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CHINA STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES 12

Chinese Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Rationales, Risks, and Implications

by Joel Wuthnow



Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs
Institute for National Strategic Studies
National Defense University

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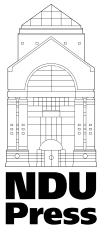
Chinese Perspectives on the Belt Road Initiative

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*Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs
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China Strategic Perspectives, No. 12*

Series Editor: Phillip C. Saunders



National Defense University Press
Washington, D.C.
October 2017

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First printing, October 2017

For their valuable comments and advice, the author thanks Jack Gill, Thomas F. Lynch, Phillip C. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, and Cynthia Watson. NDU research interns Alex Jeffers and Jordan Link provided helpful translation and research assistance. The author also thanks the Mercator Institute for China Studies for giving permission to use the figure on page 6.

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Executive Summary

Chinese officials have downplayed the security dimensions of Xi Jinping’s signature foreign policy initiative—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, Chinese strategists have extensively analyzed three major issues: strategic benefits the BRI can provide for China, key security risks and challenges, and ways to reduce those risks. This study surveys their views and comments on implications for U.S. strategy. Key findings include:

The main strategic benefits of the BRI include bolstering regional stability, improving China’s energy security, and amassing influence in Eurasia.

- Chinese analysts see Eurasian integration as a way to create a more stable security environment around China’s southern and western periphery by addressing the underlying sources of violence and building mutual trust. Another benefit is increasing China’s energy security by diversifying oil and natural gas supply and transport routes.
- Several analyses describe the BRI as a way for China to simultaneously achieve two geopolitical objectives: amassing strategic influence in Eurasia’s heartland while deftly avoiding direct competition with the United States. Some sources, however, are more explicit in portraying the BRI as a response to U.S. pressure, especially that posed by the Barack Obama administration’s rebalance to Asia policy.

Implementing BRI projects could be frustrated by domestic and regional instability, non-traditional security threats, and strategic balancing from other major powers.

- Chinese sources—including Xi Jinping himself—portray the BRI as unfolding within a turbulent and, in some ways, deteriorating security environment.
- Key operational challenges include regional conflict and protecting property and personnel from “radical” groups, such as Uighur separatists, the so-called Islamic State, and Pakistani militants, although Chinese sources rarely acknowledge that anti-China sentiment stemming from policies such as exclusive use of Chinese labor could be contributing to that violence.
- Chinese observers closely follow perceptions of the BRI in states such as the United States, Japan, and India, and assume that all three will respond individually or collectively

to oppose China's ambitions, or have already done so. Lesser concerns are raised about Russia and Southeast Asian states.

China will have to marshal military, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic tools to counter perceived threats to the BRI's long-term viability.

- While some Chinese sources advocate greater expeditionary naval and ground force capabilities as a means to protect overseas equities, others argue that many challenges can be reduced through private security forces and host nation support. Mitigating threats to Chinese overseas interests also requires stronger risk assessment capabilities and enhanced nontraditional security cooperation, especially in the counterterrorism arena.
- Many Chinese writings argue that strategic competition can be avoided by co-opting other major powers, such as by including U.S. companies in key BRI projects, and by carefully avoiding encroaching in other states' spheres of influence. Many also call for a more attractive strategic message to enlist supporters and calm detractors.

U.S. strategy should seek to check China's geopolitical ambitions while advancing mutually beneficial cooperation where possible.

- The most negative outcome for the United States would be a Sinocentric Eurasian order in which Beijing locks countries into exclusive economic relationships and U.S. interests are marginalized.
- China's ability to pursue an exclusive regional sphere of influence hinges on variables including China's interests in maintaining stable relations with the United States, the willingness of other major powers to check China's aspirations, and the ability of BRI partners to avoid overreliance on China's economic largesse.
- U.S. strategy should aim to preserve the strategic balance in Eurasia by maintaining strong U.S.-China economic relations, encouraging alternative regional infrastructure development plans, and remaining a committed partner to states across the continent. However, this does not preclude U.S.-China cooperation in areas of shared interest, such as in the counterterrorism domain. The mix of competitive and cooperative responses to the BRI should facilitate larger U.S. strategic aims in the region and vis-à-vis China.

Introduction

One of Chinese president Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy programs is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a web of infrastructure development plans designed to increase Eurasian economic integration. Chinese official rhetoric on the BRI focuses on its economic promise and progress, often in altruistic terms: all countries have been invited to board this "express train" to wealth and prosperity.¹ Missing from the rhetoric is much discussion of the initiative's security dimensions and implications. Chinese officials avoid describing the strategic benefits they think the BRI could produce, while also gliding over major security risks and concerns. Yet at the unofficial level, China's security community has paid close attention to these issues, probing in great depth the gains Beijing can expect, the challenges it will face, and the new demands it will have to satisfy.

Understanding those Chinese assessments is helpful as the United States considers how, when, and in what capacity to engage the BRI.² Many foreign observers have speculated about the geopolitical ambitions behind the initiative, often describing it as a Chinese "Marshall Plan" designed to amass influence in Eurasia.³ Evidence from Chinese sources helps validate, but in some ways qualify, those views. At the same time, there could be room for mutually beneficial security cooperation on Eurasian security affairs, insofar as both China and the United States seek to advance stability in Central Asia and other affected regions, and oppose common challenges, such as terrorism and piracy. Chinese writings help illuminate how those risks might impact BRI, and where opportunities for cooperation might arise.

This study finds that Chinese security perspectives on the BRI are fundamentally ambivalent. On one hand, the thinking goes, economic development and connectivity will help stabilize China's border regions, secure its energy supplies, and allow China to extend its strategic influence. On the other hand, China will face various challenges, ranging from terrorism to strategic competition from the United States, Japan, and India. Meeting these challenges requires careful diplomatic coordination and messaging, a stronger ability to anticipate and assess risk, and new capabilities to protect trade routes and Chinese citizens abroad. For the United States, evidence from Chinese sources supports the need for caution about Beijing's intentions, but also highlights areas of potential cooperation to the extent that both countries share complementary regional agendas.

Following a brief background section, the study surveys the Chinese literature in three main parts: the first covers strategic drivers, the second covers key operational and strategic

challenges, and the third part focuses on the range of new requirements. The final section provides overarching thoughts about the discourse and discusses implications for the United States.

Background

Xi Jinping outlined a vision for enhanced Eurasian economic integration in two speeches delivered in late 2013: remarks in Kazakhstan announced the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), while a speech in Indonesia unveiled the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Together, these formed the main components of the BRI, often known internationally as “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR).⁴ Xi’s agenda was not fundamentally new, but rather built on Chinese overseas infrastructure development activities pursued over the preceding 25 years. This included various energy, transportation, communications, and other projects, largely in Central and Southeast Asia.⁵ Several of these projects were subsumed under the BRI framework, such as a freight line connecting Chongqing with Duisburg, Germany, that opened in 2011, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor, which had been discussed as early as 1999.⁶

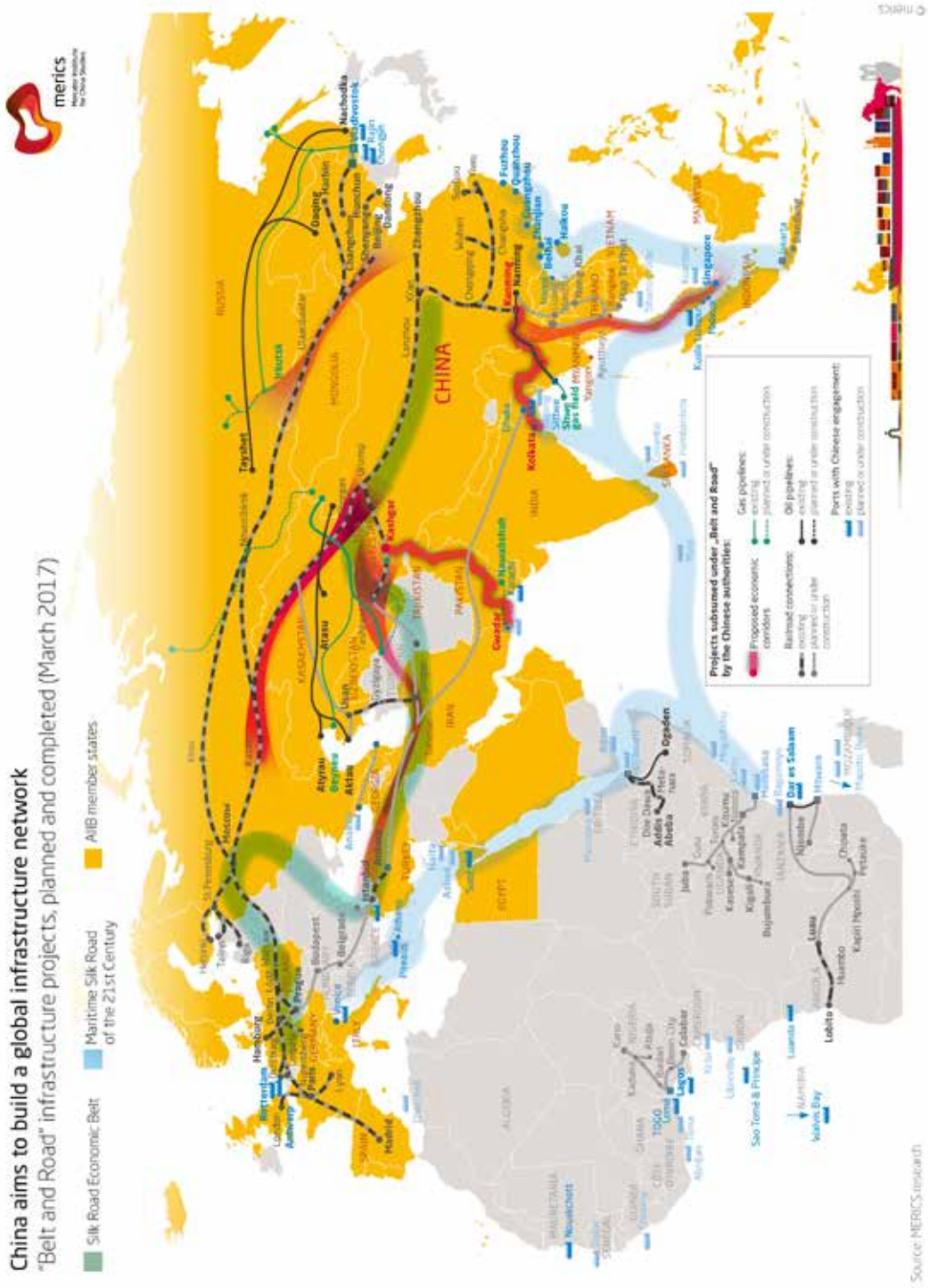
China was not alone in its focus on Eurasian development. Since 1992, the European Union had launched several projects under its Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia initiative.⁷ In 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the New Silk Road Initiative to better integrate Afghanistan into the Central and South Asian economies through energy and transportation development.⁸ In 2013, Japan’s Shinzo Abe initiated a “revitalization strategy” involving \$110 billion in infrastructure investment over 5 years, while in the same year South Korea’s Park Geun-hye announced a Eurasia Initiative focused on regional economic connectivity.⁹ All of these programs took place in the context of Eurasia’s growing need for infrastructure spending to support development, which the Asian Development Bank assessed would require \$1.7 trillion per year between 2016 and 2030.¹⁰

What was unique was the BRI’s expansive scope and scale. The centerpiece is a web of six economic corridors linking China with each of its neighboring subregions, identified in the table.¹¹ Perhaps the most well-known is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), involving \$46 billion in Chinese investments, mainly in the energy sector; other corridors link China with Central, South, and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and ultimately Europe.¹² Financing would be allocated by new multilateral institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with an initial capitalization of \$100 billion, and the \$40 billion Silk Road Fund, in addition to national banks such as China’s Export-Import Bank. In total, Chinese government spending on the BRI is expected to reach \$1 trillion.¹³ The figure on page 6 sketches the scope of BRI projects and routes.

Table. Summary of BRI Economic Corridors

Corridor	Partners	Example Projects
Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor	Bangladesh, India, Myanmar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China-Myanmar crude oil and liquified natural gas (LNG) pipeline • Padma Bridge (Bangladesh) • Tunnel construction under Karnaphuli River (Bangladesh)
China-Central Asia-West Africa Economic Corridor	Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China-Kazakhstan passenger train • Manas airport modernization (Kyrgyzstan) • Turkey east-west high-speed rail
China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China-Laos Railway • Upgrade of Lancang-Mekong ship route
China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor	Mongolia, Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altai LNG pipeline (linking Xinjiang and Siberia) • Altanbulag-Ulaanbaatar-Zamiin-Uud highway
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwadar free zone development • Karakoram Highway, Phase II (Thakot-Havelian) • Peshawar-Karachi Motorway
New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor	Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China-Europe freight trains (39 routes linking China with 9 European countries) • Hungary-Serbia railway • China-Belarus Industrial Park • China-Kazakhstan Khorgos International Border Cooperation Center • Port of Pireaus (Greece)

Sources: Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, *Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice, and China's Contribution* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 10–17; Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Washington, DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), 74–85. Zhuang Beining, “Spotlight: China-Myanmar Oil, Gas Project Benefits Both,” Xinhua, May 10, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/10/c_136272395.htm>. “China Focus: China Mulls Upgrade of Lancang-Mekong Ship Route,” Xinhua, March 25, 2016, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-03/26/c_135224454.htm>. “Infographic: China-Europe Freight Train Service,” Xinhua, April 21, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/21/c_136225717.htm>. For a comprehensive list of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects, see <www.cpec.gov.pk/>.



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The official rationale behind the BRI is that economic growth can be accelerated through infrastructure development, lower trade barriers, stronger energy connectivity, harmonization of standards, and other means. One authoritative Chinese document states that the economic corridors help facilitate “an efficient and smooth Eurasian market,” and create opportunities for development of Eurasia’s “hinterland.”¹⁴ However, foreign analysts have discussed a range of more self-interested Chinese economic motives. These include employing industrial overcapacity in areas such as steel, aluminum, and cement; sustaining gross domestic product growth, which is needed to maintain social stability; providing capital for struggling Chinese national and local state-owned enterprises; developing impoverished Chinese inland provinces, such as Xinjiang, Gansu, and Yunnan; and promoting the internationalization of the renminbi.¹⁵

Chinese rhetoric on the BRI exudes economic confidence, often focusing on “early harvest” results. At the May 2017 Belt and Road Forum, for instance, Xi Jinping said that the BRI was “becoming a reality and bearing rich fruit,” highlighting progress in areas such as port development projects in Pakistan and Greece; high-speed railway projects in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe; an increase in trade and investment between China and BRI partners; and provision of \$1.7 billion in AIIB loans.¹⁶ China’s state-run media also frequently cite impressive statistics illustrating the BRI’s progress, such as its “support” from “over 100” countries and international organizations, 66 partner nations, and infrastructure projects valued at “nearly \$500 billion.”¹⁷ This message not only attracts potential investors; it also helps burnish Xi’s legacy by aligning him with economic success.¹⁸

However, largely absent from China’s official commentary is a discussion of the BRI’s strategic benefits and security risks. Avoiding discussion of the initiative’s strategic rationale helps to reduce suspicions of China’s intentions, especially among other major countries.¹⁹ At times, Chinese officials have even actively tried to counteract foreign speculation about Beijing’s motives. For instance, Foreign Minister Wang Yi rejected comparisons of the BRI to the Marshall Plan, one purpose of which was to resist Soviet expansionism by strengthening Western European economies after World War II.²⁰ According to Wang, the BRI is both “much older and much younger” than the Marshall Plan: older, in that it embodies the “friendly exchange” of the ancient Silk Road, and younger, because it is “born in the era of globalization,” and is thus “not a tool of geopolitics.”²¹

Chinese leaders have been only slightly more vocal about the security risks facing the BRI. At the 2017 Belt and Road Forum, Xi acknowledged that the initiative is active in regions associated with “conflict, turbulence, crisis and challenge,” and called for efforts to reduce those problems through dialogue and counterterrorism (CT) cooperation.²² However, neither Xi nor

other senior officials have detailed the specific operational risks facing BRI projects, nor have they commented on the larger strategic problem, namely, that other major powers could take steps to try to preserve their geopolitical influence in areas where Chinese investments are increasing.²³ This silence is consistent with efforts to reassure investors and convince a domestic and foreign audience about the BRI's long-term viability.

Nevertheless, Chinese policy experts have thoroughly explored the BRI's security dimensions, producing hundreds of books, reports, and articles over the last few years. The most obvious reason is that policymakers require analysis and recommendations about the ways in which the BRI can be structured to advance China's strategic interests and to mitigate potential pitfalls, including threats to Chinese workers and investments abroad. It is likely that Chinese scholars have conducted BRI research for more parochial reasons as well, including securing government funding and attracting the attention of senior officials.²⁴ The absence of clear official positions has also meant that this unofficial discourse has been relatively candid, with frequent disagreements between experts. The resulting literature provides a unique window into the types of assessments that are informing leaders.

The following sections utilize this literature to illuminate the BRI's drivers, risks, and requirements from a security perspective. Priority is given to assessments from key state think tanks, such as the Chinese Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), various institutes of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and China's National Defense University (NDU), which are institutionally linked to policy customers and whose analysts are informed by access to internal documents and discussions.²⁵ Also consulted are prominent Chinese academics, who may supply policy advice on an ad hoc basis.²⁶ Finally, the study builds on two recent English-language volumes, Nadège Rolland's *China's Eurasian Century?* and Raffaello Pantucci and Sarah Lain's *China's Eurasian Pivot*, both of which holistically examine the BRI and its implications, and are required reading on the topic.

Strategic Drivers

One of the challenges for foreign observers has been deciphering the range of strategic goals that Beijing might be pursuing through the BRI, alongside more quotidian economic objectives. Chinese assessments suggest a few plausible strategic motives, or at least benefits that might accrue from the initiative's successful implementation. These include improving regional stability, increasing China's energy security, and amassing strategic influence in Eurasia while avoiding a direct competition with the United States.

Bolstering Regional Stability

One common argument in Chinese analyses of the BRI is that regional integration will contribute to a more stable security environment, especially around China's southern and western periphery. This argument both reflects and supports Xi's broader vision for a new regional order—often described as a “community of common destiny” or “community of shared interests”—in which economic development and cooperative security reinforce each other.²⁷ China's 2017 white paper on Asia-Pacific security explains the logic:

Security and development are closely linked and mutually complementary. Equal consideration should be given to both a security framework and an economic framework—the main components of the entire regional structure—to ensure their parallel development. On the one hand, the improvement of the security framework will help ensure a peaceful and stable environment for economic development; on the other, faster regional economic integration will provide solid economic and social support for the development of the security framework.²⁸

This is not an abstract goal but rather vital to the mitigation of a range of security challenges within and around China's borders, including terrorism, separatism, and extremism (known as the “three evils”), territorial disputes with India in the Himalayas and with several Southeast Asian nations in the South China Sea, and the alleged fomenting of “color revolutions” by the United States.²⁹ Along these lines, Chinese scholars argue that the BRI can help improve stability in several ways:

- Mitigating the sources of violence in fragile states. Retired Major General Wang Haiyun, a senior advisor at the China Institute of International Strategic Studies (CIISS), claims that economic growth created by the BRI will “eradicate poverty,” which is a “root cause” of terrorism and extremism, and play a role in “diffusing clashes of civilization that should actually never happen, and calming the restless social sentiments of Islamic regions.”³⁰ This could reduce perceived threats such as those posed by Uighur separatists and militants of the so-called Islamic State (IS) infiltrating into China.³¹
- Ameliorating territorial disputes. Wang Junsheng, a scholar at the CASS National Institute of International Strategy, argues that the BRI will help resolve territorial disputes

in the South China Sea by moving leaders away from a “zero sum” mindset. As evidence, he claims that Vietnam’s participation in BRI projects has lowered tensions between Beijing and Hanoi in the South China Sea, and led to stronger overall Sino-Vietnamese relations.³² Hu Bo, a research fellow at Beijing University, similarly argues that one goal of the BRI is to alleviate maritime disputes, though this does not imply that China will “sacrifice” its “legal rights” to enforce territorial claims.³³

- Increasing mutual trust.³⁴ Li Gang, a scholar at the Central Party School’s Institute of International Strategy, argues that the BRI will exhibit China’s virtues of “openness, trustworthiness, inclusivity, and development,” and thus convince other states of its peaceful intentions.³⁵ Renmin University professor Wang Yiwei likewise contends that trust gained through “civil and local interactions” in creating the BCIM economic corridor will help Beijing and New Delhi overcome historical suspicions.³⁶

- Building more effective security partnerships. Central Party School scholar Sun Xianpu argues that China can expand CT intelligence sharing, training, and technical exchanges under the BRI framework, citing closer CT cooperation with Pakistan as an example. Sun also anticipates greater cooperation in the areas of counternarcotics in Southeast Asia, and counterpiracy in South Asia.³⁷ Senior Colonel Meng Xiangqing, a professor at the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) NDU, similarly argues that the BRI will lead to closer CT cooperation among Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) members, which is needed to address violent extremism and to stabilize Afghanistan following a reduction of U.S. forces.³⁸

A weakness of the Chinese literature is that it tends to assert rather than substantiate a causal relationship between development and security. This tendency underscores official rhetoric promoting the “community of common destiny,” but ignores contentious debates in international relations and policy circles about the linkages between regional integration and conflict. Many studies, of course, support the argument that regional trade integration helps reduce conflict.³⁹ Others, however, have found either no relationship or suggest that high levels of economic interdependence could even increase the chance of interstate militarized disputes in some cases.⁴⁰ Moreover, Chinese analyses often fail to consider how regional integration may be increasing transnational security threats, such as facilitating international crime.⁴¹ By ignoring these perspectives, China’s security community might not have adequately considered the possible externalities of BRI projects.

Improving Energy Security

Another argument is that infrastructure development projects under the BRI will improve China's energy security. China's economic growth over the last two decades has led Beijing to increasingly rely on energy imports, especially crude oil and natural gas.⁴² A negative consequence is that Chinese energy shipments are vulnerable to piracy or interdiction by foreign navies, especially in narrow maritime "chokepoints." Hu Jintao labeled this problem the "Malacca Dilemma," after the strait through which around 80 percent of Chinese oil imports flow.⁴³ Moreover, despite efforts to reduce risks through overland pipeline construction and domestic energy production, the risks remain: in 2014, China became the largest global net importer of oil, most of it arriving by sea.⁴⁴

Chinese scholars suggest that BRI projects could ameliorate the Malacca Dilemma in two ways. First is through port construction, especially in the Indian Ocean. Wang Yiwei notes that China's development of Gwadar (Pakistan) and Colombo (Sri Lanka) will provide "new route options" for China and thus reduce "transport pressure" on Malacca.⁴⁵ Wang also notes Gwadar's role as the southern terminus of a planned 1 million barrel-per-day pipeline that will result in oil flowing from the Arabian Sea to northwestern China. This will help provide a "secure energy route," which is needed in light of instability in the South China Sea.⁴⁶ Two scholars from the PLA Military Transport Academy likewise argue that Colombo, as well as port projects in Tanzania and Greece, will benefit China's "strategic transport," including in the energy realm.⁴⁷

The second way the BRI could ameliorate the Malacca Dilemma is through overland pipeline construction. Huang Xiaoyong, director of the International Energy Security Research Center at CASS, argues that the planned Gwadar-Kashgar oil pipeline (which is a component of CPEC), as well as a planned oil pipeline linking the Bay of Bengal and Yunnan via Myanmar, will both help reduce China's reliance on Malacca.⁴⁸ Two other CASS scholars argue that pipelines under the China-Russia-Mongolia economic corridor will help assure China's energy security at a time of potential conflict in the South China Sea and on the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁹ However, CICIR analysts Fu Mengzi and Lou Chunhao note that even with new pipelines, China will remain dependent on maritime energy supply routes. Thus Beijing needs to increase maritime cooperation with others to ensure the safety of critical sea lanes.⁵⁰

Expanding Strategic Influence

A third perspective is that China can use the BRI to expand its strategic influence in Eurasia while avoiding direct competition with the United States. A conundrum facing Chinese

strategists for decades has been amassing “comprehensive national power” (综合国力) in the face of suspected U.S. containment plots, while also maintaining positive relations with Washington.⁵¹ On one hand is the view that U.S. military alliances, deployments, and operations in Asia are constraining China’s rise.⁵² Of particular recent concern was the U.S. rebalance to Asia strategy, which China’s 2015 defense white paper listed first in a series of negative strategic trends.⁵³ On the other hand is the desire for stable U.S.-China relations, which if undermined could upset regional stability and endanger Chinese economic gains from cooperation, both of which Beijing needs to sustain economic growth and thus preserve regime legitimacy.⁵⁴

One way out of this dilemma is to focus on expanding China’s influence along its western periphery, where U.S. presence and interests are limited. Nadège Rolland notes that PLA General Liu Yazhou and others have circulated this idea since at least 2001.⁵⁵ However, Beijing University professor Wang Jisi gave the argument its most famous articulation in a 2012 *Global Times* opinion piece, which described China’s need for a “march west” (西进) strategy.⁵⁶ Wang argued that a “strategic rebalancing” of Chinese diplomacy to the West would achieve two major goals: building regional partnerships, which would expand China’s “strategic maneuvering space” (and provide other benefits, such as stabilizing China’s restive western regions), and minimizing friction in U.S.-China relations.⁵⁷

While Wang’s influence on the BRI’s origins is debatable, a number of Chinese assessments follow his logic.⁵⁸ Sun Xianpu argues that prioritizing Western development would reduce “external pressure,” while avoiding the more intense U.S.-China rivalry that would result from a preoccupation with increasing China’s “strategic position” in maritime East Asia.⁵⁹ In Sun’s view, the BRI could even improve U.S.-China relations by satisfying Washington’s desire that Beijing play a more active role in global public goods provision, and in more specific ways, such as developing basic infrastructure development in Afghanistan, which “accords with U.S. strategy.”⁶⁰ Peng Bo of the PLA’s Institute of International Relations notes that the initiative will help China build economic ties with other Asian nations while “avoiding tit-for-tat competition with the United States in the overly crowded eastern coastal region.”⁶¹

Other analysts portray the BRI in more starkly competitive terms. Major General Qiao Liang, a professor at the PLA NDU known for his hawkish views, writes that Beijing should avoid direct competition with Washington due to the latter’s relative hard and soft power advantages, but can use the BRI as a “very clever and non-confrontational type of strategic hedging.”⁶² Li Yonghui, a Russia specialist at CASS, argues that development of the China-Russia-Mongolia economic corridor is useful in “shaking off” U.S. influence in Mongolia, while developing a “strategic triangle” between the three countries could help to offset the U.S.-Japan alliance and

safeguard “our geostrategic security interests.”⁶³ Wang Haiyun describes the BRI as a way to “counterbalance maritime hegemony through expanding land power,” and suggests that it will give China an advantage in the regional competition for influence by differentiating Beijing’s positive agenda of “common development” with the “power politics and hegemony” of a “certain major country.”⁶⁴

In sum, Chinese policy experts have discussed a range of strategic dividends that could result from BRI projects. This suggests that the initiative has some “geostrategic underpinnings,” to use Christopher Johnson’s phrase, or at least auxiliary benefits that could advantage China in the region and vis-à-vis the United States.⁶⁵ However, Chinese scholars are equally—if not more—vocal about the security risks and challenges of Eurasian integration.

Risks and Challenges

Despite Beijing’s optimistic narrative, the BRI could be jeopardized by a range of factors. Foreign observers often comment on economic constraints, such as credit risk, macroeconomic risk, legal and regulatory challenges, and poor governance and corruption in partner states.⁶⁶ In the security realm, Chinese analysts discuss risk on two levels. Operationally, Chinese (and partner) workers and investments could be subject to regional conflict as well as transnational challenges such as terrorism and piracy. Strategically, other major powers could oppose, either individually or collectively, China’s endeavors in key regions.

Operational Challenges

At the operational level are physical dangers facing BRI projects and personnel. From a Chinese perspective, this is an evolving but not intrinsically new problem. Chinese firms and citizens have “gone out” in search of economic opportunities over the last two decades, often in dangerous developing world locations.⁶⁷ In some cases, Chinese workers have been subject to terrorist attacks, such as those which resulted in the deaths of 14 Chinese nationals in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2004 and which led to suspended projects as Chinese workers were withdrawn.⁶⁸ Civil wars, natural disasters, and other large-scale disruptions have led to the destruction of property and required Beijing to carry out evacuations. Most famous is the 2011 evacuation of 35,000 Chinese citizens from Libya, though China conducted a dozen other evacuations between 2006 and 2014 in areas such as Thailand, Syria, and Vietnam.⁶⁹ Chinese assessments highlight a range of similar risks to BRI projects.

Regional Conflict

One common argument is that BRI projects are subject to the risks of operating in conflict-prone areas. Lin Limin, director of CICIR's Foreign Strategy Research Center, assesses that the SREB traverses a "geopolitical black hole," marked by unstable regimes and rampant corruption. This has led many investors to "turn back," and made it difficult to launch a high-speed rail network.⁷⁰ Major General Wang Weixing, director of the Foreign Military Studies Department at the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS), likewise notes that "the BRI route passes through many geopolitically fragile areas, with complex historical issues, intense ethnic and religious disputes, and frequent armed conflict."⁷¹ In another article, Wang argues that "religious violence," in particular, can "completely throw the BRI's construction into chaos and threaten the security of our investment projects and personnel."⁷²

Chinese scholars often focus on discord in specific subregions. These include the following:

- Middle East/North Africa. Tian Wenlin, a Middle East specialist at CICIR, assesses that since the Arab Spring, the Middle East has entered its "most turbulent period since the end of the Cold War." Specific challenges endangering infrastructure development include increasing violence between Shia and Sunni factions, especially between Iran and Saudi Arabia; the rise of separatism in areas such as southern Yemen and Libya; and the IS desire to form a state, which has split parts of Iraq and Syria.⁷³ Other scholars note the negative consequence of the Syrian refugee crisis on Europe, which will complicate BRI projects in both regions.⁷⁴ For instance, Hu Bo argues:

*If West Asian and North African trends are not slowly alleviated, refugees could come swarming forward and seriously endanger eastern Europe, southern Europe, even western European countries' governments and social stability, be a burden on economic development, and cause extremist and terrorist ideology to spread . . . and in Europe some right-wing powers still might use the confusion caused by the refugee crisis and dissatisfaction in society to change a part of the country's domestic governance structure.*⁷⁵

In the maritime domain, Fu Mengzi and Lou Chunhao note that sectarian conflict in places such as Yemen and Somalia could threaten the region's key sea lanes, such as the Strait of Hormuz, and thus the viability of the MSR.⁷⁶

- South/Central Asia. Chen Xiangyang, deputy director of CICIR's Institute of World Politics, assesses that a reduction of U.S. forces will negatively impact the security situation in Afghanistan and "surrounding countries," which could pose dangers for BRI projects in the region (including Pakistan).⁷⁷ Fu Mengzi and Lou Chunhao write that an intensifying India-Pakistan conflict, reflected in an October 2014 border incident in Kashmir that was the deadliest since 2003, will threaten projects under both CPEC and the BCIM economic corridor.⁷⁸
- Southeast Asia. Senior Colonel Li Daguang of China's NDU describes Southeast Asia as a "very unstable strategic direction," involving a recent escalation of South China Sea territorial disputes and challenges from Vietnam and the Philippines, which could threaten the development of the MSR.⁷⁹ Wang Weixing writes that internal instability in Thailand led to the cancellation of a China-Thailand high-speed rail plan, while internal conflict in Myanmar has led to dams and copper mine projects being halted.⁸⁰

Nontraditional Security Challenges

A related issue is the impact of nontraditional security challenges on BRI projects. Perhaps the most commonly cited problem in the Chinese literature is the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. Some scholars contend that extremists might oppose the BRI on ideological grounds, since economic development strengthens existing regimes, whereas radical groups often seek to subvert them.⁸¹ Wang Yiwei also notes that development makes it harder for extremists to recruit new members and influence public opinion.⁸² BRI projects and workers might make attractive targets for financially motivated attacks, including kidnappings for ransom and theft of property, such as drilling machinery, oil, and communications equipment.⁸³ Aside from direct losses, attacks could also impose indirect economic costs as firms spend more on security services and insurance premiums rise.⁸⁴

Several specific groups are repeatedly identified in Chinese assessments. Those include:

- Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). One CICIR terrorism specialist claims that the Uighur separatist group TIP (known in China as the East Turkestan Independence Movement) has been "hiding out" in South Asia and forming "symbiotic relationships with local terrorists," which could impact the BRI's implementation in the region.⁸⁵ Likewise, a terrorism scholar at the Northwest University of Politics and Law suggests that TIP is seeking to expand its influence into Southeast Asia, and could threaten Chinese workers involved

in BRI projects, including through hostage-taking.⁸⁶ Chen Xiangyang states that Uighur forces both in and outside of China launch periodic terrorist attacks, “threatening the personal safety and property of Chinese nationals.”⁸⁷

■ IS. Zhang Jie, a scholar at the CASS National Institute of International Strategy, contends that foreign pressure on IS in Iraq and Syria is leading the group to expand globally and encourage “lone wolf” attacks on targets in other countries. Based on these threats, the “risks facing Chinese personnel and investments cannot be underestimated.”⁸⁸ Tian Wenlin argues that the IS desire to gain control of oil fields in the Middle East conflicts with China’s interests in oil development as part of the BRI. Another concern is that IS could influence rebel groups in Pakistani tribal regions, thus expanding the security risks facing CPEC.⁸⁹

■ Pakistani Insurgents/Taliban. One CICIR South Asia specialist portrays the security situation in Baluchistan, where Gwadar and other major CPEC projects are located, as especially dangerous, recalling that Baluchi insurgents have a history of attacking infrastructure projects, including one 2006 assault that resulted in the deaths of three Chinese engineers.⁹⁰ He also notes increasing activities by insurgent and Pakistani Taliban forces in Sindh Province, site of various transportation and energy projects under CPEC.⁹¹ A Central Party School researcher also assesses that insurgency poses “uncontrollable risks” to CPEC in tribal regions, blaming the Pakistani government for approving routes through these areas for political reasons.⁹² However, in interviews in 2017, several Chinese South Asia scholars downplayed the risks to Chinese personnel in Pakistan, pointing to a decline in the number of terrorist attacks in recent years.⁹³

While most Chinese writings focus on terrorist threats to overseas interests, some also discuss the impact on China itself. Li Daguang notes that terrorists based in Central Asia and Afghanistan could launch new attacks in Xinjiang, which is a focal point for BRI investment within China.⁹⁴ Tian Wenlin writes that IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi envisioned that Xinjiang would become part of a new Islamic caliphate, which could prompt further IS involvement in China’s northwest.⁹⁵ A CASS scholar similarly predicts that Xinjiang could be threatened by Islamic militants returning from IS-held territories in the Middle East.⁹⁶ More generally, a researcher at the AMS Border and Coastal Defense Research Center argues that implementing

the BRI could pose new threats to China's border security, including terrorism and international crime, and create new requirements, such as for maritime search and rescue.⁹⁷

Chinese sources also discuss several other nontraditional security problems. First is piracy. Senior Colonel Liang Fang, a professor at the PLA NDU, describes piracy as a major issue along several parts of the MSR, stating that around 20 percent of Chinese ships in the Gulf of Aden have been attacked, while seven have been hijacked.⁹⁸ CICIR analysts also describe an increase in the incidence of piracy in the South China Sea, where 124 incidents were reported in 2014.⁹⁹ Second is drug trafficking, which Wang Weixing notes led to a 2011 plot to kill 13 Chinese sailors on the Mekong River in Myanmar.¹⁰⁰ The third problem is environmental risks. One scholar, for instance, argues that mudslides and other natural disasters resulting from climate change could impact BRI projects "in the construction and implementation phase."¹⁰¹

Despite these observations, a gap in the literature concerns the possibility that Chinese policies and practices themselves might be contributing to these risks. For instance, Wang Yiwei notes that local civil society groups, such as human rights or environmental activists, might instigate protests against BRI projects, but sees this as a result of conspiracies by "the Western world" to frustrate China's ambitions rather than local anti-China sentiment.¹⁰² Wang and other scholars do not acknowledge that many incidents targeting overseas Chinese interests have arisen from policies such as the exclusive use of Chinese workers, poor working conditions for local employees, and collusion with corrupt local officials.¹⁰³ Neither do they consider how restrictive policies on Uighur minorities might be increasing the prospects for violent incidents in Xinjiang. Lack of critical self-reflection means that China's security community may not fully appreciate the sources of violence along BRI routes.

Strategic Challenges

At the strategic level, prospects of competition or opposition from other major powers challenge the BRI. Chinese sources sometimes describe this as a more intractable and insidious challenge than pure operational risks. Wang Weixing notes that BRI projects are active in areas other major states regard as their "traditional spheres of influence"—the United States in Southeast Asia, Russia in Central Asia, and India in South Asia. He also labels Japan as an "enemy" that will try to block China's gains at every turn.¹⁰⁴ Wang concludes that these countries are all on "high alert" regarding the BRI, and "all have their own policies to counteract it."¹⁰⁵ Wang and other analysts delve into these countries' perceptions and assess the ways in which they are working, alone or in concert, to undermine China.

The United States

One of the most frequently discussed potential competitors is the United States. Cao Xiaoyang, a researcher at the CASS National Institute of International Strategy, notes that many U.S. observers are wary that China is using the BRI to “expand its influence,” often describing it as a Chinese Marshall Plan and as a response to the U.S. rebalance to Asia.¹⁰⁶ Those suspicions, according to some Chinese observers, are heightened by the very real challenges that the BRI could pose to U.S. global and regional leadership. Retired Major General Yang Xilian, a senior advisor at CIISS, argues that:

The establishment of the post-World War II global governance system, including the international order, international systems, international rules and norms represented by the [United Nations] and the Bretton Woods system, was dominated by the United States and other Western developed countries. Now they are out of step with current reality characterized by multi-polarization and rapid development of globalization. In this sense, the emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative could have an impact on the current international economic order dominated by the U.S. and other Western developed countries. The gaming will be inevitable between the emerging economies represented by China and the established economies represented by the [United States].¹⁰⁷

Likewise, Wang Weixing writes that the AIIB and the Silk Road Fund could “pose a threat to U.S. leadership in the international financial and trading system,” and, in particular, undermine U.S. efforts to retain influence in Central Asia, such as through the Obama administration’s New Silk Road initiative.¹⁰⁸ Tian Wenlin argues that the increasing use of the renminbi to settle international transactions, which is a goal of the BRI, threatens the U.S. “lifeblood” (that is, the influence of the U.S. dollar) and would spark greater U.S.-China competition, especially in the Middle East.¹⁰⁹

For some Chinese observers, U.S. misgivings could translate into active attempts to counter the BRI. Hu Bo speculates that the United States will use “diplomatic resistance” and military tools to frustrate China’s plans, including by inciting tensions in the South China Sea as a way to complicate the development of the MSR.¹¹⁰ Other scholars note specific ways that Washington could try to interrupt the BRI, or has already done so, including:

- Strengthening U.S. economic engagement in Asia. Writing prior to the 2016 presidential election and its theme of economic retrenchment, Wang Weixing predicted that the United States could increase development aid to Asian partners in order to compete with China, advance the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and “make changes” to international financial institutions in order to “protect its leading role in global economic governance.”¹¹¹
- Encouraging U.S. allies to avoid participation. Peng Bo claims that Washington “tried to block” South Korea, Australia, and other Asian states from joining the AIIB, and expressed dissatisfaction with the willingness of several European partners to join the bank. He concludes that while Washington’s attitude on AIIB membership has evolved, its “established policy” of trying to “control China’s rise” has not changed.¹¹²
- Stoking domestic opposition in BRI partner states. One scholar accuses the United States (and Japan) of actively opposing CPEC by using “agents” to “stir up trouble” in Pakistan, and by exercising influence in international human rights, labor, and environmental organizations critical of the projects.¹¹³ Tang Yinchu similarly asserts that Washington has used nongovernmental organizations to oppose Chinese development projects along the MSR “under disguises of environmental and human rights protection.”¹¹⁴

Japan

Japan is another commonly cited competitor. Chinese observers frame Tokyo’s reactions to the BRI in the context of a larger Sino-Japanese contest for influence in the region. One specialist notes that this rivalry has included Tokyo’s use of official development aid since 2008 to bring countries such as India, Vietnam, and the Philippines into closer alignment to “constrain China,” and Tokyo’s efforts to weaken Chinese influence in Myanmar.¹¹⁵ Another analyst argues that this competition intensified with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s purported pursuit of military normalization and anti-China predisposition.¹¹⁶ The BRI further exacerbates this rivalry by threatening Japan’s regional economic influence, especially in Central Asia.¹¹⁷

Japan could be responding to the BRI in several ways. Diplomatically, Chinese observers portray Abe’s “diplomatic offensive” in areas ranging from South Pacific island nations to the Philippines, Mongolia, and Turkmenistan, as part of a campaign to counterbalance the BRI.¹¹⁸ Diplomatic opposition, according to one scholar, also includes meddling in the South China Sea disputes and portraying China as a threat to freedom of navigation.¹¹⁹ Economically, a CASS Japan specialist notes that Tokyo responded to the AIIB with its own plan to provide \$110 billion in

additional funding for Asian infrastructure development and has used competitive bids to counter Chinese infrastructure development proposals in South and Southeast Asia.¹²⁰ In the security arena, one analyst asserts that Japan strengthened maritime security cooperation with the Philippines and other South China Sea claimants in order to impede the MSR.¹²¹

India

Competition from India is another frequently discussed problem. Hu Shisheng, director of South Asian studies at CICIR, assesses that New Delhi has been “cautious” about the BRI, with some Indian analysts seeing it as an “upgrade” of the “String of Pearls.”¹²² Hu acknowledges that part of the problem is that Beijing has not articulated the specific contents of the Maritime Silk Road, which traverses the Indian Ocean; this ambiguity only serves to “breed suspicions.”¹²³ Another Chinese scholar likewise notes that Chinese-funded port development in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, along with China-Nepal negotiations over highway construction in the Himalayas, “threatens India’s leading role in the region,” and has inspired many doubts in New Delhi.¹²⁴ Another source of tension, according to Zhang Jie, is that CPEC is envisioned to cross disputed territory in Kashmir.¹²⁵

Chinese scholars portray a range of Indian policies and activities as responses to the BRI. These include the following: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s advocacy of an assertive “Act East” policy; proposals for an India-centric Spice Route; purported interference in a January 2015 Sri Lankan election that resulted in the defeat of a pro-China candidate; efforts to block a \$1.5 billion Chinese port development project in Columbo (Sri Lanka); encouragement of refusal to fully embrace BCIM and the China-Nepal-India economic corridor; and plans to expand a strategic naval base in the Andaman Islands.¹²⁶ Wang Weixing predicts that New Delhi will continue to interfere with the participation of other South Asian countries in the BRI, support pro-India candidates in regional contests, and undermine Chinese economic agreements.¹²⁷ Prime Minister Modi’s absence from the May 2017 Belt and Road Forum likely only increased Chinese apprehensions of New Delhi’s motives.¹²⁸

Major Power Coordination

Of perhaps even greater concern to Chinese analysts is the possibility that major powers might collaborate in their opposition to the BRI. Several Chinese sources focus on developments in the U.S.-Japan alliance. Yang Xilian argues that Washington and Tokyo responded to the AIIB by promoting the TPP, encouraging reforms of the Asian Development Bank to ensure its ability to compete with the AIIB (such as raising loan limits), and prodding European states

to shape the AIIB in a way that supports U.S. and Japanese goals.¹²⁹ Other scholars also contend that the United States and Japan are colluding to oppose the BRI by refusing to join the AIIB, declining participation in other major Chinese events such as a September 2015 military parade in Beijing, and “stirring up trouble” in the South China Sea.¹³⁰ While some sources attribute stronger U.S.-Japanese coordination to U.S. designs, others suggest it reflects Tokyo’s aims to limit China’s economic success.¹³¹

Other analyses highlight India’s bilateral and multilateral activities. Fu Mengzi and Lou Chunhao, for instance, speculate that enhanced U.S.-Indian maritime security cooperation and joint statements on the South China Sea have been intended as a response to the MSR.¹³² A CASS researcher describes the evolution of the U.S.-Japan-India naval exercise Malabar as a way to demonstrate commitment to safeguard key sea lanes in the Indian Ocean in light of growing Chinese involvement.¹³³ Tang Yinchu describes Modi’s call for U.S. and Japanese support for the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, which fosters economic and cultural cooperation between India and Southeast Asian nations, as a counterweight to the MSR.¹³⁴

Other Countries

While less prominent in Chinese discourse, some analysts also consider potential challenges from Russia and several Southeast Asian states. Early Chinese analyses focused on Russian concerns about the impact of BRI projects on Moscow’s sphere of influence in Central Asia, and over the perceived lack of coordination between the two countries.¹³⁵ However, writing in 2017, Zhang Jie noted that Russia had actively embraced the continental SREB, as symbolized by Putin’s attendance at the Belt and Road Forum. This served as a “green light” for more active involvement from Central Asian states, such as Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which had been wary of alienating Moscow.¹³⁶

Other Chinese assessments describe persistent challenges to the BRI in Southeast Asia. For instance, Zhang Jie argues that Indonesia’s “Global Maritime Fulcrum” strategy, which involves balancing relations with major powers, could complicate China’s attempts to foster BRI projects in that country. Zhang also notes that friction over China’s military activities in the South China Sea could constrain Jakarta’s support for BRI projects.¹³⁷ CICIR scholars similarly argue that Vietnam and the Philippines, which are already wary about China’s role in the South China Sea, could “misperceive” the MSR as a type of “strategic weapon” that China is using to press its territorial ambitions.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, those concerns might be receding. Zhang Jie contends that 2016 elections in Vietnam and the Philippines were both “favorable” for the BRI, reflected in the participation of leaders from both states in the 2017 Belt and Road Forum.¹³⁹

In sum, Chinese sources describe an almost uniformly negative, and even deteriorating, operational and strategic environment in which the BRI is unfolding. For some foreign analysts, the logical conclusion might be that the security risks are too great to contemplate large-scale infrastructure development, and that state-owned or private firms should simply avoid operating in some countries or subregions. Yet in line with official pronouncements of BRI success, Chinese analysts project optimism that those risks can be addressed through careful interagency and industrial planning.

New Requirements

Managing the risks associated with the BRI requires parallel improvements in several areas. Chinese sources point, in particular, to the need for longer-range military capabilities, stronger risk assessment capacity, closer regional CT cooperation, more effective strategic communications, and better management of major power relations. The expectation is that the net effect of these changes will guarantee the BRI's long-term viability and safeguard China's expanding overseas interests writ large.

Developing Military Capabilities

One requirement concerns longer-range naval and ground force capabilities. Consistent with the PLA navy's focus in recent years on developing "blue water" capabilities, deployment of carrier task forces to distant areas to protect sea lanes associated with the MSR is advocated by Liang Fang.¹⁴⁰ Liang also notes that those ships could serve useful warfighting functions, such as blockading enemy ports during a crisis.¹⁴¹ Qiao Liang calls on the PLA to build lighter, more mobile ground forces (including special operations and army aviation units) that can operate in complex terrain, such as in Afghanistan.¹⁴² This would help the PLA be better able to conduct "military operations other than war," such as noncombatant evacuations or CT missions.

In a similar vein, PLA analysts contend that an expeditionary capability requires overseas facilities and supply points. This includes both Chinese-operated facilities and agreements with host nations to secure "places without bases," such as airports and harbors that can be used during a crisis.¹⁴³ In one assessment, Senior Colonel Zhou Bo, director of the Ministry of National Defense's International Security Cooperation Center, argues that the PLA's inaugural overseas base, located in Djibouti, will help facilitate disaster relief, as well as intelligence collection, and joint CT exercises with U.S., Japanese, and other foreign navies.¹⁴⁴ Another source envisions a broader "security supply chain" (安保补给链) spanning the MSR. This will require "friendly

cooperation” with Indian Ocean partners, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as with Middle Eastern and African states.¹⁴⁵

Chinese military diplomacy can also support out-of-area operations and other requirements associated with the BRI.¹⁴⁶ One author contends that the PLA needs to develop stronger foreign affairs capabilities to facilitate interactions with partners; this requires greater investment in linguistic and cultural training.¹⁴⁷ Zhou Bo argues that the PLA navy should step up anti-piracy exercises with foreign partners in the Indian Ocean. This not only helps improve the PLA’s operational proficiency, but also helps to “normalize” Chinese naval presence in the region.¹⁴⁸ Liang Fang also supports increased port visits and combined naval exercises, which helps increase mutual trust and strengthens China’s ability to protect sea lanes.¹⁴⁹

However, other sources describe limits on the PLA’s ability to safeguard overseas Chinese interests and recommend alternate solutions. Major General Zhu Chenghu, former director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the PLA NDU, states that political turmoil can jeopardize access to overseas bases during a crisis, arguing that Chinese companies should rely more on embedded private security contractors. If such a capability existed during the Libya civil war, he states, “I think we certainly wouldn’t have seen the outcome we saw in that conflict.”¹⁵⁰ Other scholars argue that, instead of deploying troops, China should depend on host nations for security protection.¹⁵¹ For instance, two CICIR analysts note that the Ethiopian government dispatched 100 troops to protect a Chinese-operated industrial park during riots in October 2016; this spared the facility from damage.¹⁵² Another, more prominent example is Pakistan’s provision of a 12,000-strong special security force to protect Chinese workers engaged in CPEC projects.¹⁵³

Improving Assessments

No less important is the need to anticipate and assess risk in the first place. Several sources emphasize the need for interagency information-sharing and analysis. For instance, Wang Weixing argues that China needs to gather “all national intelligence capabilities” to assess the security situations in BRI partner states, as well as the policies of other major countries (including the U.S. rebalance to Asia) that might impact the initiative at the operational or strategic levels.¹⁵⁴ Senior Colonel Liu Qun, director of the PLA NDU National Defense Economics Research Center, writes that the PLA should work with state agencies to assess “political changes” and “public opinion” in partner nations, and provide more granular data in areas such as weather and hydrological conditions.¹⁵⁵ Other analysts recommend the creation of a CT intelligence

center under the National Security Commission (NSC) that can manage risk assessments and facilitate better inter-bureaucratic coordination of China's CT organizations.¹⁵⁶

A related imperative concerns the risk assessment functions of Chinese firms. One article, for instance, critiques Chinese companies operating overseas for inadequate risk assessment capabilities, and encourages them to recruit a cadre of risk analysts, learn lessons from foreign multinational corporations, and build "early warning and management systems" to assess risks facing Chinese investments.¹⁵⁷

Enhancing Regional CT Cooperation

Another common argument is the need for China to enhance its counterterrorism cooperation with partners. At the official level, Meng Jianzhu, a Politburo member with the public security portfolio, has called on all BRI partners to increase information-sharing and deepen cooperation between law enforcement agencies, intended in part to address terrorism concerns.¹⁵⁸ Chinese analysts have offered various ways in which this goal can be achieved. One proposal is to create special CT units under the direction of the NSC, in which PLA, People's Armed Police, and public security officials can liaise with foreign partners and deploy if needed.¹⁵⁹ Another is to build a dedicated CT center for BRI partners which would facilitate information exchanges, issue warnings to regional embassies and consulates, and provide training to personnel and firms on how to handle terrorist incidents.¹⁶⁰

A focus of several analyses is improving CT cooperation under the SCO framework. Liu Qun argues that the SCO should be the "foundation" of CT cooperation along the SREB, and BRI partners should be invited to attend exercises as observers (or as full SCO members).¹⁶¹ Zhou Bo contends that the benefits of working through the SCO include making use of the joint SCO training facility in Xinjiang, testing PLA capabilities under realistic conditions, and increasing reliance of other states on Chinese equipment (implying that China will export more CT-related equipment to SCO states).¹⁶² In addition, a CT specialist at CICIR advocates for stronger, "complementary" relations with the SCO and a recent CT mechanism set up among China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.¹⁶³

Shaping Perceptions

At a broader level, Chinese authors regard strategic communications as useful in mollifying international suspicions and reducing domestic opposition to the BRI in some countries. For instance, one PLA media specialist argues that China needs to emphasize "soft vocabulary," such as "proposals" and "initiatives," and avoid stronger language, such as "forbidden" and

“resolutely.” She also encourages a friendly media strategy that tells the BRI’s “story” through the lens of specific projects and individuals, and which casts China as an “advocate and implementer of win-win cooperation.”¹⁶⁴ Wang Weixing calls on Beijing to send an upbeat message through multiple means, including arts performances, films, links with foreign think tanks and industry associations, and high-level summits, to “make clear that we are bearing the burdens of responsibility.”¹⁶⁵

Effective messaging will also be tailored to individual countries and audiences. One source, for instance, argues that China needs to launch BRI websites in partner states’ native languages; the reason is that “only by maximizing the use of the Internet can China gain an advantageous position in international public opinion.”¹⁶⁶ Countries with entrenched domestic opposition also need to be specifically targeted. For instance, one specialist notes that China suffers low favorability ratings in Mongolia, and to correct this problem, Beijing should clarify how the China-Russia-Mongolia economic corridor is useful in “raising peoples’ standards of living.”¹⁶⁷ Another source argues that messaging should address Russian “fears of exclusion,” and reassure India of its “special status” in South Asia while noting the economic benefits of cooperation.¹⁶⁸

Co-opting Strategic Competitors

A related issue is how to manage great power relations to avoid strategic competition. Several Chinese analysts argue that instead of direct confrontation, the most effective strategy is to co-opt the United States, Japan, India, and Russia into the BRI. Wang Weixing advocates increased technological and investment cooperation, while being cautious about hitting the “sensitive strategic nerves” of other major powers.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Zhang Jie writes that China should try to involve companies from other major states in BRI projects, investments, and technology-sharing. This will help influence the “narrow thinking” among these countries’ leaders, even though it will not remove their suspicions altogether.¹⁷⁰ Another scholar suggests linking CPEC to other states’ development strategies and inviting Western companies to join CPEC projects, including through co-bidding.¹⁷¹

Chinese discourse focuses on relations with two states in particular.¹⁷² First is India. Ye Hailin, a South Asia specialist at CASS, argues that Beijing should not compete directly with New Delhi, since India can frustrate BRI projects “by paying only a small price.”¹⁷³ Instead, China should exercise “strategic patience,” focusing on joint projects while downplaying the BRI’s security dimensions.¹⁷⁴ Hu Shisheng similarly warns that India has the “resources and ability to disrupt and even destroy” the BRI’s progress in South Asia, and has less need for Chinese infrastructure development funding than other states. Thus, he outlines a careful approach

that includes avoiding overly close military cooperation with smaller Indian Ocean countries, incrementally expanding the MSR in a way that considers India's "level of tolerance," and using "all types of platforms" to counter strategic suspicions.¹⁷⁵

Second is the United States. Some scholars emphasize economic inducement as key to managing relations with Washington. For instance, Wang Junsheng advocates the participation of U.S. companies in large-scale BRI energy projects as a way to gain U.S. acquiescence.¹⁷⁶ Qiao Liang likewise posits that U.S. businesses, including investment banks and high-tech firms, can be "cleverly" enmeshed into BRI projects; this will make it less likely that Washington will "cause trouble."¹⁷⁷ Other analysts, however, support balancing U.S. competition by increasing China's influence elsewhere. Wang Weixing argues that Beijing should increase security cooperation with Latin American countries as a "wedge" in the U.S. backyard, and should also exploit U.S.-Russian and U.S.-European differences to "relieve strategic pressure."¹⁷⁸ Cao Xiaoyang contends that China can reduce U.S. influence through closer relations with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states.¹⁷⁹

In sum, Chinese strategists argue that a range of tools can be useful in mitigating the dangers associated with the BRI. Some of these, such as expeditionary military capabilities, risk assessments, and regional CT cooperation, are focused on operational challenges to Chinese workers and investments, while others, such as messaging and economic co-optation, are more relevant to perceived strategic challenges.

Conclusion

China's unofficial discourse on the BRI acknowledges potential strategic benefits of Eurasian economic integration, but also highlights a range of obstacles and considers how those can be overcome. On one hand, implementing projects can help ensure a more stable southern and western periphery, assure China's energy supplies in the face of potential threats, and expand regional influence in a way that preserves U.S.-China cooperation. On the other hand, despite an optimistic official narrative, Chinese strategists note that Chinese (and partner state) citizens and property are subject to the risks of operating in turbulent areas, and worry more broadly about current or potential strategic competition from other major powers, especially the United States, Japan, and India. Addressing those challenges requires careful interagency planning to maximize gains and reduce risks.

From a U.S. perspective, Chinese assessments of the BRI help validate concerns that Beijing's intentions are neither altruistic nor purely economic in nature. The direct interpretation of the evidence is that Beijing is seeking spheres of influence in a way analogous to British

geographer Halford Mackinder's early 20th-century thesis that the quest for world dominance starts by occupying the Eurasian heartland.¹⁸⁰ Though usually not stated so boldly, Chinese sources do argue that the BRI can help expand China's "strategic space" and in some cases, such as currying favor with Mongolia, can help weaken U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁸¹

None of the sources consulted for this study provides a clear roadmap for how China will manipulate BRI projects and related institutions to achieve strategic dominance in Eurasia.¹⁸² Yet it is possible to speculate about how Beijing would pursue such a goal over the next decade.¹⁸³ Specific steps in using the BRI to advance a Sinocentric order could include the following: directing national banks to provide loans to states deemed adequately deferential to China's interests and away from those that are not, and trying to manipulate the AIIB and Silk Road Fund for similar purposes; creating indebtedness by providing loans to states unable to pay them off;¹⁸⁴ fostering political loyalty by routing BRI funds to politicians and other elites known to support China's agenda; and allowing Chinese firms to own and operate ports and other critical infrastructure, possibly including the ability to deny use of those facilities to China's opponents.¹⁸⁵

These economic and financial steps could buttress other activities that strengthen Chinese regional influence, such as promotion of sovereignty norms, rejection of liberal democracy, and enhanced security and defense cooperation with partners. Establishment of overseas military bases and more routine PLA naval presence in and beyond the Indian Ocean might also be used to protect critical supply routes and, during emergencies, protect Chinese workers and investments, as well as to shape the broader strategic environment more in China's favor. As Ashley Tellis notes, Beijing could use expanded power projection capabilities throughout the Eastern Hemisphere "both in order to signal its arrival as a true great power in world politics and to influence political outcomes on diverse issues important to China."¹⁸⁶ Beijing might also selectively raise tensions with neighbors opposed to its agenda; Indian media, for instance, attribute Chinese construction in a disputed area near the China-Indian-Bhutan border as a response to Indian Prime Minister Modi's refusal to attend the May 2017 Belt and Road Forum.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, China's ability to use the BRI to advance a Sinocentric order hinges on several variables. First is the extent to which BRI projects uniquely advantage China. Railways, pipelines, and other infrastructure built to Chinese specifications and that link China with its neighbors might give Beijing exclusive benefits, though other developments (such as ports) could be used by others, including China's competitors. The second variable is the extent to which China values stability in its relations with the United States. Wang Jisi's logic suggests that Beijing might temper its ambitions and focus its efforts on areas where U.S. interests are

limited. However, China could use the BRI framework to more directly challenge U.S. equities, such as those in the Middle East, or even in Latin America or the Arctic.¹⁸⁸ Third is how robustly other major powers work to preserve their competitive advantages in affected regions. Much like the Marshall Plan precipitated countermoves by a committed rival (the Soviet Union), Chinese analysts acknowledge that efforts to develop spheres of influence might stimulate strategic competition from states such as Japan and India.¹⁸⁹ Fourth is whether BRI partner nations will try to avoid overreliance on China, such as by limiting acceptance of Chinese loans, inviting competitive bids, or diversifying their economic relationships and strategic partnerships. To one degree or another, most countries are likely to play the field to maximize their negotiating leverage. Thus, the strategic impact of the BRI could be self-limiting, as participating states also create close ties with Japan, India, or the United States to maintain balance.¹⁹⁰

U.S. strategy should seek to influence these variables in a way that moderates China's geopolitical aspirations. First is incentivizing Beijing to avoid direct competition with the United States and avoiding executing the BRI in a way that hits U.S. "sensitive strategic nerves" by maintaining strong U.S.-China economic relations (although it is likely that China will become less dependent on the United States as an export market in the coming years).¹⁹¹ Second is encouraging alternative regional infrastructure development plans that help countries diversify their economic relationships. While U.S.-led programs, such as the New Silk Road, will never match the scale of the BRI, Washington can help promote regional balance and competition by encouraging Japanese and Indian infrastructure development initiatives (and strategic cooperation between Tokyo and New Delhi), and by working through the Asian Development Bank and World Bank to provide alternative financing.¹⁹² Third, the United States can support the many BRI states who wish to avoid overdependence on China by remaining a reliable economic and security partner. This can be achieved through continued strong U.S. regional engagement, despite the current milieu of retrenchment.¹⁹³

The BRI does not, however, have to be interpreted in exclusively zero-sum terms. Although the United States has an interest in maintaining strategic balance in Eurasia, and in retaining competitive advantage in regions critical to U.S. economic interests, there might also be areas where China and the United States share common interests. While Chinese arguments suggesting that Eurasian integration will help ease regional tensions and ameliorate problems such as terrorism are analytically debatable, they are consistent with U.S. official thinking that links development with security.¹⁹⁴ Thus, in principle, BRI projects could support broader U.S. interests in promoting regional peace and stability. Washington could help guarantee that those

effects are achieved by joining the AIIB and supporting select BRI projects, especially in areas like Central Asia that are more peripheral to U.S. commercial interests.

Under a cooperative framework, mutually beneficial results might also be achieved in the nontraditional security arena. Chinese scholars identify a variety of threats, ranging from terrorism to piracy to climate change, to BRI projects. Assuming more of the burden in addressing those types of challenges not only helps safeguard Chinese interests, but also benefits China's image as a supplier (rather than a consumer) of global governance. Washington can leverage those considerations to expect more from Beijing as the two states work at a bilateral or regional level to meet common challenges. Nevertheless, U.S. officials will have to weigh those benefits against concerns, such as bolstering China's image in the face of continued assertive actions in maritime Asia, or legitimizing Beijing's internal crackdown of dissidents.¹⁹⁵

At a macro level, the United States faces a tradeoff in the mix of competitive and cooperative responses to the BRI. Crude attempts to blunt China's relative gains through unilateral or collective opposition could detract from U.S. interests in shaping the initiative through active participation and reduce the likelihood for effective U.S.-China cooperation on nontraditional security issues. Conversely, a passive U.S. approach could allow Beijing to significantly expand its regional influence at U.S. expense. How that tradeoff is handled should be nested within the formulation of a larger U.S. China strategy. A strategy prioritizing economic cooperation and global governance would allow for greater engagement with the BRI, while a more competitive strategy focused on deterring Chinese assertiveness in and beyond Asia would approach the BRI in more zero-sum, antagonistic terms. Attempting to segregate responses to the BRI from larger U.S. strategic aims would lead only to mixed messages and missed opportunities.

Notes

¹“Commentary: China’s ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative Delivering Benefits to the World,” Xinhua, April 15, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/15/c_136210956.htm>.

²As part of the U.S.-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, the United States “recognize[d] the importance of China’s One Belt and One Road initiative” and pledged that a U.S. official would attend the May 2017 Belt and Road Forum (that official would be NSC senior director for Asia Matthew Pottinger). “Joint Release: Initial Results of the 100-Day Action Plan of the U.S.-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue,” May 11, 2017, available at <www.commerce.gov/news/press-releases/2017/05/joint-release-initial-results-100-day-action-plan-us-china-comprehensive>.

³Enda Curran, “China’s Marshall Plan,” Bloomberg, August 7, 2016; Theresa Fallon, “The New Silk Road: Xi Jinping’s Grand Strategy for Eurasia,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 37 (2015), 142.

⁴This report uses *BRI*, which is more commonly used in official English-language Chinese media sources. Nevertheless, *OBOR* is a more literal translation of the original Chinese *yidai yilu* (一带一路).

⁵Nadège Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Washington, DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), 32–39.

⁶Rafaello Pantucci and Sarah Lain, *China’s Eurasian Pivot* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2016), 11.

⁷Vladimir Fedorenko, *The New Silk Road Initiatives in Central Asia*, Rethink Paper 10 (Washington, DC: Rethink Institute, August 2013), August 2013, 17–18.

⁸“U.S. Support for the New Silk Road,” U.S. Department of State, available at <<https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/index.htm>>.

⁹Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 17–26.

¹⁰*Meeting Asia’s Infrastructure Needs* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2017), xi.

¹¹For a thorough overview of BRI projects, see Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 72–88.

¹²Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, *Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice, and China’s Contribution* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 10–17.

¹³“The New Silk Road,” *The Economist*, September 10, 2015, available at <www.economist.com/news/special-report/21663326-chinas-latest-wave-globalisers-will-enrich-their-countryand-world-new-silk-road>.

¹⁴*Building the Belt and Road*, 12.

¹⁵Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 95–108; Simeon Djankov, “The Rationale Behind China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” in *China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Motives, Scope, and Challenges*, ed. Simeon Djankov and Sean Minder (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute of International Economics, 2016), 7–8.

¹⁶“Full Text of President Xi’s Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum,” Xinhua, May 14, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm>.

¹⁷“Belt and Road to Offer New Momentum for Globalization: BCG,” Xinhua, March 25, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/25/c_136157463.htm>; “Spotlight: World Leaders Chant Belt & Road Chorus,” Xinhua, May 14, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282837.htm>.

¹⁸ However, Christopher Johnson notes this could also be a liability if “politicization” of the BRI trumps “economic practicality.” See Christopher K. Johnson, *President Xi Jinping’s “Belt and Road” Initiative* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016), 23.

¹⁹ For a survey of regional views, see “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Along the Silk Road,” *Asia Policy* 24 (2017), 66–122.

²⁰ For instance, in December 1947, George Kennan, then the director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, wrote that the Marshall Plan would be an effective tool in containing Soviet power. Diane B. Kunz, “The Marshall Plan Reconsidered: A Complex of Motives,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 3 (May–June 1997), 165.

²¹ “Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 8, 2015, available at <www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1243662.shtml>. See also “Comparing China’s ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative with Marshall Plan Absurd: Scholars,” Xinhua, March 14, 2015, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-03/14/c_134066619.htm>.

²² “Full Text of President Xi’s Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum.”

²³ Discussion of security challenges is also absent in two key BRI documents: *Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative*, released by the State Council on March 30, 2015; and *Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice, and China’s Contribution*, released by the Leading Group for the BRI in May 2017.

²⁴ A search of the China Knowledge Infrastructure database suggests a variety of official funding programs for BRI research. The most prominent is the National Social Science Fund (国家社会科学基金), which has supported over 1,000 research articles. Another motive for scholars may be gaining feedback from senior officials, often expressed through laudatory margin comments (批示). This can raise a scholar’s status and help solicit government funding. For a discussion, see Bonnie S. Glaser, “Chinese Foreign Policy Research Institutes and the Practice of Influence,” in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Who Makes It and How Is It Made?* ed. Gilbert Rozman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 120–122.

²⁵ For further discussion of China’s foreign policy think tanks, see Bonnie S. Glaser and Philip C. Saunders, “Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence,” *China Quarterly* 171 (September 2002), 597–616; Glaser, 87–124; and Pascal Abb, “China’s Foreign Policy Think Tanks: Institutional Evolution and Changing Roles,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 93 (2015), 531–553.

²⁶ The study avoids works from more peripheral institutes and scholars, as well as media commentary (especially in English-language venues), which are often either superficial or designed solely to advance strategic messaging. See, for example, Shen Dingli, “China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy Is Not Another Marshall Plan,” *China-U.S. Focus*, March 16, 2015, available at <www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/china-advances-its-one-belt-one-road-strategy/>.

²⁷ “Xi Jinping: Let the Sense of Community of Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighboring Countries,” *PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, October 25, 2013, available at <www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml>. For an analysis, see Michael D. Swaine, “Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” *China Leadership Monitor* 44 (2014), 1–43.

²⁸ “Full Text: China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation,” Xinhua, January 11, 2017, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2017-01/11/c_135973695.htm>.

²⁹“Full Text: China’s Military Strategy,” Xinhua, May 26, 2015, available at <http://news.xinhua-net.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c_134271001.htm>.

³⁰Wang Haiyun, “Geostrategic Thinking of Belt and Road Initiative,” *International Strategic Studies*, no. 3 (2015), 13–22. Wang previously served as a defense attaché to Moscow; China Institute of International Strategic Studies is affiliated with the military intelligence department of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

³¹Similarly, other scholars contend that the BRI will “improve ordinary people’s lives,” which will make it harder for extremists to recruit converts and “cause them to lose social influence.” Wang Yiwei and Zheng Dong, “Non-Traditional Security Challenges Facing One Belt, One Road [一带一路面临的非传统安全挑战],” *China Opening Journal* [开放导报], no. 4 (2015), 23.

³²Wang Junsheng, “‘One Belt, One Road’ and China’s Peripheral Strategy in the New Period [‘一带一路’与中国新时期的周边战略],” *Shandong Social Sciences* [山东社会科学], no. 8 (2015), 54. For a similar argument from a U.S. scholar, see Cullen Hendrix, “Rough Patches on the Silk Road? Security Implications of China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” in *China’s Belt and Road Initiative*, 25–30.

³³Hu Bo, “Three Major Maritime Security Issues Pose a Test for ‘One Belt, One Road [三大海上安全问题考验‘一带一路],” in *Assessment of China’s Peripheral Security Situation 2016* [中国周边安全形势评估2016], ed. Zhang Jie (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2016), 193.

³⁴China’s official action plan on the BRI, released by the State Council in 2015, states that regional connectivity will help partner nations “understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity.” “Full Text: Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative,” *People’s Republic of China State Council*, March 28, 2015, available at <news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-03/28/c_134105858.htm>.

³⁵Li Gang, “Exploration of New Type Great Power Relations under ‘One Belt, One Road [‘一带一路’视野下的新型大国关系考察],” *Western Journal* [西部学刊], no. 8 (2016), 12.

³⁶Wang Yiwei, *Challenges and Opportunities of “One Belt, One Road”* [一带一路 机遇与挑战] (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2015), 69. Wang Junsheng portrays the BRI as the “glue” driving regional engagement. He explains how this promotes trust: “As BRI proposals unfold, this will not only involve more high-level meetings between officials, but there will also be many working level meetings. As they carry out projects, leaders will also discuss cooperation in the security and law enforcement, social and cultural arenas. This will subconsciously advance political and security mutual trust between China and neighboring countries.” Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ and China’s Peripheral Strategy in the New Period,” 54. See also Sun Xianpu, “‘One Belt, One Road’ and Remodeling the Pattern of Great Peripheral Diplomacy [‘一带一路’与大周边外交格局的重塑],” *Yunnan Social Sciences* [云南社会科学], no. 3 (2016).

³⁷Sun, 5. Likewise, Yang Liwei, a scholar at China’s Foreign Affairs University, argues that the BRI can promote closer counterpiracy cooperation between China and India, allowing “both to achieve their dreams of becoming maritime great powers.” Yang Liwei, “‘One Belt, One Road’: A New Opportunity for Developing China-India Relations [‘一带一路’: 中印关系发展的新机遇],” *China Business & Trade* [中国商贸], no. 8 (2016), 91. In an interview, Senior Colonel Meng Xiangqing, a professor at the PLA NDU, similarly argues that the BRI will stimulate closer counterterrorism cooperation among Shanghai Cooperation Organization members, which is needed to address the “three evils” and to

counter potential instability in Afghanistan following a reduction of U.S. forces. Dong Ruifeng, “Create a Peaceful and Secure External Environment [营造即和平又安全的外部环境],” *Liaowang* [瞭望], September 23, 2013.

³⁸ Dong.

³⁹ See, for example, John Oneal and Bruce Russett, “Assessing the Liberal Peace with Alternative Specifications: Trade Still Reduces Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 4 (1999), 423–442; Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, “Trade Blocs, Trade Flows, and International Conflict,” *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (2000), 775–808; Erik Gartzke, Quan Li, and Charles Boehmer, “Investing in the Peace: Economic Interdependence and International Conflict,” *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001), 391–438; and Brandon J. Kinne, “Multilateral Trade and Militarized Conflict: Centrality, Openness, and Asymmetry in the Global Trade Network,” *Journal of Politics* 74, no. 1 (2012), 308–322.

⁴⁰ Katherine Barbieri, “Economic Interdependence: A Path to Peace or a Source of Interstate Conflict?” *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 1 (1996), 2949.

⁴¹ See, for example, *The Globalization of Crime* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). Another externality is the possibility that development could lead to greater chances for insurgencies as radical groups fear a loss of social support. Benjamin Crost, Joseph Felner, and Patrick Johnston, “Development Projects and Civil Conflict,” *American Economic Review* 104, no. 6 (2014), 1833–1856.

⁴² For a discussion, see Erica S. Downs, “The Chinese Energy Security Debate,” *The China Quarterly* 177 (2004), 21–41; Marc Lanteigne, “China’s Maritime Security and the ‘Malacca Dilemma,’” *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 (2008), 143–161; and Zhongxiang Zhang, “China’s Energy Security, the Malacca Dilemma, and Responses,” *Energy Policy* 39, no. 12 (2011), 7612–7615.

⁴³ “China,” U.S. Energy Information Administration, May 14, 2015, available at <www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/China/china.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Candace Dunn, “China is Now the World’s Largest Net Importer of Petroleum and Other Liquid Fuels,” *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, March 24, 2014, available at <www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=15531>.

⁴⁵ Wang, *Challenges and Opportunities of ‘One Belt, One Road,’* 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷ Li Yuanxing and Liang Changzheng, “A Study of Basic Questions on China’s Strategic Transport Support [我国海上战略运输保障基本问题研究],” *National Defense* [国防], no. 12 (2015), 55.

⁴⁸ Huang Xiaoyong, “Promote Collective Asian Energy Security Through One Belt, One Road [以‘一带一路’促进亚洲共同能源安全],” *Foreign Affairs Observer* [外交观察], August 7, 2015, available at <www.faobserver.com/NewsInfo.aspx?id=11409>. For background on the Gwadar-Kashgar pipeline, see Fawad Yousafzai, “China to Build Mega Oil Pipeline from Gwadar to Kashgar,” *The Nation*, June 13, 2016, available at <<http://nation.com.pk/national/13-Jun-2016/china-to-build-mega-oil-pipeline-from-gwadar-to-kashgar>>. For background on the Bay of Bengal pipeline, see Cao Siqi and You Ma, “China, Myanmar Ink Oil Pipeline Deal,” *Global Times*, April 10, 2017, available at <www.global-times.cn/content/1041785.shtml>.

⁴⁹ Piao Guangji and Li Su, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Construction and China-Mongolia-Russia Energy Cooperation [‘一带一路’建设与中蒙俄能源合作],” *Asia-Pacific Economics* [亚太经济], no. 5

(2016), 6. Likewise, Han Jingkuan, vice president of the China National Petroleum Corporation's China Petroleum Planning and Engineering Institute, claims that new pipelines developed in multiple regions could account for around 24 percent of China's oil imports and 67 percent of its natural gas imports within 20–30 years, though he does not provide baseline figures. See Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?* 112–113.

⁵⁰ Fu Mengzi and Lou Chunhao, "Some Thoughts on Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road [关于21世纪'海上丝绸之路'建设的若干思考]," *Contemporary International Relations* [现代国际关系], no. 3 (2015), 2. Fu is vice president of Chinese Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and Lou is an associate research fellow in CICIR's Maritime Strategy Center.

⁵¹ For a discussion of "comprehensive national power," see Hu Angang and Men Honghua, "The Rising of Modern China: Comprehensive National Power and Grand Strategy," Paper presented at the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy conference on "Rising China and the East Asian Economy," Seoul, March 19–20, 2004.

⁵² See, for example, John Garver and Fei-ling Wang, "China's Anti-Encirclement Struggle," *Asian Security* 6 (2010), 238–261; Yong Deng, "Hegemon on the Offensive: Chinese Perspectives on U.S. Global Strategy," *Political Science Quarterly* 116 (2001), 343–365; David Shambaugh, "China's Military Views the World," *International Security* 24 (1999–2000), 52–79; and Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security* 23 (1999), 49–80.

⁵³ "Full Text: China's Military Strategy," Xinhua, May 26, 2015, available at <http://news.xinhua-net.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c_134271001.htm>. A particular concern was strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance. For a discussion, see Adam P. Liff, "China and the U.S. Alliance System," *The China Quarterly*, April 24, 2017, 6, available at <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741017000601>>.

⁵⁴ One manifestation was Xi Jinping's emphasis on military confidence-building measures as a way to avoid unnecessary friction between U.S. and Chinese naval and air forces. See Phillip C. Saunders and Julia G. Bowie, "U.S.-China Military Relations: Competition and Cooperation," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39 (2016), 662–684.

⁵⁵ Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?* 117–118.

⁵⁶ Wang Jisi, "'March West,' China's Geostrategic Rebalance ['西进,' 中国地缘战略的再平衡]," *Global Times* [环球时报], October 17, 2012, available at <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2012-10/3193760.html>. For a discussion of Wang's thesis, see Yun Sun, "March West: China's Response to the U.S. Rebalancing," *The Brookings Institution*, January 31, 2013, available at <www.brookings.edu/blog/upfront/2013/01/31/march-west-chinas-response-to-the-u-s-rebalancing/>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Foreign and Chinese observers have debated the specific influence of the "march west" proposal on the formulation of the BRI. Wang Yong, a professor of international policy economy at Beijing University, asserts that Wang Jisi's proposal "got resonance by China's new leadership quickly, who made decisions on AIIB and the Belt and Road Initiative." Yong Wang, "Offensive for Defensive: The Belt and Road Initiative in China's New Grand Strategy," *Pacific Review* 29, no. 3 (2016), 458. However, Rolland suggests that Wang's piece was more a reflection of renewed interest in Eurasia by policymakers. Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?* 117.

⁵⁹ Sun, "'One Belt, One Road' and Remodeling the Pattern of Great Peripheral Diplomacy," 5–6.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁶¹ Peng Bo, “Analysis of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy [‘一带一路’战略探析],” *International Studies Reference* [国际研究参考], no. 9 (2015), 5. See also Ling Shengli, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Reshaping Peripheral Geopolitics [‘一带一路’战略与周边地缘重塑],” *International Relations Research* [国际关系研究], no. 1 (2016), 80.

⁶² Qiao Liang, “The U.S. Strategic Eastward Shift and China’s Strategic March West [美国的战略东移与中国的战略西进],” *High End Talk* [高端话题], no. 5 (2015), 24. Qiao is best known as co-author of the 1999 volume *Unrestricted Warfare* [超限战], which argued that China should use a range of unconventional tools, including legal and economic warfare, to counter U.S. hegemony.

⁶³ Li Yonghui, “Thoughts on the Strategic Meaning and Promotion of the China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor [中俄蒙经济走廊的战略内涵和推进思路],” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* [东北亚学刊], no. 4 (2015), 11.

⁶⁴ Wang, “Geostrategic Thinking of Belt and Road Initiative,” 21–22.

⁶⁵ Johnson, *President Xi Jinping’s ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative*, 19.

⁶⁶ For a discussion, see Economic Intelligence Unit, *Prospects and Challenges on China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’: A Risk Assessment Report*, 2015. See also Djankov, “The Rationale Behind China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” 9–10; and Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 156–159.

⁶⁷ China’s 2015 defense white paper summarizes the problem: “With the growth of China’s national interests, its national security is more vulnerable to international and regional turmoil, terrorism, piracy, serious natural disasters and epidemics, and the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication, as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue.” “Full Text: China’s Military Strategy.”

⁶⁸ Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Brauner, and Zhou Hong, *Protecting China’s Overseas Interests* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute I, 2014), 41. See also Jonas Parell-Lesner and Mathieu Duchâtel, *China’s Strong Arm: Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2015).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 46. On the Libya evacuation, see also Shaio H. Zerba, “China’s Libya Evacuation Operation: A New Diplomatic Imperative—Overseas Citizen Protection,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 90 (2014), 1093–1112.

⁷⁰ Lin Limin, “Advancing ‘One Belt, One Road,’ Highlight the Focus [推进‘一带一路’要突出重点],” *World Affairs* [世界知识], no. 21 (2016), 66.

⁷¹ Wang Weixing, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision: Risks and Challenges [全球视野下的‘一带一路’: 风险与挑战],” *Frontiers* [学术前沿], no. 5 (2015), 10.

⁷² Wang Weixing, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Responses [‘一带一路’战略面临的风险挑战及对策研究],” *China Leadership Science* [中国领导科学], no. 8 (2015), 44.

⁷³ Tian Wenlin, “‘One Belt, One Road,’ and China’s Middle East Strategy [‘一带一路’与中国的中东战略],” *West Asia and Africa* [西亚非洲], no. 2 (2016), 137.

⁷⁴ Zhang Lili and Zhang Yuyan, “The Status of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Future Challenges [‘一带一路’战略实践形势与未来推进挑战],” *People’s Tribune* [人民论坛], no. 1 (2016), 29. Zhang Li Li is Director of the Diplomacy Research Center at the China Foreign Affairs University

and Zhang Yuyan is a Ph.D. student at Renmin University.

⁷⁵ Hu, “Three Major Maritime Security Issues Pose a Test for ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 193.

⁷⁶ Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” 7. Moreover, Wang Weixing lists West Asia and North Africa as areas where the BRI coincides with “key conflict areas,” and notes that “many Chinese citizens have been killed in this violence.” Wang, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy,” 44.

⁷⁷ Chen Xiangyang, “A Snapshot of External Security Risks of Building ‘One Belt, One Road’ [绸缪“一带一路建设外部安全风险],” *Liaowang* [瞭望], April 14, 2014. Fu and Lou similarly argue that political strife, economic challenges, and “security chaos” in Afghanistan and Pakistan are difficult to address in the near term. Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” 6.

⁷⁸ Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” 6. The incident involved firing of shells from both sides, resulting in a reported five Indian and four Pakistani civilian casualties. “Kashmir: Nine Civilians Killed in India-Pakistan Border Firing,” *BBC*, October 6, 2014, available at <www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29502054>.

⁷⁹ Li Daguang, “Military Diplomacy Under the Strategic Idea of ‘One Belt, One Road’ [‘一带一路’战略构想下的军事外交],” *Defense Industry Conversion in China* [中国军转民], no. 11 (2015), 74; see also Hu, “Three Major Maritime Security Issues Pose a Test for ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 193–194.

⁸⁰ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 10. However, the Bangkok-Yunnan high-speed rail project, which foundered over cost-sharing disputes, resumed when Thailand decided to finance the project itself. Tan Hui Yee, “Thai-China Rail Project Will Continue,” *Jakarta Post*, April 6, 2016, available at <www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2016/04/06/thai-china-rail-project-will-continue.html>. With respect to Myanmar, two CICIR scholars also note that civil conflict has resulted in artillery being fired into Chinese territory, posing challenges for border security and influencing bilateral economic cooperation. Fu Mengzi and Xu Gang, “‘One Belt, One Road’: Progress, Challenges, and Responses [‘一带一路’: 进展, 挑战与应对],” *China International Studies* [国际问题研究], no. 3 (2017), available at <www.cicir.ac.cn/chinese/News_8198.html>.

⁸¹ Wang and Zhang, “Non-Traditional Security Challenges Facing One Belt, One Road,” 22–23.

⁸² Wang Yiwei, “‘One Belt, One Road’: Opportunities and Challenges [‘一带一路’机遇与挑战] (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2015), 114.

⁸³ Shi Xiehong, “The Influence of Central Asian Religious Extremists on ‘One Belt, One Road’ Construction and China’s Response [中亚宗教极端势力对‘一带一路’建设的影响及我国的应对],” *World Religious Cultures* [世界宗教文化], no. 2 (2016), 16–17. Shi is a postdoctoral researcher in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) National Institute of International Strategy.

⁸⁴ Zhang Jinping, “The Threats to ‘One Belt, One Road’ of the Strategic ‘Eastward Shift’ of International Terrorist Forces [国际恐怖势力战略‘东向’对‘一带一路’的威胁],” in *Assessment of China’s Peripheral Security Situation*, 206.

⁸⁵ Yan Shuai, “Severe Terrorist Threats Is the Biggest Motive of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Tajikistan Anti-Terrorism Cooperation [严峻暴恐威胁是中阿巴塔加强反恐合作最大动因],” *China Radio International* [国际在线], August 8, 2016.

⁸⁶ Zhang, “The Threats to ‘One Belt, One Road’ of the Strategic ‘Eastward Shift’ of International Terrorist Forces,” 204.

⁸⁷ Chen, “A Snapshot of External Security Risks of Building ‘One Belt, One Road.’”

⁸⁸ Zhang Jie, “Regional Security Issues in Constructing ‘One Belt, One Road [‘一带一路’建设中的周边安全问题],” *World Affairs* [世界知识], no. 9 (2017), 22–23.

⁸⁹ Liu Zongyi, “Building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Progress and Challenges [中巴经济走廊建设: 进展与挑战],” *International Studies Research* [国际问题研究], no. 3 (2016), 133. Liu is a South Asia specialist at the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies.

⁹⁰ Wang Shida, “The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Helping ‘One Belt, One Road’ [中巴经济走廊助力‘一带一路’],” in *Assessment of China’s Peripheral Security Situation 2016*, 175.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Yuan Sha, “Analysis of the Characteristics, Influence, and Evolution of Pakistani Domestic Terrorist Forces [巴基斯坦国内恐怖主义势力的演变, 特点及影响分析],” *South Asian Studies Quarterly* [南亚研究季刊], no. 2 (2016), 41. Moreover, Liu Zongyi writes that several Pakistani insurgent groups have held an “adversarial view on Chinese workers and are opposed to the Gwadar project,” suggesting the possibility for more targeted attacks. Liu, “Building the China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor,” 133.

⁹³ Interviews, June 2017. Notably, one scholar characterized the key risk to CPEC not as terrorism, but as “efficiency,” suggesting economic challenges.

⁹⁴ Li, “Military Diplomacy Under the Strategic Idea of ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 73–74.

⁹⁵ Tian, “‘One Belt, One Road,’ and China’s Middle East Strategy,” 137.

⁹⁶ Shi, “The Influence of Central Asian Religious Extremists on ‘One Belt, One Road’ Construction,” 17.

⁹⁷ Hou Anghao, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Calls for Big Border and Coastal Defense Theory [‘一带一路’战略呼唤大边海防理念],” *Jiefangjun Bao* [解放军报], August 5, 2015, available at <www.mod.gov.cn/intl/2015-08/05/content_4612819.htm>.

⁹⁸ Liang Fang, “The Risks of the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ Are Great [今日‘海上丝绸之路’通道风险有多大],” *National Defense Reference* [国防参考], February 11, 2015. In fact, piracy in the Gulf of Aden has significantly declined over the last several years due to international counterpiracy operations. However, the hijacking of a Sri Lankan oil tanker off Somalia in March 2017 suggested a potential reversal of those gains. See Luke Graham, “Somali Pirates Hijack First Commercial Ships in 5 Years,” *CNBC*, March 14, 2017, available at <www.cnbc.com/2017/03/14/somali-pirates-hijack-first-commercial-ship-in-5years.html>.

⁹⁹ Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road,’” 7.

¹⁰⁰ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 12.

¹⁰¹ Wang, “*One Belt, One Road*”: *Opportunities and Challenges*, 115–116. Another risk is major earthquakes along routes in northern Pakistan (Gilgit-Basalt). Thanks to Thomas Lynch for this observation.

¹⁰² Ibid., 115–116.

¹⁰³ That was the case, for instance, in a spate of attacks on Chinese workers in Africa in the 2000s. See, for example, “Overseas and Under Siege,” *The Economist*, August 11, 2009, available at <www.economist.com/node/14207132>; and Bates Gill and James Reilly, “The Tenuous Hold of China Inc. in Africa,” *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2007), 37–52. For a more recent discussion, see Tom

Miller, *China's Asian Dream: Empire Building along the New Silk Road* (London: Zed Books, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Wang, "Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy," 43.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Cao Xiaoyang, "China-U.S. Games: 'Asia-Pacific Rebalance' and 'One Belt, One Road' [中美博弈: '亚太再平衡' 与 '一带一路']," *China Economic Report* [中国经济报告], no. 4 (2016), 103. Tian Wenlin similarly finds that Americans "think that the BRI is about revising the geostrategic chessboard and the global order." Tian, "One Belt, One Road, and China's Middle East Strategy," 138.

¹⁰⁷ Yang Xilian, "Assessment on Security Environment of East Asian Region Along Belt and Road," *International Strategic Studies* no. 3 (2015), 37. Yang is a former defense attaché to both the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

¹⁰⁸ Wang, "'One Belt, One Road' Under Global Vision," 8. For details on the New Silk Road initiative, see "Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns on Economic Connectivity in Central Asia," *Asia Society*, September 23, 2014, available at <<http://asiasociety.org/policyinstitute/deputy-secretary-state-william-j-burns-economic-connectivity-central-asia>>.

¹⁰⁹ Tian, "One Belt, One Road, and China's Middle East Strategy," 138. Nevertheless, the RMB declined as a share of international payments in 2016, which analysts attributed to factors including exchange rate volatility and slowing Chinese economic growth. See Frank Tang, "International Yuan Payment Drops Sharply in 2016 on Depreciation and Capital Control," *South China Morning Post*, January 27, 2017, available at <www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2065832/international-yuan-payment-drops-significantly-2016-depreciation>.

¹¹⁰ Hu, "Three Major Maritime Security Issues Pose a Test for 'One Belt, One Road,'" 191.

¹¹¹ Wang, "'One Belt, One Road' Under Global Vision," 8–9.

¹¹² Peng, "Analysis of the 'One Belt, One Road' Strategy," 7. Xue Li, a scholar at the CASS Institute of World Economics and Politics, comes to a different conclusion, arguing that Washington was never particularly concerned about its allies joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), since this "did not fundamentally challenge U.S. leadership," but would have reacted more strongly if China had sought to form military alliances with any of these states. Xue Li, "The U.S. Rebalance Strategy and China's 'One Belt, One Road' [美国再平衡战略与中国'一带一路']," *World Economics and Politics* [世界经济与政治], no. 5 (2016), 71.

¹¹³ Liu, "Building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 133.

¹¹⁴ Tang, "Jointly Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in the South China Sea," 28. Fu Mengzi and Lou Chunhao likewise argue that the United States is using "new media" and nongovernmental organizations to promote democracy, support environmental protection, and carry out "color revolutions," which pose challenges for the Maritime Silk Road. Fu and Lou, "Some Thoughts on Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," 6.

¹¹⁵ Ding Man, "Will China-Japan Relations under 'One Belt, One Road' Be Cooperative or Conflictual? [中日两国在'一带一路'上合作还是对抗]," *Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies* [俄罗斯东欧中亚研究] no. 5 (2016), 124. Ding is a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University.

¹¹⁶ Li Chengri, "The Rise of 'Shinzo Abe's Way' and the Regionalization of Sino-Japanese Strategic Rivalry [“安倍路线”的抬头与中日战略博弈的地区化]," in *Assessment of China's Peripheral*

Security Situation 2016, 54. Li is a scholar at the CASS National Institute of International Strategy.

¹¹⁷ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 10.

¹¹⁸ Li, “The Rise of ‘Shinzo Abe’s Way’ and the Regionalization of Sino-Japanese Strategic Rivalry,” 64–66; Li Suhua, “Japan’s Thinking and Responses to the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Idea [日本对‘一带一路’构想的认知和反应],” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* [东北亚学刊], no. 3 (2015), 16–17. Li is an assistant research fellow in the CASS National Institute of International Strategy.

¹¹⁹ Ding, “Will China-Japan Relations under ‘One Belt, One Road’ Be Cooperative or Conflicting?” 125–128.

¹²⁰ Chang Sichun, “The Pattern of Japanese Investment Along the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Route and Its Influence on China [日本在‘一带一路’沿线投资的格局及对华影响],” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* [东北亚学刊], no. 3 (2016), 44–45. Chang is an associate research fellow in the CASS Institute of Japan Studies. For details on Japan’s infrastructure development aid, see Leika Kihara and Linda Sieg, “Japan Unveils \$110 Billion Plan to Fund Asian Infrastructure, Eye on AIIB,” *Reuters*, May 21, 2015, available at <www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-asia-investment-idUSKBN0O617G20150521>.

¹²¹ Li, “Japan’s Thinking and Responses to the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Idea,” 16–17.

¹²² Hu Fangxin, “China, Indonesia, India: ‘Meeting’ at Sea [中国印尼印度:‘相会’在海上],” *World Knowledge* [世界知识], no. 5 (2015), 20. The “String of Pearls” refers to an idea popularized in the mid-2000s that China is seeking to develop a series of bases in the Indian Ocean region to safeguard critical sea lanes and expand its strategic influence. For an Indian perspective, see Gurpreet S. Khurana, “China’s ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications,” *Strategic Analysis* 32, no. 1 (2008), 1–39.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Yang, “‘One Belt, One Road’: A New Opportunity for Developing China-India Relations,” 92.

¹²⁵ Zhang, “Regional Security Issues in Constructing ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 22. Similarly, Ge Cheng, a researcher with the CASS National Institute of International Strategy, notes that many Indian scholars view Chinese infrastructure development in India’s “back yard,” especially with Pakistan, as a kind of “containment.” Ge Cheng, “The China-India Consensus on ‘One Belt, One Road’: Opportunities and Challenges [‘一带一路’的中印共识: 机遇与困局],” *Shandong Journal of Social Science* [山东社会科学], no. 8 (2015), 60. See also Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road,’” 4.

¹²⁶ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 9; Tang, “Jointly Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in the South China Sea,” 29; Zhang, “Regional Security Issues in Constructing ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 22; Liang, “‘The Risks of the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ Are Great.”

¹²⁷ Wang, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Responses,” 44.

¹²⁸ Sutirtho Patranobis, “Pride and Diplomacy: Why India May Not Attend China’s Belt and Road Forum,” *Hindustan Times*, May 14, 2017, available at <www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/will-india-s-absence-at-brf-in-beijing-further-impact-ties-with-china/story-v9f4JlTYd2DZuTPcw-62SO.html>.

¹²⁹ Yang, “Assessment on Security Environment of East Asian Region along Belt and Road,” 37–38.

¹³⁰ Zhang and Zhang, “The Status of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Future Challenges,” 28.

¹³¹ Ding, “Will China-Japan Relations under ‘One Belt, One Road’ Be Cooperative or Conflictual?” 125.

¹³² Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” 5.

¹³³ Li, “The Rise of ‘Shinzo Abe’s Way’ and the Regionalization of Sino-Japanese Strategic Rivalry,” 66.

¹³⁴ Tang, “Jointly Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in the South China Sea,” 29.

¹³⁵ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 9; Peng, “Analysis of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy,” 7.

¹³⁶ Zhang, “Regional Security Issues in Constructing ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 21.

¹³⁷ Zhang Jie, “‘One Belt, One Road’ and ‘Global Maritime Fulcrum’: China and Indonesia Strategic Abutment and Challenges [‘一带一路’与‘全球海洋支点’: 中国与印尼的战略对接及其挑战],” *Contemporary World* (当代世界), no. 8 (2015), 40.

¹³⁸ Fu and Lou, “Some Thoughts on Building the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” 5. Tang Yinchu also identifies friction over the South China Sea as a potential brake on the BRI, warning, in particular, about the emergence of anti-China “cliques among ASEAN countries.” Tang, “Jointly Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in the South China Sea,” 30. In addition, Wang Weixing argues that ASEAN’s “hedging attitudes” due to South China Sea disputes have blocked the BRI from “taking root in Southeast Asia.” Wang Weixing, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Responses,” 43.

¹³⁹ Zhang, “Regional Security Issues in Constructing ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 22. Similarly, Hu Bo argues that the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations want to “hitch a ride” on China’s economic development; this means that the influence of the South China Sea disputes on the MSR’s development is “still not large.” Hu, “Three Major Maritime Security Issues Pose a Test for ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 189.

¹⁴⁰ Liang, “The Risks of the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ Are Great.” For a discussion of the development of PLA expeditionary capabilities, see Kristen Gunness and Oriana Skylar Mastro, “A Global People’s Liberation Army: Possibilities, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *Asia Policy* 22 (July 2016), 131–155; and Christopher H. Sharman, *China Moves Out: Stepping Stones toward a New Maritime Strategy* (Washington, DC: [U.S.] National Defense University, 2015).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* Liang suggests that far seas blockades could be a useful “asymmetric” way to counter blockades of China during a conflict.

¹⁴² Qiao Liang, “PLA Major General: One Belt, One Road Strategy Requires China’s Ground Forces to Take Flight [我军少将: 一带一路要求中国陆军必须飞起来],” *Global Times* [环球时报], May 7, 2015, available at <<http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2015-05-07/1708830002.html>>. Indeed, developing PLA army aviation has been a focus of recent reforms. For a discussion, see Dennis J. Blasko, “Recent Developments in the Chinese Army’s Helicopter Force,” *China Brief* 17, no. 8 (2017), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/recent-developments-chinese-armys-helicopter-force/>>. On PLA special operations capabilities, see Dennis J. Blasko, “PLA Special Operations Forces: Organizations, Missions and Training,” *China Brief* 15, no. 9 (2015), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/pla-special-operations-forces-organizations-missions-and-training/>>.

¹⁴³ Liang, “The Risks of the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ Are Great”; Wang, “One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 17–18. For a discussion of different basing options, see Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici with Scott Devary and Jenny Lin, “*Not an Idea We Have to Shun*”: Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century (Washington, DC: [U.S.] National Defense University, 2014).

¹⁴⁴ Zhou Bo, “International Military Cooperation and the Security of Overseas Interests [国际军事合作和海外利益安全],” in PLA NDU National Security Engineering Laboratory and National Defense Economics Research Center, “*One Belt, One Road*” Security Support Research Seminar [‘一带一路’安全保障研讨会辑要] (Beijing: NDU Press, n.d.), 61–64. The Djibouti facility formally opened in July 2017. See “China Sets up Base in Djibouti,” Xinhua, July 11, 2017, available at <news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/11/c_136435716.htm>. For a discussion, see Erica Downs, Jeffrey Becker, and Patrick DeGategno, *China’s Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China’s First Overseas Base* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2017).

¹⁴⁵ Liu Qun, “Innovating Overseas Military Activity Models to Protect ‘One Belt, One Road’ Security [创新海外军事行动模式维护‘一带一路’安全],” in PLA NDU National Security Engineering Laboratory and National Defense Economics Research Center, “*One Belt, One Road*” Security Support Research Seminar [‘一带一路’安全保障研讨会辑要], 76.

¹⁴⁶ For a recent analysis of China’s military diplomacy, see Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications* (Washington, DC: [U.S.] National Defense University, 2017).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Zhou, “International Military Cooperation and the Security of Overseas Interests,” 62.

¹⁴⁹ Liang, “The Risks of the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ Are Great.”

¹⁵⁰ “NDU Professor: ‘One Belt, One Road’ Requires Building Overseas Security Capabilities [国防大学教授: ‘一带一路’要建海外安保力量],” *Ta Kung Pao* [大公网], May 13, 2015, available at <<http://news.takungpao.com/mainland/focus/2015-05/2998430.html>>. For a discussion of the evolving role of China’s private security companies in protecting overseas interests, see Duchâtel, Braunder, and Zhou, *Protecting China’s Overseas Interests*, 54–56; and Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 168–169.

¹⁵¹ Zhang and Zhang, “The Status of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Future Challenges,” 29.

¹⁵² Fu and Xu, “‘One Belt, One Road’: Progress, Challenges, and Responses.”

¹⁵³ For background, see Saeed Shah and Josh Chin, “Pakistan to Create Security Force to Protect Chinese Workers,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 2015, available at <www.wsj.com/articles/pakistan-to-create-security-force-to-protect-chinese-workers-1429701872>.

¹⁵⁴ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 15.

¹⁵⁵ Liu, “Innovating Overseas Military Activity Models to Protect ‘One Belt, One Road’ Security,” 77.

¹⁵⁶ Li, Mei, and Ling, “Build a Chinese Counter-Terrorism Mechanism Under the Leadership of the National Security Commission,” 82. For a discussion of the NSC, see Joel Wuthnow, “China’s New ‘Black Box’: Problems and Prospects for the Central National Security Commission,” *China Quarterly*, forthcoming (2017).

¹⁵⁷ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Global Vision,” 15.

¹⁵⁸ “Beijing Holds Security Cooperation Dialogue on Belt and Road Initiative,” Xinhua, May 4,

2017, available at <news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/04/c_136257488.htm>.

¹⁵⁹ Li Benxian, Mei Jianming, and Ling Yunxiang, “Build a Chinese Counter-Terrorism Mechanism Under the Leadership of the National Security Commission [建立国家安全委员会主导下的中国反恐机制],” *Global Review* [国际展望], no. 4 (2015), 70–84. The authors are public security specialists associated with China’s People’s Armed Police Academy and People’s Public Security University.

¹⁶⁰ Shi, “The Influence of Central Asian Religious Extremists on ‘One Belt, One Road’ Construction and China’s Response,” 18.

¹⁶¹ Liu, “Innovating Overseas Military Activity Models to Protect ‘One Belt, One Road’ Security,” 75.

¹⁶² Zhou, “International Military Cooperation and the Security of Overseas Interests,” 64.

¹⁶³ Yan Shuai, “Severe Terrorist Threats Is the Biggest Motive of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Tajikistan Anti-Terrorism Cooperation [严峻暴恐威胁是中阿巴塔加强反恐合作最大动因],” *China Radio International* [国际在线], August 8, 2016. For background, see “China Joins Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan in Security Alliance,” *Reuters*, August 4, 2016, available at <www.reuters.com/article/us-china-security-idUSKCN10F1A6>.

¹⁶⁴ Cheng Guo, “Building Propaganda for ‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Current International Public Opinion [当前国际舆论形式下的‘一带一路’建设宣传],” *Journal of News Research* [新闻研究导刊] (2015), 262. The author is a professor in the Department of Military News Propaganda at the Nanjing Army Political Academy.

¹⁶⁵ Wang, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy,” 46. Likewise, Wang Yiwei argues that “civil exchanges,” such as interactions between firms, local, and city governments, and other actors can help to “lay a positive public opinion basis” for the BRI. Wang, *Challenges and Opportunities of ‘One Belt, One Road,’* 75. See also: Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 164–165.

¹⁶⁶ Su Mengqi, “A Brief Analysis of How to Tell the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Story under Media Convergence [浅析媒体融合背景下如何讲好‘一带一路’故事],” *News Dissemination* [新闻传播], no. 7 (2016), 46. Su teaches military journalism at the Nanjing Army Political Academy.

¹⁶⁷ Li, “Thoughts on the Strategic Meaning and Promotion of the China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor,” 13.

¹⁶⁸ Cheng, “Building Propaganda for ‘One Belt, One Road’ Under Current Public Opinion,” 262.

¹⁶⁹ Wang, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy and Responses,” 46.

¹⁷⁰ Zhang, “Regional Security Issues in Constructing ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 22.

¹⁷¹ Liu, “Building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Progress and Challenges,” 136.

¹⁷² Other major countries are also sometimes discussed. For instance, Zhang Jie argues that China should manage relations with Indonesia by respecting Jakarta’s pursuit of independent foreign policy, avoid overly negotiating or committing to projects, and avoid pursuing projects with “excessive risk.” Zhang, “One Belt, One Road’ and ‘Global Maritime Fulcrum,’” 41. On Russia, Chen Xiangyang argues that China should “take pains” to cooperate with Moscow in building the Silk Road Economic Belt and prevent the West from “fomenting dissent and driving a wedge between China and Russia.” Chen,

“A Snapshot of External Security Risks in Building ‘One Belt, One Road.’”

¹⁷³ Ye Hailin, “India’s South Asia Policy and its Influence on China Promoting ‘One Belt, One Road [印度南亚政策及对中国推进‘一带一路’的影响],” *Indian Ocean Economic Research* [印度洋经济体研究], no. 2 (2016), 15.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Hu, “China, Indonesia, India: ‘Meeting’ at Sea,” 20. Nevertheless, Yang Liwei points out that there is some economic complementarity between the two countries: China can encourage greater participation of Indian information technology, insurance, financial, and other service industries in China, and can also support the manufacturing needs of India’s software industry. Yang, “‘One Belt, One Road’: A New Opportunity for Developing China-India Relations,” 92.

¹⁷⁶ Wang, “‘One Belt, One Road’ and China’s Peripheral Strategy in the New Period,” 49.

¹⁷⁷ Qiao, “PLA Major General: One Belt, One Road Strategy Requires China’s Ground Forces to Fight.”

¹⁷⁸ Wang, “Research on the Risks and Challenges Facing the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy,” 46.

¹⁷⁹ Cao, “China-U.S. Games: ‘Asia-Pacific Rebalance’ and ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 105.

¹⁸⁰ Nadège Rolland, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer?” *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2017), 133.

¹⁸¹ However, in one essay, Wang Yiwei does explicitly link the BRI to the Mackinder thesis. Fallon, “The New Silk Road,” 142.

¹⁸² This could reflect either a lack of detailed thinking in China’s security community or, more likely, the sensitivity of the subject for open source publications.

¹⁸³ See also Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 142–148.

¹⁸⁴ For instance, Djibouti is reportedly indebted to China at a rate of 60 percent of its gross domestic product. One government critic states that “such generous credit is itself a form of control. We don’t know what China’s intentions really are.” See Andrew Jacobs and Jane Perlez, “U.S. Wary of Its New Neighbor in Djibouti: A Chinese Naval Base,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2017, available at <www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/africa/us-djibouti-chinese-naval-base.html?_r=0>.

¹⁸⁵ One example is Sri Lanka’s sale of a majority stake in the Hambantota port to a Chinese private firm, though the Sri Lankan government claimed that it would continue to control which ships can dock there. Anjana Pasricha, “Sri Lanka Sells China Majority Stake in Strategic Indian Ocean Port,” *Voice of America*, July 29, 2017, available at <www.voanews.com/a/sri-lanka-china-majority-state-indian-ocean-port/3964042.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Ashley J. Tellis, “Protecting American Primacy in the Indo-Pacific,” Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 25, 2017, 3.

¹⁸⁷ Sushil Aaron, “Is China Punishing India For Its Belt and Road Stance While Testing Modi and Trump?” *Hindustan Times*, July 4, 2017, available at <www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/is-china-punishing-india-for-its-belt-and-road-stance-while-testing-modi-and-trump/story-1NIB0lcGtgMy4U-VO5pDO1M.html>.

¹⁸⁸ However, Matt Ferchen argues that China’s prospects in Latin America could be limited by conflict, local opposition, and bureaucratic impediment. Matt Ferchen, “Chinese Infrastructure Initiatives in Latin America: A Bumpy Road Ahead,” *Phoenix Weekly*, June 26, 2015, available at <<http://carn->

egietsinghua.org/2015/06/26/chinese-infrastructure-initiatives-in-latin-america-bumpy-road-ahead-pub-60840>.

¹⁸⁹ The Soviet Union responded to the Marshall Plan by increasing its economic and political intervention in Eastern Europe, taking steps such as introducing the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) to engineer a “Soviet bloc.” For a discussion, see Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail N. Narinsky, “New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports,” Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, March 1994.

¹⁹⁰ For instance, Southeast Asian states have long sought to strike a balance between reliance on China and the United States. See, for example, Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2008), 113–157; and John G. Ikenberry, “Between the Eagle and the Dragon: America, China, and Middle State Strategies in East Asia,” *Political Science Quarterly* 131, no. 1 (2016), 9–43.

¹⁹¹ Two Brookings Institution scholars note that, as of 2017, Chinese exports account for only 5 percent of gross domestic product and around 3 percent when only value-added is included. Ryan Hass and David Dollar, “Making Sense of the Trump Administration’s Possible Economic Actions Against China,” *Order from Chaos Blog*, August 3, 2017, available at <www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/08/03/making-sense-of-the-trump-administrations-possible-economic-actions-against-china/>.

¹⁹² Darshana Baruah, “Growing Strategic Engagement Between Tokyo and Delhi,” *Carnegie India*, May 31, 2017, available at <<http://carnegieindia.org/2017/05/31/growing-strategic-engagement-between-tokyo-and-delhi-pub-70127>>. See also Thomas F. Lynch III and James J. Pryzstup, *India-Japan Strategic Cooperation and Implications for U.S. Strategy in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2017), 17–18.

¹⁹³ This is especially important for key non-allies such as India. See, for example, Ashley J. Tellis, “Avoiding the Labors of Sisyphus: Strengthening U.S.-India Relations in a Trump Administration,” *Asia Policy* 23 (2017), 45–46.

¹⁹⁴ For instance, the 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy states that “Development reinforces diplomacy and defense, reducing long-term threats to our national security by helping to build stable, prosperous, and peaceful societies.” *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2006), 33. See also Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Leading through Civilian Power,” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November–December 2010), 18. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Defense considers infrastructure development in fragile states, such as Afghanistan, a key to stability. See Joint Publication 3-07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2011).

¹⁹⁵ This is especially relevant to any cooperation against Uighur separatists, whom Beijing has long regarded as “terrorists.” For a discussion of constraints on U.S.-China CT cooperation, see Murray Scot Tanner and James Bellacqua, *China’s Response to Terrorism* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2016), 118–122.

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