



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of International Relations

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
THREE DIMENSIONS OF CHINA'S BELT
AND ROAD INITIATIVE THROUGH
CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICAL THEORIES**

Ahmet AKTAY

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2023

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Ahmet AKTAY has on the date of 13.06.2023 Date successfully passed the defense examination and approves his Master's Thesis titled A Comparative Analysis of the Three Dimensions of China's Belt and Road Initiative through Classical Geopolitical Theories.

Prof. Dr. Oktay Fırat TANRISEVER (Jury President)

Prof. Dr. Burak TANGÖR

Prof. Dr. Emel Gülden OKTAY (Main Adviser)

I agree that the signatures above belong to the faculty members listed.

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Ahmet AKTAY

ABSTRACT

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The Belt Road Initiative (BRI) is an infrastructure project launched by the People's Republic of China (PRC) designed to increase connectivity across the world through the construction of ports, airports, railways, highways, and industrial and technological hubs. Although they are absent in its official documents and statements, Beijing has certain geopolitical expectations from the efficient execution of the project. Beijing expects that the BRI will promote the current status of the PRC in global politics and the national security of China through securing China's international trade and energy transportation lines. Additionally, the massive amount of Chinese investment, which is estimated to reach 4 trillion RMB in the final stage of BRI, is expected to create asymmetric relations between Beijing and receiving countries, and those relations will provide leverage for the PRC in its forward policy. This thesis argues that classical geopolitics provides a well-founded instrument for analysing the three dimensions of the BRI, namely the maritime Silk Road, the Polar Silk Road, and the Silk Road Economic Belt, in a comparative manner. In doing so, the thesis attempts to provide useful insights in terms of assessing whether BRI will yield the desired geopolitical consequences for the PRC.

Keywords

China, Foreign Policy, The Belt and Road Initiative, Silk Road Economic Belt, Maritime Silk Road, Polar Silk Road, Classical Geopolitics

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA/AD	Anti-Access Area Denial
ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
ADB	Asian Developmental Bank
ADIF	Air Defense Identification Zones
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
BBR	Berlin-Baghdad Railroad
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	An Acronym for Five Regional Economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDB	China Development Bank
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEXIM	Export-Import Bank of China
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CTKIID	China-Thailand Kra Infrastructure Investment and Development
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EIA	Energy Information Agency
ESCO	European Security Cooperation Organization
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIUK	Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSR	Maritime Silk Route
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDB	New Development Bank
NDRC	National Development and Reformation Commission
NSC	National Security Commission
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSR	Polar Silk Road
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RMB	Renminbi
RMB	Chinese Yuan
ROC	Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication

SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
SRIB	Silk Road International Bank
TEU	Twenty-Foot Unit Equivalents
TPP	Trans Pacific Partnership
UNSC	UN Security Council
US	The United States
USD	US Dollar
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWI	First World War
WWII	Second World War

INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was initiated by China in 2013 as a cooperation scheme with economic and geopolitical drives. Because of the scale of the initiative, which encompasses multiple and comprehensive schemes and numerous projects across the five continents, its transformative effect on the current configurations of world politics will be enormous. The initiative is essentially a product of China's logic of being a trading nation as well as its complex foreign policy since its establishment as an independent state in 1949. Therefore, for a thorough analysis of the initiative, it is necessary to comprehend the modern history of China, its foreign policy during the Cold War, especially its involvement in Third World affairs, as well as economic reformation and the subsequent phenomenon of China's rise.

The thesis relies on classical geopolitical theories for a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the BRI. The classical geopolitical theories refer to a set of interpretations developed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, pointing out the decisive role of geography in historical and political developments as well as statecraft. They were developed in an international environment in which great power competition was intense and war was the prime apparatus of policy. In the post-Cold War era, the relevance of classical geopolitics in the analysis of current international phenomena was challenged in many ways. For a brief moment, the unexpected end of the great power competition without the outbreak of a war between the two blocs, the subsequent unipolar movement led by the US, and the war's temporary retirement from the scene cast a shadow upon classical geopolitics as solid ground for analysis of contemporary international developments.

In this respect, the first argument of the thesis is that the foreign policy conduct of great powers can be explained through classical geopolitical theories, and thus these theories provide a reasonable and solid base for analysis of political developments in the 21st century. After the end of the Cold War, the liberal delusion of the "end of history," which basically states the universality of liberal democracy and the end of great power politics, dominated the studies of international relations. In this context, the status of classical geopolitics, which was built upon great power politics, has been challenged in many

ways. However, the restoration of Russia's military power and the rise of China as an economic and military power have brought great power politics with all its glory back into international relations. This, in turn, reopened the theoretical space to classical interpretations of geopolitics in analysing the unfolding international developments in the contemporary configurations of world politics.

At this very juncture, a contradiction emerges with regard to the use of the classical geopolitical theories for BRI's analysis, which is essentially a geo-economic project. In this respect, the thesis argues that classical geopolitics can be adequately applied to BRI's analysis. First of all, The BRI, as an infrastructure investment project, is strictly bound by geography. The general overlap between the initiative's geographical outline on paper and the emphasis on certain geographies by renowned theories of classical geopolitics made it possible for the interpretation of China's grand scheme through pure geographical and strategic perspectives. This possibility manifest itself most obviously in the Eurasian Basin which is emphasized by the Heartland theory of Mackinder on which majority of overland projects of the initiative concentrates.

Secondly, although geopolitical theories primarily concern great power competition and power relations, international commerce and access to natural resources occupy an important place in classical geopolitics. The linkage between classical geopolitics and international commerce is constituted by the fact that international commerce is one of the most prominent factors determining one nation's national wealth and power. Certain renowned geopoliticians like Mahan directly refer to international commerce as the primary way to generate national power. Similarly, the phenomenon of the rise of China is mainly caused by Beijing's export-oriented economic development and its increasing volume of international trade and trade surplus. This forces Beijing to consider the geopolitics of trade and access to global resources. Therefore, because of the implications of BRI on China's international commerce as well as its global outreach to natural resources, the initiative can be examined through classical geopolitical theories.

In this context, it will be argued in the thesis that the declaration of the BRI constitutes a *de facto* departure from China's peaceful rise rhetoric because its successful implementation would have important geopolitical and strategic implications. This fact alone effectively makes the BRI a geopolitical initiative rather than a purely cooperation

scheme. In addition to their mere potential economic outcomes, which can respond to China's various internal challenges, Beijing expects certain geopolitical outcomes from the implementation of the BRI projects.

The thesis mainly invokes three geopolitical theories in order to provide a thorough analysis of the BRI. Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Mahan's thesis on sea power, and Spykman's Rimland Theory are applied to the analysis of three core components of the BRI: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and the Polar Silk Road (PSR). The thesis argues that through the implementation of the BRI, Beijing aims to:

- to promote a China-centric global economic order.
- to foster its economic and political development.
- to enhance political influence of China in the region attached to the BRI.
- to increase its global outreach to the energy resources and raw materials.
- to secure maritime and overland trade routes and energy transportation lines and eventually exert control over them.
- to modify the existing trade routes and create new corridors, thus undermining the control of third parties over its international trade.
- to ensure its energy security.
- to gain leverage over other parties in regional disputes through creating asymmetrical relations.

In this respect, the first chapter of the thesis "Classical Geopolitical Theories" is devoted to providing an introduction to the classical geopolitical theories. This chapter will provide information about the emergence of geopolitics as a distinct field in political science and the underlying logic behind its development. Moreover, the main tenets of the three theories of classical geopolitics that will be invoked for analysis for the three components of the BRI, namely the Heartland Theory of Mackinder, Mahan's Sea Power Theory, and the Rimland Theory of Nickolas Sypkman, will also be discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter, "Historical Roots of the Rise of China," will provide a brief account of the foreign policy of the PRC and the phenomenon of the rise of China. It will be argued that, since its establishment as a revolutionary state at the advent of the Cold War,

the foreign policy of China has been blended with historical, cultural, ideological, and geopolitical elements, and these elements reflect to a certain degree upon Beijing's contemporary foreign policy. The economic reforms embarked under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the subsequent phenomena of the rise of China, its foreign policy manoeuvres reflecting the changes in the geopolitical environment as well as in its economic orientation, will be touched upon in this chapter. Additionally, the emergence of foreign policy rhetoric of the "peaceful rise of China," prioritizing economic development and avoiding great power competition, will also be discussed.

The third chapter, "China's Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping," is devoted to discussing the rise of multipolarity in international relations and the formation of the China's new foreign policy under the pressure of the systemic changes. It will be argued in this chapter that the emerging multipolarity in international relations started to shape the behaviours of international actors, including China, and its foreign policy began to be accorded in accordance with systemic changes since 2008, when the global economic crises commenced. This part of the thesis also discusses the initiation of the BRI as a foreign policy enterprise under the rule of Xi Jinping and why the BRI constitutes a path change in Beijing's foreign policy.

The fourth and final chapter, "Analysis of the BRI Through the Theories of Classical Geopolitics," aims to provide a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the three parts of the BRI. The thesis will invoke three fundamental geopolitical concepts in analysing BRI: the Heartland Theory by Halford Mackinder for SREB, the land component of the BRI; the Mahainan Sea Power Theory for analysing MSR; and the Rimland Theory by Nicholas Spykman for analysing PSR. It will also be discussed in this section why these classical theories are appealed to analyse a specific part of the BRI. This chapter will provide a comparative account of what geopolitical outcomes the PRC expects from the BRI and to what extent the three parts of the BRI could meet Beijing's expectations. In addition, this part of the thesis also examines the applicability of classical theories of geopolitics in the analysis of contemporary geopolitical initiatives like the BRI, which is a geo-economic design in essence.

CHAPTER 1

CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICAL THEORIES

In Einsteinian Physics, the world which we contact with, operates within four-dimensional structure. The first three dimensions of that structure refer to the any direction that physical objects, which are also occupying specific space within the structure, can move across. The fourth one the “time” on the other hand, is non-spatial component of the structure despite its constant interaction with the initial three spatial dimensions. This space-time context constitutes the fine structure that every physical force interacts with one another at the same time being created by these forces. The space-time fabric of the universe also restricts the movements of the physical objects by allowing them to act in a certain way(Russell, 2009).

For geopolitics, geography acts for human activities in the same way that the space-time fabric of the universe acts for physical objects. On the one hand, geography provides a spatial dimension from which human activities originate; on the other, it places certain limitations on those activities, ensuring that specific communities in specific locations develop distinct ways of living and distinct economic, social, and political structures. Geopolitics mainly focuses on the impact of geographic and cartographic conditions and their companions like industry and population on the foreign policies of states, on developments in global politics, and on repeating historical and political patterns. The complementing non-geographic factors like population, industrial base, and characteristics of the nations and governments occupying certain spatial spaces distinguish geopolitics from mere geographic analysis like cartography and topography and give it the label of being a branch of human geography.

This non-geographical aspect of geopolitics is subject to forthcoming changes, while constant geographic properties offering a relatively stable base for the analysis (Fettweis, 2015). Although Earth’s geographic properties are also exposed to changes over time, those changes occur at such a slow pace that they are beyond humans’ comprehension and thus become irrelevant for political analysis. This relatively constant nature of geography makes it the most reliable element in the analysis of global developments as

well as historical patterns. Even at the state level, the compelling role of geography in the foreign policies of individual states makes itself present slightly but in a constant and profound manner (Akad, 2013). The main reason behind that role in the policies and actions of the states lies in the fact that states are essentially territorial units whose power highly depends on the properties of their geography and their capacity to harness their geographic advantages to generate economic and political power. Other elements, such as population, economy, or even bureaucracy, have tended to change in less time than the territorial changes (Kelly, 2017). Furthermore, under current international conditions in which war as a policy tool seems to fade away and territorial expansions or arrangements have been denounced as illegitimate ways of conducting policy, geography has been playing a compelling role in the foreign policies of individual states. Many international disputes have become deadlocks, like those in the South China Sea, East Mediterranean, and Kashmir, because states are well aware that stepping back on their claims would probably result in permanent foreign policy failure. Once the territorial disputes are settled, it becomes nearly impossible to reverse the situation due to international pressure as well as the cost of military action in the current state of military technology.

As geography dictates the patterns of human activities throughout the world, it is also subject to change, in a limited scope, that is brought about by the unconscious or deliberate actions of humans. Throughout history, forests were destroyed, marshes were drained, and many other alterations were made in order to enhance living space and the economic activities of humanity. Certain human-oriented alterations have had a great impact on global politics and the international and regional balance of power. The opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and Panama Canal (1914) can be the best examples of this historical pattern. The opening of the Suez Canal revealed shorter shipping routes between Europe and East Asia and thus restored the geopolitical importance of the Mediterranean region, boosting the power and global dominance of Great Britain, which controls the entrances to the Mediterranean through its military control of Gibraltar and Egypt. Opening of the Panama Canal, on the other hand, boosted the military power of the United States by combining the two separate navies of the US and also enables the US to operate in strategic inner lines through its military control of the Panama Canal. Therefore, not only geographical properties but also artificial alteration of those properties can constitute significant implications for geopolitics.

The emphasis on geography as a determinant of state actions can be detected in the historical and political texts of antiquity and works published before the classical texts of geopolitics. But the application of geography within those texts is limited in extent, and the analysis of the sequence of events in accordance with their geographical determinants lacks the general rules that could be applicable in other cases. Although geography strongly influenced military strategy since the Renaissance and the conceptualization of geographic factors dominated the texts on military strategy, the solid ground of geography in the analysis and formation of military strategies could not be extended towards grand strategy and politics until the 19th century (Farinelli, 2000).

Thus, the development of the theories of full-fledged analysis known as "classical geopolitics" corresponds to the late 19th century. The classical geopolitics is distinct from early geographical analysis by the extent of the geographical input applied as well as its ability, which goes beyond mere explanation of events, to prescribe policy recommendations.

At first glance, it seems contradictory that if geography has such a compelling role in state actions and international developments, why has the theorization of this role been delayed for such a long time, despite the existence of states that date back centuries? The key to the contradiction lies in the question of the availability of accumulated geographic knowledge to be applied in geography-oriented theorization of politics. As Halford Mackinder points out, the knowledge of humanity on the globe was incomplete until the late 19th century (Mackinder, 1904). The last discoveries in the Arctic and Antarctica closed the age of maritime discoveries, which began in 15th-century Europe. The early European expeditions created a circular movement between the expansion of geographic knowledge and further maritime explorations (Spencer, 1988). At the end of these maritime explorations in the late 19th century, no land left that was significantly large enough to alter the existing human perception of the earth (Love, 2006). Thus, accumulated knowledge on the globe and the preceding geographical examinations of discovered land did not allow the emergence of a globally applicable geopolitical theory until the end of the century.

1.1. PROFOUND THEORIES OF CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICS

1.1.1. Mahanian Geopolitics: Indoctrination of the Sea Power

The Mahanian geopolitical theory is based on the ideas of renowned admiral and naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), who served the US Navy as a sailor and educator. He developed his strategic outlook on historical and political developments when he served as the head of the newly founded US Naval College at Newport. Mahanian Geopolitics is based on the ideas and concepts gathered from his various works, but especially from his two famous books, *The Influence of the Sea Power Upon History* and *The Influence of the French Revolution*, written and published in the last decade of the 19th century (Mahan, 1890, 1892).

Mahan himself never mentioned the term "geopolitics" in his influential book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, which constitutes the very foundations of what is known as Mahanian geopolitics. In fact, the term "geopolitics" was coined by Kjellen almost a decade after the first publications of Mahan's book in 1890. For that reason, geopolitical traditions have been considered by many scholars to be started by the works of Ratzel and Kjellen, whose works embodied exact wording to indicate the relationship between politics and geography (Dodds, 2007). The theoretical outlook introduced by Mahan, on the other hand, has been considered by those as being among the vast array of works on strategy despite its strict geographically-oriented outlook on the historical developments stretching from the Punic Wars in the 4th century B.C. to the Napoleonic Wars in the 19th century. The influential theories of classical geopolitics are also built upon the geopolitical distinction between the sea power and continental powers introduced by Mahan, which makes his theory impossible to overlook by any geopolitical analysis.

The geopolitical concept introduced by Mahan is based on the decisive role of sea powers in the development of historical events. "*The Influence of the Sea Power upon History*," through which Mahan outlined his theoretical outlook, scrutinized the main military engagements and their political and strategic consequences between the 17th century and the Napoleonic Wars. The progress of those developments, as pointed out by Mahan, reveals the strategic superiority of sea power vis-à-vis land power (Mahan, 1890). The

distinction between sea power and land power and the strategic outcomes yielded from those two distinct geopolitical positions also became one of the central themes in the geopolitical tradition proceeding Mahan.

As the historical proceedings of the events indicate that control of the sea has been the chief decisive factor in the great power struggle, the construction of the logical basis for indoctrination into that role was a challenging work. If all human activities originate from the land, why have the seas played such a decisive role throughout history? To answer that question, Mahan refers to the cementing function of the seas among distinct geographical units and separate human activities like a "great highway". With the advancement of civilization, no geographically-delimited economic unit was managed to maintain itself without economic interactions with others. The low maintenance cost and greater degree of security offered by maritime transportation gave leverage to sea commerce over trade conducted by overland routes. The greater volume of the payload and the shorter transportation time offered by maritime transportation further overshadowed the importance of the overland trade. The establishment of naval control over the seas, therefore, practically means the control of international trade, without which no nation can maintain its economic dynamism for long (Mahan, 1890).

Historical evidence, for Mahan, reveals the tendency that whoever controls the sea commerce through its naval forces also holds the upper hand in its relations with others as well as in global politics in general. In peacetime, sea commerce generates national prosperity by allowing the merchant navy to conduct profitable and often disproportionate trade with the outer world. The ability to infiltrate world trade to a greater degree gives dominant sea power, resources to maintain its superior international position. On the other hand, in wartime, sea power achieves a strategic advantage over its continental enemy through the execution of strategic operations of commerce-destroying and the implementation of blockades directed at the ports and shores of the enemy. Thus, sea power can cut off the enemy's maritime connection with the outer world on which nations' long-run economic well-being and even the maintenance of their military forces and the support of their military operations are extremely dependent. (Crowl, 2010). Therefore, the sea power facing its continental enemies must implement a strategy of strangulation; through that strategy, prolonged military conflict only yields the desired outcomes for the nation having superior naval forces.

For Mahan, sea power does not emerge spontaneously over the course of history. He outlines a number of factors for the formation of an effective sea power. Economic, social, and geographic considerations all play an influential role in forging effective naval forces and emerging as the dominant sea power. The first chapter of "The Influence of the Sea Power upon History" is devoted to the analysis and assessment of those factors and reveals their relation to sea power in historical context. Elements of the sea power listed by Mahan are "geographical position", "physical conformation", "extent of territory", "number of populations", "character of nation," and "character of government"(Mahan, 1890).

The first two criteria set by Mahan for the formation of sea power correspond to the geopolitical dimension of the Mahanian Theory. The physical properties of the countries, stretching from the length of the coastline to the suitable harbors to host high-tonnage naval and commercial vessels, the countries' locations vis-à-vis maritime communication lines, and the system of rivers or canals allowing the inward development of maritime commerce, are all considered important determinants in the formation of sea power. However, Mahan further outlines the prerequisites for global naval dominance, which are oversea colonies and bases and the naval control of the main maritime chokepoints. These prerequisites proceed by the formation of naval forces and determine the global effectiveness of the navies and their dominance over the main sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and therefore the international trade. (Sumida, 1999).

Mahan considers maritime commerce the chief factor in the generation of national wealth and prosperity. However, the share of the dominant sea power in overall international trade conducted through the sea must be disproportionate enough to constitute a solid base for the creation of overwhelming naval force vis-à-vis other nations. Mahan argues that those favorable conditions can best be created through a chain of colonies, which would serve as a source of natural resources and a market for goods for metropolitan countries (Mahan, 1890). The logistics of the naval forces' military operations are also great concerns for the navies. When the immense body of water is taken into account, these concerns even intensify for the navies operating on a global scale. These navies, thus, need fulcrums for the maintenance of fleets dispatched to distant waters as well as for the logistics of military operations. The colonies of the states can serve as the bases

for the navies of those states, but the bases can also be built on non-commercial territories just to serve pure military purposes (Crowl, 2010).

The final determinant of global naval dominance is the control of maritime chokepoints. The seas and oceans of the earth function as the "great highway" for the maritime vessels that no navy could exert total control over. The maritime vessels can move in either direction on the surface of the oceanic waters, but maritime traffic concentrates on a number of geographical points that connect two extended water bodies. The relative importance of those chokepoints differs in accordance with the current state of global economic, political, and military parameters. In general, the geographical points through which the greater commercial maritime traffic passes have greater geopolitical value compared with others. The maritime chokepoints locating where the maritime commercial trafficking is concentrated also allow the application of the basic military principle of concentration of the forces on a decisive point. (Crowl, 2010). Control of those points allows sea power to deny the passage of other states in times of conflict, manipulate maritime shipping in favor of its commercial ships, and cut the maritime connection between two separate regions to yield strategic benefits.

The application of Mahanian geopolitical concepts to the current state of international developments requires great caution. The political climate as well as military technology have changed so much that some of Mahan's ideas have become irrelevant in analysing the current events in global politics. However, the overall promise of the Mahan, which is the decisive role of the sea power in the orchestration of events in international relations, still continues to be valid. Therefore, the BRI can be analyzed in accordance with that principle. The number of free trade agreements, the access of Chinese naval vessels to the military facilities of countries along the Maritime Silk Route (MSR), and exerting control over the maritime chokepoints or the ability to overpass them will be the variables in the application of Mahanian geopolitics to the analysis of the BRI of China.

1.1.2. Mackinder and the Heartland Theory

The British geographer Halford Mackinder (1861–1947) has been the most influential figure in the history of classical geopolitics. The Heartland Theory is formed by his

diligent work on the geographical analysis of historical developments and the strategic implications of these historical patterns for future political developments.

Mackinder first revealed his Heartland Theory in 1904, when he delivered a speech presenting his paper "Geographical Pivot of History" to the Royal Geographic Society. Then his Heartland Theory was revised two times, in 1919 and 1943, by Mackinder to capture the latest international developments in his geographical analysis of international relations. The first version of Heartland Theory was developed to address the historical tensions of political developments in the world as well as the security concerns of the British Empire, intensified by the emergence of continental powers. In the later versions, Mackinder makes slight revisions in accordance with the immediate lessons learned from the latest international conflicts regarding the implications of the Heartland and how to balance the power potential that the Heartland possesses. But the overall promises for the Heartland and its strategic properties and the general struggle between the power centres classified according to their geopolitical basis, have remained the same (Sloan, 1999).

The geopolitical concepts introduced by Mackinder are based on the geographical division of the world and the classification of certain geographical parts in accordance with repeating historical patterns. Mackinder first divides the world into two separate units: the "World Island" and "satellites" (Mackinder, 1962). The World Island corresponds to the geographical unit we call the "Old World," consisting of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The great mass of land stretching from Cape Roca, the westernmost part of Europe, to Vladivostok and from the Cape of Good Hope to the Northern Pole exhibits a degree of territorial continuity, allowing social connectivity despite great breaks in certain marginal lands like the Sahara Desert. On the other hand, the New World, consisting of the three new continents discovered through European expeditions, lacks territorial continuity compared to the World Island. The New Continents pale compared to the vast surface of World Island, which covers two-twelfths of the whole globe, and its vast population as well as its resource potential. These geographic properties make the new continents practically "satellites" orbiting the world. Mackinder incorporates Britain, Japan, and Malaya into that category despite their greater connectivity with the world thanks to their geographical proximity (Mackinder, 1962).

The potential of the World Island in terms of population and natural resources, combined with its vast territory, makes it the most vivid and decisive political unit in the world. The world's dominance thus depends on the control of the World's Island and specifically of the Eurasian continent, which is the most dynamic part in terms of the political developments throughout history (Mackinder, 1962). Mackinder further outlined the strategic importance of the "Heartland," the core geopolitical region in Eurasia. The Heartland region approximately corresponds to the area locked between the Ural Mountains in the west, the Himalayas in the south, and Siberia in the north-east. Throughout history, the Heartland has displayed the vivid mobility of horsemen or nomadic people, whose power originates in the east of the Ural Mountains. The westward expansion of power originating from the Heartland has been one of the central themes in history (Mackinder, 1904, 1962).

The strategic importance of the Heartland rested on its strategic position vis-à-vis the other power centres of the World Island. The Heartland stays on "geopolitical inner lines" in an extensive political context. The power occupying Heartland is able to project power to the historical centres of political and economic centres of the Old World while at the same time staying away from the danger directed by those centres due to its impenetrable geopolitical features. China, India, and Europe have witnessed the invasion of the nomadic people several times using the same invasion routes that originated from the Heartland region. However, the expansions of the Heartland towards power these areas had been short-term, chiefly because of the extended logistic lines created by the occupation of vast territories and dependence on poor logistic lines. (Mackinder, 1904).

Mackinder discusses how the global balance of power in favour of maritime nations against land powers could come to an end due to the revolution in transportation (Mackinder, 1904). The expansion of the railways starting in the 19th century made the transportation of goods and people more efficient via overland routes. The expansion of the overland logistical potential significantly increased the strategic position of the Heartland. The uncultivated strategic advantages of the region, like providing shorter routes between the economic centers of the world and the ability to influence those centers to a greater degree, would be opened to exploitation through the construction of an effective network of railways stretching from Eastern Europe to China and even to India. The increasing logistical capabilities would also enable Heartland power to harness other

advantages, including the development of untouched natural resources in the region, thus allowing the emergence of an efficient and vibrant economic base in Heartland.

The revolution in transportation would lead to the emergence of an efficient power centre in the Heartland that could exert greater influence to Europe. This influence, however, would differ from that exerted by the horsemen and other nomadic peoples in the pre-Colombian era thanks to the efficient overland communication lines. The heartland power dominating Europe could collect the resources of the entire Eurasian continent and forge an efficient naval power to counter the dominant sea power located on the outer crescent. Mackinder thus argues that the Heartland power can create the first world-wide dominance because its power would exceed the combined power of the entire outer crescent nations, even in terms of naval capabilities (Mackinder, 1962).

Although the potential of the Heartland has not materialized in the way that Mackinder's anticipations, it offers a unique insight into the developments in Eurasia. The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), the overland component of the BRI, has been designated to pass through the Heartland before reaching Europe. The initiative has been considered to boost the region's logistical connectivity through the construction of highways, industrial and logistical hubs, as well as railways. The improved connectivity between the Heartland and Eurasian economic centres could provide an opportunity to unleash the unrealized geopolitical potential of the region. The desired geopolitical outcomes that China expects from the Silk Road Economic Belt thus depend on its ability to unleash those underlying forces of Heartland. The ability of Beijing to materialize the potential of the Heartland envisioned by Mackinder would be strictly bound to its ability to infiltrate the natural resources of the region, to overcome the region's strategic weaknesses created by political fragmentation, and to promote overland transportation against maritime transportation in such a way that overland routes could constitute a significant alternative to the maritime trade routes.

1.1.3. Spykman and the Rimland Theory

The Rimland theory has been based upon the works and ideas of Nicholas Spykman (1893-1943), a Dutch-American scholar who was among the first intellectuals to introduce classical realist thought in the USA. Spykman's geopolitical outlook stems

from his conviction that geography is the most important factor in foreign policy formation because it is the most permanent one. However, the role of geography in the destinies of states is not deterministic, as argued by many other European scholars. Rather, geography offers a number of possibilities whose materialization depends on the effects of many other factors (Spykman, 1944). His ideas became prominent in US foreign policy after WWII and heavily influenced the US grand strategy implemented during the Cold War period (Wilkinson, 1985). Therefore, Spykman not only affected geopolitical understanding of US foreign policy academically but also practically due to the application of his ideas into foreign policy practices, which makes him one of the central figures in the history of geopolitics.

Spymann's Rimland Theory essentially provides a synthesis of Mahan's indoctrination of the Sea Power and Mackinder's assumption about the geopolitical potential of the Heartland. Spymann departs from the Heartland theory by putting the inner crescent outlined by Mackinder at the centre of his thesis as the principal geographical unit. Spymann refers to the inner crescent as Rimland in his analysis and argues that Rimland, the territories that encircle the World Island, is of utmost importance to check the continental power of the Heartland (Zoppo, 1985). The insular power that controlled the Rimland would contain the power of the Heartland and become a dominant factor in continental politics on the World Island. The function of the dominant insular state in the Rimland suits the traditional role of the Sea Power in continental politics as a balancer, preventing the emergence of continental hegemony, which would constitute a significant danger to its central position brought about by naval superiority against its continental rivals (Wu, 2018).

The importance of the Rimland for Spymann arises from its strategic suitability to resist the expansionist efforts originating from the Heartland. States throughout history have exhibited certain similarities in their efforts to expand borders. A number of considerations, ranging from economic to military, affect the direction of the expansions. The quest for natural resources, the aspiration to reach seas or suitable ports to infiltrate international sea commerce, and the desire to lean the state borders on the natural barriers can drive states' expansions. However, the expansion of borders, regardless of their origin or imperative, generally follows the direction in which the state encounters no or little resistance and ends when effective control of the invaded territory becomes

impossible(Wilkinson, 1985). The Rimland offers the resistance points for the Sea Power to prevent the expansion of the continental powers towards the seas. Continental seaboards are the most suitable points for sea power to accumulate their military and diplomatic strength due to their power settings depending on their naval strength and the superior lines of communication offered by sea navigation. The military and diplomatic power of the maritime nations begin to shrink in the deeper parts of the continent and end at a certain point where the strength of land power prevails over that of sea power and the advantage of maritime communication. These strategic considerations make the Rimland not only the most important geographical unit to resist the seaward expansion of the land powers but also almost the only geographical unit in which the sea power can yield decisive results.

Despite the promotion of BRI as economic enterprise by Beijing, it is certainly designed to address a number of diplomatic and strategic challenge that China faces. Maritime Silk RoadF (MSR), the sea component of the BRI, traces the coastlines of Rimland, and nearly all the Rimland Nations are included as participants. In addition, global geopolitical settings have been changing under the pressure of climate change. The Russian Arctic Seaboard has been emerging as the Eurasian Rimland. Together with MSR's navigation along the traditional Rimland, Polar Silk Road (PSR) offering shorter transpolar routes to reach Europe embodies certain geopolitical implications for China's global position and the global balance of power. Therefore, Rimland Theory becomes extremely relevant to assess the strategic implications of the MSR and PRS. In the thesis, Rimland Theory will be invoked to assess those implications as well as the reactions against the BRI by the Rimland nations and by global and regional powers.

1.2. CONCLUSION

Classical geopolitical theories were born out of the accumulation of geographical knowledge and the tradition of military strategy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The theories of classical geopolitics built upon the interconnection between the geographical properties of the Earth and historical and political developments. Because the Earth's physical geography is a relatively stable element compared to the other elements in the grand strategy, classical geopolitics offers a solid ground for the evaluation of political developments. The BRI constitutes no exception in this sense. The

theories of classical geopolitics can be applied to analyze the general strategic and political implications of the implementation of the BRI. In this context, the prominent theories of classical geopolitics, namely Mahan's Sea Power Theory, the Heartland Theory of Mackinder, and the Rimland Theory of Spykman, can be invoked to carry out such an analysis.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE RISE OF CHINA

The foreign policy of China, like any other nation that has deep and profound historical experience of statehood, exhibits a degree of complexity, consisting of historical, strategic and geopolitical constituents. Historical and socio-cultural components of foreign policy are generally applied to point out the continuance of the foreign policy making process and international behaviours of certain nations across time and space. On the other hand, geopolitics and international structure are applied to foreign policy analysis with the intention of revealing how the foreign policies of a particular nation differ in different times and different international and geopolitical contexts. This chapter will examine the foreign policy of the PRC since its foundation in 1949 until the beginning of the presidency of Xi Jinping in accordance with the changes in international structure and geopolitical realities. Therefore, the changes in foreign policy priorities and actions of the PRC will be revealed in accordance with the changes in international structure and geopolitical realities. The chapter will particularly address the impact of the economic and political rise of China on its foreign behaviour.

In Chinese foreign policy since the beginning of the 20th century, the generation of state power and the security of the state has been the central theme in policy objectives. A strong state has generally been linked with the prosperity and well-being of the Chinese population (Ye, 2011). The desire to generate and maintain state power reflects the lessons learned from national suffering at the hands of foreign powers, beginning with China's defeats in the Opium Wars, which lasted until the end of WWII. Although, with the exception of Taiwan, China had never been colonized in the way that other nations around the world had been by imperial powers, port treaties pushed it to semi-colonial status. (Kane, 2001). The inferior status experienced by foreign powers in the first half of the 20th century and much of the 19th century pushed China to attach great importance to the elements of national power and self-reliability. However, the special emphasis on the specific element of state power has undergone certain changes throughout the history of the PRC. During Mao's highly indoctrinated rule over China, the main focus was given to the military domain and military strategy. During this period, China militarily opposed regional developments and pursued a policy of active engagement despite its relative

weakness against its adversaries, while focusing on the development of nuclear capabilities to ensure the regime's survival. On the other hand, in the post-Mao era, Deng Xiaoping reversed the attention of Chinese domestic and foreign policy. Special attention was given to enhancing the economic capabilities of the state. The economic development of the country and the prosperity of the Chinese nation became the main precondition for the survival of the regime and for the international position of the Chinese nation among other great powers.

China's foreign policy underwent changes several times during the rule of Mao Zedong. Beginning with the establishment of the PRC up until the 1960s, China remained an ally of the Soviet Union. The central task during this era was to oppose US actions in the region and to solve the Taiwan issue. In the 1960s, due to the coming into light of differences between the two headquarters of the Communist Camp, which became known as "Sino-Soviet split", relations with the Soviet Union began to deteriorate and the PRC faced threats coming from both the US and the Soviet Union. China pursued an alignment policy with the Third World to compensate for deteriorating relations with Moscow. The efforts of Beijing to establish itself as a power centre through its Third World activism failed because of China's lack of capabilities and the unwillingness of many Third World nations to improve relations with China at the expense of their relations with Moscow. In the 1970s, the end of the Vietnam War and a growing Soviet threat to its northern borders changed the course of China's foreign policy. Starting with the beginning of the 1970s, world politics witnessed the gradual improvement of Sino-US relations and subsequent reconciliation between the two countries.

The roots of the foreign policy of the PRC were laid out in 1949 when communists led by Mao Zedong came into power by defeating the nationalist army. Coming to power with a revolutionary struggle against a nationalist army headed by Chai Kai-Shek, endorsed by the US militarily, practically left no realm of manoeuvre in terms of foreign policy for the newly founded Communist state. Right after its declaration of independence on October 1st, 1949, assertive realities of the bipolar world also played a key role in Chinese foreign policy orientation. The Soviet Union did not hesitate to recognize the new socialist state on the mainland, despite its initial recognition extended to the Chai Kai-Shek government. As a result, the PRC found itself in a de facto alliance with the Soviet Union soon after its establishment. Sino-Soviet relations were further fortified by

the signing of the Sino-Soviet Friendship and Mutual Assistance Treaty in 1950. Through this treaty, the Soviet Union committed to providing the PRC with 300 million USD in financial assistance and agreed to hand over Chinese territories in Manchuria captured by Japanese occupation forces (Armaoğlu, 2020)

2.1. CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE COLD WAR

During the Cold War, emerging realities of the bipolar international structure established a pattern of political division in many countries. Numerous countries were torn apart into separate legal entities by political struggles between the political factions representing different ideological orientations. The communists in those countries were supported by the Soviet Union (and later by PRC) as anyone else resisting them by the USA and its allies. Those political conflicts turned into a bipolar stalemate because of the balance of military power between the opposing forces and because their international supporters, the US and SU, did not let those conflicts turn into full-scale military confrontation between themselves. By following this general pattern of the Cold War, China was also divided into two legal entities by the establishment of the nationalist government in Taiwan. However, Communist Mainland and Nationalist Taiwan declared themselves the sole representative of the unitary China, thus defying others' legitimacy. This duality brought about by the rule of the Kuomintang over Taiwan created the geopolitical Achilles hell in the foreign policy of PRC especially in its relations with the US and became a destabilizing factor in its relations with the western world as well as with regional countries.

The newly established PRC did not find itself in a hospitable international environment. After the declaration of the PRC, Beijing had fallen into the constant pressure of insecurity during the turbulent years of the 1950s. The US military activities in the Pacific, in the adjacent territories to China raised the “fear of containment” in Beijing (Yahuda, 2019) Retreating forces of Chai Kai-Shek were now imposing a naval blockade against mainland China, aiming to cut the connection of the PRC with the outside world, thus weakening the position of the communist regime for an extended period of time. Its immediate concern, on the other hand, was to prevent People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces from invading Taiwan. US politically and militarily supported Taipei's blockade

efforts(Elleman, 2005). Meanwhile, in Korea, the US was the main supporter of the Rhee Regime in the southern part of Korea providing a bridgehead for a possible seaward invasion of mainland China either by Kuomintang Forces or an international coalition, as China had already witnessed in the period what Chinese called “age of humiliation” (Hunt & Levine, 2012).

PRC identified the US as the main foe for the socialist regime on the mainland and for the global socialist course. In accordance with its newly established foreign policy parameters, Beijing pursued a dual policy against the US at regional level. On the one hand, it sought to eliminate the economic and political influence of the US at home established by the Open-Door policy accumulated until the day when the PLA defeated the Kuomintang army. On the other hand, China embarked on a policy of active engagement with the US in Asia Pacific. Beijing under Mao’s Chairmanship backed the communist movements in Korea and Vietnam, denounced the occupation of the US over Japan, fought against the protectorate of the US over Taiwan, which the PRC considers as an integral part of its entity (Hunt&Levine, 2012).

The sense of insecurity in the PRC first resulted in the Chinese intervention in the Korean War. The decision to take part in the ongoing conflict over the Korean Peninsula was taken in defiance of Kremlin’s previous decision opting for the status quo on its eastern flank. The Kremlin perception before the escalation of conflict favours the status quo not only Korea but also other parts of the world. It was considered that the main target of the US was the USSR and Washington was biding its time to attack it. Escalation of conflicts in the Third World, thus, would give the US the reason to launch a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. This would result not only in vanishing out of the Soviet Union from the international arena, but also in annihilation of the socialist movement altogether on a global scale, because socialism in other parts of the world was not mature enough to survive on its own (Zhihua, 2000). However, Mao’s perception did not share the basic assumptions of Moscow. He considers that the main struggle between the two camps would be fought over the intermediate zones emerging in the Third World. He, thus, insisted that strangulation of socialism in these intermediate zones was the main target of the US rather than the USSR itself. Therefore, contrary to Moscow, its gigantic counterpart, PRC became much more enthusiastic about supporting the socialist movements in its periphery. (Hager, 2019).

In accordance with its strategic perception of the delicate international balance of power, Moscow opted to stay away from the conflict over Korea in case of an outbreak of war through North Korea's attempt at invasion. Stalin also made his point clear during his meeting with Kim Il Sung in April 1950s, Moscow would help to equip the Army of the Democratic Peoples of Korea, but in case of the US's involvement in the conflict, the USSR would definitely not "lift even a finger". Stalin pointed out Mao to Kim Il Sung to ask for help to counter military involvement of the US in the upcoming war on the Korean Peninsula. In May 1950s, in the meeting between Chairman Mao and Kim Il Sung, the destiny of the Korean Peninsula was determined. Despite the ongoing operations of the PLA in the inner parts of China, notably Xin Jiang and Tibet, Mao gave carte blanche to Kim Il Sung, clearly indicating that the PRC would provide troops to North Korea if Americans were involved into the war.(Hunt & Levine, 2012).

On 25th June 1950, ten divisions of the Northern Army, fortified with Soviet-made tanks and heavy artillery, crossed the 38th parallel and started the Korean War. Seoul, capital of South Korea, quickly fell into the arms of Northern troops and the Southern forces began to unorderly retreat against the overwhelming force of the military of North Korea. Within a short period of time, it became clear that Northern Forces would take control of the whole peninsula if the US did not intervene in the war. This led the US to take further precautions, in addition to its ongoing military supply to Southern troops. In the absence of the Soviet delegation at the UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting, the US secured UNSC Resolution 82, enabling deploying coalition forces against Northern aggression. The coalition forces consisting mainly of US troops landed on Inchon in September 1950 caught Northern troops by surprise, and two weeks later Seoul was re-taken by the US-led coalition (Stueck, 1995).

Despite the capture of Seoul, which reserved the strategic situation on the Korean Peninsula for pre-war conditions, the coalition counter-offence continued well beyond the 38th parallel. The US strategic command did not expect that China would take part in the Korean War on the side of North Korea. Rather, US security officials and high command expected that the PRC would take this opportunity to attack Taiwan. Accordingly, the US seventh fleet was ordered to be deployed in the Taiwan Strait to deter any amphibious operation which would be carried out by the PLA. However, the advance of US-led coalition forces towards the Yalu River alerted Beijing and led the

PLA to take part in the war. As an experienced soldier and military strategist, Mao was aware of Korea's strategic position as an invasion route deep into mainland China. The US military presence along the Chinese border after the end of the war, thus, would put China under constant political and strategic pressure from the US (Yufan & Zhihai, 1990). Intervention of PLA into the conflict with its "Volunteers Army" under the command of the Peng Dehuai one of the most prominent commanders of PLA, caught coalition forces by surprise and drove the coalition forces well beyond 38th parallel and Seoul once again fell under the hands of North Korea. However, the technical superiority of coalition forces and efficient naval lines of communication prevented the driving international coalition out of Korean peninsula. After two years of fighting, the situation on the Korean Peninsula reversed to the pre-war conditions. However, Korean War and PLA's intervention revealed serious implications on newly founded China's foreign policy. First of all, intervention of PRC with its "volunteer army" to the Korean conflict reflected that Beijing would resist the American efforts to contain China and endanger the revolutionary government in the mainland. The relative success of PRC against the western alliance in the Korea also gave Beijing further strategic impetus to fortify its strategic position against the US and its regional allies and showed the limitations of US power in the Asia-pacific region. Nevertheless, Beijing's involvement into the Korean conflict militarily had hampered any potential reconciliation between US and China. After the war, US foreign policy concluded that China may pose far-more great danger to US's regional scheme than those of posed by the Soviet Union (Gaddis, 2005).

The brinkmanship of China in the overture period of the Cold War peaked during the mid-1950s with Beijing's two bid on Taiwan. China's strategic reasoning behind its proactive policy against Taiwan was twofold. On the one hand, the revolutionary government in the mainland was seeking security by bringing an end to the national fragmentation of China. On the other hand, it would have the potential to break the geopolitical containment imposed by the US commitment granted to the Taipei regime, as well as to weaken the US's regional alignments in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, by acting unilaterally on the Taiwan issue, China would also fortify its international status as a great power by significantly diminishing its strategic dependence on the Soviet Union. The Taiwan move also had significant implications for the revolutionary movements in the Third World and for the leadership of international

socialist revolutionism. In accordance with Beijing's calculations, an achievement over Taiwan against the US would boost international reputation of the PRC and it would result in Chinese leadership in the revolutionary movements in the Third World against the colonial rule of metropolitan countries or against governments backed by the Western alliance.(Gunn, 2020).

In 1954, immediately after the end of the Geneva Conference, Mao decided to escalate the situation in the Taiwan strait by launching an attack on the offshore island controlled by forces of Republic of China (ROC). The operational target of the Chinese forces was to capture the offshore islands (particularly Jingmen and Manzu) stretching between the mainland and Taiwan. Occupation of those islands would fortify the strategic position of the PLA in the Taiwan Strait and endanger the nationalist Taipei regime's very existence as a separate political unit. The mixed messages from the US side after the Korean War concerning the defence of Taiwan made Chairman Mao and his close circle to believe that the US would not come to the aid of nationalist forces and, thus, paved the way for the Chinese aggression (Armaoğlu, 2020; Gunn, 2020).

US policy towards Taiwan before the Korean War was in favor of Beijing's strategic interests. Washington was considering Taiwan as unworthy to defend due to the fact that over-involvement in the Taiwan issue would create long-reaching hostility with mainland China. However, the Korean War and involvement of the PRC in the war had changed the position of the US in the Asia-Pacific. The US began to perceive the threat of international communism in the East and South-East Asia orchestrated and supported by the PRC. The prevailing domino theory in the diplomatic and military circles in the US regarding the spread of communism assumed that, fall of one nation would result in a chain reaction and other nations would fall into the hands of communists who are controlled by Communist headquarters namely by Moscow and Beijing. Contrary to assumptions of China, the US began to extend its regional commitment in the region after the Korean War and the Chinese offensive towards Taiwan had an effect of strengthening this ongoing process pursued by US (Jervis, 1980).

In this geopolitical context, the Taiwan crisis initiated by Beijing in 1954 and 1958 was counterproductive to its foreign policy objectives concerning the region. The escalation of the first crisis immediately after the Korean War, led the US and the ROC to conclude the Mutual Defence Treaty in 1954 linking the US to the defence of the island. The US

tightened its position with the Formosa Resolution passed by the Congress in 1955. Therefore, the PRC has found itself in a diplomatically worse-off position compared with pre-1954 period. Thus, in the second crisis over Taiwan in 1958, the PRC had to face an even firmer response by the US. Both attempts of PLA aimed to improve its strategic position in the Taiwan straits and liberate Taiwan had failed. Throughout both Taiwan Crisis, Beijing had to contend with potential military involvement of the US. During the second crisis over the strait, PRC had confronted nuclear blackmail of the US to make China step down. Consequently, at the end of the 1950s, reconciliation with the western block became practically impossible for the PRC, while its strategic position across the region worsened due to diplomatic involvement of the US was formalized by the US-ROC Mutual Assistance Treaty and accelerated the process of SEATO's establishment in 1954 (Gunn, 2020).

2.1.1. The Sino-Soviet Split

The Sino-Soviet split refers to the emergence of gradual antagonism in the relations between the Soviet Union and PRC which were thought to consist of a unitary front against the Western Bloc led by the US when the crisis came into light during the 1960s. The outbreak of political conflict between the two headquarters of the socialist camp marked one of the most decisive points in their relations as well as in the history of the Cold War. Despite the fact that tensions in the Sino-Soviet relations became clear at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split emerged out of the prolonged process, the historical roots of which can be found in the unfair agreement imposed on China by the Russian Empire and in the Chinese civil war lasted until the foundation of PRC in 1949 (Lüthi, 2008). The Sino-Soviet conflict started as political disagreement on certain issues and the general way of conduct of bilateral relations and turned into military clashes at the end of the 1960s. The gradual deterioration of the relations brought about important changes in the diplomatic orientation of the PRC and paved the way for substantial transformation of China's politics and economy which would eventually result in the so-called "rise of China".

The growing tension in the relations was partly caused by the general dissatisfaction of the PRC regarding the Soviet way of conducting bilateral relations. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Chairman Mao generally disliked the way of handling of bilateral affairs by the Soviet Union and its perception of China as a junior partner. Chinese revolutionaries regarded this attitude of the Soviet Union towards China as “Soviet patronage”, emerging even before the establishment of the PRC (Michael Yahuda, 1983). Moscow, from the beginning of the establishment of the CCP, demanded that the interests of the CCP and later PRC should be subordinated to the general cause of the socialist movement which was led by the Soviet Union. It thus attempted to gain an upper-hand in relations with CCP and to direct it in accordance with its own interests (Akad, 2015). The Soviet Union, in many instances, attempted to gain control of the CCP and of proceeding of the war against nationalist forces and to accord the developments in accordance with Soviet interests. For instance, PLA’s Wuhan operation, which was disapproved by Comintern, constituted the first disaccord between CCP and the Soviet Union. After the failed attack, Moscow decided to tighten control over the CCP and replaced Mao with Wang Ming, who is one of the 28 so-called “Returned Students”, as the chairman of the party. For the time being, Mao had to struggle not only for victory against Japanese occupation forces and nationalists, but also for regaining control of the party in which Soviet-controlled factions were in predominant positions. Elimination of Soviet control over the party could not be accomplished until the rectification campaign between 1942-43. From then on, Mao also skilfully refrained from other Soviet attempts to exert greater control over the CCP, like the Soviet proposal to install the headquarters of the PLA in the Xinjiang province bordering the Soviet Union. Instead, Mao installed his headquarter in Yenan province despite its strategic vulnerability due to being more exposed to military attacks and an unfavourable location for acquisition of Soviet military assistance (Lüthi, 2008).

The second phase of the Chinese Civil War began at the end of the WWII with the defeat of Japan in East Asia, which unleashed existing hostility between the Nationalist forces and Revolutionary forces under Mao’s leadership. In 1945, Nationalist forces were better equipped than those of Mao Zedong’s. In addition, they were maintaining strategically better positions on the mainland. For this reason, the Soviet Union, which persisted its occupation in Manchuria, recognized the Chiang Government as the official authority of

China via the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Post-war Cooperation agreed upon during the Yalta Conference. In accordance with the terms of the agreement, Stalin agreed to withdraw his forces from Manchuria and other parts of mainland China. However, the Soviet Union would retain control over the railroads and ports of Manchuria. The treaty concluded that the Chinese Eastern Railroad and the South Manchurian Railroad would be owned by the Sino-Soviet Railroad company and thus would be co-operated. The Nationalists would also leave the Port Arthur and Dairen Ports for Soviet control for thirty years. In return Soviet Union would be completely withdrawn from Manchuria after the signing of instruments of surrender with Japanese authorities (Coughlan, 1970). The Soviet recognition of the Nationalist government and continuous advice for CCP not to attack Nationalist forces caused deep-seated resentment of Chinese revolutionaries and made them question the real intentions of the Soviet Union regarding China and the global cause of the Communist movement. From the CCP's point of view, it appeared that the Soviet policy favoured a divided and weak China, rather than a unified and strong state, even though this state would be run by a communist regime. In 1949 PLA achieved victory over the nationalist forces and the PRC was proclaimed in October. Despite the establishment of a socialist regime in Mainland China, the Soviet Union extracted huge amounts of war reparations from Manchuria, both in the form of industrial equipment and natural resources, and they also maintained control over the Port Arthur and Dairen Ports until 1954. Although Beijing was apparently dissatisfied with the presence of the Soviet Union in Manchuria, it could not take the risk of alienating its only international ally due to the obvious weakness of the newly established communist regime (Holcombe, 2017.). Those ports and full control over Manchuria were handed on PRC with the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance signed in 1954. Nevertheless, Soviet Union's general attitude against the CCP and PRC throughout of this period significantly damaged its image in the eyes of Chinese revolutionaries.

Despite the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, Sino-Soviet Relations returned to the track of deterioration by the mid-1950s. The outbreak of a chain of crises in the Eastern European countries strained the relations between Beijing and Moscow. The Soviet Union during the crisis had looked upon its fellow Communist State, the PRC, to support the Soviet Union's policies and its subsequent repression of the crisis by military intervention. Throughout this period of turmoil, which erupted first in

Hungary and later spread to Poland, the Soviet Union had sought China's support for its policies and way of handling Eastern European affairs as an instrument of legitimacy and showing off a unified front of international communism. Beijing, however, was sending mixed signals throughout the escalation of the crisis. On the one hand, it criticized the revolts on the grounds of their anti-communist favour. On the other, it urged the Soviet Union to allow greater independence for Eastern European countries. After the Soviet intervention in Hungary and Poland, Khrushchev personally invited Zhou Enlai to mediate between the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries with the hope of establishing a new basis of relations in order to consolidate the Socialist Bloc. However, Zhou's visits to Eastern Europe upon the invitation of Khrushchev had counter-effects and deeply soured Sino-Soviet relations. Zhou, during his visit, criticized both the Stalinist tendencies of the Soviet Union and its methods of conducting relations with Eastern European countries. Although Mao urged him not to go further in his criticism, Zhou's words had already echoed in the ears of Soviet policymakers as Chinese deceptive attempts to stir up hornets' nest in Eastern Europe, which they considered as their backyard (Zagoria, 1974).

The further deterioration of relations between Beijing and Moscow was prevented by the internal developments in the Soviet Union. The Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, was dismissed from his duties at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) by the Presidium dominated by Molotov. In the course of the events, Khrushchev regained the initiative with the help of Defence Minister General Zhukov and re-established himself as party secretariat. In the aftermath of the consolidation of his power within the party, Khrushchev purged the Molotov clique from their position in the CPSU and even dismissed General Zhukov from his duties, considering his growing influence in the state apparatus. However, his legitimacy was seriously damaged by these developments, and therefore, he desperately sought international support to consolidate his position within the party and in international socialist blocs. In this context, the timely intervention of Mao Zedong into the internal crisis of the Soviet Union and the extension of his support to Khrushchev led to a temporary improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. Sino-Soviet relations reached their historical peak point in the following years, until the 1960s, in which the Sino-Soviet split became apparent. On October 15th, 1957, with the Agreement on the New National Defence Technology, China succeeded in ending Soviet

support for its nuclear program. Moreover, the Conference of World Communist and Worker's Parties, which was held in Moscow, co-sponsored by the CCP and CPSU, indicates that Moscow had begun considering China as a quasi-equal partner (Z. Shen, 2020; Zagoria, 1974).

2.1.1.1. Sino-Soviet Competition in the Third World

WWII crippled the Western Empires' capabilities and created a power vacuum in the Third World. The Cold War era witnessed the fierce competition between the two blocs in the Third World to fill the power vacuum brought about by the demise of these Western Empires. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had worked hard to install like-minded governments and thus establish a sphere of influence in the developing political centers of East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. The establishment of PRC as a giant state in socialist bloc tilted the prospect of victory in East Asia to the socialist bloc as well as creating a new-comer peer competitor in the global context of the geopolitical competition.

The competition over the Third World during the Cold War thus became a tri-party game among the Soviet Union, PRC, and US. From the very beginning of its establishment, the PRC became the centre of revolutionary insurgencies in East Asia and Indo-China and contributed to a great extent to the revolutionary movements in other regions. Despite the fact that the Chinese economy lagged far behind its geopolitical counterparts, its vast territory and population enabled China to play an active role in the Third World. The Chinese involvement in Third World affairs was carried out in line with Chairman Mao's perception of the essence of Cold War competition. Mao argued that true competition between socialist and capitalist forces occurs in the "intermediate zones." For him, two intermediate zones laid down the territories between the United States and the Soviet Union. The first intermediate zone consists of the capitalist states of Western Europe, Northern America, Japan, and Austria. The second one, however, consists of the newly post-colonial states emerging as consequences of the demise of the empires of Western Europe after WWII. Mao concludes that the real target of the US's imperialism was not the Soviet Union but the intermediate zones stretching between the two poles of post-WWII order (Mark, 2012).

In essence, the major schism between Beijing and Moscow was caused by their respective relations with the Third World as well as the question of who would assume leadership Third World countries. After Stalin's death, having been left as the most senior revolutionary in the world, Mao increasingly emphasized the importance of the intermediate zone and China's unique responsibility to support revolutionary movements springing there. The geopolitical reasoning behind China's pivot to the Third World was to carve out an international front consisting of the newly independent Third World nations (Tse, 2008). This international front in return would boost Beijing's international position vis-a-vis both the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as provide China a degree of security in its surroundings. China, especially in the second half of the 1950s, invested a considerable amount of diplomatic capital in Third World affairs. In 1954, Zhou Enlai's diplomatic achievement at the Geneva Conference made China one of the chief countries in the Vietnam issue. After that point, China's image both in Soviet client states in Eastern Europe and in the post-colonial countries of Asia and Africa experienced a sudden improvement. In 1955, China attended the Bandung Conference and became one of the most influential nations. In order to fortify its emerging international posture as an independent country in the Socialist bloc, China, together with India, introduced the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" during the conference. Also known as the Panchsheel, the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" became one of the most-cited international documents during the Cold War. Beijing also attempted to promote its image as an anti-imperialist country through its generous support for the struggles of Third World nations against Western imperialist states and international aid programs beginning in the mid-1950s (C. Jian, 2011).

The Chinese approach to the Third World aimed to construct an international unitary front from below against Western imperialism headed by the United States. This approach was fundamentally challenging to the Soviet leadership in the international socialist movement. The Soviet approach throughout the Cold War represented a top-down tendency in which the Soviet Union was the fundamental actor in the global struggle against the Western Bloc. The conceptualization of relations in this way required the subordination of the revolutionary movements around the world to the national interests of the Soviet Union. Moscow legitimized its stance by claiming that the flourishing revolutions in the world would fade away in the absence of international support and that

only the Soviet Union in the socialist bloc had the capacity to provide that support. Therefore, Soviet foreign policy throughout the entire period of the Cold War was built upon the principle of avoidance of direct confrontation with the United States, which would endanger its very existence (Hager, 2019).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Third World issue became the fault line in Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviet Union gradually became uneasy about Chinese activism in the Third World and in Eastern European countries to the detriment of Soviet interests. At the same time, the PRC began to criticize Soviet foreign policy conduct as compromising Western imperialists at the expense of the global revolutionary movement. The relations between the two poles of the socialist bloc became too tense in the late 1950s. As early as 1956, the Soviet Union initiated the process of withdrawing its technicians and military advisors from China and completed the process within a few years. At the end of the 1960s, there were no Soviet technicians or military advisors left in China. In 1959, the Soviet Union also ceded its economic and military assistance as well as its contribution to the PRC's nuclear program. The rift between their relations continued during the entire period of the 1960s. In 1963, when the Soviet Union concluded the Test Ban Treaty with the United States, Beijing raised its criticism on the ground that the main target of the treaty was China's nuclear program. For Beijing, the Soviet Union was collaborating with the United States against China, which was the true threat to Western imperialism in the Third World. Thus, China toned up its criticism of alleged Soviet revisionism and also began to express its dissatisfaction with the so-called unequal treaties concluded with external powers when China was in no position to resist imposition on terms which were contrary to its national interest. The rhetoric of unequal treaties alarmed the Soviet Union that China might seek revisions along with their common borders and in outer Mongolia. Beijing's implicit territorial claims embodied in the rhetoric of unequal treaties led the Soviet Union to conclude the Mutual Defence Treaty with Mongolia and to scale-up its military presence along with its border with China. In 1966, the tensions in Sino-Soviet relations led to the break-up of party-to-party relations between the two largest Communist parties in the world. As world politics was advancing towards détente in the late 1960s, there were no signs that the tension in the relations between the two socialist states would be defused (Lüthi, 2008).

2.1.1.2. Military Clashes Along with Ussuri River

The growing distress in the Sino-Soviet diplomatic line evolved into open hostility in 1969. The Sino-Soviet border, along with the Ussuri River, became the hot spot as the military clashes erupted on a small island. Indeed, the northern-eastern section of the Sino-Soviet border has been in a constant state of destabilization since the early 1960s, as antagonism between the two countries grew steadily. While China was beginning to articulate its dissatisfaction with the unequal treaties in the 1960s, the Soviet Union initiated the process of amassing its military might in the border area and the border incursions and violations became the daily routine between the patrolling units of the respective countries. The sovereignty over Zhenbao Island, a small island on the Ussuri River, turned into an immediate source of conflict. In March 1969, major military clashes erupted over the island involving the use of heavy artillery and armoured vehicles in which both sides suffered heavy casualties. Following the incidents in March, the situation along the Sino-Chinese border continued to destabilize. The situation became even more dangerous in August when the Soviet Red Army launched a coordinated attack on a Chinese military station in Xinjiang (Kuisong, 2000).

After the military exchanges along the Ussuri River and the Soviet attack that annihilated a Chinese squadron in Xinjiang, the prospect of a military attack by the Soviet Union against China significantly increased. US intelligence agencies gathered information on Soviet military exercises in which simulated targets resembled Chinese nuclear facilities. In Beijing, military officers and top-ranked policy-makers also contemplated that a Soviet attack on the Chinese military facilities or bordering areas was not out of the question. Following months of border clashes, China invoked extraordinary measures to absorb Soviet attacks and prepare for war with the Red Army. To foster the rumours of Soviet military intervention, a senior Soviet diplomat in Washington, Dadydov, asked his American counterparts informally what would be the US's reaction if the Soviet Union initiated a pre-emptive strike against Chinese nuclear facilities. At this informal meeting, US official Stearman warned that an attack on China would have far-reaching consequences that no one could predict. By the end of the 1960s, decade-going Sino-Soviet conflicts had evolved into a possible full-scale military conflict between the two countries (Burr, 2001).

The great anxiety brought by the prospect of Sino-Soviet war dominated global politics in 1969. The war between the two former allies also had the potential to go nuclear. In particular, the Soviet military seriously contemplated launching a pre-emptive attack on Chinese nuclear facilities to cripple the newly emerging nuclear capabilities. However, the situation started to show signs of de-escalation, especially at the end of the year. The timely death of Vietcong leader and renown revolutionary Ho-Chi Minh on the 9th of September contributed to the prevention of major military conflict between the two states. The Soviet delegation attending the funeral conveyed a message to Chinese counterparts regarding the Soviet side's readiness to enter into diplomatic talks to de-escalate the conflict started by the military exchanges in the Far East region (Kuisong, 2000).

China's border clashes with the Soviet Union made it possible for China to make major diplomatic manoeuvres in the remainder of the Cold War. Considering the dangers of the international challenges that China faced, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai established a "Four-Marshall Working Group" to analyse the current international geopolitical situation. The four-man Marshall Group, comprised of four veteran PLA Marshalls, is tasked with closely monitoring international developments and making policy recommendations to the CCP Central Committee. Throughout the escalation of conflict with the Soviet Union, the study group worked diligently to provide useful insight to the Central Committee of the CCP regarding the triangular relations among the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the USA. The four marshals concluded in their written report to the Central Committee that the Soviet attack on the PRC is unlikely because a final decision in favour of the attack is unlikely to be reached through the Soviet Politburo decision-making process. In addition, the report laid down the strategical reasoning for the improvement of Sino-American relations in order to compensate for the weakening strategic position of the PRC caused by open hostility with the Soviet Union. In this regard, the Four Marshall Group proposed resuming so-called ambassadorial talks with the United States (Xia, 2006).

2.1.2. The Sino-American Reproachment

Following the Sino-Soviet border clashes in Northeast Asia and the emerging US foreign policy interest in disengaging counter-revolutionary reactionism in the Third World,

favourable geopolitical conditions emerged in Sino-American relations. Nevertheless, the resulting Sino-American rapprochement from this favourable environment did not take place all of a sudden. Both sides, at first, needed to overcome deep-seated mutual suspicion and to reveal their positions on the eve of changing international conditions. Therefore, Moscow and Beijing engaged in intense diplomatic exchanges via back-channels before the breakthroughs in bilateral relations.

Ambassadorial talks were the main and most immediate diplomatic means through which both sides exchanged a great deal of thought on various international issues contaminating bilateral relations. The so-called ambassadorial talks refer to diplomatic deliberations held, especially in Warsaw and Bucharest. Both countries have held 136 meetings at ambassadorial level since the first meeting at the end of the Geneva Conference in Geneva in 1955. The nature of the initial meeting, however, was not to make any substantial improvement in Sino-US relations. Rather, they concentrated on more technical issues, such as the repatriation of detained US and Chinese soldiers from the Korean War to their home countries at first, and later, on maintaining the Taiwan Strait cease-fire. With the changes in the international environment in the late 1960s, triggered by the US's dragging into the Vietnam conflict and growing Sino-Soviet antagonism, the nature of the ambassadorial talks had also gradually changed. In the late 1960s, the ambassadorial talks became one of the main diplomatic platforms through which both sides sought the prospect of reconciliation. Although the ambassadorial talks did not produce any concrete political outcome in the form of contractual documents, they served at least two purposes. Firstly, the diplomatic deliberations at ambassadorial level are still diplomatic contact, which would serve to relevance mutual positions on various international issues. Second, the last sessions of the ambassadorial talks produced the desired output, which is the continuation of the diplomatic deliberation at a higher level. At the 136th meeting taking place in Warsaw, China agreed on the US proposal to send American representatives to Beijing in order to engage in direct diplomatic talks. The acceptance of these proposals was practically the end of the phase of diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level, while opening a new chapter in the future of Sino-American relations (Goldstein, 2001).

The second catalyst for Sino-American rapprochement was timely international mediation carried out by Pakistan. The Pakistani initiative was born out of Nixon's and his then national security advisor Henry Kissinger's trip to Pakistan in 1971. At the end of this visit, Nixon asked Yahya Khan, the military ruler of Pakistan, to convey a special message to China. Pakistan, then, was the only country that had cordial relations with both China and the United States. Nixon's message was simply expressing the US's interest in improving relations beyond the existing constraints. Back-channel diplomacy established through Pakistan continued until the establishment of formal high-level interaction between Beijing and Washington. The Pakistani channel was critical in overcoming mutual suspicion, particularly on the most sensitive issues in Sino-American relations. In particular, the US's intention to reduce its military posture in the Taiwan Strait was transmitted via Pakistani channels and echoed in Beijing as positive steps taken by the US to improve relations. The Taiwan dispute was also brought up at various points during the lengthy process of ambassadorial talks, but no practical outcome was achieved. Accordingly, although Pakistani mediation also did not lead to any lasting agreement over the issue, it made it possible for both sides to outrun the vicious circle that ploughed Sino-American relations for decades (Ali, 2005).

In April 1971, an infamous trip of US ping-pong players, which became referred to as "ping pong diplomacy," appeared as the big-bang of Sino-American rapprochement. However, the underlying conditions were already set by changing geopolitical circumstances and diplomatic deliberations through back-channels. The ping-pong diplomacy, in this sense, provided both sides a vague opportunity to be seized in order to upgrade the relations to higher levels. Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971 accelerated this momentum already gained since April 1971 by ping-pong diplomacy. (Hong & Sun, 2000). Kissinger and his skilful diplomacy also helped to overcome the gravitational effects of the disparity between the US and China on certain long-standing issues, in particular the Taiwan issue and Chinese representation in the UN.

In parallel with improving relations, the PRC began to reap the political and economic benefits of its changing international orientation as early as 1969. In the aftermath of the border clashes along with the Ussuri River, the US removed travel restrictions to China. This ping-pong diplomacy was in fact a by-product of this early outcome of changing US

policy towards China. In 1971, during the trip of a US ping-pong team to China, the US also removed its long-standing trade embargo imposed on the mainland. The most decisive moment in the relations, however, was China's gaining UN representation in October 1971. This achievement was materialized by the US revoking its reservation, preventing the entrance of the PRC into the UN and UNSC. Subsequently, the PRC overtook the ROC as the sole representative of China. (Hong & Sun, 2000).

With regard to the Taiwan dispute, there were three main deteriorating factors in Sino-American relations. The first one was the US military presence on the island and in the Taiwan Strait. The second was the US's Defence Treaty with the ROC government, signed in 1954, and the third was the PRC's sovereignty claim over the island. The US, during Nixon's presidency, had taken certain practical steps to overcome Taiwan's obstacle before its aspiration to improve relations with Beijing. In terms of the US military presence on the island, the US has begun to transmit its intention to reduce its military strength both on the island and in the Taiwan Strait. In 1972, during his trip to China, Nixon clearly articulated that the US would withdraw two thirds of its military forces immediately, and the remaining forces would also be drawn off when the Vietnam War ended. This would defuse most of the anxiety among the many Chinese regarding US military intentions in the region and a possible US-backed invasion attempt by nationalist forces in Taiwan. The US-ROC Mutual Security Treaty posed a more formidable challenge to the improvement of bilateral relations. The issue was brought up multiple times by Chinese statemen on various occasions since the beginning of deliberations at high levels. The issue has revolved around mutual renunciation of force in the Taiwan Strait and declarations of commitment to peaceful resolution of the dispute. The US's concern regarding its security alignment with the ROC was that any US retreat from its commitment to defend the island against an aggression from China would potentially weaken the US's credibility in the eyes of its other allies. The PRC was also anxious to abandon the principle of the use of force against Taiwan because of the implications of this renunciation for its sovereignty over the island and the possibility of Taiwanese separatism. Regarding the sovereignty issue, the US de facto acknowledged the PRC's One China discourse when it did not react to the PRC's taking over its UN seat from the ROC in 1971. This stance of the US also fortified by its various statements and contractual agreements (Goh, 2004).

From 1969 until February 1972, US-China rapprochement was an implicit tendency and a compelling suspicion that the USSR had to be reckoned with. However, in February 1972, this tendency became reality with Nixon's trip to China. The Shanghai Communiqué, jointly issued by the US and PRC, formalized the Sino-American rapprochement and fundamentally altered not only bilateral relations but also US-Taiwanese relations as well as the overall fabric of international relations. The communiqué institutionalized the US's "One China" policy. On the other hand, China has obliged itself to primarily investigate possible means of peaceful resolution of the dispute. Therefore, while not solving the dispute by any means, the communiqué removed the issue as an obstacle to the improvement of the bilateral relations (Shanghai Communiqué, 1972).

The US-China diplomatic reconciliation achieved in the 1970s laid the foundation for China's market-oriented and export-driven economic reforms at the end of the decade. The reorientation of its foreign policy in the bipolar context of the Cold War towards the US and the western bloc enabled China to engage with the global liberal economic order and to infiltrate global trade and foreign capital despite its socialist regime. The economic reforms, in turn, would lead to the emergence of the geopolitical phenomenon of the rise of China.

2.2. ECONOMIC REFORMS AND THE RISE OF CHINA

The economic reforms and measures implemented during Deng Xiaoping's tenure were fundamentally different from those introduced by his predecessors. Economic growth and development had both been pivotal concerns since the establishment of the PRC. Having examined China's weakness against industrial powers during what they called "the century of humiliation", Chinese revolutionaries devoted themselves to building a strong and reliable economic base upon which national power could flourish. However, the method of economic development until Deng Xiaoping's reforms was industrialization through central planning. Therefore, from the 1950s onwards to 1978, China had prioritized heavy industry, especially iron and steel production, over the production of consumer goods and manufacturing. This economic policy was heavily based on the strategic concern of self-reliance, and international trade was a secondary concern. The

economic reform model introduced by Deng Xiaoping fundamentally altered the economic structure of mainland China. Paying little attention to the self-reliance and socialist model of development, Deng Xiaoping made foreign trade and foreign direct investment the engine of Chinese economic development. Accordingly, Chinese industrial production began to be directed by international demands and "manufacturing" replaced heavy industry as the driving force behind growth and development(Gittings, 2006).

The new economic model was put into practice in December 1978 with the announcement of "four-chapter policy" at the Third Plenum. The renewed enthusiasm for economic development was also in line with the four-modernization rhetoric developed by Zhou Enlai in order to describe the path of modernization of the Chinese economy. The "four modernizations" refer to the modernization of the four key components of the Chinese economy: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence. In order to achieve the desired economic transformation, Deng Xiaoping and other reformers implemented certain economic and financial policies that allowed greater economic liberalization, greater foreign investment, and greater international trade. These policies had gradually transformed China from a communist state into a market economy. Chinese success in economic transformation, in turn, gave rise to the phenomenon of the Rise of China by the beginning of the 1990s. Thereby, the economic transformation of China took place as a consequence of the market-liberalization at home and the opening-up of China to external markets.

The first and most immediate economic reforms were made in order to decentralize the firmly controlled Chinese economy. With the so-called "responsibility system," the state gradually relaxed its tight control over the economy and delegated production to privately owned enterprises. The first target and test ground of this policy was the de-collectivization of agriculture. The Household Responsibility System, embarked at the end of the 1970s, divided the large-conglomeration of land accumulated into the hands of collective farms among individual families. The Industrial Responsibility System followed suit and transformed industrial production. Individuals or groups were allowed to run enterprises via contract while state-owned companies were granted the right to keep the profits after taxation. Many sectors and areas were re-organized in the wake of the implementation of de-centralization policies. In addition to transformation of the key

sectors of the economy, China also loosened the state-controlled price policy. The state control over goods and services was removed on a product basis and temporary mechanisms like the two-tier price system were established in order to facilitate smooth transformation (Marino, 2018)). Furthermore, the labour market in China also got its share of the wind of liberalization and de-centralization. This was one of the most controversial and bold moves in the process of economic reforms for a country that declared itself as a "people's republic". Reforms in the labour market abolished unconditional job security by breaking the "iron rice bowl" and the principle of equal wages regardless of efficiency in order to materialize higher productivity and efficiency in workplaces (Gitting, 2006). These internal adjustments re-organized the Chinese economy and prepared the ground for its economic take-off.

Secondly, the opening-up of the Chinese economy constitutes another aspect of China's impressive economic transformation and development. From the 1970s onwards, China has progressively opened its economy to global markets and foreign direct investment. The initial steps for China's new international trade policy were the decentralization of foreign trade and the grant of rights to a growing number of private firms to engage in foreign trade. In parallel with this new policy, the share of state-controlled companies in foreign trade had steadily declined throughout the period of economic reformation. Beijing also adopted certain policies and regulations in foreign trade with a view to increasing its exports and endorsing exporting companies. For example, the export processing system was established and promoted by several regulations, making intermediate goods more accessible and more affordable for Chinese manufacturers. In addition, the Chinese state also secured a sufficient supply of basic raw materials and energy for producers of export goods (Lardy, 1993). Alongside the promotion of foreign trade via various measures, the attraction of foreign direct investment is an integral component of the general strategy of opening-up. In 1979, a joint venture law was accepted by the National People's Congress. The law aims to allow foreigners to establish business partnerships in China to sell their products in foreign markets (Salem, 1981). Accordingly, Special Economic Zones (SEZ), as the specially administrated regions where foreign direct investment is allowed, were established along with the Chinese coastal regions. Due to the success of the first SEZs established in Shenzhen, Zhuhai,

Shantou, and Guangdong, the practice was expanded and numerous SEZs proliferated in the coastal regions of China(Gittings, 2006).

The market-oriented transition of the Chinese economy puts China on an export-driven path of development. To further this export-driven growth and development, China has pursued an integral monetary policy. In 1978, at the eve of the economic reforms, one USD was approximately equal to less than 2 Chinese Yuan (RMB), the national currency of China. However, China has devalued its national currency steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, by the turn of the millennium, one USD was worth eight RMB. Since then, USD-RMB parity has not dropped to the level of 6 RMB per 1 USD. Keeping the value of the RMB down against the USD made exports from China more affordable in the global market and imports into China more difficult. Consequently, China's current account surplus had steadily increased.

As a result of the firm commitment to economic reforms, China has recorded impressive economic growth. By the beginning of 1976, when China recorded its last negative GDP growth, Chinese GDP had grown by approximately 10% annually. Chinese GDP increased from 178 billion in 1978 to 347 billion in 2000, more than doubling. Since then, this pattern has repeated almost every 5 years, and Chinese GDP reached 17.7 trillion in 2021. Consequently, the relative wealth and economic prosperity of China vis-a-vis other countries have also improved. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world in terms of GDP. In terms of purchasing power parity, China has enjoyed the position of being the largest economy in the world since 2014 (World Bank, 2022).

This spectacular growth of the Chinese economy and national wealth has also reflected upon its energy consumption. Rapid economic development and rising living standards in China have fundamentally altered the Chinese energy scheme's overall outlook. Before the implementation of economic reforms, China was a net exporter of hydrocarbon resources, and this export constituted a major part of its foreign trade. However, as China's economy had sustained rapid growth during the 1980s and 1990s, China's ability to sustain its favourable position in its energy production-consumption equilibrium was overly strained. Consequently, China first became a net oil importer in 1992, and then in 2004, Chinese natural gas consumption exceeded its production. Despite its vast coal reserves, China has become a net importer of coal since 2009 (EIA, 2019). In 2010, China

overtook the US as the largest energy consumer in the world. China also became the biggest oil importer by 2017 (EIA, 2022).

2.2.1. The Peaceful Rise of China

The commencement of economic reforms and the opening of the Chinese economy to global markets brought about a paradigm-change in Chinese foreign policy. From its establishment as an independent state in 1949 till the death of Mao, Chinese foreign policy was revolutionary in essence, aiming at overthrowing the old international order (Zhu, 2010). Throughout this period, Chinese foreign policy was security-oriented, relying on military and political power to promote its posture in international affairs. This over-reliance on military means in international affairs had been pursued prior to 1979, even at the expense of economic interests, which were also desperately needed for a war-torn and newly established state like China. The Korean War and the initiation of two crises in the Taiwan Straits, which were carried out in accordance with this foreign policy paradigm, discourage western powers from engaging in extensive economic relations with China. The emergence of the Sino-Soviet antagonism coincided with US involvement in the Vietnam War and also exacerbated its economic isolation for a brief period of time until 1972.

In 1979, while China was entering a new path, its foreign policy had also begun to send signals of change. Despite the fact that security remains a central concern, China has gradually come to the conclusion that its survival and its aspiration to be one of the central powers in the international system could be best achieved through economic development. Therefore, from 1979 onwards, the economy has gained control of foreign policy. Chinese national interests were re-evaluated in accordance with the economic reform process and its aspiration to better penetrate the global economy. As economic reforms begin to yield their benefits, economic prosperity and development have increasingly become associated with the survival and wellbeing of the PRC and its political system (Gitting, 2006).

2.2.2. Beijing's Indirect Approach in Its Foreign Policy Conduct

One of history's greatest strategists, Basil Liddell Hart, argues in his infamous *Strategy: Indirect Approach* that wars have been won not by those with the most resources, but by those with the best strategy for using those resources. He firmly draws attention to psychological factors in strategic behaviour and advocates that strategy should be employed not for the purpose of defeating the enemy's armed forces, but to defeat its will to continue fighting. He thus argues that the greatest strategy rests upon the principle of unpredictability. Hart's formulation of strategic principles, dubbed the "indirect approach," has had a significant impact on both military doctrines of modern armies and grand strategies of states. The "indirect approach" strategy, which prioritizes psychological factors and economy of force, does not necessarily command passivity in action, but in certain cases, "strategic prudence" could be an integral part of this concept (Earle, 2015).

The path of Chinese foreign policy, which was dictated by the guidance of Deng Xiaoping, could be regarded as an example of an indirect approach in the greater geopolitical context. At least for two reasons, Deng Xiaoping, the architect of reforms and development in the Chinese economy, was also completely aware that a compatible foreign policy is essential for the realisation of their outcomes. To begin with, foreign direct investment, infiltration of high technology through foreign trade, transfer of foreign technology, and maintaining access to global markets were critical components of China's economic rise. (Keith, 2018). Secondly, the fruition of economic reforms would take a certain amount of time during which a favourable and tranquil international environment is needed, especially in relations with the US. The achievement of these objectives requires a prudent and watchful foreign policy and its skilful implementation. Therefore, those compelling factors forced Beijing to depart from its traditional way of foreign policy making and implementation and adopt a unique grand strategy to achieve its aspirations indirectly.

Deng Xiaoping established a prudent foreign policy for China, taking into account the needs of economic development and existing international power realities, which was continued by his successor until 2012, when Xi Jinping assumed power. On a regional and global scale, Deng advised China to maintain a low profile in its foreign policy

conduct. The strategy of maintaining a low profile in international affairs stemmed from the strategic concern that China requires time to mature into a full-fledged great power capable of competing on equal terms with other great powers in global affairs. According to Deng Xiaoping, during the time frame in which China would catch-up with the leading economic and political power centres, Beijing should "hide its capabilities and bide its time" in its foreign policy conduct. Otherwise, China risks engaging in a great power competition, which could halt its economic development and prevent it from reflecting on its national power (Keith, 2018). Therefore, by the beginning of 1978, China had increasingly adopted a foreign policy primarily concerning its economic development and the avoidance of direct confrontation with external powers, while accordingly continuing the generation of its national power.

In accordance with the guidelines set by Deng Xiaoping, the "peaceful rise of China" discourse was promoted by the Chinese foreign policy and security establishment. The term was originally coined by Zheng Bijian, who was then vice-president of the Central Party School, to point out the main trajectory of the economic growth of China and its development as a new power centre. Since its first use in 2003 at the Boao Forum in Hainan province, the term has gained widespread acceptance among top-ranking statemen and foreign policy officials, and it has begun to be mentioned in formal speeches and official statements. (Pan, 2009). The Peaceful Rise of China discourse is basically China's self-declaration of its benign intentions concerning the geopolitical consequences of its growing economic, political, and military capabilities. For China, its economic and military rise would not relocate the building blocks of the current international economic and political order. On the contrary, as being a beneficiary of globalization and the international economic system, China would act as a responsible state-holder in the international arena and promote economic interactions and existing international norms and regimes governing international economic, political, and strategic relations.

China's self-proclaimed "peaceful rise", intending to promote its international image as a benign power and reassure its regional and global counterparts, has been in line with its foreign policy choices and actions. Following a series of market-oriented reforms, China has increasingly concluded that selective acceptance of internationally recognized norms and increased participation in international economic institutions is in its best interests (Bergsten et al., 2008). Therefore, from the 1990s onward, China has pushed

forward with greater integration into the global economic order. This newfound enthusiasm for foreign policy enabled China to join global international institutions established and led by the United States and its Western allies after WWII. Beijing's plea to participate in global liberal economic order was also encouraged by the US and many western powers, considering the potential transformation effects of free trade and economic prosperity on China's society and political system.

These new foreign policy objectives have led China to enter into global institutions governing the world economy and foreign trade. In the pre-opening-up period, the PRC deliberately abstained from participating in global economic organizations by accusing them of being impetuses of global capitalism and imperialism led by Western powers. However, with the paradigm-change introduced by Deng Xiaoping, China began to implement its new policy towards international organizations as early as the 1980s. In 1980, China took back its seats in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), in which, in fact, it was one of the constituent members in 1945. Chinese participation in the Asian Developmental Bank (ADB) followed suit in 1986. In return for its re-integration into the global financial order, Beijing has received the funds and investment that it desperately needed for economic modernization and infrastructure development. In the first half of the 1990s, China's integration into global organizations halted due to renewed but short-lived isolationism in its foreign policy due to the Tiananmen Square incident and the collapse of Soviet Union. Nevertheless, China was able to return to the path of an economically-driven opening-up policy in the second half. In 2021, China gained membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and marked one of the most important milestones in its economically-driven opening-up policy (Xie, 2011). Therefore, China set off in the new millennium as a deeply integrated country into the global economic order which has an unprecedented growth rate.

2.3. CONCLUSION

Following the establishment of the PRC as an independent entity in 1949, Chinese foreign policy underwent certain changes. Having been a state that gained independence after a long revolutionary struggle, the PRC found itself in a de-facto alliance with the Soviet Union. Assertive realities of the emerging Cold War between the two power blocks in the

international arena also played a role in China's "leaning against one-side" foreign policy strategy. From the outbreak of the Korean War until the Sino-American rapprochement, China pursued revisionist foreign policy on both global and regional scales, with the goal of destabilizing the existing international system and establishing a new one in which China would be a pivotal power center. In accordance with this strategy and the potential adverse geopolitical consequences of the US's foreign policy in its immediate region to the detriment of its interests, Beijing commenced a policy of engagement with the US. China, thus, militarily involved in the Korean War, escalated two crises in the Taiwan Strait and provided considerable material and political support to revolutions flourishing in the Third World. By the beginning of the 1960s, however, Sino-Soviet relations began to deteriorate, and at the end of the decade, this prolonged process of deterioration turned into open hostility on their common border along with the Ussuri River. The Sino-Soviet split in the communist bloc was precipitated by disagreements between the two nations regarding their respective conceptualization of bilateral relations as well as competition in the Third World. Therefore, at the beginning of the 1970s, China became a more isolated country both in political and economic terms. However, Beijing was able to overcome this isolation by exploiting the geopolitical division between the US and the Soviet Union with the initiation of rapprochement with the US. The Sino-US rapprochement brought about significant political benefits for China. For instance, in 1971, the PRC took its seat in the UN and UNSC by replacing the ROC and put across the "One China Policy" starting with its UN membership and with the so-called Shanghai Communique. China's foreign policy had experienced its last major changes until the presidency of Xi Jinping during the tenure of Deng Xiaoping. Deng introduced market-oriented economic reforms and transformed China's economic and political fabric. The export-driven and investment-seeking model of development reflected also on PRC's foreign policy. In accordance with Deng's advice, the PRC started to keep a low posture in international relations by hiding its growing capabilities and biding its time. Resolution of traditional foreign policy issues has been postponed for an indefinite amount of time while China focuses on developing and modernizing its economy. Therefore, the PRC had concentrated on integration into the global economy and international institutions governing global economic relations until Xi Jinping assumed power and began to carry out its independent foreign policy agenda.

CHAPTER 3

CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER XI JINPING

The end of the Cold War inaugurated an unprecedented period in modern international relations. The demise of Soviet power created a global power vacuum that could be filled by any other state but the US. Russian Federation inherited only a small portion of power possessed by its predecessor Soviet Union and thus unable to exert influence at global scale. Other powers, Japan and Germany in particular, was in no shape to influence global balance of power, nor those states are willing to play such a balancing role. China, on the other hand, lacked enough capabilities and was preoccupied with political turmoil in the mainland triggered by collapse of Soviet Union and Tiananmen Square incident. Moreover, proceeding Western sanctions and rush to cutting of diplomatic ties with China among many Western nations, made China especially cautious in its way to handle international affairs. Thus, having been left as sole super-power, US had enjoyed near-hegemonic status vis a vis other powers in international system. Only British Empire after the Napoleonic Wars had possessed similar capabilities in modern history (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Having been left as the sole superpower on the international stage, the US has pursued its own political agenda in the post-Cold War geopolitical landscape. From the First Gulf War on, the US has begun to practice its unilateral interventionism with great enthusiasm. Despite the fact that it has sought international support for its actions, the US did not refrain from acting on its own in the absence of other states' backing. During this period, international actors witnessed the overstretch of the quasi-hegemon's power. US started to reshape the political landscape in many regions in accordance with its strategic priorities. Its military interventions in the Balkans during the Yugoslavian dissolution process and in the Middle East against Iraq and Afghanistan fundamentally altered geopolitical conditions on the ground and marked the milestones in unilateral movement in international affairs (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The change in Chinese foreign policy coincides with the systemic shift from the US's quasi-hegemony towards emerging multipolarity, in which overall power among great

powers is more equally dispersed. The economic rise of China at an unprecedented pace and the economic and military recovery of Russia under the rule of Vladimir Putin paved the way for the re-emergence of multipolarity in international relations. Due to the fact that the world is still in the transformation process, it is hard to pinpoint the turning point toward multipolarity in global power equilibrium. This transition has resulted in a sequence of events having grave geopolitical importance. However, the global economic crisis and Russian unilateral intervention in Georgia marked the transition in great power relations as an irreversible process.

3.1. EMERGENCE OF THE MULTIPOLARITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

3.1.1. Global Economic Crisis and China's Rise of Economic Power in Relative Terms

The 2008 economic crisis originating in the US hits all economies across the world indiscriminately. Global GDP growth shrank from 2007's level of 4.5% to 2.1% at the end of 2008. In 2009, on the other hand, the world has experienced negative growth in terms of GDP since the decades long continuous positive growth trend (World Bank National Accounts Data, n.d.). However, despite the global economy engulfed by financial bottleneck and recession, countries experienced the effects of the financial crisis disproportionately. China, in particular, had shown extraordinary resilience compared with the world's other leading economies. This in return, have had positive reflection on China's self-confidence in its economic and political system as well as its self-image as an emerging power.

In 2008, when the financial crisis broke out, China's economy marked an impressive 9.7% GDP growth. The following year, China also announced the 9.4% annual growth of its total output in goods and services, while its peers in economic terms had entered an economic slowdown and recorded negative growth. In 2009, the US, the leading economy in the world, experienced negative growth, and its continuous economic positive growth lasting almost two decades came to an abrupt end. Japan, in the same period, declared negative GDP growth for two consecutive years, 2008 and 2009 (World Bank National Accounts Data, n.d.). Consequently, the global financial crisis bolsters Beijing's economic

posture vis-à-vis its geopolitical competitors. In 2010, China surpassed Japan as the world's second largest economy. This single event, taking place right after the global financial crisis, transmitted warning signals regarding the extraordinary resilience of China's economy across the world and triggered deep-seated concerns about the consequences of its economic rise as well as its growing economic and geopolitical intentions. (D. Chen & Wang, 2011)

Amid the economic turmoil and changing economic relations among major economies in the world, Chinese foreign policy also signaled changes in its decades-long prudent and economically-driven outlook. Beijing had employed a much more "assertive" approach in both its rhetoric and its actions regarding regional affairs and global power relations. One explanation of the changing attitude of China underscores the changing global balance of power and the relative increase in Beijing's position as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftershocks. According to this explanation, the inability of the US to prevent its market crash, which resulted in economic turmoil that plagued the developed world as China was exhibiting extraordinary resilience, made Beijing confident in its economic and political systems as well as its capabilities. The decaying US diplomatic posture across Asia-Pacific also reinforced its belief regarding the end of unipolar movement under US leadership, which has persisted since the end of the Cold War (Womack, 2017).

Another argument paints a different picture about China's changing international posture. The renewed US enthusiasm to return to Asia-Pacific after its relative disengagement following its declaration of the global war on terror has triggered China's reaction to defend what it perceives as its core national interests. Beijing has increasingly come to consider renewed American diplomatic and military activism in the Asia Pacific through a geopolitical prism. For China, the motive behind the US's actions across the region is to implement a policy of containment against itself. Therefore, the US has been pushing to gather as many countries as possible to check China's economic and military rise and its geopolitical aspirations in the Asia-Pacific region. Accordingly, the US has positioned itself against China in many regional disputes with its neighbors, played the Taiwan card by selling advanced weapons to the island, and fortified its regional alliances with its firm stance against North Korea and its nuclear and ballistic missile programs (Scobell & Harold, 2013). In politico-economic terms, the US also attempted to undermine Beijing's

economic leadership in the region by vigorously pushing for the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Although TPP could not live up to Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the agreement, a similar aspiration was renewed with the proposition of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework during Biden's presidency. Therefore, it is debated that under these conditions, China's former stance in its foreign policy has become outdated and null in effect, thus giving way to a more assertive approach (Forough, 2022).

3.1.2. Restoration of Military Strength of Russia

Accompanied by China's economic rise, the restoration of Russian power both in economic and military terms has made significant contributions to the emergence of multipolar tendencies in the international system. The re-emergence of Russia as a remarkable political and military actor directly contributed to changes in Chinese foreign policy in at least two ways. Firstly, Moscow's re-assumption of great power status has distracted a significant amount of attention from the rise of China. Secondly, the reconciliation achieved in Sino-Russian relations, which was cemented by the conclusion of a treaty in 1996 constituting a strategic partnership between the parties, had broken Beijing's diplomatic isolation. Especially in terms of strategic relations, Russia has become its key provider of advanced weapon systems and critical military technology, which China has been constantly denied by Western powers since the Tiananmen Square Incident in the wake of the end of the Cold War (Blank & Levitzky, 2015)

During the first term of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, the Russian economy had recovered from the decade-long turmoil created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and policies of rapid transition to a market economy. The so-called shock therapy embarked upon during the 1990s left the Russian economy in bad shape and exacerbated the economic and financial challenges and security threats that Moscow faced during the 1990s. As part of the policies of rapid transition, many state-owned companies and industries were handed down to private companies and individuals, which deprived the state of much-needed economic resources for the materialization of the country's political and economic transition. Putin ended the uncoordinated policies of privatization and initiated a process of renationalization of key industries in Russia. The primary targets of his nationalization policies were the gas and oil companies given away to foreign

companies and Russian individual entrepreneurs who became oligarchs as a result of the policies of the 1990s. Consequently, the Kremlin, under Putin's leadership, reestablished tight control over the hydrocarbon industry firms and then all over entire Russian economy. The revenues gathered by the oil and natural gas exports were also directly used to modernize the overall state structure and the Russian military (Maness & Valeriano, 2015). The restoration of Russian power had also direct reflections on its foreign policy. In fact, there has been growing unease in the Kremlin regarding western policies since the end of the Cold War. Russia had felt insulted due to its inability to resist the western attempts on various occasions, ranging from the Yugoslavian dissolution process at first to the color revolutions and later to the eastward expansion of western institutions, namely NATO and later the EU. The admission of the Baltic States into the NATO alliance in 2004 was the final straw for Russia because Moscow still considered the former space of the Soviet Union as its own sphere of influence. In 2007, during the Munich Security Conference, Putin made clear this new direction of Russian foreign policy before the leaders of Western countries. One year later, Russia invaded Georgia as a response to NATO's "open door policy" re-emphasized during the Bucharest summit in the same year, which made it possible Georgia and Ukraine to participate in the NATO alliance (Mearsheimer, 2014)

The Sino-Russian rapprochement since the end of the Cold War has also played a key role in transition from unipolarity to a multipolar international system. In essence, both China and Russia have lacked the capabilities to resist unilaterally against the US and its global policies. For much of the post-Cold War period, China has been mainly an economic competitor, lacking enough military capabilities in comparison with Russia and the US. Russia, on the other hand, relies mainly on its military power, especially its nuclear capabilities and strategic rocket forces, in its strategic interaction with the other great powers (Sakwa, 2017). Although Moscow also tends to use its export of hydrocarbon resources as a strategic asset in its foreign policy, its one-sided economy, lacking the complexity of its predecessor, the Soviet Union, has also proven to create vulnerabilities that outweigh the desired strategic gains. Therefore, the other two poles of emerging multipolarity have an uneven power structure in their total sum of power equilibrium.

The vulnerabilities of Russia and China arising from their limited capabilities have driven the two states more and more close since the end of the Cold War. The US policies of NATO expansion, construction of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) theaters in Europe and North-East Asia, and arms sales to Taiwan have reinforced the tendency towards reconciliation and subsequent strategic partnership in Sino-Russian relations. Both countries settled their long-standing border disputes within the framework of the Shanghai Five (later the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) during the 1990s and early 2000s. Following this, they have initiated extensive cooperation at both a regional and global scale in order to form a counterbalance against the hegemonic tendencies of the US (Tao & Xu, 2020)

Practically, strategic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing has focused on security and energy dimensions. The ongoing cooperation in those areas has yielded significant benefits for both nations. For China, realignment with Moscow has provided much-needed military equipment and weapon systems that are essential for its external security. In the wake of the end of the Cold War and the Tiananmen Square Incident, Western countries, and the US in particular, imposed a strict embargo on China in critical military technologies with the aim of depriving its ability to become a military powerhouse in the Indo-Pacific region. Apart from the mere sale of weapon systems, China has also received significant transfers of key military technologies and technical expertise from Russia. Especially since 2010, when Russian-Western relations have remarkably soured, China has started to receive the cutting-edge technologies in the Russian arsenal, such as the Su-35 fighter jets and the S-400 Triumph air defense system. In line with these developments, Russia has significantly changed its practice of selling more technically advanced weapons systems to India than to China. This also implies that China replaces India as Moscow's key security partner in its grand strategy (Blank & Levitzky, 2015).

In addition, Russia has also increasingly become an important country in terms of Chinese energy security. Although the Middle East region remains the greatest source to meet Beijing's soaring energy demand, the share of Russian oil and natural gas in China's energy market has been on a steady increase. On a country basis, Russia has become China's largest energy partner. In return, the energy relations with China have provided a hedge for Moscow against its relations with the Western world. The energy and security relations forged with Beijing have enabled Russia to conduct independent maneuvers on

the Eurasian continent. When Russian-Western security relations deteriorated due to many disputes stretching from the Syria crisis to the crisis erupted on Ukraine, financial resources derived from Sino-Russian energy cooperation played a part in maintaining its strategic position (Skalamera, 2016).

3.2. CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER XIJINPING

3.2.1. Presidency of Xi Jinping and the New Concepts in China's Foreign Policy

In 2012, Hu Jintao concluded the two-term limit for the presidency set by his predecessor Jiang Zemin and parted with his positions in the CCP and state apparatus in the PRC, respectively. Consequently, the 18th Central Committee of the CCP convened in Beijing in November 2012 to determine the new Politburo, the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee, and the new leader of China. As expected, Xi Jinping emerged from this momentous process as the new secretary general of the CCP, the highest post in the hierarchy of Chinese politics. He also assumed the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which is traditionally held by the general secretary. Due to his newly-attained posts within the party and his holding of the presidency of the PRC, which is a ceremonial post in essence, Xi Jinping became the top person in determining the new directions of Chinese foreign policy (Men & Tsang, 2016).

Xi Jinping has become one of the most prominent and influential figures in the short history of the PRC. Immediately after assumption of key offices within CCP and PRC, respectively, he commenced the process of accumulation of executive power within the small circle of people led by himself. Xi explored a variety of tools to increase its power within the party echelon as well as vis-à-vis the traditional stakeholder groups of the foreign policy-making process in Beijing, namely the state bureaucracy and most importantly, the military. During his first term in office as general secretary, Xi employed his anti-corruption campaign to achieve his aspiration for power. By means of this campaign, he was able to purge more than two hundred thousand party officials, including certain senior members of the CCP like Whang Qiwang (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016). PLA were also another target of the nation-wide anti-corruption campaign. Certain high-profile figures in the PLA were removed from their posts on the grounds of corruption charges.

These attempts have yielded multi-fold benefits for the remainder of Xi Jinping's rule. On the one hand, through his ardent pursuit of an anti-corruption campaign, he was able to restore the inner discipline of the CCP as well as remove his most prominent opponents from power. In addition, the investigations targeting high-ranking military officials have also fulfilled a similar function in the PLA. Xi also attempted to buttress the party-military bonds by relentlessly stressing the importance of the PLA's loyalty to the CCP. On the other hand, his anti-corruption campaign has also been welcomed by the Chinese nation, boosting its approval rates across the mainland. As a result of his successful accumulation of power within the state apparatus of China, Xi Jinping has recently been able to break the two-term constitutional limit set for party secretariat via the constitutional amendments made in 2018. The rule of Xi Jinping was cemented by his re-election as party secretariat in the first plenary session of 20th Central Committee of the CCP conveyed in Beijing in November 2022 (Jameston Foundation, 2022).

Xi Jinping came into power amid transformational winds in the international system. As of 2012, the transformation from quasi-unipolarity to the multipolar international system has been continuing, and the systemic tendencies for balancing the US, like the strategic partnership with Russia, have long been on track in Chinese foreign policy. In this historical context, due to the coincidence of the presidency of Xi Jinping with systemic changes and structural adjustments (for instance, the US's pivot to Asia policy and the growing partnership between Russia and China), there has been a tendency to portray his rule as a turning point in Chinese international behavior. For John Mearsheimer (2001), growing capabilities of China and action-reaction relations among the great powers have been shaping the behavioral patterns of both China and its peers in the current geopolitical context. Nevertheless, during the presidency of Xi Jinping, these structural changes in internal relations have been capitalized on and institutionalized within Chinese foreign policy (Chang-Liao, 2016). In other words, under the rule of Xi Jinping, China has put aside its hesitation and embarked on the role of balancing at both regional and global scales within the scope of its capabilities.

During the first term of Xi Jinping's presidency, the synchronized changes in international relations and Chinese foreign behavior first reflected themselves in the official statements made by the foreign policy establishment and senior state officials. Along with the persistent emphasis on the "peaceful development" of China, new concepts in foreign

policy have gained widespread weight in China's foreign policy rhetoric. For example, Beijing began to promote its "new type of great power relations" proposals, aiming mainly at the redefinition of relations between the US and China (Zhang, 2015). The new conceptualization of relations between great powers has important implications for the changing characteristics of China's foreign policy. Firstly, Beijing now acknowledges that the new era of multipolarity will unleash a new rivalry among great powers in the international arena that needs to be managed. Secondly, China, for the first time, has taken the initiative to set the parameters of relations between great powers, especially between China and the US. This initiative had historically pertained to Western powers, in particular the US, since the end of WWII. Therefore, the promotion of its "new types of great power relations" also reveals the fact that China has now felt itself powerful enough to attempt to set the new parameters of the global power relations.

The second foreign concept that has gained unique emphasis during the Xi era is the rhetoric of "the community of common destiny" (Zhang, 2015). The concept was first developed to describe the special relationship between mainland China and Taiwan. Ever since its first usage, the phrase has been used in a number of official documents and statements made by high-ranking officials. It has started to be referred to mainly to convey the message of Chinese enthusiasm across the world to forge and strengthen the relations between China and a wide range of countries. The immediate target of the "community of the common destiny" concept is the countries occupying the geographies in close proximity to China. Although the first appearance and usage of the concept dates back to the era of Hu Jintao (2003-13), the concept has gained unprecedented emphasis during Xi Jinping's presidency. Xi attempted to link the economic and political development of China with the overall well-being of the world economy and the individual development of specific countries, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. On the other hand, the inauguration of the BRI gave the concept its unique flavor (Kai, 2013) From then on, China has increasingly assumed the mission to actively promote the establishment of "communities of common destiny" across the globe. The key defining feature of this community is that the participating countries will be respectful of Beijing's vital national interests. While placing itself at the very core of this community through its foreign direct investment and developmental loans, China could also potentially benefit from international partnerships that would boost its global influence.

Finally, Xi Jinping has also begun to spell out the "great rejuvenation of Chinese nations" since his inauguration into the presidential office. The concept has been invoked by him to imply that China has been finally taking back its deserved status in international relations due to an unprecedented period of political and economic reforms under an uninterrupted period of the CCP's rule. In principle, the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" could be translated into geopolitical language as Beijing's self-declaration of its great power status (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016). Apart from its declaratory value, the relentless emphasis on the concept by the top-persons in the state apparatus, also shed light on China's growing capabilities and the implication of these capabilities in the geopolitical standoff among great powers.

By comparison, the foreign policy rhetoric of China during the Cold War is at odds with the recent trends in its foreign policy releases and diplomatic language stressing its status as a great power. For instance, the very first speech delivered by Deng Xiaoping in 1974 at the UNGA on behalf of China, pointed out that China would never seek hegemonic status and would never become a superpower (Global Times, 2021) These remarks, which were in line with China's then international status, appear to be in sharp contrast with Beijing's foreign policy actions and declarations. Today's China is feeling strong enough to declare itself one pole in a multipolar international order and is aspiring to play a greater role in its region and beyond. As early as 2010, the statements of then Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi in Hanoi hinted those other regional countries are "small nations," while underscoring China "as a big country," whose interests should be observed by its "smaller" neighbors. Statements like this made by top-tier politicians and military persons, and Beijing's growing military clout in its immediate region, make its pre-declared intentions on the non-pursuance of hegemony quite ambiguous (Lowsen, 2018). This single incident shows that Beijing, in effect, has been increasingly considering itself as a principle among equals, at least in its near abroad. Nonetheless, China's emerging foreign policy tendencies stem not from malicious intentions toward world hegemony, but from its growing capabilities, which compel it and its peers to act in a certain way.

3.2.2. Acta Non Verba: Foreign Policy of China in Deeds

Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, China's foreign policy has entered a period of hyperactivity, accompanied by systemic changes. Apart from its new rhetoric, which began to circulate in diplomatic documents and official statements, the signs of new activism in foreign policy can also be traced in the deeds of Beijing.

The growing activity in Chinese foreign policy has an entangled relationship with the inflation of foreign policy actors. Throughout the 2000s, in accordance with the "go abroad policy" set by Beijing, Chinese companies and energy conglomerates have started to invest abroad. As a result of this process, many state organs and commercial actors, ranging from the PLA to various ministries, from private companies to national energy conglomerates, have become heavily engaged in the process of foreign policy making and its implementation. This inflation of actors in foreign affairs has been both the reason for and the instrument of Chinese activism across the globe. Despite the fact that foreign policy has been forged and tightly directed from Beijing by the high echelons of the CCP and the foreign ministry, a wide range of actors have been complicating its implementation. These new linkages with the rest of the world, while bringing about new ways for China to spread its influence globally and to materialize its core interests, also create a tide that pulls China into the regional disputes, global geopolitical contentions, as well as the internal politics of other countries, which are the practices that Beijing has historically tended to avoid (Chang-Liao, 2016)

Given the growing complexities of the determination and implementation of its foreign policy, the PRC has initiated certain domestic processes to manage the arising complexities. The most notable internal development in this regard came into existence with the establishment of the National Security Commission (NSC) in November 2013. One of the NSC's primary responsibilities is to facilitate coordination and cooperation among state agencies involved in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. Although the NSC is not a purely outwardly-focused initiative considering the wide range of internal security problems in the PRC, its creation is still an important step to eliminate certain deficiencies embedded in Beijing's tradition of governing foreign affairs. Apart from its function in navigating the PRC's concerted efforts in foreign policy, the NSC also increases the ability of the CCP to maintain its tight control over the security and

foreign policy establishments and various bureaucratic and business rings in its contemporary foreign affairs (Ji, 2016).

The new direction of China's foreign policy emerged first in the country's periphery. This new direction taking shape during President Xi Jinping's first tenure has blended with growing assertiveness and enthusiasm for multilateral cooperation (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016). First of all, in this period, China has relentlessly pursued regional integration with other states. For that purpose, Beijing endorsed and actively participated in the establishment and enhancement of regional economic schemes. Due to the long-standing belief that China is a key beneficiary of economic globalization and liberalization of trade, the free-trade talks have constituted the backbone of Chinese regional integration strategy. In 2012, the negotiations for a China-Japan-South Korea free-trade agreement were initiated. In 2020, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was concluded among ASEAN members and many Asia-Pacific nations, including China, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Covering up 30% of total global population and 29% of global GDP, RCEP represents one of the largest economic blocs in history (Kang et al., 2020). In the same period, China has actively promoted the establishment of many multinational institutions and urged its neighbors to participate in these new endeavors. For example, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), created in 2016 by China, welcomed the participation of many other regional actors, including Japan and India.

China's active promotion of multilateral cooperations also goes beyond its immediate region. These cooperation attempts cover a wide range of areas, stretching from security to economic relations. For example, during the Ufa Summit of SCO in 2015, SCO was expanded for the first time since its creation by including India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, by giving new impetus to the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) as a regional forum that does not include the US, Beijing has promoted its newly emerging "Asia for Asians" vision (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016). During that period, BRICS, which was first used as an acronym by Goldman Sachs to point out the importance of the fast-growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, was elevated to a multinational platform consisting of those top developing countries. The intuitional relevance of BRICS was upgraded when the leaders of BRICS countries signed the agreement creating the New Development Bank (NDB) during the sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza in 2014 (Nayyar, 2016). Being considered

the parallel organization to the World Bank, the NDB was officially tasked with the provision of necessary assistance and loans to facilitate the process of economic growth and development for developing countries (New Development Bank, n.d.).

In line with the growing activism in both the regional and global spheres, Beijing also maintained the same degree of assertiveness during this period of time. Military means have increasingly replaced other means as the principle foreign policy instrument, especially in handling the regional disputes in Asia-Pacific. In 2012, China declared its Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIF), which include the disputed Diaoyu/Ryukyu islands between China and Japan. Amid the ongoing tensions started by China's unilateral declaration of ADIF, high-ranking officials in Beijing have implied that China does not recognize the sovereignty over Okinawa Island, the largest island in the Ryukyu Island chain, which also hosts an US military base. This move also fostered deep-seated suspicion both in Tokyo and in other regional countries regarding the rise of China, because the Okinawa Island was outside of the original disputed territories between China and Japan (Forsythe, 2013).

Similarly, China also bolstered its military posture in the South China Sea and endorsed its territorial maritime claims by means of increasing military activity. As part of its area denial/anti-access maritime strategy, China began to construct artificial islands in disputed maritime bodies in the South China Sea. These artificially created islands in the dispute areas fulfill multiple purposes. On the one hand, the construction of these islands can be regarded as a flag-waving operation representing the sovereign rights of the PRC over the disputed waters. On the other hand, artificial islands significantly expand the Chinese military's presence in the region. The fortification of the islands with runways, reconnaissance and surveillance installations, and other military infrastructure and equipment has periodically followed the pattern set by China in the South China Sea. These infrastructures, primarily designed for expansion of the PLA's capabilities in the region, also ended the ambiguity around the purpose of the proliferation of Chinese artificial islands in the disputed waters (Chen, 2015).

In parallel with the proliferation of the artificial islands across the South China Sea, the PLA and PLA Navy (PLAN) have increasingly embarked on a tougher position across the South China Sea and the greater Asia-Pacific strategic theater. Since the beginning of Xi Jinping's term, the military incursions carried out by units of PLAN and PLAAF's

aircrafts have increased in frequency. PLAN also carried out escorting missions to the drill ships, engaging in exploration activities in the disputed seas. Consequently, increasing frequency of military activities in the Asia Pacific theater has become one of the most express manifestations of the new direction of Chinese foreign policy under Xi's presidency (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016)

3.3. THE BELT ROAD INITIATIVE

The BRI by far constitutes the pinnacle of emerging Chinese foreign policy within the parameters set by decaying unipolarity and changing international structure. The geopolitical importance attributed to BRI comes from the potential geopolitical consequences, if China successfully implements it. The intended or potential geopolitical implications of the BRI's implementation are examined in detail in the next chapter. The intended or potential geopolitical implications of implementation of the BRI is examined in detail in next chapter. This chapter provides a brief history of the BRI since its first proposition by Chinese President Xi Jinping upon his inauguration into the presidential office.

3.3.1. Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)

The BRI was first put forward by Xi Jinping in September 2013 during his visit to Kazakhstan on the occasion of the SCO summit. During his visit, he delivered a speech at the President Nazarbayev University of Kazakhstan, titled "Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future." In his speech, Xi mentioned the historical friendship between the Chinese nation and the peoples of Central Asia. He also stressed the importance of the ancient Silk Road in terms of its contribution to human civilization through cultural exchanges, mutual learning, and the promotion of friendship among the peoples along this historical trade route stretching from China to Europe through the Eurasian land bridge. Xi pointed out today's necessity to embark on an innovative approach in order to deepen cooperation and foster development among the nations of the Eurasian continent and proposed to jointly construct an "economic belt along the Silk Road". Thus, later formulated as the "Silk Road Economic Belt", the initiative was first unfolded as a blueprint to foster economic, commercial, and cultural

interactions with the Eurasian continent based on historically proven experiences derived from the Ancient Silk Road (Consulate-General of PRC in Toronto, n.d.)

3.3.2. 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)

The articulated plans for development of the SREB revealed during Xi's trip to Kazakhstan were purely land-oriented in character, given the undisturbed Eurasian terrain lying between China and Europe. On the other hand, maritime-oriented plans for building the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" were also unfolded in the remainder of the same year. Similar to the SREB, Xi declared China's interest in collaborating on the development of the MSR when he paid a visit to Indonesia in October as the first stop on his trip to ASEAN countries. During a special session of the Indonesian parliament, Xi addressed the Indonesian representatives and underlined the significant function of the sea as a connecting force between peoples and civilizations. Then, Xi underscored his belief that further development of China cannot be achieved in isolation and that a concerted effort is needed for the creation of a "community of shared destiny" between China and ASEAN members. The leader of China presented his view of maritime cooperation between ASEAN countries and China as having utmost importance for his administration. In accordance with this view, China and ASEAN nations could achieve the joint building of the MRS in the 21st century (China-ASEAN Center, 2013). Those efforts, in return, would yield mutual benefits for development and prosperity, similar to the ancient Silk Road, which led to a flourishing and prosperous ancient civilization in its surroundings.

3.3.3. Polar Silk Road (PSR)

The Belt and Road Initiative was made up as an umbrella term in order to refer to the 21st Century MSR and the SREB together. Later, integral initiatives like the Polar Silk Road, first proposed in 2015, and the Digital Silk Road were also commissioned into the BRI. Thus, BRI began to be addressed as the overarching strategy embodying several geopolitical designs promoted by the PRC and aiming at increasing connectivity between China and the rest of the world. As can be seen from the connotation between BRI and the ancient Silk Road, the overwhelming majority of China's proposed design is

geographically concentrated on the Eurasian continent and maritime communication lines connecting China and Europe (Tillman et al., 2018). However, given the participation of many South American and African countries, the BRI does not have strict boundaries. On the contrary, BRI is an evolving project whose ramified branches have particularly tilted towards certain geographies.

3.3.4. The Incentives Behind BRI

BRI has been declared and vigorously promoted within an economic climate where Chinese economic growth has been cooling down after decades of impressive growth. Starting in the early 2010s, China entered a new phase in its economic rise, characterized as "the new normal," in which the strong GDP growth above 10 percent could no longer be sustained. The declaration of BRI corresponds to the emergence of this new challenge for the PRC and the bureaucratic and political elites governing the economy. The BRI is widely considered a response to break the cycle of low growth that has trapped China since 2012. Through the implementation of massive projects within the scope of BRI, Beijing contemplates those new markets would be open for Chinese firms as well as new opportunities would emerge to invest in foreign markets. This, in turn, would create a stimulus for further development for both the global economy and China's own economy (Zou et al., 2022).

BRI also effectively addresses certain internal defects embodied in the Chinese economy. First of all, over the course of the so-called Chinese rise since 1979, China has experienced massive but unbalanced economic growth. While its coastal regions have developed at a rapid pace, economic development has not been as successful in the inner and western sections of mainland China. This has exacerbated many social and political problems in these relatively underdeveloped parts of the country. Therefore, Beijing considers BRI an important tool for overcoming difficulties to foster development of its inner region. SREB, in particular, will be expected to increase the connectivity between China's western provinces and the adjacent regional market. The enhancement of connectivity would facilitate the flow of raw materials and energy from resource-rich regions like Central Asia and the Middle East into the local industries. In addition, the adjacent regions would become the markets for Chinese manufactured goods. As a natural

consequence of this process, China aims at eliminating poverty and security threats in its relatively underdeveloped western and inner provinces (Ferdinand, 2016)

Another internal challenge that Beijing is willing to address through BRI implementation is the overcapacity and inefficiency that plague many sectors in China. For many years, the steel and cement industries, in particular, have been inefficient compared with the dynamic industries carrying the bulk of the burden of China's economic development. Moreover, many of the firms facing the challenges of overcapacity, growing debt, and inefficiency are state-owned companies. In this context, the BRI offers an immense opportunity for China to overcome these deficiencies in its production capacity and further its industrial development. Especially, the cement and steel sectors would be the main beneficiaries of the implementation of infrastructure projects under BRI across the globe. When loans are granted for a specific BRI project, the duty to carry out the physical work is usually granted to Chinese construction firms. This, in turn, creates an impetus for strained sectors of the Chinese economy and gives way to a positive financial environment for their reorganization (Wang, 2016)

3.3.5. The Official Aims of BRI

Following the declaration of BRI, the PRC has issued an action plan officially titled "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," setting the official aims of BRI that Beijing intended to achieve through BRI's successful implementation. According to this action plan, Beijing establishes six major priorities that will be realized through the BRI. These priorities are as follows:

Cooperation Priorities: constitute the first category of priorities in the initiative. Beijing expects other participant countries to cooperate on a variety of issues in order for the successful implementation of the BRI.

Policy Coordination: is stipulated in the documents as "an important guarantee for implementing the initiative". In accordance with this priority, China emphasizes the significance of intergovernmental mechanisms and policy exchanges for the materialization of the promises of the BRI. Accordingly, Beijing urges other participants

to coordinate their respective economic and developmental policies and broaden their regional integration in line with the BRI.

Facilities Connectivity: Increasing connectivity of infrastructure facilities constitutes another important aspect of the BRI. The BRI regional and global schemes will fund a series of infrastructure projects that connect distinct geographies as well as regional economic units.

Unimpeded Trade: The establishment of a positive climate for the smooth and uninterrupted exchange of goods and services is set as a major priority under the BRI. In fact, the BRI as a whole, is hinged on fostering international trade. The document underscored the necessity of achieving a greater degree of international commercial exchanges through the removal of barriers before trade and investment as well as the creation of a stable business environment. The document urges participant countries to jointly constitute regional "free trade areas" and to undergo comprehensive cooperation on all related fields of international trade, ranging from customs cooperation to mutual recognition of respective legislations.

Financial Integration: BRI envisions enhanced financial integration among the participant countries. The document outlines the joint construction of systems for currency stability, credit information, and investment and finance. The PRC also encourages individual countries to join the emerging new multilateral institutions in the global economy, such as the AIIB and the NDB. The increasing financial integration is a critical component of BRI to establish a full-fledged mechanism for global economic integrations.

People-to-People Bonds: The BRI aspires to go beyond simply covering economic and political relations between participating countries. Rather, the BRI is intended to serve a similar function to its ancient forerunner, the Silk Road, in terms of fostering mutual learning and cultural exchanges. Building public support for the BRI is also cited as an important precondition for successful implementation of the project within the document (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015).

In the light of these official priorities of BRI, enhancing connectivity across the globe appears to be the chief objective of China's geopolitical design. This in turn will have a positive impact on international trade and investment. Beijing desires to achieve its objective of enhancing global connectivity mainly through two separate ways. First of all,

BRI is designed to enhance the physical connectivity across the globe through the construction of infrastructure projects in participant countries. Increasing integration of the cyberspace and separate financial systems would have supplemental effects on the physical infrastructure. In this regard, the increasing political and social connectivity constitutes the second dimension of the BRI. The success of the whole project is intimately linked with the political will of the participants as well as the public support for the project within those countries. Therefore, the PRC attaches great importance to the constitution of socio-political connectivity among its partners within the scope of BRI.

3.3.6. The BRI as an Inclusive Globalization or Globalization with Chinese Characteristics

Basically, Chinese BRI can be seen as a massive scale infrastructure project. The chain of concrete projects stretching across five continents will connect the particular economic units via the construction of ports, highways, and railways, as well as industrial and logistical hubs. In theory, increasing connectivity across those regions would boost economic and commercial interaction among distinct economic units and give additional momentum to global and regional development. In terms of its promises and aims, the BRI is closely linked to economic globalization.

In the event of its successful implementation, the BRI would have certain potential implications on the current global economic and commercial structure. In this context, Joshua (2018) argues that BRI has come to the forefront in China's promotion of the Beijing Consensus over the Washington Consensus. The Washington Consensus, in his argument, represents the Western or, more specifically, American way of globalization, which has gained ever-increasing weight since the end of the Cold War. The foundations of the Washington Consensus lie within the neo-liberal economic doctrines in which privatization and limited intervention by the state in the economy are enshrined. In practical terms, the Washington Consensus created a mechanism of conditionality through which subsidies and developmental funds are directed to states that are eager to observe basic neoliberal dictums. The Beijing Consensus, on the other hand, while maintaining the adherence of its certain provisions, attempts to reverse the Washington Consensus by designing a greater role for the state both in individual national economies and in the global economy. In this sense, BRI represents a showcase of the Beijing

Consensus by effectively challenging at least two fundamental principles of the Washington Consensus. On the one hand, because a project of such magnitude as BRI cannot be implemented solely by the private sector, it attempts to lay the foundations of a global economy in which states play a greater role than private conglomerates. On the other hand, BRI effectively challenges the conditionality set by Atlantic-oriented globalization. In the Atlantic-centered global economic order, international funds, developmental aids, and the enhancement of trade relations are conditioned on certain criteria ranging from the reformation of the internal economic policies of the individual states to their adherence to principles of liberal democracy and human rights. China, however, within the scope of BRI, exhibits great flexibility to cooperate with various states regardless of their political orientation or their individual paths for development. This, in turn, makes BRI more appealing for the countries that are not eager to swallow the bitter pill prescribed by the Washington Consensus.

3.3.7. The Institutions Of BRI

The BRI, at least on paper, represents the largest project in history and focuses on increasing global connectivity and economic interactions. Implementation of a project of this magnitude, as well as yielding the desired economic and political benefits, requires a degree of multinational institutional framework. The routes within the scope of BRI run from China to Europe and encounter many multinational platforms between China and its regional partners like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, as well as loose cooperation formats like ASEAN+China and 16+1 (China plus 16 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries), etc. However, none of those multilateral platforms is either designed for or suited to undertaking the massive tasks that will be encountered in the implementation of BRI. Likewise, no clearly defined internal institution is erected to coordinate the efforts for BRI's development. Thus, both participation in and implementation of the project are hinged on certain loose mechanisms. This will, in return, reduce the institutionalization of the project and enable China to act in a flexible manner in its relations with participant countries across the five continents (Du, 2016)

Due to the lack of proper multilateral platforms, the commissioning of new participants into the initiative is carried out at the bilateral level. The conventional way to take part in

BRI is to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation or issue a joint statement with the PRC (Du, 2016). Because of its inclusive nature, China exhibits a great degree of flexibility to cooperate within the BRI's framework with a wide range of countries, regardless of existing disputes or conflicts in bilateral relations. Therefore, by 2019, China will have signed an instrument of cooperation or issued a joint statement with 136 countries and 30 international institutions regarding their participation in implementation of the BRI (Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, 2019).

Smooth implementation of BRI also requires an institutionalized dispute settlement mechanism. Since its announcement in 2013, more than 100 countries have participated in the initiative. Dozens of projects have also been launched within the framework of the BRI. As the initiative evolves, it is expected that more countries will take part in it and that many more projects will also be commissioned. This inflation of participant countries and projects will bring along conflicting interests and disputes on both regional and global levels. In the absence of effective mechanisms for dispute settlement, conflicting interests and disputes that could potentially arise among participant countries or between China and other participants could lead to backlashes both for the smooth implementation of the project and for Beijing's overall foreign policy. Thus, it seems necessary to establish effective dispute resolution mechanisms in order to disengage China's foreign relations with the rest of the world from the wide range of conflicts that may arise during the implementation of the BRI

In the absence of finely tailored institutions designed specifically for the BRI, China relies on its national institutions and existing multi-national institutions to carry out the task under the initiative. In the official document released in 2015, the responsibility to carry out the overall implementation of BRI was entrusted to the National Development and Reformation Commission (NDRC). However, NDRC shares its responsibility in certain respects with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). In line with conventional CCP procedures, a "small leading group" consisting of senior party members was set up in order to facilitate coordination among different institutions as well as make important political decisions with regard to the BRI (Yu, 2016).

Financing a wide range of infrastructure projects constitutes the main task of the BRI. China basically relies on five financial tools to overcome this task: developmental aids, preferential loans, commercial loans, developmental financing, and funds created mainly for BRI's financing. Aid allocated by the central government of the PRC makes up only a small portion of the total amount of investment made in the framework of BRI. In this context, BRI has mainly relied on financing through loans allocated to participant countries. These loans vary in nature and are given to participants for up to 20 years at annual rates between 2-4 percent (W. Liu et al., 2020)

The various financial institutions play their part in financing the projects under the BRI. Those that have played a forefront role in financing the projects are predominantly national banks and specifically designed funds from China. For example, the only authority that can extend preferential loans under the Chinese financial system is the Export-Import Bank of China (CEXIM). The China Development Bank (CDB) is another perfect example of national institutions financing BRI's overseas projects. Besides, Beijing has also set up a specially designated fund for the implementation of BRI. The funds for this purpose have already exceeded the number of 20, and in total they amount to more than 1.5 trillion USD. The most notable example of those is the Silk Road Fund, established in 2014 (Yu, 2016)

Apart from those examples, multinational institutions could potentially contribute to financing BRI to a great degree. In this regard, AIIB and NDB appear to be most significant candidates fitting this role. The AIIB was formally established among its 54 founding members in 2016 and was primarily created in order to fill the investment gap in Asia. Because of its pioneering role in the establishment of the bank as well as its sheer contribution of the bank's capital, China holds a predominant position in the AIIB. The center of the Bank locates in Beijing, and 26% of voting power enables China with veto power in light of the fact that the articles of the constituent agreement could only be amended by a 75% majority (Yu, 2016) Although the establishment of the AIIB and NDB coincides with the official declaration of the BRI, the bank is neither a formal integral institution nor a necessary component of the BRI. For example, the share of the contributions made by the AIIB has only made up 8% of the total investment made under the BRI until now (Hurley et al., 2019). In addition to these institutions, the Silk Road International Bank (SRIB) was also created in order to provide financial services for

Chinese enterprises engaging operations in the African region (Silk Road International Bank, n.d.). All of these financial institutions could potentially play influential roles in the implementation of BRI as well as upgrade the institutional degree of the project, mainly because of their multinational framework.

3.3.8. BRI as a De-facto Departure from Peaceful Rise of China

The Treaty of Westphalia, by convenience, represents the starting point of modern international relations within the field of political science. The reason behind the representative value of the treaty comes from the belief that state interaction after the conclusion of the treaty fundamentally differs from the prior historical period before the treaty's conclusions. Since the Treaty of Westphalia, the world has undergone significant changes, and different types of rules and practices for state interaction have emerged, especially after the outbreak of major wars among great powers. Accordingly, the Concert of Europe was widely used in order to define the international relations emerging after the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, while the Bretton Woods System has been used to define geo-economic relations within the Western World. On the other hand, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the politico-economic system established in Bretton Woods prevailed as the sole system governing inter-state relations, despite having undergone significant changes.

The PRC has integrated into the Bretton Woods system after its departure from the orthodox way of communism that defined the entire era under Mao's leadership. Since the embarkment of significant and irreversible economic reforms towards market economy in 1979, China has experienced rapid growth due to the sheer-size of its population and its welcome by the Western bloc into the Western economic and political system within the geopolitical climate of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, despite the fact that power within China has remained firmly in the hands of the Communist Party.

However, the end of the Cold War and China's fast-growing economy caused underlying suspicions about the PRC and its geopolitical intentions to resurface. The Tiananmen Square incident also fostered rhetoric about Beijing's inability to live in harmony with

Western norms and rules governing political and economic relations in the post-Cold War period.

The "peaceful rise of China" rhetoric was elaborated during the early 2000s as a reassurance to Western countries that Beijing would not attempt to dislocate building blocks of current international relations and would not pursue any kind of hegemony, neither economic nor political, over other countries. As a result, China would remain committed to the current norms and institutions governing geo-economic relations on a global scale. Concerning the negative resonance of "rise" in the ears of other countries, the concept was modified as "peaceful development of China" and wholeheartedly embraced by the foreign policy establishment in Beijing (Yue, 2008). China has relentlessly underlined and relied on its peaceful development rhetoric in its relations with the rest of the world and has thus tried to break its political isolation and extend the geopolitical space for its further development.

Although China claims to be committed to this principle in rhetoric, BRI puts pressure on its assertion of peaceful development. The main reason for decorating the BRI with such an attribute is because, in the event of its successful implementation, the current geo-economic and geo-political structure would fundamentally change.

To begin with, the current international relationship is based not only on certain rules allegedly broken by China, but also on the covered principle of Western dominance. The western countries hold clear-cut advantages in nearly all significant international institutions, ranging from the IMF to the World Bank. Within the inner structure of those institutions, the US and other key Western countries hold a significant majority in voting parity (Xie, 2011). In addition, contrary to the sheer size of the Chinese economy as the second largest economy in the world, Beijing could not enjoy the capability to influence decision-making power in line with its economic and political power. For example, Japan, whose economy is currently only slightly larger than a quarter of China's in terms of GDP, has more voting power in the IMF and World Bank than China does. As a result, frustrated by its relentless pursuit of reformation in the current international economic structure, China now pursues its own global economic agenda. As with the establishment of the AIIB in 2016, the BRI is also aiming to replace the existing economic and geopolitical system with a new one in which China possesses equal or more power than its Western counterparts.

The BRI has brought about a strong push towards globalization within the era in which trade barriers have been erected by the major economies. In this context, Beijing offers its inclusive globalization via the BRI. As it is laid out in its action plan, BRI welcomes any country, regardless of its level of development or political orientation. However, the real target of the BRI is the developing world, which desperately needs the developmental aids and infrastructure investments. Beijing hoped that successful implementation of the BRI would result in the formation of a "community of common destiny," similar to the Transatlantic community that emerged following the implementation of the Marshall Plan. Despite the fact that China promotes certain general norms like "inclusiveness", respect one another's ways of developing and political systems, the defining feature of this community would be the observance of its national interests by others (W. Liu & Dunford, 2016). The loans and aids within the scope of BRI constitute "the carrot" in its emerging carrot and stick strategy, while Beijing is also working on the "strict" aspects of this strategy.

Nevertheless, BRI is essentially a geopolitical project whose most important and decisive implication would be unfolded on the political geography of the world. The projects within the scope of the BRI could have a transformative effect on current geopolitics. The most important aspect of this transformative power lies in its main promise of increasing global connectivity. Since the age of geographical exploration, the West, most notably the Western Sea powers, has determined and controlled the world's major trade routes. After WWII, the US took over the heir of the British Empire and established its naval control over the seas by taking over British overseas bases spread all over the world. However, the implementation of BRI has the potential to alter existing trade routes and allow China to exert greater control over major transportation corridors and SLOCs around the world that are critical to China's power and prosperity.

Therefore, BRI constitutes a de-facto departure from the road of peaceful development. Because the rhetoric of peaceful development is heavily based on Beijing's assurances that it will adhere to the current international political and economic system, the implications of the BRI could have far-reaching consequences in which China will no longer be faithful to its promises. Firstly, in the event of successful implementation of BRI, the China-centric international institutions could replace the Western institutions. Secondly, through the extension of loans and infrastructure investments, China might

carve out its own international block consisting mainly of developing countries. Finally, the ability of China to exert greater control over main trade routes could be significantly expanded via the reconstruction of existing trade routes under the scheme of the BRI. All of these significant implications and the vigorous activism embedded in BRI, imply that Beijing departs from its early path of peaceful development, which envisions strategic prudence and passivity in foreign policy.

3.4. CONCLUSION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought an end to the bipolar international structure of the Cold War, and the US's quasi-hegemony emerged as a geopolitical reality in international relations. However, this unique position of the US did not last for a long time, and the distribution of power among the states began to reach a new equilibrium with the beginning of the new millennium. The main drivers behind the emerging multipolarity in global politics were the preservation of Russian military power and the economic rise of China. The year 2008 represents the turning point with respect to the verification of these new international realities. The outbreak of the global economic crisis in the US and the Russian invasion of Georgia marked the transition towards multipolarity as an irreversible process.

The systemic changes occurring in the international power structure, have had important implications for Chinese foreign policy. After 2008, China began to show a degree of assertiveness and put progressively aside its strategic prudence in its interactions with its neighbors and external powers in the Asia-Pacific region. Amid these systemic changes in international relations and the changing foreign policy posture of Beijing, a transition of power occurred in China. President and CCP Secretary General Hu Jintao completed his two-term limit, and Xi Jinping arose as the new Chinese leader in 2013. During his presidency, China employed new foreign rhetoric in order to reclaim its international position as a great power. Therefore, statements like "new types of great power relations" and the "community of common destiny" began to circulate in the press releases of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as in the speeches delivered by top-ranked state officials.

As a continuation of the growing activism in its foreign policy, the BRI was declared by President Xi himself immediately after his inauguration. The SREB, the land component of the BRI, was declassified in Kazakhstan, and the MSR, the BRI's sea leg, was revealed in Indonesia. Later, the Beijing Polar Silk Road Vision participated in the general scheme of the BRI.

Apart from its official aims, presented merely as a cooperation scheme in the formal documents, the BRI embodies the growing global ambitions of the PRC. In this context, it offers a Chinese version of globalization and constitutes a de-facto departure from its peaceful development rhetoric. Because the successful implementation of BRI embodies the potential to fundamentally alter current geopolitical parameters (Joshua, 2019).

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE BRI THROUGH THE THEORIES OF CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICS

Geography, in its broadest definition, refers to general attributions of the planet Earth's surface. Being shaped by natural forces, humankind's ability to change the attributions defining certain geography is limited. However, the political geography representing the interactions between geography and man-made socio-political superstructures can change and has been constantly changing throughout the course of history. Because geography remains a constant element in the process of change throughout the entire period of history, it embodies enormous value in the analysis of political and historical occurrences and recurrences (Short, 2002). Geopolitics as an academic field of interest builds entirely upon the impact of geography upon historical and political developments without excluding the impact of superstructure in the process of those developments.

The BRI was launched by the PRC in 2013 as a combination of infrastructure projects stretching from China to Europe, overpassing the Eurasian land bridge and vital SLOCs. The ramified branches of the BRI reach five continents, including more than 100 countries (Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, 2019). For this reason, the transformative potential of the BRI is enormous. In the event of its successful implementation, the BRI could significantly alter the existing political geography of the world. This effectively makes the BRI a geopolitical design, and thus a subject of the classical geopolitical theories. However, due to the great extent of the projects within the BRI framework, it is very difficult to thoroughly analyze the BRI from a single theory. Therefore, in this chapter, the BRI will be analyzed in accordance with three prominent theories of classical geopolitics: Mackinder's Heartland Theory, the Mahanian Theory, and the Rimland Theory developed by Spykman.

4.1. DRAWING COMPARISONS BETWEEN BRI AND ITS HISTORICAL COUNTERPARTS

The BRI is not unique with regard to its potential impact upon the political geography of the globe. There are certain historical examples that are quite akin to BRI in terms of their impact on the global geopolitics of their times, or at least their unrealized potential to

make such an impact. The construction of the Suez Canal and Panama Canal, the Ottoman Empire's unrealized projects for construction of a canal between Don-Volga rivers connecting the Black Sea with the Caspian Sea—all can be considered prominent historical examples of attempts to alter prevailing geopolitics in their times. However, all these attempts are regional in nature and thus fail to match the greater potential that the BRI has. In this regard, in modern history, only the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad (BBR) and the Marshal Plan can be compared with the BRI. Because the former had an enormous potential to alter then strategic parity in favor of land power: the German Empire, and the latter had actually made an important impact on geopolitical struggle during the course of the Cold War.

The Berlin-Baghdad railway project was proposed in the era of revolution in land transportation and immediately became a matter of international controversy. In that period of time, railroads significantly expanded the military capabilities of the militaries of the era and enabled them to project power over great distances. The strategic importance attributed to the railroads was proven on many historical occasions. The complex web of railroads in Germany and the sophisticated use of this web gave the Prussian Army a cutting-edge advantage against its adversaries in the sequence of German unification wars. The Prussian Army defeated its opponents in separate wars, and its superior logistical capabilities contributed greatly to the final outcome (Kennedy, 2014). Similarly, the strategic importance of the railroads played a critical role in the first Russo-Japanese wars. Having been anxious about the enhancing strategic capabilities of the Russian army as a result of the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Japan was urged to declare war against the Russian Empire before the Russian Empire made the railroad functional (Akad, 2013).

4.1.1. The Berlin-Baghdad Railway

The route of the Berlin Railroad was lying between Berlin and Bagdad, and its longest part crossed the Ottoman territories. This constituted a crucial aspect of the controversy surrounding the project. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ottoman power was declining, and the collapse of the empire was almost certain. In this context, the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad could enable vibrant and powerful Germany to fill the geopolitical

power vacuum left by the decaying Ottoman Empire. The concession of the railroad was proposed to other European powers, and its final blueprint underwent significant changes in accordance with their interests (Barth & Whitehouse, 1998). Nevertheless, these attempts did not satisfy the great concerns circulating across Europe. Great Britain, the dominant power in the era, was particularly concerned about Germany's intentions regarding the implementation of the BBR projects.

There were essentially two significant aspects of the BBR's strategic influence upon the power relations among the European States prior to WWI. The economic consequences of German infiltration into the Middle Eastern regions constituted the very first aspect of the strategic implications of the project. In that period, France and Great Britain were dominating the Middle Eastern trade, and Russia, together with Great Britain, had strategic interests in Iran and the Persian Gulf. In addition, the discovery of the oil reserves in the region had also made significant contributions to the economic and strategic importance of the region before the eyes of colonial powers. In this context, the BBR project could expand the rising German Empire's outreach well beyond Eastern Europe, and a vibrant German economy could replace others as the dominant player in the Middle East (McMeekin, 2010)

Besides, the implementation of BBR would have a far-reaching strategic impact on the geopolitical competition among the great powers of the era. As mentioned earlier, the railroads revolutionized war and increased the strategic positions of the land forces. This enabled armies of the era to operate in more distant places than before. Prior to the outbreak of WWI, Germany held the position of being Europe's most powerful land power since 1871. However, the strategic clout of the German Army was constrained by its limited logistical capabilities. The conclusion of BBR, on the other hand, would drastically enhance Berlin's ability to expand its military influence well beyond its immediate region. The capability to project power to distant lands, which was previously confined to sea powers, would make the German Empire a significant military competitor in the Middle East. BBR would thus bring the vital waterways of the Turkish Straits, Suez Canal, and Persian Gulf into the operational radius of the German Army. Especially, Great Britain, whose power and prosperity depended on its lifeline to India, exhibited the greatest discontent against the German Initiative. The Russian Empire would be the other most-severely affected European power, only after Great Britain, by the increasing

influence of Germany via BBR. Russia would have to compete with another great power in addition to Great Britain in its struggle to reach the open seas via either the Turkish Straits or Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the enhancement of power projection capabilities of the Second Reich also threatened the strategic connection between the Russian Empire and Great Britain in case of an outbreak of war against an aspiring hegemon in continental Europe (Maloney, 1984)

The BBR example demonstrates the impact of critical infrastructure upon strategic relations among great powers. The German Initiative is considered one of the underlying fault lines in the power politics in Europe that ultimately led to the outbreak of WWI. Most importantly, it played its part in Russo-British reconciliation, which was marked by the Reval agreement against the growing threat of Germany to the global balance of power (Maloney, 1984). All of these make BBR an important test ground for BRI in terms of its nature as well as its geopolitical consequences. Apart from this mere similarity, BRI is a much more complicated and multi-faceted project than BBR, which was proposed but never fully materialized by the German Empire.

4.1.2. Marshall Plan and the BRI

Another historical example showing geopolitical similarities to BRI is the Marshall Plan, implemented immediately after the end of WWII by the USA. The BRI is widely compared with the Marshall Plan due to their similarities in terms of the driving forces behind the both projects as well as their geopolitical outcomes.

Speaking from an economic point of view, both the Marshall Plan and the BRI aim to overcome the economic challenges that the initiator countries had encountered. During WWII, the consistent need for American industrial outputs to maintain war efforts against the Axis powers led to a production boom in the US. However, when the war ended with Allied victory, the US faced the challenge of overcapacity in its economy. The war-torn Europe, which generously absorbed the overflow of all kinds of US goods during the war, was no longer in proper shape to consume excess products from the US. In this context, the Marshall Plan aimed at the restoration of the European economy in a way to ensure that reviving economic activity on the continent would absorb larger amounts of goods produced in the US and thus foster its economic development. Just like the US after

WWII, China had to face similar challenges after the 2008 financial crisis. The crises led to an economic slowdown across the globe and increased the prospects for prolonged economic stagnation in developed countries. For Beijing, this prospect of economic stagnation emerging in the developed world is an immense threat to its export-driven economy and development model (S. Shen & Chan, 2018). As a consequence, China has turned developing markets into a potential export destination for its excess products. In this sense, the BRI aims to generate similar conditions to those that the Marshall Plan created in Western Europe in the regions that are predominantly occupied by developing countries.

In terms of political implications, the similarities between the Marshall Plan and the BRI are less clear. The Marshall Plan, implemented in the early phase of the Cold War, deflected the threat of communism in Western Europe and made Western Europe the stronghold of the US geopolitical design for the remainder of the conflict. The desired geopolitical outcome as a result of the execution of the plan had been achieved through the conditionality of the loans. The BRI, on the other hand, stipulates no conditions with regard to participation in the initiative or benefiting from the loans allocated for BRI projects (Shang, 2019). At this point, the lack of conditionality actually could cripple the BRI in terms of its efficiency in satisfying China's geopolitical interests. The crucial point in this dilemma is how China will force the participants in a certain direction if it does not lay any conditions for the acquisition of infrastructure investment in the first place. Nevertheless, the initiative has become the focus of international attention concerning its potential outcomes, which may extend beyond the mere economic sphere between China and participant states.

4.2. SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT: REJUVENATION OF HISTORICAL TRADE ROUTES ON THE HEARTLAND

Since the announcement of the BRI in 2013, there has been a widespread argument among academic circles regarding the correlation between the initiative and the Heartland theory developed by renowned geopolitical theorist Halford Mackinder. The main reason behind the academic interest in affiliating the BRI with the Heartland Theory originates from the land component of the BRI overpassing the Eurasian basin, which is geopolitically termed the "Heartland of the World Island" by Mackinder (Mackinder, 1904).

Mackinder first revealed his theory in 1904, when he presented his article titled "Geographical Pivot of History" before the Royal Society of Geographers. Although he made significant modifications with regard to the strategic implications arising from his theorization of the historical geography, the main tenets of his theory stand still. The Heartland Theory predominantly bases itself upon three main foundations: strategic balance or imbalance between sea power and land power; the geographical dominance of the Heartland Region throughout history; and the strategic implications of the revolution in land transportation upon the rivalry between the sea and land powers as well as upon the decisive role that the Heartland plays in the course of political developments.

First of all, Mackinder's argument primarily focuses on the recurring struggle between sea and land powers in the course of the history. Since the geographical explorations, sea powers have played a leading role in historical and political development. From the 15th century to the 20th century, the main sea powers have overwhelmed their continental peers. The dominant non-European powers located in distant places across the globe fall under the influence of European colonial powers. In Europe, maritime nations have prevented continental challengers from establishing hegemony all over the continent and from challenging their global primacy. This historical pattern repeated itself all the way from the Wars of Louis XIV to the Napoleonic Wars and to the Great Game between the Russian and British Empires. Mackinder defines this unhindered period between the 15th and 20th centuries as the "Colombian Epoch" (Mackinder, 1904).

In economic term, sea powers outperformed land powers economically by keeping the strings of international trade, in strategic terms, the strength of sea power lies in its power projection power capabilities. In comparison with land power, the permeable nature of the seas enables sea power to project greater power over greater distances. Because the transportation capacity through the water, well exceeds the those of means of overland transportation, sea power overwhelms their continental peers in nearly all interactions. The Crimean War is a well-known historical example of the overwhelming logistical capabilities of sea power against continental forces. During the war, the supply lines of the allied forces of Great Britain and France extended all the way to French and British ports, while the Russian Army was mainly supplied from the Smolensk. However, despite the shorter supply lines that the Russian Army had, France and Great Britain were better able to supply their armies compared with Russia. It only took a shorter time for Great

Britain and France to bring fresh troops and ammunition to the frontlines, while the Russian Army suffered staggering logistic shortages (Lambert & Badsey, 1994)

In the second half of the 19th century, the critical impact of the railroads was manifesting itself also in military strategy. The railroads revolutionized the war-making abilities of the armies of the era by allowing quick mobilization and speedy military buildup, as well as extending their projection of power and logistical capabilities. Mackinder was among those who first appreciated the implications of the railroads upon the military strategy and strategic balance between sea and land powers. Firstly, for Mackinder, railroads had the potential to cease the strategic supremacy of sea power over land power and thus put an end to the Colombian Epoch. The second conclusion that Mackinder drew from the revolution in land transportation is regarding the interplay between the strategic developments triggered by the railroad inflation and geography. Mackinder presumes that railroad expansion in Eurasia would disproportionately disrupt the geopolitical balance of power in favor of the Heartland, as a geo-historical region (Mackinder, 1904, 1962).

In Mackinder's original article of 1904, the Heartland region stretches from the Donets River, dividing today's Russian-Ukrainian border, to the Pacific Ocean in Siberia in an east-west direction. In a north-south direction, the heartland stretches from the Arctic Sea to the Himalayas. Heartland shares borders with China by the Gobi Desert, with the Middle East by Trans-Caucasia and the Iranian Plateau, and with India and Indo-China by the Himalaya Mountains. The borders between the Heartland and Europe approximately correspond to Russia's today's western borders. What creates the historical importance of the Heartland in Mackinder's thesis lies in the fact that historical invasion routes from east to west and north to south overpass the Heartland. Throughout history, nomadic empires originating in the heartland have attempted to conquer Europe, India, China, and the Middle East by crossing geographical barriers. Those nomadic empires did not last long due to the overwhelming distance between the conquered territories and the socio-political power centers of the conquerors, located in the East. In Mackinder's projection, however, the proliferation of railroads would shorten the supply lines both in the east-west and north-east directions, thus disproportionately expanding the Heartland's resource base and capabilities of power projection. In the end of the process, the industrialized heartland would overwhelm other power centers of the world

and become the dominant power in the world by overtaking the main sea power (Mackinder, 1904)

Another important source of the prevailing position of the Heartland is that the Heartland constitutes a geopolitical inner line condition in some way. The strategic inner lines doctrine, developed by Swiss strategist and general Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779–1869), refers to the strategic advantage of an army having shorter supply lines against its opponents (Akad, 2013). The Heartland region seems to possess this strategic advantage on a geopolitical level due to its geographical positioning vis-a-vis its surroundings. The pivotal position of the Heartland, while empowering the region to enter into economic and political interaction with its neighboring regions; keeps it immune to the toxic effects of its individual interactions with one region on its overall strategic position as well as on its interactions with other regions. The geostrategic position of Russian Empire after the Crimean War provides one of the most prominent examples of this geopolitical pattern. The defeat that the Russian Army suffered in this war had devastating effects for the Russian Empire. Its westward expansion was interrupted, and its strategic access to the Black Sea was shut down. However, this devastation in its western flank had little effect on the eastern part of the empire. Russia, in the post-Crimean era, had redirected its expansion towards Central Asia and Siberia and thus brought a new dimension to the ongoing Great Game with the British Empire, the chief sea power in the era (Bassin & Lieven, 2006). Similarly, the Soviet Union, inheriting the geography from its predecessor among other things, had principally maintained its global strategy through harnessing the inner-line advantage of the Heartland. The Soviet Union exerted impressive influence on the developments in China, the Indo-China region, Middle East, and the Indian Peninsula. The argument thus far illustrates the impressive importance of the Heartland region in strategic and military terms. At this point, an ambiguity emerges as to what designates military-oriented Heartland Theory in the analysis of the BRI, which is essentially a politico-economic project. As it's nearly certain that the infrastructure projects that have been implemented within BRI's framework would not carry China's battalions but its containers, the relevance of the Heartland Theory lies more in geopolitical and geo-economic considerations than in military-strategic ones. First of all, the general geographic overlap between the SREB and the Heartland Region creates a solid base for analyzing the SREB from a Heartland-oriented geopolitical perspective, at least to

illustrate whether or not the theory is relevant for such an analysis. Secondly, both BRI and SREB place special emphasis on geographical connectivity. As Mackinder warns that increasing connectivity through railroad expansion in Eurasia could bring the Heartland's power to the brink of world dominance, the boost of connectivity through infrastructure investments enables China to harness the envisioned strength of the Heartland for global dominance (Chen & Fazilov, 2018).

4.2.1. SREB - Energy Implications

Access to critical resources is a significant dimension of Mackinder's treatise on Heartland. He asserted that thanks to the railroad revolution, the power dominating the Heartland would be able to access and exploit the vast resources of Eurasia and thereby eventually challenge the privileged status of the sea power (Mackinder, 1904). There is no doubt about the fact that one of the primary driving forces behind BRI was China's quest for energy and raw materials. In the scope of the land component of the BRI, three regions are predominantly important for China. Middle East, Central Asia, and Russia; the former two is included in Mackinder's geopolitical demarcation.

The energy policy of PRC to great extent have built upon the principle of diversity. Beijing have been pursuing a strategy of diversification of both its energy mix as well as its suppliers in order to refrain from fall into a bottleneck of energy supply and thus maintain its economic growth and prosperity (Cheng, 2008; Tunsjø, 2014). Therefore, in its strategic interaction with key energy suppliers, China prefers to establish a balanced trade off considering the dangers of overreliance on a particular supplier. In this context, what China really aims to achieve through SREB is to have as possible as evenly dispersed suppliers while ensuring inflow of sufficient energy for its growing economy.

In accordance with the statistics of the US Energy Information Agency, since the mid-1990s, China has been mainly relying on external sources to meet its energy consumption. In 2012, domestic oil production in China stayed at 5 million barrels per day while its daily oil consumption exceeded 15 million barrels. Similarly, China could only domestically produce 55% of its more than 13 trillion cubic meters of natural gas consumption in 2022. The main countries on which China relies to meet its soaring energy consumption are those located in the Middle East and former Soviet countries. In 2022,

the Middle East alone will supply more than half of China's oil imports. In terms of natural gas, former Soviet republics supply approximately 37% of its total natural gas imports (EIA, 2022).

Mackinder asserts that the industrial power commanding the Heartland would be strategically better off vis-à-vis sea powers when the revolution in land transportation allows it to infiltrate the vast resources of Eurasia. In this respect, the materialization of his predictions depends heavily on the inaccessibility of its supply lines by the navies of the major sea powers. The figures mentioned above portray the Chinese success in terms of penetration of energy resources in Eurasia, stretching from Russia to the Middle East. However, in terms of the amount of oil and natural gas imported through pipelines, China has still been in an odd position. Only a small fraction of Chinese oil imports reaches the mainland through pipelines. The majority of China's oil imports from more than 15 countries are transported by tankers through maritime communication lines. Additionally, these oil imports have to transit vital maritime chokepoints before reaching China. For example, more than 70% of Chinese oil imports pass through the Malacca Strait, which connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Compared with oil imports, China relies less on seaborne transportation of LNG. However, while seaborne LNG imports account for 65% of its total imports, China's dependence on the Malacca Strait remains an important concern in terms of natural gas. Nearly a quarter of China's total natural gas imports have to pass through the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea (US Department of Defence, 2022)

The over-reliance on the seaborne transportation of energy constitutes security threats for China. The Malacca Strait, in particular, as a maritime bottleneck, endangers Beijing's constant access to the oil and natural gas supply from the source countries in Africa and the Middle East. China contemplates that its strategic access to the energy lanes could easily be interrupted by external powers at maritime choke-points, in particular the Malacca Strait. The security challenge that Beijing encounters in the Malacca Strait was coined the Malacca Dilemma in Chinese strategic thinking. Since its first articulation by former president Hu Jintao, the term has gained widespread attention within political and security circles in Beijing. In this context, growing increasingly insecure about its over-reliance on seaborne energy supply, China aims to reduce this dependency by increasing

its overland connectivity with energy-rich Eurasia through pipelines as well as by promoting energy corridors bypassing the Malacca Strait (Lanteigne, 2008)

Currently, China relies mainly on three pipelines that bring Eurasian energy resources into industrial and urban centers on mainland China. East Siberia–Pacific Ocean pipelines lie between Daqing Province of North-East China and Eastern Siberia. As of 2021, China imported 600,000 barrels of Russian crude oil per day via the Siberia–Pacific Ocean pipeline. The second one, the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline, is between Kazakhstan and China. In 2021, the pipeline transported only 67 million barrels of crude oil for the whole year, equivalent to 219,000 barrels per day (Kazakhstan-China Pipeline, 2023) The last oil pipeline connecting Kyaukpyu to Yunnan Province of China allows Beijing to short-cut Malacca Strait by transporting Middle Eastern and African oil through Burma. Approximately 440,000 barrels of crude oil are streamed through the Myanmar-China Pipeline each day (US Department of Defence, 2022).

The BRI offers certain opportunities for China to enhance overland energy connections across Eurasia. In 2020, Chinese energy engagement under the BRI was recorded at 26 billion USD (Rong & Zhu, 2017, pp. 113-119). However, no blueprint for the construction of new pipelines has been unveiled yet. Although there are rumors about the construction of a pipeline between Pakistan’s Gwadar port and Mainland China, the project seems economically inapplicable and strategically dysfunctional (Shaikh et al., 2016). Moreover, the current oil pipelines in China have been operating below their capacity. The East Siberia-Pacific Ocean Pipeline has a capacity to transport 1.6 million barrels of crude oil per day, however, it has currently transported only slightly more than a quarter of its capacity (Sussex & Kanet, 2015). Similarly, the Myanmar-China pipeline has been operating below its capacity, because the transportation of oil through the Malacca Strait is a more economic option.

Despite its longstanding concerns about the interception of its seaborne energy supply lines by external powers, China seems to stick to its diversification strategy. Even after the emergence of a favorable environment in Eurasia in terms of energy deals after Russian aggression against Ukraine and following Western sanctions, China exhibits a degree of uneasiness regarding overreliance on one single source. In this context, while scaling up its energy imports from the Russian Federation, China has also increased its energy relations with other regions. In this context, Xi Jinping secured billions of dollars

in energy deals with Saudi Arabia and with the United Arab Emirates during his visit to Gulf Region in January 2023 (Kalin, 2022). Therefore, in light of the entangled nature of China's energy security as well as the current direction of BRI's investments, the SREB, in its current phase, could not respond the Chinese geopolitical vulnerabilities of energy supply into the mainland.

4.2.2. SREB and Railway Connection

Since the geographical explorations began in the 15th century, the commercial interaction across the globe has been made primarily through maritime transportation. This fact is also one of the main rationales behind the formation of formidable navies by trading nations. Throughout the centuries, navies were constructed mainly for the protection of oversea interests and maritime communication lines of the merchant nations. In this process, the dominant sea power that imposed its dominance over the oceans gained enormous geopolitical influence around the globe. These sea powers, succeeding one after another since the 15th century, yielded disproportionate benefits from their economic interactions, subordinated other nations, and forcefully transformed their economic structures in accordance with their economic and strategic principles. Subordination of the Indian Peninsula by the British Empire, imposition of semi-colonial status on China after the Opium Wars, and so-called port-treaties, as well as the opening of Japanese ports after the infamous expeditions of Admiral Perry, are all prominent examples of the primacy of sea power.

In the late 18th century, rail transportation first emerged in Britain and quickly spread in Europe and North America. The construction and expansion of the railroad connection played a significant role in the development of the national economies of the era. In the end of the 19th century, the geopolitical implications of railroad expansion for international trade and for strategic imbalance between land and sea powers were yet to be unfolded. Mackinder was among those who believe that overland transportation will fundamentally change the geo-economic and geo-political realities shaped by the overwhelming influence of ocean-bound international trade and thus by the primacy of sea power. It was these unignorable implications that made international railroad schemes

like the Berlin-Baghdad Railway and the Manchurian Railway Project so complicated and politically sensitive.

However, railroad expansion did not lead to a revolution in international trade, and transportation of goods has remained seaborne up until now. Currently, approximately 80% of all goods and services are transported via maritime transportation. Overland transportation only accounts for 7% of international exchanges (U.S. Energy Information Administration EIA, 2019). In this context, from Mackinder's geopolitical perspective, the general success of SREB mainly depends on its ability to materialize the unrealized potential of overland transportation in international trade and global connectivity.

The strategic rationale behind SREB is to reduce China's overarching dependence on maritime commerce as well as exposure of its maritime communication lines to naval blockages and interceptions (Lomagin, 2015). In this regard, the main threat against China's maritime commerce comes from the US and its powerful navy; however, India could also pose a serious challenge for China and could intercept its energy and commercial lines connecting China with its trade and energy partners through the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. The westward railroad and highway campaign initiated within the scope of SREB can be regarded as Beijing's hedging strategy to cope with the threats directed against its maritime commerce.

Each economic corridor as part of the BRI encompasses draft plans for enhanced railway and highway connectivity between China and the regions included in SREB. However, China attaches greater importance to railway connectivity between Europe and China. The European Union is China's largest trading partner, and its trade with Europe is conducted through Beijing's most vulnerable maritime communication line. This shipping line passes through several choke points; first the Malacca Strait, then Bab al-Mandeb and Gibraltar certain conflict-torn areas like the Gulf of Yemen as well as the hinterlands of its strategic competitors like the Indian Ocean. In this context, China has been promoting the rail connection with Europe in order to reduce its dependence on maritime commerce.

So far, three plans of transportation routes have become prominent under BRI. The first railroad scheme runs through the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor and connects China with Europe through Russian territories. The second railway project, also

known as the Middle Corridor, runs through Central Asia, connects China with the Trans-Caucasus region via the Caspian Sea, and reaches Europe from Turkey. The last transportation scheme also capitalizes on Central Asia's pivotal position. This railroad project passes through Central Asia, then Iran, and reaches Turkey; from there, it makes its way to Europe.

The "Eurasian Land Bridge" aspiration of China preceded the official inauguration of the BRI by Xi in 2013. The first railway connection between China and Kazakhstan, the pivotal country in the Chinese railway dream, was provided during the 1990s (Bucsky & Kenderdine, 2020). Similarly, China began to experiment with organizing freight train expeditions to Europe in 2011, and since then, especially after the declaration of the BRI in 2013, the railroad connectivity has significantly expanded. Li, Bolton, and Westphal (2018) find, using a gravity model, that Chinese exports to European countries with railroad connections to China have recorded important growth compared with those of other European countries. Especially the export of value-added sectors of the Chinese economy, namely electronics, manufactured goods, machinery, and transportation equipment, has recorded an impressive 25% increase. Interestingly, the railroad connection has not significantly affected China's imports from those European countries. This means that the railway connection has also had a positive impact on China's trade balance with European countries (Y. Li et al., 2018).

Despite the potential positive effects of increased railroad connections between China and Europe on both Chinese economic growth and international trade, the central question regarding the railroads still hinges on the SREB's ability to reduce maritime commerce. However, a number of factors undermine the economic viability and sustainability of the rail-bound trade interaction between China and Europe and prevent it from becoming a meaningful alternative to seaborne transportation.

The first important factor in this regard is the railroads' inability to create a long-term alternative to maritime transportation. The railways offer faster logistical operations between Europe and China, but the cost of railway operations is significantly higher than maritime logistics. For now, the rail freight from China to Europe is highly subsidized by the Chinese central government and local authorities. However, when the subsidies are cut ultimately, the railway transportation would become economically unsustainable. In that case, the transportation fee per container would stay above 6,000 USD per container

and would stay well above the average transportation cost of maritime transportation (Kenderdine, 2018). This makes certain sectors that are sensitive to cost increases unsuitable for railway transportation. For this reason, the railroad logistics starting in 2011 between Europe and China did not lead to an increase in export volume like the chemical industry compared with value-added and highly competitive Chinese industries (Li et al., 2018). Consequently, the increase in freight costs would have potentially harmed to a great extent the export-driven Chinese economy. An increase in the overall logistical cost of Chinese exports would lead to a decline in the growth of China's export volume. As a result, China could lose its traditional markets in certain industries to late-comer manufacturing states like India and Vietnam. Likewise, the existing web of railways is unable to carry the sheer volume of China's international trade. For example, in 2015, the railways transported some 1.54 million twenty-foot unit equivalents (TEU) of goods. This considerable figure was dwarfed by the payload handled in Chinese ports, which is equivalent to 189 million TEUs (Bucsky & Kenderdine, 2020).

The second factor undermining the efficiency of railway logistics is that transborder railway connections are prone to disruptions. The freight trains traveling on the railways that would be developed under the SREB have to pass through the territories of many states before reaching their destinations. This practically means their travel had to be coordinated and monitored by the respective administrations of each country. Compared with the way of maritime transportation, in which the high seas serve as free highways for navigators and the development of international law of the seas provides a great degree of stability and predictability, the international railways embody certain logistical difficulties. Additionally, the railroad connection between the two separate political units can be cut anywhere in the transit territories. Recently, the Russian invasion attempt in Ukraine illustrated the unreliable nature of the rail-bound logistical schemes crossing many countries. Following the commencement of war in Ukraine's soil, ongoing military operations at the Eastern gate of Europe combined with the harsh sanctions imposed on Russia significantly reduced the frequency of the train expeditions between China and Europe. Within weeks following the invasion, the volume of transported goods between Europe and Kazakhstan, the main logistics hub in SREB, has dropped more than 20%, while the train shipment between China and Europe experienced a dramatic 43% decline (Daly, n.d.).

These findings illustrate that, even if new railway routes could be constructed and efficiently operated as part of SREB, it seems not likely to reduce Beijing's high dependence on seaborne transportation in any meaningful way. This conclusion stems from both economic and political fundamentals. First of all, the railways could not outmatch maritime transportation in terms of the sheer size of payload transported by means of seas and oceans, which provides global connections. Second, the international railways are prone to disruption in many ways. The risk embodied in railroad transportation also increases in parallel with the length of the railroad as well as with the number of countries on their way to their final destination. Compared with railways, the seas provide a much more secure way for international transportation of goods. Because there is more than one maritime connection among many regions in the world, blockages of the international waterways can also be compensated by redirecting the maritime transportation to other SLOCs. On the other hand, the alternative railway schemes between the regions are both scarce, and their construction and maintenance are expensive and time-consuming endeavors (Regmi & Hanaoka, 2012)

4.2.3. Heartland Theory in Practice: The Cases of Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Mackinder's theoretical demarcation of geography, attributes uneven significance in distinct parts of the Heartland region. He notoriously states that "whoever rules the Eastern Europe will rule the Heartland, whoever rules the Heartland will rule the World Island; and whoever rules the World Island will rule the world" (Mackinder, 1904). This geopolitical dictum of Mackinder points out the ongoing rivalry among great powers in the 19th and early 20th centuries unfolding in Eastern Europe. Mackinder's remarks regarding the overarching value of Eastern Europe hang on the region's strategic positioning as a bridgehead against Western Europe and the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The establishment of effective control over this part of the world would yield clear-cut strategic benefits for the controlling power. The power controlling Eastern Europe would be in a position to exert greater influence over the economically vibrant and industrious Western Europe. Then, it would be a matter of time for the power controlling Eastern Europe to tighten its grip over Europe's small nations. Finally, the regional hegemon in the Heartland would direct its attention toward challenging the main sea

power (Mackinder, 1904). However, this time the embodied strategic advantage of the sea power as being an insular state will be offset because the heartland power itself, due to the lack of a continental challenger, will also act as a continental-scale island. For the overarching significance of Eastern Europe, Brzezinski speculates that Russia without Ukraine could no longer be counted as an empire. Because without Ukraine, among other things, Russia would be cut off from Eastern Europe and thus from the prospect of regional and global control (Brzezinski, 1998).

More recently, Central Asia has quickly climbed the ranks in terms of geopolitical significance. The end of the Cold War effectively diminished the foundations of Russian control over Central Asia and opened this critical region to geopolitical competition. As Eastern Europe provides strategic access to European politics, Central Asia provides opportunities for enhancing influence over the Caspian Region, the Indian Peninsula, and the Middle East. The increasing significance of Central Asia is also strengthened by the changing dynamics of the global economy and the rise of the Asia-Pacific region as the engine of global economic growth. In this context, these two regions have greater relevance for assessing China's SREB in accordance with the geopolitical perspective set by Mackinder and his theory.

4.2.4. Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe provides strategic access to Western Europe, and thus it is an indispensable part of the SREB, which covers the entire Eurasian continent in its blueprint. In recent years, China was able to carve out a special relationship with countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) through the establishment of the so called 16+1 format. In 2011, China and 16 Eastern and Central European countries convened in Budapest for the first meeting of the China and CEE Countries Economic and Trade Forum. The initiative became an institutional forum one year later when the parties agreed to organize the meeting on an annual basis at prime ministerial level at the end of the Budapest meeting. The 16+1 format was renamed 17+1 after the participation of Greece in the forum in 2019. In 2021, however, Lithuania left the initiative and the initiative was downgraded back to its original 16+1 format (Jirouš, 2022). In addition, the bilateral relations between China and CEE countries have developed rapidly, and strategic

partnerships have been established between China and Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. In economic terms, Hungary became the bastion of Chinese investment and business, while Poland has begun to effectively serve as a terminal for the railway connection between China and Europe (Matura, 2018).

The main driving force in CEE countries to establish closer ties with China despite their increasing integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions is the prospect of diverting Chinese investment for their development. For this reason, the declaration of BRI was welcomed with much more enthusiasm in CEE countries than in their Western European peers. Hungary, the investment hub of China in Europe, was the first country to sign the instruments for participation in the BRI (Matura, 2018). Secondly, CEE countries expected that cooperation with China provide them a greater access to the China's internal market. Therefore, CEE countries count increasing economic cooperation with China and the greater flow of Chinese investment as a way to strengthen their struggling economies and foster their economic development (Pavličević, 2016)

The prevailing perception in CEE overlaps with what China is willing to promote about its self-image in the developing world. Xi Jinping himself, during his address to the CCP Congress, articulates that China will come to the forefront in supporting economic growth and development in the developing world (Matura, 2018). In theory, SREB seems to fit China's self-proclaimed mission in the developing world as well as seems as a sufficient project to satisfy specific needs of CEE countries. However, from a geopolitical point of view, the usefulness of the China's carrot strategy under the guise of an infrastructure investment offering still depends on further developments and thus appears stagnant under the current geopolitical configurations.

The usefulness of Beijing's geopolitical strategy first necessitates the definition of its objectives concerning Eastern Europe. The ideal geopolitical conditions for Beijing would be carving out its own sphere of influence within Europe. In this scenario, CEE countries forming a separate bloc within the Western bloc would act as a safeguard for Chinese interests within Euro-Atlantic institutions and would increase Chinese bargaining power vis-à-vis its Western counterparts. In theory, due to the decision-making procedures in most important Euro-Atlantic institutions like NATO and the EU, Beijing's aspiration to exert its influence through Eastern Europe could become a reality (Kowalski, 2017). Therefore, Mackinder's dictum could manifest itself in a subtle manner

with regard to China commanding pivotal Eastern Europe and thus penetrating the European continent.

As for 2021, China has made clear achievements in Eastern Europe, especially in economic terms, even before the commencement of the most grandiose BRI projects. Hungary's restless position in the European Union, together with its increasing economic ties with Beijing and Poland's growing eagerness to upgrade its relations with China, provide important clues for Beijing's subtle but substantial achievements within the last decade in this region. And what is worse for Washington and Brussels is some Eastern European countries' eagerness to improve their relations with China at the expense of their transatlantic ties. As a recent example of this phenomenon, the Polish president attended the inauguration ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, risking the alienating its transatlantic peers, while the Western countries boycotted the Olympics under the pretext of China's alleged human rights violations (Reuters, 2022).

Nevertheless, with regard to Eastern Europe, there are limits to China's foreign policy and its aims within the framework of SREB projects. The main factor limiting China's success with regard to Eastern Europe is the lack of suitable tools other than investment opportunities and economic incentives in its foreign policy inventory. Even China's investment in CEE countries and provision of greater access to its market lag behind the expectations of most CEE countries. Thus, the mismatch between the foreign policy tools and ultimate gains in China's foreign policy prevents the creation of gravity through which CEE could fall into Beijing's orbit. The frustration in certain CEE countries due to the non-realization of the expected gains through cooperation with China leads to certain backlashes against Beijing's regional policy (Kowalski, 2017). For example, in 2021, Lithuania decided to leave the 16+1 format and establish diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Reportedly, the right-wing Czech government has been contemplating following a similar path laid down by Lithuania regarding 16+1 format. (Jirous, 2022). These developments suggest that the BRI's investment and China's economic carrot could only result in CEE countries abstaining from taking sides against rather than taking sides with China.

4.2.5. Central Asia

Since the end of the Cold War, Central Asia has become an increasingly important region for China. From the mid-1990s, by means of the format of the Shanghai Five and then the SCO, Beijing settled its border disputes with newly independent Central Asian countries and thus laid the foundation for further cooperation. Thereafter, China-Central Asian relations have entered a fast-track of improvement (Sheives, 2006) Especially in economic terms, Sino-Central Asian relations have yielded mutual and increasing benefits for both sides. While the rich energy resources in Central Asia have turned into an important asset for Beijing's soaring energy demand and supplier-diversification strategy, the energy-deals with China provided Central Asian countries opportunities to escape Moscow's economic and political gravity and further their economic development (Zhuangzhi, 2004)

In line with the increasing economic and political interactions, an important emphasis is placed on Central Asia in the BRI, which is the latest geopolitical design set forth by Beijing ((T. W. Lim, 2018)). The selection of Kazakhstan, the largest country in Central Asia, for the inauguration of the BRI is also an important indicator for the region's pivotal position in Chinese foreign policy. One reason behind the significance of Central Asia in the SREB is that Beijing aims to foster economic growth and development in its inner and western parts. China values economic interactions and infrastructure connectivity with Central Asia as an important precondition to achieving its internal development strategy. In Beijing's view, Central Asian countries, while providing important inputs for the development of the regional economies, would also serve as markets for the outputs manufactured in these regions. Additionally, increasing infrastructure connectivity would link the westernmost part of China with other external markets through Central Asia and thus contribute China's strategy of trade route diversification (Pantucci, 2015, 2019)

The implications of the increasing economic interactions and physical connectivity provided by the SREB are not confined to mere economic relations. On the contrary, ultimately, Beijing wants to enhance political and even military clout in Central Asia. The potential implications of the instability in the region for its internal security, especially in the context of the ongoing distress in its Xinjiang province, make Beijing stay alert in terms of developments in the region. Additionally, due to its soaring investment as part

of SREB, even if China does not pursue a strategy for regional influence, it may find itself in a hegemonic position just by merely protecting its massive investments. Therefore, because of its geographical proximity to China, Central Asia will be one of the most affected regions by this emerging tendency in China's foreign policy (Blanchard & Flint, 2017). All these factors play their part in China's growing interest in playing a greater role in Central Asian political and military affairs.

However, China's growing posture in Central Asia has been attracting increasing attention and creating concerns in the capitals of the other great powers. In this context, China's prospects to turn Central Asia into its own stronghold at the borders of Russia, India, and the Middle East hinge on its ability to well-play the power politics unfolding in the region. Due to the landlocked geographical feature of the region and its Soviet past, as well as the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Russian Federation is the main competitor for China in the region. The crucial part of the problem regarding Central Asia is that China has to manage its economic and political activities in the region without damaging its bilateral ties with Moscow. The SREB constitutes a delicate matter in this regard because its successful interpretation by Beijing would tilt Central Asia disproportionately towards China (Pantucci, 2015b)

In fact, Beijing's growing interactions with Central Asia have long been a matter of concern for the Kremlin. Since the early 2000s, Russia has watched China's increasing economic and political clout in Central Asia with growing unease. In this process, Russia has successfully resisted the prior Chinese attempts to enhance and institutionalize its influence across the region. This includes its constant objections to Chinese proposals to extend the scope of the SCO beyond its current role as merely a discussion forum in security matters. Similarly, China's attempt to create a free-trade zone among SCO members was also blocked by Moscow due to its concerns over Beijing's economic takeover of the region. While resisting China's infiltration attempts to Central Asia, Russia, in the meantime, has constantly promoted its own scheme for closer interaction with Central Asian countries. As opposed to the weak practical structure of the SCO, Moscow erected the Common Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, which would also act as institutional bulwarks against China's infiltration attempts (Pieper, 2021).

The Russian Federation exhibited similar disdain towards the SREB when it was first declared by Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan. The proclamation of the initiative had triggered long-standing anxieties in Moscow about being pulled into an asymmetrical relationship with Beijing regarding Central Asian affairs. Russia has also been concerned about the emergence of alternative transportation routes to the Trans-Siberian Railway, which would weaken the dependence of Central Asian nations on Russia in terms of their international trade and could cost Russia billions of rubles annually. These factors have kept Russia from officially articulating its approval for China's BRI. Only after the deterioration of relations with the West over the ongoing dispute in Ukraine made Russia more prudent in its relations with Beijing. Bewaring of the risk of alienating China in face of its decaying relations with the West, Moscow has also embarked on a more benign attitude towards BRI (Vinokurov, 2019) Vinokurov, 2019; Peyrouse, 2017).

However, the changing attitude of Moscow is still far from satisfying Beijing's expectations. Concerning the preservation of its special relations with Central Asia and of its upper hand in handling Central Asian affairs, Russia demands the co-implementation of the SREB between China and the EEU. For Russia, Acceptance of its proposal would mean Beijing's de facto acceptance of Russian primacy over former Soviet space and provide a common ground for governing the interaction between the two powers in these regions. On the other hand, although China issued a bilateral declaration with Russia regarding linking up the EEU and BRI on May 8, 2014, it continued to bilaterally negotiate SREB projects with other members of the EEU. In addition, both China and other Central Asian countries show greater interest in maintaining SREB negotiations at the bilateral level (Gabuev, 2016). This shows that the both countries perceptions towards the regions still remains to be unreconcilable.

The lack of a sufficient institutional framework between Central Asia and China emerges as another factor constraining China's influence over the region. Although SCO provides a platform for consultation and loose cooperation among its members, the growing economic and political impact of China has yet to be materialized on an institutional and contractual basis. For example, China has neither a free trade agreement with nor there is an any chance that such an agreement could be concluded in the near future. Even the aforementioned May 8 declaration between China and the Russian Federation states that an FTA between the EEU and China is a matter of the distant future (Gabuev, 2016).

Therefore, in the context of the non-institutionalized nature of China-Central Asian affairs as well as potential competition with Russia over the region, Chinese expectations of gains from SREB are becoming increasingly elusive.

Therefore, China's foreign policy under BRI's scheme has certain constraints with regard to both Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In the case of Central Asia, the main barriers to greater Chinese achievements are the lack of institutionalized relations with Central Asian countries and the possible resistance of the Russian Federation against further capitalization of the region by China. On the other hand, the increasing deterioration of relations with the West could force Russia to adopt a more benign position against China's growing interests in the region. With regard to Eastern Europe, Chinese foreign policy lacks sufficient means to establish an effective sphere of influence over the region. Even the unleashing of greater capital inflow by China into the region would not lead to Beijing's economic and political penetration of the region. In ideal scenario, China could ensure that CEE countries would not participate into the coalitions formed against itself rather than making them to follow a band-wagoning strategy favoring relations with China over their existing Transatlantic bonds.

4.3. MARITIME SILK ROAD AND CHINA'S MAHANIAN STRATEGY

4.3.1. Mahan's Thesis on Sea Power

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) served as a naval officer and admiral for the US Navy. His commandship in the US Navy was reportedly not spectacular; even his grasp of the naval development and appreciation of naval tactics of his time was arguably quite problematic. He was known for his preference for sailing ships over steam-powered ones. However, his career as a naval historian at the US Naval Academy makes a sharp contrast with his commandship and tactical and operational knowledge. He owed his fame and success to his theorization of sea power and the decisive role that sea power had played in human history and geopolitical developments (Paret et al., 1986).

His theory bases itself on the close connection between national power and the sea power which is a source of economic development and prosperity in peace time by means of maritime commerce and a strategic asset in wartime. Mahan asserts that command of seas

yields clear-cut and decisive advantages to sea powers against their continental adversaries. His theory overly relies on his historical observations of the decisive role of the sea powers, especially that of Great Britain, since the establishment of Britain's naval primacy in a series of wars against the Dutch Republic, the Spanish Empire, and France between the 17th and early 19th centuries. He associates the dominant position of Great Britain in military, political, and economic terms with its effective control exercised upon the seas nearly for three centuries (Mahan, 1890).

The question of which factors constitute the foundations for the formation of effective sea power is another subject matter of Mahan's writings. The purpose of Mahan's writings goes well beyond his academic interest in political and naval history. He primarily focused on drawing lessons from the historical examples and laying out the theoretical path for the political and military development of his country, the US, into a world-class sea power (Paret et al., 1986). For Mahan, the formation of an effective sea power and the establishment of supremacy over the world oceans depend on certain social, political, and material factors. In terms of the socio-political factors, a state's transition into a sea power depends on the characteristics of its population and political culture. He argues that states whose populations are deeply connected to the seas and maritime affairs have greater potential to forge an effective sea power. After the very first condition is met, a state's destiny as a sea power depends heavily on the abilities of its respective state authorities. A government cognizant of the opportunities of maritime commerce and the strategic advantages of possessing efficient naval capabilities is a necessary condition for the establishment and institutionalization of sea power. The definitive role that state authorities play in the formation of sea power is exemplified by Mahan in his writings on naval history. For instance, he discusses that the establishment of Great Britain as a formidable sea power dating back to the Commonwealth administration (1649–60) and to the introduction of the Navigation Act (1651), which prohibited foreign ships from conducting marine trade in British ports. Similarly, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83), Comptroller-General of Finances and Secretary of State for Navy under Louis XIV, initiated shipbuilding campaigns both for the commercial and naval fleets of imperial France and thus turned France into a formidable naval power of his era. However, after his term, France lost momentum in the development of its naval capabilities and gave Britain naval supremacy through a series of staggering naval defeats. In material terms,

the geographical characteristics of the states, the extent of the country, the size of the population, as well as the geographical location—play a part in determining the states' destiny as sea Powers (Mahan, 1890).

Mahan attaches great importance to maritime commerce as a means of national development and prosperity because the overwhelming part of all international exchanges is conducted through this form of commerce. His theorization of sea power stays thus at the intersection point between military strategy and the political economy of international trade. Mahan speculates by invoking historical evidence that the state controlling international commerce overrides others in geopolitical terms and occupies a strategically advantageous position in its interactions with other states, both economically and militarily. Through effective control of the world oceans, the dominant sea power stays in a favorable position to reach strategic commodities, open external markets for its domestic industry, and deny their peers the opportunity to prosper through engaging international commerce to the extent that it does (Mahan, 1890).

Mahan also stipulates certain conditions for the establishment of command over the world's oceans. First of all, any aspirant to naval supremacy should possess a powerful industrial base for the formation of naval forces as well as for advancing its overseas interests through international trade. Secondly, the establishment of military control over the seas necessitates a formidable navy capable of navigating in blue waters. However, the navy in itself is not enough to reap all the benefits pertaining to sea power. Besides, a commercial fleet is also equally important for an aspirant sea power, both in terms of advancing oversea commercial interests and establishing effective military control over the seas. For Mahan, possessing a capable commercial fleet have at least two important roles. Firstly, the commercial fleet is the main means by which sea power furthers its economic interests, thus maintaining its favorable strategic position as a dominant state on the international stage. Secondly, commercial fleets possess indispensable strategic value in wartime for naval fleets operating in distant waters by dramatically expanding the navy's logistical capabilities (Mahan, 1890).

Because the seas and oceans across the planet are so immense, the absolute control of all water bodies is generally beyond the capabilities of any individual state. However, sea power could exert efficient influence over the seas through controlling the main SLOCS connecting the distant economic and political centers. Sea power could exert such control

by means of a chain of strategically chosen oversea bases. The locations of those bases generally correspond to geographical nodes where the maritime navigation converge and nearby places to the main SLOCs. This chain of oversea bases fulfills at least two functions. First of all, they act as an outpost of the sea power in remote areas, through which the sea power ensures the navigational safety of its commercial ships and monitors the overflow of the commercial and naval activities of other states. Secondly, oversea bases provide logistical support for the sea power's naval fleets' operations well beyond its territories. Therefore, without a chain of bases located in strategic geographical points, the very foundations of sea power are significantly crippled regardless of the extent of its operational navy(Mahan, 1890).

4.3.2. MSR from a Mahannian Perspective

Mahan's sea power theory has relevance for thoroughly evaluating the MSR revealed by China in 2013 as part of its greater scheme, the BRI. As also discussed in the previous section of this chapter, global connectivity makes up an important aspect of the classical geopolitical theories. This provision is also true for Mahan's thesis on sea power. He attaches great importance to the global connectivity provided by oceans, and to the conditions for and consequences of the establishment of control over the oceans through naval dominance. MSR as a project bending to increase maritime connectivity through infrastructure investment ranging from the Pacific Rim to Europe and from the African coast to Latin America, logically overlaps the theoretical outlines of the Mahan's argument for global connectivity and its control by military means.

In addition to its geopolitical ones, the political and economic implications of the MSR in terms of international trade also constitute another correlation between Mahan's Sea Power Theory and the Chinese grand strategy behind the MSR. Just like Mahan, China is also well aware of the importance of maritime commerce and its connection with its own economic development and national prosperity. In this context, progression of its maritime and commercial interest as well as protection of its maritime shipping lines is an important dimension of China's foreign policy. As a trading state, Beijing faces significant geopolitical challenges against its seaborne trade in the Indian Ocean, Malacca Strait, and Persian Gulf. These geopolitical challenges have also been exacerbated by the

fact that China's main shipping lines are vulnerable to interceptions by regional and global players. Therefore, it became increasingly important for China to eliminate threats directed against its maritime commerce. In this sense, eliminate the threats directed against its seaborne trade is an important dimension of MSR initiative.

Finally, in classical geopolitical theories, the only thing that bridges the gaps between potentials and consequences is the capabilities of the states, namely military power. When China's naval-built-up program and its alleged pursuit of naval bases across the Indian Ocean known as the "String of Pearls" strategy are taken into account, MSR appears as an integral component of China's Mahanian Strategy. As a consequence of this strategy, China expects to develop into a full-fledged sea power, and MSR could lay the geopolitical foundations for such a rise while significantly expanding Beijing's maritime interest and influence along with main SLOCs connecting China with its economic partners (Brewster, 2017).

This section of the chapter will evaluate the MSR from a Mahanian Sea Power perspective. The geopolitical aspirations of China and the potential consequences of MSR's implementation will be discussed in accordance with the preconditions to becoming a genuine sea power set by Mahan.

4.3.3. MSR as a Quest For Sea Power

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, declared by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Indonesia in 2013, constitutes the seaborne leg of the BRI blueprint. Comparing with its continental peer, SREB, MSR does not attempt to bring a paradigm-change with regard to international trade and trade routes. The maritime transportation corridors included in the MSR project follow the well-established historical trade corridors in a west-east direction since the geographical explorations in the 16th century. The MSR, in this framework, indicates China's desire to consolidate its influence over the existing SLOCs through massive infrastructure investments.

In line with the official documents, MSR is an infrastructure-oriented scheme aiming to upgrade infrastructure connectivity along the vital SLOCs between China and the outer world. Because the seas allow greater freedom of movement for international transportation compared with overland routes, the infrastructure connectivity for

maritime transportation refers to end-to-end linkage through the ports. Accordingly, the implementation of MSR generally involves enhancing the capabilities of the existing ports and constructing new ones along the main shipping lines (K. X. Li et al., 2020).

Mahan, in the late 19th century, urged the US to look for overseas markets for its industrial surplus at home and called for the expansion of the US navy to protect its overseas interests. Just like the US in much of the 19th century, today's China is also struggling with the problem of overcapacity in its economy. While China's industrial capacity has continuously expanded, the digestion capacity of its traditional export destinations could not keep up with the speed of Beijing's increasing industrial outputs. Financial and geopolitical developments have also been exacerbating this ongoing trend. Furthermore, the geopolitical risks attached to being overly dependent on China also force its trading partners to diversify their suppliers toward other developing countries. In this context, MSR offers new opportunities for Beijing to overcome the overcapacity that has plugged its economy by expanding its exports in unconventional ways. This represents the increasing enthusiasm in China to finance the construction of ports and acquire the shares of the existing ports along with the route of the MSR (S. Shen & Chan, 2018). Because ports constitute the access point for individual and, in certain cases, regional markets, the enhancement of the total capacities of ports also means the enhancement of the host countries' capacity to absorb more Chinese goods.

The first wave of China's economic reforms and development resulted in an increase in commercial interaction between China and the economic cores of the world; the second wave, initiated by the go-abroad strategy and later by the BRI, would lead to greater engagement with the economic peripheries (Joshua, 2019). Although MSR is a multiregional initiative involving both developed and developing parts of the world, the impact of the initiative would be uneven in accordance with the developmental level of the regions. In this context, the potential economic and political outcomes of MSR projects in investment-hungry developing countries would outperform those in the developed economies of Western Europe. Similarly, the geopolitical implications of the projects also fundamentally differ in different parts of the developing world.

Regions attached to MSR have varying significance in terms of the capitalization of economic and political benefits through implementing the initiative. As indicated by the first reveal of the project in Indonesia, South-East Asia is one of the MSR's target regions.

In fact, the disparity between the region's trillion-dollar infrastructure investment needs and the financial conditions of many South-Eastern countries makes Chinese investment in the scope of MSR increasingly attractive in the eyes of the regional countries (Rana et al., 2020).

4.3.3.1. MSR in Southeast Asia

With relation to Southeast Asia, Beijing has several expectations from the successful implementation of MSR. First of all, MSR seems like a prescription eliminate the risks and threats directed against its seaborne commerce and maritime supply lines, which feed the soaring Chinese industry with energy and raw materials. In this context, the Malacca Strait is the most vulnerable part of the main shipping lines connecting China with its energy suppliers in the Middle East and export destinations in Western Europe. The economic utility of using the Malacca Strait and the strategic vulnerabilities created by being dependent on this maritime node are coined the Malacca Dilemma by top-tier Chinese politicians and political analysts (Lanteigne, 2008).

Therefore, one crucial geopolitical prospect from MSR is to reduce the risks that plague China's maritime interests, especially in the geographic nodes. Secondly, China may be willing to use its economic leverage to solve its regional disputes in its favor. In this regard, MSR may provide an instrument to compel South Asian countries to accept the Beijing's regional schemes.

The MSR offers certain opportunities for China to overcome the strategic challenges attached to the Malacca Strait. First of all, the consolidation of the South Asian Rimland through infrastructure investment could, in theory, allow China to by-pass the Malacca Strait and reduce the risks of over-relying on the strait for energy supply and transportation of goods. The China-Pakistan and China-Myanmar Economic Corridors constitute the backbone of China's hedging strategy against the Malacca Strait. These two economic corridors will reach maritime infrastructure financed by China in the south-eastern rimland and reduce maritime traffic on the Malacca Strait. Therefore, in the event of the closure of the Malacca Strait to maritime traffic for various reasons, China would have an alternative to maintain its logistical operations with these combined logistical schemes (Ahmed et al., n.d.).

However, the combined logistical routes connecting MSR with SREB would not genuinely eliminate the geopolitical risks of being dependent on maritime routes and the control of these vital maritime passages by external powers. Even if it successfully diverts its logistical operations towards the overland routes reaching the South Asia's coasts, the risk of being denied access to the ocean thus remains for China. The US and even India can cut China's supply lines west of the Malacca Strait before they reach their destinations in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Elimination of these overriding geopolitical challenges necessitates the enhancement of Beijing's naval capabilities well beyond the South China Sea and the proliferation of overseas bases, along with MSR, as fulcrums of Chinese naval capabilities.

Apart from the geopolitical value of the region in its grand strategy, China places emphasis on Southeast Asia in geo-economic terms. In parallel with its reform efforts in the domestic economy, Beijing goes after a deeply integrated and China-centred economic structure in its periphery. The nations of Southeast Asia are the natural and most immediate targets of Beijing's growing geo-economic aims. As part of its strategy to upgrade the domestic economy and develop into a technological powerhouse, China aims to export its labour-sensitive sectors to its peripheries and thus restructure the regional economy in accordance with its geo-economic interests. In this context, the BRI suits the requirements of region-wide structural reforms. In this sense, the function of BRI will be extended from being a means of logistical connectivity to becoming an instrument of regional integration and industrial connectivity (Jiang, 2020)

The Beijing's most important advantage with regard to MSR as an economic integration is that the regional countries perceive the economic cooperation with China as an opportunity for economic development (Garlick, 2019). South Asia is the region in which China has the most extensive FTA network. Recently, the RCEP upgraded regional integration, including China, and provided new means for Beijing to enhance trade relations and economic cooperation with regional countries (Ministry of Commerce People's Republic of China, 2023). In this regard, with its limited definition as an economic and developmental cooperation scheme, the MSR could further China's economic interests across the region and serve to create a China-centric regional economy.

However, despite advantages of the Beijing in terms of its geopolitical influence in South East Asia like its geographical proximity and the investment gap existing in the region, certain factors also constrain its ability to fully exploit the benefits in the scope of the MSR. First of all, the widespread concerns among the regional countries regarding Beijing's intentions withhold many regional states to cooperate to greater extent with China. For now, the most enthusiastic states for enhancing cooperation with China are those which have favourable balance of trade with China and those which are less confronted with Beijing in regional disputes (X. Chen & Fazilov, 2018). For instance, Vietnam with its export-driven economy and having most-contested claims with China in South-China Sea Dispute has showed some degree of reluctance to participate China-led projects in the region. Similarly, Malaysian government in 2008 accused China to pursue a neo-imperialist strategy in the region and cancelled several BRI project (Garlick, 2019)

When all these particularities are taken into account, the external powers' competing schemes with China-centric projects has been increasingly appealing to regional countries. The existing concerns against China and the regional disputes create a favorable environment for external states to deeply involve into regional politics to balance China's growing influence across the region. In recent years, Washington's gunboat diplomacy has achieved extraordinary success in the region. Besides, although regional countries tend to perceive economic cooperation with China as more of an opportunity than a threat, they nevertheless have supported counter economic initiatives like the TPP agreement, which excludes Beijing, in order to balance Beijing's growing economic influence in the region (Ravenhill, 2017)

In this context, the expectation that MSR could provide leverage to China in the South China Sea dispute appears to be an ill-defined strategy for resolution of the dispute in accordance with Beijing's preferences. On the contrary, the ongoing conflict with its neighbors prevents China from fully exploiting the geopolitical potential of the MSR. China's growing military activity in the disputed waters and the push for infrastructure connectivity in the regions has been perceived by regional states as hegemonic tendencies and make them more reluctant to accept the BRI's loans(Garlick, 2019). Rather, the regional countries have become extremely eager to participate in the economic and military coalitions against China. Therefore, China's assertiveness itself constrains its soft

power, which is necessary to successfully implement a project like MSR, which is based on voluntariness.

4.3.3.2. MSR in Africa

Like Southeast Asia, Africa as a whole occupies an important place in China's grand strategy. The economic and political outlook of the continent makes it a natural candidate for China's grand BRI scheme. Africa represents one of the most underdeveloped regions of the world. The development of the continent in general necessitates extensive capital investment in the continent's infrastructure and industrial base. Therefore, due to the interconnection between the continent's investment needs and China's national interests involved, the BRI has naturally extended to include the African continent.

China has important interests in improvement Africa's overland and maritime infrastructure. The shipping lines connecting China with Europe follows the African Eastern shores. Maritime transshipment between Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea is connected via Red Sea and the region hosts two important choke points namely Suez Canal and Bab el-Mandeb. These geographical features make the region extremely important for the China's maritime security. Therefore, the region finds its place in the MSR.

Beijing has a multifaceted interest with regard to Africa and its inclusion into the MSR and its overall maritime strategy. In economic terms, the region hosts vast natural resources, which are increasingly vital for the overall well-being of China's economy (Brautigam, 2011). As Mahan's theory suggests, sea power is an instrument for furthering the states' economic interests, and the acquisition and shipment of raw materials into its mainland is one of the chief concerns for China's strategy within the scope of MSR. In this regard, MSR offers a mutually beneficial way for economic cooperation and a positive trade pattern between China and Africa. With BRI, China will be able to trade its direct investments in African infrastructure and sales of industrial products for the much-needed raw materials. The improvement of maritime infrastructure all across Africa, including the deep-water ports, will chiefly serve to enhance Beijing's grasp on African resources while improving the continent's capacity to digest its industrial products.

Because of these geo-economic concerns, China has been investing in maritime infrastructure not only in the geopolitically important East African rimland but also in Western Africa. In line with its maritime infrastructure investments, China has been making inroads into inner Africa by enhancing the railroad and highway network of the continent. The improvement of overland infrastructure, in return, enhances the hinterland connectivity of the China-sponsored deep-water ports and thus their outreach of raw materials in Africa's relatively marginal inner regions while creating new export markets for its industry (Breuer, 2017). On the other hand, the role of Africa in BRI is not clearly defined yet. Some Chinese scholars, like Justin Yifu Lin, a Chinese professor at Beijing University and former vice president of the World Bank, envision a greater role for Africa under the BRI. For him, China-African cooperation in BRI should focus more on structural transformation of economic relations, and labor-sensitive sectors of China should be exported to the developing African economies. Infrastructure investments in this sense would have a supplementing effect on the promotion of China-centric development across the African continent (Jian, 2018).

The second and more direct interest of China regarding the MSR is to secure its maritime interests along the shipping routes connecting China with its trading partners. Just like in the Malacca Strait, China's international transportation exposes certain risks and threats in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea. The interruption of maritime navigation in these waters because of various reasons ranging from regional conflicts to maritime piracy is a real and constant danger for China. This necessitates PLAN to operate these troubled waters to protect China's commercial interests. For this reason, the first and only Chinese overseas base locates in Djibouti. In the upcoming future, it is expected that China's naval posture in the region will grow, and China will need more maritime facilities to ensure the logistical well-being of its fleets (Clemens, 2015). In this case, the maritime infrastructures under the MSR can be subject to dual use and can host PLAN's vessels. Thus, the transformative effect of infrastructure investment in Africa would expand China's maritime influence along a cordon following the MSR from the coast of China to the East African Rim.

4.3.3.3. Emerge of Military Bases along MSR: String of Pearls

Possessing strategically chosen overseas bases is an indispensable component of sea power in Mahanian geopolitical tradition. The great bodies of the world's oceans set barriers before the naval capabilities of particular states. Even if in the 21st century the logistical capabilities of navies are well beyond their peers in the 19th century, the contemporary navies still face significant geopolitical and strategic challenges in operating in distant waters. Mahan himself, in 1890, warns the US, which was an infant industrial and colonial power at that time, that "having no foreign establishment, the ships of war of the United States will be "like land birds unable to fly far from their own shores" (Mahan, 1890). The same logic can also be adequately applied to China as an aspiring sea power in the 21st century. Although PLAN has expanded to a significant degree in just a few decades, it still needs overseas bases to be fully accounted for as a real blue-water navy.

After witnessing centuries of Western domination, China in recent years has duplicated its efforts to assert its maritime influence well beyond its immediate region. Accompanied by its growing blue water capabilities, its investment in military maritime infrastructure constitutes a significant facet of its maritime strategy. In recent years, the interest of China in investing in critical military infrastructure manifested itself in the proliferation of its artificial island constructed for military purposes over the South China Sea. In line with the Mahanian dictum on overseas bases, China has been accused of pursuing naval bases at strategically chosen points along the vital SLOCs passing through the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Eastern Shores of Africa on its way to Europe. This strategy that China allegedly pursues, was first coined as a "string of pearls" by US consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, specializing in military affairs and intelligence, in its report titled "Energy Futures in Asia," presented to the US Department of Defense in 2005 (Suri, 2016).

The "string of pearls" refers to a chain of maritime infrastructure stretching from the South China Sea to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean. Each "pearl" in this strategic metaphor indicates particular maritime infrastructure, either commercial or military in nature. These "pearls" are strategically located in maritime choke points on which maritime shipments converge. For example, the Chinese artificial island in the South China Sea and upgraded military facilities on Hainan Island each constitute a

"pearl" in the string of pearls strategic concept. Chittagong container shipment facility in Bangladesh and Sittwe deep-water ports in Burma, located in the Bay of Bengal, as well as Hambantota international port, adjacent to the Palk Strait between Sri Lanka and India, represent other pearls in this strategic concept. Similarly, a deep-water port in Pakistan, Gwadar," is another pearl that occupies the entrance to the Persian Gulf. In addition, the first official naval base of China is located in Djibouti, which controls the Bab al-Mandab Strait connecting the Indian Ocean with the Red Sea (Pehrson, 2006).

However, China's approach to possessing naval bases has a unique dimension in comparison with former sea power aspirants. In essence, much of the pearls in the string stretching from the Taiwan Strait to Bab-al Mandab are primarily maritime facilities for civilian and commercial usage. The only formal overseas base of China is located in Djibouti, and officially tasked with combating piracy in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The controversial point of the Chinese pearls is that the commercial facilities constructed or operated by Chinese firms could be subject to dual-use. The utilization of these maritime facilities for military means could dramatically enhance the operational capabilities of PLAN. Even if these maritime facilities would not host any military installations like modern reconnaissance and surveillance equipment or air-support units, they can still be invaluable assets for China's maritime strategy by expanding the logistical capabilities of the PLAN. This possible function of Beijing's pearls makes more sense, especially if its emerging aircraft carrier task groups are considered (Clemens, 2015)

The declaration of MSR as a strategic initiative thus further contributed to the existing controversies around China's maritime facilities in the Indian Ocean and its aggressive port-acquisition strategy. The initiative clarified that China's strategic maritime interests in the Indian Ocean and beyond will only increase in time in parallel with its growing commercial and political interests along these water bodies. In this context, its growing infrastructure investments in the scope of MSR could create a gravitational field for PLAN to increase its clout along with the route of the BRI. This in turn could trigger a chain reaction in which, while the protection of its investments is the reason for China's military presence, the maritime infrastructures, which are civilian in essence, become the main multiplier of force for the PLAN (Blanchard & Flint, 2017).

Another possible scenario holds that MSR at bottom is a facet of Beijing's military strategy from the beginning. In this context, MRS presents a strategic cover for furthering the geopolitical and military interests of Beijing across the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (Hlongwa, 2020). The strategic logic behind the proliferation of China's civilian investment in maritime facilities along the MSR is that civilian infrastructure attracts much less international attention than building military fortifications along main transportation corridors. From this perspective, Beijing pursues a low-profile naval strategy while constantly promoting its military and commercial interests beyond its periphery (Styan, 2020).

The case studies of particular maritime infrastructures in the Indian Ocean also support the claims that China, in part, pursues a dual strategy in the scope of the MSR. In this regard, the China-sponsored ports do not adequately comply with certain specifications determining the economic viability of the the ports. In general, proximity to main SLOCs and hinterland connectivity, as well as the distance between the new and existing ports, play important roles in their economic and commercial success. However, the Chinese "pearls", which are included in the general scheme of MSR, do not adequately fulfill these criteria. For example, Gwadar in Pakistan and Kyaukpyu in Myanmar were constructed in marginal areas and lack sufficient connectivity with their hinterlands. Although these ports could become success stories if the China-Pakistan and China-Myanmar Economic Corridors is completed successfully, so far they have failed to attract enough traffic and thus remain inefficient compared with other ports in their proximity. Similarly, the port of Hambantota, constructed in the southern part of Sri Lanka, is located in a favorable position in terms of its proximity to the main shipping line between Europe and Asia, but the presence of the nearby Port of Colombo blocks its commercial viability (Funaiole & Hillman, 2018). Therefore, all these factors cast doubt on the MSR projects as well as China's previous investments in maritime infrastructure in the Indian Ocean as purely commercial projects. Rather, the lack of these sufficient commercial and economic bases further verifies the strategic and geopolitical motives behind the initiative's initiation.

As mentioned above, at the moment, China has no oversea military bases save for one in Djibouti. Due to the lack of any acknowledgement by Chinese officials with regard to the "string of pearl" strategy, there is an ambiguity around the question of when and where Chinese "pearls" start to shine as full-fledged military installations. Despite the ambiguity

of the timing, the location of the possible military or dual-use logistical facilities is more likely to emerge in East Africa, where Chinese influence is much more capitalized in diplomatic and strategic terms. A number of factors ranging from the host countries reluctance under the US and India's pressure to allow Chinese military facilities, the regional disputes involving China, and the US's counterbalance could prevent or at least delay the proliferation of Beijing's chain of bases in South East Asia. By contrast, South Africa appears to be a more likely destination for the emergence of the first Chinese oversea bases (Clemens, 2015)

4.3.4. Exerting Control over SLOCs through Constructing Artificial Choke-Points: The Cases of Kra Canal and Nicaragua Canal

In Mahanian geopolitics, sea power has an instrumental value for the control of international commerce and the global resources traveling back and forth across the seas. The control of international commerce necessitates the control of oceans. Because of the immense size of the oceans compared with the extent of human activities, control of the oceans basically means the control of international shipping lines. On the other hand, the control of shipping lines is generally achieved through holding maritime chokepoints.

The definition of maritime choke points needs specific attention. In general, the definition indicates the narrowest points of the shipping lines on which maritime navigation converges. However, there is no specification over narrowness for determining a geographical formation as a maritime choke point. Historically, the maritime straits and canals connecting the two distinct bodies of water are used as synonyms for the term. However, the considerably extensive maritime passages like the GIUK Gap connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Arctic Ocean, which is also adequately fulfills the definition. Similarly, various factors determine the geopolitical significance of the geographical nodes. For instance, the geopolitical importance of some geographical nodes like Hurmuz and the Malacca Straits comes from their critical roles in terms of global commerce and energy supply. On the other hand, because the GIUK Gap was the exit point of the Second and Third Reich's wolf packs during the two world wars and the Soviet Union's nuclear submarine fleets during the Cold War, its geopolitical value is determined mainly by strategic factors (Pincus, 2020).

The maritime choke points can be either naturally-formed geographical formations or artificial constructions. The artificial choke-points constructed mainly for providing better means of maritime communication by converging divided water bodies can also provide certain strategic and geopolitical advantages to controlling powers. For example, the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914 provided immense strategic advantages for the US. The connection of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by means of the Panama Canal multiplied the US's naval strength by enabling the US Navy to operate in strategic inner lines. Since then, the US has been able to mobilize its forces either in the Atlantic or Pacific with greater speed and simultaneously exert its influence in both oceans without dividing its forces. From its construction to the neutralization of the Canal Area in 1999 by the Panama Canal Treaty, the US had established naval and air bases on the Panama Isthmus and established effective control over it (Novak, 1989).

4.3.4.1.1. Kra Canal

Because of the strategic implications of the construction of artificial choke points and thus disrupting existing SLOCs, the building or control of artificial channels is a historically controversial issue in international politics. The construction of the Kra Canal is no exception to this historical pattern. After settling at Singapore, the entrance of the Malacca Strait, for the sake of its control over the maritime routes between the dispersed parts of its colonial empire, Great Britain resisted projects on the utilization of the Kra isthmus for the construction of an artificial passage that would create an alternative to the Malacca Strait. The issue turned into an international controversy for the first time during the colonialization process of Indochina in the second half of the 19th century. The competition between the French and British Empires in the Siam Peninsula for extending their spheres of influence in the region brought about rival schemes for the construction of the Kra Canal (Kiernan, 1956). France attempted several times to obtain a concession from the Siamese Kingdom for the canal's construction. Afterwards, the rise of the Japanese Empire in the East created another challenge for the British Empire with regard to geopolitical competition over the Siam peninsula. To maintain its strategic control over maritime navigation and protect Singapore's status as a valuable strategic asset, Britain resisted the construction of the Canal by any other powers. Great Britain had persisted in its policy against the construction of the canal even after WWII. The Anglo-Thai

Agreement of 1946 included the 7th Article withholding Thailand's right to construct the Kra Canal. Therefore, the discussions around the construction of the canal were delayed until the 1980s, and the Asian Financial Crisis in the 1990s created another setback for the project (Menon, 2018)

The construction of the Kra Canal regained widespread international attention when its possible inclusion in the China-sponsored BRI emerged in 2013. In 2015, the news stating that China-Thailand Kra Infrastructure Investment and Development (CTKIID) and Asia Union Group had reached a MoU for joint construction of the canal began to circulate in international media outlets. Although the respective authorities of both countries denied any official agreement at a political level regarding the Kra Canal, they remained silent about any possible cooperation between their private sectors. Moreover, with tacit approval from Beijing, Chinese construction giants reportedly undertook feasibility studies in the Kra Isthmus. These developments increased the possibility that China might sponsor the construction of the canal, which is estimated to cost around 28 billion USD (Peng Er, 2018).

The project could be supported by China as part of its strategy to reduce overdependence on the Malacca Strait by promoting alternative transportation schemes like the China-Myanmar and China-Pakistan Economic Corridors. The construction of the canal, while allowing Beijing to short-cut the Malacca Strait, would also yield economic opportunities by providing a shorter route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. In addition, Chinese construction firms engaged in the project would benefit from transit fees. Therefore, in addition to its commercial and financial benefits, constructing and establishing effective control over the canal would enable Beijing to enforce a degree of security over its lifelines connecting its territory with main energy providers and export destinations (Menon, 2018).

4.3.4.1.2. Nicaragua Channel

The Kra Canal is not unique in the sense that it is an infrastructure project that could significantly alter the current geographical outlook of the world. The unleashing of massive loans and funds to undertake the physical burden of the BRI raises speculation about other mega-infrastructure projects lying dormant for decades. The Nicaragua Canal

is one of the such projects waiting for China's backing in order to become a reality. Just like the Kra Canal, the Nicaragua Canal also does not offer any promise to provide any unique opportunity, which was absent before the construction of the proposed scheme. Unlike the Kra Canal, the proposed canal does not also shorten the existing SLOCs between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The mere value of the Nicaragua Canal lies in its position as creating an alternative to the Panama Canal.

The controversy around the Nicaragua Canal began one year before the declaration of the BRI. In 2012, the Nicaraguan Government signed an MoU with HKND Group, a Chinese consortium, with regard to the construction of a canal lying 400 nm away from the Panama Canal. According to original plans, the Nicaragua Canal would be completed by 2020. However, the project has bogged down because of the financial crush of billionaire Wang Jing, the main sponsor of President Ortega's project, and domestic complexities in Nicaragua (LatinAmerican Post, 2018).

Despite the current stalemate, the Nicaragua Canal project provides important insights for the potential evolution of the BRI and China's growing posture in maritime affairs. First of all, the participation of the Chinese firm as the main contractor in the project does not necessarily indicate Beijing's involvement; however, no Chinese firm could take such an initiative to the contrary of central government concerns. Therefore, it can be inferred that Beijing sees strategic value in creating alternatives for maritime transportation, especially where China has no or little stake in maintaining existing patterns in maritime trade.

4.3.4.1.3. Limitations on Kra Canal and Nicaragua Canal

With regard to the Kra Canal, Beijing's influence could be undermined by a number of factors. First of all, Washington would try to use its leverage on Thailand to stall the implementation of the project or internationalize the construction of the canal, considering the strategic implications of Beijing handling the project single-handedly. What is worse for China is that the US's involvement could also be favored by Thai authorities in order to balance Beijing's growing influence. Secondly, the existing regional disputes between China and regional countries could cast a shadow over the implementation of the projects. In this context, China's efforts to push the Kra Canal further could therefore be perceived as the continuation of its efforts to tighten the grip

over the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. Therefore, the project could easily evoke regional responses, which, in turn, make the implementation of the project politically sensitive for Beijing.

Compared with diplomatic complexities of construction of Kra Canal, China is in diplomatically favorable position in possible implementation of Nicaragua Canal. Over the years, China has achieved to keep sound relations with Nicaragua. Therefore, Nicaraguan authorities compared with South-Asian nations is much less skeptical about the China's geopolitical and strategic aims by vigorously sponsoring maritime infrastructures. However, the political leverage of Beijing in Nicaragua could be offset by certain overarching geopolitical and strategic factors. First of all, the China's involvement in the canal project poses a serious challenge to Monroe doctrine which fencing the Western hemisphere as US's sphere of influence. Therefore, the implementation of the project would bring Sino-US geopolitical rivalry to American Continent on which China has little experience and leverage against its formidable rival. Secondly, distance between the China and Latin America would seriously reduce the Chinese capabilities to protect its investment in this continent. This could only be overcome by establishment of permanent bases in American continent for PLAN. However, this step cannot be taken by China unless taking the risk of broader and fiercer competition with the US.

In short, the BRI raises speculations about the implementation of the mega-infrastructure project, which can fundamentally alter current geopolitical space. Kra and Nicaragua Canals represent just two of these projects. The materialization of both can provide certain economic and strategic advantages for China, while the Kra Canal's strategic utility for China's geopolitical design is more clearly defined. However, just like their historical examples, both projects could trigger fierce competition between China and regional and global actors. In this context, the true cost of their implementation could easily exceed the financial or economic burdens.

4.4. POLAR SILK ROAD: EMERGENCE OF EURASIAN RIMLAND

Rimland Theory is a geopolitical concept developed by Nicholas Spykman, an American international professor at Yale University. His theorization of geopolitics is actually an

antithesis of the Heartland Theory developed by Halford Mackinder. In general terms, Spykman is critical of Mackinder's overstress on the Heartland Region as the pivotal region in the industrial era. He rather places emphasis on the "Rimland" as the principal geographical unit in the struggle among great powers for world dominance. For Spykman, an inadequate industrial and economic base in the Heartland region prevents enormous military and political power from flourishing there (Spykman, 1944).

The "rimland" as a geographical area completely corresponds to the "inner crescent" theorized by Mackinder. This geographic unit refers to the coastal zones surrounding the Heartland region. The Rimland region as a whole exhibit amphibious characteristic. Historically, Rimland powers had to defend themselves against both land and sea powers, which makes this region an interplay of sea and continental powers. For Spykman, the Rimland constitutes the key geographical unit for world domination. The last three great wars in world history occurred because of the danger of domination of the whole rimland region in a particular geography by a single power. During these conflicts, land power, namely the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and sea powers, Great Britain and the US, aligned against the potential hegemon emerging in the Rimland (Spykman, 1944).

Spykman's theory provides an insightful tool for the geopolitical evolution of the Polar Silk Road, because the harsh realities of climate change alter not only the earth's geography but also the world's political geography. Under these changes, the previous geopolitical descriptions could easily become void. The retreat of vast ice masses in the Arctic region gives way to the emergence of trans-Arctic maritime corridors and the extraction of raw materials from the seabed of the Arctic Ocean. Under these conditions, the Heartland region will no longer be cut off from open seas and maritime navigation. On the other hand, the emergence of the Eurasian rimland along the Arctic coast will result in the formation of a new frontier along which great power politics will play out. The shorter routes between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans will also multiply the geopolitical importance of this new geopolitical frontier.

4.4.1. China's Arctic Policy and PSR

Throughout history, the Arctic Ocean has been a "closed" maritime zone because of the extreme climate conditions. In previous centuries, thick ice masses did not leave the

Arctic Ocean for most of the year, making maritime navigation nearly impossible. For this reason, the Arctic region was one of the latest explored geographical regions in the world. The region's geographical exploration was not completed until the early 20th century.

However, the phenomenon of global warming fundamentally alters the geographical conditions in the Arctic. The vast ice masses have been increasingly retreating and giving way to maritime navigation and other economic activities in this once-marginal geography. On the other hand, the emerging political and economic opportunities in the region, whet the appetite of regional and external powers. In this regard, China's interests in the region date back to the 1990s. Beijing's early expeditions towards the region included to scientific research, maritime navigation, and the unveiling of the potential of the region in terms of fishing stocks and raw materials (Sun, 2013). While global warming progressively increased the possibilities of human activity in the Arctic, China's interest in the region has only grown over time. In 2015, China declared its Polar Silk Road vision. In 2018, Beijing issued a white paper on the Arctic Region for the first time and officially set its Arctic Policy. This was followed by Beijing's publication of the first white paper on the Arctic Region in 2008, and thus, determination of its official Arctic Policy.

The white paper provides a brief background for its involvement in the region and declares China as an "important stakeholder" in Arctic affairs. With this document, China introduced its self-definition in the region as a "near Arctic state". The document reveals its priorities and aims regarding its involvement in Arctic affairs. Those include securing the freedom of navigation across the region, the right to undertake scientific research, as well as participation to the utilization of the natural resources in the region (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2018).

The release of the document reveals that China has quite extensive range of interest in the Arctic region. Its PSR vision constitutes just one dimension of the its Arctic policy and provides an instrument for progression of its interest in the region. In particular PSR, just like other components of BRI, represents the mentality China as being a trading nation. Its export-driven economy and soaring industry drives Beijing to capitalize Arctic's better and secure transportation routes and to control its vast raw materials and energy resources (Flake, 2013). The PSR, on the other hand, enables China to use its economic leverage to materialize its plans for the region.

4.4.2. The Geopolitical Logic Behind the PSR

The utilization of shipping lines passing through Arctic region would yield certain economic and security benefits for PRC. First of all, trans-Arctic routes will significantly shorten the maritime transportation from China to Europe. Currently, the commercial ships from China via Suez Canal reaches their destinations in European ports nearly in 30 days. However, utilization of Northern Sea Route following the Russia's shores will shorten this duration of time to 18 days. The utilization of Trans-polar routes, on the other hand will additionally provide the 1-5 days reduction to this duration of transportation. Although these transpolar routes are currently not open to maritime navigation, in the long term this passage may also become usable for commercial navigation (Bennett et al., 2020).

Besides its economic utility for China's international commerce, the new trans-arctic trade routes will also reduce certain security risk attached to China's international transportation. Together with the BRI's overland corridors, PSR promises to efficiently divert the China's international trade apart from the shipping lines trans passing the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait. Due to the current state of Sino-Russian relations, the effective control of this new international routes by Russian Federation also provides additional security for Beijing. Unlike the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, the trans-Arctic corridors offers undisrupted shipping lines passing through friendly waters.

Another important dimension of the China's involvement into Arctic affairs is the expectation to participate in natural resource extraction activities in the region. The Arctic region host vast natural resources. But until recently, the harsh climate conditions and undeveloped infrastructure of the region has made extremely difficult to utilize the region's rich and virgin raw materials. In addition, because of the adverse effects of the climate change, the cold waters in the Arctic Ocean pulls the marine species like a magnet. Therefore, the region has recently become an important zone for fishery activities. Those factors drive China to pursue an active economic and foreign policy towards the region (Sun, 2014).

In line with its growing appetite for exploit the potential of the Arctic region both in terms of natural resources and transportation lines, the PSR has an important function in Beijing's Arctic policy. China wants to take advantage of the investment gap and the need

to develop infrastructure, in the region. Although Russia itself has ambitious plans for develops the region single-handedly, it generally lacks the enough resources to responds the region's enormous demands. On the other, general situation of the Russia-West relation eliminates the joint ventures involving Western states like Germany and Japan for development its Far East and Arctic shores (Flake, 2013).

This creates Beijing a playground for taking more active posture in Arctic Affairs. In recent years there has been fundamental change in Moscow's general attitude towards China's economic and political involvement into the Arctic region. In 2013, Moscow lifted its long-standing opposition before the participation of China among other non-littoral states into the Arctic Council. Although the China's accession into the Organization as the observer member become possible after the introduction of Nuuk Criteria, which oblige the observers to acknowledge the sovereign rights of littoral states and restrict the scope of their participations in the mechanism of the organization, the acceptance of China nevertheless represents an important milestone in Russia's China policy in the Arctic (Flake, 2013; Røseth, 2014)

Although the two states have conflicting opinions regarding the legal framework of the Arctic affairs as well as the application of international law in the maritime affairs in region, they have been cooperated in practical manner in the region in a broad spectrum ((Flake, 2013; Trenin, 2020). In 2013, China's China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China's Silk Road Fund obtained 20% and %9 stakes respectively in Yamal LNG projects of the Russian Federation. In 2015, China's Development Bank and Russian Novatek signed and MoU on development of another energy cooperation project, the Arctic LNG-2, which has the capacity to produce the 19.8 Mt LNG annually. Similarly, the permissions were granted for Chinese petroleum companies to conduct explorations in several locations in Russian Arctic offshores. Therefore, China has steadily increased its stakes in the development of the Russia's Arctic resources and become a key energy partner of Russia in the region (Pelaudeix, 2018).

Although Russia is the key partner of China in terms of development of energy resources and raw materials, China's interest in the Arctic and its periphery is not confined to this cooperation. A small island state, Iceland, offers a particularly interesting story of the China's involvement in the region and the driving forces behind its Arctic policy. Iceland in contrast with its size have an immense strategic value in the regional geopolitics. The

island sits in the middle of the entrance of Arctic from the Atlantic Ocean and thus constitutes a natural transit hub in the emerging trans-Arctic routes. For this reason, Iceland has been on the Beijing's radar and attracting enormous investments from Chinese companies. Considering its important role of in the new patterns of international transportation, China has been investing in physical infrastructure and buying huge-chunks of lands in the island (Blunden, 2012).

Similar to the example of Iceland, there has been increasing trend in China's investment in other littoral states to Arctic. For example, Chinese companies has undertaken several infrastructure projects in Norway, Greenland and Finland. China has also been showing interest to joint ventures of development of the natural resources with Arctic nations. Especially Greenland's natural resource potential in terms of rare earth materials drawing Beijing's attention. In 2016, a Chinese company Shenghe purchased the 12,5% share of Greenland Minerals and Energy Ltd. operating in the Greenland's Kvanefjeld mining site. An MoU between the two companies, allowed Shenghe to take its share in the production in the form of output material and transport these materials to China in order to feed Chinese striving economy for raw materials (Pelaudeix, 2018).

All of these developments illustrate the geopolitical drives behind Beijing's involvement into the Arctic affairs and its national interests in the region. In general, the idea of utilization of the trans-Arctic transportation routes and the huge potential of the region in terms of natural resources shape the China's Arctic policy and its actions. The PSR in this respect, is a natural extensions of China's broad interests towards the region. The initiative offers a general and flexible cooperation scheme to littoral states and sets the parameters of the China's stakes in the region.

4.4.2.1. China's Involvement in the Arctic from Rimland Perspective

The Arctic once was a marginal region in terms of its economic potential as well as its access to main trade routes. The Arctic Ocean was covered by ice for much of the year and thus did not allow maritime navigation. The first maritime expeditions in the region could be made despite numerous challenges and by taking extraordinary risks (Scott, 1909). Although the ship-building technology and emergence of ice-breaker ships allowed the greater mobility in the Arctic, the region has remained marginal in terms of

commercial transportation. These geological properties of the region effectively make the Arctic's coastal regions land-block territories. Therefore, Arctic was geographically attached to Heartland region because its lack of direct access to open seas, and therefore, of its invincibility by sea power.

However, the global warming causes the thick ice masses in Arctic to melt in accelerated degree, and as a result, the region has increasingly opened the maritime navigation. The duration of ice-free season in the Arctic has been steadily increasing and in the near future, it is projected that the Arctic will be open for year-round if the phenomenon of global continues at its current pace (Humpert & Raspotnik, 2012). This important changes in the geographical conditions, have had profound impact on the region's geopolitics. Under these circumstances, it become increasingly impossible to regard the Arctic shores as landlocked areas and extremely difficult to attach the Heartland's properties to the region. Moreover, the emergence of shorter maritime lines of communication among Asia-Pacific, North-America and Europe decorates the region with the attributions of having grave geopolitical importance. In fact, Arctic region has been transforming into a Eurasian rimland and became a subject to geopolitical analysis from the sea power perspective.

Spykman argues that the key to regional hegemony or possessing a dominant position in world affairs is to establish an effective control over the rimland. In accordance with the Spykman's argument, the power controlling the rimland would have strategically better of position vis-à-vis its rivals in global power politics (Spykman, 1944). Therefore, the rise of Eurasian rimland and the establishment of control over the new trade route lying parallel with this territory would have grave impact on the international relations. The PRS, in this sense, represents China's attempts to consolidate its power via infrastructure investments upon this emerging geopolitical unit.

The establishment of effective control over the Arctic rimland made China to hold commanding position against the trans-polar shipping routes. This, in return, will not only ensure the security of its international connectivity stretching from China to Europe and to North America, but also enable it to put extraordinary pressure on its geopolitical rivals (Lundestad & Tunsjø, 2015). Therefore, Beijing would be in a favorable position to deny others from the main shipping routes among the most important economic centers of the world and thus to exert greater global influence.

The China's geopolitical aims in this regard is hinged upon certain conditions. First of all, in order to be remain as an active player in the Arctic, China should maintain its strategic alignment with Moscow. Russia, has the longest coast and most extensive maritime jurisdiction zones in the region. The maintaining the strategic connection with the Moscow would enable China to participate in Arctic affairs and to exploit the region's economic and strategic opportunities to a great extent. Otherwise, China would face the not only the risk of failure of its PSR vision, but also the danger of being strategically denied from the region. In this scenario, Arctic would become another headache for Beijing's geopolitical vision rather than a strategic asset in global geopolitics.

Because of the only glue between geopolitical aspirations and political developments is military power, the realization of Beijing's aspirations regarding Arctic necessitates the extension of its military power towards the region. This in return, could trigger the tension with Russia which consider the Arctic as its own realm of influence (Blunden, 2012). However, especially after the commencement of Ukraine war and the lining up of only remaining neutral littoral states namely Finland and Sweden in the Arctic to participate in the NATO Alliance, Russia could see strategic value to enhance its military cooperation with China in the region. In a way that to support this assumption, China has regularly participated in Russia's Vostok military drills in East Siberia in recent years. In 2022, the both powers also conducted naval exercises in the Arctic region and the entrance of the Bering Strait (Zhao, 2022). Therefore, it become increasingly possible that with the deterioration of the relations with the West, Moscow could come to perceive China in Arctic as an opportunity rather than as a strategic challenge, in order to balance the growing pressure coming from the Transatlantic alliance.

4.5. CHINA'S MILITARY BUILD-UP: NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN GEOPOLITICAL ENDS AND MILITARY MEANS

Classical geopolitics is closely associated with military strategy and the balance of power. One important reason for this close connection is that geographical studies are one of the principal interests of military affairs. Additionally, many of the founding fathers of classical geopolitical theories, like Mahan and Haushofer, were military-origin scholars. However, the main reason behind the interconnection between military strategy and classical geopolitics is that classical geopolitics is mainly concerned with power relations

among the principal international actors, and national power, on many occasions, equals military power, both in classical theories and realist thinking alike. Therefore, the only glue that can bring together Beijing's geopolitical aspirations behind the implementation of the BRI and the actual outcomes of the project is China's military power.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending has surpassed 2 trillion USD for the first time in history. China's military expenditure for 2022 was recorded at 295 billion USD, the second-largest military budget after the US. Beijing's military expenditure has experienced continuous growth for 27 consecutive years (SIPRI, 2022).

In recent years, in parallel with its growing economic influence and geopolitical ambitions across the world, China has initiated a program of military modernization. Beijing's military modernization program has focussed on arms' modernization, capacity building, and joint forces training activities (US Department of Defence, 2022). In line with China's export-driven growth and with the growing maritime threats against its national security, PLAN, in particular, has experienced rapid growth and modernization. From its establishment until the 1980s, PLAN was essentially regarded as a supportive unit of PLA. The main doctrine of PLAN was also a continuation of its general "people's war" doctrine, which is built upon guerilla fighting principles against superior forces. Thus, the guerilla navy of China was officially tasked with protecting China's coasts.

Under Liu Huaqing, who served as commander in chief for PLAN, China's naval strategy as well as the force structure of PLAN underwent significant changes. During his commandership, Liu initiated a naval modernization program and introduced an "oceanic" vision into China's strategic thinking (Li, 2009). He envisioned PLAN developing into a modern naval force capable of operating in blue water and set a three-phased development plan for this objective. During the first phase, PLAN would be able to project power and establish control over the maritime zone from China's shores up to the first island chain stretching from Kuril Island to the South China Sea. Then, during the second phase of naval development, PLAN's capabilities would be enhanced to operate in the military theater up to the second island chain, encompassing an area starting from the outmost Japanese islands, passing the US naval base on Guam Island, and extending to Kavieng Island in Papua New Guinea from there. When the PLAN attains the capability to operate up to the second island chain, it will actually become a blue-

water navy. In the final phase of Liu's plan, the operation capabilities of PLAN would be extended to operate beyond the second island chain, and thus the blue-water capabilities of PLAN would be fortified (Kondapalli, 2000).

During the timeframe between the phases of progressive capacity building, PLAN has relied upon indirect strategies for overcoming the military threats in the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean. Facing the US with superior naval capabilities in the Pacific Ocean, the PLA embarked on a flexible attitude and initiated a pattern of strategic competition with Chinese characteristics in the Pacific Ocean. By means of its interim naval doctrine, known as the Anti-Access/Area Denial (AA/AD) strategy, China denies direct confrontation and employs asymmetric capabilities to counter the superior naval units in the Western Pacific and South China Sea. The AA/AD strategy basically aims to keep the operating units of its strategic competitors off China's shores and make it extremely risky for these units to operate within the range of the PLA's asymmetric capabilities (Connolly, 2017). The backbone of the AA/AD capabilities of the PLA, on the other hand, is constituted by the sophisticated web of submarines in various classes, precision-guided missiles, as well as modern reconnaissance and surveillance equipment (Y.-H. Lim, 2017)

4.5.1. Rise of PLAN as a Blue-Water Navy

Throughout the centuries, the navies have been built to protect the commercial and maritime interests of the states. Because the naval fleets have been the principal units for power projection to distant places, the naval task groups have served as both strategic and political assets in international relations. Although the primary function of navies is to be an instrument for transporting the military power of the nation to distant places, the structure of naval units has undergone significant changes in line with technological changes and the evolution of naval strategies and tactics. Today, due to the decisive role airpower plays in military engagements, aircraft carrier task groups constitute the backbone of the modern navies' power projection capabilities. Therefore, having capable aircraft carrier task groups is an indispensable component of any sea power, including China.

China's ambition to have aircraft carriers dates back to the commandship of the Liu Huaqing (1982–88). Liu believed that PLAN's development into a blue-water navy

extremely hinges on possessing capable aircraft carrier units. Long before China possessed its first aircraft carrier, Liu established training centers for future commanders of aircraft carriers and initiated special programs for the design and construction of China's indigenous aircraft carriers (Storey & Ji, 2004). However, Liu could not live long enough to see the commissioning of the first aircraft carrier into the PLAN. A Soviet-built Kuznetsov-class aircraft carrier, "Varyag," was purchased from Ukraine, equipped with modern weapons and communication systems, and put into active duty in 2017 under the name of Liaoning (Episkopos, 2020).

However, the commissioning of its first aircraft carrier did not satisfy Beijing's maritime ambitions. The Type 002 aircraft carrier Shandong, which actually mimics the design of the Soviet Kuznetsov class aircraft carrier, was domestically built and commissioned into the PLAN in 2019 (Gady, 2019). The indigenously designed Type 003 "Fujian" followed the previous ones and started its sea trials in 2022 (Liu, 2023). The rapid expansion of PLAN's aircraft carrier units reflects China's aspiration to become a world-class military power by 2050. In accordance with these aspirations, China would possess at least six aircraft carrier units until 2035 and 10 until 2050 (Episkopos, 2020). Yet, all aircraft carriers in PLAN's inventory are diesel-powered, which has limited payload and power projection capabilities compared with nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. However, the next aircraft carriers that will be commissioned into the PLAN in the upcoming years will be nuclear-powered. Therefore, in the mid-century, China's aircraft carrier units and capabilities of power projection would match those of the US, at least in quantity.

The inflation of China's aircraft carrier units is a significant indicator of its growing geopolitical ambitions. On the one hand, the aircraft carrier groups would strengthen their position in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait vis-à-vis their strategic competitors. On the other hand, its emerging capabilities of power projection would enable China to oversee its energy supply lines and maritime shipping corridors along the Indian Ocean, Malacca Strait, and later the Arctic Ocean. Beijing's growing naval power, centered on aircraft carrier units, would also become an indispensable apparatus to protect soaring Chinese investment across the globe. In this sense, the initiation of the BRI creates both an instrument and a reason for China's naval development and global military influence.

4.6. CONCLUSION

The BRI was launched as a massive-scale infrastructure project by China and immediately diverted considerable international attention. The main aim of the initiative is to improve infrastructure connectivity across the world with a view to fostering global economic development and China's own economic growth. However, the scale of the BRI, its transformative potential and China's changing international profile make the BRI increasingly difficult to consider as merely an economically motivated project. Rather, certain strategic factors and geopolitical outcomes of the initiative indicate Beijing's geopolitical aspirations behind the initiation of the BRI. In this regard, China's BRI resembles its most immediate historical counterparts: the Berlin-Baghdad Railway and the Marshal Plan, both of which were initiated as economic cooperation schemes but embodied certain geopolitical drives. These factors make the BRI not only a geopolitical design but, at the same time, makes it a subject to analysis through classical geopolitical theories.

Because of the scale of the BRI, no single theory of classical geopolitics adequately fits for a thorough analysis of the initiative. For this reason, Mackinder's Heartland Theory, the Sea Power Theory set by Mahan, and Spykman's Rimland Theory are employed in order to analyze different but interconnected components of the BRI.

The SREB, the land-leg of the BRI, connects China with Europe through the Eurasian Basin, and this makes the analysis of the SREB from the Heartland perspective considerably valid. In this context, SREB is analyzed mainly through two aspects of Mackinder's thesis. First of all, the usefulness of overland transportation to eliminate the threats and risks plagued its international and energy trades is an important geopolitical concern for Beijing. However, certain factors, like the fact that overland transportation is more prone to disrupt, its economic cost, and the relatively lower payload capacity of railroad transportation, prevent SREB from constituting any meaningful alternative to Beijing's seaborne trade. Secondly, in accordance with Heartland theory, the geopolitical influence of China across the Heartland regions depends on its capability to exert control over Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In the case of Eastern Europe, the lack of foreign policy tools in its inventory other than economic incentives, the lack of proper institutions between China and CEE countries and the CEE's already existing

trans-Atlantic ties limit China's influence there. In the case of Central Asia, because of the region's Soviet past and economic and political integration with the Russian Federation, China's geopolitical and economic influence greatly depends on a Sino-Russian accord regarding Central Asian affairs. On the other hand, the deterioration of Russian relations with the West makes Moscow more tolerant against the growing economic influence of China in Central Asia.

The MSR initiative constitutes the maritime dimension of the BRI and therefore becomes eligible for analysis from a Mahanian geopolitical perspective. In this context, the geopolitical value of MSR for Beijing hinges on its ability to help China develop into a genuine sea power. The infrastructure investment in the scope of MSR represents Beijing's efforts to consolidate its influence along the main shipping lines with its trading and energy partners. The geopolitical outcomes of MSR would vary in accordance with the regions attached to the initiative. One of the regions on which Beijing places utmost importance in the MSR is Southeast Asia. The region's investment gap and geographical proximity make Southeast Asia one of the logical targets of BRI. However, the regional disputes between China and many Southeast Asian countries, as well as the involvement of external powers in regional affairs, constrain Beijing's influence across the region. Compared with Southeast Asia, Africa represents another case in which China's geopolitical aspirations could become reality. The strategically chosen naval bases constitute another important dimension of Mahan's Sea Power Theory. The aggressive port-acquisition strategy of Beijing and the economic inefficiency of some port investments made by Chinese firms foster speculation about China's pursuit of naval bases coined as "string of pearls" strategy by Western scholars. Although there is not enough evidence for China's "string of pearls" strategy, it is more likely that China's first overseas bases could emerge in Africa rather than South Asia. Finally, the MSR also fuels speculation regarding the construction of artificial choke points, which is a historically and geopolitically controversial issue. Most recently, news about the financing of Nicaragua and Kra Canals has circulated in international media outlets. Although there is no official acknowledgement of China's involvement in those projects or no concrete steps for their construction, because of the pressing risks involving China's high dependence on the Malacca Strait as well as the project's economic efficiency, the

construction of the Kra Canal would serve Beijing's geopolitical aspirations in a greater degree.

The latest transportation scheme incorporated into the BRI is PSR. The ongoing phenomenon of climate change has increasingly opened the Arctic Ocean to human activities. PRC, as a "near Arctic state," has important stakes in the development of the region's emerging economic potential in terms of maritime navigation and the exploitation of the vast natural resources. The geopolitical outcomes of Beijing's involvement in the region are analyzed through Rimland theory, the geopolitical perspective set by renowned international relations scholar Nicolas Spykman. At first glance, the Rimland theory seems odd in analyzing the PSR because of the geographical properties of the Arctic Ocean as a closed-water body to international navigation for centuries. However, the melting of thick ice masses in the Arctic Ocean leads to the emergence of trans-Arctic routes and thus transforms the geopolitical properties of the region. China's main interests regarding the region are to capitalize on the shorter transportation routes among Europe, North America, and Asia Pacific and to participate in the exploitation of natural resources. The current state of Sino-Russian relations as well as the investment needs in the region's infrastructure provide an important advantage for China in the Arctic region. Therefore, the capitalization of the economic potential of the region would have important geopolitical consequences. Because exercising control over emerging "Eurasian Rimland" and shorter shipping routes among the world's most vibrant economic centers would fortify China's geopolitical position and eliminate the security threats that China faces in the Malacca Strait and Indian Ocean.

Finally, the pace of China's military development also signifies the geopolitical drives behind the BRI. In recent years, China has been pursuing an aggressive naval capacity-building program. Especially its emerging aircraft carrier units indicate that China could spread its geopolitical influence beyond its region. In this sense, it is likely that the expansion of Beijing's military influence will follow the maritime routes of the BRI.

CONCLUSION

The BRI was launched by the PRC in 2013 as a combination of infrastructure projects stretching from China to Europe, along the Eurasian land bridge and vital water bodies connecting China to its main trading and energy partners. The overland and maritime components of the initiative include more than 100 countries from five continents. Therefore, the BRI embodies enormous potential to transform the strategic and geopolitical fabric of the world. This potential effectively makes the BRI a geopolitical scheme and a subject of analysis in classical theories of geopolitics. The great extent of the project, on the other hand, makes it extremely difficult to analyze it from a single theory of classical geopolitics. For this reason, this thesis attempts to analyze different components of the BRI from different geopolitical perspectives and try to provide an answer to whether or not the initiative would yield desired geopolitical outcomes to the PRC, its composer and maestro.

The British geographer Halford Mackinder's Heartland theory is invoked in the evaluation of the SREB, the overland leg of the BRI. The general geographic overlap between the SREB and the Heartland Region creates a solid base for analysing the SREB from a Heartland-oriented geopolitical perspective. Another important factor that makes Mackinder's thesis relevant for such an analysis is that geographical connectivity occupies an important place both in the BRI and in his Heartland theory. As Mackinder argues that increasing connectivity through railroad expansion in Eurasia could bring the Heartland's power to the brink of world dominance, the boost of connectivity through infrastructure investments could potentially allow China to harness the envisioned strength of the Heartland for global influence.

The thesis argued that increasing China's outreach to raw materials and energy resources and ensuring its energy security are both important aspects of the BRI. Similarly, access to critical resources constitutes an important dimension of Mackinder's theory of the heartland. He asserted that thanks to the railroad revolution, the power dominating the Heartland would be able to access and exploit the vast resources of Eurasia and thereby eventually challenge the privileged status of the sea power. In this respect, the main driving force behind China's energy strategy regarding the Heartland region is to reduce

its dependence on seaborne energy supply lines, which are vulnerable to interceptions by sea powers, especially in maritime choke points like the Malacca Strait.

However, the evidence suggests that although SREB could expand its outreach to vast energy resources in Eurasia, certain considerations make China's involvement in the exploitation of these resources complicated. In this context, despite its longstanding concerns about the interception of its seaborne energy supply lines by external powers, diversification continues to be the chief element in China's energy policy. Beijing exhibits a degree of uneasiness towards overreliance on one single supplier and one single region to meet its energy needs. This factor illustrates why certain oil and natural gas pipelines between China and Eurasian suppliers have been operating under capacity. Even after the emergence of a favorable environment in Eurasia in terms of energy deals after Russian aggression against Ukraine and following Western sanctions imposed on Moscow, China remains committed to its energy diversification strategy. In this framework, while the volume of energy imports from the Russian Federation has increased following the Western sanctions on Russia, China has not refrained from scaling up its energy relations with other regions, especially with Middle East. Therefore, in light of the entangled nature of China's energy security as well as the current direction of BRI's investments, the SREB alone, in its current phase, could not respond to the geopolitical vulnerabilities of China's energy security despite enhancing its outreach to the energy resources of Eurasia at the same time.

The thesis argued that securing its trade routes is one of the central expectations of China from the implementation of the BRI. With regard to SREB, the reduction of its dependence on maritime shipping lines connecting China with its trading partners is the chief expectation behind the infrastructure projects of SREB. Beijing's maritime trade routes follow the same routes as its energy supply lines, so they are also vulnerable to interruptions. The strategic expectation from the SREB is to reduce China's overreliance on its maritime shipping lines through the construction and effective operation of railways on the Eurasian continent. Beijing's objectives regarding increasing railroad connectivity across Eurasia constitute a correlation with Mackinder's argument on the geopolitical consequences of the proliferation of railways in the Heartland region. For him, overland transportation through railways will fundamentally change the geo-economic and geopolitical realities shaped by the overwhelming influence of ocean-bound international

trade and thus by the primacy of sea power. Therefore, the thesis attempted to evaluate the geopolitical implications of increased railway connectivity within the SREB framework in accordance with the Heartland Theory.

The findings illustrate that, even if new railway routes could be constructed and efficiently operated as part of SREB, it seems unlikely that they would reduce Beijing's high dependence on seaborne transportation in any meaningful way. Both economic and geopolitical factors play their part in explaining why the railway connections could not yield the results that Mackinder argued. First of all, the railways can not outmatch maritime transportation in terms of the sheer size of payloads transported by means of seas and oceans, which provide global connections. Second, the international railways are prone to disruption in many ways. The risk embodied in railroad transportation also increases in parallel with the length of the railroad as well as with the number of countries along their way to their final destination. In this context, maritime commerce provides a much more secure way for the international transportation of goods across distant regions. The existence of more than one maritime connection among many regions in the world provides a strategic hedge for trading nations to redirect their maritime transportation to other shipping lines if a certain international waterway is blocked for various reasons. On the other hand, the alternative railway schemes between the regions are scarce, and their construction and maintenance are expensive and time-consuming endeavors.

Lastly, one of the central arguments of this thesis was that the PRC expects to enhance its political and economic influence across the regions incorporated into the broad scheme of the BRI. In this respect, the Heartland Theory is employed in order to assess the geopolitical influence of the PRC in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, where most of the SREB projects concentrate. Heartland Theory places an emphasis on Eastern Europe in terms of its geopolitical importance in global power relations. The region's geopolitical function as being a bridge to Western Europe makes this part of the world a significant geopolitical unit. Just like Eastern Europe, Central Asia provides strategic access to the Caspian Region, the Indian Peninsula, and the Middle East, which makes it suitable for analysis through the Heartland Theory in the same way as Eastern Europe.

The evidence suggests that, with regard to both regions, Beijing has certain advantages and disadvantages. The needs of economic development and the regions' investment gap

provide Beijing with room for maneuver in both Central Asia and Eastern Europe. In this sense, SREB represents China's carrot strategy, through which it could trade its investment in infrastructure and industries in regional countries for political influence over these regions. However, with regard to CEE countries, the main factor limiting China's success with regard to Eastern Europe is the lack of suitable tools other than investment opportunities and economic incentives in its foreign policy inventory. Thus, the mismatch between foreign policy tools and Beijing's ultimate aspirations prevents the creation of gravity through which CEE could fall into Beijing's orbit. The frustration in certain CEE countries due to the non-realization of their expectations through cooperation with China also leads to certain backlashes in the region. In this context, findings suggest that the BRI's investments and China's economic carrot could only result in CEE countries abstaining from taking sides against rather than taking sides with China.

In comparison to the CEE, China is in a more favorable position in Central Asia; however, its foreign policy objectives are also subject to certain constraints. Since the end of the Cold War, Beijing has become the primary economic actor in the region, and the investment gap as well as the developmental needs in the region provide additional opportunities for China. The main barriers to greater Chinese achievements are the lack of institutionalized relations with Central Asian countries and the possible resistance of the Russian Federation against Beijing's further capitalization of the region. On the other hand, the increasing deterioration of its relations with the West could force Russia to adopt a more benign position against China's growing interests in the region. In this sense, the SREB has the potential to satisfy Beijing's aspirations to a greater extent in Central Asia than in Eastern Europe.

The thesis invokes Mahan's Sea Power Theory in order to provide a geopolitical analysis of MSR, the sea component of the BRI. The global connectivity through oceans and establishment control over the them make up an important aspect of Mahan's thesis on sea power. The equal emphasis that MSR puts on global maritime connectivity and the speculations concerning the geopolitical aspirations of China behind launching a massive-scale infrastructure campaign make the analysis of MSR through the sea power perspective set by Mahan sufficiently appropriate.

The thesis argues that the furthering of China's economic and political development as well as the promotion of a China-centric global economic order constitute a significant part of the geopolitics of the BRI. From a sea power perspective, the progression of its maritime and commercial interests as well as the protection of its maritime shipping lines is an important dimension of China's policy within the scope of the MSR. First of all, the MSR initiative offers opportunities for China to enhance the markets for its international trade. Because the overwhelming majority of international trade is conducted through maritime commerce, the enhancement of the total capacities of ports also means the enhancement of the host countries' capacity to absorb more Chinese goods. In addition, through the implementation of the BRI, Beijing also seeks to promote a deeply integrated and China-centered economic structure in its periphery.

Although the MSR covers a wide range of countries, including developed ones, its effect would not be the same in all regions. Rather, the transformative effect and geopolitical consequences of the initiative would be greater in developing regions. In this sense, Southeast Asia is one of the target regions in MSR. With regard to Southeast Asia, one of the most crucial geopolitical prospects from MSR is to reduce the risks plagued the China's maritime commerce and energy supply lines, especially in the geographic nodes. The overdependence on Malacca Strait in its maritime commerce, which is coined the Malacca Dilemma by Chinese strategic thinking, represents just one of the instantiations of Beijing's strategic vulnerabilities. Secondly, China may be willing to use its economic leverage to solve regional disputes in its favor.

Therefore, it was one of the central arguments of this thesis that the PRC expects to secure its trade routes and eventually exert control over vital shipping routes through the BRI. In theory, the consolidation of the South Asian Rimland through infrastructure investment could allow China to bypass the Malacca Strait and reduce the risks of over-dependence on the strait for energy supply and transportation of goods. The China-Pakistan and China-Myanmar Economic Corridors constitute the backbone of China's hedging strategy against the Malacca Strait. However, these infrastructure schemes cannot genuinely eliminate China's strategic vulnerabilities. Because its shipping lines could easily be intercepted in the west of the Malacca Strait by other powers before reaching their destinations in the maritime infrastructure in Pakistan and Myanmar.

On the other hand, the thesis argued that BRI is essentially an instrument for enhancing its influence and promoting a China-centric economic order. China has certain advantages with regard to promoting regional integration in Southeast Asia, like its geographical proximity as well as the investment gap in the region. However, there exist certain constraints that prevent the full exploitation of MSR's full potential by China. Regional countries in general have deep concerns about Beijing's intentions in the region. For now, the most enthusiastic countries to participate in the initiative are those that have less contested claims with Beijing in regional disputes. In this regard, the MSR's ability to provide leverage in regional disputes is also limited. On the contrary, it is the regional disputes that are withholding the emergence of the true transformative potential of the MSR in geo-economic and geopolitical terms.

Another region in which China has important stakes in the framework of MSR is Africa as a whole. Africa represents one of the most underdeveloped regions of the world, and this makes it a natural destination for the BRI's infrastructure projects. The eastern part of the continent is on shipping lines connecting China with Europe and thus has strategic importance in terms of China's external trade and maritime interests. Secondly, the region is an important source of raw materials for China's industry and economy. The infrastructure investments of MSR as well as the overland infrastructure projects connecting the inner regions of Africa with the seas could increase China's outreach to the vast resources of the continent.

Compared with Southeast Asia, China stands in a more advantageous position in Africa. Beijing's image as an international actor is more positive in Africa than in any other part of the world, and regional countries compared with South Asian nations have fewer reasons to feel threatened by China's growing economic clout on the continent. Through the projects of the BRI, China would be able to trade its direct investments in African infrastructure and sales of Chinese industrial products for the much-needed raw materials. This, in turn, provides a mutually beneficial way of cooperating and a positive trade pattern between African countries and China.

It was argued in the thesis that the establishment of control over the main trade routes was one of the central aims of the PRC in the framework of the BRI. In this respect, Mahanian geopolitics provides an effective tool to assess the maritime influence of the PRC through

the implementation of the sea-leg of the BRI. Mahan's Sea Power Theory, like other classical theories of geopolitics, primarily concerns power relations. For Mahan, sea power has the instrumental value of establishing control over the oceans through which international trade is conducted. Because of the enormous extent of the oceans, absolute control is impossible to establish. Rather, by means of an effective navy and a sophisticated web of military bases, sea power could establish only a relative dominance over the main SLOCs connecting distinct economic units across the world. herefore, the oversea military bases strategically located in proximity to the main SLOCs are equally important as possessing a formidable naval force in Mahan's geopolitics.

In this context, the initiation of MSR as part of BRI as well as Beijing's aggressive investment strategy in foreign ports fostered the debates over the "String of Pearls strategy, China's alleged pursuit of possessing oversea naval bases. Although there is no clear evidence regarding the interconnection between the MSR and the so-called string of pearls strategy, the economic inefficiency of certain port investments by Chinese companies indicates that there may be some strategic motives behind the initiation of the MSR. In this regard, Beijing's investments in maritime infrastructure along the Indian Ocean and East Africa may be subject to dual use in the near future. In addition, it is more likely that the first maritime infrastructures that will be used by PLAN for logistical and strategic purposes will emerge in Africa than in Asia.

Lastly, the MSR also fuelled speculation about China's involvement in the construction of two artificial choke points: Nicaragua and the Kra Canals. Because maritime traffic concentrates in the geographical nodes, the construction of the Kra and Nicaragua Canals could potentially lead to the constitution of China's control over the main SLOCs, which would pass through these canals. Apart from their mere their strategic value, due to the fact that there already exist alternative routes between the oceans that could be connected through the construction of both canals, the two projects do not offer any breakthrough with regard to international transportation. Because of the shorter routes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans that it could provide, the Kra Canal still seems like an economically viable project. Nevertheless, the strategic factor, especially its chief concern to create an alternative to the Malacca Strait, drives Beijing to participate in the construction of the Kra Canal.

However, although China is almost the only country that could single-handedly carry out the construction of both canals, its realm of maneuvering will be limited by a number of factors. First of all, Washington may opt to use its leverage on Thailand to stall the construction of the Kra Canal by China. Secondly, the existing regional disputes between China and regional countries could cast a shadow over the implementation of the projects. In this context, China's efforts to push the Kra Canal further could therefore be perceived as the continuation of its efforts to tighten its grip over the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. Therefore, the project could easily evoke regional responses, which, in turn, would make the implementation of the project politically sensitive for Beijing.

With regard to the construction of the Nicaragua Canal, China is in a diplomatically more favourable position due to the state of bilateral relations with the Nicaraguan government. However, the political leverage of Beijing in Nicaragua could be offset by certain overarching geopolitical and strategic factors. First of all, China's involvement in the Nicaragua project could trigger a wider geopolitical rivalry with the US, in which Beijing has little or no experience. Secondly, the distance between China and Latin America would seriously reduce China's capabilities to protect its investment in this continent. This geopolitical challenge can only be offset by the establishment of naval bases in Latin America, but this step cannot be taken without taking the risk of fiercer competition with the US.

The Spykman-Rimland theory is applied to analyze the PSR, the recently incorporated scheme into the BRI. At first glance, it seems odd to analyze the PSR's focus on the Arctic Ocean from a Rimland-oriented geopolitical perspective. The theoretical demarcation of Rimland refers to those areas that are accessible to sea powers. The Arctic Ocean, on the other hand, did not allow high-frequency maritime navigation until very recently. However, the ongoing phenomenon of global warming has been changing the geographical conditions in the Arctic in a way to allow maritime navigation to a greater degree. For this reason, the Arctic Ocean not only turns into a navigable water body for commercial purposes but also has the potential to fundamentally alter the existing parameters in maritime transportation by allowing shorter shipping routes between Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Northern America. Thus, in the near future, it is more likely than not that the Arctic Ocean and its coastal region will exhibit the geopolitical properties of Rimland.

As the thesis argued that access to raw materials and exerting control over the main trade routes are important drives behind the BRI, the same is also true for China's keen interest in the Arctic with its ambitious PSR initiative. The initiative represents Beijing's logic as a trading nation to capitalize on the shorter shipping routes among the world's most important economic centers. Besides, Beijing also shows keen interest in the development of the vast and virgin natural resources of the Arctic region. With regard to emerging trans-Atlantic transportation routes, Beijing's utilization of these routes would yield certain economic and geopolitical benefits. Economically, the shorter routes would reduce the transportation costs of China's international commerce. In geopolitical terms, the new trans-arctic trade routes will reduce certain security risks attached to China's international transportation, especially those arising from its overreliance on shipping lines passing through the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait. Together with the BRI's overland corridors, PSR promises to efficiently divert China's international trade apart from the shipping lines passing through the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait. Due to the current state of Sino-Russian relations, the effective control of these new international routes by the Russian Federation also provides additional security for Beijing. Unlike the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, the trans-Arctic corridors offer undisrupted shipping lines passing through friendly waters.

In line with its growing appetite to exploit the potential of the Arctic region both in terms of natural resources and transportation lines, the PSR has an important function in Beijing's Arctic policy. China wants to take advantage of the investment gap and the need for infrastructure development in the region. Although Russia itself has ambitious plans for developing the region alone, it generally lacks the resources to meet the region's enormous demands. The other regional countries have been encountering similar difficulties for developing their holdings in in the Arctic. This creates an additional playground for China and its ambitious PSR in the Arctic.

Sypkman in the 19th century argued that the Rimland has overarching importance in geopolitical power relations between sea power and its continental peers. As a by-product of climate change, the Arctic coast has been emerging as a full-fledged rimland in the 21st century. In addition, the utilization of the shorter shipping lines could turn this once marginal region into the world's most important geopolitical unit. For these reasons, among the other schemes of the BRI, PSR embodies the most extensive geopolitical

potential. On the other hand, intimidation of Russia and other Arctic states, especially Iceland, by means of investment offerings could bring China to the brink of commanding this important geopolitical unit.

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Tarih: 07/07/2023

Tez Başlığı: ÇİN'İN KUŞAK VE YOL GİRİŞİMİNİN ÜÇ BOYUTUNUN KLASİK JEOPOLİTİK KURAMLAR ÇERÇEVESİNDE KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ANALİZİ

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Öğrenci No: N20130129

Anabilim Dalı: Uluslararası İlişkiler Ana Bilim Dalı

Programı: Ahmet AKTAY

Statüsü: Yüksek Lisans Doktora Bütünleşik Doktora

DANIŞMAN GÖRÜŞÜ VE ONAYI

Prof. Dr. Emel Gülden OKTAY

Detaylı Bilgi: <http://www.sosyalbilimler.hacettepe.edu.tr>

Telefon: 0-312-2976860

Faks: 0-3122992147

E-posta: sosyalbilimler@hacettepe.edu.tr



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Student No: N20130129
Department: Department of International Relations
Program:
Status: MA Ph.D. Combined MA/ Ph.D.

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Öğrenci No: N20130129

Anabilim Dalı: Uluslararası İlişkiler Ana Bilim Dalı

Programı:

DANIŞMAN ONAYI

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Student No: N20130129

Department: Department of International Relations

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