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB);*
3. *China - Central and West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC);*
4. *China - Indo - China Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC); or China - Southeast Asia Corridors;*
5. *China - Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC);*
6. *Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC).*¹⁰⁹

The B&R is designed to create "global canals" along the GSR, covering countries both on land and at sea.¹¹⁰ As a complex mega-project it plans to develop transport communication network in order to create modernized economic and transport corridors and combined will create a massive loop linking three continents - "economic

Republic of China, with State Council Authorization, 28.03.2015.

¹⁰⁸ "China's 'String of Pearls' Exhibits the Dragon's Great Game of Loans and Debts", European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), Amsterdam, May 2019, p. 3.

* See' APPENDIX. Map 1, 2.

¹⁰⁹ **Thomas Vien**, "The Grand Design of China's New Trade Routes", Stratfor, 24.06.2015.

¹¹⁰ **Bai Gao**, "From Maritime Asia to Continental Asia: China's Responses to the Challenge of the Trans-Pacific Partnership", Department of Sociology Duke University, October 2013, p. 12.

cooperation area" stretches from the **Western Pacific** through the **Indian Ocean** to the **Baltic Sea**.¹¹¹ The Chinese leadership believes that B&R can serve as an impetus for the integration of all sub-regions of Asia-South, South-East, West, and particularly in CA, the MENA to raise pan-Asian and Eurasian cooperation to a new level in the process of economic globalization.¹¹²

Countries along the BRI will be able to improve the connectivity of their infrastructures and facilitate international transport in the following areas: *railways and highways, sea ports, aviation, energy - oil and gas pipelines, industrial parks, power supply, communications - optical networks*.¹¹³

The idea of building infrastructures gives impetus to real diversification and decentralization of economies and the full development of new regional centers along new expressways and highways to expand logistics opportunities, develop tourism potential and create many new jobs.¹¹⁴ China did not have to start from scratch, but would simply expand and connect existing segments of transport networks and infrastructures, some of which it has built itself across Eurasia.¹¹⁵ By investing in large infrastructure projects in more than 70 countries, China can increase the economic interdependence of B&R countries* with China, expand the use of the yuan (Renminbi/RMB) as the main trading currency and increase the efficiency of its trade routes, accelerate the economic development of

¹¹¹ **Shannon Tiezzi**, "China's 'New Silk Road' Vision Revealed", The Diplomat, 09.05.2014.

¹¹² «Китай: развивать дух Шелкового пути и совместными усилиями совершать великие дела», Посольство Китайской Народной Республики в Российской Федерации, 01.01.2015.

¹¹³ "One Belt One Road 一带一路. What is 'One Belt One Road?'", BDO, Singapore, November 2015, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ **Шевырев И.**, «Шелковый путь – проект для Евразии», Киевский ТелеграфЪ, <http://telegrafua.com/world/14663/>

¹¹⁵ **Thomas Vien**, "The Grand Design of China's ...", op. cit.

* See' APPENDIX. Table 2.

the western provinces of China.¹¹⁶ Since 2000, China's central government has been pursuing development strategies for its western regions in an effort to improve economic and social development in this area.¹¹⁷

About 16 Chinese provinces have been covered by B&R, the rest have also expressed their desire to participate. For many less developed regions, mainly in inland China, B&R represents a clear opportunity to catch up with the more developed provinces on the east coast of China. Beijing intends to ensure greater stability in the inner provinces, especially in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) by improving communication with other regions.¹¹⁸

The BRI is a way to take advantage of China's financial, market, technology and manufacturing capabilities in less developed markets. This could help Chinese companies improve their transnational capabilities, establish foreign trade and manufacturing strongholds, and help China tackle the serious problem of overcapacity, especially in the segment of state-owned enterprises (SOE), and revive less efficient domestic industries. In this way, BRI will help develop and facilitate the orderly "going out" of Chinese companies called turning or "pivot abroad". BRI's goal could be a "new wave of opening", replacing Beijing's role of opening to the outside, in contrast to the past, when China opened to participation from the outside, attracting foreign investment, technology and management skills.¹¹⁹ China's "new opening" will depend on local innovation, not

¹¹⁶ **Roi Feder**, "What China's New Silk Road Means for Israel", Diplomatic Courier, 01.09.2016.

¹¹⁷ "Chinese Dream Fervent Attachment to West China", Compiled by Editorial Committee of This Book: Translated by Zhang Qiang and Jiang Cheng, Anhui literature and Art Publishing House, Hefei, 2015, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ "China's New Silk Route. The Long and Winding Road", PwC's Growth Markets Centre, February 2016, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ **François Godement**, "'One Belt, One Road': China's Great Leap Outward", China Analysis, The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), June 2015, p. 9.

investment from planning authorities in Beijing. Now the most promising opportunities are opening up in the Arab countries, CA and Russian Federation (RF), and over the next 30 years, China's development history will be centered in the west. Perhaps by this reason Xi Jinping described his economic strategy as "a new round of opening to the world", and Chinese experts describe B&R as "the country's second or new discovery" after 1979.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, the Chinese government described it as the third round of China's opening up after the creation of special economic zones (SEZ) and China's accession to the WTO.¹²¹ According to commitments made to the WTO, China has intensified its efforts to open wider, constantly improved the foreign-related economic management system and mechanism, facilitated trade and investment opportunities and begun to promote regional economic cooperation and gradually establish free trade areas (FTAs) with others.¹²² By the 2014, there were more than 160 bilateral economic and trade mechanisms, signed over 150 bilateral investment agreements and launched top-level economic dialogues.¹²³

According to Beijing, B&R as an innovative model of cooperation is planned to be built on the basis of strategic coordination of economic and political ties, adhering to the principle of operational efficiency and flexibility, avoiding a system of forced distribution,¹²⁴ promoting mutual understanding between peoples, which means communication, recognition of the goals, ideas, feelings of different countries and civilizations within the framework of the BRI.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ **Ibid.**, pp. 2-5.

¹²¹ **Barbara Woodward, Stephen Phillips**, "One Belt ...", op. cit., p. 7.

¹²² **Wang Danli**, "Trends in China: Economic System Reform", Chief Consultant: Zhang Zhuoyuan, Chief Editor: Wu Li, Beijing Times Chinese Press, 01.09.2014, p. 166.

¹²³ **Ibid.**, p. 168.

¹²⁴ **Фэн Юйцзюнь**, «Экономический пояс Шелкового пути обладает глубоким смыслом», Жэньминь Жибао, 22.01.2014.

¹²⁵ **Guo Xiangnag, Jiang Zhida**, "Understanding between the Peoples: Miscon-

China's interest in delivering expensive goods of small volume by rail across Eurasia is explained by the fact that, although maritime transport is cheaper, the distance between the Far East and Western Europe via the Eurasian Land Bridge is 5,000 miles shorter than through the Suez Canal, which is 6,800 miles shorter than through the Panama Canal, and 9,300 miles shorter than around the Cape of Good Hope.¹²⁶ In addition, due to the increase in the added value of products, cheap but slow sea transport is losing its dominant position and attractiveness, while more expensive but faster land-based transport is becoming more attractive.¹²⁷

In 2017, the China announced a new initiative to create a "Digital Silk Road" (DSR) within the framework of the BRI. The construction of the NSP infrastructure is closely related to the creation of the DSR, which offers consumers of Chinese goods a new level of logistics and retail through the introduction of modern technologies.¹²⁸ The DSR was introduced in 2015 by an official Chinese government white paper, as a component of Beijing's BRI. For years, it has been less an identifiable set of projects as much as it was a brand for virtually any telecommunications or data-related business operations or product sales by China-based tech firms in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, or the Caribbean - home to the 100 + "BRI countries".¹²⁹ The DSR in its spirit corresponds to the

ceptions and Approaches", China International Studies (CIS), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, November-December 2015, p. 77.

¹²⁶ John C. K. Daly, "China, Belarus Deepen Ties, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*", Vol. 12, Issue 164, The Jamestown Foundation, 14.09.2015.

¹²⁷ Bai Lianlei, "Azerbaijan in the Silk Road Economic Belt: A Chinese Perspective", China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, 30.08.2017.

¹²⁸ Аликберова А.Р., Балакин Д.А., «Цифровой Шелковый Путь в контексте внешнеполитической концепции Китайской Народной Республики», Россия – Китай: история и культура: сборник статей и докладов участников XII Международной научно-практической конференции, Изд. «Фэн» АН РТ, Казань, 2019, с. 22.

¹²⁹ Paul Triolo, Robert Greene, "Will China Control the Global Internet via its Digital Silk Road?", *SupChina*, 08.05.2020.

principles of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the state program of the PRC "Made in China - 2025" (MIC-25), within the framework of which it is planned to qualitatively increase industrial automation and technological modernization.¹³⁰

The MIC-2025 Initiative, launched by Prime Minister (PM) Li Keqiang in 2015, aimed at modernizing China's industrial potential, consolidating China's global leadership position in high technology, reducing the country's dependence on foreign technology imports, and investing in significant funds in their own innovations to create Chinese companies that can compete both domestically and around the world. China sees MIC-2025 as a chance to fully integrate into the global manufacturing chain and more effectively cooperate with industrialized economies.¹³¹ The core is to accelerate the innovative development of the manufacturing industry, improve quality and increase return.¹³² Beijing's ambitious plan to create one of the world's most advanced and competitive economies using innovative manufacturing technologies ("smart manufacturing") aims to turn the China from a big manufacturing country into a "manufacturing superpower" in the coming decades and challenge the economic primacy of today's leading economies and international corporations.¹³³ On May 19, 2015, the State Council officially issued MIC-25 and promoting the leap-forward development of manufacturing industry is the strategic need to realize the "Two Centennial Goals" and the "Chinese Dream of great national rejuvenation", and also the

¹³⁰ Аликберова А.Р., Балакин Д.А., «Цифровой ...», указ. соч., с. 22.

¹³¹ "Made in China 2025, Background", Institute for Security and Development Policy, June 2018, p. 1.

¹³² "Panorama of Reform and Opening-up in China ...", op. cit., p. 907.

¹³³ Jost Wübbeke, Mirjam Meissner, Max J. Zenglein, Jaqueline Ives, Björn Conrad, "Made in China 2025. The Making of a High-Tech Superpower and Consequences for Industrial Countries", *Papers on China* No 2, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), December 2016, p. 6.

objective demand in realizing steady economic growth, restructuring and improving quality and increasing return.¹³⁴

DSR promotes the use of digital diplomacy, one of the most important directions of China's foreign and domestic policy today. The country's leadership, which has long been actively using soft power technologies for its own purposes, highly appreciated the potential of digital diplomacy - the use of information and communication technologies not only to solve foreign policy problems, but also to ensure internal stability.¹³⁵

While, initially, the BRI encompassed a limited number of countries, currently it is “*open to all nations and not limited by geography*” with states like Morocco, Libya and Lebanon having joined the initiative at later stages (by virtue of signing relevant Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) in 2017, 2018 and 2017 respectively).¹³⁶ Initially the initiative OBOR includes 65 countries.¹³⁷ By 2016, more than 70 countries and international organizations have shown interest, and more than 30 countries have signed agreements with China to build B&R.¹³⁸ According to the BRI report released by the Chinese government, Beijing had signed 173 cooperation agreements with 125 countries and 29 international organizations by the end of March 2019.¹³⁹ The project covers a highway with a length of 47,100 km, it is potentially involving an area that covers 55% of world Gross national product (GNP), 70% of

¹³⁴ “*Panorama of Reform and Opening-up in China ...*”, op. cit., p. 906.

¹³⁵ Аликберова А.Р., Балакин Д.А., «Цифровой ...», укз. соч., с. 23.

¹³⁶ “*The Role of China in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Beyond Economic Interests?*”, Euromesco Joint Policy Study, Katarzyna W. Sidło (Ed.), European Institute of the Mediterranean, July 2020, p. 33.

¹³⁷ Han Wang, “*One Belt One Road Strategy: Energy Transit Risks*”, Energy Charter Secretariat, Kyrgyzstan, 25.09.2015, p. 13.

¹³⁸ Liu Junguo, “*China-initiated ‘Belt and Road’ Benefits the World*”, People's Daily Online, 14.03.2016.

¹³⁹ «Топ-10 масштабных проектов инициативы ‘Один пояс - один путь’», Вести Экономика, 05.04.2019.

global population, and 75% of known energy reserves.¹⁴⁰ It covers oil and natural gas pipelines, extensive energy transmission lines and 14 logistics centers. The whole project corresponds to 26% of the world's surface. The support for integrated transportation by creating inter-continental roads, maritime and aviation corridors, averting non-tariff barriers in trade and paving the way for investment, encouraging intergovernmental cooperation, expanding cultural and human ties, student and staff changes are among the targets.¹⁴¹ Implementation may span a very long time period – as much as 35 years, reaching completion in time for the 100th anniversary of the PRC in 2049.¹⁴² China was to launch five years of strategic planning in 2016, with implementation expected to begin in 2021.¹⁴³

Chinese officials have promoted BRI in several international forums involving the following regions: the Asia - Europe Meeting (ASEM), ASEAN+1 (Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China), the China - Arab States Cooperation Forum (22 members of the Arab League plus China), the Forum on China - African Cooperation (50 African countries plus China), and China - CEE 16+1 (the sixteen Central and Eastern European Countries plus China).¹⁴⁴ Under EBSR China needs to properly forge relationships with existing regional integration organizations and major powers involved with various economic cooperation programs, including the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), the Customs Union (CU) of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, the EAEU, updated in 2015, SCO, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ François Godement, “*‘One Belt, One Road’ ...*”, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

¹⁴¹ Hazel ÇağınElbir, “*The Charming Modern Silk Road Dazzles the EU*”, Analysis No. 12, Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), 29.04.2019.

¹⁴² François Godement, “*‘One Belt, One Road’ ...*”, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ “*One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland*”, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Li Jianmin, “*Silk Road Economic Zone, the EEU and China-Russia Coope-*

The *Belt and Road Forum* entitled “*Strengthening International Cooperation and Co-building the ‘Belt and Road’ for Win-win Development*”, was successfully held in Beijing from 14-15 May 2017. More than 1,600 delegates from over 140 countries and 80 international organizations, including 29 heads of state or government, attended Forum. The *Joint Communiqué of the Leaders Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*, and a *List of Deliverables* that includes 76 items comprising more than 270 concrete results in 5 key areas, were released after the Forum.¹⁴⁶

Thus, Beijing hopes that the closer economic ties forged through the BRI will strengthen diplomatic relations between China and countries along the routes and contribute to a multipolar world order.¹⁴⁷

BRI Multilateral Development Banks. BRI will be realized through the China-led Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Fund (SRF) and the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB).¹⁴⁸ China has allocated a total of about US \$ 100 billion for three new infrastructure funds:

- US \$ 50 billion to the new AIIB,
- US \$ 40 billion to the Central Asia-focused SRF,
- US \$ 10 billion to the BRICS-led NDB.¹⁴⁹

The AIIB membership has gone up to 97 countries. Over 1,800 projects of the BRI are underway with over US \$ 80 billion in direct investments in non-financial sectors. China had invested about US \$

ration, *Asia's New Future: Towards a Community of Common Destiny*”, Boao Forum for Asia, Hainan Province, PRC, March 26-29, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ “*China's Foreign Affairs 2018*”, Department of Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples' Republic of China, 2018, p. 106.

¹⁴⁷ “*The Role of China in the Middle East ...*”, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁴⁸ “*AIIB Founding Members to vie for Power at Singapore Meeting*”, CCTV.com, 20.05.2015.

¹⁴⁹ François Godement, “‘One Belt, One Road’ ...”, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

30 billion in over 80 industrial parks abroad. The initial outlays of US \$ 800 billion are yet to be invested - partly due to the reassessments on financial risks.¹⁵⁰

AIIB: AIIB, headquartered in Beijing, was founded in October 2014 by China and 20 other countries in Asia.¹⁵¹ Founding members have priority over countries that register later because they will have the right to set the rules for the bank.¹⁵² Each member country has a voting share roughly proportional to its subscribed capital. China is the largest shareholder, and its operations are likely to extend to traditional loans and loan guarantees. It is expected to use bond financing and raise private capital through PPP enterprises. The main goal is to provide financing for infrastructure projects in member countries.¹⁵³

It is worth noting that the AIIB does not depend on the Bretton Woods system and is viewed as a rival to the IMF, WB and ADB, which are in the system and in the power of the US or Japan.¹⁵⁴ AIIB can become an alternative to the WB and the IMF in Asia,¹⁵⁵ and with a capital of US \$ 50 billion, will significantly increase the ability of developing countries to gain easy access to credit.¹⁵⁶

SRF: On November 24, 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced his intention to create a Chinese SRF and invest US \$ 40

¹⁵⁰ Kondapalli Srikanth, “*China's Belt and Road Initiative: From Arctic to Space. How China Plans to Expand its Global Footprints*”, Financial express, New Delhi, 24.04.2019.

¹⁵¹ «Франция, Италия и ФРГ идут в Азию против воли США», Вести, 17.03.2015.

Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

¹⁵² Cary Huang, “*57 Nations Approved as Founder Members of China-led AIIB*”, South China Morning Post, 15.04.2015.

¹⁵³ Barbara Woodward, Stephen Phillips, “*One Belt ...*”, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ Cary Huang, “*57 Nations Approved ...*”, op. cit., p. 1; Yelin Hong, “*The AIIB is Seen Very Differently in the US, Europe, and China*”, The Diplomat, 08.05.2015.

¹⁵⁵ Латынина Ю., «Рождение сверхдержавы», Новая газета, 19.11.2014.

¹⁵⁶ Ankit Panda, “*South Korea Joins the AIIB*”, The Diplomat, 28.03.2015.

billion in it.¹⁵⁷ The fund is sponsored by China's foreign exchange reserves, as well as the government and state-owned financial institutions.¹⁵⁸ The fund positions itself as a medium and long-term development fund focused on financing and investment services, and will primarily use domestic capital, especially foreign exchange reserves. It will be used to develop infrastructure, build new ports, airports and railways, will focus on high-return projects such as resource development and industrial cooperation in the countries of the BRI cooperation zone.¹⁵⁹ SRF is oriented towards funding for specific projects and is jointly funded by China's foreign exchange reserves: *the State Administration of Foreign Exchange; the China Investment Corporation; the Export-Import Bank of China* (Eximbank of China); *the China Development Bank* (CDB).¹⁶⁰ It is expected that this fund will be similar to the investment arm of the WB International Finance Corp and the mutual development fund of the African Development Bank. Funded by a small group of investors, SRF focuses on natural resource exploration and industrial and financial cooperation.¹⁶¹ The Fund must advocate for the concept of green and sustainable development, incorporating social responsibilities such as environmental protection into its feasibility evaluation and risk management system.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Дёгтев А., «Как Центральной Азии совместить Шелковый путь и ЕАЭС?», Евразийское развитие, 25.11.2014.

¹⁵⁸ Peter Wolff, "China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative – Challenges and Opportunities", Report Prepared for the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank, German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), 2016, p. 10.

¹⁵⁹ Barbara Woodward, Stephen Phillips, "One Belt ...", op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁶⁰ "China Boosts Silk Road Fund's Capital to Meet Enormous Funding Demand: Official", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 14.05.2017.

¹⁶¹ Helen Chin, Fong Lau, Winnie He, Timothy Cheung, "The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road", The Fung Business Intelligence Centre, May 2015, p. 8.

¹⁶² "China Boosts Silk Road Fund's ...", op. cit.

NDB: The NDB (formerly the BRICS Development Bank) was launched in Shanghai (July 21, 2015) by developing countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which account for over 40% of the world's population and 25% of global GDP. Non-BRICS countries can join, but the BRICS countries will retain at least 55% of the shares.¹⁶³ China and Russia contributed US \$ 41 billion and US \$ 18 billion, respectively, of US \$ 100 billion to the Contingent Reserves Agreement (CRA).¹⁶⁴ Brazil and India had to contribute US \$ 18 billion and South Africa US \$ 4 billion.¹⁶⁵ The five BRICS countries all have equal voting shares.

The NDB began operations in 2016 with a start-up capital of US \$ 50 billion.¹⁶⁶ It will finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects and can do so in non-BRICS emerging markets. Along with the AIIB, the NDB is likely to contribute to projects that are quickly becoming a hallmark of the Chinese EBSR project, which has figured more clearly in the negotiations within the SCO, especially at the bilateral level with Russia.¹⁶⁷ Despite criticism that the NDB is being created to stem the growing influence of developed Western countries through international organizations such as the IMF and the WB, BRICS leaders believe that the Bank does not replace established Western institutions,¹⁶⁸ but complements them by studying innovations in governance models.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ "One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland", op. cit., p. 8.

The NDB's headquarters is in Shanghai, the president from India, the chairman of the board of directors from Brazil and the chairman of the board of governors from Russia.

¹⁶⁴ Deena Zaidi, "A Tale of Changing Equations: China and Russia", Economywatch.com, 21.08.2015.

¹⁶⁵ «Правительство РФ внесет \$18 млрд в резервный фонд БРИКС», ИА REGNUM, 10.04.2015.

¹⁶⁶ Oliver Stuenkel, "The New Development Bank (NDB): The BRICS Grouping Promises to Go Green", Post-Western World, 27.02.2016.

¹⁶⁷ Sarah Lain, "Russia Faces Facts on China", The Moscow Times, 02.08.2015.

¹⁶⁸ Deena Zaidi, "A Tale of Changing Equations ...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁹ Shannon Tiezzi, "Don't Forget about the New BRICS Bank", The Diplomat, 22.08.2015.

The differences between the roles of the AIIB, the SRF and NDB experts considered are follows: the intended recipients of the AIIB are all regional member countries and the intended recipients of SRF are countries along the B&R routes. AIIB focuses on infrastructure and SRF focuses on infrastructure, resource development, industrial cooperation. The source of funding for the AIIB is its member countries and funding for SRF is carried out mainly by Chinese capital.¹⁷⁰ The NDB will probably be somewhere in between, as the vast majority of contracts will be awarded to companies from China or other BRICS countries, but with companies from other countries that will eventually become members.¹⁷¹

President Xi Jinping promised to provide assistance and funding to countries, especially the poorest regions of Asia.¹⁷² In May 2017, speaking at the opening of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, he announced significant financial support for these efforts:

- *RMB 100 billion (about US \$ 14.5 billion) to increase the SRF;*
- *The CDB and China Exim Bank will establish special lending schemes for the equivalent of RMB 250 billion and the equivalent of RMB 130 billion;*
- *RMB 300 billion for doing business with foreign funds in yuan;*
- *RMB 60 billion in aid to developing countries and international organizations.*¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Barbara Woodward, Stephen Phillips, "One Belt ...", op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁷¹ "One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland", op. cit., p. 12.

Membership is not limited to BRICS countries, although most of the shares will be held by BRICS countries.

¹⁷² «Китай намерен ускорить создание Экономического пояса Шелкового пути», Nur.KZ, 06.11.2014.

¹⁷³ "China Focus: Riding on Fruitful Forum, Confident Xi Takes Belt & Road to Next Level", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 16.05.2017; "China Boosts Silk Road Fund's ...", op. cit.

Moreover, CITIC Group* has pledged its support for B&R's trading strategy with an additional US \$ 113 billion.¹⁷⁴ In addition to these institutions, China has established the China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund (for Southeast Asia), the China-CEE Investment Cooperation Fund (for Central and Eastern Europe). There are also plans for the SCO Development Bank (DB) to focus on China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁷⁵ But the SCO's DB project has stalled for several years, since Russia sees in it a threat to China's credit expansion in Central Asia (CA) and proposes to use the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) for investments, in which Russia and Kazakhstan hold the largest shares.¹⁷⁶ Some BRI projects may also be financed from European sources and may be beneficial for European companies.¹⁷⁷

By 2017, the CDB, one of the country's policy banks, has invested over US \$ 890 billion in over 900 projects involving 60 countries. More than US \$ 10 billion has been invested in projects covering coal and gas, mining, electricity, telecommunications, infrastructure, agriculture and so on.¹⁷⁸ China's Big Four state-owned banks provided nearly US \$ 90 billion in loans to countries associated with the initiative in 2016 alone. The B&R project already has US \$ 1 trillion of projects underway, including major infrastructure works in Africa and CA.¹⁷⁹ Since starting operations in 2016, the AIIB approved loans and investment worth US \$ 2.5

* Formerly China International Trust and Investment Corporation.

¹⁷⁴ Maciej Bochra, "The New Silk Road and the Baltic Sea Region. One Belt, One Road", Baltic Transport Journal, No. 4, 2015, p. 60.

¹⁷⁵ "One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland", op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁷⁶ «В китайском инфраструктурном мегапроекте спешат участвовать и Азия, и Европа», Ведомости, 18.03.2015.

¹⁷⁷ "One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland", op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁷⁸ He Yini, "China to Invest \$900b in Belt and Road Initiative", China Daily, 28.05.2015.

¹⁷⁹ "China's \$900 billion New Silk Road. What You Need to Know", World Economic Forum, 26.01.2017.

billion to 16 projects across Asia, including in Bangladesh, Georgia and Pakistan.¹⁸⁰ South-South Cooperation Fund for Climate Change have been created, all offering alternatives to the IMF and the WB.¹⁸¹

The funding pledged for this ambitious project is an additional US \$ 124 billion including assistance, grants, and loans to countries within the initiative. Various estimates for the capital needs of the projects under the BRI range from US \$ 2 trillion to US \$ 8 trillion for an indefinite period.¹⁸² Chinese companies can gain access just under US \$ 600 billion from the state-controlled financial sector.¹⁸³ The exact total cost of the initiative is not known but according to some estimates, US \$ 8 trillion will be invested.¹⁸⁴

At the Chinese B&R forum in 2019, it was announced that Chinese companies had invested US \$ 90 billion in B&R countries, which is a lot, but this is only a drop in the ocean.¹⁸⁵ The global infrastructure investment needed to support the currently expected rates of economic growth is between US \$ 3.3 trillion and US \$ 6.3 trillion annually.¹⁸⁶ Beijing's FDI in the BRI will reach US \$ 300 billion by 2030. Furthermore, it has the potential to establish a new order not only in Eurasia but the entire international system as well. By 2020, the PRC had already invested over US \$ 148 billion, while the total value of projects financed by China in its BRI partners until

¹⁸⁰ **Janne Suokas**, "China-led AIIB Expands Membership to 80 Countries, Adopts Energy Strategy", Gbtimes, 16.06.2017.

¹⁸¹ **Laurence Brahm**, "The New Silk Road Will Link China with the Middle East", Business Insider, 06.06.2016.

¹⁸² **Anu Sharma**, "An Analysis of 'Belt and Road' Initiative and the Middle East", Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Vol. 13, Issue 1, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2019, p. 36.

¹⁸³ **Mihir Sharma**, "The World Shouldn't Save the Belt and Road", Bloomberg, 02.05.2019.

¹⁸⁴ **Mordechai Chaziza**, "China-Bahrain Relations ...", op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁸⁵ **Комиссина Ирина**, «Китай будет реализовывать внешнюю политику через 'мягкую силу'», Российский институт стратегических исследований (РИСИ), М., 07.02.2017.

¹⁸⁶ **Mordechai Chaziza**, "The Significant Role of Oman in China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative", Contemporary Review of the Middle East, No. 6(1), 2019, p. 45.

2020 reached US \$ 256 billion, and the total volume of trade between China and other BRI countries exceeded US \$ 3 trillion. Chinese firms have also established over 50 economic and trade zones in over 30 countries. By 2020, about one hundred Chinese state-owned enterprises have implemented a total of 3116 investment projects in the B&R countries.¹⁸⁷

In Europe, as in Washington, China's launch of a new institution to channel a fraction of its massive currency reserves into infrastructure investments in Asia posed a political conundrum and provoked turf disputes. Some experts estimate China's initiated AIIB as a serious challenge to the IMF and the US, capable to shake the economic and political leadership of America and the EU. An American analyst even stated that the NSR project aims at no less than a revolutionary change in the economic map of the world. It is also seen by many as the first shot in a battle between East and West for dominance in Eurasia. China's massive project has already triggered dramatic changes in global policy, but it is likely to face a lot of Western geopolitical obstructions. "The great game" for the dominance in Eurasia between the East and the West will continue.¹⁸⁸

Economic Belt of Silk Road. The Chinese concept of EBSR was first used during President Xi Jinping's tour of the four CA countries, which began on September 3, 2013 in Ashgabat and ended on September 13 at the SCO summit in Bishkek. Speaking at Nazarbayev University in Astana, President Xi Jinping expressed the idea of creating the New Silk Road Economic Belt (NSREB) as a new

¹⁸⁷ **Mordechai Chaziza**, "China-Qatar Strategic Partnership and the Realization of One Belt, One Road Initiative", China Report 56(1), SAGE Journals, February 2020, pp. 80-81

¹⁸⁸ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese Concept of "One Belt, One Road" Plan: Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", The Silk Road: Collection of Papers from the Third international conference on Chinese studies "The Silk Road", organized by The Confucius Institute in Sofia at "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia, 04 – 05 June 2015, Bulgaria, 2015, pp. 246-247.

form of deepening cooperation between China, CA and Russia.¹⁸⁹ China pushes for westward opening-up on the basis of a CA development strategy to include the Mediterranean, the Atlantic as well as the Indian Ocean into a broader cooperation, involving the CA, West Asia, South Asia, even a number of European countries.¹⁹⁰ In the future, the united transport network will make it possible to create a transport corridor from the Asia-Pacific countries to the countries of Western Europe. It will unite 18 Asian and European countries with a total area of 50 million km² with a population of 3 billion people.¹⁹¹

One of the EBSR's objectives is to fill the Eurasian infrastructure gap (mainly related to the lack of transnational traffic) by linking the infrastructures of the relatively undeveloped interior regions of CA and the South Caucasus (SC), located between two developed terminals in Europe and East Asia.¹⁹²

Four of the six B&R economic corridors are included in the EBSR:

1. The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC): this linked to the Trans-Siberian Railway, would involve strengthening rail and highway connectivity that crosses Russia, PRC and Mongolia, including new construction, advance customs clearance and other transport facilitation.

2. The New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELB): this would be a second Eurasia "land bridge" - involving a

¹⁸⁹ «Выступление Председателя КНР Си Цзиньпина в Назарбаев университете (полный текст)», Посольство Китайской Народной Республики в Республике Казахстан, 16.09.2013.

¹⁹⁰ **Pan Zhiping**, "Silk Road Economic Belt: A Dynamic New Concept for Geopolitics in Central Asia", China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, 18.09.2014.

¹⁹¹ **Петрунько К., Сазонов С.**, «Синьцзян превращается в важнейшее логистическое звено транспортной системы КНР», Актуальные проблемы развития КНР в процессе ее регионализации и глобализации: материалы VII Международной научно-практической конференции, ЗабГУ, Чита, 2015, с. 143.

¹⁹² **Bai Lianlei**, "Azerbaijan in the Silk Road ...", op. cit.

railway running from Lianyungang in PRC's Jiangsu province through Alashankou in Xinjiang province, eventually ending at Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Anticipating the corridor, the PRC, has already introduced several new international rail routes offering rail-to-rail freight transfer, and a "one declaration, one inspection, one cargo release" system for cargo moving across borders.

3. The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAE): the corridor includes five Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan - as well as Iran and Turkey in West Asia. For the most part, the China-CA gas pipeline already exists for energy (the longest in the world). Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Xinjiang also plan to link ME with this pipeline. The corridor plan coalesces with national development strategies such as Kazakhstan's "Road to Brightness", Tajikistan's "Energy, Transport and Food", and Turkmenistan's "Strong and Happy Era".

4. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): this would run from Kashgar (Xinjiang), in northern PRC, to Gwadar Port in south Pakistan. The corridor will extend the Karakoram Highway and would necessitate building highways, railways, oil and natural gas pipelines and fiber-optic networks.¹⁹³

Geographically, EBSR starts from China at the eastern end of the continent of Eurasia, passes through CA, West Asia, South Asia and some other regions in **three lines (northern line, middle line and southern line)**, approaches the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas, the Arabian Peninsula and arrives in Europe and NA at the western end of Eurasia. Specifically, three trans-Eurasian economic lines of EBSR are as follows:

¹⁹³ **Thomas Vien**, "The Grand Design of China's ...", op. cit.; **James Villafuerte, Erwin Corong, Juzhong Zhuang**, "The One Belt, One Road: Initiative Impact on Trade and Growth", 19th Annual Conference on Global Economic Analysis, June 2016, p. 9.

1. **"Northern Line" or (China-Central Asia-Russia-Europe):** starts from China through Kazakhstan, through the south of Russia, through Ukraine, the territory of Belarus, through Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe and finally reaches Germany, arriving in Western Europe.

2. **"Middle Line" or (China - Central and West Asia - the PG and the Mediterranean Sea):** starts from China through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries through Turkmenistan and continues along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, finally reaching Europe through Turkey.

3. **"Southern Line" or (China - Southeast Asia - South Asia - Indian Ocean):** starts from China through Afghanistan, Pakistan, through Iran to the Arabian Peninsula, and then reaches NA through Egypt.¹⁹⁴

The land-based NSR will begin in Xi'an before stretching west through Lanzhou (Gansu province), Urumqi and Khorgas (Xinjiang), which is near the border with Kazakhstan. The NSR then heads southwest:

✓ From CA to the northern Iran before swinging west through Iraq, Syria, and Turkey;

✓ From Istanbul, the NSR crosses the Bosphorus Strait and heads northwest through Europe, traversing Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Germany;

✓ Reaching Duisburg in Germany, it swings north to Rotterdam in the Netherlands;

✓ From Rotterdam, the path runs south to Venice (Italy), where it meets up with the equally ambitious MSR.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ "Silk Road Economic Belt: Prospects and Policy Recommendations", Working Papers, Center for China in the World Economy, Tsinghua University China Economic Net, 20.05.2014, pp. 3-4; Прохвятилов В., «Китайские поезда как инструмент геополитики 21-го века», Argumenti.ru, 22.02.2017.

¹⁹⁵ Shannon Tiezzi, "China's 'New Silk Road' Vision ...", op. cit; Camille Brugier,

Maritime Silk Road. Historically, the MSR refers to the ancient maritime trade and cultural route between China and other parts of Asia, Europe, East Africa and the ME. In this aspect, Xi Jinping's MSR is a recreation of historical prestige as one of the world's leading maritime powers, allowing Beijing to develop and strengthen its maritime influence.¹⁹⁶

The idea of establishment the MSR was revealed during Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's attendance at the 16th ASEAN + China summit in Brunei (9-10 October, 2013) and Xi Jinping's speech in the Indonesian parliament (3 October, 2013).¹⁹⁷ At the Indonesian legislature Chinese President particularly talked about the sea path of the Silk Road (SR)¹⁹⁸ and called for establishing a MSR adapted to the needs of the 21st century. Premier Li said that since ancient times, Southeast Asia has been an important center of the ancient sea SR, China will strengthen maritime cooperation with the countries of the ASEAN, and use the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund, established by Government of China, for the active development of maritime partnerships under the MSR.¹⁹⁹ This coincides with Li Keqiang's pledge to upgrade the *Gold Decade* (2000-2010) of China-ASEAN cooperation into a *Diamond Decade*.²⁰⁰

Relying mainly on ASEAN countries, the MSR should contribute to the development of the Regional Comprehensive Economic

"China's Way: The New Silk Road, Brief Issue", European Union Institute for Security Studies, May 2014, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Байдаров Еркин, «Китай и Морской Шелковый Путь 21 века: возрождение или экономическая экспансия?», Rezonans.kz, 19.03.2021.

¹⁹⁷ Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, "China's New Silk Road ...", op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ Bai Gao, "From Maritime Asia to Continental Asia ...", op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁹⁹ Ruan Zongze, "What Kind of Neighborhood Will China Build?", China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, 28.05.2014.

²⁰⁰ Zhou Bo, "The String of Pearls and the Maritime Silk Road", China-US Focus, 11.02.2014.

Partnership (RCEP), and further strengthen China's commitment to supporting the implementation of the Master Plan* on ASEAN Connectivity.²⁰¹ As part of its comprehensive transport strategy, China intends to solve the problems of financing the ASEAN railways with the help of the SRF, creating transport corridors through Asia.²⁰²

MSR covers more than 20 countries, varying in size, development, history, religion, language and culture, and passes through the regions that is sensitive to international strategy and has complex geopolitics.²⁰³ The main attention in the planning of MSR was paid to close cooperation in the field of finance and economics, infrastructure projects (joint construction of roads and railways), expansion of cooperation in the field of security, technology and science.²⁰⁴

The MSR will complement the EBSR by linking Chinese ports with other countries via maritime links, focusing on the use of sea routes and Chinese coastal ports²⁰⁵ to connect China with Europe via the South China Sea,* the Straits of Malacca, Lombok, Sudan and

* The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity is envisaged to connect ASEAN through enhanced physical infrastructure development (physical connectivity), effective institutional arrangements (institutional connectivity) and empowered people (people-to-people connectivity).

²⁰¹ **Soegeng Rahardjo**, "Reinvigorating Maritime Links between Indonesia, China and Asia-Pacific, Asia's New Future: Towards a Community of Common Destiny", Boao Forum for Asia, Hainan Province, PRC, 26-29.03.2015, p. 13.

²⁰² **Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga**, "Rolling out the New Silk Road: Railroads Undergird Beijing's Strategy", China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 8, The Jamestown Foundation, 17.04.2015, p. 3.

²⁰³ **Li Cigui**, "Reflections on Maritime Partnership: Building the 21st century Maritime Silk Road", China International Studies (CIS), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, July/August 2014, p. 9.

²⁰⁴ **Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar**, "China's New Silk Road ...", op. cit., p. 3;

²⁰⁵ "One Belt One Road 一带一路 ...?", op. cit., p. 4.

* Control over the South China Sea is one of the milestones in the Chinese strategy for dominance. It is one of the busiest commercial routes and the shortest possible way connecting the West Pacific/East Asia with the Indian Ocean, Africa, and Europe. It also provides direct access to 9 of the 10 largest commercial ports in the world. 7 of them are Chinese, including Hong Kong and the other 2 are Busan in South Korea and Taiwan.

along the north Indian Ocean to the PG, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, encompassing South and Southeast Asia, particularly Sri Lanka. Thus, the MSR will extend from Asia to the Near East, ME, East Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe - China's largest export market.²⁰⁶

The two from six B&R economic corridors are included to MSR:

✓ **China - Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC):** *the linkage will deepen relations between the PRC and five countries in continental Southeast Asia - Viet Nam, the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar-through (i) joint planning and constructing an extensive transportation network and several industrial cooperation projects; (ii) a new mode for financing cooperation; and (iii) promoting sustainable and coordinated socioeconomic development.*

✓ **Bangladesh – China – India – Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC):** *this would require consensus for cooperation on transport infrastructure, investment and commerce, industrial parks and people-to-people connectivity.*²⁰⁷

The Maritime Silk Road will begin:

✓ *From Quanzhou in Fujian province and also hit other southern Chinese ports - Guangzhou (Guangdong province), Beihai*

²⁰⁶ **Morgan Clemens**, "The Maritime Silk Road and the PLA: Part One", China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 6, The Jamestown Foundation, 19.03.2015, p. 6.

²⁰⁷ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative: Challenges and Opportunities", LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017, pp. 76-86; **James Villafuerte, Erwin Corong, Juzhong Zhuang**, "The One Belt, One Road Initiative Impact ...", op. cit., p. 9.

BCIM-EC is a sub-regional cooperation that aims to introduce new impetus to economic and social development by linking the southwestern parts of China with the northeastern region of India and the Bay of Bengal through Yangon and Mandalay in Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Although it was initiated long before the inception of BRI, China later incorporated it under BRI platform as one of the six economic corridors.

(Guangxi) and Haikou (Hainan) before heading south to the Malacca Strait;

✓ From Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) the MSR heads to Kolkata (India), Colombo (Sri Lanka) and a transit stop in the Maldives, and then crosses the rest of the Indian Ocean to reach Nairobi (Kenya);

✓ From Nairobi goes north around the Horn of Africa and moves through the Red Sea into the Mediterranean, with a stop in Djibouti, and through the Suez Canal will allow to reach Athens (Greece) before meeting the land-based EBSR in Venice (Italy), which will run from China through CA and the Caucasus.²⁰⁸

MSR targets key littoral states along major Indian Ocean trade arteries for the construction of two mega-projects - the land-based **CPEC** and the sea-based **BCIM-EC**. With large investments from China, they can fundamentally change the political and economic landscape of the Indian Ocean region (IOR),²⁰⁹ one of the most strategically significant in a world, which has become a friction point for tension between the US, China and India, and where China and India are fighting for superiority over sea lines. Such tension intensifies as each state takes measures to counter the others and project dominance within the region.²¹⁰

MSR will allow China to enter the Pacific Ocean, "control the South China Sea in the south" and enter the Indian Ocean from the South China Seas through the Strait of Malacca, breaking through the US environment.²¹¹ Thus putting the South China Sea in its sphere of

²⁰⁸ Camille Brugier, "China's Way ...", op. cit., pp. 1-2; Shannon Tiezzi, "China's 'New Silk Road' Vision ...", op. cit.; Pale Sofia, "Where Will First Chinese Overseas Military Bases Spring Up?", New Eastern Outlook, 24.05.2016.

²⁰⁹ Zhou Bo, "The String of Pearls ...", op. cit.

²¹⁰ Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, "China's Growing Influence in the Indian Ocean: Implications for Sri Lanka and its Regional Allies, Strategies for the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions of the U.S. and Like-Minded Countries", Hudson Institute, December 2019, p. 48.

²¹¹ Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "Rolling out the New ...", op. cit., p. 3.

influence may lead to China's transition from geopolitical vulnerability to a strong position, effectively supporting the "**Great Maritime Wall**", and providing China with unhindered access to the Indian and Pacific Oceans.²¹²

4. Chapter Conclusion

In recent years, the policy of "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development" in China's grand strategy has sought to combine China's *hard* and *soft* powers to bring about a *soft rise* for China. Seeking to play a more significant role in world politics and economics and often feeling undervalued by the international community, the Chinese leadership is increasingly using the tools of *public diplomacy* to create an image of China that, in their opinion, is more in line with reality: China as reliable, open to cooperation, a peaceful developing country that takes good care of its huge population. Previously Beijing has demonstrated a limited understanding of public diplomacy, seeing it either as external propaganda or a form of internal public affairs, but this has not prevented China from becoming a skilled public diplomacy player.

So, China pays special attention to the soft power aspects of its foreign engagement, playing to both regional and wider global audiences, in front of which it seeks to portray itself as a non-threatening and responsible international power. Beijing is also promoting the Chinese language and culture in an effort to strengthen its soft power in the international arena. The surge in Confucius' institutions has attracted a lot of attention from both scholars of public diplomacy and politicians.

The priority in the ideological and political propaganda of public diplomacy within China and beyond is given to *Chinese*

²¹² Mattias Bouvin, "The Hard Edge of China's Soft Power", Global Security Review, 23.01.2019.

Dream or *Great Dream* - another initiative of Xi Jinping. The *Chinese Dream* aims to reflect a new balance of interests between the individual, society and the state, developed over the years of reforms, to make the common dream of China and the individual dreams of each person interconnected. This is not only the dream of every single Chinese, but the common dream of all nationalities, and is inextricably linked with the universal dream of all peoples. The *China Dream* is a "socialist dream" that embodies the desire for shared prosperity within the country. It acts as a tool to unite Chinese society and build a positive image of the country abroad. The main point of the *Chinese Dream* is the perception of Western achievements through the "*mixing and matching*" of capitalism and socialism, free market and government regulation, trade dominance and ideological orientation, as well as the implementation of revisionist modernization with Chinese characteristics. To this day, all modern versions of the *China Dream* have focused on modernization on a national basis.

The outlined concept presupposes, in fact, a new attempt to establish the rules of the game for mutually beneficial cooperation between peoples. It is also manifested in the BRI, based on the SR concept, which is seen as a more equitable and promising form of cooperation between countries. These are projects that represent efforts to give economic and political importance to Eurasia instead of the centrality of the Atlantic.

China as well announced a new initiative to create a "*Digital Silk Road*" within the framework of the BRI. The DSR in its spirit corresponds to the principles of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the state program of the PRC *Made in China - 2025*, within the framework of which it is planned to qualitatively increase industrial automation and technological modernization.

In fact, the proposed concept of the *Chinese Dream* becomes the ideological basis of the proposed BRI, which in turn will contribute to the spread of the *Chinese Dream* outside the PRC. Beijing

believes that the revival of the SR is interconnected with the revival of the Chinese people, which is the core of the *Chinese Dream* concept. And since the SR from the very first day, has become a platform for exchanges and cooperation between East and West, hence the SR is a symbol of a strong, stable, developing China, which plays an important role in the world arena. Therefore, the revival of the SR is part of the revival of the Chinese nation, and, hence, also part of the *Chinese Dream*.

SECOND CHAPTER

"STRING OF PEARLS" - A COMPONENT OF THE MARITIME SILK ROAD STRATEGY

1. "Choke Points" and Sea Lines of Communications – the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) Platform

In 21st century the Indian Ocean will have more significance; its waters cover an approximated 73.5 million km², combining half the world's latitudes and 7 of its zones, along with 48 independent seashores and island countries including of 2.6 billion people which is world's 39% of population.²¹³

Unlike the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the Indian Ocean is a closed ocean, bordering four continents, which makes its access very limited. Its many straits, called "Choke Points",* some of the famous of them around the world are:

1. *The Malaccan strait in the Indian Ocean;*
2. *The Gulf of Hormuz in the ME;*
3. *The Suez Canal linking the Mediterranean and the Red Sea;*
4. *The Panama Canal linking the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean;*
5. *The Strait of Bosphorus (Turkish Strait) linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea;*

²¹³ Hafeez Ullah Khan, Dr. Ijaz Khalid, "New Delhi Response to Beijing 'BRI' Project: A Lucid Connection with Chinese 'String of Pearls'", Journal of Political Studies, Vol. 25, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 247-248.

* Maritime "Choke Points" are naturally narrow channels of shipping having high traffic because of their strategic locations. Maritime chokepoints, or oil chokepoints, are congestive pathways in some of the world's famous shipping routes. There are many such chokepoints around the world, however, a few of them are extremely famous for ships and thus face high international security conflicts and cross-border terrorism threats.

6. *The three Danish Straits linking the Baltic Sea with the North Sea;*

7. *The Strait of Bab al-Mandeb forming a gateway for vessels to pass through the Suez Canal, through the east coast of Africa.*²¹⁴

These narrow straits regulate incoming and outgoing traffic and have historically been used to restrict access to trade routes during the war. The Indian Ocean multiple straits are its main access points:

- *the Strait of Bab al-Mandab* connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden;*
- *the Strait of Hormuz* connecting the PG to the Gulf of Oman;*
- *the Strait of Malacca* between Malaysia and Indonesia;*
- *the Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait in Indonesia.*²¹⁵

²¹⁴ "What are Maritime Chokepoints?", Marine Insight, 11.10.2019.

* The **Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb** is located between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula, and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa. The Bab-el-Mandeb acts as a strategic link between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

* The **Strait of Hormuz** is a strait between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean and is one of the world's most strategically important chokepoints. On the north coast lies Iran, and on the south coast the UAE and Musandam, an exclave of Oman. A third of the world's liquefied natural gas and almost 20-25% of total global oil consumption passes through the strait, making it a highly important strategic location for international trade.

* The **Strait of Malacca** is one of the most important shipping lanes in the world and is the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, linking major Asian economies such as India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Over 94,000 vessels pass through the strait each year (2008) making it the busiest strait in the world, carrying about 25% of the world's traded goods, including oil, Chinese manufactured products, coal, palm oil and Indonesian coffee. About a quarter of all oil carried by sea passes through the Strait, mainly from Persian Gulf suppliers to Asian markets. In addition, it is also one of the world's most congested shipping chokepoints because it narrows to only 2.8-km-wide at the Phillips Channel (close to the south of Singapore).

²¹⁵ "China's 'String of Pearls' Exhibits the Dragon's ...", op. cit., p. 2.

More than 80% of the world's maritime trade oil passes through Indian Ocean "Choke Points", in which:

- 40% oil passes through Strait of Hormuz;
- 35% oil passes through Strait of Malacca;
- 8% oil passes through the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

The ocean is a strategic front for China's national economic security and supports an export-oriented economy model. China's foreign trade dependency ratio is 60%, and 90% of the volume of foreign trade traffic is completed through sea transportation.²¹⁶ A significant part of exported goods produced in the PRC goes to the world market through the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Malacca.²¹⁷ Malacca suffers from piracy, although this has been reduced by Singaporean and Malaysian naval patrols over recent years. Due to its shallow depth at Phillips Channel to the south of Singapore, the Strait provides a true bottleneck and, potentially, a tempting target for pirates, terrorists or aggressive countries during wartime. A large sunken vessel would not only obstruct much of the channel, but also cause an environmental disaster. This would lead to 'enormous costs' and 'unforeseeable downstream effects', so that economic losses would probably run into billions of euro within a short period of time. But it is unlikely that Malacca's closure would become an existential threat to European economic prosperity, as several alternative routes like the straits of Lombok or Sunda could be utilized for shipping instead.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Wang Zhuo, China International Economic Cooperation Association Writing Group, "China's Strategies in Developing Marine Economy", China Renmin University Press, 2011, p. 53.

²¹⁷ Amrita Jash, "Djibouti: A Roadway to China's 'Indian Ocean Dream'", Maritime Perspectives 2017, Edited by Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan and Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana, National Maritime Foundation, 2018, p. 73.

²¹⁸ James Rogers, "From Suez to Shanghai: The European Union and Eurasian Maritime Security", Occasional Paper 77, European Union Institute for Security

The Suez Canal carries 14% of world trade in goods and 60% of Chinese exports to Europe; and half of China's imported oil sources, which are expected to double by 2035. Most of China's daily exports to Europe, worth US \$ 1 billion, go through the Bab al-Mandab Strait.²¹⁹ About 30% of China's over US \$ 300 billion of maritime trade currently moves across the Indian Ocean.²²⁰ China imports 80% of its oil (via the Strait of Malacca) and India imports 65% of its oil across the Indian Ocean from the MENA.²²¹ According to US Energy Information Administration (EIA), more than 17 billion barrels of oil passed out through the Hormuz Strait per day. More than 85% of the crude oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz - the geographic "Choke Point" and main artery for the transportation of oil from the MENA - goes to Asian markets, especially to the two fast growing economies and the largest oil importers - China and India, also South Korea and Japan, whose fuel dependence is growing and heavily dependent on MENA oil.²²² To the north of Strait of Hormuz lie a string of Iranian military bases, including the Bandar Abbas naval airbase, surrounded by further military outposts on the nearby islands of Abu Musa, Larak and Sirri.²²³

China surpassed the US in annual gross crude oil imports in 2017, importing 8.4 million barrels per day (b/d) compared to 7.9 million b/d in the US. China became the world's largest net importer (imports minus exports) of all oil and other liquid fuels in 2013. New refinery capacity and the accumulation of strategic reserves, coupled

Studies, March 2009, pp. 26-27.

²¹⁹ Jimmy Matar, "China's Rising Role in the Middle East: An Overview", Meirss, 15.08.2018.

²²⁰ Gurpreet S Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications", Strategic Analysis, Vol. 32, No. 1, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, January 2008, pp. 2-3.

²²¹ Hafeez Ullah Khan, Dr. Ijaz Khalid, "New Delhi ...", op. cit., p. 248.

²²² Iraj Roudgar, "Strategic Competition in the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia", Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research, International Institute of Academic Research and Development (IIARD), Vol. 3, No. 2, 2017, p. 74.

²²³ James Rogers, "From Suez to Shanghai ...", op. cit., p. 27.

with declining domestic oil production, were the main factors contributing to the recent increase in crude oil imports to China.²²⁴ And as China becomes more and more dependent on the oceans for international trade, fuel supply and transportation of goods, MENA remains the most important source of energy, security in the Indian Ocean and, therefore, the security of sea lines of communication from Bab al-Mandeb, Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca are vital to China.²²⁵

The Indian Ocean also plays an important role for China in its space exploration program. The spacecraft and satellite tracking and control vessel “*Yuan Wang*” is based west of Australia, and the port of Karachi has a Chinese ground station serving similar functions. Under the auspices of the PRC, the Asia-Pacific Space Organization was created, which includes Iran, Bangladesh, Pakistan and other countries.²²⁶

Sea Lane/Lines Safe Communications. The Indian Ocean also has an impressive number of shipping lines, also known as Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) - the sea routes between ports. Given that over 90% of world trade is in shipping, these SLOCs are of great geopolitical importance, as the country that controls them can either open or restrict their access. With some of the fastest growing economies in Asia and the world's 13 busiest ports in Asia, as production rises, the demand for secure transit routes and SLOCs in the Indian Ocean are expected to grow over the next few decades.²²⁷

The Indian Ocean is also home to China's important SLOCs, which raises the stakes for China to maintain security and stability in the IOR to avoid any choking hazard.²²⁸ In this sense, the strategic

²²⁴ “China Surpassed the United States as the World’s Largest Crude Oil Importer in 2017”, The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 31.12.2018.

²²⁵ Zhou Bo, “*The String of Pearls ...*”, op. cit.

²²⁶ Лебедева Нина, «Большой Индийский океан и китайская стратегия 'Нить жемчуга'», Перспективы, Фонд исторической перспективы, 15.10.2011.

²²⁷ “China’s ‘String of Pearls’ Exhibits the Dragon’s ...”, op. cit., p. 2.

²²⁸ Amrita Jash, “*Djibouti: A Roadway ...*”, op. cit., p. 73.

and defensive goals of China for the MSR project are to ensure the security of seaports as “outposts”, naval support, the development of routes, supply lines, political and economic ties,²²⁹ as well as defining broader geopolitics, maritime order and balance of power in Asia, ME, Africa and IOR.²³⁰

Of most important interest is China's energy “*lifeline*”, which runs through the IOR and largely represents its “*strategic vulnerability*” to a US or Indian ban. This makes the protection of its SLOC one of the most important functions of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA)’s Navy (PLAN/PLA-N) missions in the IOR and reinforces the need for a permanent Chinese presence in the naval forces in the IOR.²³¹ The modernization and expansion of PLAN's presence in the IOR offers China more opportunities to establish more overseas bases serving PLAN, gain valuable work experience away from home, and strengthen and improve China's ability to project geopolitical power. In fact, the modernization of PLAN has been merged with B&R, so that the goals of the two projects can be mutually beneficial.²³²

Modern Chinese maritime policy is based on the “*Agenda of China on the Seas and Oceans for the 21st Century*” (1996) and the “*White Paper on the Development of the Marine Economy in China*”

²²⁹ Mercy A. Kuo, “*The Power of Ports: China’s Maritime March*”, The Diplomat, 08.03.2017.

²³⁰ Brahma Chellaney, “*China’s Silky Indian Ocean Plans*”, op. cit.

China’s interest in the Indian Ocean has grown steadily since 2008, when it embarked on a naval mission as part of a multilateral effort to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa. It was the first time the Chinese navy had deployed that far in 600 years.

²³¹ Gurpreet S Khurana, “‘Beyond Hardware and Technology’: *The Intangibles of China’s Naval Power (Part 1)*”, Maritime Perspectives 2017, Edited by Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan and Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana, National Maritime Foundation, 2018, p. 201.

²³² Alex Payette, Guorui (Tom) Sun, “*China’s Two Ocean Strategy: Controlling Waterways and the New Silk Road*”, Asia Focus, No. 31, Asia Programme, The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS), May 2017, p. 16.

(1998), which put forward a strategy for the continued development of the country's marine economy and set the following goals:

- ✓ *effective protection of the marine rights and interests of the state;*
- ✓ *rational development and use of marine resources;*
- ✓ *effective protection of the marine environment;*
- ✓ *the development of science, technology and education in the field of oceanology;*
- ✓ *integrated marine management;*
- ✓ *ensuring the peaceful use, development and protection of the seas and oceans and the resolution of all maritime disputes on an equitable basis.*²³³

It is no coincidence, that President Xi Jinping's vision of the MSR reinforced the PLA's naval imperative, which adheres to the principle of "flag follows trade". The 2014 Chinese *White Paper on Defense* (the first official formulation of China's military doctrine or strategy, published May 26, 2015) for the first time explicitly pointed to the PLAN's task of "open seas protection". This indicated a shift from the PLAN's doctrine of 'offshore defense' to that of 'offshore defense-cum-open seas protection' for securing China's distant interests.²³⁴ The White Paper says: "... [World] Ocean is the guarantor of China's peaceful existence and sustainable development. The traditional mentality proclaiming the dogma of land over the [World] Ocean should be discarded ... Great importance should be attached to the presence in the (World) Ocean in order to protect communications and the foreign presence of China".²³⁵ This means

²³³ Ли Гуаньцзюнь, «Стратегия 'нитки жемчуга' в контексте морской политики КНР», Вестн. Моск. ун-та, № 4, Сер. 25, Международные отношения и мировая политика, 2011, с. 162-163.

²³⁴ Gurpreet S Khurana, "Beyond Hardware and'", op. cit., p. 201.

²³⁵ Алиханов Руслан, «Го, порты и деньги. Зарисовки о фактической стратегии Китая», Forbes, 24.07.2017.

the development of the ocean-going fleet, as well as the solution to the problem of the lack of logistics infrastructure, that is, the creation of a base for the Chinese fleet in the Indian Ocean. The White Paper emphasizes that the national interests of the PRC are changing as China grows - now these are various global factors, such as the threat of international terrorism, global epidemics or the problem of sea piracy.²³⁶

Thus, the MSR military doctrine illustrates China's shift from *continental to naval strategy*, that is, a shift from its long-standing *focus on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to the Indian Ocean*, which has become the largest and strategically important maritime corridor for the global economy and security. China's aspiration for great power status can be achieved by strengthening its dominant role and gaining freedom of navigation in the most important waters of the Indian Ocean, which is facilitated by the *China Dream*.²³⁷ To realize this dream, China needs a peaceful and stable international and peripheral environment, and will realize its dream through persistent endeavors for peaceful development.²³⁸ As the famous navigator of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Zheng He said, our wealth depends on the sea, as well as our safety. Indeed, opening to China includes opening to the ocean.²³⁹

MSR's strategy is also noteworthy in that it focuses on the creation of Chinese strongholds or "naval posts" with military or geopolitical influence along the coast of the Indian Ocean, in the PG

²³⁶ Кувалдин Стас, «Китайская подводная лодка зашла в Карачи», Газета.Ру, 01.07.2015.

²³⁷ Amrita Jash, "Djibouti: A Roadway...", op. cit., p. 73.

²³⁸ Yiechi Yang, "China's New Foreign Relations for a Complex World", China International Studies (CIS), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, January/February, 2014, p. 9.

²³⁹ Maya X. Guo, "Trust in the Theory, China's Philosophy for a New International Order", Foreign Language Press, 2015, p. 111.

and the Mediterranean Sea, called the “*String of Pearls*” - similar to the “*Dual Use Logistics Facility*”.²⁴⁰

Maritime “String of Pearls” Strategy (SPS). Since the end of the 20th century, Beijing has begun work on projects for a “*Dual Use Logistics Facility*”, which should constitute a “*String of Pearls*”. The “*Dual Use Logistics Facility*” is distinguished by its small footprint, its emphasis on providing logistical support to non-traditional security missions overseas, and its dual commercial and military nature. The “*String of Pearls*” model is similar to the “*Dual Use Logistics Facility*” except that it will include clandestine access agreements and covert development of commercial facilities to support subsequent military uses, with the ultimate goal of supporting major military operations against India and dominate the IOR.²⁴¹

Christina Lin offers several elements to carry out SPS:

- *Gaining access to airfields and ports through the construction of new facilities (sometimes if necessary with significant construction subsidies) or by establishing cordial relations with countries that already have key facilities.*

- *Expanding diplomatic relations to keep airspace and sea routes free and often accompanied by mutually beneficial trade and export agreements. Since securing the “String of Pearls” depends on connecting a number of dissimilar locations, it is important to ensure that each pearl is protected from any potential threats from neighboring states.*

- *Upgrading the military to move effectively to maintain individual pearls when needed, and in preparation for relevant actions and exercises.*²⁴²

²⁴⁰ **Christina Lin**, “*The New Silk Road: China’s Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East*”, Policy Focus, No. 109, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2011, p. 10.

²⁴¹ **Christopher D. Yung**, “*Burying China’s ‘String of Pearls’*”, The Diplomat, 22.01.2015.

²⁴² **Christina Lin**, “*The New Silk Road ...*”, op. cit., p. 10.

The theory of the “String of Pearls” is connected with Beijing's need for geostrategic security of “Choke Points” and sea [oil and trade] routes important for its development.²⁴³ The SPS is designed to create infrastructure projects spanning China's SLOCs,²⁴⁴ and is based on China's need for increased influence and presence on sea routes through investment,* port development, economics, politics, diplomatic and military means.²⁴⁵ The new ports, built under the SPS, not only operate as strategic outposts along major SLOC, but also provide the basis for the construction of new railways that extend from these ports into the interior of the host countries.²⁴⁶

Dai Xu, a former colonel of the PLA Air Force, argued in 2009 that in order to effectively fulfill its international obligations and build a good image, China needs *sufficient forces to safeguard world peace*, which requires a dedicated supply point.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ **Ventsislav Bozhev**, “*The Chinese String of Pearls or How Beijing is Conquering the Sea*”, De Re Military, 26.08.2019; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*Middle East and North Africa as a Part of Chinese String of Pearls Strategy*”, Orbis Linguarum, Vol. 18, Issue 3, Езиков свят, Филологическия факултет при ЮЗУ “Неофит Рилски”, Благоевград, България, 2020, p. 61.

²⁴⁴ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*String of Pearls' Strategy as a Measure for the Implementation of The Chinese Maritime Silk Road Initiative*”, Международный научный журнал «Современные востоковедческие исследования», Казань, International Science Journal “Modern Oriental Studies”, Kazan, Vol. 2, № 2, 2020, p. 100.

* China’s investments extend from Hainan Island in the South China Sea, through the littorals of the Straits of Malacca, including port developments in Chittagong in Bangladesh; Sittwe, Coco, Hianggyi, Khaukphyu, Mergui and Zadetkyi Kyun in Myanmar; Laem Chabang in Thailand; and Sihanoukville in Cambodia. They extend across the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Pakistan’s Gwadar Port, and in islands within the Arabian Sea and into the Persian Gulf.

²⁴⁵ **Chris Devonshire-Ellis**, “*China’s String of Pearls Strategy*”, China Briefing, 18.03.2009.

²⁴⁶ **Elodie Sellier**, “*China’s Mediterranean Odyssey*”, The Diplomat, 19.04.2016.

²⁴⁷ **Christopher D. Yung, Ross Rustici, Scott Devary, Jenny Lin**, “*Not an Idea We Have to Shun’: Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century*”, Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, Institute for National Strategic Studies, China Strategic Perspectives, No. 7, National Defense University Press

In order to distinguish China's actions from those of the "Western and Japanese imperialists", Chinese military thinkers adopted a special term: "*strategic strong point*", which has different meanings depending on the context used. In some cases, it refers to a quasi-alliance relationship, in other cases it is used in the context of foreign ports. The 2013 Science of military strategy describes them as places that "*provide support for overseas military operations or act as a forward base for the deployment of military forces overseas*".²⁴⁸

It is worth noting that China has never officially used the term SPS to refer to the Chinese network of offshore facilities in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.²⁴⁹ The term was coined in 2005 when the American consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) published an "*Energy Future in Asia: Final Report*". It predicted that China would try to expand its naval presence throughout the IOR by establishing a maritime civilian infrastructure in friendly states in the region, and the strategy was dubbed "*String of Pearls*".²⁵⁰ While the above report is not publicly available, those with access have consistently quoted one line: *China is building strategic relationships along sea routes from the ME to the South China Sea in ways that involve defensive and offensive positioning to protect China's energy interests, but also to achieve broad security goals*.²⁵¹ The authors argued that if China needed to protect its flow of energy across the Indian Ocean, it could build on its existing commercial and security relationships to establish a "*string*" of military installations in South Asia. The

Washington, D.C., October 2014, p. 14.

²⁴⁸ **Conor Kennedy**, "*Strategic Strong Points and Chinese Naval Strategy*", China Brief, Vol. 19, Issue: 6, The Jamestown Foundation, 22.03.2019.

²⁴⁹ **Кувалдин Стас**, «Китайская подводная лодка зашла ...», укр. соч.

²⁵⁰ **Benjamin David Baker**, "*Where is the 'String of Pearls' in 2015?*", The Diplomat, 05.10.2015.

²⁵¹ **Jessica Drun**, "*China's Maritime Ambitions: A Sinister String of Pearls or a Benevolent Silk Road (or Both)?*", Center for Advanced China Research, Washington DC, 12.06.2017.

analysis in the BAH study has been accepted by some political circles in India and the US as describing China's actual strategy for its foreign activities. At the time, China was involved in the construction of naval bases in Burma, financed the construction of a new port in Gwadar, Pakistan, and invested in commercial port facilities in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.²⁵²

It is also believed that China's economic aid to the aforementioned countries (also Greece), together with investments in overland pipelines, roads and railways across the Caspian region (EBSR), are part of the "String of Pearls" military strategy aimed at ensuring free flow of energy and naval-access outposts along the major trade arteries in the event of a conflict in Taiwan and the subsequent US naval blockade.²⁵³

In fact, the SPS is aimed at gaining direct access to China in the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal, bypassing the Strait of Malacca, which became doubly relevant in connection with the adoption in 2000 of the program for the accelerated development of the southwestern provinces of China - Yunnan, Sichuan and etc. Construction of a network of roads and pipelines in these provinces and into the interior of China from ports in the Indian Ocean, for example, in Myanmar, speeds up and reduces the cost of delivery of goods and energy resources.²⁵⁴

It is also worth noting that the SPS was developed in part due to the lack of progress on the Kra Canal project (across the Kra Isthmus in southern Thailand), which would allow Chinese ships to enter the Indian Ocean from the South China Sea,²⁵⁵ bypassing the Strait of Malacca and Singapore located on its shores. Then the Thai authorities were not ready to delegate national sovereignty to the

²⁵² **Christopher D. Yung, Ross Rustici, Scott Devary, Jenny Lin**, "*Not an Idea We Have to Shun' ...*", op. cit., p. 14.

²⁵³ **Christina Lin**, "*The New Silk Road ...*", op. cit., p. 10.

²⁵⁴ **Лебедева Нина**, «Большой Индийский океан и китайская ...», укр. соч.

²⁵⁵ **Chris Devonshire-Ellis**, "*China's String of Pearls Strategy*", op. cit.

Chinese, explaining their refusal by the quirks of local legislation prohibiting foreigners from registering land as property.²⁵⁶

Currently China's investment is spreading from Hainan Island in the South China Sea through the coastal areas of the Strait of Malacca, including port facilities at Malacca (Malaysia), a container port in Chittagong (Bangladesh); Coco, Hianggyi, Sittwe or Kyaukphyu (Myanmar), port of Chauphyu on Ramree Island in the Bay of Bengal (Myanmar), Mergui and Zadetkyi Kyun (Myanmar); Laem Chabang (Thailand) and Sihanoukville (Cambodia). They stretch across the Indian Ocean, Colombo and Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Male (Maldives), the port of Gwadar and Pasni (Pakistan), port of Djibouti (Djibouti), Victoria (Seychelles) and the islands within the Arabian Sea and the PG.²⁵⁷ PRC has invested as well in ports of Greece, the Netherlands, Singapore, Kenya, Togo.²⁵⁸

Beijing insists that all these investments were economically motivated and part of the MSR.²⁵⁹ By 2017, about US \$ 46.6 billion of investments were announced or completed in China, including 40 port projects, the largest of which are:

- ❖ *Tanzania (Bagamoyo – US \$10 billion);*
- ❖ *Sri Lanka (Colombo and Habamtota - US \$ 3 billion);*
- ❖ *Burma [Myanmar] (Sittwe port in Maday Island - US \$ 2.5 billion);*

²⁵⁶ Цатурян Саркис, «Малаккский пролив, нефть и большая война: Как США убивают Китай?», ИА REGNUM, 25.05.2016.

And this is not only a matter of regional competition, but of history itself: since 1897, an agreement has been in effect between Thailand and Britain, according to which the Thai side refuses to build a canal in order to preserve the significance of Singapore. Now Americans are concentrating military efforts in Asia to maintain control of the Chinese economy.

²⁵⁷ Храпчихин Александр, «Жемчужная удавка», Почта Полевая, 26.05.2017; Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "China's String of Pearls Strategy", op. cit.

²⁵⁸ "One Belt One Road: Insights for Finland", op. cit., p. 7.

²⁵⁹ Anthony Kleven, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road a Military Strategy?", The Diplomat, 08.12.2015.

❖ *Australia (Darwin, Newcastle, and Melbourne -US \$ 2.2 billion);*

❖ *Israel (Ashdod and Haifa - US \$ 2.9 billion).*

Level of ownership and volume of investments in the port vary. Taken together, Chinese port operators China Merchants Port Holdings, China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO Group) and China Shipping Terminal Development, all mainland companies, easily compete with the two largest container flow companies in the world - PSA International of Singapore and Hutchison Ports Holdings from Hong Kong.²⁶⁰

In fact, the development of MSR has made China an Indian Ocean power even without a navy capable of projecting power across the Indian Ocean or a collection of overseas bases. Originally described by Western analysts as a SPS, the MSR announcement in 2013 provided more clarity as to what China was doing: *it was building or financing expansion of ports and facilities throughout the Indian Ocean in a "places" as opposed to bases" strategy in which China provided access to ports and naval facilities of partner states.*²⁶¹

Military Component of SPS. In fact, the "String of Pearls" concept is often viewed a military initiative, with the aim of providing China's navy access to a series of ports stretching from the South China Sea to the Arabian Sea and oil-rich ME.²⁶² It begins at the Yulin Naval Base on the territory of the PRC itself, on Hainan Island - the largest naval base in Asia, capable of receiving and servicing ships of all classes. In the underground shelter of the Naval

²⁶⁰ Mercy A. Kuo, "The Power of Ports ...", op. cit.

²⁶¹ Jonathan Fulton, "The Gulf between the Indo-Pacific and the Belt and Road Initiative", Rising Powers Quarterly, Vol. 3, Issue 2, Rising Powers in Global Governance, August 2018, p. 179.

²⁶² Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative...", op. cit., pp. 95-102.

Base there can be up to 20 submarines, including a nuclear submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and a nuclear submarine. Although in the Pacific Ocean, outside the territorial waters of the China, there were no PLA naval bases, but there were two auxiliary facilities - a satellite weather station on the island of Karakira (Solomon Islands) and a post of equipment for monitoring the surface situation on the island of Tuamotu (French Polynesia). The latter is interesting because the PRC intelligence object is, in fact, located on the territory of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member country. In addition, the PLAN can be used to refuel Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea).²⁶³

Actually, China was adopting a “Dual-Use Logistics Facility” approach, involving ports that would ostensibly serve *both commercial and logistics purposes* rather than full-scale military operations.²⁶⁴

Here are some of the dual-use Chinese logistics facilities:

- a) **Hong Kong (China):** *strong central base;*
- b) **Sanya (China):** *submarine base;*
- c) **Paracel Islands:** *base area for resupply; an upgraded airstrip on Woody Island, located in the Paracel archipelago about 300 nautical miles east of Vietnam;*
- d) **Spratly Islands:** *submarine locations and resupply;*
- e) **Sihanoukville (Cambodia):** *naval access base;*
- f) **Isthmus of Kra (southern Thailand):** *strategic protected corridor for access from South China Sea to Gulf of Thailand to Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean;*
- g) **Smith Island (Myanmar):** *naval base with electronic intelligence;*

²⁶³ Храмчихин Александр, «Жемчужная удавка», укз. соч.

²⁶⁴ James M. Dorsey, “China and the Middle East: Venturing into the Maelstrom”, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2019, p. 210.

h) **Sittwe (Myanmar):** *Strategic location as resupply point, a deep-water port under construction;*

i) **Chittagong (Bangladesh):** *amphibious naval installation, a container shipping facility;*

j) **Hambantota (Sri Lanka):** *military base utilized for protection;*

k) **Marao (Maldives):** *military base utilized for protection and marine expeditions;*

l) **Gwadar (Pakistan):** *strategic, protected location for China as a naval base and intelligence installation;*

m) **Port Sudan (Sudan):** *strategic location for resupply and resources, upgraded facilities which provide vital access to the Suez Canal and the Horn of Africa;*

n) **Al-Ahdab (Iraq):** *oil and petroleum location, troop support location;*

o) **Lamu (Kenya):** *strategic port location for African resources;*²⁶⁵

p) **Hainan Island (China):** *upgraded military facilities;*

q) **The South China Sea:** *oil-drilling platforms and ocean survey ships;*

r) **Great Coco Island (Myanmar) near the Strait of Malacca:** *intelligence-gathering facilities;*

s) **Irrawaddy transportation corridor:** *it would link China's Yunnan province to the Bay of Bengal through Burma;*

t) **The Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline:** *a potential extension of the IPI through Islamabad and over the Karakoram Highway to Kashgar in Xinjiang province, intended to transport fuel into China.*²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Anthony Sterioti, “The Significance of China's 'String of Pearls Strategy'”, SSRN.com, 09.04.2017, pp. 3-4.

²⁶⁶ Christina Lin, “The New Silk Road ...”, op. cit., p. 11.

In fact, the Indian Ocean is considered the main region for preparing the PLAN and provides the conditions for navigation and operation in the deep-sea region, which gives the PLAN an excellent opportunity to practice the escort and defense of the Chinese commercial fleet.²⁶⁷ A recent announcement by the Chinese government about the reduction of the PLA with the calculation of an increase in the size of the Marine Corps from 20,000 to 1,000,000 indicates a tectonic shift in its focus from protecting the periphery of China to protecting the naval forces. Some of these buildings will be located at facilities operating in China, in Djibouti and Gwadar.²⁶⁸ In order to launch joint anti-piracy exercises and to lay the foundation for further military cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean and the PG, the Chinese conducted military exchanges between Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Pakistan, the Maldives, Sudan, Seychelles, Saudi Arabia and other countries.²⁶⁹

However, it would take the PLAN many years to bring into operation a full-fledged Carrier Task Force, and possibly decades to make it effective enough to achieve sea-control against advanced navies. Meanwhile, this process can deliver an indelible blow to China's goal of promoting a "soft" and "constructive" image in the Indo-Pacific region (IPR), including through its MSR.²⁷⁰ It is nothing more than an attempt to restructure the SPS in harmless soft terms.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Alex Payette, Guorui (Tom) Sun, "China's Two Ocean ...", op. cit., p. 5.

²⁶⁸ Dolma Tsering, "China's 12th National People's Congress (NPC) 2017: Matters 'Maritime' and 'One Belt One Road'", Maritime Perspectives 2017, Edited by Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan and Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, 2018, p. 70.

²⁶⁹ Sun Degang, "China's Soft Military Presence in the Middle East", Middle East Institute, 11.03.2015.

²⁷⁰ Gurpreet S Khurana, "China's Aircraft Carrier: 'Dreadnought' or 'Doctrinal Dilemma'?", Maritime Perspectives 2017, Edited by Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan and Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana, National Maritime Foundation, 2018, p. 177.

²⁷¹ Brahma Chellaney, "China Reinvents 'String of Pearls' as Maritime Silk Road", Nikkei Asian Review, 29.04.2015.

For comparison, on the MSR, special attention is paid to infrastructure programs that will stimulate economic growth and development along their path and link the component of the "road" with the component of the land-based "belt". To achieve this, the roadmap requires coordination of policies, expansion of ties in transport (both water - and land-based) and energy infrastructure, as well as the removal of trade barriers. Commonalities between SPS and the MSR include:

- *Deepening relationships with target countries;*
- *Focusing on strategic waterways in the Indo-Pacific;*
- *Developing infrastructure in target areas;*
- *Sustaining and encouraging economic growth;*
- *Safeguarding and enhancing China's energy security.*²⁷²

China's defense guidance tasks the PLA with playing a more prominent role in Beijing's new military diplomacy and national security strategy, a further shift away from "keeping a low profile". The PLAN's participation in international counterpiracy patrols in the Gulfs of Aden and Guinea, China's first naval deployment outside Asia, is one example of the PLA's recalibrated engagement.²⁷³ In the eyes of foreign observers, the most striking illustration of China's global ambitions was the sending of Chinese ships to the shores of Somalia to fight pirates in 2008 - the first in 500 years China's participation in a naval campaign outside its territorial waters.²⁷⁴ The Somali coast is located on two major shipping routes; one connects Asia and the PG to Europe via the Gulf of Aden, and the other connects the North-South trade route along the East African

²⁷² Jessica Drun, "China's Maritime Ambitions ...", op. cit.

²⁷³ Paul Nantulya, "Chinese Hard Power Supports Its Growing Strategic Interests in Africa", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 17.01.2019.

²⁷⁴ Гуаньцзюнь Ли, «Стратегия 'нити жемчуга' в контексте морской политики КНР», Международные отношения и мировая политика, № 4, Сер. 25, Вестник Московского университета, М., 2011, с. 163.

coast. Somalia has become the most serious threat to world shipping passing through these areas.²⁷⁵

Between December 2008 and August 2018, China sent 30 naval escort task forces to Somalia in the international anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden. More recently, Beijing also conducted mass evacuations of Chinese and foreign nationals from Libya and Yemen.²⁷⁶ In January 2018, two warships from the 27th Chinese naval escort stopped by Algiers for a four-day friendly visit as part of a four-month tour.²⁷⁷

May assume that a naval presence in Africa will give China greater latitude to support its peacekeeping troops, humanitarian interests, and hard security operations. Together, these deployments form part of a diverse set of deployments that the PLA calls “*new historical missions*”.²⁷⁸

2. "String of Pearls" in the Ocean Security System: Rejection of the Principle of Non-Interference

There has been much discussion in the expert community about the possible links between “String of Pearls” theory and MSR, and their contradictory role to the Chinese *non-interference* policy. Many experts are sure that having developed the SPS and established bases in ports, it will be difficult for Beijing to adhere to the principle of

²⁷⁵ **Dinesh Yadav**, “*Piracy in the Gulf of Aden: Isn’t it Time Already for the Warships to Head Home?*”, Maritime Perspectives 2017, Edited by Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan and Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana, National Maritime Foundation, 2018, p. 131.

²⁷⁶ **Fan Gaoyue, James Char**, “*Introduction to China’s Military Operations Other Than War*”, Policy Report, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, February, 2019, pp. 5-6.

²⁷⁷ **Adel Abdel Ghafar**, “*Beijing Calling: Assessing China’s Growing Footprint in North Africa*”, Brookings, The Brookings Institution, 23.09.2019.

²⁷⁸ **Paul Nantulya**, “*Chinese Hard Power Supports its Growing ...*”, op. cit.

protecting *non-alignment* and *non-interference* and refuse to pursue a policy of building military bases abroad.

Some analysts believe that “String of Pearls” is not a coordinated strategy on the part of China, and there is no substantial evidence in Chinese sources or elsewhere to support the allegations of commentators, scholars, and officials who use it as a basis for explaining Beijing’s intentions in the Indian Ocean.²⁷⁹ According to Zhou Bo, Honorary Fellow, PLA Academy of Military Science, the only thing that can be justified in the “String of Pearls” theory is that it emphasizes the growing importance of the Indian Ocean for China’s ever-expanding national interests.²⁸⁰

China’s stated *non-interference* principle is an important element of its national security policy, and the absence of Chinese military bases abroad is often cited as an example of Beijing’s commitment to non-interference and non-alignment,²⁸¹ which in turn was seen as a pragmatic step towards securing and maintaining access to vital resources in most developing countries, and played an important role in enhancing *South-South* solidarity in developing countries.²⁸² *South-South cooperation, non-interference, and non-conditionality* are at the forefront and at the center of China’s approach, presented as “*one of humanitarian and development aid plus influence without interference, in contrast to the West’s coercive approach of sanctions plus military intervention*”.²⁸³

However, China’s long-standing commitment to non-interven-

²⁷⁹ “*Naval War College Review*”, Vol. 64, No. 1, U.S. Naval War College Press, Newport, RI, Winter 2011, p. 61.

²⁸⁰ **Jessica Drun**, “*China’s Maritime Ambitions ...*”, op. cit.

²⁸¹ “*Naval War College Review*”, op. cit., p. 61.

²⁸² **Richard Aidoo, Steve Hess**, “*Non-Interference 2.0: China’s Evolving Foreign Policy towards a Changing Africa*”, Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 44(1), 2015, p. 111.

²⁸³ **Ivan Campbell, Thomas Wheeler, Larry Attree, Dell Marie Butler, Bernardo Mariani**, “*China and Conflict-Affected States: Between Principle and Pragmatism*”, Saferworld, January 2012, pp. 8-9.

tion does not mean that the foreign policy community in China has always reached consensus on its validity and relevance. If a few years ago, almost no Chinese scientist challenged the principle of non-interference, infringement on the sovereignty of other nations, in recent years more and more have been arguing about this issue. One important factor contributing to the current domestic criticism of China's strict commitment to non-intervention is regulatory change in the international system.²⁸⁴ The current debate in China is resolving around the establishment of what are commonly referred to in the US military as "*places, as opposed to bases*". This type of strategy involves securing with friendly governments diplomatic agreements allowing access to those nations' facilities in order to obtain essential supplies, such as fuel, food, and freshwater, for deployed forces. Such agreements can also involve reciprocal guarantees of military support in such areas as training, equipment and education.²⁸⁵ The adherence to *non-interference* or *non-intervention* has been perceived as a pragmatic step towards securing and sustaining access to vital resources in most of the developing world.

However, it should be noted that China's first overseas base in Djibouti (which we will talk about below in more detail), opened in mid-2017, like one pearl in a string, adds the first explicit military component to its MSR, despite the fact that official statements emphasize the purpose of the base: *providing support for military operations other than war* (MOOTW).²⁸⁶ The official goal was to open a logistics support base to become the center of peacekeeping

and other strategic policies in Africa and the IOR.²⁸⁷ But actually, in addition to providing a demanded supply point for the PLAN, the base will be crucial to expand China's intelligence gathering capabilities in the area and provide the PLA Air Force with the long-awaited opportunity to reach world level.²⁸⁸

From here it should be concluded that the Chinese principle of a policy of non-interference, the rejection of a foreign military presence and ensuring the development of mutually beneficial economic and trade relations as the main task no longer corresponds to the need to ensure China's security and vital interests. Therefore, it is possible that in the foreseeable future, China will increasingly have to become a regional player in competitive cooperation with the US and India.²⁸⁹

It follows from the foregoing that the establishment of places to support extended Chinese naval activities in the Indian Ocean creates a security dilemma in the region, particularly for US and India. The emergence of tensions regarding the regional order was facilitated by the modernization of the armed forces and the increase in military spending in China, which led to naval expansionism and the construction of artificial islands - not prohibited by international law - and military bases on the islands; also accelerating the regional arms race in Southeast Asia.²⁹⁰ As a result of the implementation of the first stage of the long-term plan for the modernization of the Chinese Navy, the country's navy acquired the ability to "*project power*" over the entire Yellow Sea, East China and South China Seas

²⁸⁴ Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner, Zhou Hang, "Protecting China's Overseas Interests. The Slow Shift away from Non-interference", Policy Paper, No. 41, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Solna, Sweden, June 2014, p. 6.

²⁸⁵ "Naval War College Review", op. cit., p. 61.

²⁸⁶ Jessica Drun, "China's Maritime Ambitions ...", op. cit.

²⁸⁷ Marc Lanteigne, "The Role of UN Peacekeeping in China's Expanding Strategic Interests", Special Report 430, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, September, 2018, p. 4.

²⁸⁸ Andrea Ghiselli, "China's First Overseas Base in Djibouti. An Enabler of its Middle East Policy", China Brief, Vol. 16, Issue 2, The Jamestown Foundation, 26.01.2016, p. 7.

²⁸⁹ James M. Dorsey, "China and the Middle East ...", op. cit., p. 1.

²⁹⁰ Iraj Roudgar, "Strategic Competition in the Persian ...", op. cit., p. 74.

within the Philippine Islands and the Ryukyu Islands archipelago.²⁹¹

The US and India are concerned that part of the artificial island construction includes runway upgrades, heavily supported by military facilities such as the site on Woody Island, near Vietnam. This means a shift in the balance of power in the Indian and Arabian Gulf from the traditional Indian government, supported by US military power, to China, backed by regional diplomatic ties. Now the US and India are more concerned about whether this strategy is solely for the supply of building materials and trade routes, or whether China will subsequently use them to gain regional dominance.²⁹²

Since the IPR is a freedom of action for the US Navy (USN) and Air Force in accordance with the principle of “*freedom of navigation*”, Beijing’s attempts to establish sovereignty over the South China Sea, as well as its territorial disputes in the region, are seen by US as an encroachment on the principle “*Freedom and openness*”, and as “*undermining the sovereignty of neighboring countries*” for turning them into “*satellites*” of Beijing.²⁹³ In this regard, it is not surprising that in 2017 the Trump administration introduced a new strategy to remove the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); on the end position of the Transatlantic Partnership (TAP) and on adherence to the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) in the region.²⁹⁴

The challenge from the PRC in the struggle for control over sea spaces seems to many American experts, perhaps, the main threat to American leadership and the existence of the entire international order. They believe that this will not only turn the South China Sea

²⁹¹ Титаренко М.Л., «Геополитическое значение Дальнего Востока. Россия, Китай и другие страны Азии», Отв. Ред. Шабалин В.И., Памятники исторической мысли, ИДВ РАН, М., 2008, с. 441.

²⁹² Chris Devonshire-Ellis, “*China’s String of Pearls Strategy*”, op. cit.

²⁹³ Морозов Ю.В., «И Indo-Тихоокеанская стратегия Д. Трампа как угроза интересам Китая и России в АТР», Китай в мировой и региональной политике. История и современность, Вып. 23, ежегодное издание /сост., Отв. Ред. Сафронова Е.И., ИДВ РАН, М., 2018, с. 111.

²⁹⁴ Там же, с. 108.

into an inland sea, but also deprive the USN of the ability to operate globally to maintain the security and maritime dominance needed to maintain the Bretton Woods system.²⁹⁵

However, many experts are confident that China does not pose a serious challenge to US supremacy at sea, and the USN continues to maintain a dominant position in the Western Pacific and around the world.²⁹⁶ Growing concerns about China's military spending must be properly contextualized, especially given the continued dominance of the US military. China's potential nuclear threat, while growing, is still relatively small and vulnerable when viewed together with US nuclear arsenals. Currently, the size of the Chinese arsenal ranges between a 10th and a 100th the size of the US arsenal.²⁹⁷

As for India, while MSR covers ports in countries around India such as Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan, but not in India itself, New Delhi believes China is invading India's waterways. China's investment in CPEC, which runs through the disputed areas of Kashmir and also highlights China's strong ties to Pakistan, is

²⁹⁵ Пономарев Н. В., «Влияние военно-политических процессов в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе на систему безопасности в Северо-Восточной Азии», Вестник СПбГУ, Сер. 6, Вып. 4, Политология. Международные отношения, 2016, с. 111.

²⁹⁶ Li Fanjie, “*The Prospect of Sino-US Maritime Conflict and Cooperation*”, China International Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, 20.01.2014.

According to statistics for 2010, the total tonnage of the American fleet amounted to about 2.6 billion, which is more than the total tonnage of all the remaining 17 fleets following it (out of 17 fleets, 14 belong to US allies). The USN is equipped with the most advanced weapons in the world, including centralized and networked weapons systems. In terms of overall missile capabilities, the missile capabilities of the USN exceed the combined capabilities of all the other 20 fleets in the world ranking after it. As for the total number of battleships, the USN at least corresponds to the sum of the Chinese and Russian Navy (203 versus 205), but the total USN tonnage is 263 times the total tonnage of the Chinese and Russian Navy.

²⁹⁷ Neil Renic, “*Rising China: A Threat to International Security?*”, E-International Relations (E-IR), 13.04.2012; Harutyunyan Aghavni, “*From China’s Concept ...*”, op. cit., p. 14.

another challenge for India.²⁹⁸ Consequently, India views MSR as a threat or form of competition, and the SPS as a challenge to the existing balance of power in the Indian Ocean,²⁹⁹ a threat to India's security in the IOR, and as a tool to strategically encircle India. B&R is described as "*China's dual path to superpower status*" to realize global hegemony that threatens India's dominance in South Asia and the Indian Ocean and puts China in a dominant position in Asia, Africa and Europe.³⁰⁰

China's Pakistani and Burmese 'pearls' are likely to become hubs in the much broader strategic land and sea supply chain that connects Africa and ME to mainland China. In the event of a blockade, Beijing will gain access to an alternative - shorter and safer - energy distribution route. China-related resources could then be shipped to Sittwe and Gwadar, transported overland by road and rail across the respective Chinese borders with Burma or Pakistan, and directly to China's Yunnan or Xinjiang provinces. As China's geostrategy in the Indian Ocean strengthens, a future "*pearl*" may be discovered in the Seychelles, expanding China's influence in East Africa. Moreover, in December 2008, Beijing officially announced its interest in building an aircraft carrier. Using language reminiscent of the era of battleships, a spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Defense said, "*The aircraft carrier is a symbol of overall national strength and a symbol of the competitiveness of the country's naval forces*". The Chinese aircraft carrier could provide a powerful support for the Chinese "String Pearls" by providing Beijing with the means to advance its naval power into the Indian Ocean.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Sarah Lain, Raffaello Pantucci, "*The Economics of the Silk Road Economic Belt*", Workshop Report, Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies, London, November 2015, p. 2.

²⁹⁹ Brahma Chellaney, "*China's Silky Indian Ocean Plans*", op. cit.

³⁰⁰ Gan Junxian, "*The 'Belt and Road': Will Chinese Dragon and Indian Elephant Walk Separately or Tango Together?*", China International Studies (CIS), No. 53, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, July/August 2015, pp. 68-69.

³⁰¹ James Rogers, "*From Suez to Shanghai ...*", op. cit., p. 16.

Some experts believe that as America's influence in these regions is waning and a peaceful region no longer necessarily requires a US military presence, China's strategy may be conservatively supported by other Southeast Asian countries, with the possible exception of India. Pro-American countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines can benefit from improved and growing ties with China, while countries such as Pakistan, North Korea, Myanmar and Cambodia are already strong allies of Beijing.³⁰²

However, it is more likely that the countries of the Indian Ocean may not want to maintain a Chinese military presence and will be interested in maintaining a balanced relationship with the US and India while developing ties with China.

3. Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at the Crossroads of the "String of Pearls"

The MENA is also located in the center of China's BRI, where not only three continents - *Asia*, *Africa* and *Europe* meet, but also five seas: *Mediterranean*, *Red*, *Arabian*, *Caspian* and *Black*, and it adjoins four strategic maritime channels: *Bosphorus*, *Dardanelles*, *Bab el-Mandeb* and *Hormuz*.³⁰³ The SPS provides a forward presence for China along the SLOCs that now anchor China directly to the MENA region. It is an important hub for the two OBOR routes - *EBSR* and *MSR* - due to its strategic location at the intersection of land and sea roads connecting Asia, Africa, Europe³⁰⁴, and the three most important economic maritime regions:

1. *the South China Sea*;
2. *the Persian Gulf*;

³⁰² Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "*China's String of Pearls Strategy*", op. cit.

³⁰³ Mordechai Chaziza, "*China-Qatar Strategic ...*", op. cit., p. 82.

³⁰⁴ "*Is China-Pakistan 'Silk Road' a Game-Changer?*", BBC, 22.04.2015.

3. *the Mediterranean Sea.*

The MENA region is also important to the MSR because of the inclusion of maritime “Choke Points” for energy transportation, such as:

1. *the Bab al-Mandab Strait;*
2. *the Hormuz Strait;*
3. *the Suez Canal.*³⁰⁵

It is known that the oil transported through the Malacca Strait towards East Asia is three times the amount transiting the Suez Canal and fifteen times the amount passing through the Panama Canal. Approximately 90% of China's oil imported from Africa and the ME was transported via this route in 2016.³⁰⁶ Beijing is expanding its presence along the Indo-Pacific Sea Route connecting the Strait of Malacca with the Suez Canal and therefore the Mediterranean Sea, where Chinese companies maintain their presence or control in ports and terminals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Turkey, Israel, Djibouti, etc. through acquisition, construction, modernization, expansion and operation to serve commercial and military interests.³⁰⁷

To ensure reliable access for Chinese commercial shipments from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, Beijing has adopted a dual-track approach while expanding its interests in the Suez Canal corridor and following the overland route through Israel.³⁰⁸ MSR is

³⁰⁵ **Jimmy Matar**, “China's Rising Role in the Middle East ...”, op. cit.

³⁰⁶ **Ventsislav Bozhev**, “The Chinese String of Pearls ...”, op. cit.

³⁰⁷ **Ronald H. Linden**, “The New Sea People: China in the Mediterranean”, IAI Papers 18, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 14.07.2018, p. 4; **Naser Al-Tamimi**, “Belt & Road Initiative: The Middle East's Growing Role?”, Al Arabiya English, 17.05.2017.

³⁰⁸ **Emma Scott**, “China's Silk Road Strategy: A Foothold in the Suez, But Looking to Israel”, China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 19, The Jamestown Foundation, 10.10.2014, p. 10.

putting Egypt in the spotlight with the Suez Canal and a megaproject to build two parallel canals. Located at the junction of three continents, Egypt could become the capital of the NSR.³⁰⁹ Tehran is also a key onshore hub for China and MSR with Beijing seeking to expand rail links and perhaps even establish a naval base on one of the Iranian islands.³¹⁰ The Syrian ports in Tartus and Latakia, which are now Russian bases, are designated as the main points of departure for Chinese goods entering Europe.³¹¹ OBOR will inevitably include a Syrian hub with the necessary legal support for Chinese investment, construction and banking companies.³¹² Now there is talk that Tripoli (Lebanon) may even become a terminal in the Chinese NSR project, paving the trade route from East Asia to Europe.³¹³

The Gulf States have a maritime heritage that has historically linked them to other Indian Ocean societies, but they are usually not oriented towards the points to the east. During the modern history of these states, they traditionally oriented their foreign policy towards the Arab world and the West. However, from a geopolitical point of view, the Gulf occupies a critical “point” with the Strait of Hormuz, linking the region with trade routes in the Indian Ocean.³¹⁴

The 3,000 km CPEC land transport corridor should connect Xinjiang with the Arabian Sea through Pakistani Kashmir in the China-run port of Gwadar, link the sea and land Silk Roads and develop not only its commercial value, but also the potential of the navy outpost overlooking the shipping lanes of the PG.³¹⁵ Pakistan's

³⁰⁹ **Anu Sharma**, “An Analysis of ‘Belt and Road’ ...”, op. cit., p. 13.

³¹⁰ **Christina Lin**, “The New Silk Road ...”, op. cit., p. X.

³¹¹ **Ed Blanche**, “China's New Silk Road Includes Both Risk and Promise of Prosperity”, The Arab Weekly, 17.12.2017.

³¹² **Pepe Escobar**, “The New Silk Road Will Go Through Syria”, Asia Times, 13.07.2017.

³¹³ **Philip Issa**, “Lebanon Prepares for Syria's Post-War Construction Windfall”, Associated Press, 17.08.2017.

³¹⁴ **Jonathan Fulton**, “The Gulf between ...”, op. cit., p. 183.

³¹⁵ **Brahma Chellaney**, “China Reinvents ‘String of Pearls’ ...”, op. cit.

port of Gwadar cuts the distance between East African and PG ports to western China by more than four times the distance between eastern China and these regions through the Strait of Malacca and Indonesia.³¹⁶

From the east coast of China, ships follow the South China Sea to the Strait of Malacca, from where they head to the shores of northern and northeastern Africa to reach Israeli ports via Bab el-Eilat and Ashdod, bypassing the Suez Canal. The further route involves the connection of trade routes with Istanbul (where railway tunnels already pass along the bottom of the Bosphorus), Athens (Greece), Naples (Italy), Marseille (France) and other Mediterranean cities that are part of the euro zone.³¹⁷

Chinese companies provide a majority stake in the port of Piraeus in Greece and hold assets in the seaports of Egypt (Alexandria, Adabiya, Port Said), Algeria (Scherchel), Turkey (Amberlee) and Italy (Genoa and Naples) - all of which may be part of B&R's strategy.³¹⁸ From a military point of view, the addition of a new "pearl" in the Mediterranean in the form of the Greek seaport of Piraeus allows China to control maritime access to Istanbul and Black Sea ports in Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, southern Russia and Georgia.³¹⁹

It is also planned to combine the construction and operation of China's steadily developing four large industrial parks in Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman with neighboring ports, including the

Khalifa port in Abu Dhabi, the Djibouti port and the Said port of Egypt and others, to create an "industrial park - port interconnection".³²⁰ As the 3rd largest re-export hub in the world after Singapore and Hong Kong, roughly 60% of China's trade passes through Dubai's Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA), the world's largest free zone, and Jebel Ali port for re-export.³²¹ JAFZA was built from scratch in a top-down plan and is now a model for other similar zones that grow along the various routes of the NSR. This place, which hardly existed 30 years ago, is now home to more than 7,000 international companies, including of the Fortune 500 companies. They employ almost 150,000 people and account for approximately 21% of Dubai's GDP (US \$ 87.6 billion in 2015), including trade with China totaled US \$ 12.6 billion.³²²

4. China's Expansionism in the Indian-Pacific Oceans and the MENA: Cooperative and Competitive Perspectives

As can be seen from the above, China hopes to contribute to strengthening regional security at the southern gateway from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, one of the world's largest shipping lanes and a key part of the MSR.³²³ And despite the denial of the "spheres of influence" mentality, when Chinese interests are threatened, then in order to increase the effectiveness of the soft power strategy, protect their commercial interests and counter

CPEC, US \$ 46 billion project, will allow Beijing to shorten the route of its oil imports from the ME and Africa to barely 1/4 of the current 12,000 km. The oil will be offloaded at Gwadar for transport by pipeline to western PRC.

³¹⁶ **Jacob Zenn**, "Future Scenarios on the New Silk Road: Security, Strategy and the SCO", China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 6, The Jamestown Foundation, 19.03.2015, p. 10.

³¹⁷ "Turkey and Israel are Intercepted at Sea 'Silk Road' of Iran", CypLIVE, 12.03.2017.

³¹⁸ **Roi Feder**, "What China's New Silk Road Means for Israel", op. cit.

³¹⁹ **Christina Lin**, "The New Silk Road ...", op. cit., p. 10.

³²⁰ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese 'Belt and Road' Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa", Казанский (Приволжский) федеральный университет, Институт международных отношений, Институт Конфуция КФУ, 2019, с. 33.

³²¹ **Emma Scott**, "China's 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy Meets the UAE's Look East Policy", China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 11, The Jamestown Foundation, 29.05.2015, p. 12.

³²² **Wade Shepard**, "Next Up on China's Maritime Silk Road: Abu Dhabi", Forbes, 02.07.2017.

³²³ **Stephan Barisitz, Alice Radzyner**, "The New Silk Road, Part I: A Stocktaking and Economic Assessment", Focus on European Economic Integration, Issue Q3/17, Oesterreichische Nationalbank (Austrian Central Bank), 2017, p. 24.

some security challenges and threats (Islamic radicalism, piracy, transnational crime, etc.) China sometimes takes action using a combination of *soft* and *hard* power.³²⁴ In December 2015, Beijing even passed a law allowing the Chinese military to conduct anti-terrorist operations outside of China with the consent of the host country. This law gives China the opportunity to play a more active role in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) or any other organization that is detrimental to international stability, and not only provide troops for the UN peacekeeping force.³²⁵

And since China has limited hard power resources due to the fact that the country is not a member of military alliances and does not have a military presence in the MENA, Beijing is trying to expand its influence through the use of soft power resources, creating new military bases in Africa and ME and is actively developing the naval forces.³²⁶ This will help China increase the frequency of PLAN operations in the region and increase the number of Chinese ships sailing through the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.³²⁷

Chinese permanent military presence overseas takes three main forms:

- *Escort fleet in the Gulf of Aden;*
- *Navy technical service stops;*
- *Peacekeeping forces in the ME.*³²⁸

After China conducted its first off-PLAN operation under the

³²⁴ Глазунов О., Савченко Ал., «Особенности и приоритеты внешней политики Китая в странах Ближнего Востока», Издательский дом «Хорс», 2018, с. 4.

³²⁵ Roie Yellinek, "China's New Position on the Middle East", BESA Center Perspectives Paper, No. 30, BESA Center for Strategic Studies, 20.09.2016.

³²⁶ Mao Yufeng, "China's Interests and Strategy in the Middle East and Arab World", in Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell (Eds.), *China and the Developing*. Armonk, M.E. Sharpe NY, 2007, p. 124.

³²⁷ Ankit Panda, "A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?", *The Diplomat*, 13.05.2015.

³²⁸ Sun Degang, "China's Soft Military Presence ...", op. cit.

auspices of the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy mission in 2008, it became apparent that these operations (and subsequent logistical problems) were too large-scale and only covered areas for fuel and food supplies for armed forces and civilians that are thousands of kilometers from China's coastal waters. Called "MOOTW", these new missions can also include tasks such as peacekeeping, humanitarian and disaster relief operations, and operations to maintain internal stability.³²⁹

From 2009 to 2015, China sent 19 naval escorts to the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, which visited Djibouti, Kenya, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.³³⁰ In February 2011, the Xuzhou missile frigate, which also performed escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, was dispatched near Libya to support and protect ships evacuating Chinese stranded in the country. In a sign of China's growing role in protecting international peace and stability, the PLAN has dispatched ships on numerous occasions to participate in escort, evacuation, search and rescue missions and disaster relief missions. A hospital ship was sent to the typhoon-affected Philippines for medical assistance in 2013; in 2014, warships were dispatched to escort the sea transport of Syrian chemical weapons; and the warships joined the search for the missing Malaysian airliner MH370.³³¹

In 2014, the PLAN's 17th and 18th naval escort taskforces, comprising various amphibious landing ships, missile frigates, and supply vessels, were sent to the Gulf of Aden. In December 2014, China dispatched the PLAN's 19th naval escort taskforce to Somalia, and in April 2015, it sent the 20th taskforce.³³² In March 2015, the

³²⁹ Virginia Marantidou, "Revisiting China's 'String of Pearls' Strategy: Places 'With Chinese Characteristics' and Their Security Implications", *Issues and Insights*, Vol. 14, No. 7, June 2014, Pacific Forum CSIS, p. 3.

³³⁰ Sun Degang, "China's Soft Military Presence ...", op. cit.

³³¹ "China Evacuates Citizens from Yemen", *CCTV America*, 30.03.2015.

³³² Ankit Panda, "A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?", op. cit.

Chinese government redeployed naval vessels on anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters to evacuate its citizens from conflict-affected Yemen. The fleet consisted of the Linyi and Weifang missile frigates, as well as the Weishanhu supply ship.³³³ By smoothly evacuating about 800 Chinese and foreigners from the port of Aden to the East African port of Djibouti, China has demonstrated the ability to quickly get in and out of a difficult situation without the need to fire from an aircraft carrier or anti-ship assassin submarines.³³⁴

Chinese UN peacekeeping forces in the MENA consist of 1,152 personnel:

1. *UN Truce Supervision Organization (2 observers);*
2. *UN Interim Force in Lebanon (343 soldiers);*
3. *UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (444 soldiers, 18 police, and 12 military observers);*
4. *UN - African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (321 soldiers);*
5. *UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (12 military observers).*

Chinese Navy interim technical service stops in the MENA can be categorized into three types:

- *for ship fuel and material resupply, such as stops in the ports of Djibouti (Djibouti), Aden (Yemen), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), Salalah (Oman), and Sudan;*
- *for relatively fixed supply ship berthing and fixed-wing reconnaissance aircraft take-off and landing, as a stop in the Seychelles, which are based on short-term agreements;*
- *stops that allow for a complete recharge to rest weaponry*

³³³ "China Evacuates Citizens from Yemen", op. cit.

³³⁴ Kevin Wang, "Yemen Evacuation a Strategic Step Forward for China", The Diplomat, 10.04.2015.

*and take advantage of a large ship repair center, such as the stop in Pakistan, which is based on a long-term agreement.*³³⁵

Salalah is a first category logistics center that provides refueling for Chinese ships. **Aden** belongs to the second category of logistics and is a large naval base previously used in this capacity by Great Britain and then by the SU. It has 16 berths and provides bases for ships up to and including a destroyer.³³⁶ The Chinese Navy is increasingly using the deep-water Omani port of Salalah in the Arabian Sea (considered a US pro) as a refueling and resupply base for its anti-piracy operations.³³⁷ PLAN warships involved in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia have made more than 20 resupply calls at the Salalah.³³⁸

Chinese warships are using ports in Yemen to resupply. Moreover, in December 2009, Beijing announced its intention to establish a permanent naval base in the Gulf of Aden/Arabian Sea.³³⁹ The Yemeni port of Aden is more likely than the other alternatives, Oman and Djibouti, which have close ties to NATO and Washington.³⁴⁰

Sudan hosts Chinese bases for the PLAN and ground forces and the PLA Air Force.³⁴¹ In July 2015, the UN invited China to send a peacekeeping infantry battalion to the UN mission in South Sudan to

³³⁵ Sun Degang, "China's Soft Military Presence ...", op. cit.

³³⁶ Храмчихин Александр, «Жемчужная удавка», укз. соч.

However, in connection with the current situation in Yemen, it is not clear to what extent Aden can now be used as a naval base.

³³⁷ Afshin Molavi, "Enter the Dragon: China's Belt and Road Rising in the Middle East", Issue 1819, Hoover Institution or Stanford University, 02.10.2018.

³³⁸ Chris Zambelis, "China and the Quiet Kingdom: An Assessment of China-Oman Relations", China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 22, The Jamestown Foundation, 18.11.2015, p. 12.

³³⁹ Christina Lin, "The New Silk Road ...", op. cit., p. 11.

³⁴⁰ Mohammad Salim Al-Rawashdeh, Mohammad Hamad AL-Qatatsheh, "China's Strategy in the Middle East (The Silk Road Project)", Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), Vol. 22, Issue 1, Ver. 4, January 2017, p. 41.

³⁴¹ Храмчихин Александр, «Жемчужная удавка», укз. соч.

protect civilians, UN personnel and facilities during humanitarian rescue operations and to assist the *Intergovernmental Authority on Development* (IGAD) in oversight and inspection missions. This time, China is deploying an entire infantry battalion for international peacekeeping, whereas previously, China's peacekeeping force consisted of only an engineering unit, a transport unit, a medical unit and a security unit.³⁴²

First overseas “military base”: The SPS ends at a 3rd category logistics center in the Port of Djibouti (“Gateway to the Red Sea”), which opened in July 2017.³⁴³ China refers to the first overseas “military base” as a support base for escort, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and search and rescue humanitarian operations in the MENA.³⁴⁴ Djibouti is the first place in the world where China has established its foreign full-fledged military base (for logistics facilities intended for sea recreation and supply) outside the PRC (with the exception of facilities on the disputed islands of the South China Sea). This is the only place in the world where the American and Chinese military are literally face to face (the only US military base in Africa).³⁴⁵ While this strategy is primarily aimed at connecting the Horn of Africa with the IOR and the South China Sea, the Djibouti node could also develop this strategy in the Mediterranean (via the Suez Canal) and further moving south along the African East Coast, reach the South Africa.³⁴⁶

With regard to the fight against pirates, it should be noted that since the Strait of Singapore and the Strait of Malacca (part of the MSR) are the busiest trade routes, they are the epicenters of piracy.

³⁴² **Zhang Dan**, “China Assumes International Responsibility by Dispatching Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion”, CCTV.com, 01.15.2015.

³⁴³ **Храмчихин Александр**, «Жемчужная удавка», укз. соч.

³⁴⁴ **Tyler Headley**, “China’s Djibouti Base: A One Year Update”, The Diplomat, 04.12.2018; **Charlotte Gao**, “China Officially Sets Up Its First Overseas Base in Djibouti”, The Diplomat, 12.07.2017.

³⁴⁵ **Алиханов Руслан**, «Го, порты и деньги ...», укз. соч.

³⁴⁶ **Anthony Steriotti**, “The Significance of China’s ...”, op. cit., p. 2.

And if even more cargo is transported along the MSR routes, then, in theory, the merger of pirates will become easier, which will jeopardize the security of the BRI implementation.³⁴⁷ Thus, Beijing has become a larger security player in the wider region, and China’s naval forces are involved in the fight against piracy in the Horn of Africa.³⁴⁸ In 2008, Chinese naval forces in Somali waters began joint anti-piracy exercises.³⁴⁹ In early 2009, China sent two warships to the Gulf of Aden to replace two of its ships already patrolling the pirate region of Somalia. Destroyer *DDG-167 “Shenzhen”* and frigate *FFG-570 “Huangshan”* from the port of Zhanjiang in Guangdong province were to replace the Chinese warships “Haikou” and “Wuhan”, which since December 2008 took part in the joint UN mission to protect ships in the region from pirates. On Chinese ships, two helicopters and about 800 crew members, including a special task force, entered the bay.³⁵⁰

In the Gulf of Aden, a Chinese frigate managed to prevent a Somali pirate attack on a UAE-owned oil tanker in April 2017.³⁵¹ Nonetheless, the deployment of Chinese “guards” to protect BRI projects opens up a new element of overseas troop deployments - a feature that challenges China's core foreign policy principle of non-interference.³⁵²

However, a SPS or a “Dual Use Logistics Facility” model may be most appropriate to support China's future Indian Ocean operations and address unconventional security challenges. This will ease

³⁴⁷ “The Belt & Road Initiative — 一带一路”, op. cit., p. 6.

³⁴⁸ **Nicholas Lyall**, “China’s Rise in the Middle East: Beyond Economics”, The Diplomat, 25.02.2019.

³⁴⁹ **Sun Degang**, “China’s Soft Military Presence ...”, op. cit.

³⁵⁰ «Китай бросает новые силы на борьбу с сомалийскими пиратами», Известия, 02.04.2009.

³⁵¹ **Eleonora Ardemagni**, “Gulf Powers: Maritime Rivalry in the Western Indian Ocean”, ISPI Analysis, No. 32, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (Italian Institute for International Political Studies), 2018, p. 11.

³⁵² **Kondapalli Srikanth**, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative ...”, op. cit.

the burden of logistical support for China's maritime operations overseas (currently mainly anti-piracy operations), but could be expanded to support limited operations to protect Chinese citizens and property overseas. This could include non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs) for Chinese citizens, humanitarian and disaster relief operations, and possibly special forces ground operations in places like Africa to protect Chinese personnel, property and other economic interests.³⁵³

Currently, there are two main views on China's role in the MENA and IPR, and its implications for the foreign policy of the US, India and other regional players. Some believe that China's actions in the MENA and the IPR are aimed at expanding the power and influence of China at the expense of other regional powers in the area, which could ultimately lead to conflict between them. The second view is that China's growing role in the MENA will foster greater interdependence and cooperation between the US, Iran, China and other regional players, which will benefit all parties.³⁵⁴

In fact, China's strategic move towards IOR through the Horn of Africa has raised serious concerns about its military expansion in the region. China's long-term military presence in Djibouti, Gwadar and other ports in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, which could also serve as a stop for PLAN naval expansion, poses problems for India, US and other regional powers. The US is worried about China's growing global military presence, while India is concerned about China's ability to freely project its power into the Indian Ocean.³⁵⁵

With the world's economic center of gravity now centered around China and Asia more broadly, the Chinese will seek to attract

investment from the MENA, especially from the energy-rich states of the PG. Naturally, these factors will induce the Chinese (and possibly other actors in Asia such as India) to more aggressively defend their national interests in the region.³⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, Beijing is fully aware of the possible backlash it could generate in the international community through the BRI initiative and growing economic and military power, as well as how the perception of the "Chinese threat" could damage Beijing's image. The Chinese understand that without an effective solution to this problem of the "Chinese threat" in the US and its neighboring countries, this growth will not be well received by the international community as a whole.³⁵⁷ The "Chinese threat" approach to IPR was also evident in statements by US officials in the Trump administration, as well as in the National Security Strategy (NSS) in December 2017. And if the US approach to IPR continues to emerge as a means of confronting China, the states and regions of Eurasia and the Indian Ocean may face a new set of international political challenges, as different views on the Asian order lead to competition between the great powers, and the PG region is likely to participate in their competition.³⁵⁸

In this regard, in order to allay fears about China's strategic advancement in the IOR through the Horn of Africa and the "Chinese threat", Beijing downplayed the military-strategic importance of the base, calling it "*a base for supply missions to provide support, peacekeeping and humanitarian missions in Africa and Western Asia*". Justifying this goal, the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that since 2008, China has been deploying ships in the Gulf of Aden and waters off the coast of Somalia for escort purposes. Strongly

³⁵³ Christopher D. Yung, "Burying China's 'String of Pearls'", op. cit.

³⁵⁴ Henry Toshihiko Saito, "China's Expansion into the Middle East and Its Effects on U.S. Foreign Policy", Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California, March 2007, p. 3.

³⁵⁵ Ankit Panda, "A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?", op. cit.; Afshin Molavi, "Enter the Dragon ...", op. cit.

³⁵⁶ "China is Capable of Competing with the United States in the Middle East", Politikan.com.ua, 23.06.2013.

³⁵⁷ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese Peaceful Rise and Development. The Theory of 'China's Threat'", The Countries and Peoples of the Near and Middle East, Vol. 30, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2016, pp. 222-223.

³⁵⁸ Jonathan Fulton, "The Gulf between ...", op. cit., p. 176.

opposing the name Djibouti as a military outpost, Beijing claims it acts as a logistical support to replenish food and fuel supplies. However, this move by China reflects a shift in its foreign policy, as it contradicts its own commitment to the principle of *non-interference* and confirms Beijing's pragmatic departure from Deng Xiaoping's dictum of “*maintaining a low profile*”.³⁵⁹

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that China avoids opposing other players in the region, especially the USA. While China is expanding its navy on a military front, it is far from becoming a major naval power on a scale that could challenge or supplant the USA.³⁶⁰ Beijing is taking advantage of the American security umbrella in the PG – the USN, which guards the shipping lanes for barrels of oil that mostly go to Asia rather than the West.³⁶¹ Moreover, in December 2014, the US and China held a joint anti-piracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden, in which 700 US and Chinese naval personnel took part. The USN and PLAN provided extensive training on search and seizure protocol and sought to improve communication between the two naval forces.³⁶² In addition, the dissatisfaction that Donald Trump expressed about the disproportionate dependence of the international community on the US in preserving freedom of navigation on critical sea lanes and the long-term protection of shipping lanes to other countries with zero compensation can even be taken as an invitation to revitalize PLAN in the western Indian Ocean, in the Gulf of Aden and in the PG.³⁶³

³⁵⁹ Amrita Jash, “*Djibouti: A Roadway...*”, op. cit., p. 72.

³⁶⁰ John Calabrese, “*The Risks and Rewards of China’s Deepening Ties with the Middle East*”, China Brief, Vol. 5, Issue 12, The Jamestown Foundation, 24.05.2005, p. 4.

³⁶¹ Afshin Molavi, “*Enter the Dragon ...*”, op. cit.

³⁶² Brittney Washington, “*The Gulf of Aden Needs US-China Maritime Cooperation*”, 06.11.2017.

³⁶³ Ankit Panda, “*Trump Wants China to Pick Up the Slack in the Strait of Hormuz*”, The Diplomat, 25.06.2019.

Some experts even believe that the US needs to create an integrated regional security structure in PG or ME as a whole, so that as a forum it can attract China to a more responsible position in the MENA. Otherwise, a clash of interests could jeopardize the achievement of US goals in the region and reignite a more unwelcome antagonism between the US and the world's fastest growing power.³⁶⁴

5. Chapter Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, we conclude that while China's historical legacy rejects the idea of a naval-based superpower, to maximize its global dominance, Beijing's naval power will grow steadily, as it did with the British and Americans. In this respect, R. Alikhanov makes a remarkable comparison between the SPS and the Chinese “Go” game, where the pieces of the latter are likened to the key Chinese naval bases. Likewise, Henry Kissinger, in his work “*On China*”, drew parallels between China's naval strategy and “Go”. According to the author, the ideal of Chinese strategy emphasizes the patient accumulation of subtleties, complexity and tactical advantages. If, as is customary in chess, global or regional players strive for absolute superiority or complete defeat of the adversary, then Beijing, as is customary in “Go”, tends to achieve relative superiority by avoiding strategic emptiness and filling it, in this case by fulfilling its SPS and the MSRI.

However, despite the continued advancement of the Chinese navy in the Pacific and the partial success of the SPS, its practical implementation is limited by a number of geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic issues. Therefore, in order to reduce resistance to “Chinese rise”, Beijing should not only pay special attention to increasing its naval power and pursuing interests in the Pacific and

³⁶⁴ Flynt Leverett, Jeffrey Bader, “*Managing China-U.S. Energy Competition in the Middle East*”, The Washington Quarterly, Winter 2005-06, p. 199.

Indian Oceans, the MENA, but also strengthen political and economic cooperation with the US, India, Japan and ASEAN and MENA countries. It is obvious that in the conditions of globalization of the world economy, ensuring the security of maritime communication between the states becomes possible only through cooperation, and not through traditional competitive struggle. As part of its maritime expansion strategy, the "String of Pearls" allows Beijing not only to control energy, trade and delivery routes, but also to deploy its security and intelligence forces in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In fact, the SPS could not only allow China to shift its balance of power regionally and globally, giving Beijing a dominant position, but also enable the deployment of combat operatives at intersections connecting Asia, Africa and Europe. Chinese expansion and its military presence are likely to grow steadily to secure Chinese multibillion-dollar infrastructure projects along the "String of Pearls".

THIRD CHAPTER

CHINESE SOFT POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

1. "Beijing Consensus" - an Alternative Development for the MENA Countries

Over the past decade, China has been guided by a development strategy whose main motto is peaceful rise or revival. The concept of peacefully strengthening or elevating the country arose against the background of China's rapid economic growth, high rates of its development, deepening of the policy of reforms and opening up.³⁶⁵ Rapid economic growth, military modernization and rising energy demand in recent years have led many to talk about the "Chinese threat" as China's growth in the West is viewed with uncertainty, anxiety and suspicion. To counter international perceptions of the looming "Chinese threat", Beijing has announced several "*big ideas*", including "*Peaceful Rise*", "*Peaceful Development*" and "*Harmonious Society*", as China's meta-narrative of its rise. Moreover, to project the impact of soft power on the international environment and build a positive image, Beijing is using public diplomacy to try to transform China's rise from hard to soft. The concept of the "*Beijing Consensus*" or the model of China's economic development has become the most vivid reflection of the modern experience of China in creating an effective ideological product that combines elements of "*soft*" and "*hard*" power.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Дейч Т.Л., «Африка в стратегии Китая», Институт Африки РАН, М., 2008, с. 57.

³⁶⁶ Aghavni Harutyunyan, "From China's Concept ...", op. cit., pp. 5-6.

The attractiveness of the Chinese model or the “Beijing Consensus”, which symbolizes an alternative development model combining a liberal or market economy and an authoritarian political system.³⁶⁷ Moving from a planned economy to a market economy, China has increased the level of political democratization and, as a result, has freed up systematic space for resolving the contradictions accumulated over a long time.³⁶⁸ The Chinese model is gaining considerable attention as an alternative for developing countries to the “conditionality” of Western-dominated aid agencies and official development aid (ODA) of the major economies. It promises capital, technology, and a skilled workforce based on equality, mutual benefit, and non-interference [or minimal political interference] - the building blocks of China's *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*. Many developing country leaders, even pro-Western ones, find China's aid (currently mostly low-interest loans) and investment packages attractive because they are not driven by the demands of austerity or IMF and WB structural adjustment or by improvements in human rights, labor and policy reforms, and environmental protection that may accompany ODA of the US and other countries.³⁶⁹

The China model serves as a vehicle for rapprochement with the MENA and has become more popular and attractive mainly among the authoritarian or semi-authoritarian countries in the region against the backdrop of the “Washington Consensus”, driven by Western economic ideals of the free market and supported by dominant US institutions such as the IMF and the WB. While the ME regimes have largely been unable to provide the state capacity, industrialization, and institutional structures needed to succeed, such as the China

model, Beijing's economic alternative is likely to remain the source of China's soft power to strengthen its influence in the MENA.³⁷⁰ And China's economic, political and military aid to the MENA countries can help imitate its model among them.³⁷¹

A significant number of MENA countries, both allies of the US and those with “difficult relations” with them, see China as a factor that balances Washington's influence in the region. Along with Beijing, several MENA countries share a common desire to limit US global hegemony and Western influence in their internal affairs.³⁷² The fact that China has never been an occupying power in its modern history has become another positive factor for rapprochement with the countries of the region, which view the Asian giant as a country without colonial ambitions. China is making good use of these comparative advantages.³⁷³

Chinese politicians will naturally see their growing economic leverage as potentially the most effective tool for strengthening its overall soft power. In economic terms, China clearly has a stronger comparative advantage in terms of economic leverage than the other options. Thus, China hopes that its stronger geoeconomics can compensate for its initially weaker geopolitics.³⁷⁴

The Chinese leadership and scholars believe that the country's revival should be peaceful and carried out on the basis of respect for other civilizations. The country's recovery strategy includes abandoning the Cold War mentality and maximizing the development opportunities provided by globalization by conquering new markets and attracting investment. Chinese experts emphasize that China's

³⁶⁷ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “Chinese Policy of Soft ...”, op. cit., p. 180.

³⁶⁸ Huang Renwei, “Understanding China's Way from a Global Perspective”, China's Road and Prospect, Record of the 5th World Forum on China Studies, Edited by the Institute of China Studies, SASS, China International Press, 2013, p. 58.

³⁶⁹ Mei Gurtov, “China Model Hits the Road: Xi Jinping's Middle East Trip in Context”, China-US Focus, 05.02.2016.

³⁷⁰ Nicholas Lyall, “China's Rise in the Middle East ...”, op. cit.

³⁷¹ Mohamed bin Huwaidin, “China in the Middle East, Perspectives from the Arab World”, Arab Insight, Vol. 2, No. 2, Summer 2008, p. 67.

³⁷² “The Sino-Saudi Energy Rapprochement: Implications for US National Security”, The Gracia Group: New York, 2002, p. 2.

³⁷³ John Calabrese, “The Risks and Rewards ...”, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁷⁴ John Wong, “China's Rising Economic Soft Power”, Asia Dialogue, 25.03.2016.

peaceful rise means new development opportunities not only for China, but also for other countries in Asia and the whole world.³⁷⁵

2. China's Soft Power Toolkit in the MENA Region

a) *Mediation and Cultural Diplomacy*

Another pillar of China's soft power policy is mediation diplomacy, where Beijing positions itself as a mediator and peacekeeper in managing conflicts, crises and other security events in the MENA (Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process).³⁷⁶ In many territorial disputes in the regions of the ME, for example, between Iran and the UAE over small islands in PG or Iraq and Iran, Israel and Palestine, Turkey with Greece and Yemen with Saudi Arabia, China does not seem to intervene or ally with a certain country in dispute. Thus, unlike the US and some European powers, China has a positive image in the MENA countries. During the recent unrest in the MENA countries, China has shown restraint by not taking sides with any of the warring parties, the country has adopted a policy of non-intervention and offers "*mediation for peace*" to facilitate dialogue between opposing political parties. Beijing has not responded to Arab calls for military intervention in Syria to fight IS and topple President Bashar al-Assad. Likewise, President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia and Iran, including Egypt, in early 2016, signaling the country's willingness to present itself as a "*no strings attached*" broker. China's strategy to achieve a balanced approach between oppositions in the MENA is likely to receive more political and economic incentives than moving to one country or political group at the expense of another. This

³⁷⁵ Дейч Т.Л., «Африка в стратегии Китая», укз. соч., с. 57.

³⁷⁶ Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Approach to Mediation in the Middle East: Between Conflict Resolution and Conflict Management", Middle East Institute, 08.05.2018.

approach is unique and different from the Washington mediation method.³⁷⁷

China expressed its desire to join the Four-Party Center for the Exchange of Security Information between Iran, Russia, Iraq and Syria, established in 2015 in Baghdad.³⁷⁸ The *Middle East Foundation for Peace and Development of China* (MEFPD), in cooperation with the *China-Arab Exchange Association*, launched the ME Peace Forum in December 2015 to promote peacekeeping efforts in the unrest-ridden region and to improve methods of solving ME problems and advance development in the region.³⁷⁹

However, China still considers itself a second-tier player, and not one of the main external powers influencing the development of events in the countries of the MENA. Beijing has tried to carefully balance the geopolitics of MENA, accommodating but limiting the US and European Union (EU) agendas on issues like Iran, and supporting Russia's stance on issues like Syria, while trying to portray itself as a more moderate, balanced party backing the Syrian government.³⁸⁰ Chinese diplomats have played a key role in the *P5 + 1* negotiations on Iran's nuclear program and in brokering the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA). China seeks to mediate the Syrian and Palestinian conflicts by hosting warring parties in Beijing and engaging in peace talks ahead of the summit.³⁸¹

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, China made a proposal in 2013, and in 2014, China put forward a five-point

³⁷⁷ Henelito A. Sevilla, "China's New Silk Route Initiative: Political and Economic Implications for the Middle East and Southeast Asia", *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2017, pp. 89-90.

³⁷⁸ «Китай хочет присоединиться к Четырехстороннему центру обмена информацией о безопасности в Багдаде», *Диалог Цивилизаций*, 03.06.2019.

³⁷⁹ "Chinese Foundation Launches Middle East Peace Forum", *Xinhua*. china.org.cn, 16.05.2016.

³⁸⁰ Gabriel Domínguez, Ju Juan, "Soft Power - China's Expanding Role in the Middle East", *Deutsche Welle*, 04.02.2015.

³⁸¹ Sebastian Hornschild, "China in the Middle East: Not Just about Oil", *European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)*, July 2016, p. 2.

proposal to end the armed conflict in Gaza. In 2012, China came up with a four-point proposal to end the Syrian civil war.³⁸² During a visit in mid-July 2017 by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Beijing proposed the creation of a "*China-Palestine-Israel trilateral dialogue mechanism*".³⁸³ China supports the political rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and understands that both Arab and non-Arab Muslims have equal sympathy for the Palestinian cause. However, as part of the process of reform and opening up since the 1980s, China has taken a neutral position on this issue.³⁸⁴

With regard to the Gulf crises, Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a three-point solution. China also worked with parties concerned in South Sudan, attended the first phase of the IGAD High-Level Forum on Revitalizing the Peace Agreement on South Sudan, and called on the parties to the conflict to sign an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, civilian protection and humanitarian access.³⁸⁵

Mediation diplomacy makes China more visible and authoritative, which, in addition to increasing its national and international prestige, helps to gain power and influence in a broader transformation of the regional balance of power. It also promotes its own economic interests and political influence in countries and regions previously dominated by some of its strategic competitors. Ultimately, it can be assumed that in the near future, the phasing out of its cautious stance aimed at protecting long-term access to MENA may lead Beijing to make a strategic decision to play a more decisive role

³⁸² **Yoram Evron**, "China Has a New Middle East Peace Plan", *The Diplomat*, 14.08.2017.

³⁸³ "China Seeks Support for Israel-Palestinian Peace Plan", *South China Morning Post*, 01.08.2017.

³⁸⁴ **Mu Chunshan**, "Why China Must Pay Attention to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *The Diplomat*, 19.07.2014.

³⁸⁵ "China's Foreign Affairs 2018", op. cit., p. 63.

in resolving regional disputes or to insist that no regional problem is resolved without China's participation.

Another influential instrument of Chinese soft power policy in the countries of the MENA is cultural diplomacy, through the active use of which Beijing intends to strengthen goodwill and friendship, as well as develop intercivilizational harmony and mutual understanding. In 2001, a non-governmental *Sino-Arab Friendship Association* was established, led by a Chinese Muslim and deputy director of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, to promote friendly events and cultural understanding.³⁸⁶

Beijing is putting more emphasis on teaching Chinese in the MENA, building dozens of Confucius Institutions, trying to educate a generation of Arabs better attributed to the Chinese state, who understand the country, appreciate the spirit of its language, and help build bridges between China and Arab world. In addition to Confucius Centers, Beijing is working to establish and expand faculties of Chinese language and culture at various universities,³⁸⁷ funds Chinese cultural institutions, sponsors several weeks of Chinese culture, weeks of Chinese cinema and festivals, and exhibitions of Chinese art and history in the MENA countries.³⁸⁸

In particular, the rise in the number of Chinese cultural institutions in the MENA indicates that China's soft power initiative in the region has been effective and will continue to expand. In 2007, Oman and China signed an agreement to open a Chair of Arab Studies at the Beijing University of China. Meanwhile, several Chinese artists took part in the annual Muscat Arts Festival.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ **Yufeng Mao**, "China's Interests and Strategy in the Middle East and Arab World", in Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell (Eds.) *China and the Developing*. Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, NY, 2007, p. 123.

³⁸⁷ **Jumana al Tamimi**, "China Uses Soft Power to Woo Arab World", *Gulf News*, 15.10.2017.

³⁸⁸ **Yufeng Mao**, "China's Interests and Strategy ...", op. cit., p. 123.

³⁸⁹ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Exploring the China and Oman Relationship", *The Diplomat*, 10.05.2014.

In December 2009, the first Confucius Institute in Morocco was inaugurated at the Mohammed V University in Rabat.³⁹⁰ The first Confucius Institute in Tunisia opened in November 2018, and the Chinese Cultural Center in Rabat was opened in December 2018.³⁹¹ In addition, a project is currently being implemented to create centers of mutual assistance.³⁹² Meanwhile, Egypt is home to two Confucius Institutes located at Cairo University and Suez Canal University, as well as a Chinese Cultural Center.³⁹³

The first ever Chinese archaeological mission in Egypt began excavations in November 2018 at the Montu Temple in the monumental southern province of Luxor.³⁹⁴ In November 2018, Egyptian and Chinese media noted the broadcast of a dubbed Arabic version of the popular Chinese television series “*Ode to Joy*” on Egyptian state television.³⁹⁵

China has also stepped up its efforts to reach an Arab audience with the Arabic version of the monthly “*China Today*”, headquartered in Cairo. Many conferences related to Arab countries have been held in cities across China for several years now, and dozens of Arab researchers and scholars have been invited to attend.³⁹⁶ To further accelerate the region's economic growth through human resource development, President Xi announced in 2016 that the Chinese government would offer 10,000 scholarships and 10,000 training

³⁹⁰ “*Morocco Diplomata Magazine Interviews Chinese Ambassador*”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 13.04.2011.

³⁹¹ Adel Abdel Ghafar, “*Beijing Calling ...*”, op. cit.

³⁹² Chuchu Zhang, “*Potential to Leap Forward? Interrogating the Relations between China and Tunisia*”, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 17.11.2020, p. 13.

³⁹³ Adel Abdel Ghafar, “*Beijing Calling ...*”, op. cit.

³⁹⁴ “*1st Chinese Archeological Mission in Egypt to Start in Luxor Temple*”, Xinhua. New China, 25.11.2018.

³⁹⁵ “*Yearend: China-Egypt Relations See Strong Push in 2018*”, Xinhua. English.news.cn, 28.12.2018.

³⁹⁶ Jumana al Tamimi, “*China Uses Soft Power to Woo ...*”, op. cit.

opportunities to MENA students and workers.³⁹⁷

The *China Islamic Association* (established on May 11, 1953), a national Muslim organization under the control of the *State Administration of Religious Affairs* (SARA), organizes visits by Chinese pilgrims. According to the 2013 census, there are just over 20 million Muslims in China. A total of 10 ethnic groups, including the Hui population (9.81 million) and Uyghurs (8.39 million), constitute the majority of Muslims. According to the Hajj Department of the Chinese Islamic Association, SARA decides on the distribution of quotas for pilgrims by provinces and regions, depending on the number of applications in each province. China's national quota is set by Saudi Arabia.³⁹⁸

It should be noted that since the 50s of the 20th century, the PRC government began to pursue a policy aimed at expanding cooperation with Islamic countries. It is known that even at the Bandung Conference, Zhou Enlai was accompanied by two Muslims: the Deputy director of the Islamic Association of China, Imam Ma Pusheng, and Professor Liu Linghui, a researcher at the Department of Arabic Language at Beijing University. They brought with them to the forum the “*Koran*” and the “*Constitution of the PRC*” in Arabic, the books “*The Life of Chinese Muslims*” and “*Chinese Muslims*”.³⁹⁹

Since the 1980s, in order to strengthen the country's prestige in the MENA and establish diplomatic relations with Muslim countries, as well as to strengthen existing ties, Beijing has revised the religious policies of previous governments, calling them intolerant of reli-

³⁹⁷ Alvin Cheng-Hin Lim, “*Middle East and China's ‘Belt and Road’: Xi Jinping's 2016 State Visits to Saudi Arabia, Egypt And Iran*”, Analysis, Eurasia Review, 30.01.2016.

³⁹⁸ Li Qian, “*Chinese Government Goes to Great Lengths to Help Muslims Go on the Hajj*”, Global Times, 14.08.2017.

³⁹⁹ Пахомова М.А., «Особенности политической культуры Китая в источниках по политике КНР в отношении государств Арабского Востока (2014-2019)», Востоковедение: История и методология, Вып. 1, ИВ РАН, М., 2019, с. 41.

gions.⁴⁰⁰ Concerns about the Muslim minority in China were also expressed by the Saudi monarchy, and Muslims were allowed to make the pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time since the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In China, the Islamic Association was restored, religious holidays began to be celebrated. Beijing even allowed Iranian mullahs to investigate the situation of Muslims in China. It should be noted that the liberalization of the Chinese government's policy regarding religion was mainly aimed at ensuring support for the modernization path of Beijing from national minorities.⁴⁰¹

In addition to the current unofficial religious exchanges between China and Saudi Arabia, which are based on the pilgrimage of Chinese Muslims to the Islamic holy lands in Saudi Arabia, China is also developing other cultural cooperation projects with MENA, such as intercivilizational dialogues, twin-city (sister cities) ties, media cooperation, and dialogue on environmental issues.⁴⁰²

The role of soft power in China's foreign policy will also grow steadily, harmoniously complementing the methods of traditional diplomacy in the interests of ensuring the country's geopolitical position in the world. Since 2014, numerous events - conferences, seminars, round tables - have been held with the participation of large cities and provinces in China, ministries and departments, academies and institutes, think tanks and universities, in which various

⁴⁰⁰ **New York Times**, 15.06.1983.

Statistics from the 1982 National Census show that the number of Muslims among China's national minorities was about 13 million, and according to unofficial figures, 20 million. There were 12,000 functioning mosques and 15,000 Muslim clerics in Xinjiang.

⁴⁰¹ **Հարությունյան Աղավնի**, “ՉՇՀ-ի մերձավորարևելյան քաղաքականությունը 1970-ականների վերջերին”, Մերձավոր Արևելք: Պատմություն, քաղաքականություն, մշակույթ, Հ. 5, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2008, էջ 83; **Far Eastern Economic Review**, 07.12.1979.

⁴⁰² **Lirong Ma**, “The Rise of GCC's Soft Power and China's Humanities Diplomacy”, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013, p. 71.

aspects of BRI are actively discussed. China is sponsoring various events and business forums in countries, including the MENA along the route, showing interest in the project. At such meetings, Chinese experts, as a rule, promote the merits of the initiative, positioning China as a peace-loving country responsibly approaching issues of joint development.⁴⁰³ According to Chinese diplomats, “*people-to-people exchange*” is a key element of the BRI, with infrastructure projects, ports and sea routes designed to facilitate not only trade and investment, but also the movement of people.⁴⁰⁴

b) Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership

Based on a policy of non-interference, China develops stable bilateral relations not only with countries of strategic importance to the MENA region, but also with countries that are not of energy or strategic importance to China.⁴⁰⁵ The Chinese government's ongoing goal of establishing and developing partnerships is to achieve stable bilateral relations, including:

- *regular exchanges between high-ranking officials from different branches of government;*
- *promoting economic exchanges and cooperation;*
- *refusal to interfere in internal affairs;*
- *orientation towards common interests;*
- *coordination of foreign policy in international affairs within the country.*⁴⁰⁶

China engages in two main types of “*partner diplomacy*” in the

⁴⁰³ **Комиссина Ирина**, «Китай будет реализовывать ...», укр. соч.

⁴⁰⁴ **Adel Abdel Ghafar**, “*Beijing Calling ...*”, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁵ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*The Arab Spring as a New Challenge and a New Opportunity for China's Middle East Policy*”, *Armenian Political Science Journal*, 1(1), Center for Perspective Studies and Initiatives, Yerevan, 2014, p. 107.

⁴⁰⁶ **Georg Strüver**, “*China's Partnership Diplomacy: International Alignment Based on Interests or Ideology*”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 2017, pp. 44-45.

MENA region: the strategic partnership (SP) and the comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP). According to the study of Chinese partner diplomacy by Georg Strüver, the relationship between partner countries within the framework of the SP has the following four characteristics:

- *They go beyond the typical diplomatic relationship, involving constant meetings between government officials and agencies to develop communication and trust.*
- *They do not fall within the framework of treaty alliances or coalitions.*
- *They are more "goal-oriented" than "threat-oriented" and tend to focus on areas of mutual cooperation in the areas of economics, culture, security and technology.*
- *They are characterized by an emphasis on behavior and institutional processes.*⁴⁰⁷

The labels “*strategic partnership*” and “*comprehensive strategic partnership*” usually go hand in hand with broader agendas and more formalized mechanisms for cooperation. Although “*strategic partnerships*” are still limited to cooperation in some important areas and are often limited to closer economic cooperation, agreements under “*comprehensive strategic partnerships*” often include rather detailed agendas for bilateral cooperation and provide for the creation of specific communication channels to facilitate regular exchange between leaders of the state and high-ranking representatives of various state structures.⁴⁰⁸

Following the 2008 economic crisis, members of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) decided to transform the relationship from a simple “*new type of partnership*” to a “*strategic partnership*”, including a comprehensive one:

⁴⁰⁷ Adel Abdel Ghafar, “*Beijing Calling ...*”, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁸ Georg Strüver, “*China's Partnership Diplomacy ...*”, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

1. *Algeria - Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2014;*
2. *Djibouti - Strategic Partnership in 2017;*
3. *Egypt - Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2014;*
4. *Iran - Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016;*
5. *Iraq - Strategic Partnership in 2015;*
6. *Jordan - Strategic Partnership in 2015;*
7. *Kuwait - Strategic Partnership in 2018;*
8. *Morocco - Strategic Partnership in 2016;*
9. *Oman - Strategic Partnership in 2018;*
10. *Qatar - Strategic Partnership in 2014;*
11. *Saudi Arabia - Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016;*
12. *Turkey - Strategic Partnership in 2010;*
13. *UAE - Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2018.*⁴⁰⁹

The 8th CASCF Ministerial Meeting was held in July 2018 (Beijing), and China and the Arab League (AL)* agreed to modernize their bilateral ties to form a “*strategic partnership of comprehensive cooperation, joint development and [that is] future oriented*”.⁴¹⁰ The 22 AL States underlined the importance of the ME for the BRI, which was reinforced by the release of the “*Declaration of Action on China-Arab States Belt and Road Cooperation*” as the outcome of the meeting.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Jonathan Fulton, “*China's Changing Role in the Middle East*”, Atlantic Council. Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, June 2019, p. 4.

* AL has currently 21 members: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE, Yemen.

⁴¹⁰ Laura Zhou, “*China Pledges US\$23 Billion in Loans and Aid to Arab states as it Boosts Ties in Middle East*”, South China Morning Post, 10.07.2018.

⁴¹¹ Jonathan Fulton, “*For China, the Belt and Road run through the Middle East*”, South China Morning Post, 14.07.2018.

c) *Bilateral and Multilateral Formats of Cooperation*

China's policy in the MENA is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Western Asia and NA of the MFA of the PRC, which is in charge of relations with 23 states,* as well as with regional organizations: the *Community of Sahel-Saharan States* (CEN-SAD), the *Arab Maghreb Union* (AMU), the *Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries* (OAPEC), *Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf* (GCC), the *League of Arab States* (LAS), the *Organisation of Islamic Cooperation* (OIC) and the *China-Arab States Cooperation Forum* (CASCF).⁴¹²

China seeks to develop relations with the region in both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic formats, cooperating mainly through the three mechanisms CASCF, GCC and FOCAC, which institutionalize PRC's diplomacy in MENA.⁴¹³

CASCF: CASCF, established in 2004, is an official initiative between China and AL countries, which aims at dialogue, cooperation, peace and development.⁴¹⁴ China and the Arab countries have established a strategic partnership of all-round cooperation and joint development through the CASCF, which has become an important platform for collective dialogue and pragmatic cooperation between the two sides.⁴¹⁵ Within the framework of CASCF, interaction between the peoples of China and the Arab countries has become increasingly active. The *Sino-Arab Research Center on*

* Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Israel, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Iraq, Yemen Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Mauritania.

⁴¹² Пахомова М.А., «Особенности политической ...», укр. соч., с. 35.

Such policy directions as the Arab countries, Turkey, Israel and Iran are in many respects regarded as independent foreign policy directions.

⁴¹³ Yao Kuangyi, "Arab Countries: Reform and Development of China-Arab Relations", China International Studies (CIS), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, Winter 2005, pp. 90-92.

⁴¹⁴ Jin Liangxiang, "Sino-Arab Relations: New Developments and Trends", Vol. 11, No. 4, Middle East Policy Council, Winter 2004.

⁴¹⁵ "Full Text of China's Arab Policy Paper", op. cit.

Reform and Development was established at Shanghai International Studies University and held two seminars on China's economic development, management experience exchange and other topics for Arab countries. The 7th CASCF Seminar on Sino-Arab Relations and Civilizational Dialogue, dedicated to intercivilizational exchanges and deradicalization, was held. The 1st China-Arab States BDS Cooperation Forum took place. China has hosted a group of economic reporters and a third group of prominent Islamic figures from Arab countries.⁴¹⁶

GCC-CHINA: Relations with the monarchies of the PG in the Framework Agreement between China and the GCC, formed in 1981 in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) between Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.⁴¹⁷ The immediate goal of the GCC was to collectively counter their security threats and defend against the threat posed by the Iran-Iraq war and Iran-inspired Islamist activism.⁴¹⁸ The six GCC countries* are pursuing a neutral foreign policy of non-alignment and are adopting moderate and practical measures.⁴¹⁹ China was one of the first countries to establish links with the

⁴¹⁶ "China's Foreign Affairs 2018", op. cit., p. 64.

⁴¹⁷ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Around China's Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)", Сборник доклады от Първа Национална научна конференция "Китай: традиция и съвременност", Институт Конфуций, София, 2009, p. 157; Батыршин И.М., «Место Стран Совета Сотрудничества Арабских Государств Персидского Залива на Меняющемся Рынке Нефти», Востоковедный Сборник, Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 2006, с. 311.

⁴¹⁸ Машин В.В., Яковлев А.И., «Персидский Залив в Планах и Политике Запада», М., 1985, с. 111-112.

* Faced with the current new world situation, the six GCC countries are increasingly showing a trend towards engaging in international and regional affairs, developing pluralistic external relations and emphasizing a balance between the major powers. In major world and regional affairs, they take a unified position and play a collective role, reflecting the unity and integrity of the foreign policy of the six countries. A customs union between the GCC was announced in 2003, and the GCC common market was launched on January 1, 2008.

⁴¹⁹ Мелкумян Е.С., «Совет Сотрудничества Арабских Государств Залива: Региональные и Глобальные Вызовы», Сборник статей, Ближний Восток и Современность, М., 2006, с. 97.

GCC Secretariat on May 27, 1981, just two days after the establishment of the GCC, strongly supports GCC unification and regional integration and views this process as a positive contribution to the ME peace process, Arab unity and regional security maintaining peace and security in the Gulf region and promoting regional economic cooperation.⁴²⁰ A mechanism that has the potential to strengthen trade relations is the long-agreed China-Gulf Free Trade Agreement (FTA).⁴²¹ FTA negotiations,* first discussed in 2004 under the *Framework Agreement for Cooperation in the Economy, Trade, Investment and Technology*, have been characterized by a surge in activity. During Xi's state visit in 2016, the FTA gained momentum, but the ongoing dispute between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and Qatar made it impossible to conclude a multilateral agreement.⁴²² A China-GCC FTA* should be based on a GCC-Singapore FTA (negotiations began in 2008 and entered into force by

⁴²⁰ "The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC)", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 15.11.2000.

⁴²¹ "China-GCC FTA, China FTA Network". <http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/topic/engcc.shtml>

* To date, the parties have held five rounds of negotiations and reached an agreement on most issues related to trade in goods. Negotiations on trade in services have also begun.

⁴²² **Jonathan Fulton**, "China-Saudi Arabia Relations Through the '1+2+3' Cooperation Pattern", *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2020, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, p. 517.

* A political framework must be put in place to remove barriers to trade (including services), ensure market access and investment, and promote multilateral rights to establish companies and joint ventures. The China-GCC FTA should also ease cooperation between State Owned and Government Related Enterprises which are dominant in both China and the GCC countries. Likewise, cooperation and joint investment between the Sovereign Wealth Funds of the two parties, which hold liquid assets in excess of US \$ 7 trillion mainly invested in Western markets and government securities, will lead to smarter investments in financing economic development in Asia/China, the ME, Africa and other emerging markets where the real returns are more promising.

2014), not only as a prelude to a broader FTA between the GCC-ASEAN, but also as a supplement to China's FTA.⁴²³

FOCAC: FOCAC was established in October 2000 at the first Ministerial Conference in Beijing as a multilateral platform for exchange and cooperation between China and 53 out of 54 African countries that have formal diplomatic relationships with China.⁴²⁴ FOCAC, which meets every three years leading to a three-year action plan (overseen by a monitoring committee) bilaterally between China and African countries, provides an alternative to traditional development assistance mechanisms and is part of the growing trend of South-South cooperation.⁴²⁵ The FOCAC partnership has one precondition for cooperation with African countries - adherence to the principle of the "One China" policy, which implies the rejection of formal political relations or contacts with Taiwan as a sovereign state.⁴²⁶ The adoption of the "Beijing Consensus" by African leaders is driven by the attractiveness of Beijing's soft power: a long history of friendly ties, the provision of valuable, "unconditional" financial and technical assistance to both elites and those most in need, and increased trade between the world's largest developing country and the continent with the most developing countries.⁴²⁷

FOCAC is based on five guiding principles and goals set out in the White Paper on China's Africa Policy in 2006:

⁴²³ **Nasser H. Saidi**, "The Gulf Should Pivot East and Build the 'New Silk Road'", *HuffPost News*, 15.04.2014.

⁴²⁴ **Li Anshan**, et al. "The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: From a Sustainable Perspective", Centre for African Studies Peking University, 01.08.2012, p. 5.

⁴²⁵ **Tara Mackinnon**, "The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)", the BRICS Policy Center, 2016, p. 1; "China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation", Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, Beijing, December 2010, p. 1.

⁴²⁶ **Greta Simonaviciute**, "China in Africa: A Study of Chinese Leadership in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)", Malmö University, Spring 2020, p. 11.

⁴²⁷ **Drew Thompson**, "China's Soft Power in Africa: From the 'Beijing Consensus' to Health Diplomacy", *China Brief*, Vol. 5, Issue 21, The Jamestown Foundation, 13.10.2005, p. 2.

- *sincerity, friendship and equality;*
- *mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity;*
- *mutual support and close coordination and*
- *learn from each other and strive for common development.*⁴²⁸

During the Fourth FOCAC Ministerial Conference, held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, November 8-9, 2009, China announced its willingness to invest more in Africa, planning more projects and increasing its “*no strings attached*” (“*unconditional*”) presence.⁴²⁹ New areas of cooperation at FOCAC 2018 could include renewables and BRI.⁴³⁰

In 2010, another format of the **China-Arab States Economic and Trade Forum** was established, which ensures the Sino-Arab economic and trade cooperation for further expansion through a new effective platform and mechanism.⁴³¹

China is also considering accepting new members from the ME to the SCO⁴³² to expand military and anti-terrorism cooperation in the MENA, forging ties with Afghanistan and Iran and dialogue partner Turkey. Economic participation through B&R, combined with

⁴²⁸ **Jennifer G. Cooke**, “*China’s Soft Power in Africa. Chinese Soft Power and its Implications for the United States*”, Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World, A Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), March 2009, pp. 29-30.

⁴²⁹ **Yitzhak Shichor**, “*Libya Cautions China: Economics Is No Substitute to Politics*”, China Brief, Vol. 9, Issue 24, The Jamestown Foundation, 03.12.2009.

⁴³⁰ **Janet Eom, Deborah Brautigam, Lina Benabdallah**, “*The Path Ahead: The 7th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*”, Briefing Paper, No. 1, SAIS-CARI, August 2018, p. 1.

⁴³¹ **Qian Xuewen**, “*Sino-Arab Economic and Trade Cooperation: Situations, Tasks, Issues and Strategies*”, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 5, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011, p. 71.

⁴³² **Wang Jian**, “*‘One Belt One Road’: A Vision for the Future of China-Middle East Relations*”, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 09.05.2017, p. 4.

intergovernmental cooperation through the SCO, contributes to the fight against terrorism in the region.⁴³³

d) Trade and Economic Ties, Humanitarian Assistance

BRI investments are welcomed in the MENA region amid economic difficulties, significant infrastructure shortages as a result of sanctions, falling oil prices, as well as rapid population growth, unemployment, a growing middle class and increasing wealth accumulation, security concerns and political instability. The main role of MENA in BRI initiatives is to increase domestic consumption, provide new sources of growth and opportunities for China's surplus industrial capacity, and create valuable employment opportunities for its construction companies with long-term *return on investment* (ROI) potential in the hope that that the creation of new export markets.

Despite the establishment of multi-format relations with the countries of the region, China has traditionally sought to protect its growing interests in the region, carefully avoiding participation in any conflicts and disputes, not intervening in them or taking sides in the region. This cautious approach by China has hindered the development of specific policies or strategies in the MENA and strong commitments to any states in the region other than those necessary to maintain friendly business ties or pragmatic diplomatic and security relations.⁴³⁴ But now, to support the growth and expansion of their companies' prospects, facilitate exports, find new markets and provide new sources of energy for industrial companies, Chinese investments in the MENA are currently diversifying into

⁴³³ **Megan Wang**, “*China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative*”, SOAS University of London, 01.06.2018.

⁴³⁴ **Andrew Scobell, Alireza Nader**, “*China in the Middle East: The Wary Dragon*”, RAND Corporation, 2016, p. 2.

other sectors such as telecommunications, tourism, financial services, food processing, manufacturing and infrastructure.⁴³⁵

The economic direction plays an important role in the Chinese soft power strategy and is implemented mainly due to investment attractiveness (unlike the West, it does not impose requirements in terms of human rights, transparency or sustainability), which is an important tool for providing the national economy with resources and markets.⁴³⁶ In fact, the investments that China, unlike the US, promoted around the world, without setting any political conditions and emphasizing the desire for economic gain, in modern conditions have become an instrument of Chinese soft power.⁴³⁷ Adhering to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, China's foreign aid and investment in developing countries is provided on one condition: the adoption of the "One China" policy.⁴³⁸

To facilitate the channeling of energy resources into the world's fastest growing economy, the Chinese government is using its soft power to advance China's long-term economic interests and create favorable conditions for these interests of Chinese business, following the tactics of "offending no one" in the region.⁴³⁹

However, in MENA countries that receive Chinese aid and investment, there are problems associated with high levels of corruption, weak institutional capacity and the likelihood of recipient countries' default on debt with strategic and political implications.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ **Rus Beasley**, "The New Silk Road Investing in and Venturing with Middle Eastern Companies", Report Overview, The Mergermarket Group, Hong Kong, 2012, pp. 9-11.

⁴³⁶ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese Policy of Soft ...", op. cit., p. 186.

⁴³⁷ **Павленко Владимир**, «Китай и ЕС пошли в поход против США?», ИА REX, 27.03.2019.

⁴³⁸ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese Policy of Soft ...", op. cit., p. 186.

⁴³⁹ **Yufeng Mao**, "China's Interests and Strategy ...", op. cit., p. 113.

⁴⁴⁰ **Manuel Almeida**, "China's 'Marshall Plan' for the Arab World", Arab News, 14.07.2018.

There are also a number of legal problems associated with serious differences in the system of employment, tax and financial law, security in the legislation of most MENA countries, as well as suspicions of Chinese experts in the judicial systems of MENA countries about their possible control by "external forces", which may significantly complicate legal issues.⁴⁴¹

However, Beijing believes that through significant investments in capital, personnel and technology, Chinese enterprises in the MENA can play an important role in maintaining and modernizing regional economies and ensuring social stability in an often conflicted region.⁴⁴² Beijing is confident that any solution to hot spots and political issues, especially in the Arab countries, depends on economic growth and improving people's lives through national development and economic recovery, that is, security through development. Chinese experts believe that this approach to MENA differs from that of the West, which was mainly concerned with political interests and security issues, while China is focused only on the economy and trade.⁴⁴³

China's soft power policy in the countries of the MENA is also being implemented through the allocation of foreign aid and the strengthening of humanitarian contacts.⁴⁴⁴ China was one of the first countries to provide humanitarian aid to Egypt, Tunisia (US \$ 5 million), Syria, Libya during the Arab Spring events.⁴⁴⁵ During his January 2016 ME tour, President Xi Jinping offered the region US \$

⁴⁴¹ **Глазунов О., Савченко Ал.**, «Особенности и ...», укз. соч., с. 4.

⁴⁴² "Spotlight: China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative Boosts Mideast Development", Xinhua. english.news.cn, 19.01.2016.

⁴⁴³ **Jonathan Fulton**, "China's Changing Role ...", op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁴⁴ "How 'Unconditional' is China's Foreign Aid?", Deutsche Welle, 15.05.2018.

⁴⁴⁵ **Yao Kuangyi**, "The Upheaval in the Middle East and China's Middle East Policy", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (In Asia), Vol. 6, No. 3, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012, p. 18.

55 billion in financial support, loans and investments.⁴⁴⁶ In July 2018, Beijing pledged US \$ 20 billion in loans to Arab countries and over US \$ 100 million in financial assistance to countries in greatest need, including Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.⁴⁴⁷ China is attending the Friends of Yemen Conference, which raises funds to solve Yemen's problems. In July 2017, Beijing provided the Yemeni government with a US \$ 22.5 million grant in emergency assistance and additional funds to the UN World Food Program and the World Health Organization to help fight the cholera epidemic. In 2009, the Chinese government awarded a US \$ 753,000 grant to help Yemenis displaced by fighting between the army and the Houthi rebels.⁴⁴⁸

In total, the Chinese authorities have provided a US \$ 20 billion line of credit to rebuild economies hit by conflicts in Arab countries.⁴⁴⁹ In early 2014, as the number of Syrian refugees continued to arrive in Jordan, Beijing allocated US \$ 200,000 to provide medical assistance and transport these refugees.⁴⁵⁰ As part of its aid program for Arab countries, China has sent nearly 2,000 medical workers to Yemen over the past 40 years to implement health projects in that country.⁴⁵¹

Beijing's economic and political position in MENA region has significantly strengthened under President Xi Jinping, who clearly

⁴⁴⁶ "Can China's New Silk Road Bring Economic Benefits to the Middle East?", Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS), 23.05.2017.

⁴⁴⁷ Manuel Almeida, "China's 'Marshall Plan' for the Arab World", op. cit.

⁴⁴⁸ I-wei Jennifer Chang, "China and Yemen's Forgotten War", the United States Institute of Peace, 16.01.2018.

⁴⁴⁹ «Китай предоставит арабским странам Ближнего Востока кредиты и помощь», EADaily, 10.07.2018; Алексеева Надежда, «Асимметричный ответ на действия США: зачем Китай укрепляет связи с арабским миром», ТВ-Новости, 10.07.2018; «Си Цзиньпин пообещал арабским странам кредиты на \$20 млрд и гуманитарную помощь», Интерфакс, 10.07.2018.

⁴⁵⁰ Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, "Sino-Jordanian Ties: Growing in the Midst of Turmoil", The Diplomat, 09.07.2014.

⁴⁵¹ Jumana al Tamimi, "China Uses Soft Power to Woo ...", op. cit.

defined the ability of Chinese economic power to bring geopolitical dividends by expanding China's international influence through infrastructure diplomacy of NSR.⁴⁵² In recent years, Chinese infrastructure investment in the MENA has indeed increased by 1,700% from 2012 to 2017. According to the Israeli intelligence community, the Chinese authorities invest mainly in the energy sector (US \$ 150 billion). Then comes industry (US \$ 113 billion), transport (US \$ 103 billion), defense technology (US \$ 68 billion).⁴⁵³ The trade impact of BRI transport projects is positive for all B&R corridor countries, but with significant differences. Reducing the trade costs associated with new transport infrastructure allows companies in BRI countries to gain better access to markets and regional and global value chains by importing cheaper and better materials and thus increasing productivity and export opportunities. Total exports from MENA, CA and BRI countries to sub-Saharan Africa increased by 2.0%, 1.9% and 1.2%, respectively.⁴⁵⁴

By 2017, Chinese companies were building US \$ 25 billion in projects in the energy, bridges and transportation infrastructure sectors.⁴⁵⁵ Between 2001 and 2016, China's trade with the ME grew from approximately € 16 billion to over € 191 billion, overtaking the US as a regional trading partner in 2010.⁴⁵⁶ In MENA countries in 2017, half of BRI countries' exports went to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, each accounting for more than US \$ 200 billion. The smallest volume of exports goes to Djibouti, the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) and the Republic of Yemen. The last two countries affected by the conflict had negative export growth rates from 2000 to 2017. The

⁴⁵² Roi Feder, "What China's New Silk Road Means for Israel", op. cit.

⁴⁵³ Субботин Игорь, «Израилю предрекают превращение в колонию Китая», Независимая газета, 08.08.2019.

⁴⁵⁴ Экономика Одного Пояса, Одного Пути. Возможности и риски транспортных коридоров», World Bank Group, Washington DC, 2020, с. 60.

⁴⁵⁵ "Can China's New Silk Road Bring Economic Benefits ...", op. cit.

⁴⁵⁶ Filippo Fasulo, Valeria Talbot, "The MENA ...", op. cit., p. 84.

fastest growing exports were recorded in Bahrain, Lebanon and Qatar.⁴⁵⁷

In Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria, China has avoided alignment with rival factions while maintaining its ability to compete for post-conflict contracts. In more stable countries, China has also demonstrated its economic strength, becoming the largest source of foreign investment in the ME and the region's largest trading partner. While the number of Chinese BRI projects is declining globally, MENA is the only region that has seen an increase in Chinese investment and construction projects. By 2019, the region had become the second largest recipient after Europe.⁴⁵⁸

3. OBOR - Soft Power Discourse

One of the main instruments of China's soft power in the countries of the MENA has become the Chinese geopolitical and geo-economic project NSR. The first policy documents outlining the shape of China-MENA cooperation within the BRI framework was the “*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*”, published by the Chinese government in March 2015.⁴⁵⁹ It describes plans for how the Belt will link China to the PG and the Mediterranean Sea through CA and Western Asia (passing through Gwadar, Istanbul and Tehran,⁴⁶⁰ as well as through Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Turkey);⁴⁶¹ and how the road will connect South China Sea to the Mediterranean through the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Suez Canal.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁷ «Экономика Одного Пояса, Одного Пути ...», укз. соч., с. 17.

⁴⁵⁸ **Frederic Wehrey, Sandy Alkoutami**, “*China's Balancing Act in Libya*”, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 10.05.2020.

⁴⁵⁹ **Jonathan Fulton**, “*China's Changing Role ...*”, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴⁶⁰ **Megan Wang**, “*China's One Belt, One Road Initiative*”, op. cit.

⁴⁶¹ **Алексеева Надежда**, «‘Асимметричный ответ ...’», укз. соч.

⁴⁶² **Manuel Almeida**, “*China's 'Marshall Plan' for the Arab World*”, op. cit.; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “*Chinese 'Belt and Road' ...*”, op. cit., p. 32.

Vision and Actions' emphasis on cooperation priorities indicates that the means by which China is already developing bilateral relations through MENA will be coordinated with BRI. It refers to two multilateral initiatives that can foster to BRI cooperation - the CASC and the China-GCC Strategic Dialogue.⁴⁶³ In 2015, within the framework of the free trade zone (FTZ) project, consultations were conducted on the implementation of other major projects - the *China-Arab Joint Investment Fund* and the AIIB.⁴⁶⁴

Below are the regional AIIB members from MENA countries with the membership date and general subscription:

- *Afghanistan - Oct 13, 2017, US \$ 86.6 million;*
- *Bahrain - Aug 24, 2018, US \$ 103.6 million;*
- *Iran - Jan 16, 2017, US \$ 1,580.8 million;*
- *Israel - Jan 15, 2016, US \$ 749.9 million;*
- *Jordan - Dec 25, 2015, US \$119.2 million;*
- *Oman-Jun 21, 2016, US \$ 259.2 million;*
- *Pakistan - Dec 25, 2015, US \$ 1,034.1 million;*
- *Qatar - Jun 24, 2016, US \$ 604.4 million;*
- *Saudi Arabia - Feb 19, 2016, US \$ 2,544.6 million;*
- *Turkey - Jan 15, 2016, US \$ 2,609.9 million;*
- *UAE - Jan 15, 2016, US \$ 1,185.7 million.*

Non-regional AIIB members from MENA countries with membership date and total number of subscriptions:

- *Egypt - August 04, 2016, US \$ 650.5 million;*
- *Ethiopia - May 13, 2017, US \$ 45.8 million;*
- *Sudan - September 13, 2018, US \$ 59.0 million.*

⁴⁶³ **Jonathan Fulton**, “*China's Changing Role ...*”, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴⁶⁴ **Ильминская М.Ф.**, «Регион Персидского залива как зона геополитических интересов Китая», Серия Международные отношения, № 1, Вестник РУДН, М., 2015, с. 156.

Prospective AIIB members from MENA countries with a membership date and total subscriptions:

- *Kuwait (regional)*;
- *Lebanon (regional)*;
- *Algeria (non-regional)*;
- *Libya (non-regional)*;
- *Morocco (non-regional)*;
- *Tunisia (non-regional)*.⁴⁶⁵

Among those who have appointed a director, Turkey holds 2.66% of the shares, just below the top 10 shareholders, where the United Kingdom (UK) is in tenth place with 3.11%. The second ME country with a representative as a director is Saudi Arabia, which comes immediately after Turkey and Italy (2.62%) with a share of 2.59%. Finally, Egypt - due to the fact that it is not considered a regional member of the bank, being "African" rather than "Asian", can appoint a director with a share of only 0.66% less than countries such as Iran (1.61%) or the UAE (1.21%).⁴⁶⁶

All GCC countries are members of the AIIB, the UAE and Qatar have established BRI Joint Investment Funds (JIF) with China, and Saudi Arabia has signed a MoU with China to establish a BRI JIF worth US \$ 20 billion.⁴⁶⁷ The UAE's contribution to the AIIB is slightly less than that of Saudi Arabia and Iran, but more than that of Qatar and Kuwait.⁴⁶⁸

The MoU was signed during the 2017 *High Level Joint Committee* (HLJC) in Riyadh to develop a US \$ 20 billion JIF with the Saudi Industrial Development Fund, China's SRF and Everbright.

⁴⁶⁵ **The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) Headquarters**, Beijing. <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>

⁴⁶⁶ **Filippo Fasulo, Valeria Talbot**, "*The MENA ...*", op. cit., p. 78.

⁴⁶⁷ **Jonathan Fulton**, "*The Gulf between ...*", op. cit., p. 187.

⁴⁶⁸ **April A. Herlevi**, "*China and the United Arab Emirates: Sustainable Silk Road Partnership?*", China Brief, Vol. 16, Issue 2, The Jamestown Foundation, 26.01.2016, p. 15.

This follows the model established with the UAE and Qatar, which have established similar, albeit smaller, foundations with Chinese organizations. The fact that both of them have gone from MoU to activation suggests that the Saudi-Saudi JIF also has the potential to be activated, and is expected to be used to develop projects related to BRI and Saudi Vision 2030.⁴⁶⁹

During President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia in January 2016, SRF and Saudi ACWA Power signed a MoU to jointly develop and invest in energy projects in the UAE, Egypt and other countries in the MENA, which represents the first step of SRF to investment cooperation in MENA.⁴⁷⁰

4. The First White Paper of Beijing Arab Policy: The "1 + 2 + 3" Model of Cooperation

In June 2014, President Xi outlined the "*1 + 2 + 3 strategy*" at the 6th CASCFC Ministerial Conference with the theme "*building modern SR and promoting China-Arab common development*".⁴⁷¹ On January 13, 2016, in connection with President Xi's visit to the ME, Beijing published its first official *White Paper on China's Arab Policy*, which hints at China's multifaceted relationship with Arab countries and is a fundamental and more concrete document reflecting China's interests in ME.⁴⁷² The document is impressive in its volume, contains about 7,600 hieroglyphs, consists of a preface and five parts, including:

⁴⁶⁹ **Jonathan Fulton**, "*China-Saudi Arabia Relations ...*", op. cit., p. 521.

⁴⁷⁰ **Dongmei Chen, Wenke Han**, "*Deepening Cooperation Between Saudi Arabia and China*", King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), March 2019, p. 15.

⁴⁷¹ **Sun Degang**, "*China's Soft Military Presence ...*", op. cit.; **Afshin Molavi**, "*Enter the Dragon ...*", op. cit.

⁴⁷² **Sana Hashmi**, "*Energy at the Helm: Xi's Visit to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran*", Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), India, 04.02.016, p. 1.

1. *Deepening China-Arab strategic cooperation relations, characterized by all-round cooperation and joint development,*
2. *China's policy towards the Arab states,*
3. *Full revitalization of Sino-Arab cooperation,*
4. *Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum and following actions,*
5. *Relations between China and organizations in the Arab region.*⁴⁷³

The White Papers announced that China and the Arab countries will adopt a comprehensive cooperation model known as "1 + 2 + 3" to improve pragmatic cooperation,⁴⁷⁴ which provides a detailed overview of China's plans in the region.⁴⁷⁵ China's Arab Policy Paper lists the traditional areas of railways, highways and seaports, as well as aviation and satellites in infrastructure cooperation with the ME.⁴⁷⁶

Within "1 + 2 + 3" the energy will form the core ("1"). This refers to the need to expand cooperation in the field of energy, covering a range of issues, including the extraction of oil and natural gas, ensuring the security of energy transportation routes and the establishment of mutually beneficial long-term relations between China and the Arab countries in the field of energy.⁴⁷⁷ Infrastructure construction and trade/financing, investment promotion will serve as its *Two Wings* ("2"), and ("3") refers to the high-tech areas of nuclear energy, space satellite/aerospace technologies, renewable energy sources (RE), and industrial capacity cooperation.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷³ «Китайское правительство опубликовало первый документ о политике в отношении арабских стран», Russian.news.cn, 13.01.2016.

⁴⁷⁴ Sana Hashmi, "Energy at the Helm ...", op. cit., p. 1.

⁴⁷⁵ Sebastian Hornschild, "China in the Middle East ...", op. cit., p. 1.

⁴⁷⁶ "Spotlight: China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative ...", op. cit.

⁴⁷⁷ Sumedh Anil Lokhande, "China's One Belt One Road Initiative and the Gulf Pearl Chain", China Daily, 05.06.2017.

⁴⁷⁸ "Full Text of China's Arab Policy Paper", op. cit.; Wang Jian, "'One Belt One Road' ...", op. cit., p. 3; "Xi Jinping Attends Opening Ceremony of Sixth Ministerial Conference of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum and Delivers Important Speech Stressing to Promote Silk Road Spirit and Deepen China-Arab

While the "1 + 2 + 3" Arab Policy Paper is considered primarily a geo-economic rather than a geopolitical strategy,⁴⁷⁹ it is China's most formal recognition of the fact that its infrastructural, economic and development goals for the region are intertwined with political and security considerations in the long term historical perspective. As the first document outlining China's strategy for the Arab world, it states that securing China's key objectives in the region requires more engagement, reaffirming "the political will of a commitment to peace and stability in the ME".⁴⁸⁰

During the 8th CASC Ministerial Meeting in July 2018 (Beijing), it was announced that another project called "Industrial Park - Connecting ports, Two-Wheel and Two-Wing Approach" would provide the basis for consolidating China-built industrial parks in key cities of the PG with regional ports. This will create a regional MSR network and establish a hub that will connect other important MSR regions such as South Asia and East Africa.⁴⁸¹ Chinese maritime companies are active in the countries of the region and own assets in the seaports of Egypt (Alexandria, Adabiya, Port Said), Algeria (Churchill), Turkey (Amberley) - all of them are part of B&R strategy.⁴⁸²

The *Two-Wheel* and *Two-Wing* approach will also enable Chinese industrial parks (FTZs) to create business clusters, increase trade flows, and connect supply chains across the region. It is planned to develop large industrial parks to create the above mentioned "Industrial park - port interconnection". The parties also

Cooperation", Embassy of PRC in Republic of Iraq, May 2014; "Full Text of China's Arab Policy Paper", The State Council the People's Republic of China, ENGLISH.GOV.CN, 13.01.2016.

⁴⁷⁹ Sun Degang, "China's Soft Military Presence ...", op. cit.

⁴⁸⁰ Manuel Almeida, "China's 'Marshall Plan' for the Arab World", op. cit.

⁴⁸¹ Jonathan Fulton, "Domestic Politics as Fuel for China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative: The Case of the Gulf Monarchies", Journal of Contemporary China, Taylor and Francis Group, p. 2.

⁴⁸² Roi Feder, "What China's New Silk Road Means for Israel", op. cit.

agreed to merge long-term plans, including rail networks in the Arabian Peninsula and NA, to continually improve ME's ability to facilitate trade, develop industrial agglomeration, and accelerate regional development.⁴⁸³

Two Wheels combine cooperation in the field of conventional oil and gas and low-carbon energy to forge a strategic energy cooperation relationship between China and the Arab countries, while *Two Wings* calls for increased cooperation in science, technology and finance. They require cooperation in artificial intelligence, mobile communications, the Internet of Things, space launches, satellite navigation and others, as well as innovation, investment in nanotechnology and financing methods.⁴⁸⁴ Taken together, these regional connectivity projects and priorities indicate the direction of MSR in the broader ME and the central role that the Gulf region will play.⁴⁸⁵

B&R topped the agenda at the *Arab World and China Conference* in Doha in late May 2016. Many scholars have discussed the role B&R can play in facilitating interactions between PRC and the MENA. In August 23, 2016, the "*Forum of the Silk Road Economic Belt*" was held in Tehran.⁴⁸⁶

In early 2021, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi made official visits to Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, UAE and Bahrain, as well as a working visit to Oman. Just a month ago, Yang Jiechi,* paid official visits to Kuwait and Qatar. All of this demonstrates the great importance China attaches to the MENA

⁴⁸³ Wang Yi, "China and Arab States Should Jointly Forge the Cooperation Layout Featuring 'Industrial Park-Port Interconnection, Two-Wheel and Two-Wing Approach'", Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Malta, 10.07.2018.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Jonathan Fulton, "Domestic Politics as Fuel ...", op. cit., p. 12.

⁴⁸⁶ Henelito A. Sevilla, "China's New Silk Route Initiative ...", op. cit., p. 97.

* A member of the Politburo of the CCCPC, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CCCPC.

countries and its strong determination to develop relations and strategic partnerships between the two sides.⁴⁸⁷

Convergence of BRI and National Development Strategies. Many MENA countries are undergoing major industry changes, opening up many new opportunities for Chinese investors, especially in high-tech and other emerging strategic sectors. There is a rapid growth in the information industry and renewable energy sources (RES), as well as the intention to develop the non-oil industry to reduce over-dependence on oil. In this regard, China discussed BRI alignment with **Jordan Vision 2025**,⁴⁸⁸ **Saudi Arabia Vision 2030**, **Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030**, **New Kuwait 2035**, **Qatar National Vision 2030**, **Bahrain Economic Vision 2030**, **Oman Vision 2040**, **Egypt Vision 2030**, **Djibouti's vision 2035**, **Lebanon's Vision 2030**. All of them are designed to diversify these economies from a *single-resource rentier model to a post-oil model*, with the necessary transition to manage their dependence on foreign labor, public sector employment and heavily subsidized utilities.⁴⁸⁹

The future of relations between China and the oil-producing countries of the ME is likely to be based on solid, less "*liquid*" building blocks. In addition, the GCC banking and financial system should be integrated into the emerging "Redback Zone" where payments, capital markets, banking and financial assets and transactions will be based on the Chinese yuan (renminbi/RMB) as an international currency. The yuan should be used for financing, clearing and settlement between ME, the GCC and China.⁴⁹⁰

The UAE has already played a role in China's efforts to internationalize the yuan and was the first GCC member to sign a

⁴⁸⁷ "Ambassador Li Minggang Publishes Signed Article Entitled 'China a Long-term, Reliable Strategic Partner of Middle East Countries' in Kuwaiti Mainstream Media", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 08.04.2021.

⁴⁸⁸ Wang Jian, "'One Belt One Road' ...", op. cit., p. 4.

⁴⁸⁹ Jonathan Fulton, "Domestic Politics as Fuel ...", op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁹⁰ Nasser H. Saidi, "The Gulf Should Pivot East ...", op. cit.

swap agreement in 2012 for up to RMB 35 billion. At the end of December 2015, China extended its agreement on the exchange of the RMB with the UAE to internationalize the RMB in accordance with B&R guidelines for expanding the volume and scope of bilateral currency swaps and settlements with other countries in order to deepen financial cooperation, build a system of monetary stability, investment and financial system and credit information system in Asia.⁴⁹¹ Thus, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and the UAE Central Bank have taken the first step in establishing a bilateral RMB swap line that should be extended to other GCC central banks. Given the proportionality between the trade volume and the required level of swap lines, the swap line between the Gulf countries and the RMB would be around RMB 180-200 billion, given that the GCC countries account for about 2.5% of China's total trade (slightly more than in Singapore).⁴⁹²

Qatar followed UAE suit in November 2014.⁴⁹³ The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) launched ME's first centre for clearing transactions in the Chinese yuan in Qatar in April 2015.⁴⁹⁴ The center's goal is to provide local financial institutions with access to the RMB and foreign exchange markets. It also aims to promote wider cross-border use of the RMB and expand opportunities for increased trade investment between Beijing, Doha and the region as a whole. China is trying to globalize the use of its currency in order to minimize its dependence on the US dollar in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹¹ April A. Herlevi, "China and the United Arab Emirates...", op. cit., p. 14.

⁴⁹² Nasser H. Saidi, "The Gulf Should Pivot East ...", op. cit.

⁴⁹³ April A. Herlevi, "China and the United Arab Emirates...", op. cit., p. 14.

⁴⁹⁴ "Why Qatar Matters to China, in Spite of Gulf Isolation", South China Morning Post, 07.06.2017; Julia Hollingsworth, "How the Gulf Row is Blocking China's New Silk Road", South China Morning Post, 05.06.2017.

⁴⁹⁵ "New Choice: Chinese Currency Expands to Middle East", Sputnik, 06.06.2015.

5. Chapter Conclusion

So, thanks to the strategy of soft power, China has achieved tangible political and economic success in this complex region of MENA with minimal resources, especially without interfering in internal affairs and conflicts. This is due to the fact that the China interacts with MENA countries without imposing ideological or political prerequisites, for example, in exchange for foreign aid or investment. Although it would be naive to think that China does this without any expectations of reciprocity or without its own benefits.

Some observers, especially in the West, believe that China has "*hidden agenda*" behind the Chinese soft power policy, arguing that China has become more active and ambitious in the MENA in a bid to expand geopolitical reach. Despite Beijing's denial of its intentions to fill the "*vacuum*" left by the "*rebalancing*" of the US from the MENA to the APR, the new choice offered by China's B&R is tacitly understood as an alternative to the "*old choice*" of reliance on the US. The scale of the BRI and the reduction of the active US military presence in the region means that Beijing "*will be forced*" to increase its economic and security presence in the MENA. And looking to the future, there are a number of factors that will complicate the future paradigm of *non-intervention* in the context of China's presence. Thus, until the *hard power* of China is fully formed, China will continue to fight for influence through *soft power* policies and *public diplomacy* in the form of foreign aid and investment, cultural and educational exchanges, and encouraging dialogue between people.

FOURTH CHAPTER

ONE BELT, ONE ROAD IN THE PERSIAN GULF AND YEMEN

1. The Persian Gulf - an Important Platform for the "String of Pearls"

The Gulf countries, which are composed of 6 GCC countries plus Iraq and Iran, can be called the core of the ME as they are the most influential countries in the region. The communist leadership of the PRC viewed the monarchist states of the PG with deep suspicion throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, from 1967 to 1971, China supported revolutionary movements in the region, but with improved relations between the PRC and the US and increased hostility between Moscow and Beijing, China took a softer line from 1971, focusing on socialist modernization in the region instead of revolution. In the 1990s, after the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait, the collapse of the SU and the events in Tiananmen Square, China took a restrained position in the region, which also continued after 9/11.⁴⁹⁶

China is deepening its economic cooperation with the PG through the *China - GCC Framework Agreement* and the CASC.⁴⁹⁷ The war in Iraq and growing US dominance are pushing the GCC to conclude FTA with China in 2004.⁴⁹⁸

China's relations with the Gulf region have expanded significantly, especially in recent years, including geopolitical, economic,

trade, energy and security interests.⁴⁹⁹ With the growth of trade and the ever-improving structure of trade between China and the Gulf countries, especially after the 1990s, a pattern of oil trading in exchange for manufactured goods and conventional finished goods such as equipment, electronics, clothing and luggage has gradually taken shape.⁵⁰⁰

Unique reserves of natural resources and huge potential for industrialization, as well as the unique geopolitical position of the PG, which connects three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. Since the PRC is highly dependent on oil and gas imports from the PG, which are delivered mainly by SLOC tankers and pass through sea bottlenecks or "Choke Points", the forced cessation of energy imports in adverse conditions can quickly paralyze the PRC's economy and military forces. Thus, the creation of the "String of Pearls" of the PG countries, Iraq and Iran will significantly reduce Beijing's dependence on SLOC and will facilitate economic integration between West Asia, Southeast and East Asia.⁵⁰¹

The relative decline of US hegemony and influence in the PG, the growing role of China and significant progress affect the balance of power in the region. Some Gulf states, while maintaining their strategic alliance with the US, are also seeking to establish ties with other players such as Beijing to protect themselves from the threat of regional crises or to provide security in a power struggle.⁵⁰²

In this chapter, we discussed in detail the new partnership established between Iran and China in July 2020 on economic and security issues. This is stated in an 18-page proposed agreement that will clear the way for billions of dollars in Chinese investment in

⁴⁹⁶ "China and the Persian Gulf", Wilson Center, 12.07.2010.

⁴⁹⁷ Батыршин И.М., «Место Стран Совета ...», укз. соч., 2006.

⁴⁹⁸ "China-GCC FTA, China FTA Network". <http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/topic/engcc.shtml>

⁴⁹⁹ Mordechai Chaziza, "The Significant Role of Oman ...", op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁰⁰ Mo Chen, "Exploring Economic Relations between China and the GCC States", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 5, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011, p. 90.

⁵⁰¹ Sumedh Anil Lokhande, "China's One Belt One Road ...", op. cit.

⁵⁰² Mordechai Chaziza, "China-Bahrain Relations ...", op. cit., p. 78.

energy and other sectors. In July 2020, a new partnership was established between Iran and China on economic and security issues, detailed in an 18-page proposed agreement that will clear the way for billions of dollars in Chinese investment in energy and other sectors. The proposed 25-year road map between Iran and China is called the *Iran-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*. The document also describes deepening military cooperation that could potentially give China a foothold in the region through joint training and exercises, joint weapons research and development, and intelligence sharing. All of this could undermine the Trump administration's efforts to isolate the Iranian government from its nuclear and military ambitions. It has been argued that even a partial implementation of the Sino-Iranian strategic partnership will signal a serious escalation of the US strategic rivalry with China, while at the same time will punch a hole in the administration's campaign of "*maximum pressure*" on Iran.⁵⁰³

2. China and the Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

“Two-Wheeled” and “Two-Wing” Cooperation

In 2018, the volume of trade between the Gulf countries and China amounted to about € 125 billion. By 2020, the largest share of the Gulf countries' exports should have come from China - about US \$ 160 billion, with China dominating the import market, supplying goods to the PG worth about US \$ 135 billion. GCC funds in Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been prominent investors in *initial public offerings* (IPOs) of major Chinese banks, including China Agriculture Bank and ICBC. Chinese construction companies are

⁵⁰³ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “*The Lion and the Dragon: A New Stage in Sino Iranian Strategic Partnership*”, *Modern International Studies*, International Science Journal, Issue: 2, Vol. 3, Kazan, 2021. pp. 214-215.

actively involved in the over a trillion-dollar construction market in the Gulf countries.⁵⁰⁴

The Gulf Railroad Project was expected to speed up the Gulf States' connection from Kuwait to Oman via Saudi Arabia and the UAE, including branch connection to Qatar and Bahrain.⁵⁰⁵ And the light rail project in Mecca (Saudi Arabia) has brought great convenience to pilgrims.⁵⁰⁶ Improved infrastructure connectivity will enable China to expand its exports to the MENA and sub-Saharan Africa, thereby revitalizing regional value chains.⁵⁰⁷

SAUDI ARABIA: China and Saudi Arabia are considered natural partners for B&R collaboration, as Saudi Arabia is an important link between China and the hinterland of Eurasia, as well as an important crossroads linking China to the vast African market.⁵⁰⁸

During President Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia in January 2016, China and Saudi Arabia decided to establish a joint committee - a comprehensive, high-level institutional platform for cooperation between the governments of the two countries. Its main task is to implement the important consensus reached by the heads of state, as well as to coordinate and promote cooperation in various fields. Seven subcommittees* chaired by deputy ministers were established by the *China-Saudi Arabia High-Level Joint Committee*, and the *Fiscal and Finance Subcommittee* was established in 2019.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Afshin Molavi, “*China and the GCC States – A Turbo-Charged Trade Relationship*”, *The New Silk Road Monitor*, 29.10.2018.

⁵⁰⁵ Wang Jian, “‘*One Belt One Road*’...”, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁶ “*Spotlight: China's ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative ...*”, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰⁷ «*Экономика Одного Пояса, Одного Пути ...*», укз. соч., с. 61-62.

⁵⁰⁸ Juan Chen, Meng Shu, Wen Shaobiao, “*Aligning China's Belt and Road Initiative with Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision. Opportunities and Challenges*”, *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, November 2018, p. 367.

* Politics and Foreign Affairs, BRI and Major Investment Cooperation Projects, Energy, Trade and Investment, Culture, Science and Technology, Tourism, Military and Security Cooperation.

⁵⁰⁹ Zishi Yang, Le Du, Liping Ding, “*The China-Saudi Arabia (Jizan) Industrial Park under the Belt and Road Initiative*”, *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and*

In April 2016, Saudi Arabia announced its *Vision 2030 National Economic Reform Plan*, which was formally presented at the 2016 G20 Summit in Hangzhou, China, by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.⁵¹⁰ Riyadh wants to fundamentally transform its economy into a "normal" one over the next 15 years, and the only way to approach this is through Chinese investment in the real sector (commercial, manufacturing) of the economy.⁵¹¹

In March 2017, during the visit of the King of Saudi Arabia to China, President Xi formally expressed his support for Saudi Arabia's implementation of Vision 2030, as well as its willingness to contribute to the diversified economy of Saudi Arabia, which was later recorded in the "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia".⁵¹² The parties signed an agreement worth almost US \$ 65 billion⁵¹³ and created a high-level joint commission to promote the *BRI and Vision 2030 alignment*.⁵¹⁴

On 31 August 2016, during the first meeting of the China-Saudi High-Level Committee in Beijing, Yinchuan Yucheng, Guangzhou Hi-tech District Investment Group, the Royal Commission for Jizan and Yanbu (referred to as the 'Royal Commission') and Saudi Aramco signed a framework agreement for the establishment of a joint venture company in Jizan Basic Industrial City.⁵¹⁵

Saudi Jizan City for Primary and Downstream Industries (JCPDI) is being developed as part of the *BRI-Saudi Arabia strategic partnership Vision 2030* between China and Saudi Arabia. In 2016,

the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu (RCJY), Saudi Aramco, and Guangdong and Ningxia provinces agreed to establish a joint venture company *Saudi Silk Road Industrial Services* in JCPDI. It will focus on attracting Chinese investments and providing industrial services in a 32 km² special development zone, including a 30 km² industrial zone with no fixed physical boundaries and a 2 km² residential area with closed management under the JCPDI. It is designed to accelerate the Kingdom's industrialization process by integrating the technology, manufacturing capabilities and investment resources of two Chinese partners from Guangdong and Ningxia provinces. Jizan is strategically located and equipped with world-class infrastructure connecting European, African and Middle Eastern markets. Guangzhou-based Pan-Asia PET Resin, one of the three largest PET bottle suppliers in China, pioneered the project and said it plans to invest US \$ 3.8 billion to build a polyester complex in Jizan. In March 2017, RCJY signed an agreement with Pan-Asia PET Resin to allocate industrial land for a petrochemical plant in Jizan and pledged to provide funds from the Saudi Industrial Development Fund.⁵¹⁶

According to the industrial layout plan of Jizan Basic Industrial City, there are heavy industrial, manufacturing and light industries, residential areas and commercial areas from south to north. As for the heavy industry, it will focus on the development of power plants, seawater treatment plants, fuel storage facilities, etc. Light industry will focus on the development of raw materials, electronic products, advanced services, garbage disposal, industrial components, biotechnology and agricultural technology. From 2018 to 2020, *China's Enterprise Special Development Zone* will focus on the introduction of the steel, petrochemical, silicon and shipbuilding industries. From 2020 to 2025, it will oversee the development of the food and packaging industry, the assembly of household appliances, mecha-

Islamic Studies, Vol. 14, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020, p. 530.

⁵¹⁰ Juan Chen, Meng Shu, Wen Shaobiao, "Aligning ...", op. cit., p. 364.

⁵¹¹ Andrew Korybko, "Why is China Choosing to Partner with Israel and Saudi Arabia?", The Duran, 25.03.2017.

⁵¹² Juan Chen, Meng Shu, Wen Shaobiao, "Aligning ...", op. cit., p. 367.

⁵¹³ "King's Visit to China Reflects Saudi Arabia's Position Globally, Experts Say", Arab News, 19.03.2017.

⁵¹⁴ Juan Chen, Meng Shu, Wen Shaobiao, "Aligning ...", op. cit., p. 364.

⁵¹⁵ Zishi Yang, Le Du, Liping Ding, "The China-Saudi ...", op. cit., p. 533.

⁵¹⁶ Dongmei Chen, Wenke Han, "Deepening Cooperation...", op. cit., p. 24.

nical and electrical equipment, and building materials.⁵¹⁷

Another BRI-Vision synergy is the “*most ambitious project in the world*” and a US \$ 500 billion smart city on the northwest coast of the Red Sea - the Saudi metropolis of **Neom**, which will be completed in 2025. It will open up significant opportunities for contract infrastructure and ensure the successful operation of Chinese firms in the kingdom for years to come.⁵¹⁸ The city will be bigger than Dubai and it will have more robots than people. In the center of the city there will be developed industries, biotechnology, media and airlines, everything will be connected with artificial intelligence, with the Internet of Things. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said the sci-fi city with gleaming office towers and five-star hotels should reflect Saudi Arabia's efforts to transform a nation that was once bathed in oil money and is now facing serious financial problems.⁵¹⁹

China Global Investment Tracker estimates the value of Chinese construction contracts in Saudi Arabia between 2005 and 2019 at over US \$ 35 billion, of which nearly US \$ 1.1 billion comes in since 2007. Among the projects were some high-profile ones, such as the participation of the China Railway Construction Corporation in the construction of the Mecca-Medina-Jeddah railway to transport pilgrims during the Hajj, the construction by the China Energy Corporation of the largest power plant in the ME north of Jeddah, and the joint construction of Aramco-SINOPEC refinery in Yanbu.⁵²⁰ In December 2019, the *China Civil Engineering Corporation* and the Government of Saudi Arabia signed a framework cooperation agreement on the *Saudi Mainland Bridge Railway* project, which is

⁵¹⁷ Zishi Yang, Le Du, Liping Ding, “*The China-Saudi ...*”, op. cit., p. 534.

⁵¹⁸ Jonathan Fulton, “*China-Saudi Arabia Relations ...*”, op. cit., p. 522.

⁵¹⁹ Glen Carey, Vivian Nereim, Christopher Cannon, “*Sun, Sea and Robots: Saudi Arabia’s Sci-Fi City in the Desert*”, Bloomberg, 26.10.2017.

⁵²⁰ Jonathan Fulton, “*China-Saudi Arabia Relations ...*”, op. cit., p. 521.

designed for 1000 km and will become the main artery of the railway upon completion.⁵²¹

However, while most Chinese media outlets have a positive view of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, they also express concern that, despite its simple formulation, such a program is difficult to implement due to structural problems that impede economic diversity and the inability to secure their revenues without relying on oil until at least 2020.⁵²²

UAE: To integrate the UAE, China wants to combine its “*B&R westward*” strategy with the UAE’s “*Look East*” policy, which aims to increase the UAE's share of trade and investment from emerging Asian economies in an effort to diversify the local economy. As the third largest re-export center in the world after Singapore and Hong Kong, approximately 60% of China's trade passes through the JAFZA in Dubai, the largest in the world, from where it is re-exported to Africa and Europe.⁵²³

Abu Dhabi (the UAE capital) also intends to build a “*sustainable economy*” as part of a key energy security strategy for the future, diversifying its economy from oil dependence and supporting the development of tourism, manufacturing, healthcare, petrochemicals, financial services and Renewable Energy (RE).⁵²⁴ Energy diversification is in line with AIIB’s proposed “*lean, clean, and green*” approach, and Abu Dhabi believes that Beijing can strengthen the UAE as a key player and architect of the GCC’s energy future.⁵²⁵ The 100 km² Khalifa Port FTZ (KPFTZ) is an important part of the *Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030* diversification program, scheduled for completion in 2030, with the port and

⁵²¹ Zishi Yang, Le Du, Liping Ding, “*The China-Saudi ...*”, op. cit., p. 530.

⁵²² Juan Chen, Meng Shu, Wen Shaobiao, “*Aligning ...*”, op. cit., pp. 367-368.

⁵²³ Emma Scott, “*China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy Meets ...*”, op. cit.

⁵²⁴ Wade Shepard, “*Next Up on China’s Maritime Silk Road ...*”, op. cit.

⁵²⁵ April A. Herlevi, “*China and the United Arab Emirates...*”, op. cit., p. 15.

FTZ combination expected to ultimately provide 15% of Abu Dhabi's non-oil GDP.⁵²⁶

The partnership between the UAE and the PRC rests on a fairly solid foundation, primarily in the field of finance and investment. In December 2015, China and the UAE established a US \$ 10 billion joint investment fund to finance energy and high-tech projects. ICBC, China Construction Bank (CCB), Agricultural Bank of China (ABC) and Bank of China (BOC) operate in the Emirates. In 2016, UAE investors poured over US \$ 2.1 billion in China, while China's FDI in the UAE totaled US \$ 4.6 billion. The volume of trade between the countries at the end of 2017 amounted to more than US \$ 41 billion.⁵²⁷

Chinese state-owned enterprises and multinationals are well represented in the JAFZA, serving contracts throughout the Arabian Peninsula and MENA in general. Dubai is home to a sizable Chinese community, ranging from 200,000 to 300,000, with over 4,000/4,500 Chinese enterprises and companies operating there.⁵²⁸ With the growing participation of China in Africa, more and more businessmen travel to the African continent, using Dubai as a transit point.⁵²⁹

Strategically located between the West and the Far East, as well as between Europe, Russia and Africa, the UAE's geography, dynamic economy, political stability and advanced logistics infrastructure have made Abu Dhabi and Dubai invaluable trading hubs

⁵²⁶ **Wade Shepard**, "Next Up on China's Maritime Silk Road ...", op. cit.

⁵²⁷ «Китай расширяет влияние на Ближнем Востоке и закрепляется в Африке», Информационный портал Fars News - Форум Корреспондентов Ирана, Центральной Азии и России, 23.07.2018.

⁵²⁸ **Jonathan Fulton**, "China Deepens Ties with UAE with Industrial Investment", Al-Monitor, 10.07.2019, p. 2; **David Miles, Bryant Edwards**, "The New Silk Road. Investing in and Venturing with Middle Eastern Companies", Remark. Latham and Watkins, p. 5.

⁵²⁹ **Gustavo Plácido Dos Santos**, "The United Arab Emirates, Africa and Angola in the new Silk Road", IPRIS Viewpoints, Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS), 03.07.2015, p. 2.

connecting BRICS members. The UAE has played a key role in connecting China and Russia to the "Global South".⁵³⁰

In October 2016, China invested approximately US \$ 2.3 billion in the UAE, in infrastructure such as the Jebel Ali port, offering China access to a key international transport hub.⁵³¹ In the same year, the Abu Dhabi Port (ADP) signed a contract with COSCO Shipping Group, the world's largest container operator, which chose the port of Khalifa as a hub for its ME operations and is expected to increase its annual capacity to 6 million TEU (Twentyfoot Equivalent Unit) at both existing container terminals.⁵³² COSCO has invested US \$ 400 million in the construction of a container terminal at ADP to support the expected increase in trade flows along the B&R routes.⁵³³

In 2017, the *Khalifa Industrial Zone Abu Dhabi* (KIZAD) - designated KPFTZ* and Jiangsu Overseas Cooperation and Investment Company (JOCIC)* has established a China-UAE Industrial Capacity Construction Management Company and invested US \$ 1.1 billion in the port of Khalifa.⁵³⁴ At the end of June 2017, as part of the BRI, the Chinese province of JOCIC signed a US \$ 300 million agreement with the ADP in the UAE,⁵³⁵ to create more than 1,400 jobs and to develop manufacturing activities in the KPFTZ.⁵³⁶

The land allotted for Jiangsu province's activities is only 2.2%

⁵³⁰ **Theodore Karasik**, "Chinese President's Visit to the UAE and Africa Demonstrates a Shift in the New World Order", Arab News, 29.07.2018.

⁵³¹ **Ed Blanche**, "China's New Silk Road Includes both Risk ...", op. cit.

⁵³² **Lee Hong Liang**, "Abu Dhabi Ports Inks \$300m Investment Cooperation with China", Seatrade Maritime News, 21.07.2017.

⁵³³ **Julia Hollingsworth**, "How the Gulf Row is Blocking ...", op. cit.

* KPFTZ is the second busiest port in the UAE after Dubai.

* Consortium of five companies: Hanergy Thin Film Power Group, Jiangsu Fantai Mining Development (Group) Co, Xuzhou Jianghe Wood, Jiangsu Jinzi Environmental Technology, and Guangzheng Group.

⁵³⁴ **Jonathan Fulton**, "China Deepens Ties with UAE ...", op. cit., p. 2; **Lee Hong Liang**, "Abu Dhabi Ports Inks \$300m Investment ...", op. cit.

⁵³⁵ **Wade Shepard**, "Next Up on China's Maritime Silk Road ...", op. cit.

⁵³⁶ **Lee Hong Liang**, "Abu Dhabi Ports Inks \$300m Investment ...", op. cit.

of the available land in the FTZ. The goal is for Port Khalifa and the FTZ to become transnational transport, manufacturing and trade centers, which are designed to attract investment from around the world, not just China.⁵³⁷ The land lease includes an option for China-UAE Industrial Capacity Cooperation (Jiangsu) Construction Management to establish and develop a further 107,639,100 square feet of FTZ at KIZAD Area B to meet additional demand by Jiangsu province businesses. As part of the agreement, a 50-year Musataha agreement was signed by the ADP with JOCIC.⁵³⁸

In 2018, twelve Chinese companies agreed to invest over US \$ 800 million in the B&R project in Abu Dhabi, creating over 2,000 jobs. The companies, 10 of which are located in Jiangsu province in eastern China, have signed agreements with JOCIC.⁵³⁹ In September 2018, JOCIC hosted an investment promotion conference, inviting a delegation from the ports of KIZAD and Abu Dhabi to Nanjing, where they met with over 180 representatives of Chinese government agencies and 90 representatives of Chinese companies to showcase the investment opportunities.⁵⁴⁰

East Hope Group, one of China's largest companies, announced in May 2018 that it is considering investing US \$ 10 billion in KIZAD in three stages over 15 years. *East Hope* and *Emirates Global Aluminum* (EGA) are among the world's largest aluminum producers. The *Abu Dhabi Mubadala Sovereign Wealth Fund*, which is jointly owned by EGA, has partnered with Chinese institutions in a co-investment fund to benefit from projects in the UAE and China that support the BRI and the Abu Dhabi Emirate 2030 Development Plan.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁷ **Wade Shepard**, “Next Up on China’s Maritime Silk Road ...”, op. cit.

⁵³⁸ **Lee Hong Liang**, “Abu Dhabi Ports Inks \$300m Investment ...”, op. cit.

⁵³⁹ “Capturing the Opportunities from Belt and Road Initiative” HSBC Commercial Bank International Cables Federation 2018, HSBC Bank (China) Company Limited, 2018, p. 22.

⁵⁴⁰ **Jonathan Fulton**, “China Deepens Ties with UAE ...”, op. cit., p. 2.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

In April 2019, the UAE and China signed new deals worth US \$ 3.4 billion under the BRI, which could boost bilateral trade by US \$ 53 billion to US \$ 70 billion by 2020. As part of the new deals, the two countries have made a number of new investments, including the construction of a 60 million square foot station on the NSR in Dubai for EXPO 2020.⁵⁴²

In 2018, the Civil and Infrastructure Division of *China State Construction and Engineering Corporation* (CSCEC) ME has obtained the Letter of Acceptance from RTA (Road and Transportation Authority) for R1086 Dubai Hills Estate Mall Access and Umm Suqeim Street Upgrading project worth AED (UAE Dirham) 800 million (US \$ 218 million).⁵⁴³

In the Gulf of Oman in 2014, the only fully operational private container terminal in the UAE, Khorfakkan Container Terminal (KCT), received the first ship of the China Shipping Container Lines (CSCL) with the United Arab Shipping Company (UASC), co-owned by the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iraq. The two carriers have signed a series of joint service agreements connecting Asian ports with ports in the ME and Europe. In addition to the *Far East - Middle East* route, it will serve the Jebel Ali-Tianjin trade route, which is the busiest route between the Far East and the Gulf region. Since 2001, CSCL has also partnered with Dubai Ports (DP) World, a global port terminal operator that was formerly the Dubai Port Authority and is now the international division of JAFZA. Showcasing the importance China attaches to its maritime trade with the UAE, the seventh of CSCL's recently acquired 14,000 TEU container ships also made its first call at Jebel Ali Port, located at the western end of the Free Zone bordering the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. In addition to the Far East-ME route, it will serve the Jebel

⁵⁴² **Dan Murphy**, “The UAE Signed a Massive, \$3.4 billion Deal with China - and That ‘Isn’t a Surprise’”, CNBC, 29.04.2019.

⁵⁴³ “Capturing the Opportunities from Belt ...”, op. cit., p. 23.

Ali-Tianjin trade route, which is the busiest route between the Far East and the Gulf region.⁵⁴⁴

In 2014, a strategic framework agreement was announced between Qingdao Port Group and DP World, further deepening the existing partnership. The agreement focused on continued cooperation in Jebel Ali Port (a port city 35 km southwest of Dubai), DP World base port and Mina Rashid port located in the eastern part of Jebel Ali zone near the Emirate of Sharjah. Another goal is to connect the two ports with a railway that will run through the JAFZA, adding another aspect of multimodal connectivity for Chinese exporters so that they can use the UAE as a distribution hub in the Gulf region.⁵⁴⁵ The port is an important access point for China's efforts to create smooth, safe and efficient transport routes connecting major seaports along the B&R.⁵⁴⁶

However, there are also opinions that, despite the UAE's "*Look East*" policy, the Emirates have their own corporations integrated into the global economy, and the feasibility of China's plans to include the UAE in its BRI has some limitations. Locally, it describes how Chinese companies focus only on exports and imports and want government contracts without being tied to the local market and culture.⁵⁴⁷

QATAR: Qatar's *National Vision 2030* (QNV2030) is a shared vision and roadmap for transforming Doha (capital of Qatar) into a progressive society capable of sustainable development and a high standard of living for all citizens by 2030. By identifying long-term results for Doha, it provides a framework for the development of national strategies and implementation plans, assists Qatari government strategies, policies, planning and allocation of funds and resources to achieve a common goal. It also provides private sector

⁵⁴⁴ Emma Scott, "China's 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy Meets ...", op. cit.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ April A. Herlevi, "China and the United Arab Emirates...", op. cit., p. 14.

⁵⁴⁷ Emma Scott, "China's 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy ...", op. cit.

companies and, to some extent, individuals with a shared direction and purpose.⁵⁴⁸ QNV2030 envisions development in four interrelated areas: *human, social, economic and environmental development*.⁵⁴⁹

Beijing views Qatar as an important partner in advancing the B&R project, especially with its economic and geographic components that play a vital role in the creation of China - the GCC FTA. And deeper Sino-Qatari cooperation could improve the prospects for QNV2030 and help it break out of diplomatic and economic isolation.⁵⁵⁰ The side wants to strengthen the BRI's integration with Qatar's QNV2030 strategy, creating the "*four pillars*" of pragmatic cooperation between China and Qatar, including energy, infrastructure, financial investment and high technology.⁵⁵¹

In 2015, Qatar's exports totaled US \$ 5.24 billion and imports US \$ 3.7 billion.⁵⁵² The volume of trade between China and Qatar is increasing year by year, reaching US \$ 11 billion in 2019. Cooperation between China and Qatar has formed a mature model in which energy is the backbone, infrastructure is key, and finance and investment is a new starting point.⁵⁵³ There are currently more than 14 wholly-owned Chinese companies operating in Qatar, in addition to 181 Qatari-Chinese joint ventures. China is an attractive destination for Qatari investments in shipbuilding, manufacturing, petrochemicals, technology, hospitality, tourism and financial services, as well as other vital industries. Qatar also allows foreign investors 100% ownership in various sectors and industries.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁸ "Qatar National Vision 2030", General Secretariat for Development Planning, Doha, July 2008, p. 11.

⁵⁴⁹ Mordechai Chaziza, "China-Qatar Strategic ...", op. cit., p. 83.

⁵⁵⁰ "Qatar National Vision 2030", op. cit., p. 11.

⁵⁵¹ Mordechai Chaziza, "China-Qatar Strategic ...", op. cit., p. 79.

⁵⁵² HE Zhou Jian, "Qatar and China Natural Partners in Belt and Road Cooperation", The Peninsula, 30.06.2020.

⁵⁵³ Julia Hollingsworth, "How the Gulf row is Blocking ...", op. cit.

⁵⁵⁴ "China and Qatar are Natural Partners in Belt and Road Co-Operation: Envoy", Gulf Times, 29.06.2020.

⁵⁵⁵ Mordechai Chaziza, "China-Qatar Strategic ...", op. cit., p. 86.

In April 2017, the Chamber of Qatar and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade signed an agreement to develop cooperation relations between the two parties in order to maximize the benefits for the private sector of Qatar and China (private entrepreneurs), and also signed a MoU for the entry of the Qatar Chamber into the Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce. In November 2018, the parties signed a MoU to identify global maritime investment opportunities that will serve both QNV2030 and BRI.⁵⁵⁵

In 2014, Chinese companies signed agreements to participate in the construction of infrastructure projects worth US \$ 8 billion in Qatar. Projects include construction works, building roads, bridges, ports, strategic water reserves and telecommunications infrastructure. After Qatar was selected to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, China Railway Construction Corp won the contract to build Lusail Stadium for the event.⁵⁵⁶ China's largest telecommunications equipment company Huawei also contributed to the creation of the first commercial 5G networks in Qatar. The parties will also expand cooperation in the field of high technologies, in such projects of Qatar as big data, smart railways, as well as in the development of the digital economy and smart cities.⁵⁵⁷

Financial investments and cooperation in the field of high technologies are new growth points. BOC and ICBC are the two largest financial subsidiaries of Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZA) in terms of total assets, providing over 70% of loans to support local businesses.⁵⁵⁸ QFZA is positioning itself as one of the catalysts for the growth of Qatar's BRI, opening doors to potential investors in both Qatar and China. In 2019, under BRI, QFZA signed four separate MoUs with the China Council for the Promotion of

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 84.

⁵⁵⁶ "Why Qatar Matters to China, in Spite of Gulf Isolation", op. cit.

⁵⁵⁷ HE Zhou Jian, "Qatar and China natural partners ...", op. cit.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

International Trade (CCPIT), Xiamen FTZ, Shenzhen Cross-Border Electronic Commerce Association and China Harbor Group. Currently, China Harbor is implementing a green energy bus assembly plant at QFZ, as well as a ship crane project.⁵⁵⁹

BAHRAIN: In October 2008, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain presented the *Economic Vision 2030*, which focuses on shaping a vision of government, society and the economy based on three guiding principles: sustainability, fairness and competitiveness, so that every Bahraini has the means to live a safe and fulfilling life and realize its full potential. Bahrain seeks to move from an oil-based economy to a productive, globally competitive economy driven by government and an innovative private sector - an economy that fosters Bahrain's broad middle class, enjoying a good standard of living through productivity gains and high-paying jobs.⁵⁶⁰ By 2030, Bahrain intends to fully connect with the world's trade and information highways, using public and private funds to create and maintain the necessary infrastructure and services.⁵⁶¹

Bahrain's strategic location in the heart of the PG makes accessibility and access to any market in ME (land, sea or air) fast and economically viable. Port Khalifa bin Salman (KBSP), a major transshipment hub in the North Gulf, has boosted the country's role as a major supplier of goods to Saudi Arabia. The strategic location of KBSP in the middle of the PG, together with its deep-water berths and approach channel, receiving the largest ocean-going container ships, and its direct land connections to the mainland (Saudi Arabia

⁵⁵⁹ Mohammad Shueb, "Belt & Road Initiative to Bring Qatar and Mideast Closer to the World: QFZA Chief", The Peninsula, 04.11.2019.

⁵⁶⁰ "Bahrain Economic Vision 2030", Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Kingdom of Bahrain. <https://www.moic.gov.bh/en/Ministry/bahrain-economic-vision-2030>

⁵⁶¹ "From Regional Pioneer to Global Contender: The Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain", Bahrain.Bh, p. 19. <https://www.bahrain.bh/wps/wcm/connect/38f53f2f-9ad6-423d-9c96-2dbf17810c94/Vision%2B2030%2BEnglish%2B%28low%2Bresolution%29.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

and Qatar) make the port a major regional distribution center.⁵⁶²

Bahrain International Airport, which is undergoing an extensive expansion and modernization program to enhance the country's status as a tourist destination and logistics center by 2020, can be considered a major regional transport hub and a good location for order fulfillment centers for Chinese companies operating on the NSR.⁵⁶³ Several large Chinese companies, including Huawei Technologies, CPIC Abahsain Fiberglass, China Machinery Engineering Corporation and China International Marine Containers Company (CIMC), have invested in Bahrain. In 2009, Huawei moved its headquarters to Bahrain and is currently building and accelerating the Kingdom's 5G mobile network ecosystem.⁵⁶⁴

KUWAIT: In 2010, the Kuwait government issued *Kuwait 2035*, or *Kuwait's National Development Plan*, formulated with the goal of transforming the country into a regional financial center by 2035 through 164 strategic development projects. In such circumstances, the BRI gave Kuwait a chance to optimize its economic structure and could align well with the country's national development strategy.⁵⁶⁵

In 2017, the Kuwait's Directorate-General for Civil Aviation (DGCA) awarded a contract with a joint venture between China's AVIC International Holding Corporation and local Al-Dar (HOT) Engineering and Construction to build a new runway and expand the existing runway at Kuwait International Airport. The team offered 149.8m KWD (Kuwaiti dinar / US \$ 492 million) for the contract and the project was expected to be completed in 2020.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶² **Mordechai Chaziza**, "China-Bahrain Relations ...", op. cit., p. 74.

⁵⁶³ **Ibid.**, p. 74.

⁵⁶⁴ **Mordechai Chaziza**, "China-Bahrain Relations ...", op. cit., p. 75.

⁵⁶⁵ "Spotlight: Belt and Road Set to Boost Development in Mideast, Africa", Xinhua Net, 24.08.2017.

⁵⁶⁶ "Capturing the opportunities from Belt ...", op. cit., p. 23; **Jennifer Aguinaldo**, "Kuwait Awards Runway Construction Package", Middle East Business Intelligence (MEED), 29.03.2017.

Kuwait plans to invest US \$ 130 billion in the construction of the northern Silk City or a new business center commonly known as Madinat al-Hareer, which will help connect Europe and Asia along the SR.⁵⁶⁷ It is expected to be completed by 2035 in northern Kuwait and will be a major new stop on the ASR trade route. The Silk City with a 1001-meter skyscraper in its master plan will be jointly developed by Kuwaiti and Chinese enterprises as part of China's BRI program. The 36 km Sheikh Jaber Causeway project connecting Silk City and Kuwait is already under construction.⁵⁶⁸ Located in Kuwait's northern coastal region of Subiya and on Bubiyan Island, which stretches for 1,140 km², the city will become an important strategic junction connecting China and Europe on the NSR.⁵⁶⁹

OMAN: Oman is located in the southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula and is the center for the distribution of goods between East and West. Muscat (the capital of Oman) is of great importance for the maritime traffic between Oman and other countries of the PG.⁵⁷⁰ In addition to Oman's strategic geographic location, its relatively flexible investment policies, FTZs and consumer markets are attracting Chinese investors, and its ties to Oman provide China with a platform to expand its influence in ME as a whole and revive ancient trade contacts under the auspices of its B&R.⁵⁷¹ It is worth noting that Oman's geographic location puts it in close proximity to other areas of central concern for China, including Djibouti, Somalia

⁵⁶⁷ **Joyce Huang**, "Qatar Crisis Poses Test for China's Belt & Road Project", Voice of America (VOA), 08.06.2017.

⁵⁶⁸ "Spotlight: China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative ...", op. cit.

⁵⁶⁹ **Wu Sike**, "The Strategic Docking between China and Middle East Countries under the 'Belt and Road' Framework", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 9, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015, p. 1.

⁵⁷⁰ **Abdullah Saleh Al Saadi**, "The Origins of Omani-China Friendship: A Historical Review", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 6, No. 2, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012, p. 85.

⁵⁷¹ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Exploring the China ...", op. cit.

and vast expanses of East Africa, Iran, Pakistan, India and the Indian Ocean. Oman's influence as a maritime and imperial power extended beyond the Arabian Peninsula and the PG to the coastal regions of East Africa and Gwadar in Baluchistan in Pakistan - all areas that would be linked by MSR.⁵⁷²

Oman's 2040 Vision aims to reduce dependence on non-renewable energy sources and efficiently develop resources such as renewable energy sources to reduce production costs and increase competitiveness in economic sectors, infrastructure development and human capacity building for Omanis.⁵⁷³ It has 3 main pillars:

- *People and society,*
- *Economy and development,*
- *Governance and institutional performance.*⁵⁷⁴

The Omani government has responded positively to China's invitation to collaborate on MSR projects as investment and trade fit into infrastructure, financing and capacity building, supporting the restructuring of Oman's economy. Oman needs Chinese investment to provide the reliable logistics and infrastructure links needed to meet the refining and marketing diversification goals set out in its *Vision 2020 strategy* to diversify its oil and gas economy. Omanis will welcome China's growing investment due to the economic woes of low oil prices as well as the serious problem of youth unemployment.⁵⁷⁵

According to the AIIB website, two of the nine projects that have received approval are located in the ME, in particular in Oman,

⁵⁷² Chris Zambelis, "China and the Quiet Kingdom ...", op. cit., pp. 12-13.

⁵⁷³ Hussein A Kazem, Miqdam Tariq Chaichan, Ali H Al-Waeli, Kamaruz-zaman Bin Sopian, "Oman Vision 2040: Renewable Energy Program", Research-gate.net, Newsletter, Vol. 1, Issue 1, September 2020, p. 1.

⁵⁷⁴ "Oman Vision 2040", Omanuna: The official E-Government Services Portal. <https://omanuna.oman.om/en/home-top-level/eparticipation/oman-vision-2040>

⁵⁷⁵ Mordechai Chaziza, "The Significant Role of Oman ...", op. cit., p. 48.

and are categorized as "sector: transport". The first of these is Huawei the Duqm Port Commercial Terminal and Operational Zone Development Project, with an estimated cost of more than US \$ 353 million and 75% funded by AIIB (US \$ 265 million). The second is the Railway System Preparation Project, which will cost US \$ 60 million, 60% of which will be financed by AIIB (US \$ 36 million).⁵⁷⁶ In 2016, AIIB provided US \$ 300 million in funding to expand the port of Duqm in Oman and launch the first rail system in the Sultanate.⁵⁷⁷ In Oman, PRC's investment can account for more than half of all FDI.⁵⁷⁸

Oman Wanfang, a consortium of six private firms primarily from the China's northwestern Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, was named by Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD) in April 2017 as the main developer of the 1,200-hectare venture in the coastal city. Duqm is a fishing village about 550 km south of the capital Muscat, an industrial city that will complement the strategic port.⁵⁷⁹ It is planned that the Sino-Omani industrial park will include about 35 projects worth about US \$ 10.7 billion.⁵⁸⁰ It includes a refinery, a methanol plant, steel pipe plants, an automobile assembly plant, an energy project, a solar energy project and a five-star hotel with a combined investment to date of over US \$ 3 billion.⁵⁸¹

Duqm SEZ is located along the Arabian Sea coastline with a length of 3,100 km, providing an access point for energy carriers of the PG bypassing the Strait of Hormuz, designed to redirect traffic

⁵⁷⁶ Filippo Fasulo, Valeria Talbot, "The MENA ...", op. cit., pp. 77-78.

⁵⁷⁷ "China's 'Belt and Road' Offers Middle East Opportunities Galore", Ameinfo.com, 19.06.2017.

⁵⁷⁸ Megan Wang, "China's One Belt, One Road Initiative", op. cit.

⁵⁷⁹ Abhishek G Bhaya, "Analysis: Could China-funded Omani Port Go against Beijing's Interest?", CGTN, 27.02.2018.

⁵⁸⁰ "In Its Promotional Campaign in China, Duqm Focuses on Attracting New Industrial Companies", SEZAD - Sultanate of Oman, 24.09.2018.

⁵⁸¹ Abhishek G Bhaya, "Analysis: Could China-funded ...", op. cit.; Afshin Molavi, "Enter the Dragon ...", op. cit.

from the PG and reconfigure the current Indian Ocean sea routes.⁵⁸² It is one of the largest in the MENA region and one of the largest in the world. It is conceived as an energy hub, as well as an industrial and commercial center. This promising industrial hub, home to a world-class seaport and shipyard, as well as a multimodal transportation system including highways, airports, seaports and high-speed railways (in the future), is centrally located to facilitate integration and ease movement not only within Duqm, but also connecting it nationally, regionally and internationally.⁵⁸³

Oman's Sohar Port and Free Zone, a deep-water seaport located in the Gulf of Oman in the northwestern part of the country, close to the Oman-UAE border, and its associated FTZ, which is considered one of the world's largest such facilities, is of particular interest to China. Beijing is also interested in Oman's expansion of road networks and a railroad that will link the port of Sohar and the FTZ with the existing transport corridors of Oman and the PG, extending to the UAE and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸⁴

3. China – GCC: Energy Cooperation

China became a net oil importer in 1993, and by the late 1990s, the importance of ME oil in China's dependence on imported oil and for its national energy security had become apparent.⁵⁸⁵ In an effort to secure gas and oil supplies, China's state-owned oil companies, with government support, are pursuing a fuel procurement strategy in all energy producing countries, with a focus on developing bilateral

⁵⁸² Jonathan Fulton, "The Gulf between ...", op. cit., p. 186.

⁵⁸³ "Duqm SEZ: Welcome to the Future of Growth", Middle East Policy Council. <https://mepc.org/duqm-sez-welcome-future-growth>

⁵⁸⁴ Chris Zambelis, "China and the Quiet Kingdom ...", op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁸⁵ Lei Wu, Youyong Wang, "Comparative Analysis of China's Energy Activities in the Middle East and Africa", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 3, No. 1, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009, p. 36.

ties with selected important countries.⁵⁸⁶ In 2014, China overtook the US as the first destination for oil exports from the ME. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) estimates that China imported about 62% of its oil reserves in 2016.⁵⁸⁷ More than half of China's oil imports reach its ports through the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea.⁵⁸⁸

In the PG, the remaining proven oil reserves account for 66% of the world, oil production - 30%, export trade - 55%, natural gas reserves - 36%.⁵⁸⁹ Saudi Arabia ranks first with 35.5 billion tons of proven oil reserves, which is 20% of the world's reserves. Iran ranks third with 17.2 billion tons, accounting for 10%. Iraq is in fourth place with 15.8 billion tons, occupying 9%. The UAE is ranked 5th with 13.4 billion tons, accounting for 8%. Kuwait is in 6th place with 13.2 billion tons, accounting for 8%. In total, the five countries have 89.8 billion tons of proven oil reserves, which is 55% of the world's reserves. Meanwhile, there is a huge potential for oil and gas resources that needs to be proven in ME. The average production ratio (R/P) in the Gulf region was 90.1 years by 2004, well above the global average of 50.9 years.⁵⁹⁰

China imports 40-50% of the oil it needs from the PG, making the region an important component of its energy security.⁵⁹¹ China's

⁵⁸⁶ Charles E. Ziegler, "The Energy Factor in China's Foreign Policy", Seeking Changes. The Economic Development in Contemporary China, Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2011, p. 216.

⁵⁸⁷ Filippo Fasulo, Valeria Talbot, "The MENA ...", op. cit., p. 83.

⁵⁸⁸ Jeremy Garlick, Radka Havlova, "China's 'Belt and Road' Economic Diplomacy in the Persian Gulf: Strategic Hedging Amidst Saudi-Iranian Regional Rivalry", Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 2020, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁹ Hu Jianyi, "Energy Development in China and Its Cooperation with the Gulf Area", A Presentation Collection for Seminar on "International Energy Security and Cooperation", June 24-25, SIIS Publication, Shanghai, China, 2004, p. 102.

⁵⁹⁰ Yang Guang, "Sino-Middle East Energy Relations and Mutual-benefiting Cooperation", A Presentation Collection for Seminar on "International Energy Security and Cooperation", June 24-25, SIIS Publication, Shanghai, China, 2004, pp. 122-123.

⁵⁹¹ Jonathan Fulton, "China-Saudi Arabia Relations ...", op. cit., p. 517.

largest source abroad is Saudi Arabia, which accounts for 16% of imports, as well as Oman (10%), UAE (4%) and Kuwait (3%). As China sought to make liquefied natural gas (LNG) (target of 10%) a larger energy source by 2020, Qatar has also become an important energy source for China.⁵⁹² About a third of the natural gas consumed is imported from abroad, of which 34% comes from Qatar alone, and 5% imported from Yemen was at risk from the civil war that erupted in 2015.⁵⁹³ PRC is already a rapidly developing chemical market and will play an increasingly important role in the future of the Arab petrochemical industry.⁵⁹⁴

SAUDI ARABIA: Saudi Arabia has consistently been the main regional source of oil, and in recent years has alternated with Russia as China's number one global oil partner.⁵⁹⁵ In November 1999, during China's President Jiang Zemin's trip to Saudi Arabia, agreements were signed under which the Saudis opened their oil and markets (except for "upstream" exploration and production) to Chinese investment, and in turn, the Saudi national oil company Saudi Aramco was allowed participate in the "downstream" sector of China's oil refining.⁵⁹⁶

Saudi Arabia's traditional share of the US oil market was a function of the country's "strategic relationship" with the US, but this relationship has weakened, especially after the 9/11 attacks and the war in Iraq. The fact that most of the terrorists were considered

Saudis made the Kingdom less attractive for US investment. Consequently, the Saudis increasingly turned to China to recycle some of the huge liquidity that was accumulating in the kingdom from record high oil revenues. As a result, since 2002, supplies of Saudi oil to the US have decreased, while supplies to China have increased.⁵⁹⁷

By 2002, Saudi Arabia had become the leading overseas oil supplier to China, while the Chinese received advanced technology from the Saudis to improve the exploitation of their existing inland oil fields, technologies from which they would normally be excluded from by US regulation relating to the export of dual-use and other strategically sensitive items.⁵⁹⁸ In 2019, China imported US \$ 40.1 billion of crude oil from Saudi Arabia.⁵⁹⁹

Energy cooperation also includes China's assistance to the Saudi nuclear program to build nuclear reactors based on the Sino-Saudi agreement of 2016: *the first is to be operational by 2022, and fifteen more by 2032*. While officially their goal is peaceful and to provide an alternative energy source to oil, they also have political implications for defending against Iran's nuclear program.⁶⁰⁰

In 2016, China Nuclear Engineering Group Corp (CNEC) signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia to develop its own fourth-generation nuclear technology in Saudi Arabia. The agreement marks an important step towards the export of high-temperature gas-cooled reactors, a domestic nuclear technology jointly developed by CNEC and Tsinghua University. The Chinese company plans to invest about

⁵⁹² Jonathan Fulton, "China in the Gulf", About Energy, 04.11.2019, p. 4.

⁵⁹³ Filippo Fasulo, Valeria Talbot, "The MENA ...", op. cit., p. 84.

⁵⁹⁴ Anwar Yusuf al-Abdullah, "Sino-Arab Energy Cooperation", A Presentation Collection for Seminar on "International Energy Security and Cooperation", June 24-25, SIIS Publication, Shanghai, China, 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁹⁵ Jonathan Fulton, "China-Saudi Arabia Relations ...", op. cit., p. 517.

⁵⁹⁶ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, "Չին-սաուդյան հարաբերությունների զարգացումը սկսած 1980-ականներից", "Մերձավոր Արևելք և Կովկաս" Միջազգային գիտաժողով նվիրված Արևելագիտության ինստիտուտի հիմնադրման 50-ամյակին, նոյեմբերի 5-6, 2008, Զեկույցների թեզեր, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2008, էջ 48:

⁵⁹⁷ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, "Չին-սաուդյան ռազմավարական համագործակցության շուրջ", Արևելասիական ուսումնասիրություններ, Հ. 1, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2009, էջ 83-84:

⁵⁹⁸ J. Peter Pham, "China's Interests in the Middle East and North Africa in the Light of Recent Developments in those Regions", Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on "China's Current and Emerging Foreign Policy Priorities", Atlantic Council, 13.04.2011, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁹⁹ Zishi Yang, Le Du, Liping Ding, "The China-Saudi ...", op. cit., p. 532.

⁶⁰⁰ Jeremy Garlick, Radka Havlova, "China's 'Belt and ...'", op. cit., p. 12.

16.3 billion yuan (US \$ 2.48 billion) in a nuclear power equipment industrial cluster and a production base for nuclear graphite, a key material used in high-temperature gas-cooled reactors.⁶⁰¹

In August 2017, China National Nuclear Corp (CNNC), China's leading state nuclear developer, signed a MoU with the Saudi Geological Survey (SGS) to facilitate further cooperation between the two parties in the exploration and appraisal of uranium and thorium resources. The state-owned Saudi Technology Development and Investment Co (Taqnia) has signed a MoU with China Nuclear Engineering Group Corp to develop desalination projects using gas-cooled nuclear reactors.⁶⁰²

In 2017, the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) selected Saudi-based ACWA Power and China's Shanghai Power to build a 700 megawatts (MW) extension to the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Complex, more than three times the capacity of the original expansion plans. Under the terms of the contract, the new plant will supply electricity at 7.3 US cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). The project will have the world's tallest solar tower, 260 meters high,⁶⁰³ and build the world's largest solar power plant at an estimated cost of US \$ 3.86 billion. It will be phased in starting in 2020 and is part of the Dubai government's commitment to meet 75% of its energy needs from renewable energy sources by 2050.⁶⁰⁴ The solar park will produce 5,000 MW by 2030 with an investment of AED 50 billion. On March 24, 2019, DEWA, ACWA

⁶⁰¹ **Lyu Chang, Hu Meidong**, "China Nuclear to Bring Nuclear Power to Saudi Arabia", China Daily, 21.01.2016.

⁶⁰² "Saudi Arabia Signs Cooperation Deals with China on Nuclear Energy", Reuters, 25.08.2017.

⁶⁰³ **LeAnne Graves, John Everington**, "Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Announces Winning Contract for World's Largest CSP Solar Project", The National, 16.09.2017.

⁶⁰⁴ **Jonathan Fulton**, "Domestic Politics as Fuel ...", op. cit., p. 11.

Power and SRF announced the financial closure of the forth phase of the 950 MW project.⁶⁰⁵

Saudi Arabia also planned to build a solar and carbon black integrated complex worth US \$ 2 billion in partnership with China's Longi and South Korea's OCI. The feasibility study of the project was planned to be completed by mid-2019.⁶⁰⁶

UAE: The UAE is an important partner in the PG, which is one of the top 15 oil importers to the Middle Kingdom and, most importantly, it has access to the ocean, unlike Qatar, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz. The UAE is ready to become China's window to the ME and a "stronghold" in the PG.⁶⁰⁷

CNPC and its subsidiary Petrochina, as well as the SINOPEC Group (China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation) and its first listed company Sinochem International, operate in the UAE's oil and gas sector. Following the signing of a strategic partnership between the Abu Dhabi State National Oil Company (ADNOC) and CNPC in January 2012, CNPC received a 40% concession in a joint venture with ADNOC to work on exploration and production projects in the UAE.⁶⁰⁸

In March 2017, Chinese contractors secured a presence in the local solar industry by joining Jinko Solar in a consortium that struck a 25-year deal to install a 1,177 MW power plant at Sweihan in Abu Dhabi.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁵ "DEWA ACWA Power, Silk Road Fund Reach Financial Closing on 950mw 4th Phase of Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park", The Emirates News Agency, 24.03.2019.

⁶⁰⁶ "Saudi Arabia Plans \$2-billion solar and carbon black complex", ETEnergy-world.com, 14.01.2019.

⁶⁰⁷ «ОАЭ готов стать окном Китая на БВ - эксперт о визите главы КНР в ОАЭ и Африку», Информационный портал Fars News - Форум Корреспондентов Ирана, Центральной Азии и России, 23.07.2018.

⁶⁰⁸ **Emma Scott**, "China's 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy Meets ...", op. cit.

⁶⁰⁹ **Michael Fahy**, "UAE on China's Silk Road Map", The National, 13.03.2017.

OMAN: By the early 1980s, China began to view Oman not only because of its strategic importance, but also as a country with oil resources. The need to secure long-term energy supplies led China to import oil from Oman in 1983 (Oman became the first Arab nation to export oil to China) and to start purchasing Omani natural gas in 1997.⁶¹⁰ About 95% of Oman's oil exports in September 2015 came to China,⁶¹¹ which is the world's largest consumer of Oman's oil, accounting for more than half of its oil exports. The Oman Oil Company (OOC) has signed a series of agreements with several Chinese enterprises, including CNPC, Sinopec and SINOPEC, to develop bilateral industrial zone projects and to build two storage facilities at Xingang Port. China has invested nearly US \$ 600 million in several sectors in Oman, including oil and petrochemicals, and has also financed training for Omani engineers and improving the efficiency of oil production.⁶¹² Since Oman is the largest non-OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil producer in the ME, China can view Oman's position outside the cartel as a valuable asset for indirectly influencing OPEC members, many of which are the main sources of oil imports to China, on a number of issues.⁶¹³

In 2017, Ningxia Zhongke Jiaye New Energy and Technology Management Co. signed a MoU with the Omani Investment Fund to build a US \$ 94 million solar panel manufacturing facility in the Dukm Free Zone. It will produce panels for power plants generating 1,000 MW of energy per year. Ningxia Zhongke will hold 51% of the shares and the remaining 49% will be held by the Omani

Investment Fund.⁶¹⁴ Oman already exports more than three-quarters of all its oil and condensate to China.⁶¹⁵

KUWAIT: Sino-Kuwaiti relations in the energy sector are developing quite actively, which until recently was hindered by the absence in Kuwait of a law allowing foreign companies to finance oil production. Nevertheless, the SINOPEC managed to reach an agreement in principle with the Kuwaiti side on participation in financing the development of oil reserves in northern Kuwait, which are estimated at 10 billion barrels. In 2004, Kuwait and China signed an agreement on cooperation in the oil and gas sector, and in December 2005 - an agreement on investments in the oil refining and petrochemical industry of Guangdong province.⁶¹⁶

BAHRAIN: China-Bahrain trade volume increased to US \$ 1.6 billion in 2019, a rise from the US \$ 1.3 billion in 2018. By 2020, about 600 Chinese companies were registered in Bahrain, and the total investment has increased from US \$ 50 million to US \$ 400 million. In 2010, the Bahrain-China Joint Investment Forum (BCJIF) was established to foster economic ties between the two countries, and 18 Chinese commercial agencies, including the BOC, opened operations in Bahrain. In October 2019, the Bahraini Al-Waha Fund invested in Beijing-based MSA Capital,* its first investment in a Chinese fund. US \$ 250 million in Chinese funds made ten investments in the Gulf region by 2020, facilitating exchanges

⁶¹⁰ Mordechai Chaziza, "The Significant Role of Oman ...", op. cit., p. 46.

⁶¹¹ Chris Zambelis, "China and the Quiet Kingdom ...", op. cit., p. 13.

⁶¹² Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, "Exploring the China ...", op. cit.

⁶¹³ Chris Zambelis, "China and the Quiet Kingdom ...", op. cit., pp. 12-13.

⁶¹⁴ "Capturing the Opportunities from Belt ...", op. cit., p. 22.

⁶¹⁵ Afshin Molavi, "Enter the Dragon ...", op. cit.

⁶¹⁶ Дейч Т.Л., «Африка в стратегии Китая», укр. соч., с. 222-223.

* MSA Capital, founded in 2014, is an independent global private equity and venture capital firm with over US \$ 1.5 billion under management. It manages the capital of the world's leading sovereign wealth funds, international asset managers, pension funds, university donations, family office funds, as well as leading Chinese new economy entrepreneurs. It actively collaborates with prominent entrepreneurs in China and other technology markets to create leading innovative companies aiming to generate significant financial returns and meaningful positive impact. The firm is headquartered in Beijing with resident teams in Shanghai, Singapore, MENA and the USA.

between Chinese and Bahraini entrepreneurs. PRC investment and construction in Bahrain reached US \$ 1.4 billion from 2013 to 2019, most of which is in utilities (US \$ 730 million) and real estate (US \$ 690 million).⁶¹⁷

QATAR: With 25 trillion cubic meters, Qatar has the third largest natural gas reserves in the world and is the world's largest exporter of LNG with an annual production of 77 million tonnes and is projected to grow to 110 million tonnes a year by 2024.⁶¹⁸ Energy is the cornerstone of bilateral cooperation. Qatar is the second largest exporter of LNG. Here, Qatar's strategic importance to China's energy security will be determined by Qatar's uninterrupted supply of natural gas to meet China's growing energy demand.⁶¹⁹ In 2020, the Chinese side signed a US \$ 3 billion contract with Qatari partners for the LNG carrier project.⁶²⁰

4. The Lion and the Dragon: Sino-Iranian Partnership

Iran initiated diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1971, only after the US broke the ice with Beijing.⁶²¹ The warming relationship culminated in a state visit to Iran by Hua Guofeng, then-China's Premier and Chairman of the CPC in 1978.⁶²² Prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Beijing welcomed the Shah's "anti-imperial and anti-colonial" policies, viewing Iran as a "defense zone" against the SU. At the same time, the Anti-Soviet position of the two count-

ries was in line with the US strategy to counter the SU in the region.⁶²³

However, Beijing expressed support for the Islamic Revolution led by Khomeini in 1979. China was taking into account Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)'s strong strategic position in the ME, as well as Tehran's growing influence throughout Asia and its ambitions for the role of leader of the Islamic world.⁶²⁴ Although the new leadership of the IRI was skeptical of Beijing because of its previous relationship with the Shah, it did not stand in the way of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in March 1979.⁶²⁵

The ties developed over four decades across three phases: *military cooperation during the 1980/88 Iran-Iraq War; energy cooperation in the 1990s as China developed quickly; and oil deals which defied sanctions.*⁶²⁶ Bilateral ties strengthened in the mid-1980s, when Beijing developed a defense and arms transfer cooperation with Tehran. Since then, relations between the two countries have expanded to a number of domains. Trade relationship between Iran and China have steadily developed over time, despite international differences over the nuclear program.⁶²⁷

⁶¹⁷ Mordechai Chaziza, "China-Bahrain Relations ...", op. cit., p. 75.

⁶¹⁸ Mohammad Shoeb, "Belt & Road Initiative to Bring Qatar ...", op. cit.

⁶¹⁹ Mordechai Chaziza, "China-Qatar Strategic ...", op. cit., p. 86.

⁶²⁰ HE Zhou Jian, "Qatar and China Natural Partners ...", op. cit.; "China and Qatar are Natural Partners in Belt and Road Co-Operation...", op. cit.

⁶²¹ Mahmoud Pargoo, "What does Iran Really Think of China?", The Diplomat, 07.11.2018.

⁶²² Bonnie Girard, "The History of China and Iran's Unlikely Partnership", The Diplomat, 16.05.2018.

⁶²³ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, "Չին-իրանական հրթիռային համագործակցության շուրջ", Մերձավոր և Միջին Արևելքի երկրներ և ժողովուրդներ, չ. 27, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2009, էջ 69-70:

⁶²⁴ Белов Е., Ушаков В., «Китай-Иран: состояние и перспективы (1978-1988гг.)», Восток и современность, Научно-информационный Бюллетень, 4(50), М., 1988, с. 37-38.

⁶²⁵ Bates Gill, "Chinese Arms Exports to Iran", Middle East Reviv of International Affaires, Meria Journal, Vol. 2, May 1998, p. 4.

In July 1979, the CCCPC and the Chairman of the State Council, Hua Gofen, expressed their support for the Islamic Revolution led by Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini through the Pakistani Embassy in Tehran. They sent a verbal apology for a visit to Iran in August 1978.

⁶²⁶ Niranjan Jose, "Iran's Increasing Reliance on China", Middle East Monitor, 24.08.2020.

⁶²⁷ Hamzah Rifaat, "China, Iran, and 'One Belt, One Road'", The Diplomat, 25.10.2016; For more see' Հարությունյան Աղավնի, «ՉԺՀ-Իրան միջուկային

Iran is the third largest economy in the MENA region after Turkey and Saudi Arabia, with an estimated GDP of over US \$ 400 billion.⁶²⁸ In 2019, China became Iran's largest trading partner, with trade between the two countries estimated at US \$ 20 billion.⁶²⁹ Bilateral trade reflects China's purchases of oil, petrochemicals and minerals, gas condensate and industrial goods.⁶³⁰ Apart from trade, China is the leading investor in the Iranian market. About 100 large Chinese companies are investing in key sectors of Iran's economy, especially energy and transport.⁶³¹

Currently, Iran, which by virtue of its geographical position is one of the main players of ME in the new "Great Game" of geostrategic-political confrontation, has become a possible factor in China's geopolitical ambitions in CA and the ME. Moreover, as a relatively stable security partner in the troubled ME region, Tehran could become one of the main links between CA, the ME and Europe under the BRI.⁶³² Relations between Beijing and Tehran, which date back to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's "Pivot to the East policy", have blossomed under President Xi Jinping, who is pushing China's ambitious initiative.⁶³³

Iran's Significance in the B&R. BRI was warmly welcomed from the outset by Tehran. As one of the founders of AIIB, the IRI

համագործակցության շուրջ», Մերձավոր Արևելք: Պատմություն, քաղաքականություն, մշակույթ, Հ. 6, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երան, 2009, էջ 115-123:

⁶²⁸ **Naser Al-Tamimi**, "Why Iran is not the Next China?", Al Arabiya English, 08.10.2016.

⁶²⁹ **Omid Shokri Kalehsar**, "China and Iran's Strategic Partnership: A Zero-Sum Game?", The New Arab, 09.07.2020.

⁶³⁰ **I-wei Jennifer Chang**, "The Middle East in China's Silk Road Visions: Business as Usual?", The Middle East Institute, 14.04.2015.

Iran ranks second in the world in terms of natural gas reserves (after Russia), and forth in proven reserves of crude oil (after Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Canada).

⁶³¹ **Alex Vatanka**, "China's Great Game in Iran", Foreign Policy, 05.09.2019.

⁶³² "Can China's New Silk Road Bring Economic Benefits ...", op. cit.

⁶³³ **Niranjan Jose**, "Iran's Increasing Reliance on China", op. cit.

joined the bank on April 7, 2014 as the 34th member.⁶³⁴ After talks on 23 January 2016, in Tehran with President Xi Jinping, Iran and China agreed to expand bilateral relations and increase trade to US \$ 600 billion over the next 10 years and agreed on forming strategic relations [as] reflected in a 25-year comprehensive document.⁶³⁵ Relying on their respective strengths and advantages as well as the opportunities provided through the signing of documents such as the "MoU on Jointly Promoting the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" and "MoU on Reinforcement of Industrial and Mineral Capacities and Investment".⁶³⁶ Thus, Iran expressed its readiness to participate in both parts of China's NSR project - *the EBSR and the MSR trade routes* - which could serve Iran's political, geostrategic, security and economic interests at a regional level.⁶³⁷ 17 agreements were signed to expand cooperation and mutual investments in various areas including communications, railway, ports, energy, industry, commerce and services, finance, telecommunications.⁶³⁸

Following the meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Xi Jinping announced that the Chinese authorities support Iran's application for full membership in the SCO after the lifting of the UN sanctions that impeded it. The parties agreed to strengthen cooperation in the exchange of intelligence information and the joint fight against regional threats, terrorism and extremism.⁶³⁹ According to the ideologues of Iran, the inclusion of leading Islamic countries

⁶³⁴ "Iran Buys Shares of AIIB Multinational Bank", Mehr News, 27.10.2015.

⁶³⁵ "Iran, China Agree to \$600 billion Trade Deal After Sanctions Lifted", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 23.01.2016.

⁶³⁶ "Full Text of Joint Statement on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between I.R. Iran, P.R. China", Official website of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 23.01.2016.

⁶³⁷ **Omid Shokri Kalehsar**, "China and Iran's Strategic ...", op. cit.

⁶³⁸ **Сажин В.**, «Иран – Китай: намечается стратегический союз?», Международная жизнь, 27.07.2020.

⁶³⁹ «Иран и Китай вышли на всеобъемлющее стратегическое партнерство», Вестник Кавказа, 23.01.2016.

(Iran, as well as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, etc.) in the SCO will allow uniting the efforts of five non-Western civilizations - Russian, Chinese, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist in search of a new world on the basis of "fair globalization". At the same time, Iran sharply distinguishes itself both from the West (US, EU) and from the East (Russia, India, China), offering the whole world an Islamic identity based on the Iranian-Islamic (Shiite) civilization.⁶⁴⁰ It is no coincidence that Chinese and Central Asian leaders view Iran as a security partner because Iran, with its Shiite majority population, poses no threat in terms of exporting radical Islam, and its Islamist ideas have limited appeal in Central Asian states with a Sunni majority or among the Muslim minority of China, which historically fears the role of Sunni-majority states.⁶⁴¹

It is worth noting that at the SCO summit in Ufa in July 2015, the heads of the SCO member states and the organization's observers, among whom were Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Hassan Rouhani, highlighted the prospects of the initiative to form a single SCO transport system and discussed at an expanded meeting plans to link the EEU and EBSR.⁶⁴² The expansion of the EEU is one of the most important ways to develop integration in the territory of the former SU with the prospect of creating various FTZ of the EEU with countries that are not part of it. And an important role in this process can be played by the current relations between the EAEU and the countries of the ME, primarily with Iran, a temporary agreement on a FTZ with which came into force in October 27, 2019.⁶⁴³ The agreement provides for limited product coverage, but includes almost

⁶⁴⁰ Юртаев В.И., «Иран: интеграция и безопасность в Центральной Евразии», серия Международные отношения, № 4, Вестник РУДН, М., 2008, с. 18.

⁶⁴¹ Alex Vatanka, "China Courts Iran", Foreign Affairs, 01.11.2017.

⁶⁴² Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative ...", op. cit., p. 107; Alvin Cheng-Hin Lim, "2015 BRICS-SCO Summits in Ufa: New Developments in Multilateralism", Eurasia Review, 20.07.2015.

⁶⁴³ Абдраимов А., «Зона свободной торговли ЕАЭС и Ирана – перспективное сотрудничество для всех», Ритм Евразии, 27.02.2020.

all major tradable products, which account for 55% of total EAEU exports.⁶⁴⁴ The EEU has reduced import duties for Iran on more than 500 items.⁶⁴⁵

In August 2019, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif visited his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and presented a roadmap to the *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement between Iran and China*, signed in 2016 year.⁶⁴⁶ It was then that secret provisions were added to the document, which include a number of privileges for China.⁶⁴⁷

However, the agreement was stalled by Trump's destruction of the nuclear deal and a campaign of colossal pressure on China, which was forced to slow down the momentum of the Iranian - Chinese cooperation, which was gaining strength and again put tanker oil

⁶⁴⁴ «ЕАЭС и Иран переходят на преференциальные условия торговли», Евразийская экономическая комиссия, 28.10.2019.

These are agricultural and industrial product groups. Preferential import coverage is 49% of Iran's total supplies to the EEU. The list of goods for which exporters of the EEU countries will receive preferences includes meat and fat and oil products, certain types of confectionery and chocolate, as well as metals, cosmetics, and certain types of electronic and mechanical equipment. The Iranian side will be provided with tariff preferences on a detailed list of foodstuffs, primarily vegetables, fruits, dried fruits, as well as building materials, dishes, carpets, and some non-ferrous metal products.

⁶⁴⁵ Абдраимов А., «Зона свободной торговли ЕАЭС ...», укз. соч.

On average, tariffs for Iranian products were reduced by 64%. For example, for fruits - by 50-100%, vegetables - by 25-50%, and for nuts they were completely zero. In turn, Tehran pledged to reduce duties on 864 goods. Now the EAEU countries will be able to increase supplies to Iran of medicines, chemical products and the steel industry, paper, meat and fat and oil products, equipment, cars, etc. According to experts, the total export volumes of the Union countries may increase by 73%.

⁶⁴⁶ «Иран подталкивает Китай к нефтегазовой «бомбе» против США», EADaily, 14.07.2020.

In September 2015, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in Moscow signed a *Joint Statement on the Interconnection of the EEU and the EBSR*. A month later, a meeting of the Russian-Chinese working group took place, where the main areas of cooperation were determined, including large infrastructure projects and mutual investments.

⁶⁴⁷ Сажин В., «Иран – Китай: намечается ...», укз. соч.

deals into the shadows.⁶⁴⁸ Iran struck a nuclear deal with the so-called *P5+1* in 2015, which involves the waiving of sanctions in return for curbing nuclear enrichment activities.⁶⁴⁹

Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement. The Sino-Iranian talks on comprehensive strategic partnership agreement resulted in an 18 - page document called the “*Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*”, approved by the administration of President Hassan Rouhani in June 2020. However, the partnership document was non-binding and looked more like a statement of intent.⁶⁵⁰ Although the parties were in no hurry to disclose all the details of the signed document, part of which is classified, the Iranian government, which approved the Iranian-Chinese agreement as a project, announced the possibility of signing the document only after it was signed by the governments of both countries.⁶⁵¹

An agreement between Beijing and Tehran, covering trade, energy, infrastructure, telecommunications and even military cooperation,⁶⁵² suggests China will invest a total of US \$ 400 billion in Iran's banking, transport and development sectors.⁶⁵³ Iran will offer special visa conditions for Chinese entrepreneurs in Iran and for Iranian entrepreneurs in China.⁶⁵⁴ Chinese firms also continue to exploit the seabed resources of the southern coast of Iran.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁴⁸ Юзык Ю., «Союз Льва и Дракона», ТВ-Новости, 23.07.2020.

⁶⁴⁹ Hamzah Rifaat, “China, Iran, and ‘One Belt, One Road’”, op. cit.

⁶⁵⁰ Shahram Akbarzadeh, Mahmoud Pargoo, “Iran-China Deal Raises More Questions Than Answers”, Middle East Institute, 27.07.2020.

⁶⁵¹ Сажин В., «Иран – Китай: намечается ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁵² Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai, “China Plays the Iran Card”, Project Syndicate, 29.07.2020.

⁶⁵³ Abdul Basit, “What the New Iran-China Partnership Means for the Region”, Al Jazeera, 06.08.2020.

⁶⁵⁴ Субботин Игорь, «Китай обвиняют в желании колонизировать Иран», Независимая газета, 09.07.2020.

⁶⁵⁵ “Explainer: What is the ‘Iran-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership?’” The New Arab, 09.07.2020.

China and Iran will also seek cooperation on renewable sources and civil nuclear power.⁶⁵⁶ China National Nuclear Corporation is upgrading Iran's Arak IR-40 heavy water reactor to meet non-proliferation requirements as part of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. The Chinese government has extended a US \$ 10 billion loan to Chinese companies to build dams, power generators, and other infrastructures in Iran.⁶⁵⁷

China’s “Information Silk Road”. The document provides for cooperation in developing telecommunication infrastructure (DSR, 5G), basic services (search engines, email, and messaging applications), communication equipment (satellite navigation, switches, servers, and data storage), and consumer products (mobile phones, tablets and laptops). Providing Iran with know-how and equipment will allow it to completely separate from the global Internet and form a national information network.⁶⁵⁸ The Chinese global BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) will be developed in Iran⁶⁵⁹ and, accordingly, through Iran entering the ME. Iran Electronics Industries (IEI) was to create a space data collection center. With Chinese search engines, postal services, messaging apps and social media, Iran will be able to block the external Internet for a long time without jeopardizing day-to-day online activities.⁶⁶⁰

Conceptually, BeiDou is located within China’s “*Information Silk Road*”, a subset of its land and maritime silk routes under the BRI. China is now able to extend influence in a multidomain environment (land, sea and space) via its BeiDou space system, which

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Alex Vatanka, “China’s Great Game in Iran”, op. cit.

⁶⁵⁸ Shahram Akbarzadeh, Mahmoud Pargoo, “Iran-China ...”, op. cit.

⁶⁵⁹ Пустовойтова Е., «Обретёт ли Китай военную базу в Персидском заливе?», Фонд стратегической культуры, 14.08.2020.

⁶⁶⁰ Ishveena Singh, “China’s BeiDou Gives Iran What US would not”, Geospatial World, 19.10.2015.

In 2015, Iran signed a MoU with China to use BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) technology to establish BeiDou ground stations in Iran.

provides navigation to aircraft, submarines, missiles, as well as commercial services dependent on such navigation.⁶⁶¹ The American war with Huawei, sanctions and even the arrest at the end of 2018 of Huawei's commercial director Meng Wangzhou for trying to disguise Chinese investments in Iran did not bring real success. Despite everything, 5G networks were rolled out and launched in Iran in February 2020.⁶⁶² Iran also instructs China to develop the fifth generation of mobile phones (5G) networks in Iran, built by Huawei, which is being ousted from the US.⁶⁶³

China's Investment in the Iranian Fuel and Energy Complex. The main pillar of the updated agreement will be China's investment in the Iranian fuel and energy complex in the amount of US \$ 280 billion over the next five years.⁶⁶⁴ Under the agreement, Beijing expects to receive regular supplies of Iranian oil at significant discounts over the next 25 years.⁶⁶⁵ Iran needs to increase oil production to 8.5 million barrels per day, which will go to the PRC at favorable tariffs for China and Iran will become the largest oil supplier to the PRC. Such a deal is especially important for Iran's energy sector, which is in dire need of significant investment to rebuild an aging oil industry that requires more than US \$ 150 billion to modernize wells, refineries and other infrastructure.⁶⁶⁶ Iran has set a goal of increasing oil production from 3.8 million barrels per day to 5 million by 2020, but most estimates indicated that Iran will not be able to produce more than 4.2 by the end of this decade, as the

⁶⁶¹ **Namrata Goswami**, "The Economic and Military Impact of China's BeiDou Navigation System", *The Diplomat*, 01.07.2020.

⁶⁶² **Юзик Ю.**, «Союз Льва и Дракона», укз. соч.

⁶⁶³ "Explainer: 'What is the 'Iran-China Comprehensive ...'", op. cit.

⁶⁶⁴ «Иран подталкивает Китай к нефтегазовой ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁶⁵ **Abdul Basit**, "What the New Iran-China Partnership ...", op. cit.

⁶⁶⁶ **Седов Д.**, «Пакт между КНР и Ираном изменит ситуацию в Евразии», Фонд стратегической культуры, 01.08.2020.

country needs US \$ 200 billion in foreign investment over the same period.⁶⁶⁷

China will be able to purchase any oil and gas products (oil, natural gas and petroleum products) with a minimum guaranteed discount of 12% off the 6-month average price for comparable benchmark products + up to 8% of this figure as compensation for risks. Beijing will also be given the right to defer payment of up to 2 years, and the ability to pay for goods in soft currency obtained as a result of doing business in Africa and the countries of the former SU, which, if skillfully converted, could give a discount of up to 12%. The total discount on oil and petrochemicals can be up to 32%.⁶⁶⁸

Worth to note, that China has funded a number of petrochemical projects in Iran, reportedly providing US \$ 13 billion for Iran's Sabalan, Lordegan, Bushehr, and Masjed Soleyman petrochemical projects. In the first six months of 2014, Iranian projects received the second largest batch of Chinese investments, totaling US \$ 17.2 billion, and US \$ 11.6 billion was invested in the Iranian energy sector.⁶⁶⁹

In January 2016, during Xi Jinping's visit to Iran, the Chinese state-owned CNPC signed a US \$ 4.8 billion natural gas development project, 30% of which it will control along with two other partners.⁶⁷⁰ At the end of December 2018, the SINOPEC announced its readiness to invest US \$ 3 billion in the development of an Iranian oil field. The deal was part of an existing contract for the exploitation of the Yadavaran field (the Yadavaran contract was signed back in 2007), located in southwestern Iran near the Iraqi border, which has reserves of 5.7 bln barrels of oil. Washington allowed Beijing to buy

⁶⁶⁷ **Naser Al-Tamimi**, "Why Iran is not the Next China?", op. cit.

⁶⁶⁸ «Подробности секретного 25-летнего стратегического партнерства между Китаем и Ираном вряд ли обрадуют власти США», *Neftgaz.Ru*, 07.07.2020.

⁶⁶⁹ **I-wei Jennifer Chang**, "The Middle East in China's Silk ...", op. cit.

⁶⁷⁰ **Deborah Lehr**, "The Middle East is the Hub for China's Modern Silk Road", *Middle East Institute*, 15.08.2017.

360,000 barrels of Iranian oil daily. Earlier, CNPC received the consent of the White House to invest in the North Azadegan and Masjid-i-Suleiman oil fields in exchange for freezing investments in Iran's largest gas field, South Pars (which is the world's largest and shared with Qatar): CNPC replaced Total with South Pars after the French company left Iran due to the restoration of US sanctions. CNPC put into operation the first phase of North Azadegan with production of 75,000 barrels per day in November 2016.⁶⁷¹ In August 2019, China "reengaged" in the development of the Jask oil terminal, which sits east of the Strait of Hormuz.⁶⁷²

Thus, Iran will become one of the main sources of energy supplies for China. However, experts believe that such a project contradicts the current policy of official Beijing, but with increasing American pressure it becomes more and more attractive for the Chinese authorities.⁶⁷³ The inclusion of such a strategically and geographically significant country like Iran fits into the logic of gaining wider access to the oil-rich ME, where six states in the region are members of OPEC and have historically been allied with the US because of their political, economic and strategic interests. For China, the need to offset US economic interests in the PG requires more states to participate in NSR, with Iran as an important stakeholder given its geographic proximity to the region and its uneasy relationship with the US.⁶⁷⁴ It is believed that NSR could facilitate international access to Iran's gas, oil and mineral deposits.⁶⁷⁵

Military Component of 2020 Deal. One of a feature of the Sino-Iranian military and technical cooperation is the fact that

Beijing not only supplies ready-made weapons, but transfers a number of technologies to Iran, assists in the creation of its military-industrial complex capable of producing tactical and operational-tactical missiles, artillery systems, warships and boats.⁶⁷⁶ The Iranian leadership views China as one of the leading partners in military and military-technical cooperation aimed at strengthening Iran's conventional weapons and military equipment, in particular in the field of cyber weapons. After the lifting of sanctions against Iran in 2016 (in accordance with the JCPOA), it purchased 150 Chengdu J-10 fighters from China for US \$ 1 billion.⁶⁷⁷

The new agreement includes as well China's plans to develop several ports in Iran, which will provide the Chinese side with the island of Kish or the strategically important port of Bandar-e-Jask for a long-term lease,⁶⁷⁸ and will give the green light for the deployment of 5,000 Chinese PLA servicemen on Iranian territory (some of them in the PG) with the possibility of increasing the number of personnel to guard and ensure the safety of the transit of oil, gas and petrochemical products to China. Renting a port opens up wide opportunities for China to project its naval power in the PG.⁶⁷⁹ A separate article provides for the joint creation of the latest weapons and plans to help Iran in the creation of ballistic missiles.⁶⁸⁰

However, another element has now been added to this deal that could change the geopolitical balance in the ME. In early July 2020, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei agreed to expand the existing deal to include new military elements proposed by senior officials in the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) and intelligence agen-

⁶⁷¹ «Синорес вкладывает \$3 млрд в развитие нефтяного месторождения Ирана», ИА Реалист, 19.01.2019.

⁶⁷² Alex Vatanka, "China's Great Game in Iran", op. cit.

⁶⁷³ «Иран подталкивает Китай к нефтегазовой ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁷⁴ Hamzah Rifaat, "China, Iran, and 'One Belt, One Road'", op. cit.

⁶⁷⁵ Ed Blanche, "China's New Silk Road Includes Both Risk ...", op. cit.

⁶⁷⁶ Задонский С.М., «Современное состояние ирано-китайских отношений», Ближний Восток и современность: Сборник статей, Ин-т изучения Израиля и Ближнего Востока; Отв. ред. М.Р. Арунова, А.О. Филоник, М., 2003, с. 246.

⁶⁷⁷ Сажин В., «Иран – Китай: намечается ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁷⁸ Субботин Игорь, «Китай обвиняют в желании ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁷⁹ Сажин В., «Иран – Китай: намечается ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁸⁰ Седов Д., «Пакт между КНР и Ираном изменит ...», укз. соч.

cies.⁶⁸¹ Iranian sources have revealed some of the top-secret military elements of the agreement, which cover "*full air and naval cooperation between Iran and China*", with Russia playing a key role.⁶⁸² Following a planned Iranian-Sino-Russian meeting in August 2020, the Chinese and Russian Air Forces: bombers, fighters and transport aircraft will have unlimited access to Iranian airbases, and specialized dual-use facilities* recently built by Chinese companies near existing airports in Chabahar, Bandar-e-Bushehr and Bandar Abbas will be able to be used by Chinese and Russian ships from November 9, 2020. The electronic component will include all 3 key areas of Electronic Warfare (EW): *electronic support* (including early warning about the use of enemy weapons), *electronic attack* (including jamming systems) and *electronic protection* (including jamming the enemy). The goal of electronic warfare is to neutralize NATO C4ISR systems (command, control, communications, computers, surveillance and reconnaissance). The S-400 complexes will be involved to counter attacks by the US and Israel.⁶⁸³ It is supposed to link the Iranian air defense with the 19th brigade of the Russian Air Force (Rassvet) near Rostov-on-Don, which is already connected with the Chinese air defense. One of the Russian air jamming systems will be based in Chabahar and will be able to completely disable the UAE and Saudi Arabia's air defenses, to the extent that they only have about 2 minutes of warning of a missile or unmanned attack.⁶⁸⁴

Chinese Development of Iranian Transportation Infrastructure. Under the agreement of 2020, in the next five years, it is

⁶⁸¹ Simon Watkins, "China Inks Military Deal with Iran under Secretive 25-Year Plan", OilPrice.com, 06.07.2020.

⁶⁸² "Iranian Foster 25-Year Deal with China", Algora.com, 18.07.2020.

* They will deploy squadrons of bombers - Chinese-modified versions of Russian Tu-22M3 long-range bombers with a range of 6,800 km (2,410 km when fully loaded). Squadrons of supersonic fighters-medium-range bombers Su-34 and Sukhoi-57 will be deployed.

⁶⁸³ «Подробности секретного 25-летнего ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁸⁴ Simon Watkins, "China Inks Military Deal with Iran ...", op. cit.

planned to invest another US \$ 120 billion already in the transport and industrial infrastructure of Iran.⁶⁸⁵ Almost 100 joint Sino-Iranian projects will be included in the B&R megaproject. Airports, high-speed railways, seaports, bridges, ports, roads and other infrastructure facilities will be built here. The PRC will develop FTZ in Maku in northern Iran, in Abadan (where the Shatt al-Arab flows into the PG) and on the Qeshm island in the Gulf itself.⁶⁸⁶ The development of the **South-North Corridor** (Chabahar-CA), the **South-West Corridor** (Chabahar and Bandar Abbas-Turkey and Azerbaijan) and the **Pakistan-Iran-Iraq-Syria** "*pilgrimage railway*" are some notable initiatives.⁶⁸⁷

Iran's geographic location makes it the only viable land bridge from the PG to the landlocked states of CA (a market with a population of about 65 million) and the three Caucasus states (Armenia,⁶⁸⁸ Azerbaijan and Georgia), where China seeks to become a significant economic and political force. At the moment, the CA have three outlets to world markets: **East via China**, **South via Iran**, and **West via Russia**. The successful implementation of B&R gives China *de facto* control over two of the three outlets.⁶⁸⁹

Worth to note that the only country among the EEU that has a land border with Iran, Armenia can also use historically good relations with Tehran to become a guide to the Eurasian space through

⁶⁸⁵ «Иран подталкивает Китай к нефтегазовой ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁸⁶ Седов Д., «Пакт между КНР и Ираном изменит ...», укз. соч.

⁶⁸⁷ Shahram Akbarzadeh, Mahmoud Pargoo, "Iran-China ...", op. cit.

⁶⁸⁸ For more see Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Sino-Armenian Relationships and Armenia's Participation in the Chinese Initiative of Economic Belt of Silk Road", Collection of Research Papers of the Visiting Program for Young Sinologists, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), Shanghai, 2017, pp. 1-61; Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinas Belt and Road Initiative from Armenian Perspective", China Studies Quarterly, Issue No. 7, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), Shanghai, 2017, pp. 15-28.

⁶⁸⁹ Alex Vatanka, "China Courts Iran", op. cit.

the South Caucasus.⁶⁹⁰ The construction of the **Southern Armenia-Iran Railway Corridor**, as the key missing link in the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**,* will significantly increase trade with Iran and Georgia by slashing transport cost and time.⁶⁹¹ The **Southern Armenia-Iran Railway** will create the shortest transportation route from the ports of the Black Sea to the ports of the PG⁶⁹² and establish a major commodities transit corridor between Europe and the PG region with conservative long-term traffic volume forecasts of 18.3 million tons per annum.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹⁰ “Armenian PM: We are Ready to Implement China’s Silk Road Economic Belt Project”, NEWS.am, 20.05.2016.

The establishment of a FTZ between the EEU and Iran, and the opening of the Meghri FTZ on the Armenian-Iranian border may contribute to the deepening of cooperation between Yerevan and Beijing. It is expected that the synergy between the Chinese EBSR and the Russian EEU will provide China and Armenia (EEU member country) with a new platform for expanding cooperation, and contribute to deepening cooperation between the EBSR and the EEU and include its main road and rail projects on the BRI.

* **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**. http://www.instc-org.ir/Pages/Home_Page.aspx

The INSTC is the ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and CA. It is not a new concept, but the current INSTC project was initiated by Russia, India and Iran in September 2000 in St. Petersburg. The agreement was signed on 16th May 2002. INSTC, a 7,200 km (4,473 mi) freight route linking Mumbai to Moscow. INSTC envisions a network that will connect the ports and railway centers of the Indian Ocean and the PG to the Caspian Sea, and then via the Russia to St. Petersburg and northern Europe. For years, India has enthusiastically pushed for a project that aims to increase connectivity in Eurasia, in part because it believed it could help keep Iran outside the Chinese BRI and dampen any attempts at cooperation between Tehran and its main regional rival, Islamabad. The INSTC, compared with the Suez Canal, reduces the time required to transport goods from Mumbai to Moscow by 20 days. The estimated capacity of this route for the exchange of goods is from 20 to 30 million tons per year.

⁶⁹¹ **Almasian M.**, “The Southern Armenia Railway – Transportation Infrastructure in Armenia: Part IIP”, Iron Ladle Media, 08.05.2014.

⁶⁹² “Chinese Companies Show Interest in Armenia - Iran Railway Link- Minister”, Pakistan Defence, 13.08.2015.

⁶⁹³ “Russian Official Against Iran-Armenia Rail Link”, «Ազատ Եվրոպա/ Ազատություն» ռադիոկայան, 22.05.2014.

The location of the deep-water port of Chabahar on the Indian Ocean in the direction of INSTC,* thus, transit relations between Russia, Eastern Europe, CA and the Caucasus, on the one hand, and Southeast Asia, the Far East, the countries of Oceania and the PG on the other hand, are seen as significant advantages for Iran's participation in the Chinese BRI.⁶⁹⁴

China's first practical move towards consolidating connectivity with the ME was when the first freight train to travel the Ancient Silk Road (ASR) arrived in Tehran carrying goods from China and making the sea voyage of the cargo ships through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in just 14 days, compared with around 45 days by sea between China's Shanghai port to Iran's Bandar Abbas port city.⁶⁹⁵ The train arrived in Tehran on February 16, 2016, leaving Yiwu city in eastern China's Zhejiang province on January 28, covering a distance of 10,399 km.⁶⁹⁶ The 575-mile railway line between the Kazakhstan, Iran and Turkmenistan (part of INSTC planned to connect the markets of Russia, China, countries of CA and the ME),⁶⁹⁷ was opened back in December 2014.⁶⁹⁸ The most important core of this section was the Gorgan - Inche - Burun - Etrek - Bereket line, the eastern branch of INSTC, facilitating cooperation between

* Chabahar plays a key role in the INSTC.

⁶⁹⁴ «Значение Ирана в китайском проекте 'Шелкового пути' и транзитных коридорах в регионе», Pars Today, 19.03.2019.

⁶⁹⁵ “Can China's New Silk Road Bring Economic Benefits ...”, op. cit.

⁶⁹⁶ “First Train from China to Iran Stimulates Silk Road Revival”, Xinhua. China Daily, 16.02.2016; **Нурмурадов А.**, «Запущен первый тестовый поезд Кумай-Казakhstan-Туркменистан-Иран», zakon.kz, 11.02.2016; **Bai Lianlei**, “Azerbaijan in the Silk Road ...”, узн. соч.; “China's 'Belt and Road' Offers Middle East Opportunities Galore”, op. cit.

⁶⁹⁷ «Что ждет Центральную Азию в 2015 году: 10 важнейших событий», Власть, 31.01.2015.

⁶⁹⁸ **Alex Vatanka**, “China Courts Iran”, op. cit.

countries on the eastern and western shores of the Caspian Sea through northern Iran.⁶⁹⁹

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran railway. China's railway authority has put forward another ambitious plan to build a SR high-speed railway, which would connect northwest China to West Asia via CA. The route would lead from China's Urumqi and Yining to Almaty (Kazakhstan), followed by Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Tashkent and Samarkand (Uzbekistan) and Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) before finally joining the train network in West Asia through Tehran.⁷⁰⁰

Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and China railroad project. Agreement to conduct feasibility studies on a railroad project that would connect Iran to Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and China was signed by all involved sides in October 2010. The railroad is designed to reduce the distance for commercial transport between the East (from China to Iran) and the West (toward Western Europe), further shorten the existing route that connects China to the countries of West Asia and the ME in order to take oil products from the PG and to help connect Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan to the free waters of the PG through the Iranian soil.⁷⁰¹ In July 2012, these countries reaffirmed the importance to construct a railway - then called the North-South Corridor.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁹ «Иран, стратегический мост на 'Шелковом пути' между Западом и востоком», Гостелерадио ИРИ, 26.12.2014.

⁷⁰⁰ "China Proposes High-Speed Rail Line Connecting Western China to Iran", Shanghaiist, 21.11.2015.

For years, the 1.52-meter track standard adopted in CA has been a headache for logistics managers because it is not based on the 1.435-meter standard track adopted in China and most other parts of the world. Changing gauges at the border takes days for cargo and significantly cuts railway transport's competitiveness against shipping by sea.

⁷⁰¹ Farzad Ramezani Bonesh, "Various Benefits of Rail Route Connecting Iran to Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and China", Eurasia Review, 26.01.2016.

⁷⁰² "Tajikistan Looking forward to North Corridor Operation", European Dialogue, 19.06.2015.

China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line. Another railway project was the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, which is designed to connect Kashgar (Xinjiang) with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz branch will connect via Tajikistan with Iran and the PG countries.⁷⁰³ In 2012, the Chinese construction corporation CRBC* agreed to conduct a feasibility study for a railway line project running from Kashgar (Xinjiang) through Torugart and Kara-Suu (Kyrgyzstan) to Andijan (Uzbekistan), then through Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey to Europe.⁷⁰⁴

Southern corridor between Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia. China actively lobbied for the construction of a southern corridor in the EU, with the participation of Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Georgia, which was to be joined by the German railway operator Deutsche Bahn. The logistics itself was as follows: from Constanta (Romania) the freight train was to be delivered by sea to the Georgian port, and from there by rail to the Astara station

The length of the railway linking China's Kashgar city with Afghanistan's Herat city would be 1,972 km. The length of the Tajik section of this railway, running from the Nizhny Panj to the border with Kyrgyzstan was planned to be 296 km. Iran expressed its readiness to finance the Kyrgyz section of the railway.

⁷⁰³ Stephen Frederick Starr, Svante E. Cornell, Nicklas Norling, "The EU, Central Asia, and the Development of Continental Transport and Trade", Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program – A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, Institute for Security and Development Policy, December 2015, p. 38; Ким Е., «Таджикистан – Китай – одна семья»: Китай и Средняя Азия", ИА REGNUM, 09.03.2016.

* China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) is a subsidiary of China Communications Construction Company (CCCC).

⁷⁰⁴ Roman Muzalevsky, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Scheme: Fears, Hopes and Prospects", Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 9, Issue 102, The Jamestown Foundation, 30.05.2012; Harutyunyan Aghavni, "China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative and its Impact in Central Asia", The Countries and Peoples of the Near and Middle East, Vol. 32, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2019, pp. 299-300.

The Kyrgyzstan section of the line would cover 268.4 km; China's section would span 165 km. The cargo transit capacity of the line was expected to be approximately 15,000 tons.

(Azerbaijan), and then by trucks they were to be delivered to the Iranian Gazvin station, and from there by rail to Tehran.⁷⁰⁵

After the Iran's nuclear deal, and following the lifting of international sanctions, China allocated two credit facilities worth US \$ 4.2 billion to finance high-speed rail lines and connect Iran's major cities, including Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan.⁷⁰⁶

Iran is attracting a US \$ 2.4 billion Chinese credit line to build the Tehran-Isfahan high-speed railway. US \$ 1.8 billion for the project has been provided by the Eximbank of China, and the work will be carried out by the China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC),* with which Iran signed a contract to build the first high-speed line in Iran in 2015 and agreed to provide a loan in July 2017. Trains will run on a 375-km line at speeds ranging from 300-350 km/h. Work on a circuit that will connect the Iranian capital with the international airports of Imam Khomeini, Qom and Isfahan is due to be completed in 2021.⁷⁰⁷

In August 2019, Iran and China signed a contract to implement a project to electrify the 900-km main railroad linking Tehran with the northeastern city of Mashhad. There are plans to build a Tehran-Qum-Isfahan high-speed train line and expand this modernized network northwestward through Tabriz, which should become a powerful hub for a number of key oil and gas and petrochemical facilities, as well as a starting point for the Tabriz-Ankara gas

⁷⁰⁵ Цатурян Саркис, «Иран, Азербайджан и Грузия открывают Китаю путь на Чёрное море», ИА REGNUM, 26.10.2016.

⁷⁰⁶ Omid Shokri Kalehsar, "China and Iran's Strategic ...", op. cit.; Megan Wang, "China's One Belt, One Road initiative", op. cit.

* CREC is a Chinese construction company listed in Shanghai and Hong Kong stock exchanges. The major shareholder of the company is the state-owned CREC. By revenue, CREC was the largest construction company in the world in the 2015 Engineering News-Record "Top 225 Global Contractors".

⁷⁰⁷ "Iran to Draw \$2.4bn Chinese Credit Line for Tehran-Isfahan High-Speed Railway", Global Construction Review (GCR), 10.06.2019; "China Reopens \$1.9b L/C for Tehran-Qom-Isfahan Railroad Project", Financial Tribune Daily and Contributors, 18.12.2019.

trunkline (MGP). Tabriz should become the most important base on Iranian territory for the 2,300-km NSR which will run from Urumqi to Tehran through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and then through Turkey to Europe.⁷⁰⁸

The India-China Competition Over the Port of Chabahar. A significant role in the rapprochement of the countries of Central Eurasia with Iran, in particular with India and Iran, was played by the latter's consistent striving to become one of the regional centers of energy trade (oil and gas) and transport and energy integration (gas pipeline, INSTC).⁷⁰⁹ Iran, together with India and Russia, is pushing forward the sea and rail corridor, which is based on the agreement concluded with Russia and India to create the INSTC. It would link Jawaharlal Nehru Port, India's largest container port east of Mumbai, through the Iranian deep-sea port of Chabahar (in southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman), and its Caspian Sea port of Bandar-e-Anzali to Russia's Volga River harbour of Astrakhan and onwards by rail to Europe. The route would reduce travel distance by from 40 days through the Suez Canal to somewhere between 25 and 28 days and cost by 30%. It takes only 19 days for a container shipped from India through the Suez Canal to reach the German port city of Hamburg. If successful, the corridor could challenge the supremacy of the Suez Canal and complement it with China's BRI, and give Iran a significant advantage in the rivalry with Saudi Arabia and the UAE played in CA, which are also key players in Russian and Chinese ploys for dominance in the ME. INSTC also would strengthen Iran's position as a key node in the B&R on the back of a rail link between western China and Tehran that runs across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.⁷¹⁰ The competing plans for these ports on the Gulf of Oman highlight both the competition between CPEC and INSTC,

⁷⁰⁸ Сажин В., «Иран – Китай: намечается ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁰⁹ Юртаев В.И., «Иран: интеграция ...», укз. соч., с. 19.

⁷¹⁰ James M. Dorsey, "Flying under the Radar: Iranian Alternatives to Suez and Belt and Road", Inside Arabia, 21.07.2020.

and the broader geopolitical competition in South Asia between India and China.⁷¹¹ However, Russian expert V. Yurtaev believed that the materialized factor of "triple accord" of India, Iran and Russia, due to objective circumstances, was able to restrain China's geo-economic and geopolitical expansion in Central Eurasia.⁷¹²

India, in contrast to China's construction of the Gwadar port, is actively involved in the development of Chabahar, also pursuing the goal of having land access to Afghanistan and playing a more important role in trade and security of Afghanistan and CA.⁷¹³ Indian consulting company Indian Railway Construction Limited (IRCON) has pledged to provide all services and funding for the Chabahar port project, which is estimated at approximately US \$ 1.6 billion,⁷¹⁴ and approved a US \$ 150 million development plan to begin building up the investment zone stipulated by the initial agreement in May, 2016. However, Pakistan has established a transit blockade for Indian goods going to Iran and beyond. Afghanistan responded by banning Pakistani freight transit through its territory, which was a bad sign of growing hopes for regional rail links between Tajikistan and Pakistan via Afghanistan.⁷¹⁵

The Chabahar port development project includes five phases. Only one phase has been developed with the participation of India. Iran invited other countries like Australia and Japan to invest in the port, while India was working there.⁷¹⁶ Japan is also considered a potential investor in Chabahar to strengthen ties with the 80 million

⁷¹¹ **Syed Fazl-e-Haider**, "INSTC vs. BRI: the India-China Competition over the Port of Chabahar and Infrastructure in Asia", China Brief, Vol. 19, Issue 21, The Jamestown Foundation, 10.12.2019, p. 17.

⁷¹² **Юртаев В.И.**, «Иран: интеграция ...», укз. соч., с. 19.

⁷¹³ **Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai**, "China Plays the Iran Card", op. cit.

⁷¹⁴ **Abdul Basit**, "What the New Iran-China Partnership ...", op. cit.

⁷¹⁵ **Nicholas Trickett, Oliver Thomas**, "China, Russia, Iran: Ports and Power along the Belt and Road", The Diplomat, 23.03.2017.

⁷¹⁶ "India can Only Blame Itself for Iran - China Strategic Partnership Politics", The Tehran Times, 31.07.2020.

Iranian market, and to turn the territory of Iran and the port of Chabahar into an important channel for more cost-effective access to CA and Afghanistan.⁷¹⁷ After completion of missing links construction in the path on the borders with Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran will turn into the main corridor for the delivery of goods to these countries.⁷¹⁸

At stake is also container trade along the *China-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey* line, the hub of which is the port of Bandar Abbas in Iranian Baluchistan.⁷¹⁹ The construction carried out by a subsidiary of the CNPC (pending the lifting/or easing of US and UN sanctions against Iran as a result of an international agreement limiting the Iran's nuclear program) was to include an already partially constructed link between Iran and Pakistan. But the 2018 US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and the resumption of sanctions froze the pipeline project. However, in 2019, Pakistan and Iran, in order to revive the project, agreed that Iran, having completed its section of communication between the two countries, would withdraw from the arbitration procedures, which forced Pakistan to pay a fine for not fulfilling its part of the deal. According to the agreement, Pakistan must complete the construction of the pipeline section by 2024.⁷²⁰

It is worth noting that the Iranians have long viewed Pakistan - a historically strong and close ally of Saudi Arabia - with suspicion. Meanwhile, Islamabad is concerned about the development of the Chabahar port as a possible alternative to its own China-funded Gwadar project.⁷²¹ China intends to showcase CPEC* as the earliest

⁷¹⁷ **Alex Vatanka**, "China Courts Iran", op. cit.

⁷¹⁸ **Цатурян Саркис**, «Китай подбирается к Евросоюзу через Иран», ИА REGNUM, 17.05.2016.

⁷¹⁹ **Цатурян Саркис**, «Иран прощается с долларом. Что дальше?», ИА REGNUM, 29.08.2016.

⁷²⁰ **James M. Dorsey**, "China could Signal Increased Engagement with Iran but doesn't", The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer, 08.09.2020.

⁷²¹ **Ammad Malik**, "How the Growing Gulf Crisis Impacts Pakistan", The Diplomat, 29.06.2019.

and most successful of the six BRI corridors, so CPEC has been called the “*flagship project*”, “*pilot project*”, and “*icon*” of the B&R.⁷²² Pakistan hoped the projects, if completed, would generate enough revenue to pay off China's US \$ 60 billion debt. To this end, Islamabad is laying a land corridor - a series of railways and highways - to Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other countries that can benefit from faster trade routes to and from China. This land route from Gwadar, a city on the coast of the Arabian Sea, to western Xinjiang would be much faster than shipping goods by sea.⁷²³

Iran's participation in the CPEC provides more opportunities for establishing and forging bilateral relations with Pakistan, where cross-border skirmishes on the Sistan-Baluchestan and Balochistan border, as well as unit-pricing issues over the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline have been the subject of disputes between the two states.⁷²⁴ China will finance a long-stalled pipeline that will connect Iran and Pakistan, supplying natural gas from first to last and covering the 485-mile stretch of the so-called “*peace pipeline*” that runs from the coastal city of Asalue on the PG to the southern border of Balochistan between Pakistan and Iran.⁷²⁵ Connecting the pipeline to the BRI will allow China to receive Iranian gas not only by sea on its

* CPEC is a major development project aimed at building energy, industrial and communications infrastructure throughout Pakistan, with the port of Gwadar as a pillar. “CPEC-plus” is an abbreviation for an infrastructure construction scheme that includes countries other than Pakistan and China.

⁷²² **Abdur Rehman Shah**, “*The Coming of Pakistan-China ‘Entente Cordiale 2.0’*”, *The Diplomat*, 18.09.2018.

⁷²³ **Farhan Bokhari, Adnan Aamir**, “*Pakistan Seeks Iran, Saudi Help for Belt and Road Projects*”, *Nikkel Asian Review*, 23.11.2019.

⁷²⁴ **Hamzah Rifaat**, “*China, Iran, and ‘One Belt, One Road’*”, op. cit.

⁷²⁵ **Ankit Panda**, “*With China's Help, the Iran-Pakistan Pipeline Might Finally Happen*”, *The Diplomat*, 10.04.2015.

On the other side of the border, the pipeline will come into contact with the port city of Gwadar. The pipeline will cost between US \$ 1.5 billion and US \$ 1.8 billion, or US \$ 2 billion. Under the terms of the deal, 85% of the financing will be provided by a loan from China. The remaining 50 miles (80 km) from Gwadar to the Iranian border will be built by Pakistan.

eastern coast, but also in its landlocked and troubled province of Xinjiang. Joining the Iran-Pakistan pipeline to CPEC will increase Iran's importance to the success of China's Eurasian infrastructure game, as well as to the development of the Chabahar port and the Iran-Oman-India subsea pipeline as a potential alternative energy corridor from Asia to Europe. This will give Iran a key role in the efforts of the transatlantic community to strengthen relations with India.⁷²⁶

To balance India's role in Chabahar and develop trade and commerce in the region, Iran proposed in May 2019 to connect Chabahar to the port of Gwadar with its rail system, from Iran to the Northern Corridor, and through Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan both through Azerbaijan, Russia and through Turkey.⁷²⁷ Iran's proposals were met in Pakistan, as the two countries were already discussing a new ferry service that would link ports in Gwadar and Karachi with Iranian ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas.⁷²⁸

While China attaches equal importance to Saudi Arabia, a CPEC arrangement that will allow Iran to reap economic benefits while challenging Saudi Arabia's regional and ideological hegemony serves Tehran's interests.⁷²⁹ It is noteworthy that Pakistan refrained from full interaction with the *Islamic Counter-Terrorism Alliance* of Saudi Arabia, partially directed against Iran, and the Pakistani parliament rejected Saudi Arabia's request for military support in the war in Yemen. Nevertheless, Riyadh hoped that a tougher US policy towards Iran would broaden the window of opportunity in the battle against Iran.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁶ **James M. Dorsey**, “*Walking a Tightrope: China Maneuvers between Saudi Arabia and Iran*”, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*, 09.03.2017.

⁷²⁷ “*Iran Ready to Connect Gwadar Port with Chabahar*”, *Pakistan Today*, 25.05.2019.

⁷²⁸ “*India's Grip on Strategic Port Loosens as Iran Turns to China*”, *Economic Times, India*, 11.04.2018.

⁷²⁹ **Hamzah Rifaat**, “*China, Iran, and ‘One Belt, One Road’*”, op. cit.

⁷³⁰ **James M. Dorsey**, “*Walking a Tightrope: China ...*”, op. cit.

Iran as a Naval Bases for MSR. As mentioned above, the new agreement includes China's plans to develop several ports in Iran, such as Bandar-e-Jask (strategically located east of the Strait of Hormuz), which will become the country's main transshipment point and give Beijing control of one of seven major sea bottlenecks in the world. The presence of a foothold in Bandar-e-Jask would allow China not only to control the US Navy's Fifth Fleet based in Bahrain, but together with a presence in the ports of Djibouti and Gwadar, could increase China's positions in the IOR.⁷³¹ It is about building a model of multi-purpose infrastructure of "*strategic strongholds*", including Sri Lanka (Hambantota port), Pakistan (Gwadar port), Bangladesh (Chittagong port), Myanmar (Kyaukpyu port) and Cambodia (Kahkong port, as well as military Ream Naval Base), which are "*more designed as hybrid commercial and military logistics points than a collection of traditional military bases*".⁷³² It is believed that the comprehensive strategic pact with Iran could allow China to establish a military presence on the Iranian-Pakistani coast. The PLA could even help set up a network to monitor US and Indian naval activities in the region. With Chinese support for an oil terminal beyond Hormuz, Iran could also strengthen its position in the PG.⁷³³

Thus, the interconnected network of industrial parks and ports created by Chinese companies in some Gulf countries could further challenge the US' dominance in the region surrounding the strategically important Strait of Hormuz.⁷³⁴ For China, the deal not only opens up an opportunity to control Chahbahar and monopolize trade routes in CA, but also for the development of naval facilities in the

⁷³¹ **Abdul Basit**, "What the New Iran-China Partnership ...", op. cit.

⁷³² «'Шелковый путь' двойного назначения: почему Китай вооружает союзников по торговле», ИА Реалист, 11.09.2020.

⁷³³ **Abhijit Singh**, "The Maritime Implications of Growing China-Iran Strategic Ties", Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 30.07.2020.

⁷³⁴ **Белов Ал.**, «Foreign Policy: сближение Ирана и Китая станет ударом по интересам США», ИА REGNUM, 10.08.2020.

Gulf of Oman. And as the US leaves Afghanistan, a partnership with Iran will give China an almost stranglehold over a strategic corridor stretching from CA to the Arabian Sea.⁷³⁵ Iran's attempts to shift its geostrategic focus from the PG to the Gulf of Oman, relying on the development of the two strategic ports of Jask and Chahbehah, will allow it to avoid tensions in the PG region, reduce the routes of tankers carrying Iranian oil, and also allow Tehran to close the Strait of Hormuz in the event necessity.⁷³⁶

But US sanctions are pushing India out of Chahbahar and upsetting Iran, which is already pushing India out of a rail project to bypass Pakistan, another competitor in trade with CA.⁷³⁷ And indeed, days after the details of the proposed Sino-Iranian deal of 2020 were made public, information was leaked to the Indian press about Iran's decision to exclude India from an extensive rail project that would connect the Iranian port city of Chabahar to Zahedan, a city near the border with Afghanistan.⁷³⁸ There is an opinion among Indian experts that, perhaps India has lost Iran forever, because contrary to expectations, to complete the development project of the Chabahar port as soon as possible, India did not do it because of the pressure from the USA. Indian firms that had dealings with American firms were slow to proceed with the project, while Iran urgently needed to develop its economic infrastructure given its growing population.⁷³⁹ According to statements by Iranian officials, the main reason Iran excluded India from the Chabahar Zahedan project was India's delay

⁷³⁵ **Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai**, "China Plays the Iran Card", op. cit.

⁷³⁶ **Белов Ал.**, «Foreign Policy: сближение Ирана ...», укз. соч.

⁷³⁷ **Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai**, "China Plays the Iran Card", op. cit.

⁷³⁸ **Abdul Basit**, "What the New Iran-China Partnership ...", op. cit.

After 9/11, India's political and economic influence in Afghanistan grew under the guise of US security. However, after the agreement between the US and the Taliban in Doha, India's influence in the country is declining. India was not involved in the US-Taliban deal and does not play a significant role in the intra-Afghan peace process. After the withdrawal of the US, India's influence on the country will further diminish.

⁷³⁹ "India can Only Blame Itself for Iran - China Strategic ...", op. cit.

in fulfilling its funding commitments for the project, as well as the fact that India chose to be part of Donald Trump's campaign of maximum pressure on Tehran after the US withdrawal in 2018 from Iran's nuclear deal and re-imposition of unprecedented sanctions, and also stopped oil purchases from Iran in April 2019. However, in November 2018, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo officially announced that the Chabahar port project would be exempted from US sanctions.⁷⁴⁰

Many considered removing India from the railway project (which ultimately extended to Zaranj on the Afghan side of the border) as a serious setback to its plans to create an alternative trade route to Afghanistan and CA bypassing Port Gwadar. So, the inclusion of Iran in the BRI structure could lead to India losing the leverage that its close ties with the US provide against China, also lead to the fact that India will cede its position to China in Afghanistan.⁷⁴¹ Beijing could use its influence in Iran and Pakistan to encircle Afghanistan, causing problems for American interests.⁷⁴²

There is speculation that Iran's search for other regional alliances and a new partnership agreement between Iran and China may have been facilitated by New Delhi's refusal to buy Iranian oil in 2019 to please Washington and further strengthen its military-strategic ties with Tehran's adversary, Israel. News of New Delhi's interest in participating in the Israel-led *Trans-Arab Corridor*, which aims to connect India with Eurasia through Israel and several Arab states hostile to Iran, could also help bring Tehran closer to Beijing.⁷⁴³

In any case, China's participation in Iran and the full integration

⁷⁴⁰ Saeid Jafari, "Where does Iran Stand in the India-China Regional Rivalry?", Responsible Statecraft, 13.08.2020.

⁷⁴¹ Abdul Basit, "What the New Iran-China Partnership ...", op. cit.

⁷⁴² Akshay Narang, "Israel, beware: With China Keen on Buying out Iran, a World War is Quietly Brewing in West Asia", TFIPOST, 16.07.2020.

⁷⁴³ Abdul Basit, "What the New Iran-China Partnership ...", op. cit.

of Tehran into the BRI structure could weaken Pakistan's main rival, India, and open up a strategic space for Islamabad to effectively counter political and security threats. Better relations between Tehran and Islamabad with Beijing's support could help pacify the armed uprising of ethnic separatists in Baluchistan by the two countries. China's presence in Iran would mean that the port city of Chabahar will not compete with Gwadar, and India's expulsion from Iran would mean that transit trade from Afghanistan and CA will continue through Pakistani ports.⁷⁴⁴

Implications of the Sino-Iranian Pact for the US. The Sino-Iranian pact implies that for the US, the ME and China, as two theaters of military operations, are in no way separated, and by increasing pressure on China and Iran, the US encourages these two countries not only to create a common front, but also to create a new axis.⁷⁴⁵ The deal may cast doubt on Trump's plans to isolate Iran, since the tandem of two powerful states, considering this agreement not only as a strategic cooperation, but also as a joint confrontation with the US, will oppose American-Israeli policy.⁷⁴⁶ A new strategic partnership between Iran and China could jeopardize the possibility of a Republican victory in the US presidential election in 2020, as the Trump administration's strategy of maximum pressure not only failed to contain Iran and change its behavior in the region, but also pushed Tehran into the arms of Beijing.⁷⁴⁷

The military aspect of the treaty is of serious concern to the US, as is the unprecedented naval exercise last year in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman by the navies of Iran, Russia and China.⁷⁴⁸ Great concern in the US is the projection of Chinese military power into the PG, since the treaty includes agreements on the exchange of

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai, "China Plays the Iran Card", op. cit.

⁷⁴⁶ Седов Д., «Пакт между КНР и Ираном изменит ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁴⁷ Белов Ал., «Foreign Policy: сближение Ирана ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

intelligence and security data, and issues of joint military activities. Throughout the World Ocean, in particular from the South China Sea to the Suez Canal, the PRC is consistently placing its strongholds in Hambantota and Gwadar, having built a chain of ports and refueling and supply points for its fast-growing fleet. Although these points are declared as civilian objects, their military purpose is undoubtedly, and there is already a Chinese military base to fight sea pirates on the shores of the Gulf of Aden in Djibouti - just a few miles from the US military base Camp Lemonnier. Now this chain will continue with Chinese ports in FTZ on the PG coast.⁷⁴⁹ A military base in Djibouti creates a rear for Yemen in the southwest, allowing it to encircle Saudi Arabia in the south, supporting the "Yemeni rebels".⁷⁵⁰

Implications of the Sino-Iranian Pact for China. Beijing did not confirm that the deal was concluded in July 2020, but announced its support for traditional friendship and readiness to work with Iran to steadily advance practical cooperation.⁷⁵¹ Beijing's caution may indicate that the PRC does not want to escalate tensions with the US, grossly violating the tough US rules of sanctions against the Islamic Republic, nor does it want to upset the balance in relations with Tehran's regional rival, Saudi Arabia.⁷⁵²

A strategic partnership with Iran is not entirely safe for China, as continued trade with Iran, investment in the country's infrastructure, and deepening ties could cause discontent in the US. It could expose Beijing to sanctions and the risk of losing some access to the US market (which is much larger than the Iranian market), as well as disrupting their regional partnerships with Israel or Saudi Arabia, each of which is currently engaged in proxy wars and covert ope-

⁷⁴⁹ Седов Д., «Пакт между КНР и Ираном изменит ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁵⁰ Юзик Ю., «Союз Льва и Дракона», укз. соч.

⁷⁵¹ «Иран и КНР добиваются более широкого партнерства в противовес давлению США», Pars Today, 18.07.2020.

⁷⁵² James M. Dorsey, "China could Signal Increased ...", op. cit.

rations against Iran.⁷⁵³ Regarding to Sino-Iranian oil contract, although Iranian oil supplies to China hit a 20-year low in March 2020, reflecting a drop in demand amid the coronavirus pandemic, China's oil imports from Russia and Saudi Arabia have not declined. In addition, a trade agreement signed between the US and China earlier 2020 could provide for the export of US \$ 50 billion in oil, LNG, and coal from the US to China, strengthening the Washington's role in China's energy security and competition, since Beijing is unlikely to sacrifice its US trade market to trade with Iran.⁷⁵⁴ Under the pressure of US sanctions and the demand sagging due to the coronavirus, imports of Iranian oil to China decreased from 630 thousand barrels in 2017 to 100-200 thousand barrels in 2020. But even for China, US \$ 280 billion is a fairly large amount. Moreover, Iran remains a risky investment, as it is under sanctions, because of which China can buy oil and gas facilities cheaply, since there are no more willing ones.⁷⁵⁵

By the way, some Chinese companies have already paid a huge price for violating US sanctions on Iran and cut their ties with Iran prior to the pandemic to avoid violating US sanctions, which the Trump administration has been tightening against Tehran since May 2018. Avoiding secondary US sanctions on Iran-related businesses has allowed these companies to retain their access to the much more lucrative US market.⁷⁵⁶ Thus, the state company CNPC, which planned to participate in the development of the 11th stage of the South Pars field, withdrew from the deal, and the China National Machinery Import and Export Company did not complete the electrification of the Tehran-Mashhad high-speed railway under a US \$ 2.4 billion

⁷⁵³ Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai, "China Plays the Iran Card", op. cit.

⁷⁵⁴ "Explainer: What is the 'Iran-China Comprehensive ...'", op. cit.

⁷⁵⁵ «Иран подталкивает Китай к нефтегазовой ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁵⁶ Michael Lipin, Ziwon Jiang, "Pandemic not Likely to Stop China from Building Influence in Iran", VOA News on Iran, 31.03.2020.

contract.⁷⁵⁷ In 2019, CNPC withdrew from a US \$ 5 billion natural gas project in Iran due to difficulties in finding banking channels to transfer funds to Iran. The US also sanctioned the Chinese company Zhuhai Zhenrong in 2019 for transporting Iranian oil. Since the coronavirus pandemic began, anti-Chinese sentiment in Iran has risen.⁷⁵⁸ In 2017, Chinese ZTE, the giant telecommunications company, was fined US \$ 1.19 billion for violating US sanctions on Iran and North Korea. In 2018, Huawei's CFO Meng Wanzhou was detained in Canada for violating sanctions against Iran.⁷⁵⁹

Implications of the Sino-Iranian Pact for Iran. The strategic rapprochement between Tehran and Beijing causes discontent among many in Iran, both representatives of the reformist camp and radical conservatives. Critics of the agreement include former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as well as the son of the last Iranian monarch, Reza Pahlavi, who lives abroad. The reason for such hypotheses was the peculiar debt policy of the PRC, which, as is commonly believed in the research environment, inevitably entails Beijing's encroachment on the military and economic sovereignty of its debtors.⁷⁶⁰ M. Ahmadinejad even stated that it is unacceptable to conclude a secret agreement with foreign parties without taking into account the will of the Iranian people and contrary to the interests of the country and the nation. Prince Reza Pahlavi, criticizing the authorities in Tehran, said that agreements with China could lead not only to the loss of control over natural resources, but also to the emergence of a Chinese army in Iran. Some analysts are convinced that the top Iranian elite, dominated by the IRGC and religious foundations closely related to it, are interested in a strategic financial, economic and military alliance with China. Indeed, oil and gas, infrastructure, the military component - that is, those areas that are

⁷⁵⁷ «Иран подталкивает Китай к нефтегазовой ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁵⁸ «Иран и КНР добиваются более широкого партнерства ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁵⁹ Shahrām Akbarzadeh, Mahmoud Pargoo, "Iran-China ...", op. cit.

⁷⁶⁰ Субботин Игорь, «Китай обвиняют в желании ...», укз. соч.

declared as objects of investment and cooperation, are almost completely controlled by the IRGC.⁷⁶¹

However, on July 13, 2020 the head of the presidential administration, Mahmoud Vaezi, commented on the "*deal of the century*" on the air of the state TV channel, saying that no one can secretly accept anything, the document will definitely go through parliament, it enjoys the support of Ayatollah Khamenei, and there will hardly be parliamentary approval before the end of the year due to outbreak of coronavirus.⁷⁶²

With this deal, the Iranian government could buy time to maintain the status quo until the US presidential elections in November 2020, the outcome of which could determine the trajectory of US-Iranian relations and the fate of Iran's 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal, as well as influence the presidential elections in Iran, in June 2021.⁷⁶³ Perhaps Tehran was waiting for the results of the US presidential elections and some other important foreign policy events, so it prepared a grandiose Chinese Plan "B" in case of the failure of Plan "A". Plan "A" was to stake on negotiations with the US, and the Chinese "*road map*" for a period of 25 years was an argument for Washington to change its mind and return to the negotiating table on new terms. If the Democrats won the US elections, the chances of such an outcome would be pretty high. With Trump's victory, the situation could be more complicated, but the "opponent" who opposed Rouhani and the Chinese deal of the century, the IRGC hawk Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and who planned to re-run (and win) the presidential elections in May 2021, was already prepared for negotiations with him. It is possible that criticism of the "*secret plan to sell the Motherland*" was a cunning idea of Iranian conservatives, who in the elections relied on Ahmadinejad, the most ardent

⁷⁶¹ Сажин В., «Иран – Китай: намечается ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁶² Юзик Ю., «Союз Льва и Дракона», укз. соч.

⁷⁶³ Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai, "China Plays the Iran Card", op. cit.

opponent of the deal with the PRC, with instructions to try to negotiate with the Americans when the stakes had already been raised to historic highs. And it was not a pity to put the entire camp of liberals personally as “lobbyists” of China, since their eight-year period on the Olympus of Iranian politics was already coming to an end. If it didn't work out with the Americans, one could always say: *I was not against China, I was against the secret deal that Rouhani was leading.*⁷⁶⁴

The announcement of the deal with China could have allowed the Rouhani government to demonstrate that it is not putting all its eggs in the Western basket, that Iran is not isolated, and may even see economic improvements despite US sanctions. With tensions rising between China and the US, Iran hoped that PRC would support its economy and balance the US. Closer ties with China could provide Iran with more leverage in upcoming negotiations with the US and Europe when it comes to revising or restoring the JCPOA, as well as in its dealings with regional rivals such as Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.⁷⁶⁵

For Iran, developing closer ties with China is also a way of irritating Europe. Tehran has repeatedly expressed its impatience with European countries over the lack of economic dividends promised under an international nuclear deal that limited Iran's nuclear enrichment program in exchange for easing sanctions. Perhaps the Iranians would not have persecuted this policy so strongly if European business had supported the country.⁷⁶⁶

Iran managed to wriggle out, since it was not alone on the battlefield with the US, but behind China's powerful back, which means that Tehran could trade with both PRC and US.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁴ Юзик Ю., «Союз Льва и Дракона», укз. соч.

⁷⁶⁵ Vali Nasr, Ariane Tabatabai, “China Plays the Iran Card”, op. cit.

⁷⁶⁶ «Иран и КНР добиваются более широкого партнерства ...», укз. соч.

⁷⁶⁷ Юзик Ю., «Союз Льва и Дракона», укз. соч.

5. OBOR Opportunities in Iraq

China took a keen interest in developments in Iraq after monarchy was overthrown and nationalist government headed by Abd al-Karim Qasim was established in July 1958.⁷⁶⁸ The bilateral relations between China and Iraq have seen smooth development since the two countries established diplomatic relations on August 25, 1958. During the 1990 Gulf Crisis, diplomatic relations between Beijing and Baghdad were limited, and China ceased economic, trade and military exchanges with Iraq in accordance with relevant UN resolutions. After the first Gulf War, China implemented some trade exchanges with Iraq under the Oil-for-Food plan.⁷⁶⁹

In 2003, China strongly opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq, after which bilateral relations between China and Iraq were slowly restored.⁷⁷⁰ China was one of the countries that received substantial contracts from the Iraqi government to rebuild national infrastructure destroyed during the war.⁷⁷¹

China is stepping up contracts with Iraq signed under Saddam Hussein, seeking to stay in the country after the political situation stabilizes. On the eve of the Iraq war, more than 60 Chinese companies worked in Iraq, fulfilling more than 500 contracts under the UN Oil-for-Food Program, based on UNSC Resolution 986 of 1995.⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁸ Hafizullah Emadi, “China and Iraq: Patterns of Interaction, 1960-1992”, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 29, No. 53, 31.12.1994, p. 3315.

⁷⁶⁹ “Bilateral Relations between China and Iraq”, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Iraq, 01.04.2013.

⁷⁷⁰ Gordon Houlden, Nouredin M. Zaamout, “A New Great Power Engages with the Middle East: China's Middle East Balancing Approach”, China Institute, University of Alberta, January 2019, p. 30.

⁷⁷¹ Малевич Ю.И., «Проблемы внешней политики Китайской Народной Республики», Учебно-метод. пособие для студентов и магистрантов, ЦИТ БГУ, Мн., 2009, с. 138.

⁷⁷² Дейч Т.Л., «Африка в стратегии Китая», укз. соч., с. 91.

On June 21, 2009, China and Iraq signed 4 cooperation documents, including an intergovernmental protocol on writing off part of the US \$ 8 billion of the Iraqi government's debt. Other documents include a MoU between the Foreign Ministries of the PRC and Iraq, an intergovernmental agreement on technical and economic cooperation and an exchange of notes on the training of human resources between the governments of the PRC and Iraq.⁷⁷³ In February 2010, Beijing cancelled 80% of Iraq's US \$ 8.5 billion debt to China, a move designed to further Chinese business interests in the country.⁷⁷⁴

In 2015, Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi made his state visit to China, where the two sides entered into a "*strategic partnership*" agreement.⁷⁷⁵ In a MoU, both sides pledged to continue construction of storage and transport facilities, chemical processing equipment, and energy equipment. It was part of a larger economic deal that included five new agreements in the *economic, technological, military, diplomatic and energy* fields as part of China's BRI plan.⁷⁷⁶

Iraq is the sixth largest recipient of Chinese investment in MENA, accounting for 9% of all Chinese investment in the region. Between 2005 and 2017, Chinese investment in Iraq totalled US \$ 18.7 billion. 88% of that total targeted the energy sector, followed by 7% in real estate, and 5% in utilities.⁷⁷⁷ Beijing is Baghdad's largest trading partner, and Iraq is China's second largest oil supplier. In 2018, the trade turnover between China and Iraq amounted to more than US \$ 30 billion.⁷⁷⁸ China has poured about US \$ 24 billion into

⁷⁷³ Малевиц Ю.И., «Проблемы внешней политики ...», укз. соч., с. 139.

⁷⁷⁴ Naser Al-Tamimi, "China in Iraq: Winning Without a War", Al-Arabiya Net, 16.03.2013.

⁷⁷⁵ Daniel J. Samet, "China, Not Iran, is the Power to Watch in Iraq", The Diplomat, 30.10.2019.

⁷⁷⁶ "Iraq + China Establishes Long-term Oil & Gas Partnership", Oil and Gas 360, 23.12.2015.

⁷⁷⁷ Gordon Houlden, Nouredin M. Zaamout, "A New ...", op. cit., p. 31.

⁷⁷⁸ "Iraq to Join China's Belt and Road Project", The Economic Times, 23.09.2019.

Iraq since 2005, and the vast majority of that is in energy projects.⁷⁷⁹

Cooperation in the energy sector. Under UN Oil-for-Food Program the Shandong Oil Concern signed an oil supply agreement with Iraqi partners for over US \$ 24 million, and a company in Sichuan began the project reconstruction of the Baghdad power system worth more than US \$ 1 billion in 2002.⁷⁸⁰

The CNPC signed a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) for the Iraqi oil field Al-Ahdab in 1997.⁷⁸¹ In 2001, China imported 400 thousand tons of oil from Iraq, and by March 2003 it became the third consumer of Iraqi oil. The CNPC was able to sign a contract to supply oil from Iraq at the height of US sanctions. In November 2006, negotiations began to resume Iraqi cooperation with CNPC in the development of the Adhab oil fields (central Iraq) and capable of producing about 90,000 barrels of oil per day.⁷⁸² In November 2008, CNPC won a US \$ 3.5 billion contract to develop the Iraqi Al-Ahdab oil field. While in November 2009, CNPC won a large stake in a US \$ 15 billion deal to develop the Rumaila oil field in southern Iraq, thought to be the second largest in the world. In December 2009, CNPC was granted a 50% stake in the development of an oil field located in southern Iraq - in Halfaya.* In June 2012, CNPC completed the first phase of Halfaya development and increased production from 3,000 to 100,000 barrels per day.⁷⁸³ As of 2010, China had made five major oil investments in Iraq, one of which was in

⁷⁷⁹ Ben Wolfgang, "Iraq Turns to China's 'Belt and Road,' Challenging U.S. Dominance in Middle East", The Washington Times, 09.02.2020.

⁷⁸⁰ Малевиц Ю.И., «Проблемы внешней политики ...», укз. соч., с. 138.

⁷⁸¹ Naser Al-Tamimi, "China in Iraq: Winning Without a War", op. cit.

⁷⁸² Дейч Т.Л., «Африка в стратегии Китая», укз. соч., с. 222-223.

* Halfaya's proven recoverable reserves are 4.1 billion barrels, and production potential ranges from 200 thousand to half a million barrels per day.

⁷⁸³ Naser Al-Tamimi, "China in Iraq: Winning Without a War", op. cit.

Kurdistan.⁷⁸⁴ Chinese oil companies managed to bring the country's oil production to 6 million barrels by 2012.⁷⁸⁵

In a MoU signed in 2015, the two sides vowed to pursue long-term energy cooperation in crude oil trade, oil-gas exploration and development, oilfield engineering service technology.⁷⁸⁶ In January 2018, Iraq announced its intention to build an oil refinery in the port of Fao on the PG with two Chinese companies. The Iraqi Oil Ministry named these firms Power China and Norinco Chinese. The refinery's capacity will be 300,000 barrels per day. Likewise, Baghdad signed a contract with China's Zhenhua Oil to further develop the East Baghdad oil field.⁷⁸⁷ In early 2021, the Iraqi State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO), which controls Iraqi oil exports, chose the Chinese company ZhenHua Oil Co. for a multibillion-dollar oil deal to support an economy shaken by the collapse of energy prices triggered by the coronavirus. SOMO offered to supply approximately 130,000 barrels of oil per day for five years and required an advance payment for one year of delivery, which at current prices would have generated more than US \$ 2 billion.⁷⁸⁸

However, Iraq has decided not to sign an oil supply agreement with a Chinese state-owned company after the economy reeled 2019's collapse in crude oil prices.⁷⁸⁹ In June 2018, two Chinese private-sector oil companies - Geo-Jade Petroleum and United Energy Group - signed exploration and development contracts. Geo-Jade has pledged to explore two oil and gas fields in eastern and

⁷⁸⁴ **J. Michael Cole**, "China's Oil Quest Comes to Iraq", The Diplomat, 02.12.2012; «Китай в поисках нефти: Ирак на горизонте!», Искусство Войны, 15.12.2012.

⁷⁸⁵ **Дейч Т.Л.**, «Африка в стратегии Китая», укз. соч., с. 222-223.

⁷⁸⁶ "Iraq + China Establishes Long-term Oil & Gas Partnership", op. cit.

⁷⁸⁷ **Richard Wachman**, "China Pushes for Bigger Role in Iraqi Reconstruction", Arab News, 02.03.2018.

⁷⁸⁸ **Salma El Wardany**, "Iraq Signs \$2B Oil Prepayment Deal with China's ZenHua Oil", World Oil, 03.01.2021.

⁷⁸⁹ **Khalid Al-Ansary**, "Iraq Walks away from \$2B Upfront Oil Deal with China", World Oil, 22.02.2021.

southeastern Iraq. The fields in the southeastern block are expected to bring 2.4 billion barrels of oil.⁷⁹⁰ In anticipation of PM Abdul Mahdi's visit to China, the Iraqi Basra Oil Company (BOC) signed an agreement with the Chinese Hilong Oil Service and Engineering Co., Ltd. aimed at increasing production at the Majnun field.⁷⁹¹

In 2019, the French container transport and shipping company CMA CGM announced an agreement with China Merchants Port (CMP) to sell its stake in eight port terminals to Terminal Link, created in 2013 and is 51% owned by CMA CGM and 49% CMP. Among the facilities involved is the Umm Qasr terminal in Iraq.⁷⁹² In December 2020, China intends to support the cash-strapped Iraqi government with a long-term multi-billion-dollar contract between Baghdad and state-owned China ZhenHua Oil Co. to provide oil in exchange for an advance payment.⁷⁹³

Worth to note that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) took control of the oil-rich Kirkuk province and connected its oil reserves to a pipeline linking the region with Turkey. This opened up a lucrative opportunity for the Kurdish government to increase oil production to 450,000 barrels per day and set the stage for new Chinese investment projects in the region.⁷⁹⁴

Joining the BRI under a new infrastructure-for-oil program.

China is trying to expand its presence in Iraq, which is in dire need of support in its reconstruction efforts following the territorial defeat of the *Islamic State in Syria and the Levant* (ISIL/ISIS or Daesh) in late

⁷⁹⁰ **Shunsuke Tabeta**, "China Looks to Iraq to Secure Oil Supply", Nikkei Asian Review, 15.06.2018.

⁷⁹¹ **John Calabrese**, "China-Iraq Relations: Poised for a 'Quantum Leap'", Middle East Institute, 08.10.2019.

⁷⁹² **John Lee**, "China Acquires Stake in Umm Qasr Terminal", Iraq-Business News, 30.03.2020.

⁷⁹³ "China, Iraq Set to Ink Multi-Billion-Dollar Oil Bail-Out Deal", The New Arab, 09.12.2020.

⁷⁹⁴ **Olga Malik**, "What Is China's Endgame in Northern Iraq?", Politics Today, 16.03.2021.

2017.⁷⁹⁵ The Iran-Iraq-Syria regional participation in the broader B&R is incredibly important, especially since Iraq signed a September 2019 MoU, a framework loan agreement, to join the **BRI under a new infrastructure-for-oil program**. This plan involves China's reconstruction of the war-torn region under a multiphase program of *hard infrastructure* (rail, roads, energy and water projects), and *soft infrastructure* (hospitals, schools and cultural centers).⁷⁹⁶ It follows that Chinese investment in Iraq should focus not only on oil exploration, but also on infrastructure such as power plants, cement plants and water treatment plants. Numerous Chinese firms are currently engaged in major construction projects in Iraq, including *Shanghai Electric*, *China Building Materials Construction*, and *China Hydroelectric Power*.⁷⁹⁷ CITIC Construction Co., Ltd., the Chinese engineering procurement and construction firm building the plant, and Iraqi developer MPC, part of Raban Al-Safina for Energy Projects (RASEP) awarded the contract valued at more than EUR 280 million to Siemens.⁷⁹⁸

China's recovery in Iraq has recently focused more on social infrastructure. In early August 2019, China's Third Engineering Bureau signed a US \$ 1.39 billion contract for the construction of medical, residential and educational facilities in southern Iraq. China Machinery Engineering Corp. completed 80% of the project for the construction of a power plant, consisting of two production units of 630 MW each. The construction of the plant was planned to be completed in 2020.⁷⁹⁹

Chinese companies are also implementing multi-million-dollar

⁷⁹⁵ John Calabrese, "China-Iraq Relations...", op. cit.

⁷⁹⁶ Matthew Ehret, "Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road or Zone of Dark Age Chaos", Strategic Culture Foundation, 16.08.2020; John Calabrese, "China-Iraq Relations...", op. cit.

⁷⁹⁷ John Calabrese, "China-Iraq Relations...", op. cit.

⁷⁹⁸ "Siemens in \$310m Iraq Power Plant Deal", Iraq Business News, 10.07.2019.

⁷⁹⁹ Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "Chinese Investment in Iraq Provides Gains for Baghdad, Beijing", Al-Monitor, 26.09.2019.

projects and signing lucrative contracts with the government of Autonomous Kurdistan (the federal administrative unit of Iraq in the northern part of the country with Erbil, the de facto capital) and local Kurdish enterprises after the restoration of the KRG in 2005.⁸⁰⁰ In 2014, by opening its consulate general, Beijing showed clear support to the KRG and established a solid diplomatic presence in the region. Chinese contracts here include a US \$ 210 million contract to build a cement plant in Erbil, a US \$ 5 billion project to build a giant housing and urban tourist attraction in the city (both announced in October 2020), and a US \$ 5 billion agreement to build a major Chinese shopping center, signed in January 2021. All of this, not to mention the tremendous assistance China provided Erbil during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing hospitals and the public with masks, disinfectants and essential equipment.⁸⁰¹

Actually, China's success in Iraq can be attributed to a combination of risk and resilience, luck and dexterous diplomacy. In the energy sector, the Chinese have benefited from the hesitation of Western international oil companies to invest or reduce their involvement in Iraq due to security and corruption concerns. They also benefited from their willingness to accept tighter financial conditions than their competitors and from their efforts to build relationships with local stakeholders.⁸⁰²

6. Reconstruction of the Yemeni Economy in the Context of MSR

China historically had good relations with Yemen. In 1956, two countries established formal diplomatic relations at a ministerial

⁸⁰⁰ Yasin Yildirim, "China Expands its Economic and Political Influence in Northern Iraq", The Strategist, The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), 28.09.2020.

⁸⁰¹ Olga Malik, "What Is China's Endgame in Northern Iraq?", op. cit.

⁸⁰² John Calabrese, "China-Iraq Relations...", op. cit.

level, which makes Yemen the first Arabian Peninsula country to recognise the PRC as the legitimate representative of the country.⁸⁰³ China established diplomatic relations with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) in 1968.⁸⁰⁴ The PRC's early interest in North Yemen intersected with that of the former USSR, with both countries keen to confront Western influence and colonialism by establishing relations with regimes hostile to the West.⁸⁰⁵

Due to devastating civil wars prior to the 1962 Yemeni revolution, China poured resources into humanitarian aid and many nation-building projects for Yemen. After the revolution and unification of Yemen, the government made efforts to build roads, hospitals, schools. China has committed enormous resources to Yemen for road construction, medical care, educational support and textile factory technology. Common socialist history in the modern period still links Yemen and China in the twenty-first century.⁸⁰⁶ China was one of the first foreign countries to take part in Yemen's development projects when it helped build a 266-km road between Sana'a and Hodeidah back in the 1950s. Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei has been operating in Yemen since 1999. The two countries have also set up several joint projects, such as the Sino-Yemeni steel company Star.⁸⁰⁷

Since 2011, China's policy towards the Yemeni conflict has been influenced by its desire to strengthen a strong strategic rela-

⁸⁰³ **Alican Tekingunduz**, "What is China doing in Yemen?", TRT World, 13.12.2019.

⁸⁰⁴ **Wai-Yip Ho**, "'One Belt, One Road' and the Middle East in China: Yemeni Community in a Transregional Circuit", Durham Research Online, No. 21, Durham University, UK, March 2018, p. 5.

⁸⁰⁵ **Joseph Yu-Shek Cheng, Franklin Wankun Zhang**, "Chinese Foreign Relation Strategies under Mao and Deng: A Systematic and Comparative Analysis", Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies, Vol. 14, Issue 3, No. 4, 1999, p. 96.

⁸⁰⁶ **Wai-Yip Ho**, "'One Belt, One Road' ...", op. cit., p. 5.

⁸⁰⁷ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Why Is China Interested in a Volatile Yemen?", The Diplomat, 04.06.2014.

tionship with Saudi Arabia. Despite China's historic friendship with North Yemen and South Yemen, bilateral relations with Riyadh are more prominent in Chinese calculations in both 2011 and 2015 during key UNSC votes on Yemeni political issues.⁸⁰⁸ Although Beijing supported Riyadh's regional influence in the Yemen arena, it was able to balance that by supporting Iran in a higher Iranian-Chinese priority playing out at the same time, the Iran nuclear deal.⁸⁰⁹ And while China has maintained comprehensive strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE, China has discreetly supported the internationally recognized government of Yemen, while maintaining lines of communication with the Houthis and the Southern Transitional Council. Chinese officials also held diplomatic talks with al-Islah, the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. China has used these close diplomatic ties with warring factions in Yemen both to expand its economic presence in Yemen and to further strengthen its influence in the Red Sea.⁸¹⁰

China's stance on the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen falls somewhere between Russia and the US, as China has refused to emulate criticism from Moscow of Saudi Arabia's behavior, but has also expressed greater skepticism than American politicians about the viability of the military campaign.⁸¹¹

Since the overthrow of Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen in 2012, despite ongoing al-Qaeda-linked uprising, widespread poverty and severe water shortages, relations between the two countries are booming.⁸¹²

However, China has not used its close ties to Yemen's many warring parties to mediate or facilitate dialogue, but rather capi-

⁸⁰⁸ **I-wei Jennifer Chang**, "China and Yemen's Forgotten War", op. cit.

⁸⁰⁹ **Hisham Al-Khawlani**, "China Prioritizes Gulf Economic, Oil Relationships; Yemen Can Wait", The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 25.01.2021.

⁸¹⁰ **Samuel Ramani**, "China Looks to Boost Its Influence in Yemen", Al-Monitor, 09.12.2019.

⁸¹¹ **Ibid.**

⁸¹² **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Why Is China Interested ...", op. cit.

talized on these diplomatic ties to establish itself as an investor in Yemen's economy, supporting Yemen's inclusion in its BRI, and participating in economic recovery in Yemen.⁸¹³

Yemen occupies a unique geographical position at the crossroads of the *belt and road*, becoming a bridge between Asia and Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea and thus becoming a key component in the SPS.⁸¹⁴ Yemen's significant and strategically important position on the southwestern side of the Arabian Peninsula close to the Suez Canal, bordering Saudi Arabia, Oman, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden within the Arabian Sea, contributes to this by providing Beijing with an opportunity to strengthen strategic communications strongholds and trade bottlenecks around the world or near them. Yemen offers the opportunity to access untapped consumer markets for Chinese exports, as well as a lucrative investment. In 2013, Beijing was selected for a US \$ 508 million project to expand two container ports in **Aden** and **Mokha**, under which Beijing agreed to provide a concessional loan to finance projects.⁸¹⁵ This project will provide further connections in the MSR segment on the BRI.⁸¹⁶

Gaining access to the critical hub of Yemen's Bab el Mandeb Strait, which connects the Horn of Africa to the ME, could help China achieve its goal of expanding B&R to Saudi Arabia and allow China to actively participate in offshore oil trading across Yemen's sea straits.⁸¹⁷ Chinese politicians are also considering a military base on Yemen's Miyun island, near the entrance to the Bab el-Mandeb

Strait, as part of their vision to strengthen their presence in the Red Sea.⁸¹⁸

Although Yemen has fewer oil resources than its neighbors, China's growing energy needs raise the importance of oil producers, including marginal producers such as Yemen, despite the insecurity and other challenges facing the country. Since 2005, the Chinese state-owned enterprise SINOPEC Corp has been operating in the exploration and production sector of Yemen.⁸¹⁹ SINOPEC signed a deal worth US \$ 72 million to explore and produce oil in block 69 in Shabwa and block 71 in Hadramawt.⁸²⁰ In 2008, Chinese companies explored large oil and gas fields in the south of the country and on the shelf of the Red Sea on preferential terms.⁸²¹ Sinochem paid US \$ 465 million for a 16.78% stake (roughly 6,500 barrels per day) in block 10 of the East Shabwa Development area.⁸²² By 2011, together with another Chinese company, Sinochem Corp, SINOPEC has a cumulative equity production of about 20,000 barrels per day, which is 8% of Yemen's total production.⁸²³

In 2012, the China National Overseas Economic Cooperation Corporation (CCOEC) signed a deal to build three natural gas-fired power plants in the country.⁸²⁴ In addition, China has agreed to help build four 5,000-MW coal and diesel power plants in the cities of Belhaf and Ma'abar. Under the agreement, the Chinese were also

⁸¹³ **Samuel Ramani**, "China Looks to Boost Its Influence in Yemen", op. cit.

⁸¹⁴ **Hussein Askary**, "The Miracle of Yemen's Reconstruction and Connection to the New Silk Road", Operation Felix, EIR, 29.06.2018, pp. 20-21.

⁸¹⁵ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Why Is China Interested ...", op. cit.

⁸¹⁶ **Hisham Al-Khawlani**, "China Prioritizes Gulf ...", op. cit.

⁸¹⁷ **Samuel Ramani**, "China's Role in the Yemen Crisis", The Diplomat, 11.08.2017.

⁸¹⁸ **Субботин Игорь**, «От Китая ждут создания военной базы в Йемене», Независимая газета, 12.12.2019.

⁸¹⁹ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Why is China Interested ...", op. cit.

⁸²⁰ "Yemen-Sinopec in Block Deal, Kogas Keen on Yemen Exports", Energy News Bulletin, 17.01.2005.

⁸²¹ **Балиев Алексей**, «Китай идет на Африканский Рог. Йемен готовится стать проводником интересов КНР в Африке», GLOBOSCOPE.RU, 27.06.2008.

⁸²² **Eric Ng**, "Sinochem Pays US\$465m for Yemen Oilfield Asset", South China Morning Post, 05.02.2008.

⁸²³ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Why is China Interested ...", op. cit.

⁸²⁴ **Alican Tekingunduz**, "What is China doing in Yemen?", op. cit.

7. Chapter Conclusion

responsible for laying the power cables and the Safeer-Ma'abar gas pipeline.⁸²⁵

It is worth noting that during the first Houthi airstrikes launched in March 2015 by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, Beijing's main goal was to protect Chinese citizens in Yemen, most of whom worked in the oil and gas industry and construction. Beijing closed its embassy in Sana'a and a Chinese Navy ship arrived at the port of Aden to evacuate nearly 600 Chinese citizens and 225 other foreigners in Djibouti.⁸²⁶

Over the past two decades, China has provided the Yemeni government with numerous loans and grants for development and technical cooperation projects.⁸²⁷ China provided large amounts of humanitarian aid to Yemen through bilateral and multilateral channels. Between 2017 and 2020, China provided Yemen with over 11,700 tons of food, covering most of its provinces. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, China has donated test kits, personal protective equipment and medical masks to help Yemen fight the pandemic.⁸²⁸

China continues to work to secure energy and supply, protect its foreign economic interests, and advocate hands-off to minimize security risks to the BRI. Skillful management of its strategic partnership with each of the key regional players in the arena of Yemen - Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE - has so far allowed China to implement BRI - compliant projects in these regional heavyweights, while, in fact, it is expectant to see an approach to active participation again in Yemen.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁵ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, "Why is China Interested ...", op. cit.

⁸²⁶ "Yemen Crisis: China Evacuates Citizens and Foreigners from Aden", BBC, 03.04.2015.

⁸²⁷ **I-wei Jennifer Chang**, "China and Yemen's Forgotten War", op. cit.

⁸²⁸ "Chinese Envoy Asks for More Int'l Aid for Yemen", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 02.03.2021.

⁸²⁹ **Hisham Al-Khawlani**, "China Prioritizes Gulf ...", op. cit.

At present, the countries of the PG, compared to other countries in the ME, have a high level of population welfare, high rates of economic development, political stability and certain financial capabilities. The countries of the PG perceive China as an exemplary trading partner that does not interfere in domestic affairs, and as a great power with significant political influence in the international arena. So, China and the Gulf countries favor a faster pace of economic rather than political reform. Among the important areas of economic cooperation between the PRC and the states of the region are infrastructure construction, energy, including nuclear, space exploration, communications, as well as finance and investment.

Economic relations between China and the Gulf countries are dominated by oil, because despite the diversification of oil sources to support a thriving Chinese economy, the Gulf occupies an irreplaceable strategic position due to the high quality of oil, ease of transportation and low oil production costs. After the Gulf countries opened their relatively closed and monopolized oil exploration and production market to new players in order to balance the US in oil production and diversify their oil exports, Chinese companies received contracts for the production of oil or gas. With the expected increase in the number of energy deals and the completion of large-scale energy projects under the BRI, China's energy concerns could ease, helping to support economic growth.

China is also emerging as a major importer of LNG, which will create new market opportunities for Gulf producers. GCC offers price advantages for raw materials as well as a strategic location on major trade routes to Asia. The Gulf countries also have a huge oilfield services market, and China is already a booming chemical market, playing an increasingly important role in the Arab petrochemical industry. The GCC countries are most interested in China's

vibrant labor market, which has a large surplus of labor, and in goods that the country can produce cheaply, such as textiles.

As energy is supplied from the PG to China, mainly through maritime communication channels and "Choke Points", the safe passage of which Beijing seeks to ensure within the framework of the "*Gulf String of Pearls*" strategy. Its goal is to facilitate effective resource allocation and deep market integration, economic policy coordination, and deepening open, inclusive, balanced economic cooperation in the region. The Gulf countries prefer the expansion of infrastructure and production equipment in high-tech industries. The Gulf engineering market accounts for 19% of the world market, which provides great opportunities for Chinese companies currently cooperating in the construction of high-speed railways, electricity and ports. The "*Two Wheel*" and "*Two Wing*" strategies will enable the establishment of business clusters in Chinese industrial parks (FTZ) in the GCC countries, increase trade flows and connect supply chains throughout the region.

As for Iran, in the face of ever-deeper confrontation with Washington, China's policy of non-interference in conflicts and disputes in the MENA, avoiding a policy of controversy and remaining an equal trading partner for all oil and gas exporters in the region cannot last forever. If, until recently, Beijing did not seek competition with the US, and it did not have to deploy its armed forces in the region to protect its assets, now it is difficult to predict how much Beijing is ready to escalate the confrontation with Washington over Tehran, to what extent China is ready to resist US sanctions, which are likely to be introduced by the US after the entry into force of the Iran-China Treaty agreement.

It can be assumed that the Sino-Iranian deal could call into question the superiority of the US in the PG and strengthen China's international positions, since, by pursuing a hostile policy towards Iran, the US itself can limit its strategic choices and become an object of manipulation by its regional partners - Saudi Arabia and the

UAE. Meanwhile, a return to the "*nuclear deal*" and the lifting of sanctions will allow European and American companies to revive moderate forces in Iran and, in the long run, lead to better political relations.

On the other hand, the Iran-China deal is intended to show that both countries have alternatives to the West, even if many of the mentioned projects never come to fruition. While Sino-Iranian relations are still far from forming a new axis, recent talks show that by increasing pressure on China and Iran, the US encouraged the two countries to form a common front.

Yemen's geographical location provides an opportunity to observe three regional problem areas: *the Gulf of Aden*, *the Red Sea* and *the Horn of Africa*, as well as become a bridge between Asia and Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. And the BRI can be used as a new driving force in Sino-Yemeni relations, especially the integration between post-war rebuilding of the state and the implementation of the BRI. China's willingness to invest in Yemen during a political crisis increases its soft power across the country and strengthens its close ties with all of Yemen's major warring factions.

For Baghdad, BRI provides a faster and more efficient way to finance the infrastructure needed to develop it, to attract new foreign companies. With its huge oil reserves (fifth in the world) and a strategic geopolitical position, Iraq has much to offer China on the way to realizing its plans to dominate Eurasian trade. Iraq's proximity to the maritime countries of the Mediterranean, such as Israel and Turkey, and the GCC can serve as a bridge between these sea routes.

While parts of the BRI vision align well with the GCC's current goals in the areas of economic diversification, energy, investment, market access, and regional security, other aspects of the initiative carry risks, including BRI's engagement with regional competitors in the Gulf. Impending FTA negotiations between China and the Gulf countries are expected to diversify China's oil imports and help Gulf

nations reduce US dominance in the region. Besides, the stable growth of the Chinese economy, the growing cooperation of the PRC with the countries of the PG raises may concern the US about the loss of its weight in world politics and, in particular, the loss of influence in the PG region. To achieve the BRI's trade and infrastructure goals and ensure a continuous flow of diversified energy supplies, China needs to strengthen its relationship with both regional centers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, without alienating either of them or the US.

FIFTH CHAPTER

ONE BELT, ONE ROAD IN NORTH AFRICA AND DJIBOUTI

1. Beijing's Growing Presence and Influence in North Africa

China's presence in Africa has been the topic of numerous discussions and forums of political scientists, economists and military experts from various countries for a number of years now. Recently, China's actions on the African continent have drawn particularly close attention in the geopolitical arena.⁸³⁰

The beginning of the development of modern relations between China and African countries can be considered April 1955, when the Conference of 29 countries of Asia and Africa was held in Bandung (Indonesia). During it, China's PM Zhou Enlai met for the first time with the leaders of African states (Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Sudan, Liberia and Ghana). After the conference, China intensified contacts with the countries of the continent, and on May 30, 1956, a joint communiqué was signed with Egypt on the establishment of diplomatic relations, which became the first African and Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with China.⁸³¹

China began to actively penetrate Africa in the late 1950s. For the first time, the special services of the Celestial Empire were noticed on this continent during the Franco-Algerian war. Since 1958, the PRC has been secretly helping the National Liberation Front of

⁸³⁰ Михайлова Наталья, «Станет ли Африка основным направлением китайской дипломатии?», Gbtimes.com, 02.04.2013.

⁸³¹ Дегтерев Денис, «Китай – Африка: важные аспекты отношений», Мировая экономика и международные отношения, № 5, ИМЭМО, РАН, 2005, с. 84-91.

Algeria (Front de libération nationale / FLN). In March - April 1959, one of the leaders of the CCP, Liu Shaoqi, received the leaders of the Algerian rebels in Beijing, and China began to generously sponsor the FLN members with weapons and money. In October 1960, the PRC officially announced the provision of aid to Algeria, which gained independence from France in 1962 and in the 1960s, became China's main base for expanding its influence in Africa.⁸³²

The further development of China's relations with the countries of the continent was impeded by the difficult international situation prevailing at that time, as well as the beginning of the "*Cultural Revolution*" in the PRC (1966-1976). China was in a state of confrontation with the Western countries (accordingly, it could not establish relations with African regimes loyal to them), but at the same time, relations with the USSR (and, therefore, with regimes loyal to it) also deteriorated significantly.⁸³³

Over the past few years, China has gradually strengthened its economic presence in North Africa (NA) through trade, investment, and infrastructure projects. Beijing is intensifying its relations with the countries of the region on a bilateral, multilateral basis, in particular within the framework of FOCAC and CASCF.⁸³⁴ At the 2006 meeting of the FOCAC, a plan was announced to establish five SEZs in Africa to attract Chinese investment and integrate China's complex economic activities throughout the continent.⁸³⁵

China endorsed the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* in 2001, *Action Plan for Accelerating Industrial Development in Africa* in 2007, *Africa Infrastructure Development Plan and Africa*

⁸³² Игнатченко Игорь, «Незримая битва между США и Китаем за ресурсы Африки», Геополитика, 06.12.2012.

⁸³³ Дегтерев Денис, «Китай – Африка: важные ...», укз. соч., с. 84-91.

⁸³⁴ Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Libya Policy and the BRI: Sights Set on the Future", Middle East Institute, 22.12.2020.

⁸³⁵ Loro Horta, "China Building Africa's Economic Infrastructure: SEZs and Railroads", China Brief, Vol. 10, Issue 15, The Jamestown Foundation, 22.07.2010, p. 9.

2063 Vision in 2013. In 2014, China introduced the "461" *China-Africa cooperation Framework*, which means:

1. **Four Principles including;** *equality, pragmatism, sincerity, trustworthiness;*
2. **Six major projects:** *industry, finance, poverty reduction, environmental protection, cultural exchanges, peace and safety;*
3. **All under One platform:** *China-Africa forum.*⁸³⁶

The absence of China's colonial past contributes to the development of Sino-African relations, in which economic interests are given priority. It is reflected in the postulate "*prosperity first*" or "*first growth, then rights*", which implies the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights over civil-political rights.⁸³⁷

Events during the Arab Spring in MENA - the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the uprising and civil war in Libya, and the mass protests that spread across the Maghrib, Mashrik and down the Arabian Peninsula - created something of a challenge for China.⁸³⁸ The fact is that Beijing's economic interests are the most dominant factor in determining its foreign policy towards the countries of the region, and it focuses on stability to ensure continued access to natural resources, even without considering Beijing's concerns about the general undesirability of overthrowing governments by mass movements.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁶ "Why is China Successful in Africa Than Any Other Country", KT PRESS, 14.08.2018.

⁸³⁷ Elizabeth Yoneva, "In the Embrace of the Dragon: China-Africa Relations in the Extractive Industries", Collection of Papers from the Forth International Conference on Chinese Studies "The Silk Road" organized by the Confucius Institute in Sofia, 1-2 June 2017, Sofia, 2018, p. 133.

⁸³⁸ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, «Չինաստանի դիրքորոշումը 'արաբական գարնան' նկատմամբ», Ժամանակակից Եվրասիա, Մերձավոր Արևելք. Քաղաքական փոխակերպումներ, Հ. 2(1), ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2013, էջ 64-104; Harutyunyan Aghavni, "The Arab Spring ...", op. cit., pp. 105-128.

⁸³⁹ J. Peter Pham, "China's Interests in the Middle East ...", op. cit., p. 6.

In general, the strategic location of the five Arab countries (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia) of NA on the southern Mediterranean coast means that China's presence will only expand, especially in the economic sphere, where Egypt, Morocco and Algeria are the highest priority. While China's relations with Egypt and Algeria are characterized by strong diplomatic and security partnerships, its growing presence in countries such as Morocco and Tunisia remains largely economic and cultural. And despite the fact that China has signed MoU with Libya and Tunisia, it has not yet established a formal partnership with any of the NA states.⁸⁴⁰

China is the main trading partner of the African continent. According to China Global Investment Tracker, trade between China and the five Maghreb countries reached nearly US \$ 23.5 billion in 2019. Chinese investment and contracts in the Maghreb region totaled US \$ 29.6 billion between 2005 and 2019, with Algeria taking over the lion's share (US \$ 23.6 billion).⁸⁴¹ The Chinese are building roads, hospitals, stadiums in Africa, invest in the development of new technologies in agriculture. On the African continent, the Chinese have bought more than 3 million hectares of fertile land. All major contracts for exploration and production of minerals go to Chinese businessmen.⁸⁴²

According to experts, China's claims about a "*mutually beneficial model of cooperation*" with African countries are only partially true. For example, the African Development Bank estimates that by 2021, Africa's infrastructure deficit was US \$ 93 billion a year.⁸⁴³ Chinese businessmen impose restrictions on labor laws in their enterprises, which leads to social tensions. Such an ambiguous policy

⁸⁴⁰ Adel Abdel Ghafar, "Beijing Calling ...", op. cit.

⁸⁴¹ Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Libya Policy and the BRI...", op. cit.

⁸⁴² Давид Сендра Доменеч, «Китайская колонизация Латинской Америки и Африки», Центр стратегических оценок и прогнозов, 01.05.2014.

⁸⁴³ Venkateswaran Lokanathan, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications in Africa", ORF Issue Brief, No. 395, Observer Research Foundation, August 2020, p. 4.

of the Chinese authorities, accompanied by mass immigration of Chinese, is criticized by African countries.⁸⁴⁴ China's policy of attracting Chinese labor for its infrastructure projects in Africa has resulted in over 200,000 Chinese citizens working under OBOR contracts across Africa. This gives Beijing a justification for a practical approach to protecting them, as well as its burgeoning investment. The OBOR has heightened the need for a global strategy to protect China's foreign interests, and the CCP has adopted the concept of "*protecting overseas nationals*" as a core Chinese interest.⁸⁴⁵

China is setting up NA to play an integral role in connecting Asia, Africa and Europe - BRI goal. While the BRI map officially included only Egypt, MoUs were signed between China and every state in NA.⁸⁴⁶ Noteworthy that only one African city, Nairobi, was identified as an B&R hub, through which the MSR will supposedly pass.⁸⁴⁷ In 2019, the Egypt and UAE were the only Arab countries that sent top-level representation to attend the *Second Belt and Road Forum* in Beijing.⁸⁴⁸ China is investing in ports along the Suez Canal from the Gulf of Aden to the Mediterranean Sea. Of the 49 countries with which China has signed a MoU or formally endorsed the BRI, 34 (almost 70%) are located off the coast of Africa, 16 in the West, 8 in the North and East, and 2 in the south. These include the following ports: *Djibouti* (*Djibouti* -first overseas military base), *Sudan* (*Sudan*), *Said and Tevik* (*Egypt*), *Ain Sokhna* (*Egypt*), *Zarzis* (*Tunisia*) and *El Hamdania* (*Algeria*). In the future, China could use its influence on these ports for **economic** (transport of raw materials,

⁸⁴⁴ Давид Сендра Доменеч, «Китайская колонизация ...», укз. соч.

⁸⁴⁵ Paul Nantulya, "Implications for Africa from China's One Belt One Road Strategy", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 22.03.2019.

⁸⁴⁶ Adel Abdel Ghafar, "Beijing Calling ...", op. cit.

⁸⁴⁷ Clélie Nallet, "Africa on the Margins of OBOR? Three Years of China's New Silk Roads. From Words to (Re)action?", IFRI, February 2017, p. 61.

⁸⁴⁸ Chuchu Zhang, "Potential to Leap Forward ...", op. cit., p. 9.

finished goods and labour) and **military** (surveillance and blockade of overseas and deep-sea maritime traffic) purposes.⁸⁴⁹

2. The Synergy of the OBOR and the Egypt Vision 2030

Despite the fact that the official establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Egypt took place only in 1956, the interaction between the two countries developed earlier. So, for example, in the 1930s, twenty Chinese Muslim students were sent to Egypt to study at Al-Azhar University, upon completion of their studies, they became translators and teachers of Arabic in China. After the establishment of official diplomatic relations, Egypt supported the PRC in its aspiration to become a full member of the UNSC with a veto, and China condemned the aggression of Great Britain, France and the US against Egypt during the Suez crisis.⁸⁵⁰

Beijing emphasizes Egypt's role in regional and international affairs and, given the traditional activity of Egyptian diplomacy, sees Cairo as a potential partner in the Arab-Muslim world.⁸⁵¹ It is no coincidence that Egyptian-Chinese relations have a special place in the Sino-Arab dialogue, in particular in the framework of the CASCF.⁸⁵² Egypt is also an African power, so Egyptian-Chinese relations have a special place in the FOCAC. Egypt is seen as a bridge to China's expanding ties with the Arab world and Africa.⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁹ Venkateswaran Lokanathan, "China's Belt and Road ...", op. cit., p. 4.

⁸⁵⁰ Бочаров Иван, «Египетско-китайские отношения на современном этапе», Российский совет по международным делам (НП РСМД), 31.01.2020.

⁸⁵¹ "Mubarak, Zemin Discuss Situation in Palestinian Territories Egypt-China", Arabic News, 24.01.2002.

⁸⁵² Հարությունյան Աղավնի, "Չին-եգիպտական ռազմաքաղաքական համագործակցության շուրջ", Մերձավոր Արևելք: Պատմություն, քաղաքականություն, մշակույթ, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2011, էջ 150:

⁸⁵³ Chris Zambelis, "Public Diplomacy in Sino-Egyptian Relations", China Brief, Vol. 7, Issue: 7, The Jamestown Foundation, 18.05.2007.

In April 1999, a joint memorandum on establishing a strategic partnership between the two countries on the 21st century was signed in Beijing.⁸⁵⁴ In June 2006, a "Deep Strategic Cooperation Program between China and Egypt" was signed, under which a political agreement and a MoU on establishing mechanisms for strategic dialogue were signed between the two countries' foreign ministries.⁸⁵⁵

Egypt plays a key role in China's MSR due to its strategic location between Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe. Through MSR, China intends to gain access to the natural entry point to the Mediterranean from the east and make Egypt one of the largest centers for the production of Chinese goods destined for the markets of Africa, Europe and the ME.⁸⁵⁶ The Suez Canal has an advantageous geographical position, and therefore Egypt can become the industrial, trade and logistics center of the region.⁸⁵⁷

During Xi's Egyptian visit in January 2016, China signed a MoU with Egypt to enhance cooperation on the implementation of the BRI.⁸⁵⁸ In 2017, China and Egypt signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement to expand cooperation and enhance Egypt's status among China's partners.⁸⁵⁹ In October 2018, Egypt and China

⁸⁵⁴ Арутюнян Агавни, «О китайско-египетских отношениях», XXVI международная конференция. Источниковедение и историография стран Азии и Африки, "Модернизация и Традиции", 20-22 апреля 2011, Тезисы докладов, Восточный факультет СПбГУ, Санкт-Петербург, 2011, с. 9.

⁸⁵⁵ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, "Չին-եգիպտական ռազմաքաղաքական համագործակցության շուրջ", նշվ. աշխ., էջ 151:

⁸⁵⁶ Jacopo Franceschini, "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Reshaping the Political Scenario of the Eastern Mediterranean?", Mediterranean Affairs, 07.11.2018.

⁸⁵⁷ «Президент Египта поделился видением роли страны в регионе», РИА Новости, 26.04.2019.

⁸⁵⁸ "Can China's New Silk Road Bring Economic Benefits...", op. cit.; «Срочно: Китай и Египет подписали Меморандум о взаимопонимании по продвижению сотрудничества в рамках инициативы 'один пояс, один путь'», Russian. News. Cn, 21.01.2016.

⁸⁵⁹ Jacopo Franceschini, "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ...", op. cit.

had signed deals worth US \$ 18 billion as part of the BRI.⁸⁶⁰ In April 2019, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, speaking at the opening ceremony of the B&R international forum, said that Egypt is increasing energy production, diversifying energy resources and turning itself into a regional energy center.⁸⁶¹ In 2020, the parties agreed to continue work on the integration of the Chinese initiative and the national development strategy "*Egypt Vision 2030*".⁸⁶²

In November 2006, Egypt recognized China as a country with a full market economy.⁸⁶³ China's exports to Egypt reached US \$ 7.61 billion in the first eight months of 2018, while its imports from Egypt totalled US \$ 1.22 billion. China-Egypt bilateral trade volume grew 26.7% year-on-year in January-August 2018 to reach US \$ 8.83 billion. About 1,080 Chinese companies are operating in Egypt in various sectors, notably industry, information technology and economic zones.⁸⁶⁴ China and Egypt signed US \$ 1 billion financing agreement for Egypt's central bank and a US \$ 700 million loan to state-owned National Bank of Egypt.⁸⁶⁵

The Suez Canal attracts most of the Chinese investment in the country through the redevelopment of many of the canal ports, such as Ismailia and Port Said.⁸⁶⁶ Both the harbors at the ends of the Suez Canal have a great influence over the ME, Africa and the entire planet in terms of geopolitics and global trade. Egypt plans to open six new ports and more industrial parks alongside the canal, and launch in the nearby areas projects like a new industrial city, which is

⁸⁶⁰ **Fransiska Nangoy, Ed Davies**, "Egypt Minister Sees No Threats Attached to China Investment", Reuters, 14.10.2018.

⁸⁶¹ «Президент Египта поделился видением роли страны ...», укз. соч.

⁸⁶² «Китай и Египет ускоряют совместную реализацию инициативы 'Один пояс, один путь'», CGTN, 09.01.2020.

⁸⁶³ **The Egyptian Gazette**, 07.11.2006; «Египет признал за Китаем статус страны с полной рыночной экономикой», Жэньминь Жибао, 06.11.2006.

⁸⁶⁴ "Yearend: China-Egypt Relations See Strong Push in 2018", op. cit.

⁸⁶⁵ "China Extends Financial Support to Egypt with New Pacts", China National News, 22.01.2016.

⁸⁶⁶ **Jacopo Franceschini**, "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ...", op. cit.

capable of hosting hundreds of factories.⁸⁶⁷ In August 2014, a 72-km expansion of the Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone), launched in 2009, was approved by the Egyptian government to boost the country's ailing economy.⁸⁶⁸ Chinese construction firms are already the largest investors in Egypt's mega-project.⁸⁶⁹

In January 2016, China and Egypt signed a five-year outline document in which the two sides vowed to "*double their efforts*" to develop the China-Egypt Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone. It covers an area of 6 km, located some 120 km to the east of Cairo near the Suez Canal,² and is only about 50 km away from Egypt's new administrative capital, where the BRI and Egypt's Suez Canal Corridor Development Project meet. The project was to attract more than 100 textile, clothing, oil, motorcycle and solar energy enterprises to Egypt. For over a decade, it has directly offered jobs to over 3,500 people and created 30,000 job opportunities through the industries it gathered. The program has managed to attract investments from the world's top companies.⁸⁷⁰ The special market zone was home to more than 30 Chinese enterprises.⁸⁷¹ "*TEDA Fun Valley*"* in the China-Egypt Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone is also one of the main cooperation programs and attracts tens of thousands of visitors every year. In addition to a cluster of industrial enterprises, the cooperation zone will be transformed into a city with many ancillary facilities such as restaurants and super-

⁸⁶⁷ "The World is Not Enough: Egypt's New Suez Canal Conjoins Chinese Silk Road", Sputnik, 07.08.2015.

⁸⁶⁸ "Spotlight: China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative ...", op. cit.

⁸⁶⁹ **Afshin Molavi**, "Enter the Dragon ...", op. cit.

⁸⁷⁰ "Xinhua Headlines: China, Egypt Dream Big as Desert is Converted into Cooperation Zone", Xinhua. English.news.cn, 20.01.2019.

⁸⁷¹ **Gabriel Domínguez, Ju Juan**, "Soft Power - China's ...", op. cit.

* TEDA stands for Tianjin Economic and Technological Development Area, which is located about 150 km east of China's capital Beijing with the Bohai Sea to the east. It used to be a land with salty and alkaline soil, but now it is a modern industrial city with an annual gross domestic product (GDP) of more than US \$ 44 billion after more than 30 years of development.

markets, as well as commercial residential areas and a shopping center.⁸⁷² In August 2018, Egypt officially opened its “*New Suez Canal*”.⁸⁷³

In 2008, COSCO Pacific, China’s largest shipping SOE, invested US \$ 185.6 million in a joint venture to operate and manage the Suez Canal Container Terminal (SCCT) in Port Said East Port, located in the western Sinai Peninsula at the northern end of the Canal. For Port Said East Port’s second development phase, operating since 2012, China’s largest state-owned enterprises and the second largest dredging company in the world - China Harbor Engineering Company (CHEC) invested US \$ 219 million to construct a 1,200-meter quay. CHEC also completed a contract valued at US \$ 1 billion to construct a quay in al-Adabiya port at the southern entrance to the Canal.⁸⁷⁴

In May 2018, Egypt’s New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA) signed a MoU with Chinese construction company CGCOC Group (formerly known as CGC Overseas Construction Group Co., Ltd) to establish the first industrial zone in the city of New Alamein. CHEC started in August 2018, the main phase of the construction of a new terminal basin in Sokhna Port south of the Suez Canal northeast of Egypt, while the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) signed in September a loan agreement of US \$ 600 million with CDB in Beijing.⁸⁷⁵

In 2017, Egypt signed a preliminary agreement with *China Fortune Land Development* for US \$ 10 billions of investments over a period of 10 years for development works at the new administrative capital, located 40 km east of Greater Cairo, between Cairo and the

⁸⁷² “*Xinhua Headlines: China, Egypt Dream Big as Desert...*”, op. cit.

⁸⁷³ “*The World is Not Enough: Egypt’s New Suez Canal ...*”, op. cit.

⁸⁷⁴ Emma Scott, “*China’s Silk Road Strategy ...*”, op. cit., p. 11.

The 2011 Arab Spring turned into a reality the economic and security risks of China’s overdependence when Chinese cargo ships were severely detained in the Suez Canal.

⁸⁷⁵ “*Yearender: China-Egypt Relations See Strong Push in 2018*”, op. cit.

Suez Canal. Once completed, the city is expected to accommodate around 5 million inhabitants.⁸⁷⁶ The plan for the new capital, where most of the Egyptian government will relocate upon completion, could exceed US \$ 20 billion, and the CSCEC has begun construction of a US \$ 3 billion new business and administrative district, mostly funded by Chinese banks. Other Chinese companies are actively engaging with Egyptian authorities on other aspects of the multibillion-dollar project to build a new desert capital.⁸⁷⁷

Chinese drilling company ZPEC has 11 rigs in Egypt and it plans to bring more of them to join the Canal Sugar project. Since 2016, ZPEC has worked in Egypt’s 1.5-million-feddan reclamation national project and drilled 38 agricultural wells for the Egyptian military in the Sinai Peninsula. At the end of 2018, ZPEC deployed three 650 horsepower 40-meter rigs and other heavy equipment in various locations in the desert, about 50 km west of the Mallawi area in Minya (Western Desert near the southern Egyptian province of Minya).⁸⁷⁸

In March 2018, the Egyptian government signed a MoU with *China State Construction Engineering Co.* on designing and constructing three closed gymnasiums in Sharm al-Sheikh, Hurghada and Luxor in preparation for hosting the *2021 World Men’s Handball Championship*. In September 2018, Egypt and China signed deals, including the construction of a pumping and storage station in the Mount Ataka area in Northeast Egypt, a coal-fired power station in Hamrawein on the Red Sea coast and the second phase of central business district in the new administrative capital. The signings also included building a textile industrial project, a refinery and a petrochemicals complex in the Suez Canal corridor area. In December

⁸⁷⁶ “*Capturing the Opportunities from Belt ...*”, op. cit., p. 22; Ed Blanche, “*China’s New Silk Road Includes both Risk ...*”, op. cit.

⁸⁷⁷ Afshin Molavi, “*Enter the Dragon ...*”, op. cit.

⁸⁷⁸ “*Feature: China’s Drilling Company Brings Water to Egypt’s Desert for Future Giant Sugar Factory*”, Xinhua. English.news.cn, 24.11.2018.

2018, *Egypt's Arab Organization for Industrialization* (AOI) announced on the agreement with *China Railway 20 Bureau Group Corporation* (CR20G) to establish an industrial facility to manufacture monorails and express trains. Also in December, Egyptian Air Forces signed an agreement during EDEX 2018 exhibition in Cairo to purchase drones from *China's National Aero-Technology Import and Export Corporation* (CATIC).⁸⁷⁹

In August 2018, Chinese fiberglass giant manufacturer Jushi, which was introduced to Egypt via the cooperation zone, completed the production base of 200,000 tons of fiberglass by its local branch, making Egypt the world's fifth largest fiberglass producer.⁸⁸⁰ The natural resources discovered in Egyptian Zohr offshore gas field are increasing the opportunities to develop further partnerships in building offshore facilities within the MSR platform and granting new chances for China in the energy sector.⁸⁸¹

The large natural gas reserves discovered in Egypt in the late 1990s allowed it to become one of the leaders in the production of this type of hydrocarbon, not only in the ME, but all over the world.⁸⁸² As a fuel importer, China has been cooperating with Egypt since 1993 in the gas and heavy oil sectors to increase the efficiency of technologies used in old oil wells and to develop equipment for the petrochemical industry.⁸⁸³

⁸⁷⁹ “Yearender: China-Egypt Relations See Strong Push in 2018”, op. cit.

⁸⁸⁰ “Xinhua Headlines: China, Egypt Dream Big as Desert ...”, op. cit.

⁸⁸¹ **Ясоро Franceschini**, “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ...”, op. cit.

⁸⁸² **Мамед-заде П.**, «Египет и перспективы развития межазбаского газопровода», Ближний Восток и современность, Сборник статей, Вып. 20, М., 2003, с 157; **Հարությունյան Աղավնի**, “Չին-եգիպտական առևտրատնտեսական համագործակցության շուրջ”, Մերձավոր և Միջին Արևելքի երկրներ և ժողովուրդներ, Հ. 28, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2011, էջ 309:

⁸⁸³ **David H. Shinn**, “China's Approach to East, North and the Horn of Africa”, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, 21.07.2005, p. 14.

3. China-Tunisia: Strengthening the Partnership within the Framework of OBOR

China established diplomatic relationship with Tunisia on January 10, 1964.⁸⁸⁴ During the long presidency of Habib Bourguiba (1957–1987), Tunisia had rather distant and even antagonistic relations with China. His anti-communist and pro-Western policies made it difficult to establish close ties. Throughout the 1960s, Bourguiba denounced China for its foreign policy actions, especially the border dispute with India. However, in 1961, he began voting for China's participation in the UNSC. Foreign policy tensions did not prevent the establishment of trade relations as early as 1958. In 1983, the two countries signed the *Sino-Tunisian Joint Committee on Economic, Trade and Technological Cooperation* to facilitate trade relations, and made efforts to strengthen bilateral ties.⁸⁸⁵

As a country at the intersection of three - the **Mediterranean, Islamic-Arab** and **African** civilizations, Tunisia's signing of the B&R agreement with China in January 2019 sets an example of bilateral cooperation for other Arab countries.⁸⁸⁶ According to the Chinese Investment Tracker, Beijing's investment in Tunisia between 2009 and 2014 amounted to merely US \$ 110 million.⁸⁸⁷

Trade has risen between China and Tunisia, with the latter's imports from the former valued at US \$ 1.85 billion in 2017, ranking third behind France and Italy. However, China still views the country as an investment risk and is skeptical of its democratic transition and economic challenges.⁸⁸⁸ Tunisian imports from China represented 8.4% of Tunisia's total imports, with a clear predominance of

⁸⁸⁴ “Tunisia, Chinese Foreign Ministry”, China.org.cn, 10.10.2006.

⁸⁸⁵ **Yahia H. Zoubir**, “Expanding Sino-Maghreb Relations: Morocco and Tunisia”, Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 26.02.2020.

⁸⁸⁶ **Chuchu Zhang**, “Potential to Leap Forward ...”, op. cit., p. 9.

⁸⁸⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 2.

⁸⁸⁸ **Adel Abdel Ghafar**, “Beijing Calling ...”, op. cit.

electrical machinery, and equipment (56%) and fairly balanced between metals and metalwork (10%) and textiles and textile fabrics (10%).⁸⁸⁹

Tunisia, a country with key strategic positions in the Southern Mediterranean, NA and the Arab world, joined the BRI in early September 2018.⁸⁹⁰ Tunisia and China, as part of the 2018 FOCAC, signed an agreement that marked the country's first tangible steps towards forming a "*strong partnership*" with the BRI. The deals include projects to transform Tunisia's southern port of Zarzis into an economic and commercial hub, the construction of a bridge linking Djerba, Tunisia's main tourist island, with Djerf in the mineral-rich Medenine region, and the construction of a 140-km railroad linking the coastal Gabes region of the petrochemical and phosphate industry to Zarzis. Tunisia and China have agreed to open a car plant in Tunisia, operated by China's state-owned SAIC Motor Corporation Limited, which will manufacture and export vehicles to the Mediterranean region and Africa. They signed a tourism cooperation agreement that includes plans to open an air route to attract more Chinese tourists to Tunisia and expand the NA country's tourism industry, which is a major source of foreign exchange.⁸⁹¹

Undoubtedly, China is interested in the Tunisian port of Bizerte because it provides easy access to Europe; in addition, the port is located at the critical node of the submarine fiber-optic network cables.⁸⁹²

China's Huawei Marine Networks delivered the "Hannibal" cable, linking Tunisia to Italy, in 2009, as well as another major cable linking Libya to Greece, in 2010. This has led to concerns

⁸⁸⁹ "Integrating Tunisia into the New Silk Road", Zawya, 08.07.2017.

⁸⁹⁰ **Dhia Khaled**, "China-Tunisia Cooperation Stronger Than Ever", Global Times, 11.05.2020.

⁸⁹¹ **Lamine Ghanmi**, "Tunisia Joins China's Belt and Road Initiative as It Seeks to Diversify Trade, Investment", The Arab Weekly, 09.09.2018.

⁸⁹² **Yahia H. Zoubir**, "Expanding Sino-Maghreb Relations...", op. cit.

about Chinese commercial investments being used for non-commercial activities, such as intelligence gathering and naval/military cooperation in the Mediterranean.⁸⁹³

The Chinese energy construction company Sinohydro signed a contract with the Tunisian government in 2016 for the construction of a dam (passes through the mountains in the El Kef province in northwest Tunisia), which will be completed in 2022 and will be one of the largest dams in Tunisia. The dam, with a total storage capacity of 190 million cubic meters of water, will protect the region from flood and meet the needs for irrigation and domestic use of water in the region.⁸⁹⁴

In 2018, China started its first attempt to construct an overseas centre for its self-developed Beidou Satellite which has become the fourth global navigation satellite system preceded by the *Global Positioning System* (GPS) of the US, *Global Navigation Satellite System* (GLONASS) of Russia and *Galileo* of the EU. Situated in the Djazala Science Park on the northern outskirts of Tunis, the Beidou Satellite Centre is a flagship project between Beijing and the Tunisia-based *Arab Information and Communication Technology Organization* (AICTO). The centre facilitates smart city functions, enables unmanned driving of agricultural machinery, and helps farmers reduce costs, resource wastes, and damage to the environment.⁸⁹⁵

In April 2019, China and Tunisia signed a MoU, with a particular focus on the development of clean energy such as wind and solar energy. At the beginning of 2020, TBEA Xinjiang New Energy, a high-tech enterprise specializing in solar-grade high-purity polysilicon material, together with the Amea Power from the UAE, won a

⁸⁹³ **Adel Abdel Ghafar**, "Beijing Calling ...", op. cit.

⁸⁹⁴ "Feature: China-built Dam Boosts Sino-Tunisian Hydroelectric Cooperation", Xinhua. English.news.cn, 13.08.2018.

⁸⁹⁵ **Chuchu Zhang**, "Potential to Leap Forward ...", op. cit., p. 11.

contract to construct a power plant of 100MW in Kairouan, located in north-central Tunisia.⁸⁹⁶

Chinese firms can enter European markets through Tunisia, which is the first country along the southern coast of the Mediterranean to achieve free trade with the EU. In the 1990s, Tunisia signed a FTA with the EU to facilitate economic exchanges between the two shores of the Mediterranean.⁸⁹⁷

Despite the fact that tourism, culture, agri-food, renewable energy and automotive sectors are all of interest to Chinese investors, but they are hesitant to invest because of political uncertainty, insecurity, a conservative business climate, and restrictive fiscal measures.⁸⁹⁸

4. OBOR - a Means of Diversifying the Moroccan Economy

Relations between China and Morocco are centuries old. Ibn Battuta, the famous Moroccan explorer who toured China from 1345 to 1346, was the first to introduce China, especially the Great Wall, to the Western and Arab worlds.⁸⁹⁹

In November 1958, Morocco became the second country in Africa to recognize the PRC.⁹⁰⁰ China has rendered Morocco certain economic aid since 1961, but mutually beneficial cooperation between them was initiated in 1983.⁹⁰¹

According to the Chinese Investment Tracker in 2014, PRC's

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁹⁷ "Tunisia to Enhance Partnership with China in Expanding Markets: Official", Xinhua. China Daily, 17.05.2018.

⁸⁹⁸ Yahia H. Zoubir, "Expanding Sino-Maghreb Relations...", op. cit.

⁸⁹⁹ Mohammed Tawfik Mouline, "Belt and Road to Boost Sino-Moroccan Ties", China Daily, 05.09.2018.

⁹⁰⁰ Saad Guerraoui, "Morocco Establishes 'Strategic Partnership' with China", The Arab Weekly, 15.05.2016.

⁹⁰¹ "Morocco, Bilateral Relations", China.org.cn., March 2006.

investment in Morocco amounted to US \$ 780 million.⁹⁰² Morocco's imports from China were worth US \$ 3.14 billion in 2017, behind only those from France and Spain.⁹⁰³ Presently China's contracted projects in Morocco mainly concentrate on fishery cooperation. The commodities China exports to Morocco mainly include light industrial products, textiles, green tea, mechanical and electronic products, etc. China imports phosphates, chemical fertilizer and cobalt sand.⁹⁰⁴

The state visit of King Mohammed VI of Morocco to China in 2016 led to the signing of a number of important agreements, including the signing of a *China-Africa Investment Fund*. China sees Morocco as an opportunity to develop factories for export to the EU, right across the Strait of Gibraltar.⁹⁰⁵ In November 17, 2017, China and Morocco signed a MoU on joint construction of the B&R.⁹⁰⁶

In October 2000, the Moroccan Bank for Foreign Trade set up an office in Beijing.⁹⁰⁷ BOC opened its first branch in Morocco in 2017. In 2016, the Moroccan government hosted the first *Sino-African Entrepreneurship Summit* in Marrakech, where Morocco later hosted the COP22 Summit.⁹⁰⁸

In 2011, Sinochem signed a 4-year contract with Morocco's OCP Group to purchase 2 million tons of phosphate fertilizer.⁹⁰⁹ After China's Haite Group pulled out of the project, the CCCC and its subsidiary, the *China Road and Bridge Corporation* (CRBC), signed an MoU with Morocco's BMCE Bank. Construction on the "Tech City" had already begun as of July 2019. Following the

⁹⁰² Chuchu Zhang, "Potential to Leap Forward ...", op. cit., p. 2.

⁹⁰³ Adel Abdel Ghafar, "Beijing Calling ...", op. cit.

⁹⁰⁴ "Morocco, Bilateral Relations", op. cit.

⁹⁰⁵ Joseph Hammond, "Morocco: China's Gateway to Africa?", The Diplomat, 01.03.2017.

⁹⁰⁶ "China, Morocco Sign MOU on Belt and Road", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 17.11.2017.

⁹⁰⁷ "Morocco, Bilateral Relations", op. cit.

⁹⁰⁸ Joseph Hammond, "Morocco: China's Gateway to Africa?", op. cit.

⁹⁰⁹ "Morocco Diplomata Magazine Interviews Chinese ...", op. cit.

announcement of the “Tech City” project, Chinese auto manufacturing companies, including *BYD*, *Citic Dicastal*, and *Aotecar New Energy Technology*, signed agreements with the Moroccan government to build various plants.⁹¹⁰ CITIC Dicastal set up a US \$ 400 million plant to supply equipment for *the French Groupe PSA's* car assembly plant.⁹¹¹

China is looking to play a strategic role in the development of Europe - Africa connectivity across the Western Mediterranean. The Chinese presence in Morocco is concentrated in **industrial zones**, **FTZ**, and **financial centers**. In Morocco, these include the *Atlantic Free Zone in Kenitra*, *Casablanca Finance City* (CFC), and the *Tanger Med Port Complex*.⁹¹²

Beijing has a stake in Morocco's emerging trade transport corridor from West Africa to Western Europe, based on the *Moroccan high-speed railway line Al Boraq* and the largest port in the Mediterranean, the recently expanded *Tangier Med port*, made possible by an investment from China Merchants Group. CCCC is building the *Mohammed VI Tangier Tech City industrial center* (the plan was announced in March 2017) to attract more multinational and Chinese firms to Morocco.⁹¹³ The Chinese investment is expected to reach US \$ 10 billion in this project while providing employment for about 100,000 workers.

It is expected to become the largest Chinese investment project in NA and to feature several industrial zones. At the latter port complex, Chinese companies, including Huawei, are planning to establish regional logistics centers.⁹¹⁴

5. OBOR - a Precondition for the Resumption of Sino -Algerian Cooperation

China was the first non-Arab country to recognize the provisional government of Algeria in December 1958, and under Mao Zedong saw Algeria as the core of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle in Africa, a means of confirming the CPC's own revolutionary ideological claims, and a prize in inter-communist rivalry with the SU. Throughout the Cold War, relations between China and Algeria were “*a marriage of convenience ... based more on symbolism than on any particular connection*”.⁹¹⁵

In the 1990s, after Algeria abandoned official references to socialism and by this point the Chinese economy began to flourish, trade relations between the two countries began to expand. However, progress was hampered by the civil war in Algeria (1992–2002), and after the end of this conflict, China's economic presence in Algeria increased.⁹¹⁶

The progressive development of the bilateral relationship is anchored in three documents: *the Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation* (November 6, 2006, Beijing),⁹¹⁷ *the Five-Year Plan for China-Algeria Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation* (June 6, 2014, Beijing),⁹¹⁸ and *the MoU on Cooperation under the BRI Framework* (September 5, 2018, Beijing).⁹¹⁹ On June 6, 2014, China and Algeria signed the *Five-Year Plan for Comprehensive*

⁹¹⁰ Adel Abdel Ghafar, “*Beijing Calling ...*”, op. cit.

⁹¹¹ Michaël Tanchum, Nerea Álvarez-Aríztegui, “*China's Chance to Bridge the Algeria–Morocco Divide*”, East Asia Forum, 12.03.2021.

⁹¹² Djallel Khechib, “*One Belt, Different Aims: Beyond China's Increasing Leverage in the Grand Maghreb*”, Humanitarian and Social Research Center (INSAMER), 04.10.2018.

⁹¹³ Michaël Tanchum, Nerea Álvarez-Aríztegui, “*China's ...*”, op. cit.

⁹¹⁴ Adel Abdel Ghafar, “*Beijing Calling ...*”, op. cit.

⁹¹⁵ John Calabrese, “*The New Algeria' and China*”, Middle East Institute, 26.01.2021.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ “*China-Algeria Sign Statement on Strategic Cooperation*”, People's Daily Online, 07.11.2006.

⁹¹⁸ “*Wang Yi: Practical Cooperation Between China and Algeria Enters a New Stage*”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 07.06.2014.

⁹¹⁹ “*Algeria Inks MoU on Adherence to China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative*”, Algeria Press Service, 04.09.2018.

*Strategic Cooperation between China and Algeria.*⁹²⁰ On September 4, 2018, on the sidelines of the FOCAC in China's capital Beijing, Algeria and China signed an MoU on the joining the BRI. The decree said Algeria and China shall cooperate in the framework of the MoU in the fields of policies coordination, infrastructure interdependence and other areas.⁹²¹

China became Algeria's top trade partner in 2013, overtaking France. There is a significant trade deficit, and while China has become Algeria's primary source for imports, which were valued at US \$ 7.85 billion in 2018, Algeria's exports to China remain relatively insignificant compared to its exports to European countries, and are almost entirely from the hydrocarbon sector. However, its exports to China are rising, having jumped 60-fold between 2000 and 2017.⁹²² During the first five months of 2019, China remained the top supplier of Algeria with exports worth US \$ 3.5 billion.⁹²³ Although Algeria's exports to China are minimal, its imports from China totaled US \$ 5.4 billion in 2019.⁹²⁴ China, especially through construction companies, is the first foreign investor in Algeria by 2016.⁹²⁵ While Algeria has ranked among the top construction countries in China since the mid-2000s, it has not been the main destination for Chinese overseas investment. Algerian imports from China are heavily focused on capital goods, equipment, and electronics rather than cheap, poorly manufactured consumer goods. To reduce the trade deficit, the Algerian government imposed volume limits on electronic goods and household appliances, which led to a sharp decline in imports from China.⁹²⁶

⁹²⁰ "Wang Yi: Practical Cooperation Between China ...", op. cit.

⁹²¹ "Algeria Ratifies BRI Agreement with China", Xinhua. XINHUANET.com, 07.10.2019.

⁹²² Adel Abdel Ghafar, "Beijing Calling ...", op. cit.

⁹²³ "Algeria Ratifies BRI Agreement with China", op. cit.

⁹²⁴ Michaël Tanchum, Nerea Álvarez-Aríztegui, "China's...", op. cit.

⁹²⁵ "Algeria on the New Silk Roads", OBOReuropa, 09.04.2018.

⁹²⁶ John Calabrese, "'The New Algeria' and China", op. cit.

China's documented joint construction and investment activities in Algeria between 2005 and 2020 were heavily concentrated in the transport and real estate sector and amounted to US \$ 23.85 billion. Nearly three quarters of that amount was accumulated prior to the 2013 BRI launch. Since then, about US \$ 9 billion in Chinese construction and investment deals in Algeria have accounted for only a small fraction of the value of these activities in the Arab ME and other countries in NA (5%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (7%).⁹²⁷

In the 2000s, Algeria frequently asked Chinese contractors to implement the *Economic Recovery Support Program* (2001-2004) and the subsequent *Economic Growth Support Program* (2005-2009), which were financed by skyrocketing oil revenues. The goal was to catch up during the 1990s, when oil prices were low and when the "fight against terrorism" dictated spending and budgetary priorities. Since the liberalization of foreign investment laws and restrictions on structural adjustment programs, Chinese contractors have become very competitive, easily won numerous public tenders and taken the best part of the production, winning 80% of infrastructure contracts in Algeria, at a time when Western contractors were fleeing insecurity and poor business climate.⁹²⁸ Over the past two decades, Chinese enterprises were granted various public development projects valued at more than US \$ 70 billion. In Algeria, Chinese companies are primarily interested in the construction, housing, and energy sectors.⁹²⁹

Since 2002, starting in the low-cost housing sector, Chinese state-owned companies have quickly secured contracts for major infrastructure projects, such as the expansion of the rail network and

⁹²⁷ Ibid.

⁹²⁸ Thierry Pairault, "China's Economic Presence in Algeria", C.C.J. Occasional Papers, No. 1, Archive ouverte en Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, January 2015.

⁹²⁹ John Calabrese, "'The New Algeria' and China", op. cit.

the East-West highway, worth about US \$ 11.2 billion.⁹³⁰ Beijing is supporting the creation of an infrastructure corridor through Algeria that will connect sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean. In 2016, Algeria signed an agreement with CSCEC and CHEC for the construction of the *Algerian port of El Hamdaniya*. With a capacity of 6.5 million TEU, Hamdaniya can function as a corridor junction between Africa and Europe.⁹³¹ Chinese companies have built the new MFA building, a new terminal at *Houari Boumediene Airport*,⁹³² the *Opera House*, the *Sheraton Hotel* and *Oran*, the *Great Mosque of Algiers*, and the *East-West Highway*, mark the landscape, as do the thousands of Chinese workers who have established a “*Chinatown*” in a suburb of Algiers.⁹³³

Algeria ranks forth in the world in terms of phosphorite reserves. In 2018, China's CITIC Construction signed an agreement with Algeria's Sonatrach to build a US \$ 6 billion integrated phosphate plant that will increase Algeria's annual production to 10 million tonnes.⁹³⁴

In 2008, China and Algeria entered into an agreement to establish a second Chinese SEZ in NA, the *Jiangling Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone*, to be located in Mostaganem, western Algeria, with an emphasis on vehicle assembly. The agreement was attended by the Chinese company *Jiangling Motors Cooper and Jiangxi Coal Corporation Group*, as well as their Algerian partner *Groupe Mazouz*.⁹³⁵ Chinese automaker *Foton* and Algerian car dealer

⁹³⁰ Janvier Liste, Jacob Kolster, Nono Matondo-Fundani, "Chinese Investments and Employment Creation in Algeria and Egypt", African Development Bank, Economic Brief, 2012, p. 9.

⁹³¹ Michaël Tanchum, Nerea Álvarez-Aríztegui, "China's ...", op. cit.; Toms Dumpis, "Could China's Belt and Road Patch the Algeria-Morocco Rift?", Morocco World News, 14.03.2021.

⁹³² John Calabrese, "'The New Algeria' and China", op. cit.

⁹³³ Adel Abdel Ghafar, "Beijing Calling ...", op. cit.

⁹³⁴ Michaël Tanchum, Nerea Álvarez-Aríztegui, "China's ...", op. cit.

⁹³⁵ Janvier Liste, Jacob Kolster, Nono Matondo-Fundani, "Chinese Investments and Employment Creation in Algeria and Egypt", op. cit., p. 10.

KIV formed a joint venture in April 2017 to enable them to assemble cars and trucks in NA. The assembly plant is located in the province of Annaba, 535 km east of Algeria.⁹³⁶

Algeria is Africa's forth largest crude oil producer* by 2008. More than 90% of exports of its high-quality, low-sulfur, low-sulfur crude oil go to Western Europe and not to China. China's imports of Algerian oil remain insignificant compared to oil imports from other parts of Africa. China's share in Algeria's oil industry is focused on exploration and development projects. At the same time, China's role in exploration and future development in Algeria, as well as its overall role in the hydrocarbon sector in Algeria, is small, especially compared to the role of international energy giants such as Statoil, Shell, British Petroleum or Total SA.⁹³⁷

In October 2002, China's SINOPEC teamed up with Algeria's state-owned *Sonatrach** in the first Chinese oil development venture in Algeria to jointly develop the Zarzaitin oil field in southeastern Algeria at cost US \$ 525 million; SINOPEC has taken over 75% of the total investment. In July 2003, the *China National Petroleum Exploration and Development Corporation* (CNODC), a division of the CNPC, built a refinery at Adrar in southwestern Algeria for US \$ 350 million. In 2004, agreements were signed between CNPC, Sinopec and Sonatrach on oil exploration rights and related projects. Algeria has granted the *China National Offshore Oil Corporation* (CNOOC) an exploration license for the Hassi Bir Rekaiz field. In October 2009, Sonatrach announced that Sinopec is one of a group of

⁹³⁶ "Chinese Automaker to Assemble Cars, Trucks in Algeria", Xinhua. english.news.cn, 21.04.2017.

* Algeria is the world's 18th largest crude oil producer, and the second largest source of natural gas in the EU.

⁹³⁷ Chris Zambelis, "China's Inroads into North Africa: An Assessment of Sino-Algerian Relations", China Brief, Vol. 10, Issue 1, The Jamestown Foundation, 07.01.2010. p. 11.

* Sonatrach is the largest company in Africa and the 12th largest oil and gas conglomerate in the world.

four international companies shortlisted for design and engineering consideration for a new refinery in Tairat, in western Algeria, at an estimated cost of US \$ 6 billion. Sinopec is also represented along with other companies bidding for the design, *engineering, procurement and construction* (EPC) of an oil refinery in Algeria for an estimated US \$ 300 million project. China's imports of Algerian LNG are insignificant, despite the fact that Algeria is the *sixth largest producer of LNG* in the world, the *fourth largest exporter of LNG in the world*, 70% of which is exported to the markets of Europe, the US and other countries.⁹³⁸

The COVID - 19 pandemic and falling oil prices have seriously impacted the Algerian economy, as oil and gas sales account for 60% of the state budget. Fearing to enlist the support of the IMF, Algeria is turning towards China. In October 11, 2020, the *China International Development Cooperation Agency* signed an agreement with Algeria to further expand Algeria's participation in BRI.⁹³⁹

Projects linked with the BRI in Algeria will accompany the development of this Maghreb country and thus create new opportunities for companies based on the northern shore of the Mediterranean and improve connection between Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁴⁰

6. OBOR - a Factor in Stabilizing Libya

Beijing views Libya - a country connecting the Mediterranean Sea to sub-Saharan Africa - as a potentially valuable BRI partner. Libya became the last NA country to “*recognize*” China in 1971, but it did not establish diplomatic relations with the PRC until 1978.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹³⁹ Michaël Tanchum, Nerea Álvarez-Aríztegui, “*China's ...*”, op. cit.

⁹⁴⁰ “*Algeria on the New Silk Roads*”, op. cit.

⁹⁴¹ David H. Shinn, “*China's Approach to East, North ...*”, op. cit., p. 13.

Since then, Libya has not terminated periodic political relations with Taiwan.⁹⁴²

Until the beginning of 2011, that is, before the start of the civil war in Libya,⁹⁴³ China was widely represented in the oil sector of Libya, in the field of railway transport and telecommunications.⁹⁴⁴ The Chinese have been busy with billions of euros in oil development and infrastructure projects.⁹⁴⁵ Libyan oil exports to China increased by 25% during 2010, fueled by a number of factors: *low energy costs, optimal conditions for transporting products to Europe and the US, tax advantages and even labor costs were below Chinese standards*. China became the third consumer of Libya's oil, using 10% of Libya's oil exports, while the share of Libyan oil in supplies to China was no more than 3.5%.⁹⁴⁶ The value of Chinese contracts, mainly construction projects, reached US \$ 18 billion. The largest Chinese companies in the Libyan market were: *Communication Construction and China Railway Construction Corporation, China Civil Engineering Construction*, which oversaw the Eastern Sahara irrigation project. The *China Gezhouba Group* built homes in five southern cities, and *Huawei Technologies* built the infrastructure for mobile communications.⁹⁴⁷ Of the US \$ 6.6 billion in trade turnover (2010) between the two countries, the lion's share was oil, but it also included many other industries, largely due to the fact that

⁹⁴² “*African Revolutions Challenge Chinese Diplomacy*”, Intelligence Quarterly, 11.04.2011.

⁹⁴³ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, “*Հիստորիան ...*”, նշվ. աշխ., էջ 81-90:

⁹⁴⁴ «*Ливия: Китай пытается поладить и с мятежниками, и с Каддафи*», RTKORR.com, 08.06.2011.

⁹⁴⁵ Волович А.А., «*Китай на энергетическом рынке Ближнего Востока*», Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 22.09.2004.

⁹⁴⁶ Rodger Baker, “*Portfolio: China's Stake in the Middle East Unrest*”, Stratfor, USA, 10.03.2011.

⁹⁴⁷ Giampaolo Tarantino, “*Il petrolio della Libia fagola alla Cina, L'Occidentale*”, Italy, 04.03.2011.

China never imposed sanctions on the Gaddafi regime.⁹⁴⁸ When fighting broke out in February 2011, there were 36,000 Chinese citizens in Libya working for 75 companies in the oil, railways and telecommunications sectors.⁹⁴⁹ In the period from February 22 to March 5, the PRC government in just 9 days managed to carry out an unprecedented operation to evacuate 35,860 of its citizens by land, sea and air from Libya.⁹⁵⁰

In 2014, when Libya was divided between two centers of power (Tripoli and Tobruk), the complex conflict in this NA country posed new challenges in terms of China's interests. In line with the UN position, China recognizes the *Government of National Accord* (GNA) as the “legitimate” government of Libya. Since 2016, officials in Beijing have met with their GNA counterparts at least nine times.⁹⁵¹ Drawing on the lessons of its 2011 experience and officially supporting the GNA, China is pursuing a policy of cautious neutrality and diplomatic and economic diversification with a focus on long-term interests. In July 2018, during the 8th FOCAC ministerial meeting in China, GNA foreign minister Mohamed Taha Siala signed a MoU with State Counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, paving the way for Libya to join the BRI. GNA also welcomed the return of Chinese businesses to Libya in 2018, especially in the areas of Libya's infrastructure modernization and rehabilitation, and has supported Chinese telecommunications companies including Huawei and ZTE. In 2019, bilateral trade between the two countries totaled US \$ 6.21 billion, mainly driven by a recovery in Libyan oil exports to China.⁹⁵² Libya's oil exports to

⁹⁴⁸ Leslie Hook, Geoff Dyer, “Chinese Oil Interests Attacked in Libya”, Financial Times, 24.02.2011.

⁹⁴⁹ “African Revolutions Challenge Chinese Diplomacy”, op. cit.

⁹⁵⁰ «Чудесная операция Китая по эвакуации своих граждан из Ливии получила одобрение широкой общественности», Жэньминь Жибао, 08.03.2011.

⁹⁵¹ Giorgio Cafiero, “The Geopolitics of China's Libya Foreign Policy”, The ChinaMed, 04.08.2020.

⁹⁵² Frederic Wehrey, Sandy Alkoutami, “China's Balancing Act...”, op. cit.

China have more than doubled since 2017.⁹⁵³ In 2019, China imported approximately US \$ 4.8 million worth of petroleum from Libya.⁹⁵⁴

A senior delegation from Libya's *National Oil Corporation* (NOC) visited China in July of 2019 to hold talks with CNPC officials regarding crude oil purchases and possible collaboration on exploring and developing Libya's oilfields and services. And CNPC's *PetroChina* can count on its ongoing cooperation with Libya's NOC since the bulk of the country's oilfields sit in territory controlled by the *Libya National Army* (LNA).⁹⁵⁵

Turkey's ongoing military intervention in Libya aimed at strengthening the power of the *Transitional National Council* (TNC) is fueling some tensions between Beijing and Ankara, despite the fact that China nominally supports the TNC. Wang Jingyan, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, stressed that while Ankara's support of pro-GNA forces changed the situation against Haftar, the Turkish intervention is considered provocative, caused by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's internal problems within Turkey and is likely to leave Ankara in greater isolation in the eastern Mediterranean. Other Chinese foreign policy analysts see Ankara as over-ambition in Libya. There is also the view that “the stronger Turkey is in Libya, the less China will gain, as Ankara will seek to reduce US concerns in exchange for their support (or neutrality) in their ongoing struggle with Russia and the UAE”.⁹⁵⁶

While countries like the UAE, Russia, France or Turkey can provide powerful military equipment to win battles, China is one of the few countries that can provide financial and technical support to rebuild and transform a country, no matter which faction dominates the ongoing civil war. But after the conflict reaches a balance point,

⁹⁵³ Adel Abdel Ghafar, “Beijing Calling ...”, op. cit.

⁹⁵⁴ Giorgio Cafiero, “The Geopolitics of China's Libya Foreign ...”, op. cit.

⁹⁵⁵ Mordechai Chaziza, “China's Libya Policy and the BRI...”, op. cit.

⁹⁵⁶ Giorgio Cafiero, “The Geopolitics of China's Libya Foreign ...”, op. cit.

China can use the synergy between the BRI framework and the post-conflict reconstruction of Libya, and with a cautious and limited approach taken by Beijing, will achieve greater opportunities to intervene not only in Libya's economic affairs, but also in its political sphere.⁹⁵⁷

So, the events of the civil war in Libya have become a new test for China's foreign policy, based on the long-standing doctrine of "non-intervention". It has been transformed into a new strategy of "non-alignment", in which Beijing, without staying aloof from the conflict, did not take sides between the GNA and the LNA.⁹⁵⁸ Instead, the Chinese seem to be betting on both sides of the conflict and continue to watch from afar, awaiting a final political settlement and peace that could lead to a stronger Chinese presence.⁹⁵⁹

For their part, the conflicting parties discussed China's role in finding a peaceful solution to the Libyan crisis and its contribution to the reconstruction of Libya.⁹⁶⁰ In fact, the Libyan experience has become another step in shaping a fundamental change in China's foreign policy towards a more active approach to protecting China's global interests.⁹⁶¹

7. Application of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia

Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1970, but the 1974 revolution, which led to the

⁹⁵⁷ **Mordechai Chaziza**, "China's Libya Policy and the BRI...", op. cit.

⁹⁵⁸ **Eric Claude Olander**, "China Places Bets on Both Sides of the Libyan Conflict as Part of a New 'Non-Aligned' Strategy", The China-Africa Project, 30.01.2020.

⁹⁵⁹ **Guy Burton**, "Will China Become More Active in Libya?", The Diplomat, 19.02.2021.

⁹⁶⁰ "Libya Joins China's Belt and Road Initiative", Libya Observer, 13.06.2018.

⁹⁶¹ **Арутюнян Агавни**, "Вокруг Китайско-Ливийских отношений", Африка в глобальном мире: прошлое, настоящее и будущее. Материалы X Школы молодых африканистов России, 29–30 ноября 2011г., Институт Африки РАН, М., 2011, с. 12.

emergence of a regime close to the SU, provoked a distancing of Addis Ababa - Beijing links until the late 1980s.⁹⁶² China needed Ethiopia and other African countries at the UN, and Ethiopia, ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie I, was the diplomatic leader for African independence and could no longer ignore the most populous third world country, involved in solidarity and material support in the anti-colonial struggle.⁹⁶³ It was not until the armed opposition victory in 1991, the fall of the Mengistu regime, and the rise to power of the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) led by Meles Zenawi that bilateral relations began to experience real growth. The EPRDF, which came to power with the support of the US, advocated a market economy (with the exception of issues such as land ownership and the maintenance of state monopolies) and declared its readiness to establish a federal and democratic state. It was only in 1995 that the regime decided to change the balance of its foreign policy in favor of Russia and China. The main EPRDF leaders wanted to learn about China's "socialist market economy" and agricultural development.⁹⁶⁴

Ethiopia's growing interest in China is attributed to economic aid, an alternative partner to the West and an example to follow. For China, the important role of Ethiopia in the political history of Africa and its strategic position as the seat of the African Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, various international and regional organizations and diplomatic missions - a country that is the *diplomatic capital of Africa*.⁹⁶⁵

Ethiopia is a source of attraction for China more so with a population of about 90 million and a potential access for other

⁹⁶² **Jean-Pierre Cabestan**, "China and Ethiopia: Authoritarian Affinities and Economic Cooperation", China Perspectives, No. 4, December 2012, p. 54.

⁹⁶³ **Aaron Tesfaye**, "China-Ethiopia Relations and the Horn of Africa", Italian Institute for International Political Studies (SPI), 20.09.2019.

⁹⁶⁴ **Jean-Pierre Cabestan**, "China and Ethiopia ...", op. cit., p. 54.

⁹⁶⁵ **Gashaw Ayferam Endaylalu**, "China in Africa: A Partner or Patron Ethiopia in Focus", International Journal of African and Asian Studies, Vol. 46, 2018, p. 16.

regional markets such as the *Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa* (COMESA). With the introduction of liberalization policy in 1992 in Ethiopia, China poised to exploit this opportunity by investing in various economic sectors. Notable among others are road construction, electric power generation and telecommunication.⁹⁶⁶

Ethiopia views China as a source of economic aid and investment, as well as low-cost technologies that can lift millions of small entrepreneurs out of poverty through access to agricultural machinery and transport, as economic growth cannot be achieved without sustained technological and industrial modernization and structural transformation. Ethiopia also sees China as a vast market for its agricultural products and therefore a means to improve the lives of farmers, who make up about 80% of the population.⁹⁶⁷ In Ethiopia, China has developed special trade and economic cooperation zones, which allow for the improvement of poor infrastructure, inadequate services, and weak institutions by focusing efforts on a specific geographical area.⁹⁶⁸

Commercial ties were institutionalized most rapidly. In 2006, the Ethiopian government signed a major financing framework agreement with China EXIM Bank, which led to a rapid increase in the number of Chinese infrastructure projects. The framework agreement requires that all exports to China be controlled by the *Commercial Bank of Ethiopia*, the largest public financial institution. Ethiopia intends to receive export earnings to help pay off Chinese

⁹⁶⁶ **Manickam Venkataraman, Solomon M Gofie**, “*The Dynamics of China-Ethiopia Trade Relations: Economic Capacity, Balance of Trade & Trade Regimes*”, Venkataraman and Gofie Bandung: Journal of the Global South, No. 2(8), 2015, p. 7.

⁹⁶⁷ **Aaron Tesfaye**, “*China-Ethiopia Relations ...*”, op. cit.

⁹⁶⁸ **Liselotte Odgaard**, “*China’s Policy on Development and Security in East Africa*”, Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2018, p. 85.

loans.⁹⁶⁹ In 2010, a MoU was signed between the EPRDF and the CCP. Economic ties also increased rapidly. According to a 2012 World Bank survey, Chinese FDI increased “*from virtually zero*” in 2004 to US \$ 74 million annually in 2009.⁹⁷⁰

China has invested more than US \$ 20.6 billion in Ethiopia since 2005 to 2017, most of which has been focused on infrastructure projects such as roads, rail lines and telecommunications.⁹⁷¹ Chinese companies have invested around US \$ 4 billion during the last two decades in Ethiopia, employing 111,000 Ethiopians on permanent and temporary basis.⁹⁷² Ethiopia is China's main economic and strategic partner in East Africa.⁹⁷³ China is Ethiopia's largest trading partner, bilateral trade between the two countries reached US \$ 6.37 billion in 2015.⁹⁷⁴

Trade between China and Ethiopia is largely based on mechanisms such as the *Joint Ethiopian - China commission* (JECC), *Sino-Ethiopian Agreement for Mutual Promotion and Protocol of Investment - 1988*, *Sino - Ethiopia Agreement for trade, economic and technical cooperation - 1996* and *FOCAC Sino - Africa* at continental level, since recent times.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁶⁹ **Charles Matseke**, “*Ethiopia-China Relations*”, UJ Centre for Africa-China Studies. A Joint Initiative of the University of Johannesburg and Nanjing Tech University. <https://www.cacs.org.za/ethiopia-china-relations/>

⁹⁷⁰ **Daniel Kibsgaard**, “*Sino-Ethiopian Relations from Meles Zenawi to Abiy Ahmed: The Political Economy of a Strategic Partnership*”, China Research Center, 03.06.2020.

⁹⁷¹ **Tony Todd**, “*Chinese-built Railway Opens Linking Ethiopia to Djibouti*”, France 24, 06.10.2016.

⁹⁷² “*Chinese Firms Invest 4 bln USD in Ethiopia in 2 Decades*”, Xinhua. Xinhua-net.com, 03.06.2017.

⁹⁷³ **Maria Adele Carrai**, “*Adaptive Governance along Chinese-financed BRI Railroad Megaprojects in East Africa*”, World Development 141, Elsevier, 2021, p. 12.

⁹⁷⁴ “*Ethiopia Eyes Strengthened Ties with China*”, Xinhua. english.news.cn, 22.12.2017.

⁹⁷⁵ **Manickam Venkataraman, Solomon M Gofie**, “*The Dynamics of China-Ethiopia Trade Relations...*”, op. cit., p. 7.

China-built US \$ 3.4 billion railroad linking Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa and the port city of Djibouti opened in October 2016. A new 750-km line, which completely replaces the long-defunct French line, built in early 20th century, reduces travel time between two cities - up to 10 hours out of two to three days. The new line will provide Djibouti with unprecedented access to the 90 million Ethiopian market.⁹⁷⁶ The Chinese-built railway is expected to help the landlocked African country improve access to the sea and accelerate its booming industrialization process.⁹⁷⁷

Chinese firms have invested in a water pipeline from Ethiopia and a new international airport.⁹⁷⁸ China's largest footwear manufacturer *Huajian International* - the world's largest footwear manufacturer - entered Ethiopia in 2012 and opened its first factory in the *Eastern Industrial Zone*, employing 7,000 people. It was the only company to produce footwear exclusively thanks to the efforts of the Ethiopians.⁹⁷⁹

By 2012, China accounted for more than half of Ethiopia's imports of furniture and furnishings, over ¾ of Ethiopian imports of travel goods and handbags and apparel and clothing accessories, and nearly 90% of Ethiopia's footwear imports.⁹⁸⁰

In 2006, China's ZTE was granted a monopoly over the market as the Ethiopian government seemed to ignore its own procurement rules requiring competitive bidding. A US \$ 1.6 billion agreement

⁹⁷⁶ **Tony Todd**, "Chinese-built Railway Opens Linking Ethiopia ...", op. cit.

⁹⁷⁷ "Ethiopia Eyes Strengthened Ties with China", op. cit.

⁹⁷⁸ **Sarah Zheng**, "China Offers Loans to Djibouti as They Vow to Establish Closer Ties", South China Morning Post, 23.11.2017.

⁹⁷⁹ "China Moves its Production to the Countries of the African Continent", CGTN, 24.08.2018.

⁹⁸⁰ **Malancha Chakrabarty**, "Ethiopia-China Economic Relations: A Classic Win-Win Situation?", World Review of Political Economy, Vol. 7, No. 2, Pluto Journals, Summer 2016, p. 235.

was signed in 2013 with Huawei and ZTE to upgrade existing infrastructure.⁹⁸¹

A Chinese firm has signed a MoU with Ethiopia authorities on establishing a *National Artificial Intelligence Infrastructure* (NAIF) in Ethiopia. The MoU was signed between *Ethiopia Innovation and Technology State Minister, Sisay Tola and Chen Kuan*, the founder and CEO of *Chinese firm Infervision Technology Corporation* in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa in November 2019.⁹⁸²

The Ethiopia is China's second largest borrower in Africa. The external debt of the Ethiopian government is 60% of GDP, 1/3 to China, which makes the country vulnerable, and there are fears that China may have a say in its future domestic policies.⁹⁸³

China's strategic partner Addis Ababa receives significant military and economic aid without any political strings attached. Ethiopia maintains ties with the West, using Chinese aid as a bargaining chip in negotiations with European donors, and vice versa.⁹⁸⁴

8. OBOR - a Factor in Stimulating the Sudanese Economy

On February 4, 1959, Sudan established diplomatic relations with China, becoming the forth Arab and African country with diplomatic relations with China after Egypt, Morocco and Algeria. The visit of PM Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Chen Yi to Sudan in 1964 marked the beginning of the development of bilateral relations.⁹⁸⁵

Although China allowed trade, aid, cultural, political and military ties with Sudan, China did not play an important role in

⁹⁸¹ **Daniel Kibsgaard**, "Sino-Ethiopian Relations from Meles ...", op. cit.

⁹⁸² "Chinese Firm to Help Build Artificial Intelligence Infrastructure in Ethiopia", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 30.11.2019.

⁹⁸³ **Maria Adele Carrai**, "Adaptive Governance along ...", op. cit., p. 12.

⁹⁸⁴ **Liselotte Odgaard**, "China's Policy on Development ...", op. cit., p. 86.

⁹⁸⁵ "Everlasting China-Sudan Friendship: Work Together for a Shared Future", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 24.10.2019.

Sudan's politics or foreign relations until the 1989 coup that brought Omar al-Bashir to power.⁹⁸⁶

In 2015, China and Sudan announced their strategic partnership, ushering in a new era of bilateral relations. In April 2019, China gave strong support to the Sudanese transitional government. Beijing has twice sent its Special Representative for African Affairs to Sudan and has defended it at the UNSC and many other international events.⁹⁸⁷ Sino-Sudanese cooperation has long been the benchmark for Sino-African cooperation and a model for South-South cooperation.⁹⁸⁸

Since 1976, China has provided Sudan with free assistance in finding minerals and developing exploration talents and has successfully discovered more than three million tons of proven chromite reserves. Chinese miners have invested over US \$ 100 million in Sudan in the development and processing of minerals, including gold, copper, chromite and marble, and brought advanced mining and smelting technology and equipment to Sudan.⁹⁸⁹

Since the mid-1990s, economic and trade cooperation between the two sides has grown significantly in scope. China has been the largest investor in Sudan for several years, as well as the contracting partner for most projects in Sudan. According to incomplete statistics, more than 120 Chinese enterprises have made investment totaling over US \$ 13 billion in Sudan, in a wide range of sectors, including oil, buildings, road bridges, textile, mining, agriculture,

⁹⁸⁶ **Johanson D.**, "China's Soft Power in Sudan: Increasing Activity but How Effective?", In: Zhang X., Wasserman H., Mano W. (eds) *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa*, Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016, p. 182.

⁹⁸⁷ "Everlasting China-Sudan Friendship: Work Together ...", op. cit.

⁹⁸⁸ **Ma Xinmin**, "China, Sudan Expect Greater Opportunities for Reciprocal Growth", *Global Times*, 12.11.2020.

⁹⁸⁹ "Ambassador Ma Xinmin Publishes Article Titled China-Sudan True Friendship Thrives - Chinese Enterprises as a Dynamic Force to Boost Sudan's Economic Growth on Sudan Vision", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 11.12.2019.

hydropower, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, and automobile manufacturing.⁹⁹⁰

Chinese FDI in Sudan since 1996 has focused primarily on finding resources and has expanded the technological and financial capabilities of the country's oil sector.⁹⁹¹ Sudan, which for decades has been out of the access zone of Western oil companies for decades, has become one of the key suppliers of oil to the Chinese market: 600,000 barrels of Sudanese oil are shipped to the PRC every day.⁹⁹² CNPC owned 40% of the *Greater Nile Petroleum Operation Company* (GNPOC), which was formed in November 1996 to develop blocks 1, 2 and 4 in the West Upper Nile. CNPC acquired a 41% stake and Sinopec a 6% stake in *Petrodar Operating Company*, formed in October 2001 to develop Blocks 3 and 7. Block 6, located between southern Darfur and Kordofan, was 95% owned by CNPC.⁹⁹³ Before South Sudan became independent in 2011, China had a monopoly on the oil sector in Sudan.

Sudan's dependence on China, along with Chinese investment in Sudan, grew when a series of economic sanctions imposed by the US government on Sudan between 1997 and 2007 forced most Western companies to leave the country. As a result, China, along with India and Malaysia, was the commercial, military and diplomatic beneficiary of Western sanctions against Sudan. Sudan has switched from Western to Arab and Asian countries, especially China, in

⁹⁹⁰ **Ibid.**

⁹⁹¹ **Kabbashi M. Suliman, Ahmed A. A. Badawi**, "Collaborative Research Project on the Impact of China-Africa Relations", An assessment of the Impact of China's Investments in Sudan, University of Khartoum, Sudan, p. 3.

⁹⁹² **Кокшаров Александр**, «Ресурсный пылесос», *Эксперт*, № 40(677), 19.10.2009.

⁹⁹³ **Dan Large**, "China and the Changing Context of Development in Sudan", *Society for International Development*, No. 50(3), September 2007, p. 59.

terms of sources of development finance, markets for its oil, investment in Sudanese weapons factories and arms purchases.⁹⁹⁴

Since August 2006, China has sought to expand oil investment in Chad. Faced with a protracted conflict amid a regional geography of interests and an ongoing North-South peace process, China has also had to face unintended consequences of its role, including supplying arms and supporting Khartoum.⁹⁹⁵ During Hu Jintao's largest tour of Africa in 2007, Beijing for the first time officially expressed its desire to establish military bases on the Black Continent. The first candidate for the deployment of Chinese peacekeepers in Africa was the province of Darfur in Sudan, where the Chinese oil state corporations have long and firmly established themselves. China was ready to send a full-fledged military contingent to Sudan and in negotiations with Khartoum insisted on the deployment of mainly Chinese UN peacekeepers in Darfur.⁹⁹⁶ When South Sudan, which hosts a large amount of Chinese oil investment, seceded from Sudan with UN approval in 2011, China expanded development projects and loans to this new state.⁹⁹⁷

Just two years after independence, in December 2013, when civil war broke out in South Sudan, one of the first casualties was the oil industry. About half of the country's daily production was soon halted by the fighting.⁹⁹⁸ The majority of South Sudanese oil revenue, came from Chinese operated oil fields, and accounted for 98% of South Sudan's state revenue. At independence, South Sudan

⁹⁹⁴ **Andrew S. Natsios**, "China in Sudan: The Challenge of Non-Interference in a Failed State", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer/Fall 2012, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁹⁵ **Dan Large**, "China's Role in the Mediation and Resolution of Conflict in Africa", Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, The OSLO forum Network of Mediators, 2008, p. 38.

⁹⁹⁶ **Игнатченко Игорь**, «Незримая битва между США ...», укз. соч.

⁹⁹⁷ **Liselotte Odgaard**, "China's Policy on Development ...", op. cit., p. 84.

⁹⁹⁸ **Aly Verjee**, "Explaining China's Involvement in the South Sudan Peace Process", Lowy Institute, 22.12.2016.

had seceded with 75% of Sudan's known oil wealth, and the majority of oil fields that Chinese companies had invested in were located in South Sudan's territory.⁹⁹⁹ In August 2018, CNPC inked an agreement with the South Sudanese Petroleum and Mining Ministry to conduct hydrocarbon exploration in the heart of the country, outdoing French and Kuwaiti competitors.¹⁰⁰⁰ CNPC has a majority stake (41% share) in both *Dar Petroleum Operating Company* (DPOC) and in the *GNPOC* (41% share), both of which are the major oil companies operating in South Sudan. SINOPEC has a 6% stake in DPOC, which makes China, South Sudan's major oil investor and leading importer.¹⁰⁰¹

Sudan was one of the first countries to actively respond to the BRI and signed an agreement to jointly promote the initiative with China. China aligns the BRI with Sudan's national development strategy and continues to participate in Sudan's infrastructure development, promoting key projects such as the new Khartoum international airport and satellite navigation, deepening cooperation in health education, information technology and transport infrastructure. China intends to promote the implementation of the agreement on cooperation and development of Port Sudan, support the construction of a special economic zone in the Red Sea, develop shipping and tourism along the Nile, and build a cargo distribution center on the Red Sea.¹⁰⁰²

In March 2021, the three Chinese companies expressed their intention to invest up to US \$ 1 billion in Sudan, which will be directed to agriculture, mining and oil fields.¹⁰⁰³

⁹⁹⁹ **Obert Hodzi**, "Strategy of 'Parallels': China in the South Sudanese Armed Conflict", Note Observatoire de la Chine, cycle 2016-2017, Janvier 2017, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰⁰ **Austin Bodetti**, "How China Came to Dominate South Sudan's Oil", *The Diplomat*, 11.02.2019.

¹⁰⁰¹ **Obert Hodzi**, "Strategy of 'Parallels': China ...", op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁰⁰² **Ma Xinmin**, "China, Sudan Expect Greater Opportunities ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁰³ "Three Chinese Companies May Invest \$1 billion in Sudan Says Minister: *Asharq Business*", Arab News, 04.03.2021.

9. Djibouti: Beijing's First Foreign Stronghold in the MSR Strategy

Importance of Djibouti for BRI. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Djibouti on January 8, 1979, bilateral relations have made a steady advancement. Djibouti, which is also known as "*the world's naval capital*", in the 2000s became the largest stronghold on the African continent, where international forces and coalitions are concentrated to counter terrorist and international groups that threaten world economic communications. Due to the active presence of other states in Djibouti, Beijing simply cannot remain indifferent to this point on the world map, where many strategic interests of both political and economic nature intersect. Djibouti is a focal point of the western sea line in B&R strategy, and is the first point connecting Asia, Africa and Europe. It is located on the western coast of the Gulf of Aden and faces Bab el-Mandab, a transport hub for Europe, Asia and Africa, the location choke throat of the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean. BRI's policy includes investment in port expansion in East Africa and China's growing economic interest in Djibouti is part of a broader strategy to control a greater share of maritime traffic and port facilities worldwide. China's SPS provides protection and security on the trade route from South China to the Mediterranean Sea through the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, to the base in Djibouti.¹⁰⁰⁴

Although the focus of the NSR mainly focuses on relations with Europe, the countries of Central and Southeast Asia, and also pays attention to Eurasian projects, nevertheless, Africa is one of the most

¹⁰⁰⁴ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Djibouti: China's First Overseas Stronghold in The Maritime Silk Road Strategy", Eastern Asian Studies, Vol. 4, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2020, p. 56.

important regions for the PRC within the BRI.¹⁰⁰⁵ It is implementing a huge number of projects, increasingly capturing the African continent and bringing together new participants, including Djibouti, an important country for B&R's strategy.¹⁰⁰⁶

The choice of Djibouti is not without reason, the geostrategic location of Djibouti, connecting the Suez Canal with the Indian Ocean,¹⁰⁰⁷ in the Horn of Africa - between Eritrea in the north and Somalia in the south¹⁰⁰⁸ - across the road from Yemen, not far from the ME - touching the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, along the Babel-Mandeb Strait, is one of the busiest and strategically most important shipping corridors in the world.¹⁰⁰⁹ Djibouti has long been considered a key strategic location for ships of the global naval forces, based in the port facilities of the city of Djibouti, able to control the entry and exit of the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal,¹⁰¹⁰ which is the key for the global transport and oil transportation artery.¹⁰¹¹

Djibouti is of great interest to China due to the fact that the Celestial Empire is very concerned about the security of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, through which oil is transported from South Sudan and Sudan.¹⁰¹² Although Djibouti does not have significant natural

¹⁰⁰⁵ Михайличенко К.М., «Роль Африки в инициативе Китайской Народной Республики 'Один Пояс и Один Путь'», RUDN Journal of Political Science, Том 20, № 1, М, 2018, с. 60.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Там же, с. 63.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Anthony Kleven, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road ...?", op. cit.

¹⁰⁰⁸ "China's Power Play in Djibouti: First Step to Great Naval Power Status?", Sputnik, 30.11.2015.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Rajaram Panda, "Djibouti Military Base Is a New Step in China's Maritime Footprint", Global Asia, 21.09.2017.

Red Sea - at this point, it is only 20 miles wide 3.8 million barrels of crude oil passes through the strait daily and roughly 20% of world trade and half of China's oil imports pass through the neighboring Gulf of Aden.

¹⁰¹⁰ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹⁰¹¹ «Китай строит военную базу в Аденском заливе», ИА REGNUM, 03.02.2015.

¹⁰¹² Михайличенко К.М., «Роль Африки ...», укз. соч., с. 64.

resources, the port of Djibouti is the only access to the sea for the neighboring Ethiopia, rich in mineral resources.¹⁰¹³

Djibouti is also ideal as a port for sending raw materials to Beijing, which directs financial flows to Africa in exchange for access to natural resources. China is currently investing in infrastructure upgrades in Djibouti: financing the modernization of the railway in the republic, expanding the port in the capital, laying pipelines for the delivery of water and fuel, building roads and a plant for obtaining liquefied natural gas, and also investing in projects for the construction of two new airports and several government buildings. And the military base is an additional insurance for these investments.¹⁰¹⁴

Djibouti is committed to actively participating in the BRI, as well as implementing joint projects related to the "*eight major initiatives*" launched at the Beijing Summit of the FOCAC in 2018. China is ready to combine the construction of the B&R and the implementation of the agreements reached at the Beijing Summit of the FOCAC with the development strategy of *Vision of Djibouti-2035*, as well as strengthen cooperation in industries such as the blue economy, telecommunications and the digital economy.¹⁰¹⁵

Moreover, its strategic location makes it an important hub for global navies that seek to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa, in the Red Sea, and in the Gulf of Aden.¹⁰¹⁶ Since Djibouti neighbors Somalia, whose pirates threaten shipping in the Horn of Africa, as well as belligerent Eritrea and Ethiopia, and with war-torn Yemen on the opposite bank of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, China, like the US and Western Europe, is established in this region and in this country

¹⁰¹³ Бовдунов Ал., «Эффект присутствия: зачем Китай создаёт военную базу в Африке», RT, 14.07.2017.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ходаренок М., «Китайцы высаживаются в Африке», Газета.Ру, 23.08.2016.

¹⁰¹⁵ «Президент Джибути провел встречу с главой МИД КНР Ван И», Russian.china.org.cn, 10.01.2020.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ankit Panda, "A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?", op. cit.

with its points of military support to maintain political stability and to repel growing threats.¹⁰¹⁷

For these and other reasons, an African country with an area of only 23.200 km² and with a population of 900.000 people for a decade and a half has turned from an unknown piece of desert land into a place where the interests of the strongest states in the world intersect.¹⁰¹⁸

Djibouti - an Important Hub for Global Navies. Just a few years ago, it seemed unbelievable for Djibouti to occupy an important place on the Beijing security agenda, especially because of Beijing's strategy of *non-interference* in the affairs of other states and the lack of desire to establish a permanent military presence abroad.¹⁰¹⁹ Chinese warships only occasionally visited Djibouti to resupply during their anti-piracy raids in waters around Somalia, where they had serious difficulties in deploying ships to provide them with the necessary material resources and crew rest during such missions.¹⁰²⁰ Since 2009, the PLA-N has taken part in anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, and they were able to do it without a base in the region, capable of adequately supplying their admittedly limited forces.¹⁰²¹ From 2008-2015, China sent 21 escort fleet, more than 60 ships and vessels to the Gulf of Aden waters off Somalia

¹⁰¹⁷ Бовдунов Ал., «Эффект присутствия ...», узн. соч.

¹⁰¹⁸ Ходаренок М., «Китайцы высаживаются в Африке», узн. соч.

¹⁰¹⁹ "China is Setting Up Its First Military Base in Africa", War is Boring, 25.11.2015.

¹⁰²⁰ Ходаренок М., «Китайцы высаживаются в Африке», узн. соч.

Beijing was upset that the US and France have dedicated naval berths in Djibouti, while China does not. At the moment, only a few countries in the world have military bases outside their national territory. The undisputed leader in this regard is the US, which have 42 military overseas bases.

¹⁰²¹ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

escorting.¹⁰²² By the 2015, China had 50 ships docked in the port of Djibouti.¹⁰²³

However, the PRC is not the only one showing interest in this place on the map. The port of Djibouti hosts the operations management of an anti-Somali pirate operation involving the US, Great Britain, France, Germany and Spain. In addition, there are Qatari military personnel in the country. After the military conflict of Djibouti with Eritrea in 2008, a contingent of peacekeepers from the ME was deployed on the border disputed territory.¹⁰²⁴ It should be noted that on the territory of the American military base known as *Camp Lemonnier*, a routine training of the American military contingent is taking place, while joint exercises with partners from France, Germany, Italy, Japan and other countries are held at a rented training ground.¹⁰²⁵

A long-term partner for Washington and NATO, the Djibouti is presently home to US, Italian, Japanese and Pakistani military facilities,¹⁰²⁶ where both the Doraleh Multipurpose Port and the country's only international airport are located.¹⁰²⁷ Djibouti - the only permanent American military installation in Africa - is Washington's most important African ally and since 2002, the US uses its base in Djibouti, Camp Lemonnier with more than 4,000/4,500 troops deployed, to stage covert operations involving *Remotely Piloted Aircraft* (RPA), Predator UAVs and helicopters in Yemen, Somalia, and other nearby regions. The base is the principal hub for wider US

¹⁰²² „中国将在吉布提建设后勤保障设施”, 人民网/people.com.cn, 26.11.2015.

¹⁰²³ „美司令: 中国在吉布提签基地合同 但并不具有“挑衅性””, news.21cn.com, 26.11.2015.

¹⁰²⁴ Бовдунов А.Л., «Эффект присутствия ...», укр. соч.

¹⁰²⁵ Казанин М.В., «Оценки китайских специалистов значения военной базы «Кемп-Лемонье» в Джибути для ВС США», Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 29.09.2018.

¹⁰²⁶ “China's Power Play in Djibouti ...”, op. cit.

¹⁰²⁷ Andrea Ghiselli, “China's First Overseas Base ...”, op. cit., p. 7.

counterterrorism campaigns throughout the region.¹⁰²⁸ In 2014, Djibouti signed a 10-year, US \$ 630 million lease of the 100-acre Camp Lemonnier with the US. It earns over US \$ 60/63 million annually from the US.¹⁰²⁹

Since gaining independence in 1977, Djibouti has retained a significant, albeit declining military presence of 1,450 French personnel (France pays US \$ 36 million a year to rent its base).¹⁰³⁰ Italy pays US \$ 2.6 million a year to rent its base with 90 personnel.¹⁰³¹ In January 2017, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with Djibouti on the deployment of its base in this country.¹⁰³² Shortly after, Japan established its first overseas property at its 30-acre outpost in Djibouti (US \$ 30 million a year to rent its base) under 200 personnel from its Maritime Self-Defense Forces for counter-piracy operations in 2011¹⁰³³, China took the opportunity to expand its presence.¹⁰³⁴

The Djibouti President Guelleh, who pursues a multi-vector policy and benefits from the country's geographical position, and saw his country's future as a global hub for commercial transportation and wanted to turn his country into Singapore, supported China's right to protect its interests, like others.¹⁰³⁵ Officially, China, like Japan, does

¹⁰²⁸ Ankit Panda, “A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?”, op. cit.; Rob Edens, “China's Naval Plans for Djibouti: A Road, a Belt, or a String of Pearls?”, The Diplomat, 14.05.2015.

¹⁰²⁹ Rajaram Panda, “Djibouti Military Base Is a New Step ...”, op. cit.

¹⁰³⁰ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Djibouti, New Battlefield of China's Global Ambitions”, Journal of Political Risk, Vol. 7, No. 5, NY, May 2019.

¹⁰³¹ Шпунт Ал., «Пуп земли: как крошечная Джибути построила успешную экономику военных баз», ИА REGNUM, 08.12.2018.

¹⁰³² Бовдунов А.Л., «Эффект присутствия ...», укр. соч.

¹⁰³³ Ankit Panda, “A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?”, op. cit.

Japan spends about US \$ 9 million a year on its operation, the lease terms of which were not disclosed.

¹⁰³⁴ Peter A. Dutton, Isaac B. Kardon, Conor M. Kennedy, “Djibouti: China's First Overseas Strategic Strongpoint”, China Maritime Report, No. 6, The China Maritime Studies, U.S. Naval War College, New Port, Rhode Island, April 2020, p. 3.

¹⁰³⁵ «Китай строит военную базу в Аденом заливе», укр. соч.

not call its stronghold in Djibouti a military base.¹⁰³⁶

China's PLA First Outpost Overseas. In 2013, a study report prepared by the *National Defense University* (NDU) of the Chinese PLA and submitted to China's *Central Military Commission* (CMC), chaired by President Xi Jinping, proposed building a Chinese military base in Djibouti.¹⁰³⁷ But uncertainties remained where the base would be located, to the north in Obock along the northern coast of the Gulf of Tadjoura or at the port of Doraleh to the west of Djibouti City.¹⁰³⁸ In November 2015, China publicly confirmed that it would establish a facility in Djibouti. In late January 2016, the two sides "reached consensus" on the terms under which the facilities would be built.¹⁰³⁹ On November 26, 2015, the Chinese government signed a 10-year agreement with Ismail Omar Guelleh (IOG)'s Djibouti to set up a navy base to serve as a logistics hub for the PLA-N ships engaged in anti-piracy operations off the coast of Yemen.¹⁰⁴⁰ China's agreement with Djibouti allows for the presence of up to 10,000 Chinese troops through 2026.¹⁰⁴¹ The base would cost some US \$ 100 million a year.¹⁰⁴²

On July 11, 2017, the PLAN's deployed ships from the South Sea Fleet to officially open the military base in Djibouti¹⁰⁴³, and on August 1 of the same year, China's PLA opened its first outpost overseas at the *Djibouti Multipurpose Port* (DMP) in Doraleh to the west of the capital. It located 8 miles from the center of Djibouti, and

¹⁰³⁶ Бовдунов Ал., «Эффект присутствия ...», укр. соч.

¹⁰³⁷ "Djibouti - China Naval Base", GlobalSecurity.org. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/djibouti/forrel-pre-base.htm>

¹⁰³⁸ Andrea Ghiselli, "China's First Overseas Base ...", op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁰³⁹ Ankit Panda, "Confirmed: Construction Begins on China's First Overseas Military Base in Djibouti", The Diplomat, 29.02.2016.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Anthony Kleven, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road ...?", op. cit.

¹⁰⁴¹ "China Opens New Djibouti Military Base", Africa Times, 01.08.2017.

¹⁰⁴² Anthony Kleven, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road ...?", op. cit.

¹⁰⁴³ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", op. cit.

all bases of other NATO and Japanese powers are located near the international airport in the south, less than 8-11 km.¹⁰⁴⁴

It is worth to note that in 2012, Beijing decided to finance the construction realized by a Chinese company, of a new terminal in DMP in Doraleh. At the same time, the China Merchant Holding International (part of the state-owned shipping conglomerate China Merchant Group) bought a 23.5% share in the company that has owned and operated DMP since 2017 (the rest is controlled by the Djiboutian government).¹⁰⁴⁵ *China Merchant Group* - has announced it will provide a large share of a US \$ 590 million investment necessary to upgrade the DMP.¹⁰⁴⁶ Although desert and volcanoes occupy 90% of the land of Djibouti, and the country is extremely short of natural resources, the team built the base in less than a year, with communication facilities and logistics support facilities basically reaching the same standards as in China.¹⁰⁴⁷

In addition, the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway is expanding to DMP. Built by the *China Railway Group Limited* (known as CREC) and the *China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation* (CRCC), the Ethiopia-Djibouti 752.7-km railway linking Addis Ababa, Ethiopian capital and Djibouti's port in Djibouti, is Africa's first modern electrified railway.¹⁰⁴⁸ The railway was inaugurated in October 2016 and has a designed hourly speed of 120 km with a total investment of US \$ 4 billion.¹⁰⁴⁹ It was financed by the Ethiopian government and by a loan from China's Exim Bank and is expected to connect the landlocked country Ethiopia to the maritime trade

¹⁰⁴⁴ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Andrea Ghiselli, "China's First Overseas Base ...", op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁰⁴⁷ "Djibouti - China Naval Base", op. cit.

¹⁰⁴⁸ "Interview: Ethiopia-Djibouti Railway Paves Way for Chinese Standards 'Going Abroad'", Xinhua. China.org.cn., 05.10.2016.

¹⁰⁴⁹ "Ethiopia, Djibouti Launch Africa's First Modern Electrified Railway", Xinhua. English.news.cn, 05.10.2016.

routes of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.¹⁰⁵⁰ It completely replaces a long-defunct French line built in the early 20th century, and will reduce travel time between the two cities to 10 hours from the two to three days it currently takes to navigate the congested potholed roads crossed by 1,500 trucks a day.¹⁰⁵¹ In fact, Djibouti is a window to Ethiopia that China cannot ignore.

After DP World of Dubai* lost control of the *Djibouti Container Port* (DCP) located near Doraleh, in February 2018, Djibouti asked *Pacific International Lines*, a Singapore-based company that had established a "strategic partnership" with Chinese traders, to expand DCP's operations. And, along with DMP and DCP, in 2017, China Merchants began to build the *Djiboutian International Free Trade Area* (DIFTZ), where it seeks to attract the logistics companies and big data companies (IZP, for example) involved in BRI.¹⁰⁵² This Chinese-run zone with a turnover of US \$ 1 billion covers an area of 4,800 hectares. The DIFTZ focuses on logistics, export processing, financial support, manufacturing and duty-free merchandise.¹⁰⁵³

China provides nearly 40% of funding for Djibouti's large-scale infrastructure and investment projects by 2018. The Import-Export Bank of China has loaned Djibouti nearly US \$ 1 billion.¹⁰⁵⁴ Another notable investment is the Ethiopia-Djibouti Water Pipeline,¹⁰⁵⁵ a bulk terminal (for potash) at Tadjourah, a salt extraction plant at Lake Assal, water, gas, and oil pipelines, and a liquefaction plant.¹⁰⁵⁶

As for the Chinese naval outpost, it will be a combination of weapons and ammunition depots, moorings for Chinese Navy ships

¹⁰⁵⁰ Istvan Tarrosy, Zoltán Vörös, "China and Ethiopia, Part 2: The Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway", *The Diplomat*, 22.02.2018.

¹⁰⁵¹ Tony Todd, "Chinese-built Railway Opens Linking Ethiopia ...", *op. cit.*

* DP World (Dubai Port World) is one of the world's largest port operators.

¹⁰⁵² Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵³ Шпунт Ал., «Пун земли: как крошечная Джибути ...», *указ. соч.*

¹⁰⁵⁴ Anthony Steriotti, "The Significance of China's ...", *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵⁶ Anthony Steriotti, "The Significance of China's ...", *op. cit.*, p. 19.

and a helipad. There were technological buildings and sea containers at the facility (some of them with Chinese flags).¹⁰⁵⁷ When approaching the base from the water side, coordination and overcoming of a number of protective fences and security posts are required. There are several other defensive positions inside the base itself. When attacking the base, the Marines located there will be involved. The base houses ZBD-09 armored infantry vehicles and ZTL-11 assault guns. They are armed with a variety of automatic cannons, anti-tank missiles and large-caliber cannons.¹⁰⁵⁸

Although the PLA remained low-key and the training of its personnel remained unimpressive, in 2018 it completed the construction of a new pier, which is directly connected to its base, and will allow the large ships of the PLA-N to dock.¹⁰⁵⁹ The length of the pier is such that the largest Chinese ships can moor there, including aircraft carriers (with a pier length of 330 meters, the length of the same Liaoning aircraft carrier is 304 meters), helicopter carriers and nuclear submarines. If necessary, it can easily accommodate four of China's nuclear-powered submarines. But this is still relatively limited, so it seems natural that China will seek to increase the piers. A new activity may point to a second embankment or a pier near the first. Now, there periodically stop Chinese destroyers and frigates passing into the Mediterranean and operating in the Horn of Africa.¹⁰⁶⁰

The Port of Djibouti can accommodate vessels drawing up to 18 meters of water, including China's aircraft carrier or its largest forward-deploying warship, the Type 071 LPD. From Djibouti, China's Shaanxi Y-8 class maritime patrol aircraft can cover most of

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ходаренок М., «Китайцы высаживаются в Африке», *указ. соч.*

¹⁰⁵⁸ Босерман М., «Неприступная современная крепость ВМС Китая. Что скрывает база в устье Красного моря?», *Наука и техника*, 18.05.2020.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶⁰ Босерман М., «Неприступная современная крепость ...», *указ. соч.*

the Arabian Peninsula and northern and central Africa without refueling.¹⁰⁶¹

In September 2017, Chinese troops stationed at Doraleh base held their first exercises. The maneuvers took place as part of the training of the *Djibouti National Gendarmerie* and were intended, as noted in the official releases, to test practical combat readiness in conditions when military personnel and police officers are faced with extreme heat and humidity - all ubiquitous in Djibouti, as well as in other parts of Africa.¹⁰⁶²

The construction of a military base in Djibouti shows a symbolic or significant shift in China's foreign security policy, and the signing and enactment of an agreement on access to armed forces in Djibouti will help the PLA-N to establish its roots in a vital region, ensuring sustainable and significant growth in the China's naval activity.¹⁰⁶³

Djibouti and SPS. As mentioned above, PRC has created one of the most powerful naval forces in the world, capable of not only demonstrating its presence, but also acting as the main force capable of hitting targets inside the country, conducting large ambitious landing operations, etc. For the Chinese, long journeys ranging from a few months to six months have become commonplace as they create an entirely new generation of seafarers who spend their lives at sea and undergo very costly training.¹⁰⁶⁴

President Xi announced its intention to establish in 2020 the structure of the *United/Joint Operational Command* as part of a large-scale reform of the armed forces of the country aimed at increasing its ability to conduct operations abroad.¹⁰⁶⁵

¹⁰⁶¹ Anthony Kleven, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road ...?", op. cit.

¹⁰⁶² Шпунт Ал., «Пуп земли: как крошечная Джибути ...», укз. соч.

¹⁰⁶³ "China is Setting up Its First Military Base in Africa", op. cit.

¹⁰⁶⁴ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Беляев И., «Китайцы в Джибути и тайна юных затворников», Радио Свобода, 05.12.2015.

The establishment of a base in Djibouti is a clear sign of China becoming a full-fledged maritime power along with France and Great Britain, if not to speak of the US or Russia. In the surface fleet, especially in the area of landing ships, the Chinese are not only ahead of modern Russia, but even superior in power to the USSR in the mid-1980s. The Chinese fleet is showing signs of increased activity, and its surface and submarine fleets are increasingly showing their presence overseas, from Latin America and Africa to the Black and Baltic Seas, gradually transforming into a real oceanic fleet.¹⁰⁶⁶

With China's growing global military involvement, stretching from the South China Sea to East Africa and spreading its power around the world,¹⁰⁶⁷ China needs strong fleet and naval bases such as Djibouti to enable Beijing to concentrate significant naval forces (primarily PLA-N) in strategically important IPR areas and to protect their interests abroad, including with the help of their armed forces, and may also be a harbinger of further arrival in the region.¹⁰⁶⁸

The new PLA-N facility in Djibouti, at the end of the SPS 'lifeline', has been named China's first "overseas strategic stronghold". Chinese experts state that China's strategic strong points offer benefits to host states and provide them with public security goods. Moreover, these facilities will not be used for offensive operations, as is the case with foreign bases of other states.¹⁰⁶⁹ The Djibouti hub is likely to become a point of intersection of the future development of the SPS and will ensure the development of it in the Mediterranean Sea (via the Suez Canal) and further south along the African east coast reaching South Africa.¹⁰⁷⁰

¹⁰⁶⁶ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", op. cit.

¹⁰⁶⁸ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Conor Kennedy, "Strategic Strong Points and Chinese Naval Strategy", China Brief, Vol. 19, Issue: 6, The Jamestown Foundation, 22.03.2019.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Anthony Steriotti, "The Significance of China's ...", op. cit., pp. 2-3.

The main task of creating a military base in Djibouti, Beijing poses the need to ensure the safety of the MSR, in particular, from Somali pirates off the African coast.¹⁰⁷¹ *Strategic strongholds* enable China to stabilize and control situations before they escalate into crisis, and serve as a function of combining various intelligence sources to provide visualized information support for PLAN operations overseas in real time. This system will support PLAN's defensive strategy in its strategic strongholds, maritime communications and core areas of interest.¹⁰⁷² The base in the Djibouti port will also provide an airport to China and will improve the country's intelligence gathering capabilities in the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Libya and Central Africa and other places.¹⁰⁷³ The location of the installation in Djibouti also makes strategic sense, since Obock is an eavesdropping device from the only brick and mortar complex in the Washington on the African continent, from where US launches its drones at Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda targets.¹⁰⁷⁴

With the establishment of the Djibouti logistics base, the Chinese escort fleet crew will not only be able to land and rest regularly, but transportation and supplies should not rely entirely on domestic delivery. Some of the supplies can even be airlifted, which can greatly improve the quality of life of the officers and soldiers sent out.¹⁰⁷⁵ Thus, overseas strategic strongholds by effectively shortening the replenishment intervals can support the long-range capabilities of the armed forces and will be the next step in creating an "overseas support system" to support escort operations in larger missions in wider areas, especially near crisis regions, and situations.¹⁰⁷⁶

¹⁰⁷¹ **Pale Sofia**, "Where Will First Chinese Overseas Military ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁷² **Conor Kennedy**, "Strategic Strong Points and Chinese ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁷³ "美司令：中国在吉布提签基地合同 但并不具有'挑衅性'", op. cit.

¹⁰⁷⁴ **Anthony Kleven**, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road ...?", op. cit.

¹⁰⁷⁵ «Djibouti - China Naval Base», op. cit.

¹⁰⁷⁶ **Conor Kennedy**, "Strategic Strong Points and Chinese ...", op. cit.

The military base will also allow China to provide a protection shield for its citizens in Djibouti and the greater Horn of Africa region, which it cannot do now in other parts of Africa.¹⁰⁷⁷ The evacuation operation during the Libyan crisis in 2011 is a case in point, illustrating that measures to safeguard overseas interests require substantial diplomatic manoeuvres, and sometimes intensive cooperation from other states in affairs that China has traditionally perceived as strictly internal.¹⁰⁷⁸ In April 2015, the Chinese Navy evacuated 50-plus nationals from strife-torn Yemen.¹⁰⁷⁹

Of course, the creation of the piece of maritime military infrastructure in MENA assists the Chinese Navy in fulfilling its international obligations, first and foremost, its peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the UN.¹⁰⁸⁰ China became the second-largest contributor (10.2%) to the UN peacekeeping budget 2016-2018, only next to the US. Beijing set up a permanent peacekeeping police squad and built a peacekeeping standby force of 8,000 troops, as well as train 2,000 foreign peacekeepers and carry out 10 mine-sweeping assistance programs.¹⁰⁸¹

China is involved not only in various peacekeeping activities, but also helps in the training of the African armed forces. Xi Jinping in 2015 pledged to allocate about US \$ 60 million for the formation of the *African Standing Forces*. There are over 1 million Chinese citizens on the African continent.¹⁰⁸² Since 1990, over 30,000

¹⁰⁷⁷ **François Dubé**, "China's Experiment in Djibouti", *The Diplomat*, 05.10.2016.

¹⁰⁷⁸ **Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner, Zhou Hang**, "Protecting ...", op. cit., p. 5.

In March 2011 China was forced to hastily evacuate more than 35,000 of its citizens, many of them oil or construction workers, from Libya, as the regime of Muammar Gaddafi collapsed. This incident illustrated the severe and growing threats to both Chinese interests and citizens in crisis zones around the globe.

¹⁰⁷⁹ **Rajaram Panda**, "Djibouti Military Base Is a New Step ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁸⁰ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁸¹ "China's Participation in UN Peacekeeping ...", op. cit.; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative...", op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰⁸² **Михайличенко К.М.**, «Роль Африки ...», укр. соч., с. 63-64.

Chinese peacekeepers have served overseas on more than 20 UN peacekeeping missions. More than 2,400 Chinese peacekeepers are operating in seven African task areas including Mali, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹⁰⁸³ China also has experience in peacekeeping missions, such as in South Sudan in 2015.¹⁰⁸⁴

China intends of stationing 1,000 troops in Djibouti, mostly veterans from the contingents that participated in past UN peacekeeping operations.¹⁰⁸⁵ From Djibouti, the PLA can not only more quickly send peacekeepers to various UN missions in MENA, in which China participates; better protect Chinese interests and citizens at risk in MENA, and even help secure the BRI.¹⁰⁸⁶

Thus, the Chinese base in Djibouti can be not just a military outpost, but also a training experiment for future bases on the continent, especially in the fight against piracy and terrorism in places like the Horn of Africa.¹⁰⁸⁷ In fact, the naval base in Djibouti, which represents the "*first pearl of a necklace*" that unfolds along the sea route connecting China to the MENA, should be seen as a step, albeit modest, in a longer and more significant path towards realizing China's *national, global and military aspirations*.¹⁰⁸⁸

New Global and Maritime Ambitions of Traditionally Continental Power: Non-interference Principle. Although China has always been consistent in its rhetorical support for non-interference, in recent years, a policy debate has emerged regarding the principle's sustainability. Furthermore, normative developments in the international system continue to challenge the traditional primacy of state sovereignty. Meanwhile, China's embrace of economic globalization entails protecting its expanding webs of overseas interests, which

¹⁰⁸³ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative ...", op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Rajaram Panda, "Djibouti Military Base is a New Step ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Andrea Ghiselli, "China's First Overseas Base ...", op. cit., pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", op. cit.

¹⁰⁸⁸ François Dubé, "China's Experiment in Djibouti", op. cit.

often calls for a more engaging and proactive foreign policy than the strict form of non-interference would normally allow.¹⁰⁸⁹

Beijing's initial justification for opening the PLA base was its participation in 2008 in the fight against pirate attacks on civilian ships off the coast of Somalia, which contradicted a long-held policy condemning the creation of such facilities by the great and "imperialist" powers.¹⁰⁹⁰ The Chinese did not officially call their strongholds military bases, claiming that they do not have military bases abroad. But *de facto* they negotiate with the governments of these countries on the calls of their ships for maintenance and replenishment.¹⁰⁹¹

After the opening of the Djibouti base, while foreign media call the new facility of Djibouti a "*military*" base, China avoids using overt military terminology to describe the base, preferring instead to use the terms '*support facilities*' or '*logistical facilities*', which will ensure China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and search-and-rescue humanitarian operations in Africa and West Asia.¹⁰⁹² China maintains that the base is primarily for *non-military activities* and that "*the Djibouti base has nothing to do with an arms race or military expansion, and China has no intention of turning the logistics center into a military foothold*". In addition to its basic supporting role, the Djibouti base will also perform other functions including:

- ❖ *military cooperation,*
- ❖ *joint exercises,*
- ❖ *evacuating and protecting overseas Chinese and emergency rescue,*

¹⁰⁸⁹ Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner, Zhou Hang, "Protecting ...", op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁹¹ Бовдунов А.Л., «Эффект присутствия ...», указ. соч.

¹⁰⁹² Charlotte Gao, "China Officially Sets Up Its First ...", op. cit.

❖ *jointly maintaining security of international strategic seaways,*

❖ *intelligence collection,*

❖ *non-combat evacuation operations,*

❖ *peacekeeping operation support, and counterterrorism.*¹⁰⁹³

In fact, presented as a logistical support, and not a full-fledged naval base (from 1000 to 2000 people), the PLA's presence in this strategic location is changing the situation not only in this part of the world, but also around the world. And China's growing military presence in Djibouti clearly underlines the new global and especially maritime ambitions of this traditionally continental power.¹⁰⁹⁴

However, despite the obvious benefits for Djibouti, which will receive many benefits from the Chinese project, namely: *large investments, the development of transport infrastructure, services, production*, etc., the PRC, realizing its national interests in one of the key countries at MSR, will receive several times more benefits.¹⁰⁹⁵ Thanks to its large infrastructure projects, China today holds the lion's share of Djibouti's external debt: 77% of its GDP (US \$ 1.4 billion) of a total of 88% of GDP at the end of 2018. It is obvious that Djibouti also cannot pay off interests (10% of GDP in 2018), as well as the bulk of this debt in the next few years. Extending China's term to pay off its loans will not solve the problem, because most Chinese projects in Djibouti lose money: train, DIFTZ, and even DMP, whose income cannot go to China Merchants. But largely indebted to China, it will have to make concessions that will strengthen China's influence in that country.¹⁰⁹⁶ It is not surprising

¹⁰⁹³ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", op. cit.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", op. cit.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Михайличенко К.М., «Роль Африки ...», укз. соч., с. 64.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Djibouti, New Battlefield ...", op. cit.

that Djibouti was in the top five most indebted countries along with Kyrgyzstan, Tonga, the Maldives and the Republic of Congo.¹⁰⁹⁷

It is also less convincing that Beijing's interest in installing a base in Djibouti may lie in ensuring energy security, since, despite their overall strategic importance as intensive sea routes, the waters of the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, through which, according to 2013 data only 4% of imported natural gas passes to China, and 3% of oil imports, are significantly behind the Strait of Hormuz and Malacca in terms of their importance for the safety of energy imports from China. 18% of China's natural gas imports and 43% of crude oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, while Malacca is a transit route for 30% of China's natural gas imports and 82% of China's crude oil.¹⁰⁹⁸ But a deeper agenda includes China's oil interests and its arms market, on a wider scale, Africa's huge share. Chinese companies are investing heavily in the extraction of huge resources of the continent, the creation of infrastructure and production. The participation of tens of thousands of Chinese firms in various projects in Africa raises accusations that China is the "largest colonizer" of our time, and concerns about China's dominance and control over the economies of some African countries are growing.¹⁰⁹⁹

It should also be noted that the Djibouti base was constructed within the context of allowing China to create their base over the US' objections.¹¹⁰⁰ The rise of the Chinese fleet, its intentions to build an

¹⁰⁹⁷ «Кыргызстан попал в топ-5 главных должников Китая. Половина кредитов засекречена», Информационно-аналитический Центр по изучению общественно - политических процессов на постсоветском пространстве (ИАЦ МГУ), 10.07.2019; Harutyunyan Aghavni, "On Some Obstacles and Challenges to the Implementation of the Chinese Initiative One Belt, One Road", Orbis Linguarum, Vol. 17, Issue 2, Езиков свят, Филологическия факултет при ЮЗУ 'Неофит Рилски', Благоевград, България, 2019, p. 142.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ankit Panda, "A Naval Base on the Horn of Africa for China?", op. cit.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Rajaram Panda, "Djibouti Military Base Is a New Step ...", op. cit.

¹¹⁰⁰ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", op. cit.

ocean-going fleet and overseas bases, in particular a base in Djibouti, cannot but worry the US, formerly the world's only maritime superpower, and may lead to a deterioration in relations between the PRC and the US, forcing the latter to work to strengthen the concept of containing Beijing.¹¹⁰¹ Naturally, the US would not want Chinese military aircraft, including unmanned aerial vehicles, to fly near American facilities.¹¹⁰²

Sensitive to national security concerns, Washington actively protested the 2014 security and defense agreement between Djibouti and Beijing, and agreed to double the rent it paid for Lemonnier, hoping to keep President Guelleh on his side, accused by political opponents of intent to run for a fourth presidential term. On the eve of the May 2014 visit of US Secretary of State John Kerry, US lawmakers even sent a letter calling for Guelleh's double standards of Washington, as well as its long-standing human rights violations and autocratic tendencies.¹¹⁰³ Washington feared that if they got too close to China, Guelleh might be tempted to impose restrictions on US access to the base, which would seriously affect Western efforts to gather information on the IS and Qaeda.¹¹⁰⁴

Moreover, the US took note of Chinese operations in the western Indian Ocean, in 2015 for the first time confirming the deployment of Shang and Song-class nuclear submarines. The emergence of submarines in Obock could mean that China will view the Djibouti base as a naval base designed to fully support PLA-N's expansion into Western Asia and beyond. The point is that nuclear submarines armed with *YJ-18 supersonic anti-ship missiles* typically aren't necessary for humanitarian assistance or anti-piracy missions.¹¹⁰⁵

¹¹⁰¹ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹¹⁰² Ходаренок М., «Китайцы высаживаются в Африке», укз. соч.

¹¹⁰³ Rob Edens, "China's Naval Plans for Djibouti...", op. cit.

¹¹⁰⁴ Anthony Kleven, "Is China's Maritime Silk Road ...?", op. cit.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ankit Panda, "Confirmed: Construction Begins ...", op. cit.

Some commentators have suggested that Beijing may seek to "curb Western influence" in Africa and the ME with plans to open a Chinese military facility in Djibouti. It is believed that China's diplomatic efforts to create a naval logistics center for patrol boats in Djibouti demonstrate that "*Beijing is in Africa for a long time*" and that it can ultimately play the role of "*removing Western influence in the region and providing access to the continent's vast mineral resources*". Russian experts suggest the base is more than a sign that China is poised to become a *great maritime power*.¹¹⁰⁶

India as well may continue to be wary of Beijing's growing presence in the Indian Ocean under the B&R framework.¹¹⁰⁷ Djibouti's position on the northwestern edge of the Indian Ocean has fueled worries in India that it would become another of China's "String of Pearls" of military alliances and assets encircling India, which include Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.¹¹⁰⁸ Indian analysts and observers have long-feared that China's investment in civilian ports in the region is leading up to a sudden proliferation of dual-use or military facilities in the IOR.¹¹⁰⁹ They believe that, thanks to the MSRI, Beijing aims to make China the center of the new order in Asia and the IOR by establishing control over many coastal states at strategic locations and "*Choke Points*". Thus, China not only seeks strategic penetration into such small states, which are becoming vulnerable to Chinese proposals, but also creates an image of a strong but benevolent power, *withering soft power under covert long-term strategic goals*. Perhaps it's no coincidence that when concerns in some Asian capitals about China's geopolitical aims

¹¹⁰⁶ "China's Power Play in Djibouti ...", op. cit.

¹¹⁰⁷ Sarah Zheng, "China Offers Loans to Djibouti as They ...", op. cit.

¹¹⁰⁸ "China Sends Troops to Open Djibouti Military Base", Bangkok Post, 12.07.2017.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ankit Panda, "Confirmed: Construction Begins ...", op. cit.

developed, Beijing quickly rebranded the “String of Pearls” as the MSRI.¹¹¹⁰

However, on the other side, NATO, Chinese and Japanese are making serious efforts to show that there is no ground for conflict in Djibouti between them, and each is busy with his own business. To this end, in October, 2018, the EU's *Joint Anti-Piracy Task Force in Djibouti* and the PRC Navy held a joint exercise to coordinate the practical suppression of pirate attacks. Meanwhile, this cannot hide the fact that the Western powers are concerned about the expansion of China's presence outside the base, and if China seizes control of the Doraleh commercial port, *"the consequences could be significant"*.¹¹¹¹

10. Chapter Conclusion

From the above, we come to the conclusion that the PRC is strengthening its position in Africa through trade and economic cooperation, investment, humanitarian and economic assistance. China has become an important trading partner for most NA countries. The latter provide China with an uninterrupted supply of energy raw materials and minerals, in return for which Beijing invests in the construction of roads, ports, marine terminals, nuclear power plants, dams, schools, hospitals, housing and industrial facilities.

The political instability in the MENA after the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 posed new challenges and opportunities for Beijing's geostrategic influence and geopolitical ambitions in the region. However, Beijing's advance into East Africa, especially the deployment of military bases and the expansion of its naval forces, exacerbated both the Sino-US rivalry and the surplus of Chinese labor in the region, the capture of domestic markets, and the

relentless exploitation of natural resources. In order to limit or curb China's expansion of influence, Washington has been actively criticizing Beijing's cooperation with countries with human rights issues, as well as the growing dissatisfaction with the Chinese neo-colonial policy by the countries of the region.

It is no coincidence that China is creating new military bases on the African continent and thereby increasing its deterrent potential, posing a threat to strategically important economic routes and corridors of the likely transfer of reinforcements. Strengthening the international potential of the Chinese PLA allows Beijing not only to effectively monitor the actions of potential adversaries, but also force them to spend more resources, taking into account the many options for the development of events. It seems that Chinese leaders are increasingly looking for opportunities to use their growing economic, diplomatic and military power to secure their regional superiority and expand international influence, betting on a *"new type of relationship with the leading powers"* and wanting to establish their interaction with them as with *"almost equal"* player.

The construction of a Chinese military base in Djibouti more than clearly demonstrates Beijing's intentions to expand its sphere of influence not only in the Indian Ocean, but also far beyond its borders. With the growth of global interests, geopolitical ambitions and the manifestation of activity in international security issues, China is transforming from a purely continental state into a global oceanic power, capable, if necessary, of defending its ever-growing interests in the world militarily. China is promoting a *"new concept of regional security"* in the IPR and establishing its military bases overseas aimed at cooperating to protect interests without creating alliances and to ensure the security of its global projects such as the BRI.

And although China, emphasizing its *"anti-imperialist"* policy, declared its refusal to create its own military formations outside its national borders, rapid economic growth and the development of the

¹¹¹⁰ Rajaram Panda, “Djibouti Military Base Is a New Step ...”, op. cit.

¹¹¹¹ Шпунт Ал., «Пуп земли: как крошечная Джибути ...», укз. соч.

country's economic interests required a revision of the established principles. Thus, the construction of a military base in Djibouti can be seen as one of the results of China's changing military strategy and its growing ambitions to balance its military and economic power. Under these circumstances, the “*non-interference stance*” is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, given the deepening trade ties between China and Africa in general and with the thousands of Chinese workers employed in various projects across the continent.

SIXTH CHAPTER

ONE BELT, ONE ROAD IN THE LEVANT COUNTRIES

1. The Growing Importance of Levant Countries in the OBOR Strategy

Over the centuries, the **Levant**^{*} has attracted regional and world powers that have sought to dominate it because of its geostrategic, economic and religious significance. As a result, the region has often become the target of external intervention and struggles, which have taken advantage of and exacerbated the internal conflicts in the Levant. Composed of many national, ethnic and religious groups, the region is torn by internal rivalries that sometimes prevent it from using its potential for interaction.¹¹¹²

The Levant faded into the background in China's ME relations after World War II, due in part to Beijing's relatively low economic activity. China was focused on meeting its energy needs, and because of the region's close ties to two rival great power blocs: *Syria was a USSR protégé from the mid-1950s until the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and Lebanon, Jordan and Israel were deeply rooted in the bosom of the West.* Only with the intensification of China's political and economic activity in the region in the early 2000s, and even

^{*} The **Levant** – a sub-region of the Middle East consisting of **Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Gaza Strip territories, Jordan**, and most of **Turkey south-east of the middle Euphrates** – serves as a crossroads between Asia, Europe and Africa. In its widest historical sense, the Levant included all of the Eastern Mediterranean with its islands; that is, it included all of the countries along the Eastern Mediterranean shores, extending from Greece to Cyrenaica in eastern Libya.

¹¹¹² **Yoram Evron**, “*China’s Involvement in the Levant: It’s the Economy After All*”, Asia Dialogue, 20.03.2020.

more so after the launch of the BRI, the Levant regained most of its historical significance for the Celestial Empire.¹¹¹³

Prior to the 2011 Syrian crisis, inspired by the Chinese model of reform, Syria sought a "*socialist market economy*" in which economic liberalization and the strong role of the state were harmoniously intertwined. Beijing's interest in Damascus as an ASR trading terminal, despite Syria's allegedly "*rejected*" status by the West, suggests that China viewed Syria a base for expanding its influence in the region, an economically viable country and potential trading partner, as well as an endpoint of the ASR in the Mediterranean.¹¹¹⁴

Involvement in Syrian affairs during the crisis made China one of the key players in the country along with Russia and Iran. Beijing has appointed its special envoy to Syria to facilitate peace negotiations, announced its intention to provide humanitarian assistance to Damascus and participate in the country's reconstruction. Beijing has also sent military instructors to Syria and has begun work on joint counter-terrorism mechanisms. Moreover, Syria's location at the crossroads of the ME and the Mediterranean made the country a potentially vital part and key logistics hub of BRI. Expanding cooperation with Syria supports BRI ambitions in the region and its promises of financial injections into the ME.

In recent years, with the cessation of defense relations, Israel and China have sought to expand their diplomatic and economic relations, mainly in the field of industrial research and development, large-scale academic cooperation, and investment. The expansion of cooperation between the two countries is mainly due to the status of

Israel as a *start-up country*, which can satisfy China's technological needs and help it modernise many of its industries. Beijing also sees Israel as a strategic outpost in its regional interests - a small but vital stopover under the BRI, connecting the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through the Gulf of Suez, as a land bridge connecting trade and energy routes from the Far East through Africa to the ME and further to Europe on profitable trade routes by land and sea. The construction of a railway line from Eilat to Ashdod connecting the Red and Mediterranean Seas, as well as the construction of a new port in Ashdod, will provide a safe alternative route to the Suez Canal. Israel's well-secured human capital, a developed economy, a high-tech foundation, a stable public and state business environment have further enhanced the country's attractiveness as a key element of BRI.¹¹¹⁵

Due to its ideal geographical favorable position as a Eurasian country, located at the strategic crossroads of the Europe, Asia, the Caucasus and the ME, and covering the Black and Mediterranean Seas, Turkey has strategic advantage for China's interest in terms of easier access to European markets and rich ME and African natural resources. Turkey is an important geopolitical and geostrategic "*bridge*" in the "*Trans-Caspian Corridor Line*" or "*Middle / Iron Corridor*" for the BRI, which plays an important role in the development of new logistics projects to meet energy needs and ensuring interaction between East and West in terms of land, sea and air transport. Meanwhile, Turkey needs Chinese investments in the building of ports, airports, railways, tunnels, energy, machinery, telecommunications and other infrastructure-related areas.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹¹³ Mordechai Chaziza, Efraim Kars, "China in the Middle East: 'Silk Road' to the Levant", Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 2, The Middle East Forum, Spring 2021, p. 2.

¹¹¹⁴ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, «Չին-սիրիական համագործակցության նոր դրսևորումներ», Արաբական աշխարհ, Ժամանակակից Եվրասիա, Հ. 1(2), ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2012, էջ 143:

¹¹¹⁵ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "China and Israel: Evolving Relationship Within the Belt and Road Initiative", Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Vol. 14, Issue 3, Shanghai International Studies University, 2020, Taylor and Francis Group, p. 410.

¹¹¹⁶ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and Turkey's Middle Corridor", Международный научный журнал "Современные востоковедческие исследования", Казань, International Science Journal "Modern Oriental Studies",

While China sees Syria as the main crossroads connecting the various nodes of the project in the long term, Beijing is turning to Jordan in the short term, as the country has a more immediate environment with low risk and relative stability. Given China's large-scale investment in Jordan, it is increasingly clear that China hopes to prepare the Kingdom to serve as a gateway or a pillar for BRI expansion into the Levant and the center of its reconstruction efforts in Syria.¹¹¹⁷

As a former French protectorate, Lebanon has historically been a West-oriented country. Recently, however, China has been working to become a viable alternative to Western partnerships. The Port of Beirut, which was the gateway to Western Asia in the Eastern Mediterranean, may now also be the gateway to BRI in the Mediterranean.¹¹¹⁸

2. Post-War Reconstruction of Syria within the Framework of the OBOR

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) on August 1, 1956, the two countries have developed stable relations and supported each other in the international arena. The Syrian government has always adhered to adopt a "One China" policy, protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Beijing has consistently advocated a peaceful settlement of the ME conflict through dialogue and political negotiations based on the relevant UN resolutions on the principle of "land for peace".¹¹¹⁹ Given that lasting peace in the ME cannot be

established without Syria, China, as a permanent member of the UNSC, has tended to defend Syria, condemning the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and defending the Palestinian right to self-determination. Beijing has always advocated the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories of Lebanon and Syria (Golan Heights), as well as the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world.¹¹²⁰

Syria and China also had similar views on human rights issues. The two countries opposed the West's attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of developing countries, using the above-mentioned issues as an excuse.¹¹²¹

Along with the intensification of political ties, Beijing gradually launched trade and economic cooperation, made a number of important military supplies, including those related to the technology of creating short - and medium-range ballistic missiles.¹¹²² One of the first steps in China's military cooperation with Syria was the visit of a military mission led by Mustafa Tlas* to Beijing in 1969 to conclude a military deal with China to develop the Syrian missile program. The reason was the SU refusal to expand Syrian missiles with long-range capabilities, which forced Syria to look for other partners. Beijing took advantage of the weakening of the SU in Syria and the ME to try to fill the gap in the arms market.¹¹²³ According to

Vol. 2, No. 5, 2020, Kazan, p. 76.

¹¹¹⁷ Jesse Marks, Salvatore Borgognone, "Can Jordan Harmonize Chinese and American Interests in the Levant?", The Diplomat, 04.05.2018.

¹¹¹⁸ "Will China Change its Strategy with Lebanon?", Belt and Road News, 21.08.2020.

¹¹¹⁹ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, «Չին-սիբիական ...», նշվ. աշխ., էջ 140: 283

¹¹²⁰ Massoud Daher, "China and the Middle East: Establishing a New Partnership", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 3, No. 1, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009, p. 22.

¹¹²¹ "Syria Supports China on Taiwan Issue", Arabic News.com, 17.03.2005; «Сирия подтверждает приверженность политике одного Китая», Жэньминь Жибао, 08.11.2007.

¹¹²² Антипов К.В., «Ближневосточная политика Китая в контексте сирийского кризиса», Китай в мировой и региональной политике. История и современность, Вып. 17, ИДВ РАН, М., 2012, с. 205.

* Tlas was the Minister of Defense of Syria until 2002, and there were rumors that Bashar al-Assad is obliged to him for the unhindered receipt of his father's "throne".

¹¹²³ Հարությունյան Աղավնի, «Չին-սիբիական ...», նշվ. աշխ., էջ 147: 284

the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's database, Beijing has sold Syria arms totaling US \$ 76 million since 2000. For the sake of comparison, Russia purchased US \$ 2.1 billion in small arms during the same period.¹¹²⁴ On the eve of the outbreak of the 2011 rebellion in Syria, China, together with North Korea, was responsible for 30% of the weapons transactions signed with the Assad regime, while Russia accounted for 50%.¹¹²⁵

Relations between Syria and China have reached a qualitatively new level following the visit of President of Syria Bashar al-Assad to the PRC on June 21-25, 2004, during which the parties signed a number of cooperation agreements.¹¹²⁶ Since then, friendly and cooperative ties between the governments, parties and the armed forces of the two countries have strengthened even more at various levels, and high-level discussions on political and strategic issues have become more frequent. China has sought to establish its presence in Syria as an economically viable country and a base for expanding its influence in the region, as well as an important trading partner and endpoint for both the ASR.¹¹²⁷

Syria was inspired by the Chinese model of "*socialist market economy*" of reforms, in which economic liberalization and the strict role of the state are harmoniously intertwined.¹¹²⁸ The adoption of the Chinese model of economic development and modernization was seen as a viable alternative in a developing country like Syria, in

¹¹²⁴ **Roie Yellinek**, "Will China Rebuild Syria?", Belt and Road News Network (BRN), 02.04.2020.

¹¹²⁵ **Yoram Evron**, "Chinese Involvement in the Middle East: The Libyan and Syrian Crises", Strategic Assessment, Vol. 16, No. 3, October 2013, p. 84.

¹¹²⁶ «Китай и Сирия стабильно развивают отношения дружбы и сотрудничества», Жэньминь Жибао, 02.04.2008.

¹¹²⁷ **Christina Y. Lin**, "Syria in China's New Silk Road Strategy", China Brief, Vol. 10, Issue 8, The Jamestown Foundation, 16.04.2010, p. 3.

¹¹²⁸ **Virginie Delattre**, "Syria on the Edge of a New Cooperation Era?", Prospects for the EU-Syrian Association Agreement, Department for Near/Middle East and North Africa, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin, April 2010, p. 7.

contrast to the *free market model* imposed by the US.¹¹²⁹ It is no coincidence that according to the five-year development plan of the Syrian government in 2006, Damascus intended to use the successful experience of China in making the transition from a *planned economy* to a *market economy* in the country.¹¹³⁰ It is noteworthy that on June, 2007, at the third meeting of the *Sino-Syrian Joint Commission* in Damascus, Syria officially recognized China's "*status with a market economy*", China's compliance with WTO standards and minimization of government funding in China - the fact of limiting monopolies.¹¹³¹ In recent years, China has emerged as a model of particular interest for Arab governments exploring ways to improve economic performance without conceding political control.¹¹³²

However, Chinese economic interests in Syria were fairly limited. Chinese investments in Syria encompass the electricity, construction, telecommunications, agriculture, transport, tourism sectors, and oil industry. In an effort to further boost Chinese investment in Syria, Damascus has proposed the creation of a *Chinese Industrial Zone* and a *China Telecom Park*.¹¹³³ Prior to Syrian crises, Chinese exports to Syria totaled US \$ 4.2 billion in 2011, including communications equipment, heavy machinery, and other goods for industry.¹¹³⁴ According to *UN COMTRADE's International Trade Database*, China's exports to Syria totaled US \$ 1.32 billion in 2019.¹¹³⁵ China ceased investing in Syria immediately after

¹¹²⁹ **Chris Zambelis**, "China Tests its Mettle in Syria Greater China", Asia Times Online, 06.11.2008, p. 1.

¹¹³⁰ «Китай и Сирия стабильно развивают отношения ...», укз. соч.

¹¹³¹ "Syria: Befriending Beijing", Oxford Business Group, 02.07.2007.

¹¹³² **Steven Heydemann**, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World", The Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, Analysis Paper, No. 13, October 2007, p. 2.

¹¹³³ **Chris Zambelis**, "The Geopolitics of Sino-Syrian Relations", China Brief, Vol. 8, Issue 20, the Jamestown Foundation, 23.10.2008, p. 2.

¹¹³⁴ **Yoram Evron**, "Chinese Involvement in the Middle ...", op. cit., p. 84.

¹¹³⁵ "China Exports to Syria", Trading Economics. <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/exports/syria>

the outbreak of its civil war, despite Syria's role as Jordan's maritime gateway to the Mediterranean and as a land bridge between Turkey and Jordan.¹¹³⁶

Syria was first invited to attend the BRI Summit in April 2019, and Al-Assad in turn has proposed a number of projects to Beijing that benefit China, Syria and other countries along the Road.¹¹³⁷ After the end of the Syrian war, China can become part of a large-scale reconstruction of the country's destroyed infrastructure through the AIIB and investments in agriculture, industry and communications - transport corridors in the Levant and connecting Syria with Iraq and Iran (two other hubs in BRI).¹¹³⁸

Beijing has already taken a decisive step by directly participating in the final settlement of the Syrian war - in geopolitical and geo-economic terms. Since 2016, Beijing has a Special Representative for Syria and is already providing humanitarian assistance.¹¹³⁹ However, despite Beijing's intentions to rebuild Syrian costly infrastructure, the cautious Chinese are unlikely to invest heavily in Syria as long as there is war there and terrorists are not destroyed.¹¹⁴⁰

China's Role During the Syrian Crises. China has joined Russia in defending Assad's government at the UN since the early days of 2011 Syrian crisis, which received support from the West, Turkey and Gulf Arab countries.¹¹⁴¹ Beijing's position on this issue has not undergone any changes based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and on a political solution to the

¹¹³⁶ "China's Involvement in the Levant: It's the Economy ...", op. cit., p. 2.

¹¹³⁷ "Syria Reaches out to Join China's Belt & Road Initiative", Silk Road Briefing, 17.12.2019.

¹¹³⁸ **Pepe Escobar**, "The New Silk Road Will Go Through Syria", op. cit.

¹¹³⁹ **Ibid.**

¹¹⁴⁰ «Аббас Джума: Без Сирии 'Шелковый путь' будет неполноценным», ИА Реалист, 11.12.2017.

¹¹⁴¹ **Tom O'Connor**, "China Says U.S. should Give Syria's Assad 'an Opportunity to Explain' before Trump Attacks on", Newsweek, 04.11.2018; "Use of Force Not Solution to Syrian Crisis: Chinese Envoy", Xinhua News, 29.04.2011.

conflict.¹¹⁴² China called for the full use of the UNSC's role as the main channel for mediation and for the principle of deciding the country's future by its own people.¹¹⁴³

At the UNSC, which served as Beijing's "central platform" for resolving the Syrian conflict, the Chinese delegation has consistently opposed coercive measures, blocking censure, ceasefire demands, sanctions and recourse to the *International Criminal Court* (ICC).¹¹⁴⁴ At the UN, Beijing has consistently backed Moscow in support of Assad, thus vetoing six of seven UNSC resolutions condemning the Syrian authorities for using force against their citizens, giving the Assad government an opportunity to fight the insurgents without facing exhausting pressure from the international community.¹¹⁴⁵

China has participated in ministerial proceedings such as the Geneva I (2012) and Geneva II peace conferences (2014) and the Vienna peace talks (2015); and hailed the *Astana Peace Process*, launched by Russia, Iran and Turkey in 2017, as "a valuable addition to the peace talks in Geneva". China's Special Envoys for the ME, Wu Sike and Gong Xiaosheng, have devoted much of their mandate to diplomatic work on Syria, exchanging views with regional stakeholders, and striving to promote political reconciliation.¹¹⁴⁶

Generally, China four times in 2011-2016 used the veto power when voting on resolutions in the UNSC, in particular against those resolutions that could worsen the military-political situation in the country, and did not support any specific side of the conflict, considering the idea of supporting any parties as an "interpretation of

¹¹⁴² **Диденко Е.В.**, «Об официальной позиции КНР по сирийскому конфликту», Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 07.09.2017.

¹¹⁴³ "China Calls for Political Solution to Syrian Crisis", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 10.10.2016.

¹¹⁴⁴ **John Calabrese**, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", Middle East Institute, 09.07.2019; "China and Russia Veto Syria Probe", CCTV America, 23.05.2014.

¹¹⁴⁵ **Roie Yellinek**, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.

¹¹⁴⁶ **John Calabrese**, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.

the Cold War mentality". For Beijing, the preservation of the Assad regime was most acceptable, but active contacts with all parties to resolve the conflict and the invitation of their representatives to visit China showed that the Chinese side has no serious reasons to support the official regime.¹¹⁴⁷

The first series of meetings between Chinese diplomats and Syrian oppositionists from the *National Revolutionary Council for Democratic Reforms*, at the invitation of the Foreign Affairs Council under the PRC Foreign Affairs Ministry, took place from February 6 to 9, 2012 in Beijing.¹¹⁴⁸ In July 2012, China refrained from participating in the *Friends of Syria Summit*, in which participants from about 100 countries called for tougher international sanctions against the Assad regime. That month, along with Russia, China vetoed a new Western initiative in the UNSC, this time to impose sanctions against the Assad regime in response to prolonged war and bloodshed.¹¹⁴⁹ The second series took place from 16 to 20 September, 2012.¹¹⁵⁰ On October 31 of the same year, during talks with the UN Joint Special Envoy and the LAS, Lakhdar Brahimi in Beijing, Yang Jiechi, Director of the Communist Party's MFA, announced a 4-point proposal for a transitional governing body that did not contain any plans actions to resolve the crisis, but related to China's engagement with Syria.¹¹⁵¹ As the so-called "*framework ideas*" for the settlement of the Syrian conflict in 2012, the PRC put forward "*Four Initiatives*" and "*Six Ideas*".¹¹⁵² On July 19, 2013, Russia and China in the UNSC vetoed a draft resolution on Syria for the third time, which provided for the possibility of applying sanctions against Damascus. On August 29, 2013, at a meeting of the

¹¹⁴⁷ Диденко Е.В., «Об официальной позиции КНР ...», ука. соч.

¹¹⁴⁸ Казанин М.В., «Роль Китая в урегулировании сирийского кризиса», Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 04.01.2016.

¹¹⁴⁹ Yoram Evron, "Chinese Involvement in the Middle ...", op. cit., p. 86.

¹¹⁵⁰ Казанин М.В., «Роль Китая в урегулировании ...», ука. соч.

¹¹⁵¹ Roie Yellinek, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.

¹¹⁵² Диденко Е.В., «Об официальной позиции КНР ...», ука. соч.

permanent members of the UNSC, while discussing a draft resolution that would pave the way for strikes against Syria, Russia and China opposed the use of force.¹¹⁵³ Official Beijing in 2013 sent a third invitation to the Syrian opposition forces for a dialogue, and on September 10 of the same year, a meeting of Chinese diplomats and six members of the *Syrian National Dialogue* was held in Beijing. On the eve of this meeting, the Special Representative of the President of the SAR Barack Assad paid an official visit to Beijing.¹¹⁵⁴

On the basis of "*Six Ideas*" and "*Four Initiatives*" of 2012, "*Five Supports*" were proposed in 2014¹¹⁵⁵, and then another "*Four Steps*" and "*Three supports*".¹¹⁵⁶ Series of meetings of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his deputies with representatives of the *National Revolutionary Council for Democratic Reforms* took place in April 2014.¹¹⁵⁷ In November 2015, China presented a four-step strategy to move towards resolving the conflict in the region and establishing a complete truce in Syria.¹¹⁵⁸ At the end of December 2015, members of the Syrian government and relevant opposition forces visited Beijing as part of China's constructive efforts to promote peace negotiations and a political settlement of the Syrian problem, and to facilitate the peace process.¹¹⁵⁹ In late 2015, Xi

¹¹⁵³ «РФ и Китай заблокировали принятие резолюции СБ ООН о передаче сирийского досье в МУС», ИТАР-ТАСС, 22.05.2014.

¹¹⁵⁴ Казанин М.В., «Роль Китая в урегулировании ...», ука. соч.

¹¹⁵⁵ "Wang Yi Proposes Five Principles to Facilitate a Political Settlement of Syrian Issue", Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 20.01.2014.

The "*Five Supports*" initiative presented itself to Beijing as follows: 1. *Support for political instruments of settlement.* 2. *Providing support to the Syrian people in choosing the future of their country.* 3. *Support for inclusive political transition.* 4. *Supporting nationwide reconciliation and unity.* 5. *Promotion of humanitarian aid to Syria and neighboring states.*

¹¹⁵⁶ Диденко Е.В., «Об официальной позиции КНР ...», ука. соч.

¹¹⁵⁷ Казанин М.В., «Роль Китая в урегулировании ...», ука. соч.

¹¹⁵⁸ «Китай выступает за установление полного перемирия в Сирии», Газета.Ру, 14.11.2015.

¹¹⁵⁹ "China to Invite Syrian Govt, Opposition for Peace Talks", China Daily, 22.12.2015.

invited both Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem and the head of the opposition group of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) to the summits in Beijing to promote a peaceful settlement.¹¹⁶⁰ In January 2016, Xi Jinping invited Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem and the head of the SNC opposition group to high-level meetings in Beijing. Learning from his experience in Libya, it was a departure from Xi's longstanding policy of only supporting Bashar al-Assad, which meant considering other options for protecting Chinese interests in Syria and using its relations with Damascus to reach some form of deal with the opponents of Assad.¹¹⁶¹ In 2016, when Palmyra and Aleppo were liberated, the PRC established the post of special envoy for Syria.¹¹⁶² In December 2016, Russia and China vetoed a UNSC resolution that would have demanded a seven-day truce in Syria's Aleppo, with Russia arguing it would allow opposition fighters to regroup and that time was needed for talks between Washington and Moscow.¹¹⁶³

In February 2017, Liu Jieyi, China's Permanent Representative to the UN, said that China opposes the use of chemical weapons, but there was no reason to impose sanctions on Syrian officials and the military, without confirmation in the form of the results of the UN investigation.¹¹⁶⁴ After the US launched missile attacks on a Syrian military airfield in April 2017, convened at an emergency meeting of

¹¹⁶⁰ **Gal Luft**, "China's New Grand Strategy for the Middle East", Foreign Policy, 26.11.2016.

¹¹⁶¹ **George Marshall Lerner**, "Why China can't Ignore Syria's Rebel Factions", The Diplomat, 14.02.2017.

In Libya, US \$ 20 billion of Chinese assets were damaged or lost in the 2012 revolution.

¹¹⁶² **Мошкин Михаил**, «Станут ли Россия и Китай конкурентами в послевоенной Сирии», Взгляд, 01.10.2018.

¹¹⁶³ "Russia, China Block UN Demand for 7-day Aleppo Truce", Arab News, 06.12.2016.

¹¹⁶⁴ **Диденко Е.В.**, «Об официальной позиции КНР ...», укз. соч.; **Li Qian**, "China Urges Protection of Security in Syria after US Strike", CGTN, 07.04.2017; **Wang Xuejing**, "China Urges Dialogue, not Military Action in Syria", CGTN, 08.04.2017.

the UNSC, the Chinese envoy Liu Jieyi said that a political solution is the only way out for the Syrian problem, and military means will not work.¹¹⁶⁵ In early April, the press secretary of the PRC Foreign Ministry noted the need to seek a political solution in Syria, preventing further deterioration of the situation.¹¹⁶⁶

In December, 2019, at the UNSC, PRC and Russia vetoed two projects by Belgium, Germany and Kuwait to provide cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syria. The point was that cross-border humanitarian assistance means the provision of various products and items, and since different military forces have coexisted in Syria for a long time, the points of cross-border humanitarian assistance could be used to strengthen anti-government forces in Syria.¹¹⁶⁷

There are different opinions about the reasons for Beijing's support for the Assad administration. According to Israeli expert Yoram Evron, Beijing feared that the collapse of the Assad regime would cause significant damage to Iran, whose survival serves both economic and strategic interests of China, as well as lead to a civil war that would further undermine stability in the ME region and negatively affect the global energy market.¹¹⁶⁸

Keeping its distance from the Syrian conflict, Beijing is keen to advance its economic presence in the country through the BRI. With the withdrawal of US troops and the deterioration of the situation in Syria, security risks for Chinese companies and investments could affect the alleged economic cooperation of China in the region, as

¹¹⁶⁵ "Political Solution Only Way out for Syrian Issue: Chinese Envoy", Xinhua. english.news.cn, 08.04.2017; "China Urges U.S., Russia to Avoid Clashes on Syria", Xinhua, english.news.cn, 13.04.2017; «Китайский представитель призвал предотвратить ухудшение ситуации в Сирии», Russian.News.Cn, 08.04.2017.

¹¹⁶⁶ **Jane Perlez**, "U.S. Strikes on Syria Put Xi in Tough Position for Trump Meeting", The New York Times, 07.04.2017.

¹¹⁶⁷ «Китайский эксперт: США являются настоящим палачом», ЖЭньминь жибао, 24.12.2019.

¹¹⁶⁸ **Yoram Evron**, "The Chinese Initiative on Syria: Beyond the Immediate Crisis", Insight No. 383, Institute for National Security Studies, JSTOR, 12.11.2012, p. 2.

well as spread to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where China has broad economic interests.¹¹⁶⁹

There is also an opinion that due to the fact that Washington did not hide its attitude towards China as a strategic enemy in the light of its rapid economic growth and the establishment of cooperation with oil-producing countries, supporting Syria, China sought, *firstly*, to prevent the strengthening of the US position in the region and, *second*, to prevent Iran from becoming the next target of Western countries, since it was of interest to China as a source of oil and as a regional counterbalance to Israel and Turkey.¹¹⁷⁰

Russian expert A. Maslov suggests that, according to standard Chinese tactics, Beijing at first watched the battle between Damascus and the Syrian opposition, on the one hand, and the US and Russia, on the other, but then began to declare its readiness to provide humanitarian assistance and restore the economy according to the Chinese models by providing its advisers on economic and technological issues.¹¹⁷¹

Trying not to take on obligations to the Kremlin because of the Russian military actions in Syria, Beijing, on the one hand, together with Russia, acted as a united front against the West, on the other hand, showed disagreement with Moscow on many aspects. This may be explained by the difficulties of the Russian economy and Beijing's unwillingness to isolate itself from the West, remaining a global player.¹¹⁷²

China's Involvement in the Economic Reconstruction of Syria. The civil war and mass disaster killed more than 600,000

¹¹⁶⁹ **Liu Zhen**, "US Withdrawal from Syria Leaves China's Plans for Investment up in the Air, Analysts Say", South China Morning Post, 29.12.2018.

¹¹⁷⁰ **Арутюнян Агавни**, «Позиция Китая по Отношению Сирийского Кризиса», Состояние и тенденции развития ситуации на Ближнем Востоке, ИСИ, ИВ НАН РА, М., 2013, с. 119.

¹¹⁷¹ **Мошкин Михаил**, «Станут ли Россия и Китай ...», укз. соч.

¹¹⁷² «Foreign Policy: Китай начинает отворачиваться от России», Newsader, 22.10.2015.

people, devastated the Syrian economy, displaced 4 million Syrians internally and triggered the emigration of another 6 million.¹¹⁷³ The conflict desolated entire cities and destroyed the country's critical infrastructure, including nearly a quarter of its housing stock. The UN has estimated the damage done to Syria at more than US \$ 388 billion and the cost of lost productivity to GDP at about US \$ 268 billion. According to the World Factbook of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Syria's GDP has declined by more than 70% since 2010, and the unemployment rate is around 50%. The government budget declined to about US \$ 1.162 billion in 2017 from US \$ 16.4 billion in 2010.¹¹⁷⁴ Estimates of the cost of rebuilding Syria range from a "modest" US \$ 200 billion to more pessimistic forecasts in the region of US \$ 1 trillion.¹¹⁷⁵

The Assad regime, despite political divisions and mistrust, was open to investment from the US, European countries, Turkey and the Arab states of the PG.¹¹⁷⁶ In September, 2017, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, EU, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Turkey, UAE, the UK, and the US issued a joint statement, stressing that "*Recovery and reconstruction support for Syria hinges on a credible political process leading to a genuine political transition that can be supported by a majority of the Syrian people*".¹¹⁷⁷ Neither the US nor the EU is likely to offer any assistance or recovery efforts in a deeply divisive conflict. Despite the fact that the oil fields in Syria, which produced about 385,000 barrels of oil per day during the pre-conflict period, are under the control of the US military, assistance to rebuild Syria has not come from the US or the EU while Al Bashar remains in

¹¹⁷³ **Roie Yellinek**, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.

¹¹⁷⁴ "Syria Reaches out to Join China's Belt & Road Initiative", op. cit.

¹¹⁷⁵ **Roie Yellinek**, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.

¹¹⁷⁶ **John Calabrese**, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.

¹¹⁷⁷ **Charlotte Gao**, "Why China Wants Syria in its New Belt and Road", The Diplomat, 30.11.2017.

power.¹¹⁷⁸ The *Friends of Syria Coalition*, which includes, among others, the US, UK and Canada, froze pledges worth US \$ 9.6 billion until the political process leading to a post-Assad establishment begins.¹¹⁷⁹ A precondition for the US and Europe to rebuild Syria is reform, including a political transition, and a US demand for the expulsion of Iranian forces and their *henchmen*. And the Arab states of the PG see the reconstruction of Syria as a means of competition and, possibly, containment of Iran.¹¹⁸⁰

Iran and Russia, Damascus' main allies, have offered financial assistance in exchange for resources and a permanent military presence in the country.¹¹⁸¹ In addition, these countries plunged headlong into solving internal problems and overcoming the challenges of the global recession, which against the background of the pandemic will significantly reduce the state treasury revenues.¹¹⁸²

In fact, China can play a significant, if not key, role in Syria's post-war reconstruction, which will require investment of US \$ 250-400 billion.¹¹⁸³ Throughout the war, forging political ties and maintaining its embassy staff in Damascus, China laid the groundwork for participation in Syria's post-war reconstruction projects,¹¹⁸⁴ and is widely regarded as one of the leading candidates for rebuilding the badly damaged Syrian infrastructure, especially in the areas of transportation, communications and the oil and gas industry.¹¹⁸⁵ Worth to remind that in June 2014, at the sixth ministerial Chinese-Arab

¹¹⁷⁸ "Syria Reaches out to Join China's Belt & Road Initiative", op. cit.

¹¹⁷⁹ Sabahat Khan, "China's 'Rebuilding' Role in Iraq could Serve as a Template for Syria after Years of Conflict", The Arab Weekly, 01.03.2020.

¹¹⁸⁰ John Calabrese, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.

¹¹⁸¹ "Syria Reaches out to Join China's Belt & Road Initiative", op. cit.

¹¹⁸² Джеймс М. Дорси, «Проект 'Вызовы переходного периода в Сирии'», Документ, представленный на обсуждение (7), Женевский центр политики безопасности (GCSP), Июнь 2020, р. 6.

¹¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁸⁴ John Calabrese, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.

¹¹⁸⁵ Кожемякин Сергей, «Ближний Восток: схватка дракона с орлом», КИПФ, 20.08.2018.

cooperation meeting, Xi highlighted the "1+2+3" cooperation model between China and the 22 Arab states.¹¹⁸⁶

On August 5, 2018, the Chinese Ambassador to Syria published an article in the Syrian daily newspaper *Al Watan*, in which praising the forces of Assad for strengthening the stability of the regime and the Syrian strategy "East", he expressed Beijing's readiness to participate in the economic reconstruction of Syria and cooperate with Syria in political, military, economic and social areas.¹¹⁸⁷

By 2017, Chinese investment accounts for about 80% of Syria's total foreign trade. In 2017, some large Chinese companies were planning to start investments in the rehabilitation of Syrian infrastructure in the amount of US \$ 2 billion.¹¹⁸⁸ On November, 2017 China just delivered 1,000 tons of rice to Syria as part of its food aid plan under the BRI. According to China's state media, China has already signed three agreements with the Syrian government to provide humanitarian aid to Syria worth over US \$ 40 million in the first half of 2017. In July of the same year the *China-Arab Exchange Association* and the Syrian Embassy in Beijing held a special event, inviting 1,000 representatives of Chinese companies to invest on Syria's reconstruction. Chinese companies are expected to play a big role in the future reconstruction phase and the Syrian government will give top priority to Chinese companies in investment and reconstruction opportunities.¹¹⁸⁹

In February 2017, representatives from the PRC Embassy in Damascus and their counterparts from Syrian Planning and the International Cooperation Commission (ICC) signed two agreements

¹¹⁸⁶ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese 'Belt and Road' ...", op. cit., p. 32; Talbot V., Lovotti C. (Eds.), Akl Z., Cherif Y., Hartwell Ch., Milosevich M., Tafuro Ambrosetti E., "The Role of Russia In the Middle East and North Africa Region. Strategy or Opportunism?", 12 Euromesco Joint Policy Study, IEMed. European Institute of the Mediterranean, April 2019, p. 45.

¹¹⁸⁷ Roie Yellinek, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.

¹¹⁸⁸ Алексеева Надежда, «Асимметричный ответ ...», укз. соч.

¹¹⁸⁹ Charlotte Gao, "Why China Wants Syria in its New Belt ...", op. cit.

under which China will provide US \$ 16 billion in humanitarian aid in two tranches. In the same year, China also funded a US \$ 1.5 million *World Food Program* (WFP) initiative to feed newly arrived Syrian refugees in Jordan,¹¹⁹⁰ where it was also planned to build hospitals for them.¹¹⁹¹ In addition, China has donated US \$ 1 million to the *World Health Organization* (WHO), the WFP and the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC), respectively, to improve food security and health care in Syria.¹¹⁹² The PRC Embassy donated some medical equipment to a military hospital in the Damascus in March 2017. Aid, consisting of 90 wheelchairs and 40 crutches, was transported to the 601-military hospital in the Mazze area, west of Damascus. In April, the Chinese Embassy and the Syrian Planning and ICC signed two agreements under which China will provide the Syrian government with two consignments of humanitarian aid worth US \$ 16 million.¹¹⁹³

Aside from direct humanitarian aid to Damascus and other contributions through international agencies, President Xi Jinping announced early 2018 that China was allocating just under US \$ 30 million in aid to help Syrian refugees and those who have lost their homes due to the conflict.¹¹⁹⁴ On July 10, 2018, President Xi pledged a US \$ 20 billion loan package and nearly US \$ 106 million in financial assistance to the ME in what he called the *oil and gas plus model* to revive economic growth in the region. It is unclear what

¹¹⁹⁰ John Calabrese, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", укз. соч.; «СМИ: КНР будет предоставлять помощь Сирии в рамках инициативы 'Один пояс - один путь'», ТАСС, 16.05.2017.

¹¹⁹¹ Abbās Varīj Kāzemi, Xiangming Chen, "China and the Middle East: More Than Oil", The European Financial Review, February/March 2014, p. 43.

¹¹⁹² John Calabrese, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.; «СМИ: КНР будет предоставлять помощь Сирии в рамках инициативы 'Один пояс - один путь'», укз. соч.

¹¹⁹³ "Chinese Embassy Donates Medical Equipment to Syrian Hospital", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 23.03.2017.

¹¹⁹⁴ Harvey Morris, "China Extends Helping Hands to Rebuild Syria", China Daily, 10.02.2018.

percentage of the loan was set aside for Syria, but only US \$ 91 million was set aside for Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen together. On 27 August 2019, the Chinese Ambassador to Damascus announced that Beijing will provide the Syrian people with new buses and with more support in all areas, particularly in the transport sector.¹¹⁹⁵

Since 2018, China has supplied approximately US \$ 85 million to humanitarian reconstruction in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Yemen - US \$ 14 million in humanitarian aid to Palestine, US \$ 140 million to Arab countries for capacity building, and US \$ 42 million to Arab countries for training law-enforcement officers.¹¹⁹⁶

In mid-2017, Beijing hosted the "First Trade Fair for Syrian Reconstruction Projects", during which China pledged US \$ 2 billion to rebuild the Syrian industry, focusing on a plan to build an industrial park to house up to 150 companies. In October 2018, China donated 800 electrical power generators to Lattakia, Syria's largest port. More than 200 Chinese companies, largely state-owned, were present at the 60th Damascus International Trade Fair in September 2018. Here, China pledged deals including the construction of steel and power plants, car manufacturing, and hospital development. Some of China's flagship involvements include Huawei committing in 2015 to rebuild Syria's telecommunications system by 2020, and the CNPC owning major stakes in two of Syria's largest oil companies, the *Syrian Petroleum Company* and *Al Furat Petroleum*.¹¹⁹⁷ Rebuilding Syria would mean as well assessing control over Syrian oil reserves, which were split between US-backed elements, Kurds and Damascus.¹¹⁹⁸ By 2020, there has been talk in Syrian political

¹¹⁹⁵ Roie Yellinek, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.

¹¹⁹⁶ Camille Lons (project editor), Jonathan Fulton, Sun Degang, Naser Al-Tamimi, "China's Great Game in the Middle East", Policy Brief, The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 21.10.2019, p. 24.

¹¹⁹⁷ "Belt & Road News, China in Postwar Syria", Belt and Road News, 13.03.2019.

¹¹⁹⁸ "Syria Reaches out to Join China's Belt & Road Initiative", op. cit.

and economic circles about reinvesting China in the oil sector, as it has investments in oil fields in Hasaka, Raqqa and Syrian Badia provinces and two Chinese manufacturing cities in Syria.¹¹⁹⁹

Worth to note that after the European embargo on the purchase of crude oil from Syria was imposed in 2011, China took the European place, thereby obtaining control of this sphere. The CNPC was a shareholder in the two largest oil companies in northeastern and eastern Syria, and signed transactions worth billions of dollars in exchange for research and development assistance in the sector.¹²⁰⁰

SINOPEC's first major enterprise in the country was established in 2008 through the acquisition of Canada's Tanganyika Oil, gaining control over northeastern Syrian three oil fields: *Sheikh Mansur*, *Audeh/Rimelan* and *Tishrin*. The deal also gave SINOPEC Tanganyika access to 1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.¹²⁰¹ Another Chinese company, Sinochem, held the rights to one of Syria's two largest oil fields.¹²⁰²

After the war, China has invested heavily in the *Federation of Northern Syria* (TEV-DEM),* which controlled almost all of Syria's main operational energy infrastructure in 2016. SINOPEC considered itself the only organization capable of rebuilding much of its vital infrastructure and legally able to export oil through Iraqi Kurdistan and then through Turkey. However, at the end of February of the same year, TEV-DEM rejected SINOPEC's requests (which had been sent to meet with TEV-DEM to study the state of reserves and equipment and discuss the future of the fields) to return the

¹¹⁹⁹ **Abdullah Al-Ghadhawi**, “*China’s Policy in Syria*”, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, March 2020.

¹²⁰⁰ **Yoram Evron**, “*Chinese Involvement in the Middle ...*”, op. cit., p. 84.

¹²⁰¹ **George Marshall Lerner**, “*Why China can’t Ignore Syria’s ...*”, op. cit.

Tanganyika's Syrian assets contain about 21 billion barrels of oil (barrels).

¹²⁰² **Yoram Evron**, “*Chinese Involvement in the Middle ...*”, op. cit., p. 84.

* The official Kurdish name Federasyona Bakurê Sûriyê and operated by its administrative division TEV-DEM (an abbreviated form of the Kurdish name of Tevger Chiwak Democratic.

assets and approve pre-war ownership of these three SINOPEC fields. As TEV-DEM officials announced the imminent transformation of the Sheikh Mansur, Audeh and Tishrin oil fields into economic cooperatives, opposing the prospect of returning the SINOPEC fields, Beijing may have preferred to deal with Assad and support its strategic interests in the region by helping him.¹²⁰³

Syria - a Unique Partner of Chinese BRI in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Sea is the largest inland sea in the world, bordered by 19/23 countries associated with southern and central Europe, Africa and the ME, and whose well-traveled sea routes link the region to Northern Europe, the US across the North Atlantic, and Eurasia through the Black Sea and with Asia through the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean.¹²⁰⁴ Through the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean Sea is the main sea gateway between East and West. The northeast route through the Hellespont adds Russia to the picture. Whoever controls the Mediterranean has access to the oil resources of the PG, Africa's fast-growing economy, NATO military might, and the economic engine of the EU. The Mediterranean Sea is also the gateway to the dynamic, turbulent and sometimes explosive regions of the ME and Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, oil and gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean, most recently off the island of Cyprus, are generating interest, controversy and possibly conflict.¹²⁰⁵

Chinese diplomacy does not consider the Mediterranean region as a whole and does not yet envisage the creation of a common mechanism of cooperation for the entire region, and in this context, it is difficult to talk about the “*Mediterranean strategy*” of Chinese

¹²⁰³ **George Marshall Lerner**, “*Why China can’t Ignore Syria’s ...*”, op. cit.

¹²⁰⁴ **Ronald H. Linden**, “*The New Sea People ...*”, op. cit., p. 5.

¹²⁰⁵ **Mercy A. Kuo**, “*China and the Mediterranean: Geostrategic Context and Contest Insights from Barry Strauss*”, The Diplomat, 04.03.2020.

diplomacy.¹²⁰⁶ Since all countries and areas (a region with a population of over 520 million, huge markets and a strategic location) differ in population, language, region, size of economy, stages of development, political status and problems, China does not have a common strategy for the Mediterranean region and does business with each country on a bilateral basis, but in its policy towards the region economic factors continue to dominate, in particular trade and investment.¹²⁰⁷

Given the strategic position of the Mediterranean, China has begun to build up its presence in the region, acquiring, building, modernizing, expanding and controlling the most important Mediterranean ports and terminals in *Greece, Egypt, Algeria, Turkey and Israel*. Taking advantage of the Mediterranean's geographical proximity to Europe, Beijing intends to transform it into a major distribution center for Chinese goods destined for the EU, China's largest trading partner, and to build and manage ports and railways.¹²⁰⁸

The recent modernization of the Suez Canal, the main transport route between Asia and Europe, has shortened transit times between the two continents, doubled its capacity and traffic between the Red and Mediterranean Seas, allowing larger ships to be transported, which increases the competitiveness and attractiveness of Mediterranean ports.¹²⁰⁹

As China embarks on its “*Look West*” development SR strategy, Syria’s “*Look East*” policy appears to be converging with Chinese

interests at the Caspian Sea.¹²¹⁰ In its SR strategy, Beijing described Syria as a “*cohesive force*”, which along with Beijing's growing involvement in the ME, could be seen as the new *Pax Sinica*. Syria could be a gateway for China to enter the European market, especially against the backdrop of growing protectionist pressures from major EU countries such as France, Germany and the UK. China pursued as well a strategy of investing in infrastructure projects and providing abundant loans in the Balkan countries or Levant, which were preparing for EU membership. Therefore, it was not accidental that Xi Jinping in October 2009 called on larger Balkan countries that were already EU members, such as Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, to serve as links to smaller Balkan countries that have yet to join the EU.¹²¹¹ This is why China's investment in Syria could eventually gain a beachhead and foothold into the EU market via the Mediterranean Union.¹²¹²

The advancement of global transport and logistics activities in China's economic strategy to the fore (following the commodity-production factor) makes Syria a unique partner of China for the concept of the BRI, which opens up the opportunity in the foreseeable future to significantly increase China's influence on the development of the economies of a number of countries of Western Asia and NA.¹²¹³ The Syrian coast, in China's mind, will play the role of an ‘*industrial linking port*’ tying together the PG, the Arabian

¹²⁰⁶ Alice Ekman, “China in the Mediterranean: An Emerging Presence”, Notes de l’Ifri, Ifri, France, February 2018, p. 7.

¹²⁰⁷ Naser Al Tamimi, “China in the Mediterranean: Beyond Growing Interests”, Al Arabiya English, 18.10.2016.

¹²⁰⁸ Мордекай Чазиза, «Запад сушит весла: Средиземное море занял Китай», Китай сегодня, 24.06.2018.

¹²⁰⁹ Мордекай Чазиза, «Запад сушит весла ...», укз. соч.

¹²¹⁰ Christina Y. Lin, “The Caspian Sea: China's Silk Road Strategy Converges with Damascus”, China Brief, Vol. 10, Issue 17, The Jamestown Foundation, 19.08.2010, p. 9.

¹²¹¹ Christina Y. Lin, “Syria in China's New Silk Road ...”, op. cit., p. 3.

The Mediterranean Union was initiated by the 1995 Barcelona Process to create a FTZ between EU and countries in MENA along the Mediterranean Coast.

¹²¹² Christina Lin, “China's Silk Road Meets Syria's Four Seas Strategy”, Issue No. 716, Institut für Strategie-Politik-Sicherheits-und Wirtschaftsberatung ISPSW, Berlin, August 2020, p. 3.

¹²¹³ Антипов К.В., «Ближневосточная политика...», укз. соч., с. 211.

Sea, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean via Chinese investments in ports in the Gulf, Egypt, Djibouti and Israel.¹²¹⁴

Syrian Mediterranean ports at Tartus and Latakia, both currently Russian bases, have been earmarked as major departure points for Chinese goods entering Europe,¹²¹⁵ and access to these ports is attractive to multi-billion-dollar Chinese infrastructure, telecommunications and energy initiatives seeking to link Eurasia with the PRC. Such access would complement Beijing's existing backlog in the Greek port of Piraeus, the Israeli harbor of Haifa and the port of Ashdot, and would also reflect a key Syrian position on the ASR.¹²¹⁶

Syria plans to rebuild infrastructure within the country and expand its railway network by extending highways to Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Turkey and even to China, spending more than US \$ 4.7 billion. More than 50% of roads were destroyed - this is about 5,000 km, more than 75% of the railways are also destroyed, this is about 2,400 km. Beijing is no less interested in this, since the most important route to Europe (through the Mediterranean Sea), to the Arabian Peninsula and to Turkey runs through Syria, and without such an important corridor the NSR will be incomplete.¹²¹⁷

Key transport links are Syrian cities like Damascus, Homs, Tartus, Palmyra, Raqqa and Dura Europos. This is how the planned line of communications between the Celestial Empire and the EU countries looks like, which, before entering Syria, goes through **Kazakhstan** (Taraz, Alma-Ata, Turkestan), **Tajikistan** (Khojent, Istaravshan), **Uzbekistan** (Andijan, Kokand, Tashkent, Samarkand, Shakhrisabz, Bukhara), **Turkmenistan** (Turkmenabat, Merv, Urgench, Nisa), **Iran** (Kermanshah, Hamadan, Qazvin, Yazd, Mashhad,

Saddarvazekh, Sebzevar, Nishapur, Tus) and **Iraq** (Baghdad, Mosul, Samarra, Falluja, Ktesifon, Baakuba).¹²¹⁸

BRI will inevitably feature a Syrian hub – complete with the requisite legal support for Chinese companies involved in investment, construction and banking.¹²¹⁹ So, investments in international logistics and distribution centers, as well as infrastructure projects under the BRI complement each other, open up new trade links between China and the Eurasian-African zone and strengthen the country's position in the region.¹²²⁰ And if Beijing manages to more systematically expand its grip on Syria, filling the void left by the US and the EU, this will prove to be a very important factor in its expansion westward. Syria could therefore be the unattended “*back door*”, especially since the US administration has focused its attention on the Pacific (Obama's Pivot to Asia), leaving plenty of room for maneuver to other players in the region like Turkey, Iran, Russia and, of course, China.¹²²¹

However, despite the readiness of Chinese business to invest in road construction and oil production, the main condition is political stability in the country and the creation of a favorable investment climate, for which there is still a long and stubborn struggle. A much more relevant area of interaction with Damascus for Beijing is the fight against terrorism, since with the end of the war in Syria, this threat becomes much more real for China due to the growing activity of militants¹²²², especially in Iranian Kurdistan and Baluchistan, which constrict the arteries of the B&R.¹²²³

¹²¹⁴ Abdullah Al-Ghadhawi, “China's Policy in Syria”, op. cit.

¹²¹⁵ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “Middle East and North ...”, op. cit., p. 63.

¹²¹⁶ Джеймс М. Дорси, «Проект 'Вызовы ...'», укз. соч., с. 3-4.

¹²¹⁷ «Аббас Джума: Без Сирии 'Шелковый путь' ...», укз. соч.

¹²¹⁸ Цатурян Саркис, «'Шелковый путь': Китай пробирается в Евросоюз через турецкий Хатай», ИА REGNUM, 22.08.2016.

¹²¹⁹ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “Middle East and North ...”, op. cit., p. 63.

¹²²⁰ Мордекай Чазиза, «Запад сушит весла...», укз. соч.

¹²²¹ Marco Battaglia, “BRI, the Chinese Bid for Syria's Reconstruction”, Mediterranean Affairs, 02.12.2018.

¹²²² Ларин Виктор, «Большая игра: интересы Пекина на Ближнем Востоке», Международный дискуссионный клуб «Валдай», 23.02.2018.

¹²²³ Цатурян С., «'Шелковый путь': Китай пробирается ...», укз. соч.

Terrorism in Syria - a Threat to the China's Security. China's dependent on energy sources in CA and the ME, and instability in these countries or the seizure of power by Salafi regimes sympathetic to Uyghur separatism threaten not only China's energy supply, but also BRI, of which Xinjiang is a springboard.¹²²⁴ XUAR is included in the EBSR program, which gives the once depressed region the prospect of developing infrastructure and the economy as a whole. This region is rich in minerals (40% of coal reserves, 1/3 of China's oil). A gas pipeline from Turkmenistan and an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan are laid through the XUAR territory to CA. In addition, the construction of a gas pipeline from the Altai Territory of Russia is planned. Thus, the power supply of the PRC economy largely depends on a stable situation in the XUAR.¹²²⁵

Threats of transnational jihad and a wave of Islamic extremism spreading from ME to CA and Xinjiang, which could pose a serious threat not only to the PRC's security along its western border, but also to peace and stability in South Asia.¹²²⁶ China has accused militant Uighurs of being terrorists and inciting violence across the country since at least the early 2000s.¹²²⁷ If before the outbreak of the war, Beijing was focused on threats emanating from Afghanistan and CA, then with the rise of ISIS and the involvement of other extremist groups in the Syrian hostilities, Syria has become another haven for terrorist groups seeking to directly harm China, and/or its foreign interests. Hence Afghanistan and Syria, began to be viewed by

¹²²⁴ "China's Interests in Syria and the Middle East – by Dr. Christina Lin", Syria Comment, 13.11.2016.

Xinjinag inhabited by about 22 million Sunni Muslims, including 10 million Uighurs, among which Islamic radicals are indeed not few.

¹²²⁵ Биби́кова О.П., «Уйгурский джихад в Кумае и Сирии», Россия и мусульманский мир: Научно-информационный бюллетень, № 4(310), Центр науч.-информ. исслед. глобальных и региональных проблем, РАН ИНИОН, М., 2018, с. 68.

¹²²⁶ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "The Arab Spring ...", op. cit., p. 116.

¹²²⁷ Alexandra Ma, "This Map Shows a Trillion-Dollar Reason Why China is Oppressing More Than a Million Muslims", Business Insider, 23.02.2019.

Beijing as a single interconnected "terrorist front".¹²²⁸ It is no coincidence that in early September, 2013, at the SCO summit in Astana, Xi Jinping drew SCO members' attention from Afghanistan to the Syrian problem.¹²²⁹

The leadership of the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) or Turkistan Islamic Movement (TIM), formerly known as the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) established contacts with ISIS, pre-determining the participation of its militants (at the beginning there were 300) in the Syrian conflict, who took part in the battle led by the Jabhat al-Nusra (Al-Qaeda Levant, now Hayat Tahrir Ash-Sham/HTS) organization outside Aleppo.¹²³⁰ Terrorists from the TIP were seen in the countryside of Damascus.¹²³¹ Since May 2012, the militants of the TIP in Syria have joined al-Qaeda,¹²³² and since 2013 hundreds of Uyghurs have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the IS and other jihadist radical organizations in the fight against the Assad administration.¹²³³ By May 2017, the Syrian ambassador has suggested that up to 5,000 Chinese were fighting in Syria among the

¹²²⁸ John Calabrese, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.

¹²²⁹ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "The Arab Spring ...", op. cit., pp. 126-127.

¹²³⁰ Биби́кова О.П., «Россия и мусульманский мир...», укз. соч., с. 71-73.

The Uighurs are among the largest detachment of foreigners fighting alongside Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in Syria. After the CA republics gained independence, organizations appeared in the XUAR with the goal of achieving the independence of Eastern Turkestan. Among them, the World Uyghur Congress, formed in 1992, headed by Rabiya Kadyr, who prefers peaceful means of struggle, and the ETIM, which soon came into contact with foreign radical Muslim groups.

¹²³¹ "Chinese Night Tigers Special Forces Arrive in Syria", Syria News, 16.12.2017.

¹²³² Harutyunyan Aghavni, "The Arab Spring ...", p. 120; "Uyghurs fighting in Syria", Al-Manar, 29.10.2012.

¹²³³ Michael Clarke, "Uyghur Militants in Syria: The Turkish Connection", Terrorism Monitor, Vol. 14, Issue: 3, 04.02.2016. The Jamestown Foundation, p. 8; Jacob Zenn, "An Overview of Chinese fighters and Anti-Chinese Militant Groups in Syria and Iraq", China Brief, Vol. 14, Issue 19, The Jamestown Foundation, 10.10.2014, p. 7.

In July 2014, China's envoy to the ME, Ambassador Wu Sike, estimated that about 100 Chinese citizens are considered members of the IS in Syria and Iraq.

ranks of jihadist organizations such as al-Qaeda and the IS militant group.¹²³⁴

As a result of a special propaganda campaign urging the Uyghurs to leave their homeland and go to live in the caliphate, under the reigning Sharia law, the Uyghurs come to Syria via Turkey with their families, who are resettled by representatives of Jabhat al-Nusra in houses abandoned by the Syrians, mainly in the province of Idlib captured back in 2015. Moreover, visas to Turkey were provided by the consulates of this country in other states, including Afghanistan and neighboring countries of CA. In a number of cases, the Uyghurs immediately received Turkish citizenship, which provoked a protest against Ankara's actions from Beijing.¹²³⁵ In January 2015, Chinese authorities announced an expansion of the smugglers' network, arresting 10 Turkish citizens and several Uyghurs in Shanghai. The ring was organized by a "Uyghur living in Turkey and a Turkish suspect" who "charged 60,000 yuan [US \$ 9,680] per person", and also purchased Turkish passports for their potential clients. The apparent link between Uyghur militants not only with long-standing shelters in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, but also with Syrian jihadists points to the unprecedented transnationalization of Uyghur terrorism.¹²³⁶ In the summer of 2018, Uyghur militants concentrated around the city of Jisr al-Shugur (20 km from the Turkish border), where the base of the Uyghur TIP is located.¹²³⁷

In October 2020, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said that Turkey should stop hostilities in Syria, join forces with the international community to fight terrorism in the ME, and also called on the Turkish authorities to "return to the political pro-

¹²³⁴ **Tom O'Connor**, "China May be the Biggest Winner of All if Assad Takes Over Syria", Newsweek, 19.01.2018; "Chinese Night Tigers Special Forces Arrive in Syria", op. cit.

¹²³⁵ **Бибикина О.П.**, «Россия и мусульманский мир...», укз. соч., с. 73.

¹²³⁶ **Michael Clarke**, "Uyghur Militants in Syria...", op. cit., p. 11.

¹²³⁷ **Бибикина О.П.**, «Россия и мусульманский мир...», укз. соч., с. 76.

cess of solving existing problems" taking into account the generally accepted norms of international law.¹²³⁸ Worth noting that home to the largest community of Turkic Muslims from China in exile and a longtime supporter of the political and cultural rights of the Uyghurs, Turkey has occasionally "broken the Muslim world's wall of silence over China's 'repression'".¹²³⁹

Evidence suggests that a small but growing number of Uyghurs may have joined jihadist groups in Syria, often in a roundabout way through CA or through human smuggling networks in Southeast Asia.¹²⁴⁰ In July 2015, 109 Uyghurs were extradited by the Thai government to China, despite protests from the US and Human Rights Watch. At least 13 of them planned to travel to Syria and Iraq to join IS forces. In September 2014, as well as in February and July 2015, the Indonesian authorities sentenced Uyghur groups to long prison terms for "terrorist activities" in the country.¹²⁴¹

In addition to Chinese fighters, there are also anti-Chinese militant groups operating in Syria and Iraq, which are issuing anti-Chinese propaganda. This supports Chinese Major-General Jin Yinan's statements that "*East Turkistan [a term that jihadists use to refer to Xinjiang] organizations are taking advantage of the Syrian civil war to obtain experience and raise the profile of Xinjiang among jihadists from other theatres*".¹²⁴²

Although most of these Chinese citizens are likely were Muslim Uyghurs from Xinjiang, a review of photographs and video evidence showed that ethnic Han Chinese also fought in Syria and Iraq. It is possible that not all Chinese fighters in these two regional conflicts were involved in IS fighting, but were part of other rebel groups such

¹²³⁸ «МИД КНР призвал Турцию прекратить военную операцию в Сирии», Вестник Кавказ, 15.10.2019.

¹²³⁹ **James M. Dorsey**, "Turkey and China Tie Themselves in Knots over Syria and Xinjiang", The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer, 23.10.2019.

¹²⁴⁰ **Michael Clarke**, "Uyghur Militants in Syria...", op. cit., p. 8.

¹²⁴¹ **Коростников Михаил**, «Уйгурский джихад», Коммерсантъ, 14.07.2015.

¹²⁴² **Jacob Zenn**, "An Overview of Chinese Fighters ...", op. cit., p. 8.

as the *Free Syrian Army* (FSA). Some Chinese in Syria and Iraq may not even be "fighters", but simply "adventurers or dissidents" who see "joining" the insurgents as a personal way to demonstrate their opposition to the Chinese government, which they believe has "erroneously" supported Bashar al-Assad.¹²⁴³

It was believed that if the Syrian government could be overthrown by US military strikes, and various jihadist groups, including the Uyghurs, turned Syria into a permanent base for training terrorists and financing foreign attacks, China could face the threat of the XUAR getting out of Beijing's control.¹²⁴⁴

Damascus and Beijing Against Terrorism. Although China tried to avoid involvement in the Syrian crisis based on its foreign policy doctrine of non-intervention and unwillingness to directly risk its core national security interests, TIP attacks in XUAR and Syrian Uyghurs on Chinese citizens or economic interests in the ME could change these calculations leading to some form of Chinese interference in the ME or Africa.¹²⁴⁵ The prevailing mistrust and tensions in the western Pacific, military escalation in the ME to protect the TIP in Jaish al-Fatah may also have contributed to misperception, miscalculation and potential escalation into a military conflict.¹²⁴⁶ IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has repeatedly openly condemned Chinese policies in XUAR, called on Chinese Muslims to be loyal to him, and intensified ultra-religious propaganda in the region, encouraging extremists to participate in jihad.¹²⁴⁷ It is possible that the

¹²⁴³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁴⁴ Исаев Максим, «Удары США по Сирии могут спровоцировать ответный удар КНР», ИА REX, 13.04.2018.

¹²⁴⁵ Michael Clarke, "Uyghur Militants in Syria...", op. cit., p. 11.

¹²⁴⁶ "China's Interests in Syria and the Middle East ...", op. cit.

¹²⁴⁷ Лю Шэнсян (刘胜湘, Liu Shengxiang), Ху Сюэфэн (胡小芬, Hu Xiaofen), «Ближний Восток заставляет США нервничать; как Китай может использовать эту возможность и выиграть время (часть 4)», ИноСМИ.ру, 01.02.2018; 刘胜湘、胡小芬, "中东让美国很焦躁, 中国该如何抓住机遇赢得时间", 观察, 01.02.2018

main motivation of the TIP militants to join the hostilities in Syria was not hatred of the Assad regime, but the desire to acquire military experience for the subsequent fight against the Chinese authorities.¹²⁴⁸ So the killing of at least one Chinese hostage by IS, the issuance of statements threatening an attack on China,¹²⁴⁹ the support of the US/Turkey/PG of anti-Chinese militants in Syria also prompted the Chinese leadership to support the Assad regime in the fight against the TIP.¹²⁵⁰ The battle to weaken IS, backed by Iran and Russia in late 2015 and early 2016¹²⁵¹, and the ability of the Syrian government forces to push back the rebels and take control of most of Syria, with the exception of the rebel-held northwestern Idlib region, heightened China's security concerns as the presence of Uyghur militants in Syria could not only provoke Beijing to persecute Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, but also lead to the first military intervention of the PRC beyond its own borders, sending troops to participate in the battles for Idlib.¹²⁵² In September 2015, Beijing decided to take part in the fight against IS and sent its ships to the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean Sea (which has already entered the Chinese cruiser and then the aircraft carrier of the PRC) to join the Russian military operation in Syria against the IS terrorists.¹²⁵³

In early December 2016, over 70 jihadists - natives of the Caucasus and Xinjiang - were killed in the course of battles between government forces and various Islamist groups in the southwest of Aleppo.¹²⁵⁴

¹²⁴⁸ 17.12.2017, "عينون إيغور سوريا على الصين", المدن, 17.12.2017.

¹²⁴⁹ Roie Yellinek, "Will China Rebuild Syria...", op. cit.; «Круглый стол 'Стратегия Китая в XXI веке'», Научный периодический журнал «Вестник Дипломатической академии МИД России. Россия и мир», № 3(13), Дипломатическая академия МИД России, М., 2017, с. 16.

¹²⁵⁰ "China's Interests in Syria and the Middle East ...", op. cit.

¹²⁵¹ John Calabrese, "China and Syria: In War and Reconstruction", op. cit.

¹²⁵² Джеймс М. Дорси, «Проект 'Вызовы ...'», укз. соч., с. 7.

¹²⁵³ «СМИ: Китайский флот выдвинулся к берегам Сирии», Правда.Ру, 25.09.2015.

¹²⁵⁴ Исаев Максим, «Удары США по Сирии могут ...», укз. соч.

At the end of January 2017, a high-precision air strike by US piloted and unmanned aircraft on an al-Qaeda training camp in Idlib province killed many Uyghurs from the TIP who fought under the wing of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS), in their including the Uyghur jihadist known as Abu Omar al-Turkestani - one of the four most prominent TIP's leaders.¹²⁵⁵

In this context, of interest is *China's Counter-terrorism Law of December, 2015*, which allows the PLA and the *People's Armed Police* (PAP) to seek approval from the CMC to conduct counter-terrorism operations overseas. Similarly, the Ministry of Public Security is authorized with the approval of the host country and the Council of State.¹²⁵⁶ The law was created in response to seven terrorist attacks in China between the start of 2013 and the summer of 2014, five of which were in Xinjiang and all of which were affiliated with the ETIM, which is active in Syria.¹²⁵⁷

This law allowed Chinese "*Night Tigers*" special forces to deploy to Tartus in late 2017 to combat the growing presence of Uyghur militants in Syria, which indicated some degree of expansion of its military relationship with Syria, mainly in the form of arms sales and educational collaboration.¹²⁵⁸ At the same time, it was announced that a unit of "*Snow Leopards*" was sent to Syria to conduct police operations.¹²⁵⁹

¹²⁵⁵ **Uran Botobekov**, "What's are China's Stakes in Syria?", *The Diplomat*, 27.01.2017.

¹²⁵⁶ **Peter Mattis**, "New Law Reshapes Chinese Counterterrorism Policy and Operations", *China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 2, The Jamestown Foundation, 26.01.2016, p. 3.

¹²⁵⁷ **Logan Pauley**, "China Stakes out a Role for Itself in Post-War Syria", *Asia Times*, 03.10.2018.

Counter-terrorism Law allows Beijing to take all necessary measures to put down any activities or behavior it deems threatening to state security and sovereignty. These threats can be summarized by the oft-recited Chinese goal of ridding itself of "the three evils" – terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.

¹²⁵⁸ "Belt & Road News, *China in Postwar Syria*", op. cit.

¹²⁵⁹ **Ларин Виктор**, «Большая игра: интересы Пекина ...», укз. соч.

China expressed its desire to join the four-party *Center for the Exchange of Security Information* between Iran, Russia, Iraq and Syria, established in 2015 in Baghdad.¹²⁶⁰ According to repeated unconfirmed media reports, China has provided intelligence to Syria,¹²⁶¹ and since mid-2016 regularly sends military advisers to Syria,¹²⁶² to assist the Syrian government forces to work with various Syrian intelligence agencies in preventing Uyghur militants from infiltrating China and launching terrorist attacks,¹²⁶³ as well to focus on personnel training in weapons, since the Syrian government forces are buyers of Chinese weapons, including sniper rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns.¹²⁶⁴

However, in August 2018, PRC Ambassador to Damascus Qi Qianjing, denied the presence of Chinese military advisers or special forces in Syria.¹²⁶⁵

Concerns about the battle-hardened Uyghur and Central Asian contingent to be sent to Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and from there China, convinced Beijing of the need to strengthen cooperation on border security with Tajikistan and Afghanistan, where militants of the Uyghur Jihadist TIP, associated with al-Qaeda, worked with the Taliban.¹²⁶⁶

In July 12, 2019, UN ambassadors from 37 countries - including Russia, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Algeria and North Korea - released a

¹²⁶⁰ **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "China's Soft Power Policy in the Middle East and North Africa", Collection of Papers from the Fifth International Conference on Chinese Studies 'The Silk Road', Organized by Confucius Institute in Sofia 30-31 May 2019, Confucius Institute in Sofia, 2020, p. 159.

¹²⁶¹ **Джеймс М. Дорси**, «Проект 'Вызовы ...'», укз. соч., с. 7.

¹²⁶² "Chinese Night Tigers Special Forces Arrive in Syria", op. cit.; «Эксперт: Пекин без сомнений принял сторону Башара Асада», ПРАВДА.Ру, 19.08.2016; «Китай готов повоевать в сирийской провинции Идлиб», ИА REX, 03.08.2018.

¹²⁶³ **Suliman Mulhem**, "China willing to Assist Syrian Army in Idlib Offensive – Ambassador to Syria", Sputnik, 03.08.2018.

¹²⁶⁴ **Yang Sheng**, "China Boosts Syria Support", *Global Times*, 18.08.2016.

¹²⁶⁵ "China Says willing to Team with Syria's Assad in Push to Retake Territory", *Asia Times*, 03.08.2018.

¹²⁶⁶ **Джеймс М. 'Дорси**, «Проект 'Вызовы ...'», укз. соч., с. 8.

letter defending China's treatment of Uighur and other minorities in the Xinjiang region, in direct response to Western criticism earlier that month. Envoys from across the EU (along with Australia, Canada and Japan and New Zealand) had earlier co-signed a text denouncing China's conduct in Xinjiang, where one million people, mostly ethnic Uighurs, are reportedly being held in internment camps.¹²⁶⁷ Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and other countries of MENA publicly backed what Beijing calls its “*deradicalisation efforts*” in the autonomous region – in what appeared to be a staunch show of support for China's sovereignty.¹²⁶⁸

It is noteworthy that Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin announced the need to immediately correct the mistakes of the US, whose State Department removed TIP from the list of terrorist organizations on November 6, 2020, explaining this decision by “*the lack of reliable evidence that TIP is still in existence for more than ten years*”.¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶⁷ “Russia, N. Korea, Saudi, Syria and 33 Other Countries Defend China's Xinjiang Internment Camps in UN Letter”, Hong Kong Free Press HKFP, 13.08.2019.

¹²⁶⁸ Camille Lons (project editor), Jonathan Fulton, Sun Degang, Naser Al-Tamimi, “China's Great Game in the Middle East”, op. cit.

¹²⁶⁹ Прохвятилов В., «Госдеп США начал готовить переброску террористов в Синьцзян и Центральную Азию», Военно-политическая аналитика, 12.11.2020.

ETIM was added to the US Federal Register of Banned Terrorist Organizations in 2004 by the administration of President George W. Bush. Created in 1993 by two people from Khotan, a city in southwestern Xinjiang, the movement claimed responsibility for 200 acts of terrorism that killed 162 people and injured more than 400. The UN, the EU, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan recognize the ETIM as a terrorist organization. This list does not include Pakistan, where ETIM camps are located along with Afghanistan.

3. Sino-Israeli Cooperation in the Field of Innovative Economy

Israel's Significance in the BRI. Israel was the first and, until 1956, the only country from the ME to recognize the PRC, even though the two countries did not exchange ambassadors until 1992.¹²⁷⁰ China's interest in Israel in the early 1950s was driven mainly by pragmatic considerations. The Chinese communist leadership expressed their readiness to establish diplomatic relations with any government, provided that it breaks off relations with Chinese nationalists and takes a friendly attitude towards the PRC. Israel never had a relationship with the Kuomintang, and recognition was undoubtedly considered a friendly act. Israel's relations with the US did not bother Beijing too much, since the Chinese did not consider these relations a prerequisite for establishing diplomatic relations and even established diplomatic relations not only with states that clearly fell under the American sphere of influence, but which, unlike Israel, even joined the American military pacts.¹²⁷¹

In the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping, when China began to look with interest at developing arms cooperation with Israel, making the first deliveries of Israeli weapons to the PRC, and began the active phase of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, this allowed both countries to establish full-fledged diplomatic relations in January, 1992.¹²⁷² Following the opening of embassies in Beijing

¹²⁷⁰ Jin Liangxiang, “Energy First. China and the Middle East”, Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 12, No 2, Spring 2005, pp. 3-10; Հարությունյան Աղավնի, “Չին-իսրայելական կապերը նախքան դիվանագիտական հարաբերությունների հաստատումը”, Մերձավոր Արևելք: Պատմություն, քաղաքականություն, մշակույթ, Հ. 9-10, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2014, էջ 423:

¹²⁷¹ Yitzhak Shichor, “The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy 1949-1977”, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1979, p. 21.

¹²⁷² Марьясис Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль - стратегические партнёры?», Российский совет по международным делам (НП РСМД), 22.08.2017.

and Tel Aviv, economic and trade ties between Israel and the China grew, first moderately and then at a faster pace.¹²⁷³

Although in the early 2000s, under pressure from the US, Israel unilaterally abandoned existing military contracts and broke off its close relations with Beijing, the mutual perception of future economic and technological benefits contributed most to overcoming the crisis between the two countries.¹²⁷⁴ On November 1, 2005, the PRC and Israel signed an intergovernmental agreement in Jerusalem, according to which Israel officially recognized the full *market status* of the Chinese economy.¹²⁷⁵

From 1992 to 2018, the volume of bilateral trade with China increased from 50 million to US 13.9/15.6% billion dollars.¹²⁷⁶ It makes China the largest trading partner of the Jewish state in Asia and the third largest foreign trade partner in the world after the US and the EU,¹²⁷⁷ and second only to the US by 2019.¹²⁷⁸ The US remains the main country for export to Israel, but China, together with Hong Kong, occupy the second line.¹²⁷⁹ Since Chinese trade excludes business relations with Hong Kong, despite the fact that most of it is directed to the mainland, the actual trade figures are higher than officially announced. Moreover, these figures do not

¹²⁷³ **Aron Shai**, "Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality and Future Prospects", Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum No.100, Tel Aviv, September 2009, p. 25.

¹²⁷⁴ **Yoram Evron**, "The Economic Dimension of China-Israel Relations: Political Implications, Roles and Limitations", Israel Affairs, 2017, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁷⁵ **Комаров И.**, «Китайско-Израильские Отношения: Проблемы, Достижения, Перспективы», История Международных Отношений и Мировой Дипломатии. Вестник Нижегородского университета им. Н.И. Лобачевского, 2013, № 2(1), Нижегородский журнал международных исследований, Нижний Новгород, Осень-зима 2009, с. 47.

¹²⁷⁶ **Халдей Александр**, «Вашингтон в панике: Китай уводит Израиль», ИА REX, 08.04.2019.

¹²⁷⁷ **Субботин Игорь**, «Израилью предрекают превращение ...», укз. соч.

¹²⁷⁸ **Халдей Александр**, «Вашингтон в панике ...», укз. соч.

¹²⁷⁹ «Haaretz: на смену США на Ближнем Востоке придёт не Россия, а Китай», ИноТВ, 19.10.2019.

include Israel's lucrative arms sales to China.¹²⁸⁰ However, Israel is not an important market for the Chinese economy, since transactions with Israel account for only 0.3% of total Chinese trade.¹²⁸¹

One of the main reasons Israel seeks to deepen its economic relations with the fastest growing large economies in the world and expand trade with Asian markets is the desire to diversify its export markets and investment sources from its traditional partners, the US and the EU.¹²⁸² Israeli companies are increasingly turning to Asia to capture a boom in demand for their technology, as the government urges them to diversify export markets in response to Europe's rising "anti-Semitism" and potential trade sanctions.¹²⁸³

China is one of the leading manufacturing markets on the planet, and Israel is one of the leaders in research and development (R&D).¹²⁸⁴ The fields wherein Israel envisaged economic cooperation with China included *industrial R&D, large-scale academic cooperation, investments*.¹²⁸⁵ Israel's achievements in innovation and in some technical fields make it a particularly attractive partner for China, as Beijing is trying to become a world leader in high technology, moving from an economy focused on *investment* and *exports* to

¹²⁸⁰ **Aron Shai**, "Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality ...", op. cit., p. 25.

¹²⁸¹ **Янушевский Нир**, «The Marker (Израиль): угрожают ли Израилью китайские инвестиции?», ИноСМИ.RU, 21.08.2019.

¹²⁸² **Mercy A. Kuo**, "Israel Balancing US-China Relations: Geostrategic Context. Insights from Shira Efron", The Diplomat, 16.04.2019; **Robert R. Bianchi**, "China's Interests in Preserving the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse", The University of Nottingham, 25.02.2015.

¹²⁸³ "Israel Applies to Join China-backed AIIB Investment Bank", Reuters, 01.04.2015.

¹²⁸⁴ **Цатурян Саркис**, «Китай идёт на Турцию, а Германия внедряется в Армению. Что дальше?», ИА REGNUM, 10.06.2016.

¹²⁸⁵ **Yoram Evron**, "Israel's Response to China's Rise: A Dependent State's Dilemma", Asian Survey, Vol. 56, No. 2, University of California Press, March/April 2016, p. 399.

an economy focused on *innovation and consumption*.¹²⁸⁶ For a long time, Israel's exports to China consisted of high-tech products, including electronics, optical, agricultural and water technologies, chemical industry, communications, while China's exports to the Israeli market include popular and competitive raw materials, textile products and consumer goods.¹²⁸⁷

China has relatively low labor costs, huge production capacities and high demand for advanced technologies, and Israel is looking for export markets for its advanced technological products, while it carries high labor costs and limited industrial production capabilities.¹²⁸⁸ Well-secured human capital, a developed economy and high-tech base, as well as a stable business environment for society and government, make Israel a particularly valuable asset for the Chinese BRI in the long run.¹²⁸⁹

Israel did not declare its position on the BRI after its announcement, and only after China launched the AIIB in October 2014, Israel became one of the last seven countries to apply for membership. On March 31, 2015, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu formally signed a declaration of accession to the AIIB, and Israel became one of the 57 founding states. In this way, Tel Aviv positively supported the Chinese BRI, which could cause confusion in Washington.¹²⁹⁰ In January 2016, the Knesset Finance Commission approved in the second and third readings the bill on Israel's

¹²⁸⁶ Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel-China Relationship", RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif, 2019, pp. xii–xiii.

¹²⁸⁷ Xian Xiao, "The 'Belt and Road Initiative' and China-Israeli Relations", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 10, No. 3, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016, p. 6; Aron Shai, "Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality ...", op. cit., p. 25.

¹²⁸⁸ Yoram Evron, "The Economic Dimension of China...", op. cit., pp. 1–2.

¹²⁸⁹ Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel ...", op. cit., p. 39.

¹²⁹⁰ Xian Xiao, "The 'Belt and Road Initiative' and China ...", op. cit., p. 12; "Israel Applies to Join China-backed AIIB ...", op. cit.

entry into the AIIB, which became the first pan-Asian economic structure with full membership of Israel in one working group with South Korea, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and several other Asian countries. Of the bank's total registered capital of US \$ 100 billion, Israel's share will be US \$ 150 million (Israel has 0.91% of the vote), and Tel Aviv will provide commitments in the amount of US \$ 600 million in case of need to buy back shares.¹²⁹¹

Israel's AIIB membership will open up opportunities for the integration of Israeli companies into bank-financed infrastructure projects. The Israeli Foreign Ministry hailed the AIIB as "*a diplomatic achievement*" and "*one of the most important initiatives in terms of China's foreign policy and, in particular, for President Xi Jinping*".¹²⁹²

During Netanyahu's visit to China in March 2017, President Xi announced the intention of the two countries to consistently promote major projects as part of the jointly building of the BRI. PM Netanyahu also expressed the readiness of the Israeli side to actively participate in infrastructure and other cooperation within the framework of BRI,¹²⁹³ and declared that Chinese-Israeli ties are "*a marriage made in heaven*".¹²⁹⁴ Chinese PM Li Keqiang reminded that "*the Chinese people and the Jewish people are the great nations of the world*".¹²⁹⁵

In March 2015, Premier Li Keqiang underscored in the "*Report on the Work of the Government*" that China should promote FTA

¹²⁹¹ «Финансовая комиссия Кнессета утвердила ко второму и третьему чтениям законопроект о вступлении Израиля в Азиатский банк инфраструктурных инвестиций», Кнессет, 11.01.2016.

¹²⁹² Mehreen Khan, "Israel Applies to Become Founding Member of China Development Bank", The Telegraph, 01.04.2015.

¹²⁹³ Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel ...", op. cit., p. 38.

¹²⁹⁴ Shannon Tiezzi, "Israel and China a 'Marriage Made in Heaven', Says Netanyahu", The Diplomat, 22.03.2017.

¹²⁹⁵ Michael Martina, "After Saudi king, China Warmly Welcomes Israel's Prime Minister", Reuters, 20.03.2017.

negotiations with Israel and other countries.¹²⁹⁶ The two nations wrapped up their seventh round in November 2019, and could very well finalize the deal by the close of 2020. The idea that one of America's closest allies would enter into such an agreement with its "*strategic rival*" could have been accepted without enthusiasm in Washington.¹²⁹⁷ However, it should be noted that this is part of the Chinese strategy to create FTZ in those states that can be called traditional US allies in order to facilitate the supply of goods and simplify the creation of joint ventures through the FTZ.¹²⁹⁸

Israel - Logistics Center and Hub for BRI. Given the country's geographical position, China also needs Israel as a BRI logistics center and land bridge connecting China's trade routes from the Far East through Africa to the ME and further to Europe.¹²⁹⁹ Since BRI routes require not only seaports, but also railways, logistics centers, warehouses, airports, as well as hardware and software for the transportation system, Israeli companies can contribute to B&R projects by developing and integrating transport and logistics technologies and related systems, for example, for trains, aircraft and marine equipment.¹³⁰⁰ Through BRI, China seeks to play a more active role in the ME, and improved ties with Israel could offset China's historically closer ties with other countries in the region, including Iran and Israel's Arab neighbors.¹³⁰¹ Some Chinese authors even see Israel's location next to the Arab states as a "*balancing factor*" that can "*give credibility to Chinese soft power in the region*", consi-

¹²⁹⁶ Xian Xiao, "The 'Belt and Road Initiative' and China...", op. cit., p. 7.

¹²⁹⁷ "Why America Might Support a Sino-Israel Free Trade Agreement", The Times of Israel, 20.02.2020.

¹²⁹⁸ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль игнорирует сигналы США об опасности Китая», Независимая газета, 24.12.2019.

¹²⁹⁹ Roi Feder, "What China's New Silk Road Means for Israel", op. cit.

¹³⁰⁰ Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel ...", op. cit., p. 39.

¹³⁰¹ Shira Efron, Karen Schwindt, Emily Haskel, "Chinese Investment in Israeli Technology and Infrastructure: Security Implications for Israel and the United States", RAND Corporation, 2020, p. 17.

dering Israel's limited role in the BRI due to its small size, bounded transport links with countries in its region and lack of experience in large-scale projects.¹³⁰² Tel Aviv's deep ties with the US and the EU can help China expand its ties in the Eastern Mediterranean and the ME, and Sino-Israeli ties can enhance Israel's role in trade between Asia and Europe.¹³⁰³

Chinese companies, involved in national infrastructure and construction projects in Israel, have good experience in implementing infrastructure projects at a lower price and in a shorter time.¹³⁰⁴ The ability of Chinese companies to successfully build infrastructure in a highly developed country such as Israel, not only can help Chinese infrastructure companies enter the US or Europe, but will improve their image and give legitimacy to their activities, leading to additional projects in other developed states, since most BRI countries where Chinese companies are building infrastructure have low and medium incomes.¹³⁰⁵

Israel - Pivotal Location for MSR. Israel has the potential to be a small but important stop on the MSR, connecting the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal.¹³⁰⁶ From the east coast of the China, the ships follow the South China Sea to the Straits of Malacca, from where they are sent to the shores of northern and northeast Africa to reach the Israeli ports via the Bab el-Eilat and Ashdod - bypassing the Suez Canal.¹³⁰⁷ To ensure reliable access for Chinese commercial shipments from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, Beijing took an adopted a dual-track

¹³⁰² Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel ...", op. cit., pp. 39-40.

¹³⁰³ Jacopo Franceschini, "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ...", op. cit.

¹³⁰⁴ Mercy A. Kuo, "Israel Balancing US-China Relations ...", op. cit.

¹³⁰⁵ Shira Efron, Karen Schwindt, Emily Haskel, "Chinese Investment ...", op. cit., p. 18.

¹³⁰⁶ Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel ...", op. cit., p. 38.

¹³⁰⁷ "Turkey and Israel are Intercepted at Sea 'Silk Road' of Iran", op. cit.

approach while expanding its interests in the Suez Canal corridor and following the land route through Israel.¹³⁰⁸

The massive development of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, new ports appearing on its Mediterranean shores, new trade routes between Israel and its Arab neighbors, a growing geo-economic alliance between Israel, Cyprus and Greece and significant financial resources in Israeli investment intuition make this a very attractive market BRI for China.¹³⁰⁹ China has raised its naval presence in the strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb strait, and Suez Canal as well as made ports of call across the Gulf and in Egypt, Israel and Iran. Given the natural naval points of the ME (Hormuz, Suez, Mandeb), each of which faces a high level of geopolitical uncertainty, China's modern dependence on others for providing these points of attraction and sea routes is unstable in the long run.¹³¹⁰ While most of these transcontinental routes will be located in Central and South Asia, the littoral states of the Eastern Mediterranean - Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt - play a crucial role in completing China's Eurasian bridges.¹³¹¹

SPS is particularly evident in the fact that China gained control of two of Israel's three sea gates, the ports of Haifa and Ashdod, which are part of China's ambitious trans-Asian strategy to use three key resources for China's future greatness: *petrochemicals, consumer markets and advanced technologies*.¹³¹²

In 2014, CHEC won a tender for the construction of new container terminals in Ashdod port (25 miles/40 km south of Tel Aviv),

¹³⁰⁸ Emma Scott, "China's Silk Road Strategy...", op. cit., p. 10.

¹³⁰⁹ Mercy A. Kuo, "China and Israel in the Belt and Road Initiative. Insights from Roi Feder", The Diplomat, 19.09.2018.

¹³¹⁰ Mercy A. Kuo, "China and the Middle East: Israel's Strategic Stakes. Insights from Sam Chester", The Diplomat, 29.08.2018.

¹³¹¹ Sam Chester, "Is China Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process?", The University of Nottingham, 02.03.2015.

¹³¹² «Китай все ближе подходит к Израилю?», Кто в курсе, 25.12.2018.

worth US \$ 3 billion,¹³¹³ which will become the most important port for maritime trade with Europe. Ashdod on the Mediterranean coast is the destination of 90% of Israel's international maritime traffic. It is one of the largest foreign investment projects in Israel's history, as well as one of the largest projects for the CHEC.¹³¹⁴

And in 2015, Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG), which operates the Port of Shanghai, won the bid to expand the deep-sea private Haifa Port, near Israel's alleged nuclear-armed submarines. It will also have the operation rights for the terminal for 25 years after the facilities enter into service in 2021. This new terminal is just 1 km from the docks, where US warships are anchored when they call at the port of Haifa.¹³¹⁵ The Israelis allowed to rent and maintain a terminal in the port of Haifa due to traffic difficulties and increased strikes by local workers. It was assumed that new facilities built by the Chinese would unload the old port, and enterprises arriving from China would violate the Israeli state port company's monopoly. However, some observers believe that if the SIPG extends the lease of the port due to the lack of competing offers, then the Israeli authorities will be in a dependent position for a long time.¹³¹⁶ It is also noteworthy that the decisions to award the Haifa tender to a Chinese company were made by the Transportation Ministry and the Ports Authority without involvement of the National Security Council and the participation of the Navy.¹³¹⁷

Another long-term plan, that Israel hopes China could participate in, is building a railroad connection between the port of Eilat (in the southernmost point of Israel on the Red Sea) and the port of Ashdod, so-called "Red-Med Railway". It will connect the Red Sea

¹³¹³ Марьянс Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль ...», укз. соч.

¹³¹⁴ «Китай все ближе подходит к Израилю?», укз. соч.

¹³¹⁵ Altay Ath, "China, Israel, and the Geopolitics of Seaports", The Diplomat, 16.07.2019.

¹³¹⁶ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль предрекают превращение ...», укз. соч.

¹³¹⁷ Amos Harel, "Analysis Israel Is Giving China the Keys to Its Largest Port – and the U.S. Navy May Abandon Israel", Haaretz, 15.09.2018.

to the Mediterranean Sea, thereby providing a safe alternative to the Suez Canal, and creating an inland trade and logistics center for Chinese trade between Asia and Europe via the Red Sea.¹³¹⁸ From Eilat goods will be transported by new railway to the port of Ashdod on the Mediterranean coast and delivered further by sea to European customers, thereby bypassing the vulnerable neck of the Suez Canal, provided that the fare on the new line remains at a fairly competitive level.¹³¹⁹

From an Israeli perspective, the “Red-Med” would bring economic benefits as a catalyst for development of the southern Negev region. It could also improve its regional standing and strengthen its bargaining position vis-à-vis Egypt. For decades, Cairo was able to partially isolate Israel by threatening to close the Suez Canal.¹³²⁰ To solve the problems of competition between Egypt and Israel over China in the construction of new transport corridors between the Red and Mediterranean Seas, the presidents of China and Egypt met and discussed trilateral negotiations with Israel in December 2015.¹³²¹

To avoid a bottleneck in the Strait of Malacca, China is building the CPEC as a workaround. And Bab al-Mandab will guard Beijing's military base in Djibouti. The only missing node in ensuring the security of China's SLOC and “String of Pearls” is the Suez Canal, for which the “Red-Med railway” is considered the ideal logistics solution.¹³²² Taking into account the fact that the full railway and

¹³¹⁸ Alexander B. Pevzner, “China's ‘New Silk Road’ and the Middle East”, The Jerusalem Post, 08.05.2017; “China's ‘Belt and Road’ Offers Middle East Opportunities Galore”, op. cit.

¹³¹⁹ «Баланс сверхдержав в преддверии Третьей войны в Заливе», Центр стратегических оценок и прогнозов, 25.04.2012.

¹³²⁰ George N. Tzogopoulos, “Greece, Israel, and China's ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative”, Mideast Security and Policy Studies, No. 139, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, October 2014, p. 24.

¹³²¹ Sam Chester, “Is China Part of the Solution or Part ...”, op. cit.

¹³²² Andrew Korybko, “Why is China Choosing to Partner ...”, op. cit.

road corridor going to the port of Gwadar (on the Arabian Sea) between China and Pakistan, Turkey-Pakistan FTA will strengthen the interaction of Beijing, Ankara and Tel-Aviv.¹³²³

China has been a partner in important national initiatives, such as construction of the Red Line - the first stretch of a light rail line going from Petah Tikvah to Tel Aviv.¹³²⁴ Israel has added a rail line from the port of Haifa to Beit She'an (less than 10 km from the border with Jordan) and has invited Chinese companies to take part in a project of extending further its north-eastern spur right up to the border with Jordan. From there, a short link to the Jordanian town of Irbid will enable connection to the Jordanian rail network and on to Saudi Arabia and the PG. Under the auspices of BRI, this international project, led by multinational corporations, and built on a centuries-old Ottoman network, with the intention of linking the Palestinian Authority and incorporating an inland logistics and trading port in Jordan, passed through non-diplomatic countries, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.¹³²⁵

In 1997, Israel and Jordan signed an agreement on the establishment of a *Special Industrial Zone* (SIZ) in the Jordanian city of Irbid (it began to operate in 1998). Apparently, using the holes in the SIZ agreement, the main advantage of the work of the SIZ in Jordan is received by the Chinese, who invest in the enterprises operating there, and manage to hire cheaper Chinese workers, not Jordanians. Of the 71 companies operating in 2008 in the SIZ, the majority of employees 23 of them came from mainland China. At least 50% of the profits from the supply of textiles to the US from Irbid are received by companies with Chinese ownership.¹³²⁶

¹³²³ “Turkey and Israel are Intercepted at Sea ‘Silk Road’ of Iran”, op. cit.

¹³²⁴ Svetlova Ksenia, “Will Post-Coronavirus World Bring Chill to Israel-China Relations?”, Al-Monitor, 22.04.2020.

¹³²⁵ Alexander B. Pevzner, “China's ‘New Silk Road’ ...”, op. cit.

¹³²⁶ Марьясис Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль: 25 лет экономического сотрудничества», Азия и Африка сегодня, № 7, РАН, 2018, с. 42.

If we add to this that China is actively interested participating in the construction of a light metro in Tel Aviv and digging a tunnel on Mount Carmel in Haifa, it seems that the PRC seriously considers Israel as a logistic hub between Europe and Asia.¹³²⁷ It is believed that the strategic security implications of the tunnel on Mount Carmel and the high-speed train in Tel Aviv, were also not considered.¹³²⁸

In recent years, a significant breakthrough has been made in the field of inbound Chinese tourism in Israel. As a result of a strategic decision taken in 2012 by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism to focus on attracting a large number of tourists from China, the flow of tourists from China to Israel increases by 15-30% annually. And if in 2015 the country was visited by 47,000 Chinese tourists, then in 2016 it was already 79,000, and in 2017 their number for the first time in history exceeded 100,000, amounting to 113.6 thousand people. The increase in tourist flow from the Middle Kingdom was stimulated, in addition to the growth of general interest in Israel, as well as marketing campaigns and simplification of visa procedures.¹³²⁹

50 weekly flights help not only to establish an exchange of tourist flows but learn to understand each other's culture and mentality.¹³³⁰ By early 2019, there were direct flights from Beijing, Shanghai, Hainan and Chengdu to Israel, which not only bring economic benefits of tourism but also greatly promote exchanges and cooperation between Israel and China in various fields. With the booming China-Israel tourism industry, China's e-commerce giant Alibaba has launched payment service in Israel since January 2018 to provide convenience for Chinese tourists in Israel. At present, Alipay is available at nearly 100 vendors in Israel, while Tencent, Alibaba's

competitor in China, has geared up to launch WeChat payment service in Israel.¹³³¹

Innovation and investments. Israel - a "Start-up Nation". In order to achieve its ambitions to become a leading superpower and dominate the global high-tech industry, China uses not only the strategy of BRI, but also the policy MIC 25 - a state industrial initiative aimed at opening their capital markets.¹³³² China wants to become a world leader in advanced technology, both for commercial and military purposes, and has many national plans designed to stimulate the development of its technology sector. The Chinese government is issuing various industry-specific plans, such as the *Next-Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan*, released in July 2017. Key plans and policies include the *National Long- and Medium-Term Plan for Science and Technology Development (2006–2020)*, *Internet Plus*, and *MIC-2025*.¹³³³

In July 2017, China's state council released its new generation artificial intelligence (AI) development plan, intended to make China the leading global powerhouse in AI by 2030. In July 2018, two state-backed Chinese companies, *China Merchants Group* and peer *SPF Group*, announced a partnership with London-based investment firm Centricus to launch a US \$ 15 billion fund that will invest in or acquire tech companies in both China and globally.¹³³⁴

Thus, China is making its move from a commodity manufacturer economy to a high-tech one – and Israel is playing a key part.¹³³⁵ Since 2005, when defensive and diplomatic relations bet-

¹³²⁷ Марьянис Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль ...», укз. соч.

¹³²⁸ Amos Narel, "Analysis Israel Is Giving China the Keys ...", op. cit.

¹³²⁹ Марьянис Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль: 25 лет ...», укз. соч., с. 42.

¹³³⁰ Халдей Александр, «Вашингтон в панике ...», укз. соч.

¹³³¹ "Belt and Road News Network (BRN)", Belt and Road News, 21.12.2019.

¹³³² "'Made in China 2025' vs 'Make America Great Again'", Belt and Road News, 03.12.2019.

¹³³³ Shira Efron, Karen Schwindt, Emily Haskel, "Chinese Investment ...", op. cit., p. 12.

¹³³⁴ Hagar Ravet, "China's Minister of Science Wang Zhigang on a Two-Day Visit to Israel", CTEch, 19.08.2018.

¹³³⁵ David Shamah, "Israeli Tech to Power a Robot Revolution in China", The Times of Israel, 08.10.2015.

ween China and Israel were in decline, China was still looking for opportunities of technological cooperation with Israel. Chinese companies have set their sights on Israeli commercial technology in line with China's national mandate to become a world leader in industrial technology by 2025.¹³³⁶ Israeli technology attracts Chinese companies because many of them have global operations and the same standards as in *Silicon Valley*, but without sky-high cost estimates. Chinese investment in Israel covers almost every major breakthrough technology sector in industries such as autonomous and electric vehicles, where major Chinese automakers support research centers. In other sectors, such as the use of artificial intelligence, Israel is one of the leaders in almost every area.¹³³⁷

It is no coincidence that Chinese investors have focused on Israel, the “*start-up nation*”, with the highest number of start-ups per capita of any country in the world and the highest absolute number outside of Silicon Valley. Israel is especially known for its high-tech sector, with thousands of well-regarded companies focusing on cybersecurity, defense, agriculture, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals - all of which have found eager investors in China.¹³³⁸ Israeli entrepreneurs are highly sought after in China, predominantly in the fields of mobile and web technologies, telecommunications, gaming, clean-tech, agro-tech and digital health, which all go hand in hand with Israeli high-tech expertise.¹³³⁹

In 2018, 12% of all investments in Israeli startups were Chinese. Regarding large investments, whose size is US \$ 25 million or more,

25% of all investments in Israeli startups are of Chinese origin.¹³⁴⁰ More than 1,000 Chinese companies are active in Israel and several hundred Israeli in China. Of all foreign investments in Israeli hi-tech, 20% belong to the Chinese companies.¹³⁴¹

However, some experts consider that for the US and other major industrialized democracies, the Chinese tactics of MIC-2025 not only undermine Beijing's stated commitment to international trade rules, but also pose a security risk and are based on discriminatory treatment of foreign investment, forced technology transfer, intellectual property theft and cyber espionage. This prompts the US President Donald J. Trump to set tariffs on Chinese goods and block several China-backed acquisitions of technology companies.¹³⁴² In addition to the US trade war, which is an important tool to curb the rapid growth of its strategic competitor China, Washington has also put the MIC-2025 at the forefront, trying to hinder the development of China's high-tech sector, including artificial intelligence, chip manufacturing, and 5G technology.¹³⁴³ Meanwhile, many other countries have tightened control over foreign investment, and debate has intensified on how to respond to China's behavior.¹³⁴⁴

The successes of military-technical cooperation (MTC) have pushed the Chinese leadership and business people to look closely at Israel in terms of evaluating its successes in developing China's innovation economy.¹³⁴⁵ China's unique interest in Israel is evidenced by the dozens of delegations of senior government officials and

¹³³⁶ **Mercy A. Kuo**, “*China and the Middle East: Israel's ...*”, op. cit.

¹³³⁷ «Китай наращивает инвестиции в технологический сектор Израиля», Рамблер, 20.08.2018.

¹³³⁸ **Sharone Tobias**, “*China's Investment in Israel's Technology Sector*”, The University of Nottingham, 26.02.2015.

¹³³⁹ **Barnea Jaffa Lande**, “*China Increased Tech Investments in Israel*”, Lexology, 25.06.2017.

¹³⁴⁰ **Субботин Игорь**, «Израиль рискует стать шпионским форпостом Китая», Независимая газета, 25.03.2019.

¹³⁴¹ **Халдей Александр**, «Вашингтон в панике...», укз. соч.

¹³⁴² **James McBride, Andrew Chatzky**, “*Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?*”, Council on Foreign Relations, 13.05.2019.

¹³⁴³ **Han Jianwei**, “*Can US Disrupt Sino-Israeli Cooperation?*”, Global Times, 22.01.2019.

¹³⁴⁴ **James McBride, Andrew Chatzky**, “*Is 'Made in China ...*”, op. cit.

¹³⁴⁵ **Марьянс Дмитрий**, «Китай и Израиль ...», op. cit.

businesspeople who have visited Israel in recent years. Representatives of large companies and private investors from China often arrive in Israel in an attempt to crack “*the Israeli code*”, to understand the local innovation ecosystem and to implement the innovative and entrepreneurial Israeli character into their own DNA.¹³⁴⁶

China and Israel have both made innovation a top priority in their domestic development strategies. China’s strategy of pursuing innovation on three investment direction: *bilateral, regional, and global*, has become an essential part of China’s “*New Era*” vision of a country of innovators, as articulated by Xi Jinping in his 2017 speech to the leadership of the CPC at the 19th Party Congress. In addition, through many projects under the BRI, China promotes and invests in innovation, both regionally and globally. At the regional level China seeks large investments in industrial parks in countries neighboring China, such as Vietnam, Thailand and Russia. At the global level, under the BRI flag, China seeks and invests in innovation in less developed countries such as Africa, as well as in countries with developed innovative economies such as Switzerland and Belgium. If, in the framework of investment diplomacy with innovation, China and Israel cooperate on a bilateral basis, within the framework of the BRI, in the context of Beijing’s desire for scientific and technological innovation, it cooperates at the global level.¹³⁴⁷

Technology and innovation was one of the main topics of conversation during the two separate visits of PM Benjamin Netanyahu and then-President Shimon Peres to Beijing.¹³⁴⁸ In May 2014, Liu Yandong, Deputy PM of China, during his visit to Israel, attended

¹³⁴⁶ **Avi Luvton**, “*An Economic Powerhouse and a Rising Hi-Tech Superpower – 25 Years of Diplomatic Relations Between China and Israel*”, The Times of Israel, 23.03.2017.

¹³⁴⁷ **Hadas Peled, Marica Don Harpaz**, “*Innovation as a Catalyst in the China-Israel Investment Relationship: The China-Israel BIT (2009) and the Prospective FTA*”, Hebrew University of Jerusalem Legal Studies Research Paper, No. 18-12, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Faculty of Law, January 2018, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁴⁸ **Sharone Tobias**, “*China’s Investment in Israel’s Technology ...*”, op. cit.

the first Innovation Conference in Israel, and published an article entitled “*to Make China-Israel STI Cooperation Bloom*” on the Jerusalem Post. In January 2015, in Beijing, at the first meeting of *China-Israel Innovation Cooperation Joint Committee*, the two sides signed the *Three-Year Action Plan for Cooperative Innovation*, including the establishment of the *Cooperative Innovation Center*, set-up of *China-Israel “7+7 University Research Federation”*, agreement on the *2015-2019 Cultural Cooperation Action Plan*, and the start of construction of *China-Israel Changzhou Innovation Park*.¹³⁴⁹

In March 2017, Beijing hosted a meeting between President Xi Jinping and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu. The parties announced the creation of an innovative comprehensive partnership.¹³⁵⁰ In 2018, Israel and China held the fourth intergovernmental “*Innovation Conference: Israel-China*” for the establishment of a comprehensive partnership in the field of innovation. A Sino-Israeli trading platform has been created, the first of its kind in China. And immediately, 4 patents were acquired, which Tel Aviv University possessed: *from the field of intellectual production, smart cities, digital economy and biomedicine*. The Chinese bought a patent to detect neuropathy for a symbolic sum of US \$ 49 thousand, acquiring not supporters, but advocates and lobbyists. The first China-Israel *Changzhou Innovation Park* (CIP), created by the two governments in the area of complementary technological innovation, was founded in Changzhou¹³⁵¹ for Israeli companies seeking to open a branch in China and to give Israeli companies a “*soft landing*” in the Chinese market, to facilitate the adaptation of Israeli technology in the Middle King-

¹³⁴⁹ **Xian Xiao**, “*The ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ and China*”, op. cit., p. 8; “*China, Israel Look forward to Closer Innovative Cooperation*”, Global Times, 12.08.2018.

¹³⁵⁰ “*Китай инвестировал в Израиль \$16,5 млрд в 2016 году*”, IT Business Week Israel, 14.05.2017.

¹³⁵¹ **Халдей Александр**, «*Вашингтон в панике...*», укз. соч.

dom.¹³⁵² China is encouraging the establishment of Israeli innovative enterprise in China, such as Shouguang's Water City, which incorporates Israeli water technologies.¹³⁵³

Research and Development (R&D) Collaboration. A more substantial channel of Israeli technology transfer to China is R&D collaboration between companies and academic institutions of both states, as well as R&D activity of Israeli companies in China. In the early 2000s, Israeli government bodies and Venture capital (VC) firms started to promote technological-commercial cooperation between companies in the two states. The national academic science foundations in the two countries signed an agreement in 2012 to support joint research projects in science and engineering (Council for Higher Education). While the projects are purely academic, some of them, for example, in nanotechnology, new materials, and satellite technology, can be of military relevance.¹³⁵⁴

In September 2013, Tel Aviv University (TAU) and Tsinghua University signed a MoU to establish the XIN ("New" in Mandarin Chinese) Center. It should become one of the largest academic R&D centers in both countries, develop strategic cooperation in research and teaching, and will also serve as an international center for scientific and technological innovation for research both in the early stages and projects that can be prepared for market. Two governments provided funding for the project, but most of the money came from private sources in both countries.¹³⁵⁵ In 2014, TAU and Tsinghua launched a US \$ 300 million joint center for innovative

¹³⁵² **Avi Luvton**, "An Economic Powerhouse and a Rising ...", op. cit.

¹³⁵³ "Israel and China: Toward a Comprehensive Innovative Partnership", Israel Defense, 22.03.2017.

¹³⁵⁴ **Yoram Evron**, "Between Beijing and Washington: Israel's Technology Transfers to China", Journal of East Asian Studies, Vol. 13, Issue 3, December 2013, pp. 517-518.

¹³⁵⁵ **David Shamah**, "Israel, China to Open \$300 Million Research Center", The Times of Israel, 19.05.2014.

research and education, initially focusing on nanotechnology,¹³⁵⁶ particularly with medical and optics applications, but will later expand to other areas, such as raw materials, water treatment, and environmental issues.¹³⁵⁷

On December 16, 2015, the *Technion-Israel Institute of Technology*, a world leader in science and technology education, funded by billionaire Lee Ka-shing in the amount of US \$ 130 million, laid the foundation for the establishment of the *Guangdong Technion Israel Institute of Technology* (GTIIT)* in Shantou (Guangdong Province, PRC). For the Technion, GTIIT means increasing global reach and status, and the industrial park planned for the GTIIT campus will serve as a stronghold for Israeli companies to crack key markets in the US and China.¹³⁵⁸

To bring down the cost of production for the many consumer and industrial products made in its factories, China is undergoing a robotics revolution, installing machines to replace people on the assembly line, and working with Israel to develop smarter and better robots, via the newly established Sino-Israeli Robotics Institute. It will be the centerpiece of a new US \$ 2 billion industrial park in the Guangzhou region of China that will be built around the technology developed jointly by Israeli and Chinese researchers. It is noteworthy that some Israeli scientists believe that laid-off workers who will be replaced by robots will eventually find more paid jobs with a higher

¹³⁵⁶ **Sharone Tobias**, "China's Investment in Israel's Technology ...", op. cit.

¹³⁵⁷ "TAU and Tsinghua University Launch \$300M Research Center", Tel Aviv University, 27.05.2014.

* GTIIT will be comprised of three units: *the College of Engineering; the College of Science; and the College of Life Science*. GTIIT will offer high-level, innovative and research-oriented undergraduate and graduate education. Investments in this collaboration will also benefit research facilities and infrastructure on the Technion campus in Haifa. It will also become an anchor in the Far East, which complements Technion's partnership with Cornell University at the Jacobs Technion-Cornell Institute at Cornell Tech in New York City.

¹³⁵⁸ "Launch of First Israeli University in China", Technion Israel Institute of Technology, 16.12.2015.

status, and that automation will not lead to higher unemployment, but to expand the economy, resulting in more workers places than lost, which is the goal of China.¹³⁵⁹

Israeli-Chinese private equity firm *Infinity Group* and *Neusoft Corporation* - China's largest IT Corporation, holding a 50% share of the medical market in China - have approved the establishment of a US \$ 250 million investment to back Israeli life science companies operating in China. This fund will assist Israeli medical companies to connect with the Chinese market through the integration of cloud-based platforms, which assists Israeli life science companies with regulatory approvals and product promotion in China.¹³⁶⁰

The state structures of both countries have also formed special programs to support bilateral scientific and technical cooperation with an applied bias, making it possible for joint research and development to receive state money on preferential terms from the governments of both countries. In the Chinese case, it can be state structures of a regional scale. In fact, these programs are unique funds that invest in projects if they meet established requirements. It is important that, most often, the money received should not be returned to the company in case of failure. And if successful, the government agencies that issued the money will receive royalties until the grant is fully repaid. Such financial infrastructure stimulates the effective and intensive development of scientific and technical cooperation between China and Israel.¹³⁶¹

China - a Strategic Market for Israel: Israel - a Strategic Investor for China. Though situated in a turbulent region, Israel is an island of relative stability with the highest "B&R risk on investment" ranking.¹³⁶² Israel ranked as the second lowest investment risk on the Economist Intelligence Unit BRI risk index, making

¹³⁵⁹ David Shamah, "Israeli Tech to Power a Robot Revolution ...", op. cit.

¹³⁶⁰ Barnea Jaffa Lande, "China Increased Tech Investments ...", op. cit.

¹³⁶¹ Марьянс Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁶² Roi Feder, "What China's New Silk Road Means for Israel", op. cit.

investment in the market highly attractive for China, which is currently looking for a more strategic regional footprint. China is likely to pay more attention to the fact that Israel does not have more serious national security problems than in the past, which will give Israel more leverage as a stable, prosperous and growing geopolitical force in the region.¹³⁶³

Against the backdrop of increased confrontation between China and the US, forcing Chinese investors to reduce their presence in this market, in 2016 there was an unprecedented increase in investment from China to Israeli high-tech. If in 2015 the amount of Chinese investment in Israeli companies was less than a billion dollars, then in 2016 it soared to a fantastic figure of US \$ 16.5 billion.¹³⁶⁴ A significant portion of this amount came from investing in Israeli start-up companies, with a focus on the field of information and computer (cyber) security and medical technologies.¹³⁶⁵ The MSR agreement with Israel includes Chinese investments in several sectors as renewable energy, the use of solar energy (solar energy technologies), robotics, telecommunications, chemicals market, biotechnology, agriculture, irrigation and the secondary use of water resources, infrastructures beyond ports and other areas of high technology.¹³⁶⁶

In 2001, Netafim, a leading Israeli agri-tech company and a world leader in drip irrigation systems, invested in its first manufacturing facility in China.¹³⁶⁷ The Israeli *Global Environment Service* (GES) is participating in a US \$ 5 million water treatment project in Inner Mongolia of China.¹³⁶⁸ The Chinese "water city" Shaoxin has benefited from Israel's innovative water technologies for

¹³⁶³ Mercy A. Kuo, "China and Israel in the Belt and Road ...", op. cit.

¹³⁶⁴ Марьянс Дмитрий, «Китай и Израиль ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁶⁵ «Китай инвестировал в Израиль \$16,5 млрд в 2016 году», укз. соч.

¹³⁶⁶ Jacopo Franceschini, "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ...", op. cit.; Ханин Зев, «Израильско-китайский вектор, или зачем Пекину Ближний Восток», 9tv.co.il, 05.08.2017.

¹³⁶⁷ Hadas Peled, Marica Don Harpaz, "Innovation as ...", op. cit., p. 10.

¹³⁶⁸ Aron Shai, "Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality ...", op. cit., p. 26.

developing municipal, agricultural and industrial water infrastructure. Such cooperation will be adopted in the northwestern part of China - in the Xinjiang province, where China seeks to stimulate development in order to maintain stability in the region, as well as bridge the economic gap between the eastern and western parts of the country. The introduction of Israeli inventions and technological solutions in the field of agriculture, water supply and renewable energy sources can help China turn the country's west into an agricultural production center in order to meet China's growing food needs.¹³⁶⁹

One of China's biggest and best-known technology companies, *Baidu*, is also keen on investments. *Ping An Ventures*, a major Chinese VC fund, has made investments in eight Israeli companies.¹³⁷⁰ In 2004, after receiving a number of requests from various foreign VC funds, China's first foreign-funded onshore RMB denominated license was granted to Infinity. Furthermore, one of the group's companies, a leading global manufacturer in the chip industry, became the first company with a foreign co-founder to go public on the *Shanghai Stock Exchange*. Infinity, on its part, pledged to introduce, invest, and generate innovation in China.¹³⁷¹ ECI Telecom, a maker of telecommunications equipment, initially entered the market through a joint venture, but in the course of 2006 took over full control of the venture.¹³⁷²

Another method of importing Israeli technology into China is acquisition of Israeli companies by Chinese.¹³⁷³ The *China National Chemical Corporation* bought Israeli pesticides manufacturer *ADAMA Agricultural Solutions Ltd.* for US \$ 2.4 billion in 2011.¹³⁷⁴

¹³⁶⁹ Galia Lavi, Jingjie He, Oded Eran, "China and Israel: On the Same Belt and Road?", Strategic Assessment, Vol. 18, No. 3, October 2015, p. 86.

¹³⁷⁰ Sharone Tobias, "China's Investment in Israel's Technology ...", op. cit.

¹³⁷¹ Hadas Peled, Marica Don Harpaz, "Innovation as ...", op. cit., p. 11.

¹³⁷² Aron Shai, "Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality ...", op. cit., p. 26.

¹³⁷³ Yoram Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington...", op. cit., p. 518.

¹³⁷⁴ Sharone Tobias, "China's Investment in Israel's Technology ...", op. cit.

In 2014, state-owned *Bright Food Group Co.* bought a 70% stake in Israeli dairy company Tnuva, one of the most famous Israeli companies, for a deal worth US \$ 960 million.¹³⁷⁵ China purchased controlling shares in Makhteshim Agan by Chinese state-owned firm *Chem-China* in 2011, the purchase of *Alma Lasers by Fosun Pharma* in 2013, and the acquisition of *Ahava Cosmetics* by Fosun in 2016.¹³⁷⁶ Unlike the stark opposition that state-owned Chinese firms often run into when they claim a stake in foreign energy or mineral companies in the West, the deal with ChemChina was mostly welcomed in Israel precisely because it was probably approved by the Politburo and interpreted as a sign of China's confidence in the future of Israel.¹³⁷⁷ Israeli company, *Nextec Technologies*, which developed measurement technology for the auto-motive and aviation industries, was acquired by a Chinese company in 2014.¹³⁷⁸ China has become a major buyer of Israeli agricultural technology from companies such as *Netafim*, the world leader in drip irrigation systems.¹³⁷⁹

Chinese investors are interested in several of Israel's largest arms exporters - *Israel Aerospace Industries*, *Rafael*, and *Elbit Systems*. The first two are state-owned corporations, but all three have "daughters" in the US who also develop modern weapons.¹³⁸⁰

Experts explain that one of the reasons for such a sharp increase in Chinese investment in Israel was their reduction in the US and the redirection of the flow of Chinese investment by tightening regu-

¹³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; Jinitzail Hernandez, David Lee, "East Asia Soft Power Strikes Hard in Middle East", The Jerusalem Post, 11.08.2018.

¹³⁷⁶ Avi Luvton, "An Economic Powerhouse and a Rising ...", op. cit.

¹³⁷⁷ Niv Horeish, "Autophobia? Israel's Geo-Politics in the Early 'Chinese Century'", The Chinese Journal of International Politics, Vol. 4, Issue, Oxford University Press, Autumn 2011, p. 299.

¹³⁷⁸ Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, Andrew Scobell, "The Evolving Israel ...", op. cit. p. 39.

¹³⁷⁹ Aron Shai, "Sino-Israeli Relations: Current Reality ...", op. cit., p. 26.

¹³⁸⁰ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль рискует стать шпионским ...», укр. соч.

lation in the US, as well as lower ratings of Israeli companies compared to American ones.¹³⁸¹ However, it should be noted that Israel did not want to oppose the US and strictly adhered to its understanding of the mid-2000s with the US, according to which scientific and technical cooperation with China includes only civilian know-how. But China's direct investment in Israel's high-tech industry is relatively small and sporadic. More than 90% of China's direct investment in Israel at the end of 2018 was made by purchases of only three companies, of which only one is a high-tech company. The remaining technology investments are limited to a few hundred million US dollars per year. Other Chinese investments in Israel are through VC funds, providing investors with very limited access to know-how. Overall, by mid-2018 Chinese investments in Israel constituted just 4% of Israel's FDI, compared to the US with a share of 35%. Considering the limited flow of Chinese FDI to Israel (around US \$ 100 million in 2018 out of the total US \$ 21.8 billion), China is far from gaining a foothold in Israel's high-tech sector.¹³⁸² Meanwhile, it is very difficult to determine the full scope of Chinese FDI in Israel, since in many cases, investments were carried out through off-shore Chinese companies.¹³⁸³

The Obstacles and Prospects for BRI. Of course, relations between Israel and China are not without problems. The most vulnerable areas are now at risk: *Israeli spy technology and the defense sector*.¹³⁸⁴ A 2019 RAND corporation report states that current and former Israeli parliamentarians have pointed out many problems that could arise with Chinese investment, including the “*risk of cyber espionage by the PRC and corruption crimes*”, as well as the possibility of gaining control of China over Israel's basic

¹³⁸¹ «Китай инвестировал в Израиль \$16,5 млрд в 2016 году», укз. соч.

¹³⁸² Yoram Evron, “Why is the United States Concerned about Israel–China Technology Cooperation?”, East Asia Forum, 15.11.2019.

¹³⁸³ Hadas Peled, Marica Don Harpaz, “Innovation as ...”, op. cit., p. 11.

¹³⁸⁴ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль рискует стать шпионским ...», укз. соч.

infrastructure, especially important to the national security of Israel.¹³⁸⁵ It is known that the Americans supported Israel on key issues of Jerusalem and sovereignty in Judea and Samaria and now demand that their younger ally curtail a significant part of their cooperation with China.¹³⁸⁶

Some representatives of the Western intelligence community called Israel's decision to award a Haifa tender to a Chinese company a serious threat to the security of the Jewish state.¹³⁸⁷ This caused serious criticism from the US for security reasons, since the anchoring of USN ships close to Chinese targets makes them easy prey to China's intelligence activities.¹³⁸⁸ The civilian port in Haifa is adjacent to the exit route from the neighboring naval base, which houses the Israeli submarine fleet (which has the ability to deliver a second strike at launching nuclear missiles).¹³⁸⁹

The scandal was also caused by the fact that the Chinese company is developing an underground section of the Tel Aviv tram metro station, which is only tens of meters from the General Staff building and the main military intelligence directorate.¹³⁹⁰ Israeli Navy Brigadier General Shaul Horev notes that since Americans now turn most of their attention to the South China Sea and the PG, Israel should strengthen its status as a strategic base for the Americans.¹³⁹¹ According to several former senior Pentagon and navy personnel, once China is in the picture, the Israeli navy will not be able to count to maintain close relations with the Sixth Fleet.¹³⁹² It is no coinci-

¹³⁸⁵ Исаев Максим, «Atlantic: США обеспокоены инвестициями КНР в Израиль», ИА REGNUM, 12.07.2019.

¹³⁸⁶ «Нетаньяху сделает все для сохранения отношений с Китаем», ИА Реалист, 26.05.2020.

¹³⁸⁷ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль игнорирует сигналы США ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁸⁸ Altay Atlı, “China, Israel, and the Geopolitics of Seaports”, op. cit.

¹³⁸⁹ Amos Harel, “Analysis Israel Is Giving China the Keys ...”, op. cit.

¹³⁹⁰ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль игнорирует сигналы США ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁹¹ «Израиль передаёт Китаю управление портом Хайфы – Haaretz», ИА Реалист, 16.09.2018.

¹³⁹² Amos Harel, “Analysis Israel Is Giving China the Keys ...”, op. cit.

dence that in December 2019, Zhai Jun, special envoy of the Chinese government in the ME, who made a working trip to the region, condemned US pressure on the Israeli government to block Chinese investment.¹³⁹³

Among some analysts there is an opinion that although Beijing has spoken about its intentions to have foreign bases, however, under the pretext of creating a trade route from the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal to Europe, it buys ports, for example, the port of Piraeus in Greece,¹³⁹⁴ Italian port of Trieste, and even acquired base in Djibouti.¹³⁹⁵

The Israeli intelligence community also protests against the admission of one of the Chinese companies to build a new desalination plant 15 km south of Tel Aviv, where the nuclear facility is located. This can be undertaken by local companies *IDE Technologies* and *Hutchison Water International* (a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based Hutchison Holdings), with Chinese participation. The problem is that the desalination plant, which is supposed to produce about 200 million cubic meters of water per year, was planned to be built in the area where the Israeli *Air Force Palmahim* is located, as well as the Nahal Soreq nuclear center, which was built under a contract with the US in 1955 and in the territory of which the first nuclear reactor in Israel is located.¹³⁹⁶ This was the reason why the head of the security service of the *Israel Defense Forces* (IDF) Nir Ben-Moshe sent a letter to the Israeli Ministry of Energy with an objection to participation in the tender of *Hutchison Water International*.¹³⁹⁷

¹³⁹³ «Спецпосланник КНР на Ближнем Востоке: США запугивают Израиль, пытаются заблокировать китайские инвестиции», NEWSru.co.il, 10.12.2019.

¹³⁹⁴ «Израиль передаёт Китаю управление портом Хайфы ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁹⁵ Субботин Игорь, «Израилью предрекают превращение ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁹⁶ Субботин Игорь, «Китай добрался до ядерного реактора Израйля», Независимая газета, 10.09.2019.

¹³⁹⁷ Субботин Игорь, «Китай приближает к рукам стратегическую инфраструктуру Израйля», Независимая газета, 31.10.2019.

Investigations by Israeli counterintelligence experts have shown that links between Israeli businesses and US defense contractors are the subject of scrutiny by Chinese hackers. They consider it likely that China perceives Israel as a window through which it can gain access to US secret programs.¹³⁹⁸

Anyway, in a difficult situation, Israel cannot afford to lose either its ally - the US, or China, its largest economic partner with significant investment and infrastructure potential. However, maintaining a delicate balance is becoming increasingly difficult, because on the one hand, construction has already begun in the port of Haifa, and on the other hand, Washington is increasingly disagreeing with the withdrawal of the Sixth Fleet from Haifa. In addition to the importance of global competition between the US and China, the problem of the regional influence of the expanded port of Haifa and the influence of a complex network of relations in the ME, when more trade begins to flow into the region through the Israeli port, which is expanded and served by the Chinese, is equally important.¹³⁹⁹

4. OBOR and the Middle Corridor of Turkey

Turkey as a Bridge and Transit Country for BRI. Diplomatic relations between Republic of Turkey (RT) and PRC were established in 4 August 1971, against the background of "detente" in relations between the SU and the US. However, exchanges between the two countries were expanded only from the 1980s,¹⁴⁰⁰ began to improve rapidly from the beginning of the 1990s¹⁴⁰¹ and full-scale

¹³⁹⁸ Субботин Игорь, «Израиль рискует стать шпионским ...», укз. соч.

¹³⁹⁹ Altay Atlı, "China, Israel, and the Geopolitics of Seaports", op. cit.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Yitzhak Shichor, "Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations", East-West Center, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2009, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰¹ Yitzhak Shichor, "Turkey Trot: Military Cooperation between Beijing and Ankara", China Brief, Vol. 9, Issue 8, The Jamestown Foundation, 16.04.2009, p. 5

revitalization of Turkish-Chinese relations occurred only during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (JDP/ Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP)) in Turkey, which came to power in 2002.¹⁴⁰² In recent decades, Turkish-Chinese trade and economic relations from the directions of Turkey's multi-vector foreign and Asian-Pacific policy have been the most successful.¹⁴⁰³

An important event strengthening relations between the two countries was the Joint declaration on *Establishing Strategic Relationship of Cooperation of 2010*, where both sides identified themselves as “*emerging developing countries*”.¹⁴⁰⁴ Sino-Turkish strategic cooperation was also strengthened by President Erdogan's state visit to China on July 29-30, 2015, and his participation in the *Fifth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia* (CICA) in Beijing on June 15, 2019.¹⁴⁰⁵ The enthusiasm for expanding cooperation with China, in a sense, is also explained by the fact that many young and ambitious Turkish bureaucrats, conducting their master's or doctoral studies in China, and a new group of qualified bureaucrats who have appeared in the influential ministries of Turkey, see huge potential for cooperation between two countries.¹⁴⁰⁶

¹⁴⁰² Свистунова Ирина, «Новая политика Турции в отношении стран Восточной Азии (Китай, Япония, Республика Корея)», Проблемы Национальной Стратегии, № 5(32), Российский институт стратегических исследований (РИСИ), М., 2015, с. 71.

¹⁴⁰³ “*Turkish State Minister Mr. Zafer Çağlayan Gives Interview with People's Daily*”, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Turkey, 04.01.2010, p. 1; Andrew McGregor, “*Arming for Asymmetric Warfare: Turkey's Arms Industry in the 21st Century*”, The Jamestown Foundation, June 2008, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Yitzhak Shichor, “*China and Turkey in the Post-Cold War World: Great Expectations*”, in: Bruce Gilley and Andrew O'Neil (Eds.), *Middle Powers and the Rise of China*, Georgetown University Press, 2014, p. 205.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Gu Jianjun, “*New Sino-Turkey Strategic Cooperative Ties under New Silk Road Initiatives*”, CCTV.com, 30.07.2015.

¹⁴⁰⁶ H. Akin Unver, “*Iran, Turkey and China's Middle Eastern Pivotal*”, The Diplomat, 30.05.2014.

Relations have also taken on a military character over the last decade, as Turkey pursued a more autonomous foreign policy from the West and pushed for greater strategic maneuvering space during the earlier months of Arab Spring events.¹⁴⁰⁷ In 2013, Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan, visiting St. Petersburg, repeated his request for Turkey to be admitted to the SCO in order to “*get rid of troubles*” when trying to enter the EU, while at the same time possibly approving Turkey's entry into the EEU.¹⁴⁰⁸

However, if in the middle of 2015, anti-Chinese actions were held in China with the broad support of the largest foreign Uyghur community, then after the deterioration of relations between Russia and Turkey (as a result of an incident with a Russian Su-24 shot down by Turkey), Beijing and Ankara began to strengthen relations by the end of the year, and Turkey even expressed its readiness to fight the movements previously supported by it to create East Turkestan. In early July 2016, contacts between Turkey and China intensified, primarily in discussions on the construction of railway communications within the BRI, including through the transport corridor with the participation of Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine.¹⁴⁰⁹

After the failed coup attempt in July, 2016 Erdogan has reiterated that Turkey shares more “*common values*” with the Shanghai Five: *China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan*, and that SCO is better - much more powerful than EU.¹⁴¹⁰ Moreover, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said in December 2016 that in its efforts to strengthen the falling lira, Ankara is taking steps to

¹⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Joshua Kucera, “*Erdogan To Putin: Let Us Into SCO!*”, Eursianet.org, 23.11.2013.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Ефентьев Н., «'Сержантский переворот' в Турции: 'блокада' Шелкового пути и рост уйгурского сепаратизма в Китае?» Южный Китай, 16.07.2016.

¹⁴¹⁰ Lina Wang, “*Will Turkey Join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Instead of the EU?*”, The Diplomat, 24.11.2016.

allow trade with Russia, China and Iran in local currency.¹⁴¹¹

Sentiment on Turkey's need to find new allies in Russia and China intensified after the US supported the Kurdish forces in conducting the Raqqa operation in Syria and after holding the BRI forum in May 2017 in Beijing,¹⁴¹² where President Erdoğan supported the Chinese initiative to build the BRI, expressing Turkey's readiness to take advantage of its unique geographical location.¹⁴¹³ After negotiations for membership in the EU were unsuccessful, Turkey began to consider BRI as an alternative to the EU.¹⁴¹⁴

Turkey is along the route of both *land* and *sea* branches of the BRI, and Ankara have signed several agreements under the B&R project regarding the development of railway infrastructure, the use of ports and the building of roads.¹⁴¹⁵ Turkey's geo-strategic position makes Turkey a leading energy corridor and a transit center for the main oil and natural gas producers in the Caspian, Caucasus and CA as well as for consumer markets in Europe.¹⁴¹⁶ The B&R cooperation have been strengthened especially with two inter-governmental agreements signed during the G20 summit in Antalya (Turkey) in November 2015, namely the MoU on "*Aligning the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road with the Middle*

¹⁴¹¹ "Erdogan Wants Trade with Russia, China in Local Currencies", Arab News, 04.12.2016.

¹⁴¹² Nurettin Akçay, "Turkey-China Relations Within the Concept of the New Silk Road Project", ANKASAM. Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi, 1(3), December 2017, p. 84.

¹⁴¹³ "Erdogan Highlights Turkey's Role as 'Crossroad' of Continents in Supporting B&R Initiative", Xinhua, 14.05.2017.

¹⁴¹⁴ Nurettin Akçay, "Turkey-China Relations Within ...", op. cit., p. 75.

¹⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁴¹⁶ Harutyunyan Aghavni, «China-Turkey Strategic Partnership», Страните от Източна Азия и Светът – Взаимоотношения и Взаимодействия, Национална и Научна Конференция с международно участие 2012, Доклади и Съобщения, "Експертпринт" ЕООД - Печат, София, 2013, p. 222.

Corridor Initiative", and the Agreement on "*Cooperation in the Field of Railways*".¹⁴¹⁷

One of the six BRI corridors is a land-based China-Central and CCWAEC, which requires China to coordinate with participants in six countries of different levels of development and political stability: *Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.¹⁴¹⁸ With the increase in global energy demand and trade made through China, it is aimed to provide direct transport economic corridors between Chinese export centers and European markets by modernizing the transport networks through planned and implemented projects that involve Turkey.¹⁴¹⁹

In the new rail and road links, however, the pivotal points of entry into Europe are through Turkey, assigning it a strategic role. One of the EBSR corridor - **New Eurasian Land Bridge railway project**, is being planned linking the Port of Shenzhen (near Hong Kong) to Kunming in Western China and onwards to Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Iran, and then across Turkey into Rotterdam in the Netherlands. It will cross 20 countries and measure 15,000 km, a much shorter distance than by sea via the Indian Ocean through the Malacca Straits. A branch line would begin in Turkey, crossing Syria and Palestine and end in Egypt, providing a rail link from China into Africa.¹⁴²⁰ The new road route runs via CA and Iran, through Turkey, into Europe via *Venice–Rotterdam–London*, in ad-

¹⁴¹⁷ Altay Atli, "Turkey as a Eurasian Transport Hub: Prospects for Inter-Regional Partnership", Perceptions, Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 2018, p. 121.

¹⁴¹⁸ Jonathan Fulton, "An Analysis of Two Corridors in China's One Belt One Road Initiative: China-Pakistan and China Central-West Asia", Department of Political Science/Centre of Excellence China Studies, GC University Lahore, Pakistan, 2016, p. 46.

¹⁴¹⁹ "Global and Regional Studies in Terms of Economical and Social Issues", Edited by Ahmet Oğuz, Qazaq ынiversiteti, Almaty, 2018, p. 121.

¹⁴²⁰ Rıza Kadılar, Andrew K. P. Leung, "Possible Turkish-Chinese Partnership on a New Silk Road Renaissance by 2023", Vol. 12, No. 2, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Summer 2013, p. 135.

dition to the road leading to Europe via Russia¹⁴²¹ China plans to build a high-speed railway between China and the UK, which will connect *Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Belgium and France*. The project, with an estimated cost of US \$ 150 billion, was planned to be completed in 2020-2025.¹⁴²²

The further route involves the interconnection of trade routes with Istanbul (where railway tunnels are already running along the bottom of the Bosphorus), Athens, Naples, Marseilles and other Mediterranean cities.¹⁴²³ Another railway project plans to build the *China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway*¹⁴²⁴ that would go from Kashgar in Xinjiang, through Torugart and Kara-Suu in Kyrgyzstan, to Andijan in Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan, then across Afghanistan.¹⁴²⁵ In the longer term, the planned route might provide a shorter rail link from China to Iran, Turkey and even to Europe.¹⁴²⁶

China, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey in November 19, 2015, agreed to establish a consortium for the transportation of goods from China to Europe via the *Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TCITR)*¹⁴²⁷, which runs from China through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, and further via Ukraine to Europe,¹⁴²⁸ that will help the EU get rid of Russian "transit dependence" and aiming to continue the path to

¹⁴²¹ Banu Dagtas, "At the Crossroads of the New Silk Road: News Discourses in the Turkish Press", Communication and the Public, Vol. 4(4), 2019, p. 279.

¹⁴²² Цатурян Саркис, «Китай идёт на Турцию, а Германия ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴²³ "Turkey and Israel are Intercepted at Sea 'Silk Road' of Iran", op. cit.

¹⁴²⁴ Stephen Frederick Starr, Svante E. Cornell, Nicklas Norling, "The EU, Central Asia...", p. 38; Ким Е., «Таджикистан – Китай – одна семья: Китай ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴²⁵ Roman Muzalevsky, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan ...", op. cit.

¹⁴²⁶ "From China to Iran via Kyrgyzstan: Is the Faster Rail Link Real?", RailFreight.com, 04.11.2019.

¹⁴²⁷ Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative ...", op. cit, pp. 158-161.

¹⁴²⁸ «Страны Азии проложат 'шелковый путь' через Украину», Корреспондент, 30.11.2015.

Turkey.¹⁴²⁹ TCITR provides Beijing with access to the Black Sea coast of Georgia with subsequent shipment of cargo to the ports of Romania, Ukraine (Odessa) and Bulgaria (Varna, Burgas).¹⁴³⁰

Wort to note that Turkey's importance for the Chinese initiatives increased especially after China lost the tender for the building of Georgian deep-water port in Anaklia. It would become a logistics center for communication between the Caucasus and CA railway network with Eastern Europe via the Black Sea.¹⁴³¹

Turkey, in turn, intends to develop its transport infrastructure, and by 2035 expand the Turkish track and railway infrastructure from 12,500 km to 31,000 km, presumably with an investment of about 30 billion euros.¹⁴³² Turkey is the most important link for China in connecting the railway system of Western China, the countries of CA and Iran with a gauge the width of the "European standard".¹⁴³³

According to Turk experts, the pragmatic interest of the Turkish JDP government in BRI, especially after the failed coup on July 15, 2016, has economic reasons: the expectation of growth in direct Chinese investment, the consolidation of Turkey itself as a transportation hub in the *Middle Corridor*, which uses coordination mechanisms for rail transport and customs clearance of ports for the China-Europe corridor.¹⁴³⁴ Another reason is to become a manu-

¹⁴²⁹ «Станет ли Китай союзником Польши и Азербайджана против России?», ИА REGNUM, 06.07.2017.

¹⁴³⁰ Цатурян Саркис, «Иран, Азербайджан и Грузия ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴³¹ «В орбите Пекина: Турция начнет борьбу с Восточным Туркестаном», Южный Китай, 28.04.2016.

¹⁴³² George Reiff, D. Lit., "One Belt, One Road (OBOR)", Dubai Leadership Summit, Cotonou Benin Republic, ESU, 2018, p. 9.

¹⁴³³ «В орбите Пекина: Турция начнет борьбу с Восточным ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴³⁴ Gökçe Özsu, Ferruh Mutlu Binark, "Representation of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' in Turkish Mainstream Newspapers", Communication and the Public 4(4), 2019, p. 296.

facturing and logistics base for Chinese enterprise.¹⁴³⁵

The Middle Corridor or Iron Silk Road. *Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative* shortly named as the *Middle Corridor*, is a big gain for Turkey to have an alternative for both the *Northern Route* (it is also called Trans-Siberian Railway). It includes Russia, and the *Southern Route*, which covers Iran.¹⁴³⁶ In one year, out of approximately 10 million containers that are transported from China to Europe, 96% utilizes the sea and only the remaining 4% uses the *Northern Corridor*. The *Middle Corridor* is more economical and faster compared to the *Northern Corridor* as a trade route between Europe and Asia and as such, is 2.000 km shorter, has more favorable climate conditions and shortens the travel time by 1/3rd (15 days) compared to the sea route. Furthermore, the *Middle Corridor* offers great opportunities for the cargo traffic in Asia so that the loads can reach ME, NA and Mediterranean region by benefiting from the port connections in Turkey.¹⁴³⁷

Caspian Sea is another geostrategic pivotal point as all the freight trade from China will eventually pass through north of Caspian Sea via Russia. An alternative option being considered is turning southwards from Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey called the *Iron Silk Road* (ISR - *the railway connection between China and EU*) or *Middle Corridor*.¹⁴³⁸ Any of these routes aligning to connect China to Europe such as *Trans-Asian Railway* (TAR), *Trans-Siberian Railway* (TSR), *Trans-China Railway*, *Baku-*

¹⁴³⁵ Shannon Tiezzi, "Can China-Turkey Relations Move On?", The Diplomat, 30.07.2015.

Erodgan sought to move the China-Turkey relationship beyond recent tensions over Uyghur issues.

¹⁴³⁶ Altay Atli, "Turkey as a Eurasian Transport Hub ...", op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁴³⁷ "Turkey's Multilateral Transportation Policy", Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa

¹⁴³⁸ Fareeha Sarwar, "China's One Belt and One Road: Implications of "New Eurasian Land Bridge" on Global Power Play in the Region", NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability, Vol. 1(2), 2018, p. 137.

Tblisi-Kars (BTK) as a part of ISR, are accepted as links of ISR.¹⁴³⁹ Turkey will play a key role in the NSR with its recently attracting mega investments like Marmaray, Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (entered service on August 26, 2016), Eurasia Tunnel (inaugurated on 20 December 2016) that connects the Asian and European sides of Istanbul via a 14.6 km undersea highway, Çanakkale 1915 Bridge, the New Airport (3rd), that is an international airport under construction on the European side of Istanbul with 150 million annual passenger capacity.¹⁴⁴⁰ With the BTK railway line, the *Marmaray railway tunnel* and the *Third Bridge in Istanbul/Turkey*, *Middle Corridor* is estimated to cut the Beijing-London transportation period from 45 to 15 days.¹⁴⁴¹ The *Middle Corridor* will enable Turkey to provide new services and products to countries in East and South Asia amid escalating trade wars and tightening customs rules.¹⁴⁴²

The Edirne-Kars high-speed "East-West" railway project (worth US \$ 30 billion), linking the BTK railway line with Europe and crossing the country from one end to the other, with a view to connecting the north-eastern province of Kars with the north-western province of Edirne, which goes straight to Bulgaria, is also part of the BRI.¹⁴⁴³ A framework agreement between Ankara and Beijing was concluded in 2010, but the parties each time had to postpone the implementation of the project, mainly due to political and economic turbulence in Turkey, caused by instability in eastern vilayets and the weakening of the lira.¹⁴⁴⁴

¹⁴³⁹ Özlem Koçtaş Çotur, F. Onur Uysal, "Building Blocks of Iron Silk Road and Suggestions for Turkey", XIII International Logistics and Supply Chain Congress, Izmir, Türkiye, October 22-23, 2015, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Nurettin Akçay, "Turkey-China Relations Within ...", op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁴⁴¹ Banu Dagtas, "At the Crossroads of the New Silk ...", op. cit., p. 279.

¹⁴⁴² Gökçe Özsü, Ferruh Mutlu Binark, "Representation...", op. cit., p. 296.

¹⁴⁴³ "Erdoğan: Modern İpek Yolu vatandaşlarımızın hayat standardını artıracak", BBC, 14.05.2017.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Цатурян Саркис, «США переносят войну с Китаем в Турцию и Иран», ИА REGNUM, 11.06.2016.

China already took an active part in the Turkish railway infrastructure sector back in 2005, when it won the contract for the construction of a high-speed railway line between Ankara and Istanbul¹⁴⁴⁵ worth of US \$ 1.2 billion.¹⁴⁴⁶ In 2014, China state-owned companies completed the second session of Turkey's Ankara-Istanbul High-Speed Railway with the assistance of US \$ 720 million loans from China Exim Bank.¹⁴⁴⁷ In July 2014, the second phase project of the *Ankara-Istanbul High Speed Railway* completed by a Chinese company opened to traffic successfully.¹⁴⁴⁸ The estimated speed of trains on the Ankara - Istanbul line (including Eskisehir) is 250 km per hour. But Chinese experts are confident that this figure can be increased to 280 km per hour.¹⁴⁴⁹

Marmaray is a railway project that connects the railway lines of Istanbul's European and Asian sides with a tube tunnel passing under the Bosphorus. The first stage of the Marmaray project, which was started in 2004, was completed in 2013.¹⁴⁵⁰ In November 2019, the first container train from Xian to Prague passed through the Marmaray submarine tunnel. To further develop this direction of cargo transportation in the near future, Turkey plans to send trains with export goods to the new corridor to China.¹⁴⁵¹

Only the visits of Chinese Vice PM Wang Yang and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in 2016 gave confidence to the builders of the railway line.

¹⁴⁴⁵ **Altay Atli**, "Turkey as a Eurasian Transport Hub...", op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁴⁴⁶ **Burak Akinci**, "Spotlight: Dragon and Crescent Unite under Framework of Belt and Road Initiative", Xinhua, English.news.cn, 11.05.2017.

¹⁴⁴⁷ "中国企业在土耳其铁路市场大有可为", 新华社, 11.09.2007; "Chinese Companies Have a Promising Prospect in the Turkish Railway Market", People.com.cn, 11.09.2007.

¹⁴⁴⁸ **Gu Jianjun**, "New Sino-Turkey Strategic Cooperative ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁴⁹ **Цатурян Саркис**, «США переносят войну с Китаем...», укз. соч.

¹⁴⁵⁰ **Nurettin Akçay**, "Turkey-China Relations Within ...", op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁴⁵¹ «Турция намерена активизировать использование транскаспийского коридора», Каспийский вестник, 17.01.2020.

The total length of the BTK railway line, which forms the backbone of the *Middle Corridor*, is 838.6 km.¹⁴⁵² The project, worth US \$ 450 million, reduces the transportation route between Asia and Europe by about 7,000 km, and aims to unite Azerbaijan and Turkey through the capital of Baku in Azerbaijan and the cities of Tbilisi and Ahilkelek in Georgia and transfer to the city of Kars in Turkey. This is the third largest project, jointly implemented by Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia after the *Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan* and *Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum* pipeline projects, will deliver goods from China to the Caspian Sea and the port of Baku-Alat via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and then to Europe through Georgia and Turkey, eventually connecting Beijing with London by uninterrupted rail.¹⁴⁵³ BTK is important both for trade between Turkey and China and CA, and for trade between Europe and CA and China.¹⁴⁵⁴ It is allowing the latter two, which so far traded with Turkey mainly through Russia, to be included in transport and logistics chains.¹⁴⁵⁵

Turkey offered Iran to join the BTK railway project, intending to create an alternative to the latter through the Kars-Igdir-Nakhichevan project with access to Iran. This will allow Turkey to direct freight flows eastward to Iran, Pakistan, India and South China. Trains arriving from Edirne to Kars can continue their journey

¹⁴⁵² **Banu Dagtas**, "At the Crossroads of the New Silk ...", op. cit., p. 279.

76 km of the railway will pass from Turkey, 259 km from Georgia and 503 km from Azerbaijan.

¹⁴⁵³ **Nurettin Akçay**, "Turkey-China Relations Within ...", op. cit., pp. 82-83.

The railway line, which has 1 million passengers per year and a load capacity of 6.5 million tons, will carry 3 million passengers and 17 million tons of cargo in 2034. In the Turkish part of the project, 4 stations, 3 bridges and 76 km of railway were built. The border crossing between Turkey and Georgia was secured by a tunnel. 2 thousand 375 meters of tunnel in Turkey, 2 thousand 70 meters in Georgia is located.

¹⁴⁵⁴ **Banu Dagtas**, "At the Crossroads of the New Silk ...", op. cit., p. 279.

¹⁴⁵⁵ «Турция - Китай: 'ноль проблем с соседями' или 'ноль соседей без проблем'», EurAsia Daily, 07.06.2016.

through Tbilisi and Baku with access to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and then reach the northwestern provinces of China.¹⁴⁵⁶

It is also planned to build a logistics center in Kars, which will allow the Turkish side to send 300-400 trains along the corridor in 2020, and in the next three years to increase this number to 1000, giving a new impetus to the further development of agricultural production in the country. It is possible that as a result, the parties will decide on the use of the route bypassing the Caspian Sea.¹⁴⁵⁷

The Russian company *Far East Land Bridge* (FELB), which operates most of the container trains between China and Europe, is preparing for a new container train between Suzhou (China) and Poti (Georgia) and, if run regularly, it could be the predecessor of China-Turkey train, approaching very close to the Turkish border and providing cargo connections with Turkey after Poti.¹⁴⁵⁸

It should be noted that Ankara closely followed the plans of Chinese corporations to invest billions of US dollars in the development of transport infrastructure during the implementation of the strategic plan of the Syrian President “*Four Seas*”.¹⁴⁵⁹ In this context, the civil war in Syria is of interest, which created a trilateral alliance between China, Russia and Iran over the interests of Russia in the Tartus naval base, and, in turn, brought Iran and Russia to the Chinese Maritime Theater, initiating a series of exercises at sea expanding the scope of these new triangular relations.¹⁴⁶⁰

¹⁴⁵⁶ Цатурян Саркис, «Россия и Иран на грани изоляции: Китай и Турция убивают коридор 'Север-Юг'», ИА REGNUM, 23.06.2017.

¹⁴⁵⁷ «Турция намерена активизировать использование ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Özlem Koçtaş Çotur, F. Onur Uysal, “Building ...”, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Казанин М.В., «Китайско-турецкие отношения и уйгурский вопрос», Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 27.06.2015.

¹⁴⁶⁰ H. Akin Unver, “Iran, Turkey and China’s Middle Eastern ...”, op. cit.

Although China had no immediate military objectives in Syria, the fact that its two partners, Russia and Iran, did so much in Assad’s favor, also made Beijing a party to the conflict.

Despite this, there is also an opinion that China and Turkey are gradually withdrawing the *North-South Indian-Russian-Iranian* project from the big game because of Great Britain, which, after leaving the EU, promised *India, Pakistan and China* a privileged trade partnership. This is why Tehran continues to persistently cut through the corridor to Syria with the *Iran-Iraq-Syria railway project* and the *Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline* (so far in the Iran-Iraq format), and *Moscow, Tehran* and *Damascus* were determined to take the initiative by opening a joint transport corridor in Latakia (Syria).¹⁴⁶¹

As for the MSR project, Chinese companies have also invested in Turkish ports since 2015 and are most interested in *Kumport, Chandarly* and *Mersin*.¹⁴⁶² Two Chinese port companies, *China Merchants Group*, based in Hong Kong, and *COSCO*, and the country’s largest state fund, *China Investment Corp.* (CIC), have signaled their intent to buy Turkey’s largest private port, Kumport.¹⁴⁶³ At the end of 2015, they bought out a nearly 65% stake in one of the largest Turkish container terminals at Kumport in the port of Ambarli (located in Istanbul’s European side) for almost US \$ 1 billion.¹⁴⁶⁴

Turkey and China could also expand their partnerships in Turkey’s other ports, in the *Mediterranean Sea*, in the *Aegean Sea*, and at the *Black Sea*. And a critical move is not just to combine these ports with railway projects and extend the lines, but to create a logistical network.¹⁴⁶⁵ However, ports intended to be developed in Filyos, Çandarli and Mersin still require substantial investments,

¹⁴⁶¹ Цатурян Саркис, «Россия и Иран на грани изоляции ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴⁶² Nurettin Akçay, “Turkey-China Relations Within ...”, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁴⁶³ Hülya Güler, “Chinese Companies Set Eyes on Turkey’s Third Largest Port”, Daily News, 15.09.2015.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Комиссина И., «Морской Шёлковый путь XXI в. - глобальный геополитический проект Китая», Проблемы Национальной стратегии, № 1(40), Российский институт стратегических исследований (РИСИ), М., 2017, с. 74.

¹⁴⁶⁵ David P. Goldman, “China will Buy Turkey on the Cheap”, Asia Times, 10.08.2018.

while China already preferred Greek port of Piraeus under BRI.¹⁴⁶⁶ From a military point of view, the addition of a new “*pearl*” in the Mediterranean Sea in the form of the Piraeus, allows China to control maritime access to Istanbul and the Black Sea ports of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, southern Russia and Georgia.¹⁴⁶⁷

Worth to note that Ankara and Minsk are interested in organizing freight traffic along the Dnieper, including the construction of a river port in the village of Nizhny Zhary in the Bragin region (Belarus), which in the future could become an important transit hub connecting the eastern and western parts of the NSR from China to Europe.¹⁴⁶⁸

Cooperation in Finance, Logistics, Energy, Manufacturing and Telecommunication Sectors. During the initial stages of the BRI’s implementation, FDI from China to Turkey has increased, albeit modestly. Chinese FDI has been mainly focused on the finance, logistics, energy, manufacturing and telecommunication sectors.¹⁴⁶⁹ Turkey’s becoming a founding member of the AIIB on April 16, 2015, with shares of 26,099 and capital subscription of 2,609.9.¹⁴⁷⁰ To expand the scope of cooperation between the two countries and help the country accelerate the development of urban and energy infrastructure, the AIIB Board of Directors approved two investment projects in Turkey in 2019 for a total of US \$ 500 million. Among these investments, a US \$ 300 million loan from a

¹⁴⁶⁶ **M. Sait Akman**, “*Turkey’s Middle Corridor and Belt and Road Initiative: Coherent or Conflicting?*”, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), 28.11.2019.

¹⁴⁶⁷ **Christina Lin**, “*The New Silk Road ...*”, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁴⁶⁸ **Энгин Озер**, «Отказ от доллара – не главная задача России, Китая и Турции – эксперт», Евразия.Эксперт, 06.09.2018.

¹⁴⁶⁹ **Xiaoli Guo, Giray Fidan**, “*China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Turkey’s Middle Corridor: ‘Win-Win Cooperation’?*”, Middle East Institute, 26.06.2018.

¹⁴⁷⁰ **Shannon Tiezzi**, “*China’s AIIB: The Final Tally*”, The Diplomat, 17.04.2015; “*Turkey Joins AIIB as Founding Member*”, China Daily, 11.04.2015; **Cary Huang**, “*57 Nations Approved as Founder Members of China-led AIIB*”, op. cit.; “*China’s Banking Giant Takes over Turkish Lender*”, People’s Daily Online, 26.05.2015.

sovereign fund for the Istanbul project to reduce seismic risk and prepare for emergencies will increase Istanbul’s resilience to earthquake disasters and the city’s preparedness for emergencies.¹⁴⁷¹ In addition, a credit facility worth US \$ 200 million was added to AIIB investment to provide long-term financing through *Türkiye Kalkınma ve Yatırım Bankası** to private companies in Turkey for investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency infrastructure.¹⁴⁷²

There is a competition between Turkey and China in the energy sector, which has become more apparent in the Caspian Basin and in the ongoing struggle for oil and gas exports from the former USSR. Turkey’s favorable geopolitical and strategic position allows it to influence the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus and CA. It also provides an opportunity for major consumer oil and gas producers in Europe to become a major energy corridor and transit hub. Turkey has become an important player in global energy security, trying to promote the emergence of new energy markets in Eurasia through major energy projects over the past decade.¹⁴⁷³

The number of Chinese companies in Turkey rose after the world’s largest bank state-owned lenders ICBC and BOC established a presence in the country in 2014 and 2017, respectively. More than

¹⁴⁷¹ “*AIIB Approves \$500m Loan for Two Investment Projects in Turkey*”, World Construction Network, 17.12.2019.

* TKYB - Turkish Development and Investment Bank.

¹⁴⁷² “*AIIB Invests USD500M to Support Turkey’s Urban and Energy Infrastructure*”, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), 16.12.2019.

These investments will cover electricity production based on wind, solar, geothermal and biomass energy, as well as energy efficiency projects that will save energy and reduce carbon emissions.

¹⁴⁷³ **Հարությունյան Աղավնի**, «Չին-թուրքական հարաբերությունների ռազմավարական, քաղաքական և տնտեսական համագործակցության առանձնահատկությունները», Թուրքիա-Իրան ներքին և արտաքին քաղաքականություն. Մարտահրավերներ և հեռանկարներ, Ժամանակակից Եվրասիա, Հ. 4(1), ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ԱԻ, Երևան, 2015, էջ 65:

1,000 Chinese companies operate in Turkey by 2019.¹⁴⁷⁴ ICBC on May 25, 2015, completed the acquisition of a 75.5% (US \$ 250 million) stake in Tekstilbank from Turkish GSD Holding, making it the first commercial institution managed by a Chinese bank in the country. ICBC also made a tender offer for the remaining Tekstilbank shares held by public shareholders in accordance with the country's regulatory requirements.¹⁴⁷⁵

In April 2012, both countries signed a nuclear agreement, reaffirming their readiness for deeper cooperation in the field of nuclear energy.¹⁴⁷⁶ Preliminary agreements on cooperation in the field of nuclear energy were concluded on June 29, 2016, after Turkey opposed India's participation in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, taking essentially China's position.¹⁴⁷⁷

On June 2, 2016, Beijing and Ankara signed an agreement to create an electronic cross-border trade platform. The basis of Sino-Turkish economic maneuvers (the agreement on a FTZ between Ankara and Islamabad, which was scheduled for September 2016), in fact means free trade between Ankara and Beijing, as Chinese goods flow unhindered into Pakistan through the railway, which began in northwestern XUAR.¹⁴⁷⁸

Tel Aviv also is interested in developing trade with Beijing and Ankara, viewing Turkey as an economic "bridge" to East Asia. Turks are interested in Israeli natural gas, and the Chinese are interested in the achievements of the Jewish state in the field of R&D.¹⁴⁷⁹

In 2018, with the aim of supporting the Turkish economy, strengthening partnerships and discussing the possibility of creating

¹⁴⁷⁴ **Sinan Tavsan**, "Erdogan Courts Chinese Investment on Visit to Beijing", Nikkei Asian Review, 03.07.2019.

¹⁴⁷⁵ "China's Banking Giant Takes over Turkish Lender", op. cit.

¹⁴⁷⁶ **H. Akin Unver**, "Iran, Turkey and China's Middle Eastern ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁷⁷ **Ефентьев Н.**, «Сержантинский переворот в Турции...», укз. соч.

¹⁴⁷⁸ **Цатурян Саркис**, «Китай идёт на Турцию, а Германия ...», укз. соч.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Там же.

joint projects in the private and public sectors, as well as finding new investment opportunities between Turkey and China, the richest fifty-nine Chinese businessmen (the individual welfare of each of them ranges from US \$ 15 to 30 billion) led by billionaire Jack Ma, internet giant Alibaba, visited Turkey.¹⁴⁸⁰ He has decided to invest in Turkish e-commerce firm Trendyol - one of the most famous Turkish fashion retailers, supported by foreign investors and a leader in the fragmented e-commerce market in Turkey.¹⁴⁸¹

Huawei is working with 5G Internet with Turk Telecom, focusing on cloud computing, Internet of Things, and most importantly, public security.¹⁴⁸² In the first ten months of 2014, nearly 70 Chinese companies including Hainan Airlines, Huawei and New Hope have invested in Turkey with an aggregate investment of US \$ 190 million and year-on-year growth of 11.8%.¹⁴⁸³

However, Turkey seeks a more balanced trade partnership,¹⁴⁸⁴ stimulating the participation of Chinese investors in large infrastructure schemes.¹⁴⁸⁵ Bilateral trade grew steadily from US \$ 238 million in 1990 to 28 billion in 2017.¹⁴⁸⁶ China's accumulated direct investment in Turkey increased from US \$ 509 million in the whole of 2015 to US \$ 809 million in January 2017.¹⁴⁸⁷

Difficulties Under the BRI. Despite the fact that the BRI provides a wider space for further expansion of cooperation between

¹⁴⁸⁰ "Chinese Business Magnates Flock to Turkey", Middle East Monitor, 17.08.2018.

¹⁴⁸¹ "China's Alibaba Decides to Make Investment in Turkey's Trendyol - Statement", Reuters, 28.06.2018.

¹⁴⁸² **David P. Goldman**, "China will Buy Turkey on the Cheap", op. cit.

¹⁴⁸³ **Gu Jianjun**, "New Sino-Turkey Strategic Cooperative ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁸⁴ «Турция играет ключевую роль в китайском 'Шёлковом пути': Академия наук КНР», ИА Реалист, 27.10.2018.

Turkey's trade deficit in relations with China exceeded US \$ 20 billion in 2017.

¹⁴⁸⁵ **Burak Akinci**, "Spotlight: Dragon and Crescent Unite under...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁸⁶ **Xiaoli Guo, Giray Fidan**, "China's Belt and Road Initiative ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁸⁷ **Zhou Rong**, "B&R Can Help Strengthen China-Turkey Ties", Global Times, 24.05.2017.

the two countries, however, there are also many obstacles and difficulties both local, regional and global characters. Due to the fact that Turkey is ready to reduce its dependence on Western allies, some fear that a NATO country, like Turkey, traditionally and historically oriented to the West, is making a mistake trying to establish deeper ties with the eastern powers like Russia and China. But some analysts believe that in this global world this is inevitable.¹⁴⁸⁸ Turkey's departure from the West and its dialogue partnership with the SCO "as an alternative to the NATO and the EU" may be "more likely associated with Turkey's disappointment with its Western identity than with a commitment to the common leadership of Russia and China".¹⁴⁸⁹

According to the Turkish expert, diversification of alliances with countries such as Russia and China, and becoming more independent while remaining in NATO, has long been the goal of Erdogan.¹⁴⁹⁰ But perhaps the biggest obstacle to Turkey's accession to the SCO may be the demand to begin the process of withdrawing from NATO.¹⁴⁹¹

It should be noted that since EBSR is being replaced by roads on which the interests of Turkey and its Turkic-speaking partners may prevail, Turkey's active efforts to develop economic and cultural ties with the Turkic countries of the former SU may revive the *Pan-Turkic project*, which lost its relevance in the late 1990s. Turkey, because of its ideologization, has too many doctrinal foreign policies based on the principle of "ethnic solidarity" and the idea of *pan-Turkism* and *neo-Ottomanism*.¹⁴⁹² Although the AKP government has stated that it has abandoned pan-Turkism or the political aspirations of the "unity of the Turkic world", Turkey's cultural

¹⁴⁸⁸ Burak Akinci, "Spotlight: Dragon and Crescent Unite under ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Gökçe Özsu, Ferruh Mutlu Binark, "Representation...", op. cit., p. 296.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Sinan Tavsan, "Erdogan Courts Chinese Investment on Visit ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁹¹ Lina Wang, "Will Turkey Join the Shanghai Cooperation ...", op. cit.

¹⁴⁹² «Турция - Китай: 'ноль проблем с соседями' или 'ноль ...', укз. соч.

influence in CA remains a remarkable force and has evolved from "territorial unity" into cooperation and cultural demands.¹⁴⁹³

Many experts as one of the obstacles to the construction of the EBSR see the conflict in the Xinjiang, which marks the exit of the new highway to CA. The occupation of northern Iraq and Syria by IS terrorists has already jeopardized its southern route through Turkey and Iran. And the terrorist underground in the north-west of China itself poses a threat to both the EBSR project and the new gas pipelines through which Turkmen gas flows to China.¹⁴⁹⁴ Beijing is concerned that many Uyghur separatists have taken refuge in Turkey, and many Turkish NGOs with close ties to the AKP support and help Uyghur separatists, and that many Uyghur extremists have left China to join the IS or other terrorist groups, traveling in Turkey. China fears that many Uyghur extremists (holding Turkish passports offered by Turkish embassies in China and other Southeast Asian states) will return to China to intensify the fight in Xinjiang against the Chinese government.¹⁴⁹⁵ At the same time, China, realizing the potential of the Uyghur factor, is trying to neutralize the inherent risks and dangers by reaching security agreements and establishing deep neighborly relations with a possible "enemy" [Turkey].¹⁴⁹⁶

¹⁴⁹³ Zan Tao, "'Turkey Dream' and the China-Turkish Cooperation under 'One Belt and One Road'", Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 10, No. 3, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2016, p. 69.

¹⁴⁹⁴ «Турция - Китай: 'ноль проблем с соседями' или 'ноль ...', укз. соч.

The conflict in the Xinjiang the Chinese side classifies as the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism, and the Uyghur organizations as a struggle to realize the right to national self-determination.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Wang Jin, "After the Failed Coup: A New Dawn for China-Turkey Relations?", The Diplomat, 10.08.2016.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Խաչատրյան Ա., «Չին-թուրքական հարաբերությունների տրանսֆորմացիոն շրջանն ու 'ույղուրական հարցի' չեզոքացումը (20-րդ դարի վերջ - 21-րդ դարի սկիզբ)», «Տարածաշրջան և աշխարհ» գիտավերլուծական հանդես, № 4, Երևան, 2020, էջ 36:

For its part, despite the many advantages of BRI for Ankara, the Turkish side also takes into account the risks associated with China's "colonial goals", China's circumvention of Turkey, widening the current commercial deficit and trade gap, and considers the initiative to be much more profitable for China than other countries, even if the project seems to be a win-win.¹⁴⁹⁷ Some circles in Turkey view the EBSR as a competitive initiative of China against Turkey in the context of considering CA and the Caucasus as part of its Turkish influence.¹⁴⁹⁸

However, in general, the discourses of Turkish media and politicians are optimistic about BRI, and it is believed that the project gives Turkey the opportunity to strengthen its economic, social and political relations with China and Central and Middle Eastern countries, as well as find alternative alliances with the EU and the US.¹⁴⁹⁹

5. Activation of Chinese Investments in Lebanon

For many years, Lebanon, a small country with a population of nearly 3.9 million, has been of marginal interest to the PRC. Much of the association between the two countries centered on Dr. George Hatem, an American physician of Lebanese origin who had studied medicine at the American University in Beirut and had traveled to Shanghai in 1933. Known in Chinese as Ma Haide, he joined the communist movement and became one of Mao Zedong's personal doctors and a lifelong associate.¹⁵⁰⁰

During the Lebanon Civil War (1975-1991), China repeatedly called for a peaceful settlement among the different warring groups. Initially, Beijing supported Palestinian militants, but gradually lessened this support over the course of the Civil War. During the

¹⁴⁹⁷ Nurettin Akçay, "Turkey-China Relations Within ...", op. cit., p. 92.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Zan Tao, "'Turkey Dream' and the China-Turkish ...", op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Nurettin Akçay, "Turkey-China Relations Within ...", op. cit., p. 92.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Yitzhak Shichor, "Silent Partner China and the Lebanon Crisis", op. cit.

2006 Israeli war in Lebanon, China increasingly called on all sides to cease hostilities. Lebanon's ability to engage in active diplomacy with China (or any, more generally) has been limited by its fragile political system.¹⁵⁰¹

Despite the fact that diplomatic relations between the two countries were established only in 1971, after Henry Kissinger's secret trip to the country, trade relations between China and Lebanon date back to the second half of the 1950s. The first Chinese delegation arrived in Lebanon in 1955 after visiting the Damascus Fair. Later, the first trade agreement between the two countries was signed, and in September 1956, China opened an office in Lebanon, stabilizing economic relations between the two countries.¹⁵⁰²

Trade exchanges have expanded, mainly through textiles, shipping, technology and civil aviation. In 1981, the first Lebanese-Arab delegation visited China. In the second half of the 1990s, China's economic cooperation with Lebanon rose to the level of Chinese loans and grants of several million dollars, especially in the field of telecommunications. The Chinese oil company *Chnoocig* submitted a qualification file for a tender announced by the Lebanese government to develop oil and gas fields in the Mediterranean, but was not accepted. The *Arab-Chinese Chamber of Commerce* established in Beijing in 1995.¹⁵⁰³ Lebanon and China signed a *Bilateral Trade Treaty* (BIT) in 13 June, 1996 that entered into force on 10 July, 1997.¹⁵⁰⁴

In 2006, when the Sino-Arab Friendship Association was formed and China-sponsored conferences were held in dozens of Arab

¹⁵⁰¹ Gordon Houlden, Nouredin M. Zaamout, "A New ...", op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁵⁰² Wael Taleb, "China Emerges as Potential Investor as Lebanon Runs Low on Options", Al-Monitor, 22.07.2020.

¹⁵⁰³ "Lebanon-China. A Great Economic and Commercial", Africa Pulp and Paper. <http://www.africapulpaper.com/en/news/lebanon-china--a-great-economic-and-commercial-potential>

¹⁵⁰⁴ Nayla Comair-Obeid, Zeina Obeid, "Jurisdiction: Lebanon", Obeid Law Firm, LexisNexis Mergers and Acquisitions Law Guide, 2020, p. 1.

countries, Beijing began to develop relations with Beirut.¹⁵⁰⁵ In January 2016, about 20 Chinese businessmen who visited Lebanon as part of the second *Sino-Arab Business Forum* were able to explore investment opportunities in Lebanon.¹⁵⁰⁶

By 2013, China had become Lebanon's main trading partner. Between 2005 and 2017, trade between Lebanon and China tripled, increasing from US \$ 563 million to US \$ 2.2 billion. In 2016, 84% of Lebanon's exports to China consisted of scrap and refined copper.¹⁵⁰⁷ In 2018, China was Lebanon's top trade import partner, making up 10.3% of the total share of imports in Lebanon. Imported articles comprised of machinery, electrical equipment, textiles, metal products, miscellaneous manufactured articles and equipment, plastic,¹⁵⁰⁸ furniture, toys, mobile phones, candy and food - are valued at US \$ 2 billion per year. Trade imbalances are evident in Lebanon's annual exports to China, which are no more than US \$ 60 million. About 80% of Lebanon's needs are met by imports, and 40% of imports come from China.¹⁵⁰⁹ Lebanon exports US \$ 22 million to China and imports US \$ 2 billion.¹⁵¹⁰

On April 21, 2017, the *Arab Chambers of Commerce* and the *Council of China* signed two MoUs regulating the creation of the *Silk Road Business Council*, with the aim of supporting the BRI and the CCPIT.¹⁵¹¹ On September 2017 in Yinchuan (China), the Lebanese Minister of Economy signed a MoU with the Chinese government to “jointly promote cooperation within the Silk Road Economic Belt and

¹⁵⁰⁵ **Anchal Vohra**, “A China Option for a Historically West Oriented Lebanon?”, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 17.06.2020.

¹⁵⁰⁶ “Lebanon-China. A Great Economic and Commercial”, op. cit.

¹⁵⁰⁷ **Gordon Houlden, Nouredin M. Zaamout**, “A New ...”, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁵⁰⁸ **Nayla Comair-Obeid, Zeina Obeid**, “Jurisdiction...”, op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁵⁰⁹ **Najia Houssari**, “Is It China's Turn to Wield Influence over Lebanon?”, Arab News, 01.06.2020.

¹⁵¹⁰ **Gasia Ohanes**, “Pivoting East: Will China Come to Lebanon's Rescue?”, The New Arab, 03.07.2020.

¹⁵¹¹ “Lebanon, China to Boost Belt and Road Initiative”, Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 22.04.2017.

the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative”. The MoU, inter alia, includes pilot programs, joint research, staff exchange and training courses in key areas, formulation of an action plan for bilateral cooperation and consultation, conclusion of a list of joint projects and implementation of related work.¹⁵¹² In November 2017, the *Union of Lebanese Municipalities in Tripoli* signed an agreement with the *Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce* (SRCIC) to join SRCIC to play an active role in the BRI.¹⁵¹³ In June 2018, the AIIB Board of Governors has approved a new membership application from the Republic of Lebanon, bringing AIIB's total approved membership to 87.¹⁵¹⁴

On March 30, 2019, the Lebanon and China signed two MoU to promote Chinese investment and cooperation regarding Lebanese industrial zones and the establishment of the *China Arab Arbitration Center*.¹⁵¹⁵ However, faced with a deepening economic crisis some Lebanese politicians, economists and academics argue that Beirut has lagged behind other countries in strengthening ties with Beijing.¹⁵¹⁶

China sent military aid during Lebanon's war against Israel in 2006 and then deployed peacekeepers.¹⁵¹⁷ China has a long-standing military presence in Lebanon with a 410-man unit serving with UNIFIL in the south of the country. The unit's soldiers carry out operational and humanitarian duties, including medical services, unexploded ordnance disposal, construction of UNIFIL defenses, road construction and rehabilitation of schools and kindergartens in

¹⁵¹² **Nayla Comair-Obeid, Zeina Obeid**, “Jurisdiction...”, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁵¹³ “Lebanon's Tripoli Keen for Active Role in Belt and Road Initiative”, China Daily, 27.11.2017.

¹⁵¹⁴ “AIIB Approves Lebanon Membership”, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), 26.06.2018.

¹⁵¹⁵ “China Launches New Initiatives to Boost Ties with Lebanon”, Xinhuanet.com, 30.03.2019.

¹⁵¹⁶ **Najia Houssari**, “Is it China's Turn to Wield Influence ...”, op. cit.

¹⁵¹⁷ **Anchal Vohra**, “China Wants to be Lebanon's Savior”, Foreign Policy, 09.07.2020.

the border areas. The China Field Hospital at UNIFIL headquarters north of Marjeyun provides a range of medical services to local residents and UNIFIL soldiers.¹⁵¹⁸ During the coronavirus pandemic, Beijing provided medical assistance, including testing kits. In the midst of the coronavirus outbreak in Lebanon, the country's leading doctors hosted online conferences with their Chinese counterparts to learn how best to deal with the health crisis.¹⁵¹⁹ After the port explosion, China sent a group of its Lebanon-based UN peacekeepers to assist Beirut with medical expertise.¹⁵²⁰

Over the past few years, Beijing has strengthened cultural ties with the construction of a new music center in Beirut.¹⁵²¹ Among other academic institutions, the Confucius Institute at St. Joseph's University in Beirut and the Language Centre at the Lebanese University have Chinese language programs.¹⁵²²

Struggle to Bring Lebanon out of the Crisis. Lebanon's economy was destroyed after the 1975-1991 Civil War and the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. The aftermath of the war in neighboring Syria in 2011 and the ensuing US sanctions only exacerbated the dire situation in the country, which is currently at the stage of reconstruction. In addition to the economic crisis, the worsening COVID-19 situation and months of protests colloquially known as the "*October Revolution*",* the explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020, pushed Lebanon further away from emerging market status and dangerously close to the category of a

¹⁵¹⁸ **Najia Houssari**, "*Is it China's Turn to Wield Influence ...*", op. cit.

¹⁵¹⁹ **Anchal Vohra**, "*China Wants to be Lebanon's Savior*", op. cit.

¹⁵²⁰ **Philip Crowe**, "*Will China Change Its Lebanon Strategy?*", The Diplomat, 19.08.2020.

¹⁵²¹ **Anchal Vohra**, "*China Wants to be Lebanon's Savior*", op. cit.

¹⁵²² **Najia Houssari**, "*Is it China's Turn to Wield Influence ...*", op. cit.

* The Lebanese protests of 2019-2021, also known as the "*October Revolution*", are a series of civil protests taking place in Lebanon. The protests sparked a political crisis in Lebanon, with PM Saad Hariri resigning and reiterating protesters' demands for an independent specialist government. However, other politicians targeted by the protests remained in power and Hariri was reappointed as prime minister.

failed state.¹⁵²³ Lebanon's currency lost 85% of its value, the economy contracted 12% during 2020, monthly inflation was 56%, and electricity went out for almost 20 hours a day.¹⁵²⁴ In 2020, the proportion of Lebanon's population living below the poverty line jumped to 75% from 50% before the pandemic began.¹⁵²⁵ Prices rose uncontrollably, and Lebanon needed US \$ 22.9 billion to upgrade its infrastructure.¹⁵²⁶ Talks with the IMF for financial aid have stalled, and international donors have refused to unblock the US \$ 11 billion pledged in 2018, pending major economic reforms and anti-corruption measures.¹⁵²⁷

The American representatives accused Hezbollah - a Muslim Shiite political party and militant group based in Lebanon - of hoarding dollars and large-scale smuggling. The US, by unilaterally imposing sanctions on the Syrian regime under the "*Caesar Act*",* also deprived the Lebanese economy of the benefits of rebuilding a neighboring country,¹⁵²⁸ the reconstruction of which is estimated by the WB at about US \$ 200 billion.¹⁵²⁹ The "*Caesar Act*" immediately hit the banking cooperation between Damascus and Beirut: *the Lebanese company CSG Group stopped servicing the Syrian ATMs.*

¹⁵²³ **Philip Crowe**, "*Will China Change Its Lebanon Strategy?*", op. cit.

¹⁵²⁴ **Baria Alamuddin**, "*Chinese and Iranian Vultures Circling over Beirut*", Arab News, 02.08.2020.

¹⁵²⁵ "*Is it China's Turn to Wield Influence Over Lebanon?*", The Belt and Road Initiative, 03.06.2020.

¹⁵²⁶ **Olivia Azadegan Sebastian Shehadi**, "*China Makes Tracks to Invest in Lebanese Railway*", fDi Intelligence, 21.06.2019.

¹⁵²⁷ "*Lebanon Looks to China in Hopes to Secure Investments, Bring Relief*", Alarabiya News, 15.08.2020.

* "*Caesar Act*" - Syrian Civil Protection Law, which entered into force on June 17, 2020 happened after a six-month delay given to the administration to prepare a regime of secondary sanctions against foreign citizens for cooperation with Damascus in the oil and gas sector, aviation, defense and construction. The initial sanctions list included 39 Syrian individuals and legal entities, including Bashar al-Assad, his wife, sisters and brothers.

¹⁵²⁸ **Anchal Vohra**, "*China Wants to Be Lebanon's Savior*", op. cit.

¹⁵²⁹ **Olivia Azadegan Sebastian Shehadi**, "*China Makes Tracks ...*", op. cit.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem's statements for coordinating efforts against secondary US sanctions have not received a clear response from the Lebanese side.¹⁵³⁰

There were opinions that Trump administration prevented the transfer of funds from abroad to Lebanon in dollars,* prevented Lebanese banks from delivering deposits to depositors in dollars,* and prevented international (Arab and foreign) aid to Lebanon. The WB has linked aid to Lebanon with conditions such as demarcating the border with Israel, while insisting on maritime borders that contain oil but in line with international conditions, in addition to retaining Syrian refugees and passing requirements such as resettlement. These conditions frustrated the efforts of the Lebanese delegation at the WB.¹⁵³¹

Meanwhile, Hezbollah and its allies have increasingly begun to portray the crisis in Lebanon, spawned by decades of corruption and mismanagement, as a crisis fueled by the US administration. They blame the US for an informal "*financial siege*" of Lebanon, in part to put pressure on Hezbollah, which Washington and its Gulf Arab allies see as a terrorist organization.¹⁵³² Hassan Nasrallah,* who had been an outspoken advocate of Lebanon's participation in the BRI for years, spoke for the liberation of Lebanon from the IMF, whose structural changes and conditional investments resulted in Lebanon's debt grew to over 170% of GDP.¹⁵³³ Advocating for the strengthe-

¹⁵³⁰ **Матвеев Игорь**, «Закон Цезаря: новый вызов для Сирии?», Российский совет по международным делам (НП РСМД), 07.08.2020.

* So, the receipt of money in Lebanese pounds coincided with the appreciation of the Lebanese pound against the dollar.

* So, that the depositor would lose more than half of the value of deposits, if he/she agrees to withdraw money according to the exchange value determined by the bank.

¹⁵³¹ **Mohamad Zreik**, "*Lebanese-Chinese Partnership in the Midst of the Lebanese Economic Decline*", Modern Diplomacy, 11.03.2021.

¹⁵³² **Bassem Mroue**, "*Lebanon Looks to China as US, Arabs Refuse to Help in Crisis*", The Diplomat, 16.07.2020.

* Leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah and partner in the coalition government.

¹⁵³³ **Matthew Ehret**, "*Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road ...*", op. cit.

ning of the role of China and other allies in Lebanon, Hezbollah opposed the IMF program aimed at lifting Lebanon out of the crisis, fearing that this would be due to political conditions.¹⁵³⁴

Iran, which was preparing to increase its influence in Lebanon and Iraq to serve its goals of undermining US and Israeli interests in the region,¹⁵³⁵ has offered to sell Lebanese oil for Lebanese pounds, but officials in Beirut have worried about deals with Tehran over Western sanctions. The government began negotiations with the Iraqi government, offering to provide Lebanon with fuel in exchange for agricultural products.¹⁵³⁶

Lebanon's Possible Turn Towards China. Shortly after Hezbollah offered to seek investment from China instead of IMF assistance as a panacea for the economic crisis in Lebanon, the Lebanese PM met with the Chinese ambassador to secure China's support and expand economic cooperation.¹⁵³⁷ Considering it unlikely that Western or oil-rich Arab countries would provide aid without major reforms (to reach an agreement with the IMF), the cash-strapped government of Lebanese PM Hassan Diab, supported by Iran-backed Hezbollah and its allies, turned to China for help, and this approach was strongly supported by the Shiite militant group.¹⁵³⁸

There were even opinions that Lebanon should gradually fall out of the stranglehold of the interests of the US / France / Saudi Arabia and move east along the Eurasian path, directly to the BIR and the SCO. It was suggested that the port of Beirut and even a significant part of the destroyed city in the medium term can be quickly and professionally rebuilt through Chinese investment, since the Chinese are specialists in the infrastructure construction and management of

¹⁵³⁴ **Bassem Mroue**, "*Lebanon Looks to China as US, Arabs ...*", op. cit.

¹⁵³⁵ **Raghida Dergham**, "*Could Lebanon be in the Crosshairs of the US-China Great Power Rivalry?*", The National, 26.07.2020.

¹⁵³⁶ **Bassem Mroue**, "*Lebanon Looks to China as US, Arabs ...*", op. cit.

¹⁵³⁷ **Anchal Vohra**, "*China Wants to Be Lebanon's Savior*", op. cit.

¹⁵³⁸ "*Lebanon Looks to China in Hopes to Secure Investments ...*", op. cit.

ports,¹⁵³⁹ and that they can actively participate in social development and economic recovery in Lebanon.¹⁵⁴⁰

Although Lebanon was a former French protectorate, historically a West-oriented country, China sought to establish itself as a viable alternative to Western partnership¹⁵⁴¹, and viewed Lebanon's financial crisis as a lucrative opportunity to bolster its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean by intervening in Lebanese infrastructure projects¹⁵⁴² - in ports, railroads, electricity and waste management by investing US \$ 12 billion.¹⁵⁴³ And very soon 10 large Chinese companies have confirmed their willingness to invest in infrastructure projects in Lebanon - building a north-south railway line, Beirut public transport system and the Beirut Tunnel for railways or international highways¹⁵⁴⁴ that crosses the mountains to shorten the route between Beirut and the eastern Bekaa Valley.¹⁵⁴⁵ *Lebanon's Vision 2030*, which aims to create industrial zones across the country and a dry port in the Bekaa Valley with 120,000 new jobs, is planned to be linked to China's land and sea Silk Roads.¹⁵⁴⁶

The Chinese are interested in the port of Tripoli, which could become a terminal in China's NSR project, paving the way for a trade route from East Asia to Europe,¹⁵⁴⁷ and become the main transshipment hub for the Eastern Mediterranean, since before the Syrian war, Lebanese ports were used to transship cargo to Syria and even Iraq,

¹⁵³⁹ **Pepe Escobar**, "Who Profits from the Beirut Blast?", Asia Times, 07.08.2020.

¹⁵⁴⁰ "Wang Yi Meets with Minister of Economy and Trade Raed Khourey of Lebanon", Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Malta, 10.07.2018.

¹⁵⁴¹ **Philip Crowe**, "Will China Change Its Lebanon Strategy?", op. cit.

¹⁵⁴² **Baria Alamuddin**, "Chinese and Iranian Vultures Circling ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁴³ **Wael Taleb**, "China Emerges as Potential Investor ...", op. cit.; "Rocked by Mounting Financial Crisis, Lebanon Eyes Chinese Investment", i24NEWS, 15.07.2020.

¹⁵⁴⁴ **Pepe Escobar**, "Who Profits from the Beirut Blast?", op. cit.

¹⁵⁴⁵ "Lebanon Looks to China in Hopes to Secure Investments...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁴⁶ "New Vision Connects Lebanon to Silk Road", ZAWYA.com, 25.06.2019.

¹⁵⁴⁷ **Philip Issa**, "Lebanon Prepares for Syria's Post-War...", op. cit.

and bypassed the longer sea route through the Suez Canal and around the Arabian Peninsula. With the planned Tripoli SEZ adjacent to the port, Tripoli could be a useful hub for Syria and allow China, through B&R, to play a constructive role in post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization efforts.¹⁵⁴⁸

CHEC expanded the port to accommodate the largest freighters, and in November 2017, the Union of Tripoli Municipalities signed an agreement with *China's Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce*, effectively incorporating the port into the BRI.¹⁵⁴⁹ The contracts for the Port of Tripoli included the construction of a US \$ 58 million quay and the manufacture and installation of six gantry cranes.¹⁵⁵⁰ In October 2018, the first giant COSCO ship docked in Tripoli and unloaded 1,000 of the 10,000 containers.¹⁵⁵¹ Chinese firm *Qingdao Haixi Heavy-Duty Machinery Co.* sold two 28-storey container cranes currently in port. Safety signs inside the structures are posted in English and Chinese.¹⁵⁵²

In May 2019, official negotiations took place between China and Lebanon on the revival of the long-fallen Lebanese national railway network, abandoned after the Lebanese Civil War, which should connect Beirut and Tripoli with Syrian Damascus.¹⁵⁵³ There were also talks with Chinese investors about the rehabilitation of the Tripoli-Homs railway network¹⁵⁵⁴ as part of the broader infrastructure network across Eurasia.¹⁵⁵⁵ On June 17, 2020, the Chinese Embassy publicized an offer to extend BRI projects to Lebanon

¹⁵⁴⁸ **Christina Lin**, "The Belt and Road and China's Long-term Visions in the Middle East", Working Paper, No. 47, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, 2019, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁴⁹ **Mordechai Chaziza, Efraim Kars**, "China in the ...", op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁵⁵⁰ **Nayla Comair-Obeid, Zeina Obeid**, "Jurisdiction...", op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵⁵¹ "New Shipping Line Opens between China, Lebanon's Tripoli port", Xinhuanet.com, 09.10.2018.

¹⁵⁵² **Philip Issa**, "Lebanon Prepares for Syria's Post-War ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁵³ **Nayla Comair-Obeid, Zeina Obeid**, "Jurisdiction ...", op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵⁵⁴ **Christina Lin**, "The Belt and Road and China's Long ...", op. cit. 9.

¹⁵⁵⁵ **Anchal Vohra**, "China Wants to Be Lebanon's Savior", op. cit.

featuring a modern railway connecting coastal cities in the north with Tripoli through Beirut to Naquora in the south.¹⁵⁵⁶

Reviving the railroads would mean building infrastructure quickly using Chinese expertise and creating thousands of jobs for the local workforce.¹⁵⁵⁷ They will also provide China with ample opportunities to invest in the reconstruction of post-conflict Iraq and Syria.¹⁵⁵⁸ China has announced its intention to implement real recovery programs in Syria that are also well known, and President Bashar al-Assad's long-overdue *Four Seas Strategy* (Mediterranean Sea, Caspian Sea, Black Sea and PG), first announced in 2004 (and thwarted by the Arab Spring), is finally returning to life.¹⁵⁵⁹ Lebanon could be stimulated by the reconstruction of post-war Syria, which will create a demand for 30 million tons of cargo per year, despite the fact that the main ports of Syria Tartus and Latakia have a capacity of only 10 to 15 million tons.¹⁵⁶⁰

Beijing also helped to expand the Mouawad airport (formerly known as Quleiat), some fifteen miles north of Tripoli, and to complete its transformation from a predominantly military base into a thriving civilian airport.¹⁵⁶¹

China rented a 60,000-square meter mall in Lebanese Bekaa. The most common business structures are limited liability companies (SARL), joint stock companies (SAL), offshore companies, holding

¹⁵⁵⁶ Matthew Ehret, "Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Olivia Azadegan Sebastian Shehadi, "China Makes Tracks ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Philip Crowe, "Will China Change Its Lebanon Strategy?", op. cit.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Matthew Ehret, "Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road ...", op. cit.

President Assad convinced 7 countries to sign up for its construction by 2010 and demanded that all four major water systems (Mediterranean Sea, Caspian Sea, Black Sea and PG) be connected through rail and infrastructure corridors as a driving force for mutually beneficial cooperation and regional development. Assad said about the project in 2009: "once we link these four seas, we become the unavoidable intersection of the whole world in investment, transport and more".

¹⁵⁶⁰ Philip Issa, "Lebanon Prepares for Syria's ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁶¹ Mordechai Chaziza, Efraim Kars, "China in the ...", p. 3; "China Interested in Lebanon's Infrastructure Projects: Envoy", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 03.03.2019.

companies, as well as branches and representative offices of foreign companies.¹⁵⁶² China's *National Machinery IMP/EXP Corporation* offered the construction of three new power plants of 700 MW each, a new national energy grid and port modernization.¹⁵⁶³

Lebanon - a Target Between Atlantic and Eurasian Rival Powers. Meanwhile, the US seeks to prevent an alliance or the establishment of a strategic partnership between Lebanon and China, as this is contrary to US interests, given the geopolitics of Lebanon on the borders with Syria, Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. The Lebanese government has previously asked for a partnership with China to be postponed, while neighboring countries, Egypt, Israel, the UAE and others, seek partnerships with China on all sides.¹⁵⁶⁴ *Caesar's law* and the subsequent new sanctions on the construction sector could hinder large Chinese investments in the port of Tripoli, which is based on a plan to profit from reconstruction in Syria.¹⁵⁶⁵

However, the prospect could cost the country its ties to Washington, US officials warned, as the US is an important ally for the country and the mainstay of its military, which the State Department calls a "*pillar of stability*" in Lebanon's turbulent environment.¹⁵⁶⁶

China will see the opportunity to provide assistance to Lebanon and simultaneously expand their regional influence. But China must convince the public that a pivot toward Beijing is in their interests, and not just another cozy arrangement for the Lebanese political class.¹⁵⁶⁷

China's intentions in the Levant, as in other parts of the world, are, firstly, to create the infrastructure for its B&R project to faci-

¹⁵⁶² Nayla Comair-Obeid, Zeina Obeid, "Jurisdiction ...", op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵⁶³ Matthew Ehret, "Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Mohamad Zreik, "Lebanese-Chinese Partnership ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Gasia Ohanes, "Pivoting East: Will China come ...?", op. cit.

¹⁵⁶⁶ "Rocked by Mounting Financial Crisis, Lebanon Eyes ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Philip Crowe, "Will China Change Its Lebanon Strategy?", op. cit.

litate the trade of Chinese goods throughout Eurasia, and secondly, slowly but firmly established itself as a player in the complex theater of the ME and competes with US hegemony. Beijing publicly acknowledges the first goal and hides its deeply rooted ambitions in a manner typical of the Chinese.¹⁵⁶⁸

When China's offer was renewed in June 2020, David Schenker* gave an interview on June 23 in which he warned Lebanon against falling into the "*China trap*".¹⁵⁶⁹ Lebanese politicians are also of the opinion that Beijing sets "*debt traps*" and offers quick loans for infrastructure at high interest rates, and then confiscates assets when the country cannot pay off its debts. There are warnings that China's "*ruthless, mercantile and selfish*" diplomacy has a history of partnering with African and Asian elites willing to sell their sovereignty. And there is a possibility that the freedom and culture of Lebanese citizens could be suppressed by harsh authoritarian Chinese and Iranian domination in a pitiful monolithic atmosphere. For the Iran-Hezbollah axis, this is a great opportunity to take Lebanon away from the embrace of the West and its Arab heritage.¹⁵⁷⁰

¹⁵⁶⁸ **Anchal Vohra**, "*A China Option for a Historically West ...*", op. cit.

* Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs.

¹⁵⁶⁹ **Matthew Ehret**, "*Lebanon: Pearl on the New Silk Road ...*", op. cit.

¹⁵⁷⁰ **Baria Alamuddin**, "*Chinese and Iranian Vultures Circling ...*", op. cit.

6. The Role of OBOR in Diversifying the Jordanian Economy

China and Jordan established diplomatic relations on April 7, 1977, after which cooperation in cultural, educational and many other fields has been expanded dynamically.¹⁵⁷¹ China is seeking stability and continued access to energy and resources in the region and Jordan, as one of the more stable countries in its neighbourhood, is an ideal trade logistics hub into Europe and Africa. Jordan is keen to attract Chinese investments and tourists, and to benefit from China's expertise in industry and technology and developmental planning.¹⁵⁷²

While GCC states plans are mainly to replace their basic economic model and to diversify the economy from oil, Jordan's concept is more complex, encompassing over 400 policies and including such lofty goals as strengthening institutions and ensuring sustainability. Both plans emphasize the goals of increasing both GDP and human capital.¹⁵⁷³

Jordan's strategic geographic position as a vehicle for pooling Chinese investment in the PG and Africa makes it an important entry point into the Levant region. Jordan was the second most popular regional expansion destination (after Egypt) for Chinese companies based in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.¹⁵⁷⁴

By 2017, China's MOFCOM was reporting significant figures, estimating that Jordan's imports from China reached US \$ 2.772 billion, and exports to China reached US \$ 164 million. In 2018, Jordanian sources estimated that trade relations between the two

¹⁵⁷¹ "*An Annual Policy Presentation at the Jordan Royal National Defense College by Ambassador Yue Xiaoyong*", Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Amman, 13.03.2012.

¹⁵⁷² **Elizabeth Whitman**, "*Jordan Yearns for Chinese Investment*", Al Jazeera, 04.12.2013.

¹⁵⁷³ **Megan Wang**, "*China's One Belt, One Road Initiative*", op. cit.

¹⁵⁷⁴ **Jesse Marks, Salvatore Borgognone**, "*Can Jordan ...*", op. cit.

countries were now valued at around US \$ 3 billion.¹⁵⁷⁵ In 2019, the bilateral trade totalled US \$ 4.112 billion, up 29.17% year-on-year.¹⁵⁷⁶

In 2007 two automotive Chinese companies, *Chery Automobile* and *ZXAUTO*, entered the local market to build assembly factories.¹⁵⁷⁷ In 2008, a nuclear peace agreement was signed between the two countries, although practically nothing is known about it. In 2012, Trina Solar, a major Chinese solar company, announced plans to invest US \$ 200 million in a solar energy project in Jordan. In 2013, a deal was struck between *Xinjiang Goldwind Science and Technology Company* and *China International Water and Electric Corporation* to develop, build and operate a 300-megawatt wind turbine in Jordan.¹⁵⁷⁸

The Jordanian government has a nuclear cooperation agreement with China to meet 1/3 of its energy needs by 2030. A power plant construction contract was also signed between *Shandong Electric Power Corporation* (SEPCO III) and *Samra Electric Power Generating Co.* (SEPGCO). Under the agreements, the Chinese company SEPGCO was to support SEPCO III in the installation of a 100 MW gas generator in order to complete the installation in the second phase and achieve an electrical capacity of 300 MW. The project was located in Zarqa, a city 35 km from the capital of Amman, and was slated to premiere in June 2010.¹⁵⁷⁹

In 2014, Jordan began to ramp up its own exports, sending raw

¹⁵⁷⁵ **Edwin Tran**, “China’s Ambitions in the Kingdom of Jordan”, *Encyclopedia Geopolitica*, 23.09.2020.

¹⁵⁷⁶ “Jordan and China Stand Shoulder to Shoulder”, *Belt and Road News Network* (BRN), 02.10.2020.

¹⁵⁷⁷ **Eugenia Pecoraro**, “China’s Strategy in North Africa and Future Economic Challenges for the Mediterranean Region”, *EUGOV Working Paper*, No. 25, Institut Universitari d’Estudis Europeus, Bellaterra (Barcelona), November 2010, p. 16.

¹⁵⁷⁸ **Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat**, “Sino-Jordanian Ties ...”, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁷⁹ **Eugenia Pecoraro**, “China’s Strategy in North ...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

goods and textiles to China.¹⁵⁸⁰ In 2015, Jordan and China signed investment agreements valued at more than US \$ 7 billion to boost the Kingdom’s transportation, energy, and trade sectors - including an estimated US \$ 2.2 billion oil shale power plant, which will produce roughly 15% of Jordan’s national energy needs, a US \$ 2.8 billion national railway, and US \$ 1 billion renewable energy plant.¹⁵⁸¹

China is a major consumer of potash fertilizers and the main market for Arab Potash. In 2013, Arab Potash signed a deal to sell 600,000 tonnes of fertilizer to Chinese Sinofert per year, which acted as the sole representative of Arab Potash for the sales of potash fertilizers in China. The *State Development and Investment Corporation* (SDIC)* acquired 28% of the shares of the *Jordanian Arab Potash Company* in 2018. SDIC’s stake in Arab Potash complements an investment portfolio that includes interests in energy, minerals, and finance services.¹⁵⁸²

Sino-Jordanian partnerships have been widespread since 2015, when Jordan joined the AIIB as a founding member.¹⁵⁸³ In 2015, Jordan’s *Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority* (ASEZA) signed a major investment agreement with China’s *Shenzhen Chamber of Investment* aimed at developing Aqaba’s industrial sectors.¹⁵⁸⁴

In 2015, a deal emerged in education, with the China University of Geosciences in Wuhan announcing plans to build a school in Amman dubbed “*the Silk Road Academy*”.¹⁵⁸⁵ In 2018, Chinese officials also announced plans to build the *Fujian Maritime Silk Road Commodity Center* in partnership with the *Jordan Ministry of Transportation* and a *Joint Sino-Jordan University* in Amman with

¹⁵⁸⁰ **Edwin Tran**, “China’s Ambitions in the Kingdom of Jordan”, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸¹ **Jesse Marks, Salvatore Borgognone**, “Can Jordan ...”, *op. cit.*

* SDIC - the largest state-owned investment holding company in China.

¹⁵⁸² “Capturing the Opportunities from Belt ...”, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁸³ **Jesse Marks, Salvatore Borgognone**, “Can Jordan ...”, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸⁴ **Edwin Tran**, “China’s Ambitions in the Kingdom of Jordan”, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸⁵ **Ibid.**

the aim of strengthening Jordan's role in BRI.¹⁵⁸⁶

In 2019, Jordan and Huawei signed an agreement to set up three academies in Jordan to enhance technology skills for young Jordanians. As part of the signed agreement, three academies will be created in cooperation with three public universities in Jordan. Huawei will also work with the *Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* to implement Jordan's vision for e-education, e-health and smart cities.¹⁵⁸⁷ In March 2021, *Jordan University of Science and Technology* signed an agreement with Huawei Jordan to establish an academy on the JUST campus. The academy will specialize in the fields of Cybersecurity, AI and 5G and aim to enhance students' skills and knowledge of 5G Mobile communications, in order to enrich the local, regional and global labor market with outstanding expertise.¹⁵⁸⁸

Between 1999 and 2009, China offered 17 grants to Jordan, totaling US \$ 57.1 million, to fund several development projects in the country. Since 1984, China has provided Jordan with 7 interest-free loans totaling US \$ 38.4 million.¹⁵⁸⁹ In 2015 the *Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF)* accepted a Chinese grant of around US \$ 4.7 million to purchase Chinese military equipment.¹⁵⁹⁰

7. Chapter Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, we can conclude that there is a hope in some political and economic circles in the Levant that, by increasing its political and economic participation, China will

¹⁵⁸⁶ Jesse Marks, Salvatore Borgognone, "Can Jordan ...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁸⁷ "Jordan, China's Huawei Sign Deal to Establish 3 Academies", Xinhua. Xinhuanet.com, 07.04.2019.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Ibrahim Rababah, "Just Signs Off Agreement with Huawei to Establish Academy Specializing in Cybersecurity, 5 Generation and Artificial Intelligence", Jordan University of Science and Technology, 03.14.2021.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, "Sino-Jordanian Ties...", op. cit.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Edwin Tran, "China's Ambitions in the Kingdom of Jordan", op. cit.

contribute to the development and stability of the region, while weakening the influence of Western powers. Some see China's involvement as part of Beijing's long-term vision of strengthening its strategic position on the Eurasian coast. There are also opinions that China is increasing its long-term influence on weak countries through loans and investments that they are unable to repay ("debt trap" theory).

As for Syria, during the 2011 Syrian crisis, China supported the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, advocated an end to violence and a solution to the Syrian crisis exclusively through political and diplomatic means, and for a long time avoided direct participation in the Syrian civil war. At the beginning of the crisis, the protection of Assad in the UNSC with Moscow was conditioned not by Beijing's direct interests in the Syrian conflict, but by its desire to adhere to the principle of *non-interference*. Adhering to the policy of non-alignment, Beijing refused to form a full-fledged alliance with Moscow, limiting its support to preventing the overthrow of the Assad government. However, Beijing later began to cooperate actively with both the Syrian government and opposition leaders, based on its geostrategic interests and its desire to establish itself as a superpower. China remained an attractive strategic partner compared to Russia and the US, whose rivalry in Syria even paved the way for China to build up indirect military engagement, conclude energy, trade, investment and infrastructure deals, and continue to act as a major power acting as a responsible international stakeholder.

Interestingly, by criticizing Western intervention, especially the US, in internal unrest in Syria, Beijing not only defended the interests of its allies, but also used Syria in the trade battle between PRC and the US, as well as the Assad regime in the fight against Islamists. Beijing's decision to take part in the fight against IS and other terrorist groups was motivated by considerations of China's security, since the presence of Uyghur militants in Syria could not only provoke Beijing to persecute Turkic Muslims in XUAR, but

also lead to the first military intervention of the PRC outside its borders with the sending troops to participate in the battles for Idlib. However, with the approval of the *Law on Combating Terrorism* in order to expand its self-defense and protect national interests outside its borders (taking all necessary measures to suppress any activity or behavior associated with the "three evils"), China's reputation as an unwavering advocate of non-interference and the peaceful resolution of disputes may suffer.

Beijing could expand opportunities to work with Syria and other regional powers on military exchanges, training and equipment sales. Helping to combat extremism and terrorism will also enable the PRC to demonstrate its strength in military assistance and maintain the immunity of sovereign states, while maintaining their willingness to cooperate with China in the future on infrastructure and trade and investment deals under the BRI. Despite the intention to increase its investments on a wider scale after the end of the Syrian war and the coronavirus crisis, in the face of the pandemic, China continues to harness the economic potential of Syria in the long term as a future regional hub for the subsequent implementation of BRI.

With regard to Israel, we conclude that its relations with China have not developed easily. Their official aspect has long been hampered by the ideological confrontation between the two countries during the Cold War, Beijing's support for the Palestine Liberation Organization and other Arab opponents of the Jewish state. It was only in the early 1990s, shortly after the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries (1992), that the existence of various schemes of cooperation between Jerusalem and Beijing in the previous period was first announced. Cooperation in the field of economics, high technologies, agriculture and especially the military industry began to develop rapidly. However, the Israeli-Chinese defense cooperation and the military sphere, which initially interested Beijing in relations with Israel, was practically frozen at the beginning of the new century under US pressure and began to clearly

give way to cooperation in civil spheres. China's status as a world power and a potential superpower, a permanent member of the UNSC, capable of lobbying for Israel's interests, prompted Tel Aviv to maintain closer ties with it.

For Israel, China is the most important market for startups and military equipment, an investor in infrastructure development, where Israel has big problems. Israel with political stability and with a geographical and strategic position, pragmatic economic management, with a huge potential in the field of advanced scientific technologies and military-defense complex, can become a regional pillar of China's influence in the vital region of the MENA and in the world. The creation of a FTZ within the BRI could help to double trade and expand technology cooperation; an increase in the number and volume of investments and the further development of economic relations between the two states.

China's systemic and strategic investment through government-owned or government-affiliated companies (mainly Chinese giants such as Ali Baba, Baidu, Huawei, Lenovo and others) in Israeli technology and infrastructure targets tech and finance companies and startups that can be redirected to improve security, privacy and dual-use technologies with the obvious goal of creating integrated financial ecosystems that combine finance, healthcare, social affairs, banking, insurance, education, and more.

According to some sources, China controls about 15% of the Israeli economy, which intensifies the geopolitical struggle between China and the US and opens a new front of competition, forcing the latter to pursue a policy of restraining Beijing. It should be noted that the severance of US-China ties in the field of information technology and cyber security has led to a boost in Chinese investment in Israel and China's technological advancement, which is likely to replace the US as a leader in e-commerce and digital banking. In fact, with significant impact on Israel's potential infrastructure, Beijing will also scrutinize some of Israel's military capabilities. It is no coin-

cidence that many Israeli experts criticize the privatization of Israeli ports, arguing that it poses a significant threat to Israel's security. However, given the potential risks, Israel will be cautious in dealing with Chinese companies, especially when it comes to the country's security interests, especially national strategic infrastructure and sensitive technologies. Otherwise, Israel may turn down many BRI opportunities. While taking into account the interests of Washington, Israel can become a strategic outpost for China in the region, while the Sino-Israeli economic partnership can serve as a successful model for cooperation between China and the West.

Currently, against the backdrop of huge changes in the international and domestic political situation in Turkey, the BRI will not only help Turkey economically compensate for its economic dependence on the West, but will also strengthen the country's strategic partnership with China, offering more opportunities for cooperation. Turkey's need for Chinese technology and foreign investment, as well as China's desire to promote its BRI, creates the potential for communication between countries.

Meanwhile, Lebanon, which for much of the 20th century served as an export port for Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean and where natural gas reserves have recently been discovered, is one of the few countries in the Levant where China has not invested at all. In the context of the transition from a unipolar world to a multipolar one, when the confrontation between the Atlantic and Eurasian forces in the Eastern Mediterranean is escalating, Lebanon is turning into a target between rival forces. The Chinese presence in this area will not only help in Eurasian trade, but also provide China with ample opportunities for investment in the reconstruction of post-conflict Iraq and Syria. The destruction of the port of Beirut will provide an opportunity for Chinese investment in its reconstruction, which will be necessary if China wants Lebanon to become a successful BRI hub.

As for Jordan, given the political instability in the Mediterranean, Jordan, as a stable country, can help China create an economic foothold for the BRI, which can later be used as a political lever. Meanwhile, Jordan should show some caution with China, as the US faces increasing competition in Jordan from China, whose presence and influence in the Kingdom is rapidly expanding.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES ON ONE BELT, ONE ROAD

1. The Geopolitical Challenges of the OBOR

In recent years, much has been said and written about the Chinese BRI; and mainly discussed issues relating to its economic benefits for the participating countries and the possible impact in the global and regional balance of power. However, relatively little attention was paid to the risks and problems affecting the success of the initiative in the long term. The diverse cultural, religious, economic, and socio-political situation in countries along BRI routes contributes to the inevitable and inherent risks and challenges for the project, both domestically and internationally. It may mean that in order to implement BRI, China will have to deal with powerful global competitors and some influential regional powers, which implies a new geopolitical rivalry in Eurasia and the struggle for global influence.

With the expansion of coverage to more than 70 countries, some concerns and complaints have arisen regarding BRI that have received wide publicity. In the expert community and the mass media, mainly in the West, we increasingly see comments on the growing problems of BRI and even forecasts of the possible refusal of developing countries to participate in BRI, due to their unwillingness to become an economic, raw material and financial appendage to the Middle Kingdom. According to critics of the Chinese initiative, previously optimistic participants of BRI will “soon realize” that all promises about the benefits of the project for their economies are greatly exaggerated, therefore they will have to reconsider their financial terms of agreements with Chinese partners.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the community of experts has been very optimistic about such concepts as China’s “*peaceful rise*” and its recognition of the role of “*responsible participant*” in world affairs.¹⁵⁹¹ In fact, the concept of “*peaceful rise*”, which was replaced by the theory of “*peaceful development*”, was an attempt to counter the theory of “*Chinese threat*”. Thus, China emphasized the peaceful path that it chose to achieve the status of a world power.¹⁵⁹² Further developing the Chinese strategy of “*peaceful development*”, Beijing began to promote the idea of the “*Chinese Dream*” as a part of the Chinese policy of “*soft power*”, thereby contributing to the creation of a positive image at the international level and opposing the discourse about the “*Chinese threat*”.¹⁵⁹³

Nevertheless, in recent years, optimism among the expert community and in the media space has to a certain extent been replaced by pessimism and fears about China’s self-confidence, its global ambitions and growing PRC-US rivalry.¹⁵⁹⁴ Some experts point to the threat of China’s global expansion, believing that PRC will gradually and steadily increase its political ambitions, defend its position in the international arena, accustom the rest of the world at the beginning of its *independent* and then *leading role*.¹⁵⁹⁵ Beijing declared its influence at the global level, in particular, through its BRI project and marks a shift in Chinese foreign policy from Deng Xiaoping’s “*hide your strength and bide your time*” approach to Xi Jinping’s belief that it is now China’s time to “*take center stage in*

¹⁵⁹¹ Kaczmarzski Marcin, “‘Silk Globalisation’ China’s Vision of International Order”, Point of View, No. 60, Centre for Eastern Studies, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, Warsaw, October 2016, p. 9.

¹⁵⁹² Andrzej Bujak, Zdzisław Śliwa, Yongnian Zheng, Sow Keat Tok, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’: Concept and Practice”, Discussion Paper No. 1, China Policy Institute, The University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, November 2005, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹³ Шарко С., «Публичная дипломатия как инструмент ...», с. 72.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Kaczmarzski Marcin, “‘Silk Globalisation’ China’s ...”, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Гузенкова, Т.С., Карпов М.В., «Глобализация по-китайски, или Кунтай в странах СНГ и Балтии», Страны СНГ и Балтии в глобальной политике Китая, Российский Институт Стратегических Исследований (РИСИ), М., 2013, с. 7.

the world".¹⁵⁹⁶ So, China not only showed determination to come out of the shadows safely, but also the ability to offer the world its own initiatives or concepts.¹⁵⁹⁷

However, the rise of China, its internal problems, the global shift of power from the West to the East, the US turn in the APR, China's relations with Southeast Asia due to maritime disputes and Russia's attempt to restore its influence in the post-Soviet space created difficult conditions for China to strengthen its position in the international arena.¹⁵⁹⁸ And with the struggle of the US, PRC, RF and EU for global and regional influence, the competition of great powers has become a defining feature of the geopolitical landscape on the world stage.¹⁵⁹⁹

Despite the fact that the negative economic consequences of unsuccessful reforms, lower oil prices and post-Crimean sanctions partially put Russia in dependence on participation in BRI in order to attract investment in the economy,¹⁶⁰⁰ Moscow fears a large-scale economic and infrastructural expansion of the BRI.¹⁶⁰¹ However, at a meeting of President Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping Summit in May 2015, both leaders signed a joint declaration "*on cooperation in coordinating the development of the EEU and the EBSR*", thus reaching a new level of partnership and actually creating a "*common economic space*" in Eurasia.¹⁶⁰² The biggest outcome of the agree-

¹⁵⁹⁶ Clayton Cheney, "China's Digital Silk Road Could Decide the US-China Competition", The Diplomat, 17.07.2019.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Лузянин С., «Китай между жесткостью и мягкой силой», укз. соч.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Szczudlik-Tatar Justyna, "China's New Silk Road ...", op. cit., pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Cheney Clayton, "China's Digital Silk Road Could Decide the US-China Competition", The Diplomat, 17.07.2019.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Trickett Nicholas, "The Gordian Rail Tie: Russia's Mythic Belt and Road Cooperation", The Diplomat, 20.10.2017.

¹⁶⁰¹ Комраков Анатолий, «Шелковый путь усыпан шипами», Независимая газета, 22.04.2019.

¹⁶⁰² "Eurasian Heartland: Silk Road and EEU to Solidify Sino-Russian Relations", Sputnik, 12.06.2015; Harutyunyan Aghavni, "Russia and China: On the Creation of 'a Common Eurasian Economic Space'", РОССИЯ - КИТАЙ: История и культура, Сборник статей и докладов участников X международной научно-

ment was the start of the talks on the FTZ between the EEU and China, which according to different estimates, might last from 10 to 20 years.¹⁶⁰³

Although B&R can simultaneously have both a negative and a positive impact on Russia, for Moscow the Chinese "*intervention*" in its traditional sphere of influence is undesirable.¹⁶⁰⁴ And this is despite the demonstration of complete mutual understanding on many issues between Moscow and Beijing against the background of growing common hostility towards the US.¹⁶⁰⁵ Moscow simply cannot fully agree with the *role of the bridge* and *become part of BRI* or China's growing presence in the field of logistics, since it has *its own integration project – the EEU*. On the other hand, the Russian EEU and the Chinese EBSR can to some extent complement each other. BRI can help Russia get more funding and stimulate its market, while Beijing can "*count*" on Russia's support and partnership amid criticism of the BRI, primarily from the West and India.¹⁶⁰⁶

There is a view that after changing the geopolitical situation and signing a cooperation agreement between the EEU and PRC in 2015, the US and some Western countries changed their intentions to

практической конференции, Издательство: Академия наук Республики Татарстан, Казань, 2017, с. 20; Harutyunyan Aghavni, "The Conjugation of Russia's EAEU and China's EBSR in the Eurasian Economic Space" (俄罗斯欧亚经济联盟与中国丝绸之路经济带在欧亚空间内的融合), Digest of Foreign Social Sciences, Vol. 3, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), March 2018, pp. 21-26.

* The most noticeable are a gas contract between Gazprom and CNPC (2014), SRF investments in Sibur and the Yamal LNG project (2015), and the Western Europe – Western China highway.

¹⁶⁰³ Vita Spivak, "How Putin Plans to Cash in on the One Belt One Road Initiative", Russia Beyond, 16.05.2017.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Trickett Nicholas, "The Gordian Rail Tie: Russia's Mythic ...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Bremmer Ian, "Rusia, Occidente y la incógnita de China", El País, 18.08.2014.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет 'Пояс'. Чего ждать от визита президента России в Китай», Радио Свобода, 26.04.2019.

participate in BRI, seeing in it an alternative to EEU.¹⁶⁰⁷ B&R is also seen as an economic countermeasure against restoring the US balance in the APR and insurance against possible unforeseen circumstances in case of danger to its sea routes. Many critics also called BRI as Chinese version of the *Marshall Plan*, which aims to achieve geopolitical superiority and even dominance in Eurasia.¹⁶⁰⁸ They argue that B&R can radically reduce the costs of international trade, as well as support the economic transformations of poor countries.¹⁶⁰⁹ The US administration of Donald J. Trump in the national security and defense strategies actually openly accused modern China of revisionism and an attempt to destroy the current world order. The subsequent "trade war" between the US and China, and the intensification of military activity in the South China Sea have already had a serious destabilizing effect on the security system of East Asia, pushing the region to the very edge of the abyss of the "Cold War".¹⁶¹⁰

President Trump announced on June 2018 that it would charge a 25% duty on Chinese imports worth US \$ 50 billion, directly named Xi Jinping's industrial program MIC-25, and repeatedly expressed its concern about China's rising economic, military and global influence.¹⁶¹¹ On May 2019, the US raised tariffs for Chinese goods by US \$ 200 billion from 10% to 25%, which prompted China to introduce additional tariffs for American goods in the amount of US

¹⁶⁰⁷ **Иванов Роман**, «5 проблем проекта 'один пояс - один путь'», 365 Info, 22.09.2018.

¹⁶⁰⁸ "China's 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy is not Another Marshall Plan", China and US Focus, 16.03.2015; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, "Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative ...", op. cit., pp. 205- 209.

¹⁶⁰⁹ **Deborah Brautigam**, "Is China the World's Loan Shark?", The New York Times, 26.04.2019.

¹⁶¹⁰ **Губин Андрей**, «Рост напряжённости между США и КНР грозит нарушить работу механизма АСЕАН», Российский институт стратегических исследований (РИСИ), М., 11.06.2019.

¹⁶¹¹ "To Counteract 'Made in China 2025'! US Plans to Limit China's Investment in Aviation, Robots Companies", VAAJU.COM, 25.06.2018.

\$ 60 billion. Then the US began a multi-month process of charging up to 25% of tariffs from almost the rest of China's exports to America, estimated at about US \$ 300 billion.¹⁶¹² The lack of transparency regarding OBOR has become not only one of the main sources of US objections to the implementation of the BRI, but also in wider current "trade war" and economic disputes between the US and China over justice and reciprocity for US companies operating in China.¹⁶¹³

And the new President of the US, Joseph Biden, is insisting that G7 leaders take concrete steps to counter PRC's growing global influence. One of the proposed measures will be the multi-billion dollar *Build Back Better for the World* initiative, which aims to compete with B&R and become a "better" alternative to it. Meanwhile, according to White House sources, the project does not force countries to choose between US and China.¹⁶¹⁴

MIC-25 also dispelled European former hopes for political and economic liberalization in EU.¹⁶¹⁵ Despite the growing exchanges and the expansion of cooperation between the EU and China, there are some problems associated with the growing protectionism in the EU since 2016, which has led to increased anti-dumping and anti-

¹⁶¹² **Bermingham Finbarr**, "China Throws Trade War Tariff Exclusion Lifelines That It Thought It Would Never Need", South China Morning Post, 14.05.2019.

¹⁶¹³ **Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Ma Bin, Dmitri Trenin**, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing", Carnegie-Tsinghua. Center for Global Policy, 08.04.2019.

¹⁶¹⁴ «Байден предложил странам G7 альтернативу китайскому 'Шелковому пути'», ИА Реалист, 12.06.2021.

The new G7 plan will be funded in part by US contributions to the WB and the IMF, and it is planned to negotiate with Congress an increase in America's contributions to G7 development-related projects. The White House hopes that, together with G7 partners, the private sector and other stakeholders, they will soon be able to channel hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure investment in low- and middle-income countries that need it.

¹⁶¹⁵ **Легран Филипп**, «Китайская головоломка для Евросоюза», IPG-Международная политика и общество, 19.04.2019.

subsidy investigations regarding Chinese goods.¹⁶¹⁶ EU protectionist measures cause frequent disagreements on issues related to public procurement in PRC, and recognition of the Chinese SOE's market status.¹⁶¹⁷

Moreover, EU strategy on “*Connecting Europe with Asia*”, released in September 2018, seems to set out very different principles to those of China's BRI,¹⁶¹⁸ and can be seen as an important first step in countering China's integration towards the West.¹⁶¹⁹ In relations with China, the EU faces problems such as Chinese exports of its own development model to target countries, the rapidly growing trade gap between the EU and PRC,¹⁶²⁰ labor rights, equal conditions for business, environmental and economic sustainability of various Chinese projects¹⁶²¹ and large-scale investments (the purchase of European companies and technologies), a reduction in European FDI in China, etc.¹⁶²² However, market access in China to FDI from the EU is still highly restricted. There is a common complaint about opaque connections between Beijing and Chinese enterprises, and the

¹⁶¹⁶ “Spotlight: China, Europe Expects Deeper Cooperation, Brighter Future”, Xinhua. english.news.cn, 02.04.2017.

¹⁶¹⁷ Zhang Haiyang, “Belt and Road: AIIB to Boost China-EU Relations”, China.org.cn, 14.05.2015.

¹⁶¹⁸ Chan Julian, “Europe's Challenge to China”, The Diplomat, 26.10.2018.

The EU strategy, as its principal guidelines toward connectivity between the two continents, emphasized three core aspects: “sustainable connectivity”, “comprehensive connectivity”, and “international rules-based connectivity”.

¹⁶¹⁹ Gaens Bart, “Europe's Connectivity Strategy and the Challenge of China: Rivalry, Reciprocity, or Both?”, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), 05.12.2018.

¹⁶²⁰ Chan Julian, “Europe's Challenge to China”, op. cit.

The lack of consultation has been exemplified by the Hungary-Serbia Railway construction project, another BRI pilot project. The railway has been scrutinized and investigated by the European Commission for a lack of transparency in the tendering and procurement procedures, as well as unsustainable credit lines from China that would burden Hungary and Serbia with very high interest rates.

¹⁶²¹ Fraser Cameron, “Europe's Answer to China's Belt and Road”, The Diplomat, 19.09.2018.

¹⁶²² Chan Julian, “Europe's Challenge to China”, op. cit.

lack of reciprocal market access in China. Beijing has repeatedly expressed its commitment to further open its domestic market to foreign competition and has shown signs of offering concessions.¹⁶²³

Nevertheless, against the background of the growing geopolitical competition, China is working on its global rise, while paying special attention to domestic development and maintaining political and social order. Despite insufficient experience in many regions and not battle-tested, China's global presence and influence is expanding, Beijing's weight in the international system is growing steadily, gradually “displacing” the US from its leading position and using relations with Russia to ensure a stable geopolitical rear and flow of energy, military-technological and other resources.¹⁶²⁴

2. OBOR Security Issues

Since the B&R is not only an economic, but also a geopolitical initiative, the growth of China's economy and its impact on the NSR adds a security component to it, remaining a decisive problem in the success of the BRI. Thus, with the growth of China's geopolitical weight in the world, the security burden that it will have to bear will increase. Maritime piracy, human trafficking, smuggling of drugs along the NSR route, terrorist actions by militant groups such as the ETIM, Pakistani and Afghan Taliban, al Qaeda, the IS, and other militant groups, extremely threaten the implementation of Chinese projects, people working on them, and diplomatic missions.

The long-term BRI planning can be hampered by the internal political instability of the target investment countries, where in case

¹⁶²³ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “Chinese One Belt, One Road and the European Countries”, Manas: Cultures and Societies of South, East and Southeast Asia: Traditionalism, Dynamics and Globalization, the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (CELC), Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2018, p. 7.

¹⁶²⁴ Trenin Dmitri, “China, Russia and the United States Contest a New World Order”, The Carnegie Moscow Center, 07.05.2019.

of a change of government, civil wars and armed conflicts, the new leadership may terminate the agreements concluded with China.¹⁶²⁵ Beijing is concerned about a possible “*domino effect*”, as a result of which political instability in neighboring states may spread to its northwestern provinces of China, especially to the XUAR.¹⁶²⁶ Xinjiang’s remoteness and terrain, as well as persistent security concerns about the region’s restive Uighur Muslim population, will constrain Beijing’s most ambitious visions of trans-Eurasian road, rail and pipeline systems.¹⁶²⁷

One of the most important and dangerous on the BRI is the CPEC, which crosses the border between India and Pakistan in the disputed territories of Kashmir - Baluchistan province, with deeply divided ethnic communities and separatist groups, and where the most important for BRI port of Gwadar is located.¹⁶²⁸ In addition to separatist movement by ethnic Balochs, the province’s capital city of Quetta continues to be a “*safe haven*” for Afghan Taliban leadership.¹⁶²⁹ In 2019, the Majeed Brigade of Balochistan Liberation Army’s (BLA) reportedly urged China and Pakistan to withdraw their projects from Balochistan province in Pakistan or, in case of refusal, to face retaliatory actions.¹⁶³⁰

Perhaps the most important issue for the EBSR is the influence of ISIL - the foreign and multinational force that pursues transre-

¹⁶²⁵ **Marácz Fanni**, “*Security Challenges of One Belt One Road Initiative*”, The Belt and Road Center, the Pallas Athéné Geopolitical Foundation (PAGEO) and the Pallas AthénéDomus Mentis Foundation (PADMA), 07.11.2017.

¹⁶²⁶ **Camille Brugier**, “*China’s Way ...*”, p. 3.

¹⁶²⁷ **Adrzej Bujak, Zdzisław Śliwa**, “*Global Aspects of Security Environment – the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Project*”, *Ekonomia i Prawo. Economics and Law*, 15(4), 2016, p. 445.

¹⁶²⁸ “*China’s OBOR: Opportunities and Challenges*”, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, 07.02.2017.

¹⁶²⁹ **Dubow Philip**, “*Is China’s Belt and Road Initiative Increasing Crime and Terrorism?*”, *The Diplomat*, 07.11.2017.

¹⁶³⁰ “*Balochistan Militants Issue Threat to Chinese President, Pakistan – Report*”, Sputnik International, 20.05.2019.

gional and even international terrorist goals, acting in Afghanistan and CA.¹⁶³¹ China’s security focus on Afghanistan and CA is intended to counter Uyghur militants who have moved to the region after the defeats suffered by the ISIL and the group’s establishment of a base in Afghanistan and the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. It also aims, together with efforts to break off contacts between the Uyghurs and their brethren from CA, restrain the influence of the non-violent groups of the Uighur diaspora living in CA for decades.¹⁶³² China announced as well the arrival of hundreds of Chinese militants in Syria and Iraq, mainly Uyghurs and a small number of Hui Muslims. Unlike Al-Qaeda, which is quite cautious and tactful in its statements towards China, the IS included on its list the problem of East Turkestan, and its leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi directly “*mentioned*” China in his speeches.¹⁶³³

Although Pakistan’s armed forces promised to provide a detachment of 10,000 to protect the Chinese working on the CPEC project,¹⁶³⁴ it has been suggested that the Pakistani government’s ability to protect the CPEC looks dubious, given its tendency to distinguish between “*good*” and “*bad*” jihadists.¹⁶³⁵ Moreover, the withdrawal of the US and the NATO-led military mission International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan can raise serious questions about ensuring security of BRI projects in CA and

¹⁶³¹ «*Вызовы на пути реализации проекта 'Один пояс, один путь'*», ParsToday, 09.03.2019.

¹⁶³² **James Dorsey**, “*China Adds Security Component to Belt and Road Initiative*”, LobeLog, 24.08.2018.

The threats of ISIL and the migration of ETIM fighters from Syria and Iraq to the Afghan province of Badakhshan in China’s minds haunt the return in the 1990s, a period of protests and attacks in Xinjiang, when the Taliban government allowed Uyghur militants to operate from its territory.

¹⁶³³ **Domínguez Gabriel, Juan Ju**, “*Soft Power - China’s Expanding Role in the Middle East*”, *Deutsche Welle*, 04.02.2015.

¹⁶³⁴ **Marácz Fanni**, “*Security Challenges of One Belt One Road ...*”, op. cit.

¹⁶³⁵ **Dubow Philip**, “*Is China’s Belt and Road Initiative ...*”, op. cit.

beyond.¹⁶³⁶ In late July 2021, following the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, China pledged to support the Taliban's role in rebuilding Afghanistan, while demanding to sever ties with the ETIM.¹⁶³⁷

Beijing also needs to create a more stable and peaceful environment in African countries where security risks exist. This is evidenced by the recent abductions of Chinese expatriates in Nigeria, the killing of several Chinese builders and doctors between 2012 and 2014 in the northeastern states of Nigeria, and the states of Borno, Boko Haram strongholds, the destruction of Chinese workers in factories in Lagos, and escape after a series of abductions of Chinese expatriates from the construction site for the road connecting the cities of Lokoja and Benin in April 2018.¹⁶³⁸ Actually, as China increases its exposure in Africa and starts to acquire assets, its views on the stability of partners and their ability to provide security for its interests increase.¹⁶³⁹

Transnational organized crime,* such as drug smuggling, illegal immigrant crime and transnational economic crime, are becoming more common and have a serious impact on the economic development and social stability of all countries involved in B&R.¹⁶⁴⁰ Since

¹⁶³⁶ "The Belt & Road Initiative 一带一路", op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁶³⁷ Catherine Wong, "China Pledges Support for Taliban in Afghanistan, but Demands End to ETIM Ties", South China Morning Post, 28.07.2021.

¹⁶³⁸ «Вызовы на пути реализации проекта 'Один пояс, один ...», укз. соч.

¹⁶³⁹ Kerry Brown, "The Belt and Road: Security Dimensions", Springer, Asia Europe Journal, Vol. 16, Issue 3, September 2018, p. 219.

* Current types of transnational organized crime include: a) drug smuggling, specifically the spread of opium production in Afghanistan to the world. The "drug economy" and religious extremism in CA combined, impact on China's western security; b) Illegal immigrant crime, China's labor export and overseas employment at the same time, resulting in a variety of crime with foreign labor service; c) Transnational economic crime, such as money laundering and telecommunications fraud.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Liu Haiquan, "The Security Challenges of the 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative and China's Choices", CIRR, 23(78), August 2017, pp. 140-141.

many of the BRI transport projects (for example Myanmar)* overlap existing routes of trafficking and smuggling, the reconstruction of old highways and the construction of new roads may facilitate the smuggling of drugs and expose formerly isolated areas to illicit trafficking.¹⁶⁴¹

3. Transformation of Chinese Soft Power into Hard Power: The Significance of OBOR

With BRI as a comprehensive "ecosystem" and with *hard* and *soft* power, China essentially integrates the global economy to support vital economic corridors and infrastructures. There is a view that the BRI member countries are increasingly worried that the advancement of China's *soft power* through B&R may soon become a *hard power*.¹⁶⁴² Southeast Asian countries, despite China's claims of respect for their sovereignty, fear from China's growing power, infringement of their freedom of navigation, investment from Chinese companies that want to enter strategically sensitive areas like ports, communications or energy infrastructures.¹⁶⁴³ Without serious obstacles, China fully or partially buys critical infrastructure in Europe - ports in Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and, in particular, Greece and so on.¹⁶⁴⁴

It turns out that even if Chinese diplomatic principles reject the "spheres of influence" mentality, "they are not against" temporary military deployment, if Chinese interests (in this case, BRI projects) are under threat.¹⁶⁴⁵ But the fact is that the Chinese MSR with its two

* Myanmar is already at the top of the Golden Triangle (the main opium production region in Southeast Asia). According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2/3 of China's opioids come directly from Myanmar.

¹⁶⁴¹ Dubow Philip, "Is China's Belt and Road Initiative ...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁴² Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Ma Bin, Dmitri Trenin, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁴³ Marácz Fanni, "Security Challenges of One Belt One Road ...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Fraser Cameron, "Europe's Answer to China's Belt and Road", op. cit.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Sun Degang, "China's Soft Military Presence ...", op. cit.

megaprojects CPEC and BCIM-EC is connected with the existing “String of Pearls”. This can fundamentally change the political and economic situation in the Indian Ocean, but can also solve security problems along the MSR, from territorial disputes in the South China Sea to transnational threats, such as piracy, armed robbery and terrorism.¹⁶⁴⁶

So, China explains the creation and rational use of its military bases (or maintenance points in Djibouti, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan) to combat piracy on the west coast of the Indian Ocean and to ensure energy security in the PG region.¹⁶⁴⁷ Piracy is especially a threat in the Gulf of Aden which is one of the busiest waters in the world and where at least 20,000 ships carry 12% of the world’s oil every year.¹⁶⁴⁸

This undoubtedly causes concern to the West, India and other countries of the region about China’s growing influence in the Indian Ocean, fearing that Chinese-supported civilian and port facilities in Sri Lanka and other places will be regularly used for China’s naval forces as a hub in Beijing’s alleged SPS. Partly to ease India’s fears, the Sri Lankan government banned Chinese submarines from visiting ports in early 2015.¹⁶⁴⁹

4. The "Debt Trap" Diplomacy: Myth or Reality?

The Western press constantly focused on “*debt traps*”, “*yellow peril*” and “*Chinese colonialism*” narratives, often taking as an example the Chinese presence in Africa, and connecting with the

¹⁶⁴⁶ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “*Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative ...*”, op. cit., p. 95-96.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Liu Haiquan, “*The Security Challenges of the ‘One ...’*”, op. cit., p. 144.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Ankit Panda, “*China’s Sri Lankan Port Ambitions Persist*”, The Diplomat, 27.07.2015.

long-time phobia of the “*yellow peril*”.¹⁶⁵⁰ It is said that B&R is a powerful game of China on a geopolitical chessboard, claiming that “*strategic motives*” stand behind it.¹⁶⁵¹ B&R’s critics view the initiative as a geopolitical ploy by President Xi to lure developing countries into a “*debt trap*” and thus become indebted to Beijing.¹⁶⁵² Distrust of PRC is a serious problem in many countries, some of which view BRI as a claim of China for the role of world super-power, some are afraid to rely too much on trade with China and its investment. Even for those who are not inclined to see BRI as a “*Trojan horse*” for Chinese influence or 19th-century “*reincarnation of imperialism*”, this gap in stability is the main cause for concern regarding B&R projects.¹⁶⁵³

According to some critics, the gradual establishment of control over significant assets for China, primarily natural resources, with increased political influence over the countries will occur not so much through open participation in political processes, but rather through the establishment of control over property.¹⁶⁵⁴ Thus, BRI is mainly seen as an attempt to ensure a stable supply of raw materials, mainly from Asia, Africa and the ME, and to link the economic fates of its Asian neighbors with China.¹⁶⁵⁵

Some analysts, especially in Africa, argue that many China-funded projects are not particularly beneficial for local people, and are merely a way for China to access a country's market and resources. They complain that conditions on Chinese loans and invest-

¹⁶⁵⁰ Tritto Angela, Camba Alvin, “*The Belt and Road: The Good, the Bad, and the Mixed*”, The Diplomat, 15.04.2019.

¹⁶⁵¹ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “*Chinese Initiative ‘One Belt ...’*”, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁶⁵² Afshin Molavi, “*Enter the Dragon ...*”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁵³ Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Ma Bin, Dmitri Trenin, “*The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington ...*”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “*Chinese Peaceful ...*”, op. cit., pp. 216-227.

¹⁶⁵⁵ “*The Belt and Road Initiative Looks East. Political Implications of China’s Economic Forays in the Caribbean and the South Pacific*”, HCSS Global Trends. The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2018, p. 5.

ments become very clear only when recipient countries face a debt crisis. Since Beijing usually spent more money in corrupt countries, with a negative correlation between Chinese government direct investment and the World Bank Rule of Law index, Chinese investment is sometimes associated with “*extreme exploitation, extreme corruption and political interference*”.¹⁶⁵⁶

Chinese investors are accused of becoming pickier in promoting their interests and financing their projects, not intending to distribute cheap cash to other countries.¹⁶⁵⁷ In recipient countries of PRC’s aid or investment, especially among neighbors who have previously made a deal with Beijing, there is some caution about loans with high interest rates, low security standards,¹⁶⁵⁸ revaluation of projects, lack of transparency and high levels of corruption, accompanied by nepotism and kickback, defaults with economic and political consequences.¹⁶⁵⁹

The vast majority BRI financing takes the form of loans at market rates, estimated in mid-2018 to be around US \$ 400 billion. A review of a sample of BRI projects found 40 cases of debt renegotiations, involving 24 countries, totaling more than US \$ 50 billion. This usually took the form of China unilaterally cancelling debt or deferring repayment. Examples include writing off loans of USA \$ 90 million to Cambodia (2016) and US \$ 2.2 billion to Mongolia (2017). So, the Sri Lanka debt-trap case is therefore an exception, not the rule.¹⁶⁶⁰

¹⁶⁵⁶ “How ‘Unconditional’ is China’s Foreign Aid?”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁵⁷ Vita Spivak, “How Putin Plans to Cash in on the One Belt ...”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Huong Le Thu, “Belt and Road Forums are ‘Lovely When Friends Get Together’”, The Strategist, The Australian Strategic Policy Institute Blog, 03.05.2019.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Almeida Manuel, “China’s ‘Marshall Plan’ for the Arab World”, Arab News, 14.07.2018.

¹⁶⁶⁰ George Abonyi, “With Belt and Road Projects, Consider the China Risk”, Asia Global Online, 11.06.2019.

However, it should be noted that Chinese money is especially attractive to many developing countries, because it does not come with the human rights conditions, good governance requirements, approved-project restrictions, and environmental quality regulations that are tied to money from Western governments.¹⁶⁶¹ In exchange, at least at this stage, Beijing expects to gain mainly loyalty to itself, to its ideas and values.¹⁶⁶² Indeed, a large-scale BRI infrastructure project is quite expensive and some developing countries, receiving a loan in proportion to their participation, find themselves in a “*debt trap*” that threatened their economy and stability.¹⁶⁶³ Some of Chinese foreign partners* are already in a “*debt trap*” and are facing problems in repaying them.¹⁶⁶⁴

The “*debt-trap*” argument gained further credence after Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamed, upon taking office in May 2018, canceled US \$ 23 billion in BRI projects, including a US \$ 20 billion railway, citing high costs¹⁶⁶⁵ and charging China with “*implementing a new version of colonialism*” and spoke of the BRI as an example of China’s ‘*unequal treaties*’.¹⁶⁶⁶

Sri Lanka found itself in a Chinese debt trap having difficulty repaying a loan. China’s construction in Port City Colombo, an artificial island worth US \$ 1.4 billion, was suspended after the election in 2015 of the President of Sri Lanka, Maithripala Sirisena, who accused his predecessor of having offered too many concessions

¹⁶⁶¹ Harutyunyan Aghavni, “Chinese Policy of Soft ...”, op. cit., p. 184.

¹⁶⁶² Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет 'Пояс'. Чего ...», укз. соч.

¹⁶⁶³ Mokhtari Somayeh, “‘One Belt-One Road’, Silk Road’s New Challenges, Opportunities”, MEH News Agency, 10.07.2018.

* Venezuela, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, Malaysia, Maldives.

¹⁶⁶⁴ Hornby Lucy, “Mahathir Mohamad Warns Against ‘New Colonialism’ During China Visit”, Financial Times, 20.08.2018.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Hornby Lucy, “Mahathir Mohamad Warns Against ...”, op. cit.; Pei Minxin, “Will China Let Belt and Road Die Quietly?”, Nikkei Asian Review, 15.02.2019.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Mark Akpaninyie, “China’s ‘Debt Diplomacy’ is a Misnomer. Call it ‘Crony Diplomacy’”, The Diplomat, 12.03.2019.

to China.¹⁶⁶⁷ China also acquired 99 years of operating rights to the port of Hambantota in the south of Sri Lanka after the project costs went out of control, forcing Colombo to relinquish control of the port in exchange for China's help.¹⁶⁶⁸ 70% of the port was sold to a Chinese company. But the Hambantota loans accounted for only a tiny share of Sri Lanka's debt overall. When the sale of the port was negotiated in 2016, Sri Lanka had an external debt of US \$ 46.5 billion. According to IMF, only 10% of it was owed to China and "*Sri Lanka's debt problem isn't made in China*".¹⁶⁶⁹ As a result, the port and surrounding acres of land, strategically located at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, will now be under Chinese control until the year 2116.¹⁶⁷⁰

In October, 2018, Pakistan's new government has called for a review of the CPEC, to which China has committed more than US \$ 60 billion in funding.¹⁶⁷¹ There is a risk that the amount of Chinese investment can easily cause hostile emotions among local residents. Some poorer provinces, such as Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, accuse the Punjab-dominated government of expropriating the benefits of developing the Punjab center. Other provinces prefer to stay away from Chinese investments because they see them as a threat to their traditional way of life.¹⁶⁷²

In February 2015, the Government of Cambodia (one of the most dependent countries on China in terms of investments and grants) announced that the approval of the Sinohydro dam construction project in the country worth US \$ 400 million was suspended until at least 2018. Dam has been criticized by non-governmental

¹⁶⁶⁷ **Vien Thomas**, "*The Grand Design of China's New Trade Routes*", Stratfor, 24.06.2015.

¹⁶⁶⁸ **Hornby Lucy**, "*Mahathir Mohamad Warns Against ...*", op. cit.

¹⁶⁶⁹ **Deborah Brautigam**, "*Is China the World's Loan Shark?*", op. cit.

¹⁶⁷⁰ **Fraser Cameron**, "*Europe's Answer to China's Belt and Road*", op. cit.

¹⁶⁷¹ **Pei Minxin**, "*Will China Let Belt and Road Die Quietly?*", op. cit.

¹⁶⁷² **Marácz Fanni**, "*Security Challenges of One Belt One Road ...*", op. cit.

organizations for environmental reasons.¹⁶⁷³ The country has already begun to talk about a more demanding attitude towards Chinese investors due to the strong socio-economic and environmental changes in the port city of Sihanoukville.¹⁶⁷⁴

In 2011, just two years after the start of a US \$ 3.6 billion project, the Myanmar government suddenly suspended construction of the company China Power Investment,¹⁶⁷⁵ which was faced with attempts to develop the Myitsone hydropower plant in Myanmar with an installed capacity of 6,000 megawatts.¹⁶⁷⁶ The initial transaction (according to which 90% of the electricity produced was to be sold to China, and the rest was given to Myanmar free) was strongly criticized in Myanmar and was considered a "*one-way*" deal in favor of China, with only a few advantages for Myanmar. There were also concerns that China's control over one of Myanmar's "*main sources of water*" would make the country "*more vulnerable*" to pressure from Beijing.¹⁶⁷⁷ After work on the Myitsone Dam halted, several other dam and energy projects were also put on hold, though Chinese firms did manage to complete multibillion-dollar oil and gas pipelines from Myanmar's western coast to southern China in 2013-2014.¹⁶⁷⁸

The Maldives, the tiny island nation in the Indian Ocean, is trying to renegotiate down the US \$ 3 billion debt (equal to 2/3 of its gross domestic product) it has borrowed from China to fund BRI

¹⁶⁷³ "*Prospects and Challenges on China's 'One Belt, One Road': A Risk Assessment Report*", The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2015, p. 8.

¹⁶⁷⁴ **Kairat Moldashev**, "*Risks in the Implementation of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' in Central Asia*", Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR.asia), 11.01.2019. p. 5.

¹⁶⁷⁵ **Brahma Chellaney**, "*China's Dam Problem with Myanmar*", The Strategist, 14.09.2016.

¹⁶⁷⁶ "*Prospects and Challenges on China's 'One Belt, One ...*", op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁶⁷⁷ **Sudha Ramachandran**, "*The Standoff Over the Myitsone Dam Project in Myanmar: Advantage China*", China Brief, Vol. 19, Issue: 8, The Jamestown Foundation, 24.04.2019.

¹⁶⁷⁸ **Brahma Chellaney**, "*China's Dam Problem with Myanmar*", op. cit.

projects.¹⁶⁷⁹ There is a view that India is considering giving the Maldives interest-free loans of up to US \$ 1 billion to help them pay off their debt to China, but only if the Maldives agrees to distance itself from Beijing, and in exchange for strengthening security ties, including the permanent deployment of Indian military personnel in the island country.¹⁶⁸⁰

About 17 low-income African countries have either been faced with a "debt crisis", or have had difficulty servicing their public debt. There are reports of more than 1,000 Chinese loans in Africa between 2000 and 2017, totaling more than US \$ 143 billion.¹⁶⁸¹

Ethiopia has also experienced debt concerns over Chinese-built projects. Repayment on its US \$ 4 billion railway linking capital Addis Ababa with neighboring Djibouti has been extended by 20 years over concerns of debt distress. Concerns about China's unsustainable lending in Zambia have forced critics to say that China will take control of key government assets because of Zambia's debt.¹⁶⁸² There is a view that China may as well seize the port of Kenya Mombasa, unable to pay US \$ 2.27 billion in debt.¹⁶⁸³

In Latin America and the Caribbean, aside from "the important possible exception of Venezuela", financing from China alone did not appear to be driving borrowers above the IMF's debt-sustainability thresholds. Boston University's *Global Development Policy Center* has identified and tracked more than US \$ 140 billion in Chinese loans to Latin America and the Caribbean since 2005.¹⁶⁸⁴ Chinese investment alone in Latin America is US \$ 88 billion.¹⁶⁸⁵

It is remarkable that many of the B&R countries are already

¹⁶⁷⁹ Pei Minxin, "Will China Let Belt and Road Die Quietly?", op. cit.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Yuji Kurokuma, "India Offers Maldives \$1bn in Loans to Help Repay China Debt", Nikkei Asian Review, 28.11.2018.

¹⁶⁸¹ Deborah Brautigam, "Is China the World's Loan Shark?", op. cit.

¹⁶⁸² Mark Akpaninyie, "China's 'Debt Diplomacy'...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁸³ Kondapalli Srikanth, "China's Belt and Road Initiative ...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Deborah Brautigam, "Is China the World's Loan Shark?", op. cit.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет 'Пояс'. Чего ...», op. cit.

among the most corrupt in the world. *Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index* ranks Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan as highly corrupt countries, while Russia, Pakistan, India and Mongolia received only slightly less dismal ratings, which leads to skeptical predictions about the possibility of proper absorption of capital from B&R projects in the local economies.¹⁶⁸⁶ The German-American team of economists came to the conclusion that the list of the 50 largest recipients of direct Chinese loans made by them included important allies and partners of Russia: *Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan*. Kyrgyzstan owed China 30% of its GDP. Thus, Kyrgyzstan was in the top five most indebted countries along with Djibouti, Tonga, the Maldives and the Republic of Congo. The volume of its debt to China reached 30% of Kyrgyz GDP. Belarus has debt to Beijing at 13% of GDP. Both countries are Russia's partners in the EEU, as well as the allies of the RF in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This military-political alliance with Russia also includes Tajikistan, which owes China about 15% of its GDP. In Turkmenistan, the share of debt, presumably, is somewhat higher than that of Belarus, for Uzbekistan, for which Moscow now highly expects economic and political rapprochement, it exceeds 5%. At the same time, the share of the Russia's partners in the EEU and the CSTO of Armenia and Kazakhstan is less than 5%.¹⁶⁸⁷

5. Trade, Economic, Investment, Environmental Issues and Other Challenges Related to OBOR

There are also problems with political barriers and impenetrable borders of some of the states on the BRI. Transit delays, customs

¹⁶⁸⁶ "The Belt & Road Initiative 一带一路", op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁶⁸⁷ «Кыргызстан попал в топ-5 главных должников Китая...», укз. соч.

procedures and restrictions, limitation of direct investment in these countries require political reform and cooperation among countries. Economic indicators demonstrate that it takes 50 days to pass through a country in CA, while this time in the G7 countries is around 10 days.¹⁶⁸⁸ In addition, if EBSR land transport routes in Eurasia help save on delivery time, sea logistic support is still at least 50% cheaper. Currently, the trade flow from China to Europe on land routes is almost one way, which is not economically efficient.¹⁶⁸⁹

In the maritime sector, the promotion of the Chinese project requires the signing of numerous agreements between Beijing and the ASEAN, as well as the EU. On the other hand, there are a number of countries that are on the fixed line of the NSR, and barriers to free trade are still not eliminated in customs agreements.¹⁶⁹⁰

We meet as well a lot of negative statements in the world community that the goal of the B&R project is to transfer China's excess production capacity to other countries, such as steel, cement, etc., while stimulating its state-owned enterprises.¹⁶⁹¹ Besides, in order to provide control over its investment infrastructure projects (roads, transport), China requires that the management company, technology and labor be Chinese.¹⁶⁹² The initiative would also promote the RMB as an international currency, primarily at the expense of the US dollar.¹⁶⁹³ In addition, there is a view that Chinese leaders openly criticize protectionism and call for principles of the free

¹⁶⁸⁸ Mokhtari Somayeh, “‘One Belt-One Road’, Silk Road’s New ...”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Vita Spivak, “How Putin Plans to Cash in on the One Belt ...”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁹⁰ «Вызовы на пути реализации проекта 'один пояс, один ...», укз. соч.

¹⁶⁹¹ Afshin Molavi, “Enter the Dragon...”, op. cit.

¹⁶⁹² Алиев Наир, «Китай покупает политическую лояльность Армении? Media.Az беседует с востоковедом Алексеем Масловым», Media.az, 08.04.2019.

¹⁶⁹³ George Abonyi, “With Belt and Road Projects, Consider ...”, op. cit.

market, but are themselves accused of categorically denying an open society within China.¹⁶⁹⁴

According to some experts, there is no clear legislation establishing responsibility for corruption, when investments outside the country put the Chinese investor in the preferred position in the short term. However, if an investor can avoid the expensive costs required to fully comply with local laws and “negotiating”, then in the medium and long term, this strategy carries risks for Chinese investors, including within the framework of BRI. *Firstly*, because there is a risk of becoming an object of discontent from the societies of recipient countries; and *secondly*, with the possible change of the old regime, the new authorities, even with the support of relations with China, may not share the enthusiasm of their predecessors.¹⁶⁹⁵ As a result, short-term interests that have damaged China’s image can harm its long-term economic interests.

One view, expressed by *Dingding and Junyang*, is that to improve transparency, each country is supposed to provide more comprehensive and detailed information on budget documents, such as the project basis, implementation proposal, fund allocation, and performance appraisal. The mechanism of an open legislative hearing could be established to allow the public to testify and get involved in the review. Plus, the whole process of publicly reporting the preliminary preparation, mid-term inspection, and evaluation of the government budget should become a regulatory norm. If this can be realized, all these aforementioned criticisms on transparency will wind up collapsing on themselves.¹⁶⁹⁶

¹⁶⁹⁴ Хубиев Руслан, «США и Шелковый путь: Пекин и Москва успешно держат оборону», ИА REGNUM, 19.05.2019.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Молдашев Кайрат, «Риски в реализации инициативы 'Один пояс, один путь' в Центральной Азии», Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR.asia), 11.01.2019, с. 6.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Dingding Chen, Junyang Hu, “3 ways China can Make the Belt and Road Initiative More Successful”, The Diplomat, 21.05.2019.

Beijing argues that BRI projects supported by various financial mechanisms of Chinese banks, the Big Four and state-owned enterprises will benefit the local population and are intended for joint development.¹⁶⁹⁷ According to Brautigam, even if debts are growing in developing countries, there is little evidence that Chinese banks act on behalf of their government, deliberately overestimating or financing unprofitable projects to provide China with a strategic advantage.¹⁶⁹⁸

China's state-owned banks, including the CDB and the Exim-bank of China, finance more than 70% of BRI's projects, depleting China's foreign exchange reserves. SOEs, such as COSCO Shipping Ports, play a leading role in implementation, performing 95% of the work. But private sector participation was minimal and declined, reaching only 4% of BRI loans in 2018. PRC's banks, in taking on debt to finance underperforming BRI investments by SOEs add to the growing non-performing domestic loans already on their balance sheets. In BRI projects, the SOEs behave as they do domestically, maximizing investment and output, not return-on-investment or profit. This distorts pricing of investment risks, pushing up the borrowing costs of generally more efficient private firms. In 2018, rising SOE debt levels reached RMB 100 trillion, or 120% of GDP. SOE return-on-assets (ROA) averaged 3.9%, compared with 9.9% for private companies.¹⁶⁹⁹

One view, expressed by Akpaninyie is that instead of a state-run strategy, Chinese firms motivated by profits and bureaucratic disorganization, incompetence and negligence at the state level, exploit poor countries that depend on cheap or bad loans. These companies, consciously or unconsciously, convince countries to undertake projects in which the benefits to firms far exceed those of the host

country. Worse, host governments sign non-concessional loans with high interest rates or onerous conditions that put disadvantaged countries at a disadvantage.¹⁷⁰⁰

Worth to note, that most Chinese banks are comparatively less experienced in cross-border and international transactions, or transactions on a very large scale, and are still very focused on domestic lending. They may not be fully aware of typical project financing models or transnational risks. It is necessary before making any investment decision and prior to agreeing on contracts to determine the risks and work out ways to eliminate them.¹⁷⁰¹

Huw Jenkins emphasizes the need to a good study of the Chinese experience of project finance, which is quite different from that in the West. China has laws that restrict guarantees that can be given by state entities so the concept of *Public-Private Partnerships* just doesn't work in China. You cannot guarantee debt in the same way from a state organization. China takes a more commercial rather than government liability perspective, shifting the risk much more to the private sector.¹⁷⁰²

The potential risk of environmental degradation and loss of bioavailability is another challenge for the BRI. Governments in underdeveloped and developing countries often reduce environmental standards to attract foreign investors, despite the fact that infrastructure projects (railways, roads, pipelines and power lines) usually carry risks of reducing changes in ecosystem biodiversity and pollution during construction and operation. But with the development of the economy and the deterioration of the ecological situation, the growth of requirements for foreign investments and for

¹⁶⁹⁷ Angela Tritto, Alvin Camba, "The Belt and Road ...", op. cit.

¹⁶⁹⁸ Deborah Brautigam, "Is China the World's Loan Shark?", op. cit.

¹⁶⁹⁹ George Abonyi, "With Belt and Road Projects, Consider ...", op. cit.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Mark Akpaninyie, "China's 'Debt Diplomacy'...", op. cit.

¹⁷⁰¹ Huw Jenkins, "China's One Belt, One Road: Challenges and Opportunities", Clifford Chance, 2017, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰² Ibid., p. 5.

their own governments in terms of environmental safety is inevitable.¹⁷⁰³

For many Chinese firms, labour relations, environmental protection and *Certificate Signing Request* (CSR) are new challenges, especially in countries where political opposition and environmental and social activism is robust. Foreign governments are increasingly requiring comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments and compliance with stringent environmental and workplace laws. Governments may not be willing, or have the ability, to intervene if standards are not met or disputes arise, forcing Chinese contractors into the high-risk situation of having to negotiate directly with labour unions or local communities. Project delays can result in cost overruns and also make it harder for a contractor to win future projects in that country.¹⁷⁰⁴

However, an alternative view is that not only Chinese companies are responsible for the damage caused to wildlife and environmental degradation, but also corrupt and incompetent local authorities in many countries that don't hesitate to transfer their natural resources, national parks, etc., to the Chinese or any other country.¹⁷⁰⁵ A similar view is held by Mokhtari who suggests that before carrying out any infrastructure projects and transportation, it is necessary to identify and carefully eliminate environmental hazards in order to minimize damage to the environment and habitat.¹⁷⁰⁶

In this respect, remarkable that during the B&R Forum 2019 in Beijing, Xi Jinping promised to make the environment the central task of any BRI infrastructure projects and build only "high-quality"

¹⁷⁰³ Kairat Moldashev, "Risks in the Implementation ...", op. cit., pp. 4-5.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Wong Ai Ai, Jia Stanley, "Belt & Road: Opportunity & Risk", Baker and McKenzie International, 2017, p. 24.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет 'Пояс'. Чего ...», укз. соч.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Somayeh Mokhtari, "One Belt-One Road", *Silk Road's new challenges, opportunities*, MEH News Agency, 10.07.2018.

infrastructure.¹⁷⁰⁷ Xi declared that the BRI would make the world a more beautiful place with initiatives such as the *Sustainable Cities Alliance and International Green Development Coalition*, green investment principles for BRI projects, and a commitment to sustainable development.¹⁷⁰⁸

Beijing has repeatedly confirmed that the BRI, as a dream of development, peace and harmony, not only does not threaten Western civilization or the rest of the world, but can bring mutual significant benefits. In total, one can agree that there is little evidence that Beijing is coordinating a single strategy to lure the developing world into overwhelming debt.

In official responses to B&R criticism, Beijing tries to emphasize the non-forcing nature of its project and explain that BRI is not a product of its geopolitical or hegemonic ambitions and aspirations for world domination.¹⁷⁰⁹ There are opinions that China's strategic task probably is not to support or intervene in other countries' economies in its own interests, but to obtain benefits primarily in the field of freight transportation, mining and in the development of new technologies. Actually, many states, especially in Central Europe, welcome Beijing's help and support. They are expressed in Chinese investment paving the way, expanding trade and interaction between neighboring countries who have insufficient funds for independent development, as well as offering promotional services for their products and so on.¹⁷¹⁰

Perhaps a cause of concern and doubt regarding BRI is that the difficult business and political climate that exists in many developing countries makes it difficult to carry out the necessary comprehensive analysis, and even with the most careful preparation, the success of any BRI project cannot be fully guaranteed. In order to avoid

¹⁷⁰⁷ Mihir Sharma, "The World Shouldn't Save the Belt and Road", op. cit.

¹⁷⁰⁸ Huong Le Thu, "Belt and Road Forums are 'Lovely When ...'", op. cit.,

¹⁷⁰⁹ Tritto Angela, Camba Alvin, "The Belt and Road: The Good...", op. cit.

¹⁷¹⁰ Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет 'Пояс'. Чего ...», укз. соч.

negative consequences, China calls on countries that cannot bear the debt burden of large infrastructure projects not to accept them, and urges Chinese companies in advance to commit themselves to undertake appropriate risk and business viability studies so that recipient countries can pay off their debts.¹⁷¹¹ And in spite of accusations about Chinese “debt traps”, in which many countries find themselves, although without its coercion, Beijing continues to support many countries, investing more money in them than receiving benefits.¹⁷¹²

It is noteworthy that during the 2019 Chinese B&R Forum in Beijing, which brought together 37 world leaders and delegates from 150 countries and 90 international organizations, Xi Jinping demonstrated his responsiveness to the criticism of BRI and the challenges that B&R countries faced. He promised to pay more attention to the debt sustainability, to focus on the development of the environment, to expand access to Chinese markets and to strengthen the protection of intellectual property.¹⁷¹³

6. Intra-Chinese Discourse about OBOR

In addition to external risks affecting the BRI, there are also internal risks and problems that may impede or undermine the Chinese initiative. And really, there are no guarantees that the BRI expects an easy victory, since at the moment China itself is still a developing country, facing enormous political, social and economic problems throughout the world.

However, from the very beginning of the proclamation of the initiative, there is criticism regarding the organizational nature of the NSR, since the largest project of global restructuring of the entire

¹⁷¹¹ Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Ma Bin, Dmitri Trenin, “*The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington...*”, op. cit.

¹⁷¹² Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет Пояс. Чего ...», укз. соч.

¹⁷¹³ Huong Le Thu, “*Belt and Road Forums are ‘Lovely When ...’*”, op. cit.

economic, and then, perhaps, of the political world is not represented in the organizational structure, but is called simply a movement.¹⁷¹⁴

There is a similar view that despite its ambitious intentions, issued in March 2015 by three ministries: the *MFA*, the *National Development and Reform Commission* and the *Ministry of Commerce*, the *Action Plan* for BRI more resembles a far-reaching statement of ambition without clear goals and guidelines. With a large and abstract wish list, without a coherent plan, different ministries can move in different directions, and the funding available to them, unlike headings, can be increased. And while Beijing emphasizes that BRI will follow market principles, as many government agencies and companies struggle for a piece of the pie, the risk of inefficient investments is high.¹⁷¹⁵

Because of the struggle and competition for domestic resources between different regions and the weak interaction between them, there is almost no synergy between the governments of the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang, which, with their common borders, geographical and cultural advantages, should focus on cooperation with CA and Western Asia. Xenophobia and conservatism are very serious in many parts of China, and the government needs to improve regional integration. Another internal problem is ethnic tensions in XUAR and Tibet, where demands for greater autonomy and tension in relations with the central government led to outbreaks of violence against civilians and property. The separatist movements caused by ethnic conflicts attract terrorist activity in China, as well as in neighboring countries along the B&R.¹⁷¹⁶

¹⁷¹⁴ Гостев Александр, «Путин примеряет Пояс. Чего ...», укз. соч.

¹⁷¹⁵ Meidan Michal, Patey Luke, “*The Challenges Facing China's Belt and Road Initiative*”, The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich, 29.03.2016; Meidan Michal, Patey Luke, “*China's New Global Investment Strategy: The Challenges Facing China's Belt and Road Initiative*”, DIIS Policy Brief, February 2016, p. 3.

¹⁷¹⁶ Qingzhen Chen, “*Three Domestic Challenges of China's One Belt, One Road Initiative*”, Global Risk Insight, 19.06.2017.

It is believed that many Chinese companies, that have called themselves part of B&R and export their business abroad for support and preferential access from the Chinese government, have a dubious reputation. With the growing number of Chinese enterprises expanding their activities in countries along the trade routes, some of them do more harm to the image of China than promote B&R. And not all leading Chinese companies can serve B&R, as they are limited by traditions, culture and language barriers.¹⁷¹⁷

But most of all there are complaints that the country has too quickly stepped over and expanded the BRI, paying great attention to quick results, ignoring domestic problems in favor of development abroad and business opportunities.¹⁷¹⁸ Some commentators have been critical of “*excessive foreign aid*”.¹⁷¹⁹ Prof. Xu Zhangrun of Tsinghua University wrote in his article “*Imminent Fears, Immediate Hopes - A Beijing Jeremiad*”, that the average Chinese is often offended by the fact that the state disperses large sums of money through international assistance with little or no benefit.¹⁷²⁰

This idea has been extended by Qingzhen, suggesting that the Chinese will actually ask who pays the bills, since most countries in the developing world, where China is keen to spend money building ports, railroads and other projects, are low-income countries and slow profits. And if China subsidizes development projects in these countries, why the government does not do it in China, since the high economic boom in China in the late 1980s - early 2000s led to huge inequalities, and many provinces still live below the poverty line. Social unrest and protests in inland China have become more

¹⁷¹⁷ **Ibid.**

¹⁷¹⁸ **Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Ma Bin, Dmitri Trenin**, “*The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington...*”, op. cit.

¹⁷¹⁹ **Kondapalli Srikanth**, “*China’s Belt and Road Initiative ...*”, op. cit.

¹⁷²⁰ **Xu Zhangrun**, “*Imminent Fears, Immediate Hopes - A Beijing Jeremiad*”, China Heritage, The Wairarapa Academy for New Sinology, July 2018.

frequent, and their discontent will be exacerbated if the Chinese do not see that they benefit or even lose in these foreign projects.¹⁷²¹

7. Chapter Conclusion

As a result of this Chapter, we can conclude that, despite the criticism and fears associated with the BRI, none of the “critics” who oppose it, including Westerners, does not mean a complete withdrawal from the project. Of course, one cannot exclude the possibility of leaving some BRI participants who are unhappy with Beijing, but so far there are no such countries. And the West, at least at this stage, will find it difficult to argue with the attractiveness of the Xi Jinping project. As for China, it should be said that under the “soft” scenario of development of events, Beijing will agree to make some cosmetic and even real changes to contracts and agreements to continue the project.

Although China is accused of setting a “debt trap” to seize control of strategic assets in the participating countries, especially in emerging economies with disabilities, fears that the Chinese government deliberately preys on countries in need of loans, in most cases unfounded. On the contrary, most BRI infrastructure projects are usually not commercially viable due to poor sovereign credit ratings of the borrowing countries, so China itself can accumulate debts in financing unproductive projects. And inefficient investments due to debts, as the main obstacles to China’s growth and long-term stability, can threaten the country's economic growth and prosperity and lead to social and even political instability.

For their part, host countries can certainly take advantage of the opportunities provided by BRI, but if projects involving financial or economic problems are carried out mainly due to the availability of money, this can actually drive them into “debt trap” and impede

¹⁷²¹ **Qingzhen Chen**, “*Three Domestic Challenges of China’s ...*”, op. cit.

economic development. Therefore, the participating countries should consider investment projects from a strategic point of view, guaranteeing public interest and taking into account development priorities. Both China and recipient countries should be interested in the commercial and economic viability of projects. And for the long-term development of BRI, Beijing and the governments of partner countries should be aware of all the risks and challenges and take measures to increase social, political, economic, security and environmental responsibility in the process of implementing BRI.

CONCLUSION

China's status as a rising superpower is driven by the country's dynamic economic growth, global economic achievements, consistent implementation of soft power, openness and a comprehensive reform policies. China's ambitious projects and concepts, taking on global responsibility and Beijing's desire to achieve a new geopolitical status through increased international influence, greatly contribute to strengthening China's regional and international prestige.

The purpose of this study was to cover the MENA direction of China's foreign policy, to show the growing influence of China in the new world order created after the USSR collapse and the expression of geopolitical ambitions and aspirations in the MENA region, which were further emphasized after the launch of the NSRI.

In March 2015, the Chinese government released the first policy document on the “*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*”, outlining the format of PRC - MENA cooperation. In January 2016, first basic official document reflecting China's interests in the MENA, the *White Paper* or “*1 + 2 + 3*” strategy,* was published, which mainly

covers three areas of cooperation. Within the framework of the latter, an agreement was reached between China and the AL member countries on the creation of *China-GCC FTA* and *Sino-Arab Joint Investment Fund*, as well as on the implementation of large projects with the AIIB participation.

It should be noted that the “*Two Wheel*” energy strategy combines bilateral cooperation in the field of oil and gas, low-carbon energy. Meanwhile, “*Two Wing*” calls for expanded cooperation in the fields of science, technology and finance.* For example, Israel's attractiveness to Beijing is due to its achievements in *research and development*, advanced scientific technologies, and military defense. As a rule, systemic and strategic investments made by Chinese government or government-affiliated companies (Ali Baba, Baidu, Huawei, Lenovo, etc.) are aimed at *start-ups* in Israel, as well as in technology, infrastructure, and finance. The latter can be diverted to the field of *security* and *dual-use technologies* and create integrated financial and ecosystems.*

The “*Two Wheel*” and “*Two Wing*” strategies will enable the establishment of business clusters in Chinese industrial parks (FTZ) in the MENA, increase trade flows and connect supply chains throughout the region. It is planned to combine the construction and operation of *four major Chinese industrial parks* in **Egypt**, the **UAE**, **Saudi Arabia** and **Oman** with neighboring ports, including the Khalifa port in Abu Dhabi, the port of Djibouti and the port of Said from Egypt and others, as part of the “**Industrial Park - Port Inter-connection**” project.

“Two-Wing” strategy; 3. Science, technology (nuclear power, space satellite / aerospace technology, and RE technology) and the construction of free trade zones and ports will form the ‘Two-Wheel’ strategy.

* Artificial intelligence, mobile communication, Internet of Things, space launch, satellite navigation, and innovate, nanotech investment and financing methods.

* Social and financial-banking, insurance, healthcare, education, etc.

* 1. Energy will form the nucleus; 2 Finance and trade, infrastructure will form a

As the 3rd largest re-export hub in the world after Singapore and Hong Kong, roughly 60% of China's trade passes through **Dubai's Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA)**, the **world's largest FTZ**, and Jebel Ali port for re-export. JAFZA was built from scratch in a top-down plan and is now a model for other similar zones that grow along the various NSR routes.

The PRC will develop FTZ in Maku in northern Iran, in Abadan (where the Shatt al-Arab flows into the PG) and on the Qeshm island in the Gulf itself. The development of the *South-North Corridor* (Chabahar-CA), the *South-West Corridor* (Chabahar and Bandar Abbas-Turkey and Azerbaijan) and the *Pakistan-Iran-Iraq-Syria "pilgrimage railway"* are some notable initiatives.

Turkey is an important geopolitical and geostrategic “bridge” in the “*Trans-Caspian Corridor Line*” or “*Middle / Iron Corridor*” for the NSR, which plays an important role in the development of new logistics projects to meet energy needs and ensuring interaction between East and West in terms of land, sea and air transport. Meanwhile, Turkey needs Chinese investments in the building of telecommunications, ports, airports, railways, tunnels, energy, machinery and other infrastructure-related areas.

Worth noting, that in July 2018, China and a number of AL countries¹⁷²² agreed to align their visions of national economy development and modernization with the BRI strategy as part of the “**Inclusive Cooperation Strategy**”. It was decided to relatively reduce the role of oil between China and the oil-producing countries and integrate the financial and banking systems and emerging “*Redback*” zones, where capital markets, banking and financial assets and transactions, payments will be based on the Chinese yuan as an international currency. According to some, China will soon

¹⁷²² Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, Djibouti and others. The development visions of these countries are mainly aimed at reducing the economy's dependence on oil as a result of the development of RES and the information industry.

become the world leader in *e-commerce* and *digital banking*, replacing the US.

As it is known, the main goal of BRI is to connect the transnational infrastructural communications between Western Europe and the APR by complementing the land and sea corridors. Connecting Chinese ports with many countries and sea lanes, Beijing is gradually focusing on a *continental-to-sea strategy* to gain access to the Pacific, control the South China Sea, and provide access the Indian Ocean through the Straits of Malacca. In essence, by “*breaking through*” US-controlled maritime communication routes and getting rid of its geopolitical vulnerability, Beijing intends to build its “**Great Sea Wall**” and reach the Indian and Pacific Oceans unhindered. Beijing's MSRI focuses on creating Chinese strongholds or “naval posts” with military or geopolitical influence along the Indian Ocean littoral, in the PG and the Mediterranean Sea, called a “**String of Pearls**” - similar to the “**Dual Use Logistics Facility**”. The construction of infrastructure projects (ports, airports, FTZ, etc.) along the “String of Pearls” is tied to Beijing's huge economic and trade ambitions and the consequent need for maritime communications (especially the import of vital energy sources) and geostrategic security of “**Choke Points**” (Djibouti, Gwadar, etc.).

The creation of the “**Gulf String of Pearls**” could greatly reduce Beijing's dependence on maritime communications, fostering economic integration processes between the West, South East and East Asia. The location of the deep-water port of Chabahar on the Indian Ocean in the direction of INSTC, thus, transit relations between Russia, Eastern Europe, CA and the Caucasus, on the one hand, and Southeast Asia, the Far East, the countries of Oceania and the PG on the other hand, are seen as significant advantages to the Gulf countries, particularly Tehran.

It should be noted that in order to ensure the security of its multibillion-dollar infrastructure investments along the entire “String of Pearls”, Beijing is deploying security and intelligence forces, navy

and combat units in a number of ports. **Djibouti** is the first Chinese naval base (officially a logistics facility for marine recreation and delivery) as part of the “String of Pearls” strategy. Djibouti, which is also known as “*the world's naval capital*”, in the 2000s became the largest stronghold on the African continent, where international forces and coalitions (including China) are concentrated to counter terrorist and international groups that threaten world economic communications. Perhaps in recent years, China's interest in Djibouti as a key seaport connecting Asia, Africa and Europe has been driven by its ambitions to take control of international sea lanes and ports.

Moreover, the **Iranian** island of **Kish** or the strategically important port of **Bandar-e-Jask**, which has been leased to China for a long time, as a base, would allow China not only to control the Fifth USN based in **Bahrain**, but together with a presence in the ports of Djibouti and Gwadar could increase China's positions in the Indian Ocean region. A comprehensive Sino-Iranian strategic pact could provide a Chinese military presence on the shores of Iran and Pakistan. The PLA will be able to deploy 5,000 troops in the PG region with the prospect of strengthening the Chinese navy in the region (increasing the number of Chinese personnel) to ensure safe transit of energy to China.

Beijing also sees **Israel** as a strategic outpost in its regional interests - a small but vital stopover under the BRI, connecting the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through the Gulf of Suez, as a land bridge connecting trade and energy routes from the Far East through Africa to the ME and further to Europe on profitable trade routes by land and sea. The construction of a railway line from Eilat to Ashdod connecting the Red and Mediterranean Seas, as well as the construction of a new port in Ashdod, will provide a safe alternative route to the Suez Canal. Beijing has already launched projects related to Israeli strategic ports, railways and other important structures. To ensure reliable access for Chinese commercial shipments from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, Beijing has adopted a dual-track

approach while expanding its interests in the Suez Canal corridor and following the overland route through Israel.

MSR is putting **Egypt** in the spotlight with the Suez Canal and a megaproject to build two parallel canals. Located at the junction of three continents, Egypt could become the capital of the NSR. Chinese companies provide a majority stake in the port of Piraeus in **Greece** and hold assets in the seaports of **Egypt** (Alexandria, Adabiya, Port Said), **Algeria** (Scherchel), **Turkey** (Amberlee) and **Italy** (Genoa and Naples) - all of which may be part of B&R's strategy. The further route involves the connection of trade routes with **Istanbul** (where railway tunnels already pass along the bottom of the Bosphorus), **Athens** (Greece), **Naples** (Italy), **Marseille** (France) and other Mediterranean cities that are part of the euro zone. From a military point of view, the addition of a new “*pearl*” in the Mediterranean in the form of the Greek seaport of **Piraeus** allows China to control maritime access to **Istanbul** and Black Sea ports in **Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, southern Russia** and **Georgia**.

The 3,000 km **CPEC** land transport corridor should connect Xinjiang with the Arabian Sea through Pakistani Kashmir in the China-run port of **Gwadar**, link the sea and land Silk Roads and develop not only its commercial value, but also the potential of the navy outpost overlooking the shipping lanes of the PG. Port of Gwadar cuts the distance between East African and PG ports to western China by more than four times the distance between eastern China and these regions through the Strait of Malacca and Indonesia.

Syria has also been involved in China's transport and logistics projects of the B&R strategy, in which, thanks to Chinese generous investments, the coastal regions of Syria can act as an “*industrial port*” connecting the PG, the Arabian, Red and Mediterranean Seas. The Mediterranean ports of **Tartus** and **Latakia** are of interest in terms of Chinese infrastructure, telecommunications, and energy projects and initiatives connecting Europe with China. Now there is talk

that *Tripoli* (Lebanon) may even become a terminal in the Chinese NSR project, paving the trade route from East Asia to Europe.

China is investing in ports along the Suez Canal from the Gulf of Aden to the Mediterranean Sea. Of the 49 countries that have signed or officially endorsed the BRI memorandum with China, 34 (almost 70%) are located off the coast of Africa, 16 in the West, 8 in the North and East, and 2 in the South. These include the following ports: *Djibouti* (Djibouti), *Sudan* (Sudan), *Said* and *Tevik* (Egypt), *Ain Sokhna* (Egypt), *Zarzis* (Tunisia) and *El Hamdania* (Algeria).

The study makes a remarkable comparison between two intellectual sports: *Chess* and *Chinese Go*. It is noted that if *Chess* teaches centrally calculating multi-step combinations and completely defeat the enemy by removing pieces from the board and freeing up "living space" for the winner, then *Go* (meaning "environment game") teaches the player the idea of a "strategic encirclement of the enemy". While the Western tradition values "decisive battle and heroism", Chinese strategy emphasizes the "subtlety, complexity of operations", as well as the "patient accumulation of tactical advantages". If *Chess* serves the idea of *absolute superiority* and *complete defeat* of the opponent, then *Go* teaches *relative superiority*, not allowing strategic emptiness: *the pieces remain on the board, but are deprived of the opportunity to maneuver*. This suggests that Beijing's SPS connects key Chinese naval bases, similar to the Go checkers, filling a vacuum.

As a result of the study of the B&R strategy, we have come to the conclusion that despite the continued advancement of the Chinese navy in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the partial success of the SPS, its practical implementation is limited by a number of geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic issues. Some expert circles, especially Western or pro-Western, point to a number of issues that have arisen as a result of the involvement and activity of Chinese

companies in the strategically sensitive areas¹⁷²³ of some B&R countries. For example, some political and expert circles in the US and Israel draw Israel's attention to the security risks associated with national strategic infrastructure (port, railway, metro, tunnel, etc.) and sensitive technologies and their military capabilities, which could be carefully examined by Beijing.¹⁷²⁴

In fact, there are conflicting views in the MENA countries on whether to expand or limit China's role in their political and economic life. As a rule, the cause of discontent and social tension is the so-called Chinese "neo-colonial policy" - the mass immigration of Chinese labor to countries in the region, restrictions imposed by Chinese entrepreneurs on labor law, lack of transparency and accountability in transactions, the scarcity of projects in the interests of the locals, as well as the capture of domestic markets and the large-scale exploitation of natural resources. It is known that almost all major mineral exploration and production contracts in the African continent fall to Chinese businessmen.

These include "debt traps",¹⁷²⁵ high interest rates on Chinese loans, environmental problems, low security standards, as well as loans for project revaluations, which are often accompanied by nepotism and kickbacks, with economic and political repercussions. There are fears that China is increasing its long-term influence over weak countries in the region through investment and non-repayable loans ("debt trap theory" or diplomacy), which often leads to the cancellation or delay of B&R projects.

¹⁷²³ Ports, airports, railways, highways, telecommunications, mining, energy infrastructure, etc.

¹⁷²⁴ The severance of US-China ties in the field of information technology and cyber security has served as a basis for stimulating Chinese investment in Israel.

¹⁷²⁵ The terms of Chinese loans and investments become very clear only when the recipient countries face a debt crisis. Beijing usually invests more in corrupt countries, which sometimes accompanied by "extreme exploitation, corruption and political interference".

The study also addressed security issues, particularly terrorism, that threaten the implementation of the B&R strategy. In the joint fight against these threats, Beijing is deepening cooperation with some countries in the region. Beijing is particularly concerned about militants operating in Iranian Kurdistan and Balochistan (Pakistan), which is squeezing the land and sea arteries of the NSR, as well as activities of ETIM fighters who have moved to Syria to join al-Qaeda and other extremist groups in the fight against Assad's government. The problem is that the spread of Islamic extremism from the ME to CA and Xinjiang could pose a serious threat not only to China's security along its western border, but also to peace and stability in South Asia. Perhaps that is why Beijing has tightened its grip on China's Xinjiang, home to some 22 million Sunni Muslims, including 10 million Uyghurs. Against the backdrop of growing Islamic radicalism and extremism in the ME and CA, Beijing seeks to prevent and limit the possible manifestations of Chinese Muslim activity, mainly by Uyghur separatists. Beijing is also sending military instructors to the region to set up joint counter-terrorism mechanisms. However, it is assumed that the adoption of the Anti-Terrorism Law,¹⁷²⁶ to expand self-defense and protect national interests outside China could damage China's reputation as a follower of the principle of non-interference and an unwavering advocate of peaceful settlement of disputes.

A comprehensive study of the topic shows that due to the policy of soft power, China has achieved tangible political and economic success in the MENA with minimal resources, especially without interference in internal affairs and conflicts. China's humanitarian aid to the MENA countries "*without ideological or political preconditions*" and multibillion-dollar investments, combined with a *soft* and *hard* strategy, not only protect Beijing's energy and trade inter-

ests in the region, but also effectively counter security challenges and threats such as Islamic extremism, piracy and transnational crime. It is undeniable that Chinese investments in the MENA also contribute to the economic development of the region, especially the recovery of the economies of countries in crisis or post-crisis (Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Beirut, etc.).

Mediation diplomacy likewise makes China more visible and authoritative, which, in addition to increasing its national and international prestige, helps to gain power and influence in a broader transformation of the regional balance of power. It also promotes its own economic interests and political influence in countries and regions previously dominated by some of its strategic competitors. Ultimately, it can be assumed that in the near future, the phasing out of its cautious stance aimed at protecting long-term access to MENA may lead Beijing to make a strategic decision to play a more decisive role in resolving regional disputes or to insist that no regional problem is resolved without China's participation.

China also continues to expand its influence in the MENA through public diplomacy, foreign aid and investment, cultural and educational exchanges, and interpersonal dialogue. Although it would be naive to think that the humanitarian aid and multibillion-dollar investments provided by China within the framework of the soft power are made at the expense of mutual expectations and self-interest, or without a "*hidden agenda*" behind them.

It should be noted that in practice, China manages not only to prudently avoid possible conflicts with US interests in the region, but also to use the Western-controlled maritime communications network, relying on the latter's security systems. At the same time, China's security policy is being militarized, accompanied by the deployment of a Chinese navy and military to ensure the implementation of energy and infrastructure projects at the MENA.

We believe that in order to achieve global governance, Beijing will have to continue to combine the strategy of soft and hard po-

¹⁷²⁶ This law obliges Beijing to take all necessary measures to suppress any action or behavior related to the "three evils" - terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.

wers, as it is impossible to effectively face certain challenges, threats, security risks in the region without the use of Chinese forces, naval expansion and construction of new military bases, especially in the context of the Sino-Indian or Sino-American geopolitical rivalry in the Indian Ocean and the MENA. At the same time, many experts believe that in order to reduce resistance to "Chinese rise", Beijing should not only pay special attention to strengthening its naval capabilities and pursuing interests in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, but also try to strengthen political and economic cooperation with US, India, ASEAN and MENA countries. It is indisputable that in the conditions of globalization of the world economy, ensuring the security of the sea or land communication between the states becomes possible only through cooperation, and not through traditional confrontation by force.

At the end of the study, we conclude that Beijing is pursuing regional dominance and the status of a powerful superpower through the implementation of the B&R Strategy, the most significant global initiative ever launched by China. By navigating freely from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, expanding its presence in the MENA and establishing strategic control over key strongholds along the "String of Pearls", China can shift the balance of power at the regional and global levels. It can be assumed that the B&R provides China with an unprecedented opportunity to influence global processes and actively participate in the formation of a multipolar world order while assuming a leading role. We therefore believe that, in spite of many difficulties, the MENA region, which is crucial to the implementation of Beijing's ambitious global projects and concepts, will remain vital both now and in the future.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. ABC - Agricultural Bank of China
2. ADB - Asian Development Bank
3. ADNOC - Abu Dhabi State National Oil Company
4. ADP - Abu Dhabi Ports
5. AEC - Asian-European Conference
6. AED - UAE Dirham
7. AI - Artificial Intelligence
8. AICTO - Arab Information and Communication Technology Organisation
9. AIIB - Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank
10. AKP/JDP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
11. AL - Arab League
12. AMU - Arab Maghreb Union
13. AOI - Arab Organization for Industrialization
14. APEC - Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
15. APR - Asia-Pacific region
16. APTA - Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement
17. ARF - ASEAN Regional Forum
18. ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations
19. ASEM - Asia-Europe Meeting
20. ASEZA - Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority
21. ASR - Ancient Silk Road
22. BAH - Booz Allen Hamilton
23. B&R - Belt and Road
24. BCIMEC - Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor
25. BCJIF - Bahrain-China Joint Investment Forum
26. BLA - Balochistan Liberation Army
27. BOC - Bank of China
28. BRI - Belt and Road Initiative
29. BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
30. BTK - Baku-Tbilisi-Kars
31. CA - Central Asia
32. CASCF - China-Arab States Cooperation Forum
33. CATIC - China's National Aero-Technology Import and Export Corporation
34. CCB - China Construction Bank
35. CCCC - China Communications Construction Company
36. CCCPC - Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

37. CCOEC - China National Overseas Economic Cooperation Corporation
38. CCP - Chinese Communist Party
39. CCPIT - China Council for the Promotion of International Trade
40. CCWAEC - China-Central and West Asia Economic Corridor
41. CDB - China Development Bank
42. CEN-SAD - Community of Sahel-Saharan States
43. CFC - Casablanca Finance City
44. CGCOC Group - CGC Overseas Construction Group Co., Ltd
45. CHEC - China Harbor Engineering Company
46. CIA - Central Intelligence Agency
47. CIC - China Investment Corporation
48. CICA - Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia
49. CICPEC - China-Indo-China Peninsula Economic Corridor
50. CIMC - China International Marine Containers Company
51. CIP - Changzhou Innovation Park
52. CITIC Group - China International Trust and Investment Corporation
53. CMC - Central Military Commission
54. CMP - China Merchants Port
55. CMREC - China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor
56. CNEC - China Nuclear Engineering Group Corp
57. CNNC - China National Nuclear Corp
58. CNODC - China National Petroleum Exploration and Development Corporation
59. CNOOC - China National Offshore Oil Corporation
60. CNPC - China National Petroleum Corporation
61. COSCO Group - China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company
62. CPC - Communist Party of China
63. CPEC - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
64. CRA - Contingent Reserves Agreement
65. CRBC - China Road and Bridge Corporation
66. CREC - China Railway Engineering Corporation
67. CSCEC - China State Construction Engineering Corporation
68. CSCL - China Shipping Container Lines
69. CSPs - Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships
70. CSR - Certificate Signing Request
71. CSTO - Collective Security Treaty Organization
72. CU - Customs Union
73. DB - Development Bank

74. DCP - Djibouti Container Port
 75. DEWA - Dubai Electricity and Water Authority
 76. DGCA - Directorate-General for Civil Aviation
 77. DIFTZ - Djiboutian International Free Trade Area
 78. DMP - Djibouti Multipurpose Port
 79. DP - Dubai Ports
 80. DPOC - Dar Petroleum Operating Company
 81. DSR - Digital Silk Road
 82. EAEU - Eurasian Economic Union
 83. EBSR - Economic Belt of Silk Road
 84. EDB - Eurasian Development Bank
 85. EEC - Eurasian Economic Community
 86. EGA - Emirates Global Aluminum
 87. EIA - Energy Information Administration
 88. EPC - Engineering, Procurement and Construction
 89. EPDRF - Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front
 90. ETIM - Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement
 91. EU - European Union
 92. EW - Electronic Warfare
 93. Eximbank of China - Export-Import Bank of China
 94. FDI - Foreign Direct Investment
 95. FELB - Far East Land Bridge
 96. FNL - National Liberation Front of Algeria (Front de libération nationale)
 97. FOCAC - Forum of China-Africa Cooperation
 98. FSA - Free Syrian Army
 99. FTA - Free Trade Agreement
 100. FTAs – Free Trade Areas
 101. FTZ - Free Trade Zone
 102. GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council
 103. GDP - Gross Domestic Product
 104. GES - Global Environment Service
 GLONASS - Global Navigation Satellite System
 105. GNA - Government of National Accord
 106. GNP - Gross National Product
 107. GNPOC - Greater Nile Petroleum Operation Company
 108. GPS - Global Positioning System
 109. G-8 - Group of Eight
 110. G7 - Group of Seven
 111. G-12 - Group of Twelve
 112. G-20 - Group of Twenty

113. GSR - Great Silk Road
 114. GTIIT - Guangdong Technion Israel Institute of Technology
 115. HLJC - High Level Joint Committee
 116. ICBC - Industrial and Commercial Bank of China
 117. ICC - International Cooperation Commission
 118. ICC - International Criminal Court
 119. ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross
 120. ICT - Information and Communication Technology
 121. IDF - Israel Defense Forces
 122. IEI - Iran Electronics Industries
 123. IGAD - Intergovernmental Authority on Development
 124. IISS - International Institute for Strategic Research
 125. IMF - International Monetary Fund
 126. INSTC - International North-South Transport Corridor
 127. IOG - Ismail Omar Guelleh
 128. IOR - Indian Ocean Region
 129. IPOs - Initial Public Offerings
 130. IPR - Indo-Pacific region
 131. IPS - Indo-Pacific Strategy
 132. IRCON - Indian Railway Construction Limited
 133. IRGC - Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
 134. IRI - Islamic Republic of Iran
 135. IS - Islamic State
 136. ISAF - International Security Assistance Force
 137. ISIL/ISIS - Islamic State in Syria and the Levant
 138. ISR - Iron Silk Road
 139. JAF - Jordanian Armed Forces
 140. JAFZA - Jebel Ali Free Zone
 141. JCPA - Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
 142. JCPDI - Jizan City for Primary and Downstream Industries
 143. JCPOA - Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
 144. JDP/AKP - Justice and Development Party
 145. JFS - Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
 146. JIF - Joint Investment Fund
 147. JOCIC - Jiangsu Overseas Cooperation and Investment Company
 148. KBSP - Khalifa bin Salman Port
 149. KCT - Khorfakkan Container Terminal
 150. KIZAD - Khalifa Abu Dhabi Industrial Zone
 151. KPFTZ - Khalifa Port Free Trade Zone
 152. KRG - Kurdistan Regional Government
 153. KWD - Kuwaiti Dinar

154.LAS - League of Arab States
 155.LNA - Libya National Army
 156.LNG - Liquefied Natural Gas
 157.ME - Middle East
 158.MEFPD - Middle East Foundation for Peace and Development
 159.MENA - Middle East and North Africa
 160.MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 161.MIC - 25 - Made in China - 2025
 162.MOFCOM - Ministry of Commerce
 163.MOOTW - Military Operations Other Than War
 164.MoU - Memorandums of Understanding
 165.MSR - 21st Century Maritime Silk Road
 166.MSRI - Maritime Silk Road Initiative
 167.MTC - Military-Technical Cooperation
 168.MW - Megawatts
 169.NA - North Africa
 170.NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 171.NBE - National Bank of Egypt
 172.NDB - New Development Bank
 173.NDRC - National Development and Reform Commission
 174.NDU - National Defense University
 175.NELB - New Eurasian Land Bridge
 176.NEOs - Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations
 177.NGSR - New Great Silk Road
 178.NOC - National Oil Corporation
 179.NSR - New Silk Road
 180.NSREB - New Silk Road Economic Belt
 181.NSS - National Security Strategy
 182.NUCA - New Urban Communities Authority
 183.OAPEC - Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
 184.OBOR - One Belt, One Road
 185.ODA - Official Development Aid
 186.OIC - Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
 187.OOC - Oman Oil Company
 188.OPEC - Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
 189.PAP - People's Armed Police
 190.PBoC - People's Bank of China
 191.PG - Persian Gulf
 192.PLA - People's Liberation Army
 193.PLAN - People's Liberation Army Navy
 194.PLA - N - PLA's Navy

195.PM - Prime Minister
 196.PPP - Purchasing Power Parity
 197.PRC - People's Republic of China
 198.PSA - Production Sharing Agreement
 199.QFZA - Qatar Free Zones Authority
 200.R&D - Research and Development
 201.RASEP - Raban Al-Safina for Energy Projects
 202.RCEP - Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
 203.RCJY - Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu
 204.RE - Renewable Energy
 205.RES - Renewable Energy Sources
 206.RF - Russian Federation
 207.RIC - Russia-India-China
 208.RMB - Renminbi
 209.ROA - Return-on-Assets
 210.ROI - Return on Investment
 211.RPA - Remotely Piloted Aircraft
 212.RT - Republic of Turkey
 213.RTA - Road and Transportation Authority
 214.SACF - Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum
 215.SAR - Syrian Arab Republic
 216.SARA - State Administration of Religious Affairs
 217.SC - South Caucasus
 218.SCCT - Suez Canal Container Terminal
 219.SCO - Shanghai Cooperation Organization
 220.SCZone - Suez Canal Economic Zone
 221.SDIC - State Development and Investment Corporation
 222.SEZ - Special Economic Zones
 223.SEZAD - Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm
 224.SGS - Saudi Geological Survey
 225.SINOPEC - China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation
 226.SIPG - Shanghai International Port Group
 227.SIZ - Special Industrial Zone
 228.SLBMs - Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles
 229.SLOCs - Sea Lines of Communication
 230.SOE - State-Owned Enterprises
 231.SNC - Syrian National Coalition
 232.SOMO - State Organization for Marketing of Oil
 233.SPs - Strategic Partnerships
 234.SPS - String of Pearls Strategy
 235.SR - Silk Road

236.SRCIC - Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce
 237.SRF - Silk Road Fund
 238.TAP - Transatlantic Partnership
 239.TAR - Trans-Asian Railway
 240.TAU - Tel Aviv University
 241.TCITR - Trans-Caspian International Transport Route
 242.TEU - Twentyfoot Equivalent Unit
 243.TIM - Turkistan Islamic Movement
 244.TIP - Turkistan Islamic Party
 245.TNC - Transitional National Council
 246.TPP - Trans-Pacific Partnership
 247.TSR - Trans-Siberian Railway
 248.SU - Soviet Union
 249.UAE- United Arab Emirates
 250.UASC - United Arab Shipping Company
 251.UK - United Kingdom
 252.UN - United Nations
 253.UNIFIL - United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
 254.UNSC - United Nation's Security Council
 255.US - United States
 256.USN - US Navy
 257.USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
 258.VC - Venture Capital
 259.WB - World Bank
 260.WFP - World Food Program
 261.WHO - World Health Organization
 262.WTO - World Trade Organization
 263.XUAR - Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between PRC and MENA Countries

1.	On August 1, 1956, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Syria
2.	On September 24, 1956, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Yemen
3.	On August 25, 1958, PRC established diplomatic relations with Iraq
4.	On March 22, 1971, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Kuwait
5.	On August 4, 1971, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Turkey
6.	On August 16, 1971, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Iran
7.	On November 9, 1971, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Lebanon
8.	On April 7, 1977, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Jordan
9.	On May 25, 1978, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Oman
10.	On November 1, 1984, the PRC established diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates
11.	On July 9, 1988, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Qatar
12.	On November 20, 1988, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Palestine
13.	On April 18, 1989, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Bahrain
14.	On July 21, 1990, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia
15.	On January 24, 1992, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Israel
16.	On May 30, 1956, the PRC established diplomatic relations with Egypt

Table 2. BRI-Participating Economies and Economic Corridors

	Economy	Economic Corridor		Economy	Economic Corridor
1	PRC		37	Singapore	CICPEC
2	Bangladesh	BCIMEC	38	Thailand	CICPEC
3	Bhutan	BCIMEC	39	Timor-Leste	CICPEC
4	India	BCIMEC	40	Viet Nam	CICPEC
5	Myanmar	BCIMEC	41	Belarus	CMREC
6	Nepal	BCIMEC	42	Estonia	CMREC
7	Sri Lanka	BCIMEC	43	Latvia	CMREC
8	Albania	CCWAEC	44	Lithuania	CMREC
9	Armenia	CCWAEC	45	Mongolia	CMREC
10	Azerbaijan	CCWAEC	46	Russian Federation	CMREC
11	Bosnia and Herzegovina	CCWAEC	47	Afghanistan	CPEC
12	Bulgaria	CCWAEC	48	Pakistan	CPEC
13	Croatia	CCWAEC	49	Bahrain	CPEC
14	Georgia	CCWAEC	50	Kuwait	CPEC
15	Islamic republic of Iran	CCWAEC	51	Oman	CPEC
16	Iraq	CCWAEC	52	Qatar	CPEC
17	Israel	CCWAEC	53	Saudi Arabia	CPEC
18	Jordan	CCWAEC	54	UAE	CPEC
19	Kyrgyzstan	CCWAEC	55	Yemen	CPEC
20	Lebanon	CCWAEC	56	Czech Republic	NELB
21	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	CCWAEC	57	Hungary	NELB
22	Republic of	CCWAEC	58	Slovak	NELB

	Moldova			Republic	
23	Montenegro	CCWAEC	59	Slovenia	NELB
24	Palestinian Authority or West Bank and Gaza Strip	CCWAEC	60	Poland	NELB
25	Romania	CCWAEC	61	Kazakhstan	NELB
26	Serbia	CCWAEC	62	Ukraine	NELB
27	Syrian Arab Republic	CCWAEC	63	Egypt	MSR
28	Tajikistan	CCWAEC	64	Ethiopia	MSR
29	Turkey	CCWAEC	65	Indonesia	MSR
30	Turkmenistan	CCWAEC	66	Kenya	MSR
31	Uzbekistan	CCWAEC	67	Maldives	MSR
32	Brunei Darussalam	CICPEC	68	Morocco	MSR
33	Cambodia	CICPEC	69	New Zealand	MSR
34	Lao People's Democratic Republic	CICPEC	70	Panama	MSR
35	Malaysia	CICPEC	71	Korea	MSR
36	Philippines	CICPEC	72	South Africa	MSR

Source: OECD Business and Finance Outlook

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

ՉԻՆԱՍՏԱՆԻ «ՄԵԿ ԳՈՏԻ, ՄԵԿ ՃԱՆԱՊԱՐՀ» ՆԱԽԱԶԵՌՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՄԵՐՁԱՎՈՐ ԱՐԵՎԵԼՔՈՒՄ ԵՎ ՀՅՈՒՄԻՍԱՅԻՆ ԱՖՐԻԿԱՅՈՒՄ

Չինաստանի Ժողովրդական Հանրապետության (ՉԺՀ)^{*} իբրև աճող գերտերության, կարգավիճակը պայմանավորված է երկրի ցուցաբերած տնտեսության դինամիկ աճով, համաշխարհային նշանակության տնտեսական նվաճումներով, «փափուկ ուժի», «բաց դռների» ու համապարփակ բարեփոխումների քաղաքականության հետևողական կենսագործմամբ: ՉԺՀ-ի հավակնոտ նախագծերն ու հայեցակարգերը, գլոբալ պատասխանատվության ստանձնումը, միջազգային ազդեցության ընդլայնման միջոցով աշխարհաքաղաքական նոր կարգավիճակի հասնելու Պեկինի հավակնություններն ու ծավալապաշտական նկրտումներն ակնհայտորեն նպաստում են Չինաստանի թե՛ տարածաշրջանային, և թե՛ միջազգային հեղինակության բարձրացմանը:

Սույն հետազոտությունը լուսաբանում է ՉԺՀ-ի արտաքին քաղաքականության մերձավորարևելյան ուղղությունը, ցույց տալիս ԽՍՀՄ-ի փլուզումից հետո ստեղծված նոր աշխարհակարգում Պեկինի ազդեցության մեծացումը և աշխարհաքաղաքական հավակնությունների արտահայտումը

Մերձավոր Արևելքի և Հյուսիսային Աֆրիկայի (ՄԱՀԱ) երկրներում^{*}:

Ուսումնասիրության հիմնական նպատակն է ցույց տալ Չինաստանի «Նոր Մետաքսի ճանապարհի» (ՆՄՃ) նախաձեռնության իրականացման գործում ՄԱՀԱ-ի կենսական և ռազմավարական նշանակությունը՝ իբրև Ասիան, Աֆրիկան և Եվրոպան միացնող ցամաքային և ծովային ուղիների կարևոր հանգույցի:

Աշխատանքում հանգամանալից ուսումնասիրվել են ՆՄՃ-ի շրջանակներում էներգետիկ, ենթակառուցվածքային, տրանսպորտային ու հեռահաղորդակցության, ֆինանսական, առևտրի, ներդրումային և գիտատեխնիկական ոլորտներում իրականացվող չինական նախագծերը Պարսից Ծոցի¹⁷²⁷, Լեանտի¹⁷²⁸, Հյուսիսային Աֆրիկայի¹⁷²⁹ երկրներում, ինչպես նաև Եթովպիայում, Ջիբութիում ու Եմենում:

Հետազոտության ընթացքում փորձ է արվել նաև ցույց տալ ՄԱՀԱ-ում ՆՄՃ-ի իրագործման տարբեր նշանակալի ժամանակահատվածներում տեղի ունեցած փոխակերպումները, կանխատեսել դրանց հետևանքները նոր աշխարհակարգի ձևավորման գործընթացների վրա: Նշվածից բխում են

^{*} ՄԱՀԱ-ում ընդգրկված են հետևյալ երկրները՝ Ալժիր, Բահրեյն Զիբութի, Եգիպտոս, Իրան, Իրաք, Իսրայել, Հորդանան, Քուվեյթ, Լիբանան, Լիբիա, Մարոկկո, Օման, Կատար, Սաուդյան Արաբիա, Սիրիա, Թունիս, Թուրքիա, Արաբական Միացյալ Էմիրություններ (ԱՄԷ), Պաղեստին և Եմեն, երբեմն նաև՝ Եթովպիա ու Սուդան:

¹⁷²⁷ Իրան, Իրաք են ՕՀԽ-ի անդամ-երկրները՝ Սաուդյան Արաբիա, ԱՄԷ, Օման, Կատար, Քուվեյթ, Բահրեյն:

¹⁷²⁸ Իսրայել, Թուրքիա, Սիրիա, Լիբանան, Հորդանան:

¹⁷²⁹ Եգիպտոս, Լիբիա, Ալժիր, Թունիս, Մարոկկո, Սուդան:

Հայաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականության համար համապատասխան քայլերը, մասնավորապես Երևանի հնարավոր մասնակցությունը ՆԱՏՈ-ի ծրագրերին՝ Եվրասիական տնտեսական միության (ԵՏՄ) հետ համագործակցության և ՄԱՀԱ-ի տրանսպորտային միջանցքների կառուցման համատեքստում: Որպես պատմական ՆԱՏՈ-ի կարևոր մաս, հատվելով Հյուսիս-Հարավ և Արևելք-Արևմուտք աշխարհաքաղաքական վեկտորների խաչմերուկում, Հայաստանը ևս կարող է ՄԱՀԱ-ի տրանսպորտային միջանցքների կառուցման շրջանակներում հաջողությամբ համագործակցել Պեկինի հետ: Օգտագործելով Չինաստանի ՆԱՏՈ-ի և Ռուսաստանի ԵՏՄ-ի միջև հաստատված համագործակցությունը, Երևանը՝ իբրև ԵՏՄ անդամ, կարող է նպաստել ՆԱՏՈ-ի և ԵՏՄ-ի միջև համագործակցության խորացմանը, և իր երկաթուղային ու ավտոմայրուղային նախագծերը ներառել ՆԱՏՈ-ի նախագծերում¹⁷³⁰:

Այս առումով խիստ կարևոր ու արդիական ենք համարում ուսումնասիրել ՆԱՏՈ-ի ռազմավարության դերն ու ազդեցությունը գլոբալացվող և բազմաբևեռ նոր աշխարհակարգի ձևավորման գործում, աշխարհաքաղաքական ու աշխարհատնտեսական գործընթացներում, ՆԱՏՈ-ի իրագործումը ՄԱՀԱ-ում, ինչպես նաև այն խոչընդոտներն ու դժվար

¹⁷³⁰ 2015թ. Շանհայյան համագործակցության կազմակերպության (ՇՀԿ) գազաթնաժողովում կարևորվեցին կազմակերպության շրջանակներում միասնական տրանսպորտային համակարգ ստեղծելու հեռանկարները, և քննարկվեցին ԵՏՄ-ի ու ՄԳՄԸ-ի համագործակցության ծրագրերը: Այս համատեքստում կարևոր է Իրանի ու ԵՏՄ-ի միջև կնքված և 2019թ. հոկտեմբերի 27-ից ուժի մեջ մտած ազատ առևտրի գոտու ստեղծման վերաբերյալ միջանկյալ համաձայնագիրը:

ությունները, որոնց Պեկինը բախվում է նշված նախաձեռնության կենսագործման ճանապարհին:

Թեմայի ուսումնասիրվածության արդի վիճակը Հայաստանում և արտերկրում ներկայացնելուց առաջ, նախ՝ պետք է նշել, որ Հայաստանում ՉԺՀ-ի արտաքին քաղաքականության հետազոտությունը նոր գիտաճյուղ է: Այսօր այդ թեման միջազգայնագետների, քաղաքագետների, արևելագետների և պատմաբանների հետաքրքրության շրջանակներում է:

ՉԺՀ-ի ՄԱՀԱ-ի քաղաքականության օտարերկրյա հայտանի հետազոտողներից են **Իցիակ Շիչորը** (Yitzhak Shichor), **Քրիս Զամբելիսը** (Chris Zambelis), **Ջոան Քալաբրեզին** (John Calabrese), **Ջոնաթան Ֆուլթոնը** (Jonathan Fulton), **Քրիստինա Լինը** (Christina Lin), **Ջոն Օլթերմանը** (Jon Alterman) և այլք¹⁷³¹,

¹⁷³¹ **Yitzhak Shichor**, “The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy 1949-1977”, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1979; **Chris Zambelis**, “Bottom of Form Sino-Turkish Strategic Partnership: Implications of Anatolian Eagle 2010”, China Brief, Vol. 11, Issue 1, The Jamestown Foundation, 14.01.2011; **John Calabrese**, “The Risks and Rewards of China’s Deepening Ties with the Middle East”, China Brief, Vol. 5, Issue 12, The Jamestown Foundation, 24.05.2005; **Jonathan Fulton**, “China-Saudi Arabia Relations Through the ‘1+2+3’ Cooperation Pattern”, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Vol. 14, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020; **Christina Lin**, “The New Silk Road China’s Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East”, Policy Focus No. 109, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2011; **Dan Blumenthal**, “Providing Arms China and the Middle East”, Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 12, No 2, Spring 2005; **Jon B. Alterman**, “China’s Soft Power in the Middle East. Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States”, The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 11.03.2009; **Mordechai Chaziza**, “The Significant Role of Oman in China’s Maritime Silk Road Initiative”, Contemporary Review of the Middle East, No. 6(1), 2019; **Yoram Evron**, “Between Beijing and Washington: Israel’s Technology Transfers to China”, Journal of East Asian Studies, Vol. 13, Issue 3, December 2013; **Emma Scott**, “China’s Silk Road Strategy: A Foothold in the Suez, But Looking to Israel?”, China Brief, Vol. 15, Issue 19, The Jamestown Foundation, 10.10.2014; **James M. Dorsey**, “China and the

չինացի հետազոտողներից են **Գուանգ Փանը** (Guang Pan), **Վանգ Յին** (Wang Yi), **Լեյ Ուն** (Lei Wu)¹⁷³² և այլք, ուսումնասիրողներից՝ **Մ. Պախտովան**, **Ի. Բատիրշինը** և ուրիշներ¹⁷³³:

Middle East: Venturing into the Maelstrom”, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2019.

¹⁷³² **Guang Pan**, “China’s Success in the Middle East”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 4, December 1997; **Lei Wu**, “The Middle East Oil and the Sino-US Relations”, *The Middle East Oil and the Sino-US Relations*, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol. 3, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009; **Yao Kuangyi**, “Arab Countries: Reform and Development of China-Arab Relations”, *China International Studies (CIS)*, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, Winter 2005; **Jin Liangxiang**, “Energy First. China and the Middle East”, *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Spring 2005; **Hu Jianyi**, “Energy Development in China and Its Cooperation with the Gulf Area”, A Presentation Collection for Seminar on “International Energy Security and Cooperation”, June 24-25, SIIS Publication, Shanghai, China, 2004; **Mo Chen**, “Exploring Economic Relations between China and the GCC States”, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011; **Qian Xuewen**, “Sino-Arab Economic and Trade Cooperation: Situations, Tasks, Issues and Strategies”, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011; **Wu Sike**, “The Strategic Docking between China and Middle East Countries under the ‘Belt and Road’ Framework”, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015; **Yufeng Mao**, “China’s Interests and Strategy in the Middle East and Arab World”, in Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell (Eds.) *China and the Developing*. Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, NY, 2007.

¹⁷³³ **Пахомова М.А.**, «Особенности политической культуры Китая в источниках по политике КНР в отношении государств Арабского Востока (2014-2019)», Востоковедение: История и методология, Вып. 1, ИВ РАН, М., 2019; **Батыршин И.М.**, «Место Стран Совета Сотрудничества Арабских Государств Персидского Залива на Меняющемся Рынке Нефти», Востоковедный Сборник, Институт Ближнего Востока, М., 2006; **Глазунов О., Савченко Ал.**, «Особенности и приоритеты внешней политики Китая в странах Ближнего Востока», Издательский дом «Хорс», 2018; **Дегтерев Денис**, «Китай – Африка: важные аспекты отношений», *Мировая экономика и международные отношения*, № 5, ИМЭМО, РАН, 2005; **Задонский С.М.**, «Современное состояние ирано-китайских отношений», *Ближний Восток и современность: Сборник статей, Ин-т изучения Израиля и Ближнего Востока*; Отв. ред. М.Р. Арунова, А.О. Филоник, М., 2003; **Ильминская М.Ф.**, «Регион Персидского залива

Հինաստանի մերձավորարևելյան քաղաքականության և ՄԱՀԱ-ում չինական «Նոր/Մեծ Մետաքսի ճանապարհների» մասին հայ արևելագետ-պատմաբանները և միջազգայնագետները լույս են ընծայել որոշ գրքեր և հոդվածներ¹⁷³⁴:

как зона геополитических интересов Китая», Серия Международные отношения, № 1, Вестник РУДН, 2015; **Комаров И.**, «Китайско-Израильские Отношения: Проблемы, Достижения, Перспективы», *История Международных Отношений и Мировой Дипломатии. Вестник Нижегородского университета им. Н.И. Лобачевского*, 2013, № 2(1), Нижегородский журнал международных исследований, Нижний Новгород, Осень-зима 2009; **Михайличенко К.М.**, «Роль Африки в инициативе Китайской Народной Республики 'Один Пояс и Один Путь'», *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, Том 20, № 1, 2018.

¹⁷³⁴ **Мартirosyan А.**, «На Великом Шелковом пути», Ереван, 1998; **Harutyunyan А.**, “China-Turkey Strategic Partnership in the Modern Period”, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2013; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “China’s Soft Power Policy in the Middle East and North Africa”, Collection of Papers from the Fifth International Conference on Chinese Studies ‘The Silk Road’, Organized by Confucius Institute in Sofia, 30-31 May 2019, Confucius Institute in Sofia, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Chinese ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa”, Казанский (Приволжский) федеральный университет, Институт международных отношений, Институт Конфуция КФУ, 2019; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Middle East and North Africa as a Part of Chinese String of Pearls Strategy”, *Orbis Linguarum*, Vol. 18, Issue 3, Езиков свят, Филологический факультет при ЮЗУ “Неофит Рилски”, Благоевград, България, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “The Lion and the Dragon: A New Stage in Sino Iranian Strategic Partnership”, *Modern International Studies*, *International Science Journal*, Issue: 2, Vol. 3, Kazan, 2021; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and Turkey’s Middle Corridor”, *Международный научный журнал "Современные востоковедческие исследования"*, Казань, *International Science Journal “Modern Oriental Studies”*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Kazan, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “China and Israel: Evolving Relationship Within the Belt and Road Initiative”, *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue 3, Shanghai International Studies University, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “The Arab Spring as a New Challenge and a New Opportunity for China’s Middle East Policy”, *Armenian Political Science Journal*, 1(1), Center for Perspective Studies and Initiatives, Yerevan, 2014; **Խաչատրյան Ա.**, «Հին-թուրքական հարաբերությունների տրանսֆորմացիոն շրջանն ու ուղղորդական հարցի չեզոքացումը (20-րդ դարի վերջ 21-րդ դարի սկիզբ)», «Տարածաշրջան և աշխարհ» գիտավերլուծական հանդես, № 4, Երևան, 2020; **Խաչատրյան Ա.**, «Ուղղորդական հարցը՝ ՉԺՀ արտաքին հարաբերությունների կառավարման մարտահրա-

Չինաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականությանը և «Նոր Մետաքսի ճանապարհի» ուսումնասիրությանն են նվիրված **Ա. Հարությունյանի** մենագրությունները և հոդվածները¹⁷³⁵: Վերջին շրջանում հայ հեղինակների կողմից հրապարակվել են մի շարք հոդվածներ, որոնցում բազմաթիվ այլ հարցերի հետ միասին անդրադարձ է կատարվել նաև ՉՏՀ-ի քաղաքականության ուսումնասիրությանը Հարավային Կովկասում, մասնավորապես Հայաստանում¹⁷³⁶:

վերների համատեքստում», «Այլընտրանք» գիտական հանդես, Երևան, հուլիս-սեպտեմբեր, 2020; **Խաչատրյան Ա.**, «Երեք չարիքների գործոնը ՉՏՀ կառավարման և անվտանգության մարտահրավերների համատեքստում», «Այլընտրանք» գիտական հանդես, Երևան, ապրիլ-հունիս, 2020:

¹⁷³⁵ **Harutyunyan A.**, “Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative: Challenges and Opportunities”, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, 2017; **Harutyunyan A.**, “From China’s Concept of Peaceful Rise to the Chinese Great Dream”, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “On Some Obstacles and Challenges to the Implementation of the Chinese Initiative One Belt, One Road”, Orbis Linguarum, Vol. 17, Issue 2, Езиков свят, Филологическая факультет при ЮЗУ “Неофит Рилски”, Благоевград, България, 2019; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Chinese One Belt, One Road and the European Countries”, Manas: Cultures and Societies of South, East and Southeast Asia: Traditionalism, Dynamics and Globalization, the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (CELC), Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2018; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Chinese Policy of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy”, The Countries and Peoples of the Near and Middle East, Vol. 31, IOS NAS RA, Yerevan, 2018.

¹⁷³⁶ **Манасерян Т.**, «Китай-Армения: Возрождение традиций великого Шелкового Пути», Այլընտրանք եռամսյա գիտական հանդես, Երևան, 2013; **Егiazарян А.**, «Геоэкономические приоритеты Китая в Кавказско-каспийско-центральноазиатском регионе», 21-ый ВЕК, No. 3(5), НОФ Норавапк, Երևան, 2004; **Бабаян Д.**, «Роль и место Южного Кавказа в геополитической повестке Китайской Народной Республики (II) », 21-й ВЕК, No. 2 (18), НОФ Норавапк, Երևան, 06.09.2011; **Агаджанян М.**, «Китай на Южном Кавказе: экономическая экспансия и политический прагматизм», Научное Общество Кавказоведов, 14.01.2013; **Harutyunyan Aghavni**, “Sino-Armenian Relationships and Armenia’s Participation in the Chinese Initiative of Economic Belt of Silk Road”, Collection of Research Papers of the Visiting Program for Young Sinologists, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), Shanghai, 2017.

Սակայն Չինաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականության և այդ համատեքստում ՄԱՀԱ-ում նրա քաղաքականության էությանը, փոխակերպումներին և դրսևորումներին տարբեր փուլերում, գործիքակազմին և անընդհատ «թարմացվող» թեզերի ուսումնասիրությանը նվիրված ամբողջական հետազոտություն մեզանում դեռևս չկա: Այս հանգամանքը ևս կարևորում է նմանատիպ աշխատանքի իրականացումը:

Ուսումնասիրությունն իրականացվել է նկարագրական (դեսկրիպտիվ), պատմաքննական, պատմահամեմատական և բովանդակային (կոնտենտ անալիզ) վերլուծության մեթոդների կիրառմամբ: Այս եղանակները հնարավորություն են ընձեռել հիմնավոր ներկայացնելու խնդրո առարկա թեման: Կիրառվել է հատկապես փաստաթղթերի ավանդական վերլուծության և բովանդակային (կոնտենտ անալիզ) վերլուծության մեթոդը՝ բացահայտելու հետազոտվող նյութի բովանդակությունը և վեր հանելու բոլոր հիմնախնդիրները:

Աշխատանքը շարադրելիս պահպանվել են պատմագիտության հիմնական սկզբունքները՝ պատմականությունը, գիտական օբյեկտիվությունը, համակողմանիությունը, նյութերի համադրման մոտեցումները:

Հայտնի է, որ ԽՍՀՄ-ի փլուզման հետևանքով երկբևեռ աշխարհակարգի վերացումը մի շարք տարածաշրջաններում հանգեցրեց աշխարհաքաղաքական և աշխարհատնտեսական նոր իրողությունների՝ մրցակցային հնարավորություն ընձեռելով միաբևեռ, այնուհետև աստիճանաբար ձևավորվող բազմաբևեռ աշխարհակարգում ազդեցության և գերակա-

յության հավակնություններ ունեցող երկրների համար: Այդ երկրների շարքում անվիճարկելի առաջատարի՝ ՉԺՀ-ի համար, երկարաժամկետ ռազմավարական հեռանկարներից ելնելով, կարևորվեց ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրների հետ հարաբերությունների հարաճուն ու նպատակային ընդլայնումը: Իբրև աճող գերտերություն և առանձնահատուկ տեղ զբաղեցնելով գլոբալ կառավարման համակարգում՝ Պեկինն աստիճանաբար ամրապնդեց իր ազդեցությունը խոշորագույն տերությունների միջև երկարատև մրցակցության գոտու վերածված ՄԱՀԱ-ի նկատմամբ՝ իր համար անհրաժեշտ էներգետիկ ռեսուրսներ ապահովելու նպատակով:

Հարկ է նկատել, որ նախքան 1980-ականները ՉԺՀ-ի արտաքին քաղաքական օրակարգում ՄԱՀԱ-ն առաջնահերթություն չունեց: 1950-ականների առաջին կեսին Չինաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականության մեջ հատուկ տեղ էին զբաղեցնում կոմունիստական գաղափարախոսությունը, հակակապիտալիստական, հակազաղախության և ազգային-ազատագրական շարժումները, ինչպես նաև «խաղաղ համագոյակցության հինգ սկզբունքները»¹⁷³⁷, որոնք լայնորեն ողջունվում էին ՄԱՀԱ-ում՝ նպաստելով փոխադարձ դիվանագիտական հարաբերությունների հաստատմանը: 1950-ականների վերջերին մարքսիզմ-լենինիզմի գաղափարախոսության դիրքերից նահանջի և ՉԺՀ-ի ղեկավար շրջանակներում ազգայնական ու հակախորհրդային ուլտրաձախ մի-

¹⁷³⁷ Տարածքային ամբողջականության և ինքնիշխանության փոխադարձ հարգանք, ագրեսիայի բացառում, ներքին գործերին «չմիջամտություն», հավասարություն և փոխշահավետություն, խաղաղ համագոյակցություն:

տումների դրսևորման հետ կապված, Պեկինը համակրանք ցուցաբերեց տարածաշրջանի թե՛ հակաարևմտյան, և թե՛ հակախորհրդային շարժումներին:

1960-ականների առաջին կեսին, ԱՄՆ-ի և ԽՍՀՄ-ի միջև Մառը պատերազմի երկբևեռ մրցակցությունից խուսափելու նպատակով, Պեկինն առաջ քաշեց «երեք աշխարհների» տեսությունը կամ «երրորդ աշխարհի» հետ համերաշխության ռազմավարությունը,¹⁷³⁸ որում առանձնապես կարևորվեց ՄԱՀԱ-ի դերը՝ իբրև Պեկինի ազդեցության ընդլայնման և մառիզմի տարածման հենակետ:

Մինչդեռ 1966-1976թթ. «Մշակութային հեղափոխության» ընթացքում Պեկինի միջազգային մեկուսացումն ու ՄԱՀԱ-ի հետ դիվանագիտական կապերի սահմանափակումը, քաղաքական ազդեցության ու ռազմական հզորության բացակայությունը, տնտեսության անբավարար զարգացածությունը բացասաբար անդրադարձան ՉԺՀ-ի ՄԱՀԱ-ի հարաբերությունների վրա: Ավելին, 1970-1976թթ., ԽՍՀՄ-ի «*ռազմական սպառնալիքով*» պայմանավորված, ՄԱՀԱ-ում Պեկինի քաղաքականությունը խորհրդային «*հեգեմոնիզմի*» դեմ պայքարի ուղղվածություն ստացավ:

Իրադրությունը փոխվեց 1976թ. «Մշակութային հեղափոխության» ավարտից և 1978թ. ՉԺՀ-ի Կոմկուսի կենտկոմի

¹⁷³⁸ Ըստ այդ տեսության՝ աշխարհի բոլոր երկրները բաժանվում էին երեք խմբի՝ *գերտերություններ*, *փոքր ու միջին զարգացած երկրներ* (արևմտեվրոպական և «սոցիալիստական ճամբարի» երկրների հիմնական մասը), *երրորդ աշխարհի՝ զարգացող երկրներ*: ԱՄՆ-ի և ԽՍՀՄ-ի հեգեմոնիայի դեմ պայքարում ՉԺՀ-ն փորձում էր զբաղեցնել «երրորդ աշխարհի»՝ Ասիայի, Աֆրիկայի և Լատինական Ամերիկայի ժողովուրդների գաղափարական և քաղաքական առաջնորդի դերը:

պատմական նստաշրջանից հետո, երբ Պեկինի արտաքին քաղաքականության գաղափարախոսական ուղղվածությունն իր տեղը զիջեց գործնական դիվանագիտությանը՝ Դեն Սիաոպինի նախաձեռնությամբ երկրի արդիականացման, բարեփոխումների և «բաց դռների» քաղաքականության կենսագործման համար միջազգային բարենպաստ միջավայր ստեղծելու նպատակով: Այդուհետ արդիականացման ուղին բռնած ՉԺՀ-ն իր «*թշնամիներին ու բարեկամներին*», այդ թվում՝ ՄԱՀԱ-ում, սկսեց տարրորոշել ոչ թե Վաշինգտոնի և Մոսկվայի հետ ունեցած փոխհարաբերությունների բնույթով, այլ երկրի բարեփոխումների ուղղությամբ միջազգային աջակցություն ապահովելու հրամայականով:

1980-ականներին ՉԺՀ-ՄԱՀԱ-ի հարաբերություններում ակտիվություն նկատվեց երկու «*բարենպաստ հանգամանքի*»՝ ՄԱՀԱ մեծ քանակությամբ չինական զենքի ներմուծման և տարածաշրջանից ՉԺՀ աննախադեպ ծավալների էներգակիրների արտահանման շնորհիվ: Տնտեսական որոշակի ակտիվություն ցուցաբերելով հանդերձ, Պեկինն այնուամենայնիվ որոշակի քաղաքական պասիվություն պահպանեց՝ տարածաշրջանում ընդունելով ԱՄՆ-ի և Խորհրդային Միության գերակա դիրքերը: Սակայն ԽՍՀՄ փլուզումից հետո ձևավորված միաբնեռ աշխարհակարգն ու աշխարհաքաղաքական նոր իրողությունները բարենպաստ հող ստեղծեցին ՄԱՀԱ-ում ՉԺՀ-ի ազդեցության ու գերակայության հավակնությունների դրսևորման համար:

1990-ականների սկզբից ՉԺՀ-ն վերածվեց նավթային ներկրողի, իսկ 2017թ. պաշտոնապես դարձավ հում նավթի

խոշորագույն ներկրողն աշխարհում՝ շրջանցելով ԱՄՆ-ին: Հակառակ էներգիայի աղբյուրների տարրորոշման ուղղությամբ գործադրած ջանքերին՝ Չինաստանն իր նավթային պահանջարկի 50%-ը սկսեց ապահովել ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրների հաշվին, որոնց էներգետիկ հատվածում չինական նավթային ընկերությունների համար ամուր դիրքերի ապահովումը դարձավ արտաքին քաղաքականության գերակա ուղղություններից մեկը:

ՉԺՀ-ի և ՄԱՀԱ-ի միջև քաղաքական, տնտեսական, մշակութային ու գիտատեխնիկական կապերն առավել ինտենսիվ ու արդյունավետ բնույթ կրեցին 20-21-րդ դարերի սահմանագծին: ՉԺՀ-ի արտաքին քաղաքական օրակարգում կարևորվեց ռազմավարական և համապարփակ գործընկերության հաստատումը ՄԱՀԱ-ի, այդ թվում՝ էներգետիկ հետաքրքրություն չներկայացնող երկրների հետ, երբ տարածաշրջանը դիտվեց ոչ միայն որպես էներգակիրների ներկրման աղբյուր, այլև չինական պատրաստի արտադրանքի արտահանման և կապիտալ ներդրումների հսկայածավալ շուկա:

Հարկ է նկատել, որ ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրների հետ հարաբերությունների սերտացմանը նպաստեցին այնպիսի գործոններ, ինչպիսիք են՝ նորագույն պատմության շրջանում Չինաստանի *գաղութային անցյալի բացակայությունը*, «*փափուկ ուժի*» քաղաքականության ու «*չմիջամտության*» (կամ նվազագույն միջամտության) սկզբունքի հմուտ կիրառումը, զարգացման «*չինական մոդելի*» գրավչությունն ու արդյունավետությունը:

Նշենք, որ 2000-ականների կեսերին Պեկինն ազգային

մշակույթի և երկրի նպատակային երկարաժամկետ քաղաքականության զարգացման համատեքստում ձևակերպեց չինական առանձնահատկություններով *«փափուկ ուժի»* սեփական հայեցակարգը: Այն հիմնված էր սոցիալիզմի հիմնական արժեքների (ժամանակակից մարքսիզմ) և չինական ավանդական մշակույթի, հատկապես՝ հին կոնֆուցիականության վրա: Չինաստանի ակադեմիական և դեկլար շրջանակների ուշադրության կենտրոնում հայտնվեցին նաև *«կոշտ և փափուկ ուժի համադրության»*, ինչպես նաև արտաքին քաղաքականության մեջ «փափուկ ուժի» գործիքակազմի զարգացման ու կիրառման հիմնահարցերը:

Երկրի սահմաններից դուրս «փափուկ ուժի» քաղաքականության իրականացման, երկրի դերն ու հեղինակությունը բարձրացնելու, ինչպես նաև դրական կերպար ձևավորելու նպատակով Պեկինն ապավինում է նաև հանրային դիվանագիտությանը: Այն իրականացվում է գաղափարական և քաղաքական քարոզչամեքենայի, տեղեկատվական հրապարակումների, միջազգային հեռարձակումների, մշակութային փոխանակումների, կրթամշակութային կենտրոնների համաշխարհային ցանցի՝ Կոնֆուցիուսի ինստիտուտների գործունեության միջոցով: Վերջիններիս առաքելությունը չինարենի ուսուցման միջոցով չինական արվեստը, կրթությունը, գիտությունը և մշակույթն արտասահմանում հասու դարձնելը և տարածելն է:

«Պեկինյան կոնսենսուսը» կամ *Չինաստանի զարգացման մոդելը*՝ որպես ազատական կամ շուկայական տնտեսություններն ու ավտորիտար քաղաքական համակարգերը

միավորող զարգացման նոր այլընտրանքային մոդել, լայն տարածում գտավ հիմնականում ՄԱՀԱ-ի ավտորիտար կամ կիսաավտորիտար երկրների շրջանում: Այն գրավիչ էր հատկապես արևմտյան ֆինանսական ինստիտուտների աջակցությունից օգտվող ազատ շուկայական տնտեսությունները և արևմտյան ժողովրդավարական համակարգերը միավորող մոդելի՝ *«Վաշինգտոնի կոնսենսուսի»* ֆոնին¹⁷³⁹: Պատահական չէ, որ ԱՄՆ-ի հետ թե՛ դաշնակցային, և թե՛ վերջինիս հետ խորին հարաբերություններ ունեցող ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրների զգալի մասը Չինաստանը համարում են տարածաշրջանում Վաշինգտոնի ազդեցությանը հակադրող գործոն: Այդ երկրները Պեկինի հետ կիսում են նաև Արևմուտքի ազդեցությունն իրենց ներքին գործերին սահմանափակելու և պարտադրվող ժողովրդավարական բարեփոխումներն իրենց ազգային ներքին իրողությունների ու արժեհամակարգերի տրամաբանության մեջ իրականացնելու ընդհանուր ձգտումը: Թերևս այդ պատճառով Պեկինը ներքուստ հավանություն է տալիս ԱՄՆ-ի ճնշամիջոցների շրջանցմանն ուղղված ՄԱՀԱ երկրների ջանքերին: Մինչդեռ *«Պեկինյան կոնսենսուսը»*՝ իբրև *«փափուկ ուժի»* արդյունավետ գործիք, պահպանում է իր

¹⁷³⁹ «Վաշինգտոնի կոնսենսուսը» 1989թ. Համաշխարհային բանկի, ԱՄՆ-ի ֆինանսների նախարարության և Արժույթի միջազգային հիմնադրամի (ԱՄՀ) կողմից սահմանված ստանդարտների շարք է՝ 1980-ականներին տնտեսական և ֆինանսական ճգնաժամ ապրող Լատինական Ամերիկայի երկրների տնտեսությունների վերականգնման նպատակով: Այն արտահայտում է 1960-70-ականների տնտեսական զարգացման դիրքից ստացված մոդելից (պետության կողմից տնտեսության կառավարման ակտիվ միջամտության քաղաքականություն) այդ երկրների հրաժարումն ու զարգացած պետությունների օրինակով ընդհանուր տնտեսական քաղաքականության սկզբունքների ընդունումը:

գրավչությունը՝ հակառակ ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրների՝ արդիակա-նացման ընթացքով և ինստիտուցիոնալ կառույցների զար-գացման մակարդակով չինական մոդելին զգալիորեն զիջելու փաստին:

Պեկինի ազդեցությունը ՄԱՀԱ-ում կարող է ամրապնդ-վել հատկապես 2013թ. ՉԺՀ-ի նախագահ Սի Ծինպինի նա-խաձեռնած «Նոր Մետաքսի ճանապարհի» (ՆՄՃ) աշխարհա-քաղաքական ու աշխարհատնտեսական ռազմավարության կենսագործման շնորհիվ: Աշխարհագրորեն ՆՄՃ-ի *ցամա-քային* («Մետաքսի ճանապարհի տնտեսական գոտի»՝ ՄՃՏԳ) և *ծովային* («21-րդ դարի Ծովային Մետաքսի ճանա-պարհ»՝ ԾՄՃ) միջանցքները* հատվում են ՄԱՀԱ-ում՝ Ասիան, Աֆրիկան և Եվրոպան կապող ցամաքային և ծովա-յին երթուղիների խաչմերուկներում: ՄՃՏԳ-ն կազմված է հա-ղորդակցային **երեք ուղուց** (հյուսիսային, միջին և հարա-վային) և ցամաքային տնտեսական **չորս միջանցքից**¹⁷⁴⁰, իսկ ԾՄՃ-ը՝ տնտեսական **երկու միջանցքից**¹⁷⁴¹: ՆՄՃ-ի նպա-տակն է ենթակառուցվածքային խոշոր նախագծերի¹⁷⁴² միջո-

* Համառոտ՝ «Մեկ գոտի, մեկ ճանապարհ»՝ ՄԳՄՃ:

¹⁷⁴⁰ Չինաստան-Մոնղոլիա-Ռուսաստան տնտեսական միջանցք (CMREC), Նոր Եվրասիական ցամաքային կամրջի տնտեսական միջանցք (NELB), Չինաստան Կենտրոնական Ասիա Արևմտյան Ասիա տնտեսական մի-ջանցք (CCWAEC), Չինաստան Պակիստան տնտեսական միջանցք (CPEC):

¹⁷⁴¹ Չինաստան-Հնդկաստան թերակղզու տնտեսական միջանցք (CICPEC) և Բանգլադեշ-Չինաստան-Հնդկաստան-Մյանմար տնտեսական միջանցք (BCIM-EC):

¹⁷⁴² ՆՄՃ-ի կամ ՄԳՄՃ-ի նախաձեռնությունը նպատակ ունի Ասիան և Եվրոպան միացնելու ՄԱ-ում, Աֆրիկայում և Կենտրոնական Ասիայում առկա միջմայրցամաքային ավտոմայրուղիների, երկաթուղիների, խողո-

ցով միավորել ծովային¹⁷⁴³ և ցամաքային¹⁷⁴⁴ մի շարք տարա-ծաշրջաններ և ենթաշրջաններ՝ նոր մակարդակի բարձրաց-նելով համաասիական և եվրասիական համագործակցու-թյունը:

Պեկինն ակնկալում է, որ ՆՄՃ-ի նախաձեռնությանն անդամակցող ավելի քան 70 երկրի խոշոր ենթակառուց-վածքային նախագծերում իրականացվող բազմամիլիարդա-նոց ներդրումներն ի զորու են մեծացնելու Չինաստանի դերը համաշխարհային տնտեսության մեջ՝ երկրի համար նոր շու-կաների մուտք և էներգետիկ ռեսուրսների նկատմամբ հա-սանելիություն ապահովելով, նաև խթանելու Չինաստանի արևմտյան և ծայրամասային այլ նահանգների տնտեսական զարգացումը: ՆՄՃ-ն կարող է ծառայել նաև «*Թվային Մե-տաքսի ճանապարհի*», «*Չինական երազանքի*» և «*Պատ-րաստված է Չինաստանում 2025*» ազգային հայեցակարգերի կենսագործմանը:

2015թ. մարտին Չինաստանի կառավարությունը հրա-պարակեց ՉԺՀ-ՄԱՀԱ համագործակցության ձևաչափը նա-խանշող «*Մետաքսի ճանապարհի տնտեսական գոտու և 21-րդ դարի Ծովային Մետաքսի ճանապարհի համատեղ կառուցման տեսլականի ու գործողությունների*» վերաբերյալ առաջին քաղաքական փաստաթուղթը: 2016թ. հունվարին հրապարակվեց ՄԱՀԱ-ում Չինաստանի շահերն արտացոլող առաջին հիմնարար պաշտոնական փաստաթուղթը՝ «Մայի-

վակաշարերի, նավահանգիստների, օդանավակայանների և ենթակառուց-վածքային այլ նախագծերի միջոցով:

¹⁷⁴³ Հարավ-չինական ծով, Պարսից ծոց և Միջերկրական ծով:

¹⁷⁴⁴ Կենտրոնական ու Արևմտյան Ասիա, Արևելյան ու Արևմտյան Եվրոպա:

տակ գիրքը» կամ «1+2+3» ռազմավարությունը:¹⁷⁴⁵ Վերջինիս շրջանակներում Արաբական պետությունների լիգայի (ԱՊԼ) անդամների և ՉԺՀ-ի միջև պայմանավորվածությունն ձեռք բերվեց ՉԺՀ-ՄՀԽ-ի (Մոնցի համագործակցության խորհուրդ) Ազատ առևտրի գոտու ստեղծման, չին-արաբական համատեղ ներդրումային հիմնադրամի և Ասիական ենթակառուցվածքների ներդրումային բանկի (ԱԵՆԲ)¹⁷⁴⁶ մասնակցությամբ խոշոր նախագծերի իրականացման վերաբերյալ: Նշենք, որ ՄԳՄԸ-ով նախատեսվող և իրականացվող ցամաքային և ծովային տրանսպորտային միջանցքների աջակցության նպատակով ստեղծվել են մի շարք ֆինանսական ինստիտուտներ:

Հարկ է նշել, որ «*Երկանիվ*» էներգետիկ ռազմավարությունը համատեղում է երկկողմ համագործակցությունը նավթագազային և ցածր ածխածնային էներգետիկայի բնագավառում: Մինչդեռ «*Երկթև*» կոչ է անում ընդլայնել համագործակցությունը գիտության, տեխնոլոգիաների և ֆինանսների ոլորտում (արհեստական ինտելեկտ, բջջային կապ, իրերի ինտերնետ, տիեզերական արձակուրդ, արբանյակային նավիգացիա, նորարարություն, ֆինանսավորման մեթոդներ և

¹⁷⁴⁵ Այն ընդգրկում է համագործակցության երեք հիմնական ոլորտ՝ 1) *էներգետիկան* կազմում է միջուկը; 2) *ֆինանսները*, առևտուրն ու ենթակառուցվածքները՝ «*երկթև*» ռազմավարությունը, 3) *գիտությունը և տեխնիկան* (միջուկային էներգիա, տիեզերական արբանյակ/ օդատիեզերական տեխնոլոգիա և վերականգնվող էներգիայի տեխնոլոգիական ոլորտներ) և ազատ առևտրի արդյունաբերական գոտիների ու նավահանգիստների կառուցումը՝ «*երկանիվ*» ռազմավարությունը:

¹⁷⁴⁶ ՄԱՀԱ-ի մի շարք երկրներ դարձել են ԱԵՆԲ-ի (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank AIIB) հիմնադիր անդամ:

այլն): Այս առումով Պեկինի համար հետաքրքրություն է ներկայացնում հատկապես Իսրայելը՝ հետազոտության և զարգացման ոլորտում (Research and Development) ձեռք բերված նվաճումներով, առաջատար գիտական տեխնոլոգիաներով ու ռազմական պաշտպանական համալիրով: Որպես օրենք՝ չինական կառավարական կամ կառավարությանն առնթեր ընկերությունների (Alibaba Group, Baidu, Huawei, Lenovo և այլն) իրականացրած համակարգային և ռազմավարական ներդրումներն ուղղված են Իսրայելի նորաստեղծ ընկերություններին (startup) և տեխնոլոգիական, ենթակառուցվածքային, ֆինանսական ոլորտներին: Վերջիններս կարող են վերահղվել դեպի անվտանգային ու երկակի օգտագործման տեխնոլոգիաների ոլորտ՝ ստեղծելով ինտեգրված ֆինանսական ու էկոհամակարգեր (սոցիալական և ֆինանսաբանկային գործունեություն, ապահովագրություն, առողջապահություն, կրթություն և այլն):

«*Երկանիվ*» և «*Երկթև*» ռազմավարությունը թույլ կտա ՄԱՀԱ-ում չինական արդյունաբերական պարկերում (ազատ առևտրի գոտի) բիզնես կլաստերներ ստեղծել, մեծացնել առևտրի հոսքերը և կապակցել ողջ տարածաշրջանի մատակարարման շղթաները: Նախատեսվում է «*արդյունաբերական պարկ և նավահանգիստ փոխկապակցում*» ծրագրի ներքո համատեղել Եգիպտոսում, ԱՄԷ-ում, Մաուրիտանիայում և Օմանում չինական չորս խոշոր արդյունաբերական պարկի կառուցումն ու շահագործումը հարևան՝ Աբու Դաբիի՝ Խալիֆա, Օմանի՝ Դուբայ, Եգիպտոսի՝ Սաիդ և Ջիբութիի համանուն նավահանգիստների հետ:

ԶԺՀ-ն հիմնում է ազատ առևտրի գոտիներ Մակուում՝ Իրանի հյուսիսում, Պարսից ծոցի ափին՝ Աբադանում (որտեղ Շաթալ-Արաբը թափվում է Պարսից ծոց) և Քեշմ կղզում՝ բուն ծոցում: Զարգացման կարևոր նախագծեր են Հարավ-Հյուսիս միջանցքը (Չաբահար-Կենտրոնական Ասիա), Հարավ-Արևմուտք միջանցքը (Չաբահար և Բանդար Աբբաս-Թուրքիա և Ադրբեջան) և Պակիստան-Իրան-Իրաք-Սիրիա «ուխտագնացության երկաթուղին»:

Թուրքիան՝ որպես կարևոր աշխարհաքաղաքական և աշխարհառազմավարական «կամուրջ», ՄԳՄՃ-ի «Անդրկասպյան միջանցք»-ի կամ «Միջին/Երկաթյա միջանցք»-ի կառուցման ճանապարհին, կարևոր դեր է խաղում Արևելքի ու Արևմուտքի միջև էներգետիկ փոխադրումների, ինչպես նաև ցամաքային, ծովային ու օդային հաղորդակցությունների ապահովման, լոգիստիկ նախագծերի կենսագործման առումով: Անկարան չինական նոր ներդրումներ է ակնկալում թուրքական նավահանգիստների, օդանավակայանների, երկաթուղիների, թունելների, էներգետիկայի, ինժեներական, հեռահաղորդակցման և ենթակառուցվածքների հետ կապված ոլորտներում:

Սիրիան ևս ընդգրկվել է Չինաստանի ՄԳՄՃ-ի ռազմավարության տրանսպորտային և լոգիստիկ նախագծերում, որոնցում չինական շոալ ներդրումների շնորհիվ Սիրիայի ափամերձ շրջանները կարող են Պարսից ծոցը, Արաբական, Կարմիր և Միջերկրական ծովերը միմյանց կապող «արդյունաբերական նավահանգստի» դեր խաղալ: Միջերկրածովյան Տարտուս և Լաթաքիա (Սիրիայում ռուսական ռազմահանգը-

վանները) նավահանգիստները մեծ հետաքրքրություն են ներկայացնում Եվրոպան Չինաստանի հետ կապող չինական ենթակառուցվածքների, հեռահաղորդակցությունների և էներգետիկ ծրագրերի ու նախաձեռնությունների տեսանկյունից:

Չինաստանը ներդրումներ է կատարում Ադենի ծոցից Սուեզի ջրանցքով դեպի Միջերկրական ծովի ափամերձ գծի երկայնքով ձգվող նավահանգիստներում: Չինաստանի հետ ՄԳՄՃ-ի շրջանակներում հուշագիր ստորագրած կամ պաշտոնապես իրենց աջակցությունը հայտնած 49 երկրից 34-ը (գրեթե 70%) սփռված են Աֆրիկայի ափերին, որոնցից 16-ը՝ Արևմուտքում, 8-ը՝ Հյուսիսում ու Արևելքում, 2-ը՝ Հարավում: Վերջիններս ներառում են Ջիբութի (Ջիբութի), Սուդան (Սուդան), Սաիդ ու Թնիկ (Եգիպտոս), Աին Սոխնա (Եգիպտոս), Զարգիս (Թունիս) և Էլ-Համդանիա (Ալժիր) նավահանգիստները:

2018թ. հուլիսին Չինաստանն ու ԱՊԼ-ի մի շարք երկրներ¹⁷⁴⁷ «Ներառական համագործակցության ռազմավարության» շրջանակներում պայմանավորվեցին իրենց *ազգային տնտեսությունների զարգացման և արդիականացման տեսլականները* ներդաշնակեցնել ՄԳՄՃ-ի ռազմավարության հետ: Որոշվեց հնարավորինս նվազեցնել ԶԺՀ-ի և ՄԱ-ի նավթարդյունահանող երկրների միջև նավթի դերը և ինտեգրել

¹⁷⁴⁷ Եգիպտոս, Սաուդյան Արաբիա, ԱՄԷ, Կատար, Բահրեյն, Օման, Հորդանան, Ջիբութի և այլն: Այս երկրների զարգացման տեսլականները հիմնականում միտված են վերականգնվող էներգիայի աղբյուրների և տեղեկատվական արդյունաբերության զարգացման արդյունքում նավթից տնտեսության գերկախվածությունը նվազեցնելուն:

Ֆինանսաբանկային համակարգերն ու զարգացող «Redback» գոտիները, որտեղ կապիտալի շուկաները, բանկային և ֆինանսական ակտիվներն ու գործարքները, վճարումները հիմնված կլինեն չինական յուանի՝ որպես միջազգային արժույթի վրա: Որոշ կարծիքների համաձայն՝ ՉԺՀ շուտով կստանձնի նաև էլեկտրոնային առևտրի (ecommerce) և թվային բանկային գործերի (digital banking) համաշխարհային առաջատարի դերը՝ փոխարինելով ԱՄՆ-ին:

Ինչպես հայտնի է, ՆՄՃ-ի գլխավոր նպատակն է ցամաքային և ծովային միջանցքների փոխլրացման միջոցով միմյանց կապել Արևմտյան Եվրոպայի և Ասիական-խաղաղօվկիանոսյան տարածաշրջանի միջև անդրազգային ենթակառուցվածքային հաղորդակցությունները: Չինական նավահանգիստները կապելով բազմաթիվ երկրների ու ծովային գոտիների հետ, Պեկինն աստիճանաբար կենտրոնանում է *մայրցամաքայինից ծովային ռազմավարության* վրա՝ Խաղաղ օվկիանոս մուտք ապահովելու, Հարավչինական ծովը հսկողության տակ առնելու և Մալակկա նեղուցով Հնդկական օվկիանոս ելք ապահովելու նպատակով: Գործնականում, «Ճեղքելով» ԱՄՆ-ի վերահսկողության տակ գտնվող ծովային հաղորդակցության ուղիներն ու ձերբագատվելով աշխարհաքաղաքական խոցելիությունից, Պեկինը մտադիր է կառուցել իր «**Մեծ Ծովային պատն**» ու անարգել դուրս գալ դեպի Հնդկական և Խաղաղ օվկիանոսներ:

ԾՄՃ-ի ռազմավարությունն իրականացվում է ծովային հաղորդակցության գծերի երկայնքով Հնդկական օվկիանոսի ավերին, ինչպես նաև Պարսից ծոցում և Միջերկրական ծո-

վում ռազմական կամ աշխարհաքաղաքական ազդեցությամբ չինական հենակետեր կամ «ռազմածովային դիրքեր» ստեղծելու միջոցով, որը ստացել է «*Մարգարտի շղթա*» անվանումը՝ միաժամանակ նույնացվելով «*Երկակի նշանակությամբ լոգիստիկ հանգրվաններ*ի» հետ: «Մարգարտի շղթայի» երկայնքով ենթակառուցվածքային նախագծերի (նավահանգիստներ, օդանավակայաններ, ազատ առևտրի գոտիներ և այլն) ստեղծումը պայմանավորված է Պեկինի հսկայական տնտեսական ու առևտրային ծավալապաշտության և այստեղից բխող՝ ծովային հաղորդակցության ուղիների (հատկապես կենսական նշանակություն ունեցող էներգակիրների ներկրման) և «*Ճնշման կետեր*ի» (Զիբուրի, Գվադար և այլն) աշխարհառազմավարական անվտանգության ապահովման անհրաժեշտությամբ:

Ծոցի երկրներից կազմված «*Ծոցի Մարգարտի շղթայի*» ստեղծումը կարող է մեծապես նվազեցնել ծովային հաղորդակցության ուղիներից Պեկինի կախվածությունը՝ խթանելով Արևմտյան, Հարավարևելյան ու Արևելյան Ասիաների միջև տնտեսական ինտեգրացիոն գործընթացները: Նշենք նաև, որ Հնդկական օվկիանոսում Իրանի խորջրյա Չաբահար նավահանգստի դիրքը Հյուսիս-հարավ միջազգային տրանսպորտային միջանցքի (INSTC) ուղղությամբ, մի կողմից՝ Ռուսաստանի, Արևելյան Եվրոպայի, Հյուսիսային, Կենտրոնական Ասիայի և Կովկասի, մյուս կողմից՝ Հարավարևելյան Ասիայի, Հեռավոր Արևելքի, Օվկիանիայի և Պարսից ծոցի երկրների միջև տարանցիկ հնարավորություններով զգալի առավելություն կապահովեն Ծոցի երկրներին, մասնավոր-

րապես Թեհրանին:

Իր բազմամիլիարդանոց ենթակառուցվածքային ներդրումների անվտանգությունը «Մարգարտի շղթայի» ողջ երկայնքով ապահովելու նպատակով Պեկինը մի շարք նավահանգիստներում անվտանգային ու հետախուզական ուժեր, նավատորմ և մարտական նշանակության ջոկատներ է տեղակայում: Ջիբութին «Մարգարտի շղթայի» ռազմավարության շրջանակներում չինական **ծովային առաջին ռազմահանգրվանն** է*: «Աշխարհի ծովային մայրաքաղաք» համարվող Ջիբութին 2000-ականներից դարձել է աֆրիկյան մայրցամաքի ծովային հաղորդակցություններին սպառնալիք ներկայացնող ահաբեկչական խմբավորումների դեմ պայքարի նպատակով ձևավորված միջազգային ուժերի ու կռալիցիաների (այդ թվում՝ չինական) գլխավոր հենակետը: Թերևս վերջին տարիներին միջազգային ծովուղիների և նավահանգիստների նկատմամբ վերահսկողություն հաստատելու հավակնություններով էր պայմանավորված Ջիբութիի՝ իբրև Ասիան, Աֆրիկան և Եվրոպան միմյանց կապող առանցքային ծովային հանգույցի հանդեպ Չինաստանի դրսևորած հետաքրքրությունը:

Ավելին, չինական կողմին երկարաժամկետ վարձակալության տրամադրված Իրանի Կիշ կղզին կամ ռազմավարական կարևորագույն Բանդար-Է-Ջասկ նավահանգիստը՝ իբրև հենակետ, Պեկինին թույլ կտա ոչ միայն վերահսկել Բահրեյնում տեղակայված ԱՄՆ-ի հինգերորդ նավատորմը,

* Պաշտոնապես ծովային հանգստի և մատակարարման համար նախատեսված լոգիստիկ կառույց է:

այլև, Ջիբութիի և Գվադարի (Պակիստան) նավահանգիստներում ներկայության ապահովման հետ մեկտեղ, կմեծացնի Չինաստանի դիրքերը Հնդկական օվկիանոսի տարածաշրջանում: Չին-իրանական համապարփակ ռազմավարական դաշնագիրը կարող է նաև չինական ռազմական ներկայությունն ապահովել Իրանի և Պակիստանի ափերին: ՉԺՀ-ի ժողովրդական ազատագրական բանակը (PLA) 5,000 զինծառայողի տեղակայման հնարավորություն կստանա Պարսից ծոցի շրջանում՝ տարածաշրջանում չինական ռազմածովային ուժերն ամրապնդելու հեռանկարով և չինական անձնակազմի քանակը մեծացնելու հնարավորությամբ, որոնք կապահովեն տարանցիկ էներգափոխադրումների անվտանգությունը դեպի ՉԺՀ:

«Մարգարտի շղթա» ռազմավարության մեջ կարող է ընդգրկվել նաև Իսրայելը՝ իբրև Հնդկական օվկիանոսը և Միջերկրական ծովը կապող ցամաքային կամուրջ, ինչպես նաև Հեռավոր Արևելքից մինչև Աֆրիկա ու Մերձավոր Արևելք (ՄԱ), այնուհետև դեպի Եվրոպա՝ ցամաքային և ծովային առևտրային ու էներգետիկ ուղիները կապող կենսական խաչմերուկ: Կարմիր և Միջերկրական ծովերը միացնող Էյլաթից Աշդոդ երկաթգծի, ինչպես նաև Աշդոդում նոր նավահանգստի կառուցումը կապահովի անվտանգ այլընտրանքային երթուղի դեպի Սուեզի ջրանցք: Պեկինն արդեն գործարկել է Իսրայելի նավահանգիստների, երկաթգծերի և ռազմավարական նշանակության այլ կարևոր կառույցների հետ կապված նախագծեր:

Աշխատանքում ուշագրավ համեմատություն է արվում

ինտելեկտուալ երկու սպորտաձևի՝ *շախմատի* և չինական *գոյի* միջև: Նշվում է, որ եթե շախմատը սովորեցնում է կենտրոնացված կերպով հաշվարկել բազմաքայլ կոմբինացիաները և թշնամուն ամբողջությամբ հաղթել՝ տախտակից խաղաքարերի հեռացման և հաղթողի համար «կենսական տարածք» ազատելու միջոցով, ապա չինական գոն (ինչը նշանակում է «շրջակա միջավայրի խաղ») խաղացողին սովորեցնում է թշնամու ռազմավարական շրջապատման գաղափարը: Մինչ արևմտյան ավանդույթը գնահատում է «*վճռական ճակատամարտն ու հերոսապատումները*», չինական ռազմավարության մեջ շեշտը դրվում է գործողությունների նրբության, բարդության, ինչպես նաև մարտավարական առավելությունների համբերատար կուտակման վրա: Եթե *շախմատը* ծառայում է բացարձակ գերազանցության և հակառակորդի լիակատար պարտության գաղափարին, ապա *գոն* սովորեցնում է հարաբերական գերազանցություն՝ թույլ չտալով ռազմավարական դատարկություն. խաղաքարերը մնում են տախտակի վրա, բայց զրկված են մանևրելու հնարավորությունից: Այստեղից կարելի է ենթադրել, որ Պեկինի «Մարգարտի շղթայի» ռազմավարությունը *գոյի* խաղաքարերի նմանությամբ միմյանց է կապում ԶԺՀ-ի ռազմածովային առանցքային հենակետերը՝ լրացնելով դաշտում առաջացած վակուումը:

Այնուհանդերձ, ՄԳՄՃ-ի ռազմավարության ուսումնասիրության արդյունքում եկել ենք այն հետևության, որ հակառակ Խաղաղ և Հնդկական օվկիանոսներում չինական նավատորմի շարունակվող առաջխաղացմանն ու «Մարգարտի

շղթայի» ռազմավարության մասնակի հաջողությանը, վերջինիս գործնական իրականացումը սահմանափակվում է մի շարք աշխարհաքաղաքական, աշխարհառազմավարական և աշխարհատնտեսական գործոններով:

Խոսքը հատկապես ՄԳՄՃ-ի նախաձեռնությանը մասնակից որոշ երկրների *ռազմավարական առումով զգայուն ոլորտներում*¹⁷⁴⁸ չինական ընկերությունների ներգրավման և գործունեության արդյունքում առաջացած մի շարք խնդիրների մասին է: Օրինակ՝ ԱՄՆ-ի և Իսրայելի քաղաքական ու փորձագիտական որոշ շրջանակներ Թեյ Ավիվի ուշադրությունը հրավիրում են չինական ընկերությունների կողմից ազգային ռազմավարական նշանակության ենթակառուցվածքների և զգայուն տեխնոլոգիաների ու դրանց ռազմական կարողությունների մանրակրկիտ հետազոտվելու հետ կապված անվտանգային ռիսկերին¹⁷⁴⁹:

ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրներում նաև իրենց քաղաքական և տնտեսական կյանքում Զինաստանի դերի ընդլայնման կամ սահմանափակման վերաբերյալ իրարամերժ կարծիքներ են հնչում: Որպես օրենք, դժգոհության և սոցիալական լարվածության հիմք է ծառայում այսպես կոչված չինական «նեոգաղութատիրական քաղաքականությունը»՝ չինական աշխատուժի զանգվածային ներգաղթը տարածաշրջանի երկր-

¹⁷⁴⁸ Նավահանգիստներ, օդանավակայաններ, երկաթգծեր, ավտոմայրուղիներ, հեռահաղորդակցություններ, լեռնարդյունաբերություն, էներգետիկ ենթակառուցվածքներ և այլն:

¹⁷⁴⁹ Տեղին է նշել, որ Իսրայելում չինական ներդրումների խթանման հիմք է ծառայել տեղեկատվական տեխնոլոգիաների և կիրառական տեխնոլոգիաների ներդրումը ԱՄՆ-ԶԺՀ կապերի խզումը:

ներ, աշխատանքային օրենսդրության մեջ չինական ձեռնարկատերերի մտցրած սահմանափակումները, գործարքներում թափանցիկության ու հաշվետվողականության բացակայությունը, տեղաբնիկների շահերից բխող նախագծերի սակավությունը, ներքին շուկաների գրավումն ու բնական պաշարների լայնամասշտաբ շահագործումը: Օրինակ՝ Աֆրիկյան մայրցամաքում հանքանյութերի հետախուզման և արդյունահանման գրեթե բոլոր հիմնական պայմանագրերը բաժին են ընկնում չինացի գործարարներին:

Խոսքը նաև չինական վարկերի բարձր տոկոսադրույքների, հարուցված էկոլոգիական խնդիրների, անվտանգության ցածր ստանդարտների, ինչպես նաև նախագծերի վերազնահատման վերաբերյալ տրամադրվող վարկերի մասին է, որոնք հաճախ ուղեկցվում են նեպոտիզմով և ատկատով՝ կանխադրված տնտեսական և քաղաքական հետևանքներով: Առկա է մտավախություն, որ Չինաստանը մեծացնում է իր երկարաժամկետ ազդեցությունը տարածաշրջանի թույլ երկրների վրա՝ ներդրումների և մարման ոչ ենթակա վարկերի տրամադրման միջոցով («պարտքերի ծուղակի» դիվանագիտություն)¹⁷⁵⁰, որի պատճառով ՄԳՄԸ-ի հետ կապված որոշ նախագծեր հաճախ չեղարկվում կամ հետաձգվում են:

Ինչ վերաբերում է ՄԳՄԸ-ի ռազմավարության իրական-

¹⁷⁵⁰ Չինական վարկերի և ներդրումների վերաբերյալ պայմանները հաճախ պարզվում են միայն այն դեպքում, երբ ստացող երկրները բախվում են պարտքային ճգնաժամին: Պեկինը սովորաբար մեծ ներդրումներ է իրականացնում կոռումպացված երկրներում, որոնք երբեմն ուղեկցվում են շահագործման, կոռուպցիայի և անգամ քաղաքական միջամտության տարրերով:

նացմանը սպառնացող անվտանգային, մասնավորապես ահաբեկչությանն առնչվող խնդիրներին, ապա վերջիններիս դեմ համատեղ պայքարի նպատակով Պեկինը խորացնում է համագործակցությունը տարածաշրջանի որոշ երկրների հետ: Պեկինին մտահոգում է հատկապես ՄՃՏԳ-ի և ԾՄՃ-ի զարկերակները «սեղմող» Իրանական Քրդստանի և Բելուջիստանի (Պակիստան) տարածքներում գործող զինյալների, ինչպես նաև Բ. Ասադի կառավարության դեմ պայքարում «ալ Կաիդա» և ծայրահեղական այլ կազմակերպությունների միանալու նպատակով Սիրիա տեղափոխված «Արևելյան Թուրքեստանի իսլամական շարժման» (ETIM) մարտիկների գործունեությունը: Խնդիրն այն է, որ ՄԱ-ից Կենտրոնական Ասիա (ԿԱ) և Չինաստանի Սինձյան Ույղուրական Ինքնավար Մարզ իսլամական ծայրահեղականության ալիքի տարածումը կարող է լուրջ սպառնալիք ստեղծել ոչ միայն ՉԺՀ-ի անվտանգությանը՝ վերջինիս արևմտյան սահմանի երկայնքով, այլև Հարավային Ասիայի խաղաղությանն ու կայունությանը: Թերևս այդ պատճառով Պեկինը խստացրեց իր վերահսկողությունը Սինձյանի նկատմամբ, որտեղ բնակվում են մոտ 22 մլն սուննի մուսուլման, այդ թվում՝ 10 մլն ույղուր: ՄԱ-ում և ԿԱ-ում իսլամական արմատականության և ծայրահեղականության աճի ֆոնի վրա Պեկինը ձգտում է կանխել և սահմանափակել չին մուսուլմանների, գլխավորապես՝ ույղուր անջատողականների ակտիվության հնարավոր դրսևորումները: Ահաբեկչության դեմ համատեղ պայքարի մեխանիզմների ստեղծման նպատակով Պեկինը տարածաշրջան է գործուղում նաև զինվորական հրահանգիչների:

Այնուամենայնիվ, ենթադրվում է, որ ՉԺՀ-ի սահմաններից դուրս ինքնապաշտպանության ընդլայնման և ազգային շահերի պաշտպանության նպատակով «*Ահաբեկչության դեմ պայքարի մասին*» օրենքի ընդունումը¹⁷⁵¹ կարող է վնասել Չինաստանի՝ որպես «*չմիջամտության*» սկզբունքի հետևորդի և հակամարտությունների խաղաղ կարգավորման անսասան ջատագովի վարկանիշը:

Թեմայի համակողմանի ուսումնասիրությունն այնուհանդերձ ցույց է տալիս, որ «փափուկ ուժի» քաղաքականության հմուտ կիրառման շնորհիվ Չինաստանը նվազագույն ռեսուրսներով, հիմնականում առանց ներքին գործերի և հակամարտությունների միջամտության, շոշափելի քաղաքական և տնտեսական հաջողությունների է հասել ՄԱՀԱ-ում: «*Առանց գաղափարական կամ քաղաքական նախապայմանների*» ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրներին հատկացվող չինական մարդասիրական օգնությունն ու իրականացվող ներդրումները՝ «*փափուկ ու կոշտ ուժերի*» ռազմավարության համադրմամբ նպաստում են ոչ միայն տարածաշրջանում Պեկինի էներգետիկ ու առևտրատնտեսական շահերի պաշտպանությանը, այլև արդյունավետորեն հակազդում անվտանգային այնպիսի մարտահրավերների ու սպառնալիքների, ինչպիսիք են՝ իսլամական արմատականությունը, ծովահենությունը և անդրազգային հանցագործությունը: Անհերքելի է, որ ՄԳՄՃ-ի շրջանակ ներում իրականացվող չինական ներ-

¹⁷⁵¹ Այս օրենքով Պեկինը պարտավորվում է ձեռնարկել բոլոր անհրաժեշտ միջոցները «երեք չարիքի»՝ ահաբեկչության, անջատողականության և կրոնական ծայրահեղականության հետ կապված ցանկացած գործողություն կամ վարքագիծ ճնշելու համար:

դրումները նպաստում են նաև տարածաշրջանի տնտեսական զարգացմանը, հատկապես ճգնաժամային կամ հետ-ճգնաժամային իրավիճակում հայտնված երկրների (Իրաք, Սիրիա, Եմեն, Լիբանան և այլն) տնտեսությունների վերականգնմանը:

Չինաստանը շարունակում է ընդլայնել իր ազդեցությունը ՄԱՀԱ-ում նաև հանրային դիվանագիտության, արտաքին օգնության և ներդրումների, մշակութային և կրթական փոխանակումների և միջմարդկային երկխոսության խրախուսման միջոցով: Թեև միամտություն կլինեք կարծել, որ «փափուկ ուժի» շրջանակներում Չինաստանի տրամադրած մարդասիրական օգնությունն ու բազմամիլիարդանոց ներդրումներն արվում են առանց փոխադարձ ակնկալիքների ու սեփական շահերի անտեսման գնով կամ էլ առանց դրանց հետևում «թաքնված օրակարգի»:

Գործնականում Պեկինին հաջողվում է ոչ միայն շրջա-հայացորեն խուսափել տարածաշրջանում ԱՄՆ-ի շահերի հետ հնարավոր բախումներից, այլև օգտվել Արևմուտքի կողմից վերահսկվող ծովային հաղորդակցությունների ցանցից՝ ապավինելով վերջիններիս անվտանգային համակարգերին: Մինևույն ժամանակ ՉԺՀ-ի անվտանգային քաղաքականությունը ռազմականացվում է՝ ուղեկցվելով ՄԱՀԱ-ում էներգետիկ ու ենթակառուցվածքային նախագծերի կենսագործումն ապահովող չինական նավատորմի և զինուժի ծավալմամբ:

Կարծում ենք, որ գլոբալ կառավարման հասնելու նպատակով Պեկինը ստիպված կլինի շարունակել համատեղել

«փափուկ և կոշտ ուժերի» համադրման ռազմավարությունը, քանի որ տարածաշրջանում առանց չինական զինված ուժերի կիրառման, ռազմածովային ուժերի ընդլայնման ու նոր ռազմաբազաների կառուցման անհնարին է արդյունավետորեն դիմակայել որոշակի մարտահրավերների, սպառնալիքների, անվտանգային ռիսկերի, հատկապես Հնդկական օվկիանոսում ու ՄԱՀԱ-ում չին-հնդկական կամ չին-ամերիկյան աշխարհաքաղաքական մրցապայքարի պայմաններում:

Միաժամանակ, փորձագետների մի սովոր մասի համոզմամբ, «չինական աճին» դիմադրությունը նվազեցնելու նպատակով Պեկինը ոչ միայն պետք է հատուկ ուշադրություն դարձնի իր ռազմածովային կարողությունների հզորացմանն ու շահերի հետապնդմանը Խաղաղ և Հնդկական օվկիանոսներում, այլև փորձի ամրապնդել քաղաքական և տնտեսական համագործակցությունն ԱՄՆ-ի, Հնդկաստանի, ԱՄԵԱՆ-ի և ՄԱՀԱ-ի երկրների հետ: Անվիճելի է, որ համաշխարհային տնտեսության գլոբալացման պայմաններում, պետությունների միջև ծովային կամ ցամաքային հաղորդակցության անվտանգության ապահովումը հնարավոր է դառնում միայն համագործակցության, և ոչ թե ավանդական ուժային առճակատման միջոցով:

Հետազոտության ավարտին գալիս ենք այն հետևության, որ Չինաստանի երբևէ առաջ քաշած ամենանշանակալից գլոբալ նախաձեռնության՝ ՄԳՄՃ-ի ռազմավարության իրականացմամբ Պեկինը ձգտում է հասնել տարածաշրջանային գերիշխող դիրքերի և հզոր գերտերության կարգավիճակի:

Հնդկական օվկիանոսից մինչև Կարմիր ծով ու Սուեզի ջրանցք ազատ նավարկելու, ՄԱՀԱ-ում իր ներկայությունն ընդլայնելու և «Մարգարտի շղթայի» երկայնքով առանցքային հենակետերի նկատմամբ ռազմավարական վերահսկողություն հաստատելու շնորհիվ ՉԺՀ-ը կարող է փոխել ուժերի հարաբերակցությունը տարածաշրջանային և գլոբալ մակարդակներում:

Կարելի է ենթադրել, որ ՄԳՄՃ-ը Չինաստանին վերապահում է համաշխարհային գործընթացների վրա ազդելու և բազմաբևեռ աշխարհակարգի ձևավորմանն ակտիվորեն մասնակցելու աննախադեպ հնարավորություն: Կարծում ենք, որ ի հեճուկս բազմաթիվ խոչընդոտների ու դժվարությունների՝ Պեկինի հավակնոտ գլոբալ նախագծերի ու հայեցակարգերի իրականացման համար խիստ կարևոր ՄԱՀԱ-ի տարածաշրջանը ինչպես ներկայում, այնպես էլ ապագայում կպահպանի իր կենսական նշանակությունը:

Օգտվելով առիթից՝ խորին երախտագիտությունս եմ հայտնում ՀՀ ԳԱԱ հայագիտական ուսումնասիրությունները ֆինանսավորող Համահայկական հիմնադրամին՝ *«Չինաստանի Նոր Մետաքսի Ճանապարհի նախաձեռնության իրականացումը Մեծ Մերձավոր Արևելքի տարածաշրջանում»* թեմատիկ ծրագիրը ֆինանսավորելու և մենագրության տպագրությունը հովանավորելու, ինչպես նաև ՀՀ ԳԱԱ հայագիտության և հասարակական գիտությունների բաժանմունքի ակադեմիկոս քարտուղար Յուրի Սուվարյանին և Արևելագիտության ինստիտուտի տնօրեն Ռոբերտ Ղազար-

յանին՝ գրքի տպագրությանն աջակցելու համար: Շնորհա-
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AND NORTH AFRICA**

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