The Belt and Road Initiative and Sino-Russian Relations in Central Asia: Demolishing the Condominium?

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Introduction

There is a Chinese saying, often invoked of late: “A far-off relative is not as helpful as a near neighbor.” Though the phrase owes its popularity to new foreign policy initiatives on China's part, it is an apt description of China's approach to the states to its West from the beginning. China's relationship with the five Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) is long-running – dating from their independence from the USSR – and ever-deepening. At the same time, these relationships appear poised to deepen still further, and dramatically, in the near future, the result of their participation in the huge Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) announced in 2013 by Chinese president Xi Jinping.

This massive economic project, sometimes compared to the Marshall Plan, calls for a vast improvement in five areas, the five connectivities (*wutong*) – policy communication, transportation, unimpeded trade, currency circulation, cultural understanding *(zhengce goutong, daolu liantong, maoyi changtong, huobi liutong, minxin xiangtong*) in Eurasia. Concretely, it entails massive investment in infrastructure to “break the bottleneck in Asian connectivity” through the creation of a vast network of rail lines, highways, and pipelines, as well as streamlining border crossings (McBride). It is now considered an aspect of what is called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or, alternately, One Belt One Road (OBOR) (both written in Chinese, *yida yilu*), a program that has been described as Xi's signature foreign policy (Clover). This project also includes the Maritime Silk Road, a similar initiative aimed at increasing the *wutong* by building infrastructure along a string of ports from Southeast China to the Indian Ocean, traveling along the Horn of Africa to reach Europe via the Suez Canal.

If carried through as described, the BRI would be the largest such program since the Marshall Plan: in Central Asia alone, the Chinese government has concluded deals worth 30 billion dollars with Kazakhstan, 15 billion with Uzbekistan, and 3 billion with Kyrgyzstan (McBride). (A great deal of domestic investment is being undertaken as well, often on infrastructure projects that otherwise would likely languish without funding (Zhou).) The creation of this project has occurred simultaneous with other changes in Chinese policy toward Central Asia, notably toward the security situation there.

These changes have the potential to have profound effects on the region, both on the fragile republics of which it is comprised, and on Sino-Russian relations. The latter relationship has been described as a 'condominium' – in an area Russia had previously considered wholly within its sphere of influence – in which China dominates economically but Russia provides security. In the first part of this paper, I will examine the history of Chinese-Central Asian relations; the rhetoric surrounding the Chinese foreign policy initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (of which the SREB is a major part); Chinese grand strategy; and the major economic and domestic drivers of the SREB and BRI, in order to project the likely trajectory of Chinese policy in Central Asia. In the second, I will consider Russian Central Asia policy and how the two may intersect, and the likely effects of this intersection.

The Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative has been developed significantly since initial proposals were put forth. As currently conceived, it is comprised of six economic corridors: the China-Mongolia-Russia corridor; the New Eurasian Land Bridge; the China-Central Asia-Western Asia Corridor; the China-Pakistan Corridor; the Indochina Peninsula Corridor; and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor. Of these, both the New Eurasia Land Bridge and the China-Central Asia-Western Asia Corridor pass into Central Asia via China's Xinjiang Province, the former traveling through Kazakhstan into Russia and onward to Europe, and the latter traversing all five Central Asian republics and passing through the Middle East to reach Ankara ("The Belt and Road Initiative"). Already, significant work has been done: freight routes now exist between China's Zhejiang Province and Iran (via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) (Bozorgmher), from

Chongqing to Duisburg, Germany and from Jiangsu Province to Rotterdam, Holland, among others.

Though often viewed cynically, the BRI can also be conceived of as a response to pressing needs in the region. The Asian Development Bank has found that in Eurasia every year there is an $800 billion gap between the demand for infrastructure investment and available funds. Furthermore, the Central Asian republics are economically isolated, with intra-regional trade making up just 6.2 percent of the total international trade in the region (McBride.)

The BRI is structured in such a way as to allow the Chinese government to help fill this infrastructure gap while directly benefiting Chinese companies: BRI projects are funded by Chinese policy banks (e.g. the China Development Bank) or by the Silk Road Fund (funded by the Chinese government to $40 billion), and then undertaken by Chinese companies, many of them state-owned. These projects often are staffed primarily by Chinese workers (a practice that, in the past, has at times resulted in serious tensions between Chinese workers and the local population) ("The Grand Design of China's New Trade Routes"). Though the BRI is nominally directed toward increasing Eurasian connectivity, a fair number of projects –for example, one recent project involved building 30 greenhouses in Georgia ("The Grand Design of China's New Trade Routes") - would not appear connected to that goal, suggesting that the actors involved (Chinese companies, many of them state-owned, and Chinese policy banks) are not solely intent on improving connectivity.

The above-described is massive. If completed as envisioned, it will involve Chinese investments approaching 1 trillion dollars and span more than 60 countries, affecting over half of the world's population (Mansharamani). However, in Eurasia at least, it is not evidence of a dramatic qualitative change in policy; rather, it is part of a clear evolution in Chinese Central Asia policy beginning after the collapse of the USSR.

The New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor

Source: OBOREurope

The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor

Source: OBOREurope

The History of China-Central Asia Relations

China formally recognized the sovereignties of the Central Asian republics in 1991, shortly after the dissolution of the USSR. It moved rapidly to attempt to establish good relations with them, offering them loans and commodity credits and frequently hosting high-ranking visitors from the various republics in Beijing. There were several motivations for this charm offensive. Based on a survey of diplomatic documents, the City University of Hong Kong's JYS Cheng concludes their major goals included preventing the republics from recognizing Taiwan, allaying those countries' fears about the gigantic country not far from their borders, and securing acceptance of past Sino-Soviet border negotiations (Cheng). They were also concerned about the security vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the possibility of instability there, and, even more troubling, that Xinjiang might be influenced by the militant Islam perceived to be spreading there (Beeson). The government moved quickly to attain the relevant republics' affirmation of Xinjiang's borders and its status as part of China.

Concern about Xinjiang's economic development also played a major role in China's policy toward Central Asia. The intensification of trade ties between China and Central Asia actually began before China had formally established relations with the Central Asian republics; concern about how far the province had been left behind in comparison to coastal regions lead to a refocusing on Xinjiang-Central Asia trade in the 1980s. Border trade between Xinjiang and the Soviet Union officially resumed in 1983; by 1989 trade had reached 118.9 million dollars a year. In 1990 a rail link was completed between Xinjiang and Druzhba, a town in what is now Kazakhstan (Christofferson). However, because of Xinjiang's relative isolation from the rest of China, little of its trade came from or was directed to other provinces. A possible means of rectifying this was proposed by Xinjiang's governor in 1989; he called for a 'double-opening' to both Central Asia and the interior provinces (Christofferson). This call for increased integration in both directions would be taken up in the 8th Five Year Plan, put forth in March 1991.

That plan was issued in the context of unrest in Xinjiang that was partially attributed to economic influences. In 1990 the Baren incident, a coordinated effort by the Free Turkestan Movement saw 200 armed Uyghurs clash with Chinese forces and led to major unrest throughout the province in the following weeks, including in the provincial capitol, Urumqi. Approximately 100,000 Chinese troops are reported to have been airlifted into the province from Lanzhou (Clarke, 2011). This, combined with the unrelated unrest that occurred throughout China in 1989-1990 convinced the government that it could no longer tolerate the unevenness of China's economic development (China's inland provinces lagged far behind most of its coastal regions.) Changes in the new Five Year Plan included increased state investment in Xinjiang, especially in finding and developing hydrocarbons, an emphasis on the development in infrastructure and what Wang Enmao, then chairman of the ‘Advisory Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region CCP Committee' described as the opening and operation of the Eurasian Continental Bridge, more fully connecting Xinjiang's and Central Asia's economies (Clarke 2011). The region was to become a 'transshipment zone' between the inland provinces and Central Asia (Christofferson).

The policies, designed explicitly to avoid further unrest in Xinjiang by increasing its economic development and integration with both inland China and Central Asia, are not dissimilar to the SREB policies, albeit on a much smaller scale. December 1991 saw the creation of a five year free trade agreement with Kazakhstan. In 1992 the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan visited Beijing to discuss enhancing infrastructure and improving trade. 'Growth poles' with preferential tax policies not unlike the special economic zones on China's coastal provinces were created along Xinjiang's borders (Clarke 2011). During this time period China also reoriented its energy strategy toward Central Asia and Russia, resulting, as Australia National University's Michael Clarke observes, not only of its desire to pursue Xinjiang's 'double opening,' but from the fact that, as of 1993 it was no longer energy independent, and this provided a way to diversify its energy sources (it had previously been reliant on the Middle East) and thus improve its energy security (Clarke 2011).

In 1994 China's Premier Li Peng's visited Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia, which was productive diplomatically and in terms of maintaining the forward momentum on transnational trade. During this tour, Li discussed creating a "New Silk Road" between China and Central Asia, with its basis in modern infrastructure (Clarke 2011). Topics included trade and aid agreements (including a gas pipeline with Turkmenistan) border demarcation, and Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's treatment of Uyghur political groups. These foci largely cohere with the principles for Sino-Central Asian relations Li put forth at that time: promoting peaceful coexistence; promoting economic prosperity; non-interference in internal affairs; and respecting territorial integrity and sovereignty (Umarov)

As economic integration continued apace, and the country maintained its 'double-opening' strategy in the 9th Five Year Plan, relations between China, Russia and three of the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) became more formalized in 1996 with the signing of the "Agreement on Strengthening Mutual Confidence in the Border Regions" and then the "Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Strength in Border Regions." This so-called Shanghai Five then agreed to meet every year, and in 2001 with the addition of Uzbekistan developed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Olimat).

The intervening years were notable for several reasons. For one, 1997 – the year of the signing of the "Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Strength in Border Regions" – is the same year that Chinese strategic documents began to refer to Central Asia as its "strategic rear," with two principle goals enumerated: maintaining the country as a 'buffer zone' between China and Russia, and preventing its domination by any one country (Kulnazarov).

This time period saw the beginning of the Great Western Development (*xibu dakaifang*) policy, a major policy intended to improve the economic performance of China's far western provinces. This was to be accomplished by massive investments in infrastructure, industry and environmentalism, as well as concerted efforts (acknowledged for the first-time, but in fact long-running) at encouraging Han immigration to the majority minority region (Becquellin 359). The economic improvements that came with the Western Development policy would, in a very short time span, drastically increased China-Central Asia economic interaction: trade with Central Asia as a whole increased by a factor of three between 2002 and 2003, when it reached approximately 3 billion dollars. It also saw an energy-hungry China drastically increasing its investments abroad, particularly in Kazakhstan; by the late 1990s it had a large part in that country's energy industry, winning bids to develop two oil fields and signing an investment package worth 9.5 billion dollars, included in it a pipeline between Kazakhstan and Eastern China (Clarke 2011).

The late 1990s also saw the defining of China's borders with Central Asia. The 1996 Shanghai Five border agreement invalidated the borders agreed upon between China and the USSR and necessitated that the Sino-Kyrgyz, Sino-Tajik and Sino-Kazakh borders be renegotiated. In all three Central Asian countries, this process was highly controversial. By 1999, Kazakhstan agreed to split the disputed territory approximately 50-50, a move that was heavily criticized by the Kazakh media and opposition groups; as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reporter Bruce Pannier noted it was particularly ill-received because all of this disputed territory had previously been Kazakh (Pannier). In that same year China and Kyrgyzstan also came to an agreement on their mutual border; Kyrgyzstan would control 70 percent of disputed land, and China 30 percent. This was so sensitive an issue that the Kyrgyz president misled the public (and Parliament) claiming that no land was ceded to the Chinese, which nearly resulted in his impeachment (Osimat). A Tajik-Chinese committee in 2002 also agreed to a cession of land (though less than 20 percent) on the part of the Tajiks, one which was controversial enough in Tajikistan that it was not ratified by the legislature until 2011 (Pannier).

During this time period, regional stability became a pressing concern, for both China and the Central Asian republics. Low-level violence persisted in Xinjiang, including the assassinations of government officials and an attack on a military base. At the same time, in Central Asia security concerns were becoming increasingly prominent: in the aftermath of the Tajik civil war, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan emerged, mounting offensives against the Uzbek government and attempting to assassinate the Uzbek president. The group, which had bases in Afghanistan and traversed the territories of other Central Asian states in its offensives, deeply unnerved the Central Asian republics, and by 1998 Shanghai Five meetings were focused more on security than on borders as the Chinese' concerns about separatism and Islamic terrorism converged with those of the other members. Under these circumstances, and shepherded by both China and Russia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization came into existence (Clarke 2011).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, founded on June 15 2001 (and comprised of the original Shanghai Five, plus Uzbekistan) cannot be understood outside of the context of these security concerns. On that same date, the SCO member states signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism (which came to be known as the "Three Evils) which included provisions for the creation of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) to investigate and coordinate between the member states in dealing with the Three Evils (Beeson). As Khalifa University's Muhamad Olimat observes, it also "fully adopts China's conceptualization of security threats and its perspective on the 'Three Evils'" - that is, it conceptualizes them in such a way as to justify the tamping down of Uyghur political movements. The Convention obligates member states to share information about 'criminals' – generally political activists – and extradite them as requested (Olimat).

The SCO was also envisioned as fulfilling a larger role, however. Its charter includes among its goals: "to encourage efficient regional cooperation in such spheres as politics, trade and economy, defense, law enforcement, environment protection, culture, science and technology, education, energy, transport, credit and finance, and also other spheres of common interest," and "to facilitate comprehensive and balanced economic growth, social and cultural development in the region through joint action on the basis of equal partnership for the purpose of a steady increase of living standards and improvement of living conditions of the peoples of the member States" ("Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter"). During the SCO's first meeting, in September 2001, a proposal was made to set up meetings for the member states' respective economic ministers to discuss regional economic cooperation, and the next year China proposed the establishment of a SCO free trade area within 10 to 15 years (it has yet to be realized) (Cheng). A Shanghai Cooperation Bank has also been proposed (Pantucci).

Another enumerated goal was "to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good-neighborliness between the member States" ("Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter"). This appears to have been a genuine Chinese goal, especially in reference to Russia; the day after the founding of the SCO, the Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship was signed. Observers such as Raffaello Pantucci, Director of the Institute of International Security Studies at the Royal United Service Institute, tend to view the SCO as a vehicle for Sino-Russian rapprochement, its requirement for consensus for all actions a method to alleviate concerns about China's activities in the region (Pantucci 2015). It is perhaps not a coincidence that 2001 is the year that Chinese rhetoric and strategic documents began to discuss the desirability, and mutual benefit, of creating a "Continental Eurasian Land-Bridge" connecting Europe, East Asia and South Asia (Clarke)

The influx of US troops into the region after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks diluted China's, and the SCO's influence: the US functioned as a major source of funding and support for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, though Sino-Central Asian economic connections continued to steadily intensify (Cooley). Beijing in 2004 alone made loans totaling 900 million dollars to the Central Asian states (most of it to Tajikistan). Yearly large-scale SCO military exercises also continued.

This reorientation toward the US proved to be short-lived. Sino-Central Asian (and Russo-Central Asian) relations experienced a major turnaround in 2005. That year Kyrgyzstan experienced a color revolution, and Uzbekistan experienced a wave of riots that it violently suppressed. (In the city of Andijan, Uzbek troops fired on thousands of peaceful demonstrators who were protesting oppressive government policies and the arrest of several Uzbek businessman. More than 700 are believed to have been killed, in what became known as the Andijan Massacre (Mirovalev).) In the aftermath of these events, Central Asian rulers began to evince a certain discomfort with American democracy and human rights-promotion (the main source of the break came from the Bush administration's calls for an international investigation of the massacre (Beehner)) and turned towards the SCO's vision of shared interests, economic development, stability, and state sovereignty (Clarke 2011). (As evidence of its respect for state sovereignty and non-interference, as President George W. Bush and other world leaders were calling for an investigation into Uzbekistan's Andijan massacre, China offered its visiting president a 600 million dollar contract for an oil and gas venture (Cheng).) After its May 2005 summit the SCO released a declaration calling for members of the anti-terrorist coalition to set a timeline for their temporary use of SCO member states' military facilities, and later that year Uzbekistan canceled its agreement allowing the US use of its Karshi-Kanabad air force base (Clarke 2011).

And integration continued apace. In 2007. China, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan finally completed negotiations, begun in 2003, on the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline (CACGP.) This pipeline represents a significant increase in economic integration with the region, and is projected to provide approximately 40 percent of China's natural gas by 2020. It is also important in that it has broken Gazprom's monopoly on Turkmen gas (Olimat). China purchased shares in state-owned energy companies in several Central Asian states, as well as investing in oil fields and refineries (Eder). It was heavily involved in offering aid (in the form of low-interest loans) to Central Asia during that time period, primarily for the purpose of infrastructure projects. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the primary recipients. In 2009 a 10 billion dollar loan was offered to Kazakhstan (Laruelle). China's importance to the region increased greatly in late 2008, as the financial crisis affected both Russia's and Western companies' ability to invest money in the region and left China as the only investor for projects that would not immediately return a profit (Cheng). China became (aggregated) Central Asia's largest trading partner in 2009 (Indeo).

During that same period, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization declined to recognize the 'independence' of Russia-annexed South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Instead, the SCO, in its "Dushanbe Declaration," voiced its concerns about the situation in Georgia. While backing Russia's "active role" in resolving the crisis, it called on all parties to resolve their issues through consultation and negotiation ("Dushanbe Declaration).

Events in Xinjiang would again cause an intensification of that province's, and China's, engagement with Central Asia. The 2009 Urumqi riots, in which at least 197 were killed in clashes between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, inspired major changes, including the replacement of local government and party officials, an increase in security funding, and major new policies intended to develop the province. Laid out at the Xinjiang Work Conference in 2010, which was attended by not only Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, but also presumptive leaders Li Keqiang and Xi Jinping, these policies included the establishment of a cross-border Special Economic Zone on the Chinese-Kazakh border at Khorgos and major infrastructure funding so as to allow Xinjiang to become, as then-Premier Wen Jiabao put it, 'a gateway for mutually beneficial cooperation between China and other Eurasian countries' (Pantucci March 2015). By 2012 Chinese companies owned a third of the energy assets in Kazakhstan, and Beijing had inked deals to provide aid for the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad and signed large bilateral agreements with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Shustov) (with whom, that same year, it had also signed a strategic partnership agreement (Olimat).) The proposal of the Silk Road Economic Belt the next year, on September 7, 2013, should then be viewed as the result of a steady progression, rather than as a momentous change of direction: Sino-Central Asian economic and diplomatic connections had begun intensifying long before Xi announced his initiative.

The Present Situation

On September 7, 2013, in Astana, Kazakhstan Xi Jinping laid out his proposal for the Silk Road Economic Belt and shortly after, the Maritime Silk Road, later to become the BRI. Beyond the SREB, other noteworthy changes have occurred recently in China's relations with the Central Asian republics. One such change is a modest increase in military cooperation, and weapons sales, between China and the Central Asian republics; this despite the aforementioned China-Russia 'condominium' in which China dominates economically but Russia provides security. (Russia has military bases in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and those states are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led military organization including many former Soviet states – whereas China has no bases in the region and was until recently not a member of any security organization other than the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, of which Russia is also a member (Sautreuil).)

This has been most clear in Tajikistan, the site of Russia's largest military base abroad: in October 2016 10,000 Chinese and Tajik troops engaged in joint counter-terrorism exercises along the border of Tajikistan and Afghanistan (which Russia has declined to respond to, though Umed Partov of the George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution reports that it has caused anxiety in the Russian media) (Partov). These exercises followed talks earlier in 2016 that resulted in the creation of a security alliance (the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism) comprised of China, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan

(Martina). That same year, China agreed to construct 11 security checkpoints along the Tajik-Afghan border (Sautreuil). Less dramatically, in 2014 China constructed officers' quarters for both the Tajik and Kyrgyz armies, provided $16 million in military aid to Kyrgyzstan(Kucera) and promised “hundreds of millions of dollars” to Tajikistan (Swanstrom). Beijing has also begun to sell arms to the Central Asian states, including surface-to-air missiles to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and drones to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Sautreuil), as well as lighter weapons. One major concern is generally considered to be behind this new-found interest in security cooperation: desire to secure the stability of the countries in which China is making its massive BRI investments (Blank, Swanstrom, Sautreuil). Some also point to the influence of worsening conditions in Xinjiang province (Sautreuil, Blank), which began in 2014 – the same year that military aid started to increase in a meaningful way

The second major change in Chinese-Central Asian relations in recent years lies in the 2015 decision to expand the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a multi-faceted but security-focused organization originally consisting of China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to include India and Pakistan. (They will officially join in 2017.) This is the first time the organization has expanded. Expansion to other states had been a topic of debate in the organization since 2010, with Russia pushing for membership for India and China supporting its long-time ally Pakistan's accession (Stobdan). The benefit to Russia is clear: it allows the country to grow closer to Eurasian countries as it deals with the effects of Western sanctions (Kucera 2014b) and to deepen relations with India, with whom it has had a close relationship for decades (Patranobis). China's motivations are less obvious, in that adding two such major (and nuclear-armed) powers risks diluting China's power in the organization. (The organization is frequently described as China-centered (Kucera 2014b).) The enlargement has been traced to security issues – the desire to increase security coordination with India and Pakistan in light of increasing violence in Xinjiang, the US's gradual drawdown in Afghanistan, and of course the ever-increasing Chinese investment in Central Asia (Stobdan). The inclusion of Pakistan would be particularly useful, as membership in the SCO may allow that body to influence the anti-terror policy of a country believed to provide sanctuary to some of the terror and extremist groups (Tolipov). The expansion of the SCO to India would also be beneficial to China should it succeed in using the SCO as a platform for economic integration (Stobdan). Further, the decision has been linked to the new-found desire, under the Xi Jinping administration, for China to be viewed as the "regional security heavyweight" (Tiezzi) as well as Chinese attempts to better relations with India in context of its hope that that country will cooperate with it in building the Maritime Silk Road (Kucera 2014b). The ramifications of the SCO's enlargement (to include two countries that are technically at war with one another, as well as a country – India – with which China has tense relations and a border dispute) remain unclear: it is possible that the move will simply paralyze an institution that is already generally considered to be "more talk than action" (Kucera 2014b). This would be highly unwelcome to Beijing. Should it be successful, though, the move in all likelihood will be of some benefit to the SCO in accomplishing its anti-terror mission. It would further benefit China should it allow for warmer relations with India, which is highly skeptical of the Maritime Silk Road and which is increasingly moving towards the US (Lakshmi).

BRI Rhetoric

The discourse used to discuss and justify the Belt and Road Initiative by representatives of the Chinese government and Chinese Communist Party also merits investigation. It presents a coherent picture of the contemporary world as China sees it (or wishes it to be seen) and suggests a fixed place for the BRI in Chinese foreign policy. It also, for reasons to be discussed below, puts forth principles that are likely to dictate the evolution of the BRI and have major effects on the Chinese foreign policy in the future.

The rhetoric surrounding the Belt and Road Initiative is awash in, in addition to assurances of mutual benefit and cooperation, references to a network of often interrelated foreign policy concepts – for example, the 'Silk Road Spirit' (*sichouzhilu jingshen*). These make appearances in both inwardly- and outwardly-directed materials (speeches intended for foreign audiences, speeches intended for Chinese audiences, and CCP documents intended for cadres to study, etc.). It is not my intent to suggest that these present an accurate and complete depiction of the Chinese leadership's thinking regarding the BRI and SREB; nor that these principles will be strictly followed in the future. As George Washington University's Robert Sutter points out, there is a sharp divide between principles and practice in China's foreign policy (Sutter). The discourse around the BRI, however, presents an almost-coherent vision of the present and the future, one that is both plausible and highly advantageous to China. It is useful propaganda both when directed at the leadership of foreign countries (who may be enticed to move closer to the Chinese ideal world order) and a domestic audience (for whom it reinforces China's prominence and unique benevolence on the world stage.) In short, described is both an outline of the world order that China hopes to motivate participants in the BRI to assent to and move towards, and an outline of the kind of behavior that can – and cannot – be expected from China: the failure to conform with which would result in a severe weakening of the country's long-running discursive campaign. Below, I will discuss China's rhetorical treatment of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Belt and Road Initiative in order to examine the official rationale for this program. I will then analyze the implications of these rationale (in terms of the behavior that China is committing itself to and in terms of the means it may employ to work towards the world order it states is its goal) for future behavior, in terms of the trajectory of the BRI in Central Asia and beyond.

This web of rhetoric was not well-developed when President Xi Jinping proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2013 (Xi 2013a). It is instructive to compare that speech with a speech on the BRI that Xi delivered in late 2016 in Uzbekistan (Xi 2016a); the rhetoric employed surrounding the project has undergone a clear, coherent and targeted evolution. Though the former speech features many of the phrases associated with the BRI (e.g. mutual benefit (*huli gongying)* and community of common interest (*huli gongtongti)*) others are very notably missing. "To build together (*gongjian*): appears six times in the speech in Uzbekistan; the phrase *gongtong jianshe*, of which it is a contraction, appears twice. *Gongtong jianshe* appears only once in Xi's Astana speech, and *gongjian* not at all. In the case of the former speech, 'to build together' appears four times in the context: jointly build the Belt and Road Initiative. Twice, it is used in the phrase 'the principle of mutual consultation, mutual construction, mutual sharing' (*gongshang, gongjian, gongxiang de yuanze*.) The emphasis on building together is typical for later speeches – already in a June 2014 speech to the China-Arab Cooperation Forum (Xi 2014a) Xi used the word to build together 6 times.

Other phrases that would become mainstays of Belt and Road Initiative discourse are also absent in the policy's vague initial articulation. The phrase 'hand in hand' (*xieshou*) appears four times in Xi's speech one months later to the Indonesian parliament speech, in which he proposed the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Xi 2013b), but only once in the Astana speech. It appears seven times in the Uzbekistan speech. This coheres with an ever-increasing emphasis on the compatibility of the BRI with other countries' development plans; for example, an article published by the *People's Daily* (the official paper of the Communist Party) and the Chinese Communist Party news website, designed to be studied by cadres, discussing the key countries in the Belt and Road Initiative strongly emphasizes that the Initiative will collaborate with and complement already-existing programs in many of the states it passes through – e.g. Mongolia's Prairie Road program, Kazakhstan's Bright Road program, and Egypt's expansion of the Suez Canal (Du). The emphasis on the BRI as a collaborative endeavor is implicit in many of the rhetorical constructs discussed below as well.

Two 'spirits' occur prominently in official discussions of (and justifications for) the BRI.

The first is the 'Silk Road Spirit,' which continues to make frequent appearances in BRI discourse. The second is the Bandung Spirit (*wanlong jingshen*) after the 1955 Bandung Conference, a meeting of the leaders of 29 African and Asian countries in Bandung, Indonesia that has been described as 'laying the foundations for the nonaligned movement' ("Bandung Conference").

The Silk Road Spirit did not appear in either the Astana speech or the speech in Indonesia in which the Maritime Silk Road was announced. It was in fact first introduced in the official outline of the BRI, "Visions and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road." There, it was defined as something thousands of years old, passed down "from generation to generation," defined by "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit" ("Visions and Actions") In 2016 at the Belt and Road Initiative Media Cooperation Forum Wang Chen, the Secretary-General and Vice-Chairman of the National People's Congress (the Chinese government's legislative body) described the Silk Road Spirit (to an audience of journalists from around the world) in essentially the same way, before elaborating that it was based on the principles of 'joint consultation, joint creation, the sharing of that creation' (*gongshang, gongjian, gongxiang*)(Wang 2016).

The same year, the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, speaking in that country, used almost exactly the same wording in describing the Silk Road Spirit (Sun). In 2015 the Chinese ambassador to Turkey, speaking in Turkey did the same, before going on to describe the Silk Road Spirit as an antidote for a dark time: "As we face a weak worldwide economic recovery, and numerous and complicated international and regional situations, it is more and more clear spreading and expanding on the Silk Road Spirit is both important and precious" (Yu).

Xi Jinping himself, at the China-Arab Cooperation Forum in 2016, described it as characterized by several different points. These were: cultural learning (*wenming hujian*): in short, that no culture or social system is higher or lower than any other, and all are made richer by interacting with one another. (Here Xi also promises that China will stand in opposition to any discrimination against a people or religion.) Respect for different countries choice of path (*daolu xuanze*): only the citizens of a country have the right to say whether its social system is appropriate or not. Win-win cooperation (*hezuo gongying*). Advocacy for peaceful dialogue (*changdao heping duihua*). (In reference to this last point, specific mention was made of the crisis in Syria.)

The progression here is characteristic of much of the rhetoric surrounding the BRI: the anodyne (on the surface), essentially unassailable principles defining the Silk Road Spirit are elaborated on in ways that may be somewhat disquieting to at least an American audience. For the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, the Silk Road Spirit (whose existence is evidenced by the benevolent creation of the BRI) is an antidote to the 'complicated international and regional situations' bedeviling the world – situations in which the US is uniformly involved and which is renowned for its lack of interest in 'joint consultation.' Xi's speech is even clearer in its weaponization of the concept of Silk Road Spirit, calling for a respect for individual nations' sovereignty in implicit contrast to those states which might judge (and attempt to affect) the political and social system and the choice of path of countries that are not democracies. The call for the resolution of the crisis in Syria by peaceful dialogue is yet another implicit contrast with the United States. The Silk Road Spirit here, pleasant and inoffensive though it may sound, echoes the respect for sovereignty – and refusal to judge problematic behavior – that comforted Uzbekistan so much in the wake of the international condemnation at the Andijan massacre that it began to distance itself from the US and move towards China and Russia (which it did most clearly by joining the SCO's call for a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops in the region, some of whom were occupying air force bases on its territory.)

The Bandung Spirit seems to have been used sparingly in conjunction with the Belt and Road Initiative after its initial, prominent appearance in Xi's speech to the Indonesian parliament calling for the creation of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (and for the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank.) In that speech, he refers to the Bandung Spirit as 'a main standard for relations between countries,' one whose core is peaceful coexistence (*heping gongchu*) and the seeking of common ground despite differences (*qiutongcunyi*.) Importantly, he also says that the Bandung Spirit has made a 'great contribution' to the construction of the New Type of International Relations (*xinxing guoji guanxi*) This is an important concept in its own right, which will be discussed below. Xi elaborates on the Bandung Spirit further in an April 2015 speech entitled “Promote the Bandung Spirit, Advance Win-Win Cooperation” (Xi 2015a) in which he holds up the Belt and Road Initiative as an example of an action done in the spirit of the Bandung Spirit. A good deal of time is spent on describing the Bandung Spirit as bringing forth win-win cooperation and south-south cooperation, as well as specifically stating that China is not a threat to the world. However, the Bandung Spirit in this speech is more in the spirit of the original, nonaligned movement-originating Bandung Conference: it calls for pushing the international order and international system in a more fair and reasonable direction – one in which every country's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity are respected, as are its right to choose its own social system (*shehui zhidu*) and path of development (*fazhan daolu*.) This improved direction also involves opposing intervention into another country's internal politics and the imposition of one country's will onto another. In that speech Xi calls for a 'new sustainable security concept' that includes the solving of international issues by dialogue and for the end of 'Cold War thinking' (*lengzhan siwei*) and the outdated zero-sum game mindset (*lingheboyi de jiu guannian*.) Though the West, and the US, are not mentioned, the criticism of them is not subtle.

Though the Bandung Spirit, in Xi's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road speech, is given a more-or-less anodyne definition, the speech contains many parallels to the Bandung Spirit speech. In both, explicit calls are made to trust the PRC: in the Bandung Spirit speech, Xi states that China will continue to provide aid without any political conditions. In the Maritime speech, Xi directly says that China's development presents an opportunity for Asia and the world and not a threat. The Maritime speech, too, associates the Bandung Spirit-ed world embodied by the BRI and AIIB with a 'new security concept' – calling for the end to Cold War thinking and, in this venue, not simply for the solving of controversies with dialogue but with bilateral (shuangfang) dialogue – something that China has continually sought regarding the South China Sea; it has consistently refused to participate in multilateral negotiations. In keeping with the relative mutedness of the speech, outside (*yuwai*) powers are asked simply to 'respect the diversity of the region' (*zunzhong ben diqu de duoyangxing*.) The Spirit – which in appearance is both benevolent and associated with the dispersal of huge sums in low-interest loans – is one that, if assented to, involves assenting to the principles by which China justifies its behavior in the South China Sea, as well as to an implicit condemnation of the US.

Both speeches also mention the New Type of International Relations exactly once. This concept appears in Xi's 2016 Uzbekistan speech twice (where it is explained that achieving it, and a 'community of common destiny, is the BRI's goal), and in an article associated with CPC News' theory branch published by the People's Daily as an investigation into the ideological underpinnings behind BRI called The Belt and Road Initiative: Moving Toward a Community of Common Destiny" ("Tongxiang"). This concept itself is well-explored in a CPC News theory article that is part of a series on Xi Jinping's important speeches and ideas.

The concept, like so many Chinese concepts, claims to have win-win cooperation as its core value ("Xi Jinping zong shuji"). It also reflects the common aspirations of the Chinese people and the people of the world. However, though it affirms repeatedly this new international relations concept's inclusiveness, there is also much that certain countries would not appreciate. Threats to peace in the modern world include regional hotspots, terrorism, protectionism, and what the author calls hegemonism (*baquanzhuyi*) and 'New Interventionism' (*xin ganshezhuyi*.)

The need for a New Type of International Relations is justified by yet another idea repeated incessantly in BRI discourse, that it is necessary to adjust to (*shunying*) the tide of history (*shidai chaoliu*)one that has carried us past colonialism (*zhiminzhuyi*), past the Cold War and past a period in which any one country or organization can dominate the world. (This will be discussed in more detail below.) In the above article, Xi is quoted directly, from a speech in Moscow in May 2013: 'You have to evolve with the times, you cannot maintain a colonial mindset, a zero-sum, Cold War mindset, with your body in the 21st century and your mind in the 20th." It is because the world faces 'multi-polarity' (*duojihua*), globalization (*jingji quanqiuhua*), cultural diversity (*wenhua duoyanghua*) and an 'information society' (*shehui xinxihua*) that we should jointly build a New Type of International Relations based on win-win cooperation. As one would imagine, China itself has already adjusted to this new environment, and will never attempt to be an imperial power itself, expand its territory or present a threat to any country; it is only in a peaceful international environment that China can achieve its great national rejuvenation (*zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) and make its contribution to the world. A line, then, is drawn between the past – the West and its pattern of interventionism and exploitation; and the future – China and the mutual respect and profitable cooperation it represents and the Belt and Road Initiative embodies.

Like many of the concepts that would come to form the backdrop and justification for the BRI, the phrase 'Community of Common Destiny' does not appear in Xi's Astana speech (calling for the creation of the BRI), though the less sweeping and abstract 'community of common interest' appears several times. This is despite the fact that it first appeared in 2012 in Hu Jintao's address to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party ("'A to Z'") By the following month and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road speech, though, the phrase was a recurring presence in BRI discourse. In his Indonesia speech, Xi referred four times to a 'China-Asean Community of Common Destiny' (*zhongguo-dongmeng mingyun gongtongti*.) 'Community of Common Destiny,' removed from association with any specific group of countries, appears twice in Xi's Uzbekistan speech. It makes an appearance in both the Chinese ambassador's speech on the BRI in Turkey in 2015 and the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan's speech on the BRI in Pakistan, as well as in the official articulation of the policy, the “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.” (In the latter, building a community of common destiny is mentioned alongside building a community of common interest and common responsibility; however, the Community of Common Destiny is the only one that consistently appears separate from the other two.)

In Hu's 2012 speech, the phrase appears in this context:

> *“What I mean by promoting the idea of the community of common destiny is that as we promote this country's benefit we need to concern ourselves to a reasonable degree with other countries' interests, as we pursue this country's development we must promote other nations' joint benefit; as we establish an even more equal and balanced new model of global development partnership...we share the responsibility and duty to increase humanity's mutual benefit”(Hu).”*

To give an idea of the closeness associated with the concept, it appeared in the same speech in another context as well: “We will make all efforts to promote our cross-strait [Taiwanese] compatriots to unite and strive. We are fellow countrymen across the strait, we all belong to the Chinese people, we are a blood-related community of common destiny.”. Xi expounded on the issue usefully in a 2015 speech to the UN General Assembly, in which he officially linked the

New Type of International Relations with the Community of Common Destiny concept (Xi 2015b). In that speech, too, he linked the Community of Common Destiny with the future, implicitly comparing the new concept he put forth to the events of the 20th Century, specifically World War II. "Only through following the example of history can we avoid a repeat of the disaster (of the 20th Century.)" We, he informs the Assembly, "are standing at the beginning of a new era," mentioning the progress of multipolarization and the rise of emerging market economies (*xinxing shichang guojia*) and developing countries (*fazhan zhong guojia*) as part of an irreversible historical wave (*buke zudang de lishi chaoliu*.) In something of a rhetorical coup, he says that, in order to create a world suitable to the new circumstances, China will work to create a New Type of International Relations and a Community of Common Destiny by carrying forward and expanding on the goals and principles of the UN Charter.

In order to do so, he puts forth several proposals: "We are pursuing an innovative, tolerant and mutually beneficial future. We are going to promote harmony and at the same time embrace differences...We will build a partnership of mutual consultation and mutual understanding...We want to create a just and fair structure in which we can build together and enjoy its fruits together." Both of these last two contain passages of interest, despite their studied inoffensiveness; the former is elaborated on thus: "the principle of sovereignty is not only embodied in not violating the territory and sovereignty of each nation or intervening in their internal politics, but also should be embodied by maintaining the right of each country to choose its social system and development path." The latter: "no country can bring about stability from another nation's turmoil....a single-minded concentration on military force is an overbearing, unreasonable method, you are only going to hurt yourself, like dropping a rock on your own toes." Affirming the Community of Common Destiny, incarnated on earth as the BRI, implies an affirmation of the idea that the world can be divided between the modern and peace-loving and the retrograde and dangerous. The speech ends with assurances that China will never attempt to become a hegemon, and the assertion of its dedication to the improvement of the representation of developing countries in that body: “In the UN, China's ballot will always belong to the developing nations.”

Wang Chen, the current Secretary-General of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, in his speech to international media representatives entitled “Join Hands and Build a Belt and Road Initiative Community of Common Destiny” provides a useful description of the process by which such a community might be built. Using the same language Xi used in his speech on the BRI in Uzbekistan in 2016, Wang states that the BRI will be based on 'the principle of mutual consultation, mutual construction, mutual sharing' (*gongshang, gongjian, gongxiang de yuanze*) and be directed by the Silk Road Spirit with its emphasis on peaceful cooperation. It would bring about new energy and vitality for the peaceful development concept *(heping fazhan guannian*) in this new era. Employing a phrase that appeared in multiple other speeches: “The BRI is not a solo on the part of China; rather it is a symphony performed by the countries along that route; it is not about China's goals; rather it is designed to support every country's development; its purpose is not to create China's own garden; rather it is to build a flourishing garden that all countries can enjoy together, to give the world opportunity and give every country's people well-being.”

Chen's speech does briefly hit a somewhat harsh note, however, touching on the then-recently released Hague Tribunal ruling on the South China Sea. Despite the fact that we are entering a peaceful era, some problems do remain, he tells the audience, particularly the habits of unrelated countries to meddle in regional matters and provoke disputes. This ruling, he tells us, is a serious violation of international law. It is also contrary to impartial justice. China consistently upholds international law, and will persist in walking a path of peaceful development. It is staunchly working towards the maintenance of the peace and stability of the South China Sea; it is also working with directly-involved countries to resolve the issues in such a way that respects historical fact and follows international law. Using the utterly inoffensive language of peace and mutual benefit, 'certain countries' are constructed as outside of the Community of Common Destiny and hostile to it.

The idea tying together much of the discourse surrounding the BRI, as well as several of the other major international relations concepts discussed above, is that of the 'epochal wave' (*shidai chaoliu*.) It's a phrase that appears repeatedly in discussions of the policy; in Commerce Minster Gao Hucheng's article in the People's Daily, "The BRI: A Plan That Conforms to the Epochal Wave of Peace, Development, Cooperation and Win-win, and Advances Worldwide Cooperation" (Gao) most notably, but also in Xi's speech calling for the creation of a Maritime Silk Road and his 2016 speech in Uzbekistan and various party theory documents. Similar uses of epoch are present in other important speeches and documents as well: in a 2014 speech to the CPC's Finance and Economics Leading Small Group, Xi asserted that the BRI 'conforms to the requirements and the development aspirations of the epoch' (Xi 2014b). The official policy document on the BRI references the "new era, which takes as its theme peace, development, cooperation and win-win (*yi heping, fazhan, hezuo, gongying wei zhuti de xin shidai*.), and the new circumstances faced within it, as the reason that it is necessary the world carry on the Silk Road Spirit. The Chinese ambassador to Turkey, in a speech to a Turkish audience on the Silk Road Spirit, uses identical language to the same purpose; similar statements were made in a similar speech by the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan. The phrase 'epochal wave' (*shidai chaoliu*) appears also in Xi's speech to the UN about a Community of Common Destiny, his speech on the Bandung Spirit, and his speech to the Moscow Foreign Relations Academy on building a New Type of International Relations (Xi 2013c).

This idea of an epochal wave can be taken as vaguely Marxist in its conception of history as divided into epochs, and these defined by external conditions. As Xi says in his speech to the Moscow Foreign Relations Academy, "history gives evidence that, regardless of what complication it may encounter, history always moves according to its own rules, there is no force that can counter history's forward motion." He describes the world that has developed. "In this [the modern] world, peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit have become the epochal wave, the old colonial system has fallen apart, the Cold War period of opposing blocs no longer exists, no country or organization has the power to dominate political affairs." Later in the same speech he discusses, of course, the rise of developing countries and their people, saying that the shift in the balance of power – their ever-increasing power – is salutary for world peace; and speaks of the mutual connectedness of the countries of the world, a process ever deepening, saying that "the world is ever more becoming a me within you (*ni zhong you wo*) you within me (*wo zhong you ni*) community of common destiny."

Yet all is still not well. "In this world, humanity still faces many difficulties and challenges. The deep effects of the international economic crisis are still apparent. Protectionism is heating up. Regional hotspots flare up, one after another. Hegemony, power politics and interventionism are rising. Military competition, terrorism, internet security, traditional and non-traditional threats are interwoven together." To promote peace and development remains a heavy burden, There are many who, again, "have [their] body in the 21st century and [their] mind in the past." This will not do; one must keep pace with history. What does this mean? It means that "every country should jointly create a New Type of International Relations that takes win-win cooperation as its center, and the people of every country should maintain world peace and work for joint development." And, the speech says, China encourages mutual respect, opposes the division of the world into small and large countries the strong and weak, rich and poor are equal, et cetera. It opposes intervention into other countries' internal politics, and supports the rights of countries to decide their own system and path for development. Provided is a definition of why the modes of behavior China wishes to encourage, including the BRI, are not only appropriate, but the only reasonable response, to the epoch, and that US behavior is not appropriate to it.

The BRI's Place in China's "Grand Strategy"

It is important to consider the BRI's place in the context of other preexisting concerns and trends in Chinese foreign policy, and the trajectory that they would predict for the Initiative. There are several frameworks relevant to our discussion. One concerns what is called periphery diplomacy, which was the topic of a landmark work conference attended by the entirety of the Politburo, hundreds of senior officials and even the CEOs of state-owned enterprises (Zhao) in 2013, the same year as the articulation of the BRI. That conference merits consideration both as an outgrowth of longstanding periphery policy and as a moment in which a newer conceptualization of periphery policy may (or may not) have been introduced. It has been interpreted by different scholars in different ways; several of whose views will be examined. Another useful framework is an older description of China's grand strategy, which Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis in their book *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy* describe as the "calculative strategy." Other justifications bear consideration because they were articulated by prominent personages related to the Chinese government *before* the announcement of the BRI, and are commonly assumed to have influenced it. These include the March West and Chinese Marshal Plan strategies.

Striving for Achievement

The BRI fits most neatly into a Chinese strategy called 'striving for achievement,' which the Chinese scholar (and Dean of the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University) Yan Xuetong has identified as the underlying characteristic of recent Chinese foreign policy. In his article, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving For Achievement," Yan describes a policy shift that was crystallized in 2013 by a speech by Xi Jinping at the above-mentioned first-of-its-kind work conference on periphery policy. The shift Yan describes is from keeping a low profile (*taoguangyanghui*) – a policy adopted by Deng Xiaoping in 1990-91 – to striving for achievement (*fenfayouwei*.) Though the phrase was first used by Xi, he does not attribute it to Xi, but rather states that Xi formally presented a shift that was already underway, and made it his own.

In Yan's account, keeping a low profile is defined (quoting Dai Binguo) as 'being moderate and cautious, undertaking no leadership, raising no banner, searching for no expansion, not running after hegemony and being consistent with the idea of peaceful development,' its purpose being to (in his own words) "retain a peaceful political environment for economic development" (Yan). Yan asserts that the new idea, striving for achievement, is able to (and is intended to) create a better political environment for China's rise. The most important difference between the two strategies is that one, keeping a low profile, prioritizes the development of China's economy in international relations, whereas the other prioritizes international politics, or, as Yan says, "making friends."

Yan justifies the wisdom of this shift to striving thus: "The key necessary condition for a major power to rise up is to establish its international leadership based on solid strategic credibility. A rising power cannot build up its global strategic credibility without providing security protection and economic benefits to other nations, especially its neighbors" (Yan). Credibility here, somewhat oddly, refers to morality; it is "the lowest level of morality for an international leadership to be accepted by other states." Yan uses the term to 'moral realism' to describe this idea, that in order for a state to assume global leadership, and to "establish a new world order," (which he takes to be China's goal) it must be considered to be moral, something that requires proactive action to accomplish. The low profile China was keeping, then, cleared the way for its economy to improve, but not for the country to be 'rejuvenated' (which he defines as "catching up with the United States in terms of comprehensive national power.') (Consistent with the BRI discourse discussed in the previous section, Yan sees striving for achievement as very focused on the United States, and on competing with it.) Of interest to us: according to Yan, following the logic of striving for achievement, China must disregard its non-alignment principle and begin to create formal alliances; he envisions a competition for alliances with the US.

After analyzing several major speeches and policy documents regarding the striving for achievement concept (including the Xi speech that introduced it) Yan suggests that in concrete terms several things follow from it. As Xi suggests, China will develop closer relationships with its surrounding countries, cooperate with them and ensure that they benefit from China's success. In its dealings with them (as per State Councilor Yang Jiechi) China will emphasize justice, fairness and morality, rather than economics. Its cooperation with them will include, in contrast to the keeping a low profile idea, deepening security cooperation. (In his speech at the periphery diplomacy conference, Xi specifically mentioned improved regional security cooperation as one of four key components of the new turn in strategy (Heath 2013).)

Were Yan to be correct it could have major effects on Central Asia. First among them is that, should China begin to make formal alliances, the most obvious choice for a formal ally would be Russia. The effects of this on Central Asia are hard to predict; they might be negligible, but a large increase in mutual trust between the two countries would likely rob the Central Asian republics of the ability to leverage one against another, a major feature of many of their foreign policies, and a key tool to avoid domination by any one of them. A more realistic possibility would be avoiding the adoption of an alliances-based foreign policy but an increase in security cooperation outside of the SCO. This is something that is already apparent, for example, in China joining with Tajikistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan to create the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (Martina). An increase in such cooperation has the potential to upset what has been called a China-Russia condominium (Lang).

Periphery Diplomacy

While clearly a real shift in Chinese foreign policy was articulated in and after the 2013 periphery diplomacy conference, there are noticeable continuities with Chinese policy as well. It is not a terribly original observation that China has a very long border, one that is extremely difficult to defend (particularly in the north and northwest, where it was vulnerable to nomadic peoples.) From the Qin dynasty (beginning 221BC) on, China has been forced to deal with periodic incursions from nomads to the north, a process that resulted in both defensive (e.g. the Great Wall) and offensive measures; the core of its strategy, then as now, was defense through development (Bhattacharya). China embraced a variety of diplomatic maneuvers in order to pacify its borders and neutralize the threat from these nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, including the tributary system and what is called the jimi (loose reins) system. The former, often misunderstood, was not a system of suzerainty but of hegemony: the tribute-paying states remained autonomous actors and, in some circumstances, would in essence receive payment from China rather than the reverse; China would also, when weak, pay tribute to stronger states (Buzan). During the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279AD) the empire at times actually paid tribute to the Khitan Mongols, rather than the reverse (Bhattacharya). However, as the University of Delhi's Abanti Bhattacharya notes, the method generally used in diminishing the threat from the more unruly nomadic groups to China's north (as opposed to the non-nomadic tribes to the south) starting with the Tang dynasty (618-907AD) was the 'loose reins' system (Bhattacharya). This involved the 'incorporation' of nomadic groups into the Chinese empire. As described by the University of Exeter historian Jeremy Black: “Their chiefs were given Chinese administrative titles, but continued to rule over their own people in traditional fashion” (Black). This did not prevent invasion by the Mongols, who in the 13th century AD occupied the empire, proclaiming the creation of the Yuan dynasty. After the reassertion of Han control in the fifteenth century, the empire adopted the policy of “the slow and systematic assertion of control over these outer regions in order to protect the Han from incursions by nomadic cavalry." The tributary system at this point continued through onto the end of the empire's final dynasty, the Qing ("The Geopolitics of China").

Even the border areas considered today to be within the Chinese state were problematic following the fall of the Qing dynasty; for long periods of time the Chinese government controlled only part of Tibet, and part of Xinjiang, with Soviet support, declared its independence. Defining and securing borders (e.g. securing India's recognition of Tibet's status as part of the PRC) were major goals in the diplomacy of the Chinese state in its early years (Bhattacharya). As discussed above, it has played a defining role, on a practical level, in guiding Chinese policy towards its west, including the various not-overly-organized attempts made at maintaining stability in Xinjiang (e.g. economic development attempts, security crackdowns and the founding of the SCO), and the larger-scale Great Western Development program.

It also played a part in more abstract CCP conceptions of international order, especially after 2000. The periphery was defined as being of "primary importance" to foreign policy for the first time at the 16th Party Congress in 2002 (Swaine 2013). 2003 saw then-Premier Wen Jiabao coin the phrase "good neighborhood, secure neighborhood, wealthy neighborhood," to describe the country's goals for its periphery (Zhang). In 2005 Hu Jintao put forward the ideas of a Harmonious World and Peaceful Rise, which had as their basis in part the idea that, in addition to a peaceful rise, a peaceful domestic environment would not be possible without a peaceful international environment (Wang) an idea with clear echoes of the conceptualization of the world guiding Chinese 'foreign' policy for over a millennium: foreign policy as primarily a means to prevent internal issues. At the same time, the discourse among Chinese scholars and analysts was already beginning to reflect the idea that

"One, it served as an arena for safeguarding China's national security, upholding its

sovereignty and territorial integrity. Two, it was related to the sustainable development of economy and a provider of its much-needed energy and other resources. And third, it was linked to China's ultimate growth as a major power" (Swaine).

Swaine identifies the two main changes in China's recent periphery policy in comparison to the above (having surveyed Chinese discourse on it) as: a newfound assertiveness toward territorial disputes and the creation of an emphasis on using "China's growing economic clout to create an enduring, integrated set of relationships with peripheral states that will ultimately alter their incentive structure" in such a way that helps China – with, of course, avoiding frightening the periphery into the arms of the US always on their minds (Swaine 2013). Examples would include the BRI and other transnational development projects. The recent shift is not then between lying low and working actively to create a new environment, but a shift from attempting to pacify the periphery to an attempt to gain its support.

Bhattacharya's interpretation of the shift described in the 2013 work conference has similarities to both scholars' ideas. She, too, sees no evidence of this new conceptualization of periphery policy as having a security aspect. Instead, she sees it as a reaction to both China's economic slowdown (and security situation in Western China) and to the US's 2010 'pivot to Asia': an attempt to "de-center the US in Asia" and to increase its influence globally; even (as suggested by much of the Chinese rhetoric, particularly that discussing the epochal wave) a way of building a new "global economic and political order" (Bhattacharya).

The "calculative strategy"

It is worth considering the BRI in terms of the foreign policy strategies that (as many observers would have it) have been supplanted in recent years by a new strategy of which the BRI is a part. One such is what Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis characterized as China's 'calculative strategy,' which they describe as a pragmatic policy whose goal is 'geopolitical quiescence' so that China can achieve rapid economic and technological advancement – and reach its goal of increasing its comprehensive national power – without having to deal with security competition.

Comprehensive national power (*zonghe guojia shili*) is a concept that is viewed by Chinese strategic planners as an aspect of strategic deterrence, and is in fact comprehensive, including: military forces, economic power, diplomatic influence, scientific and technological capabilities, and political and cultural unity (Heath 2016). It is viewed as a means to "strengthen[ ] the Chinese state while recovering China's centrality in international politics" (including by displacing the US) (Blackwill) as well as of "war control" - controlling the international environment to make war less likely, prevent unintended escalation and strengthen China's position if it should break out (Heath 2016). In 2002, the report of the 16th Party Congress designated the following 20 years as a "strategic window of opportunity" in which comprehensive national power could be increased because of the predicted stable international environment and continued capacity for economic growth (Yamaguchi). As an avenue to improve China's economic power and diplomatic influence, the BRI would appear to be part of the strategy that Swaine and Tellis identified, despite the apparent discontinuity between Chinese foreign policy today and when they posited the "calculative strategy."

Underlying this calculative strategy is what Swaine and Tellis describe as "constrained maximization": China attempting to increase its power in terms of a variety of issues, "in as non-provocative a fashion as possible to avoid precipitating those regional or global responses that would seek to retard the growth of that power," by, for example, balancing against it (Swaine). The principle elements of this strategy, which they assert have been guiding Chinese foreign policy since the 1980s, are a focus on economic growth and the maintenance of amicable international relations; restraint regarding the use of force; and greater involvement in regional and global politics and in organizations such as the UN. (In Yan Xuetong's telling, the switch from keeping a low profile to striving for achievement could be considered the continuation of the calculative strategy by other means. As he points out, China's rise, by its very nature, leads to anxiety in other powers, and the pivot to Asia occurred despite what Beijing viewed (in Yan's analysis, at least) as that country maintaining its low profile (Yan).)

This strategy is the result of several factors: the country's need for foreign financing and technology to achieve its goal of attaining comprehensive national power; the fact that it cannot hope to dominate the countries on its periphery, due to their relative power and orientation towards outside powers; the relative strength of the other great powers (i.e. the US and Russia); the recognition that the country has domestic problems that must be remedied before it can be deemed to have reached its goal (which Tellis and Swaine assert is, essentially, global recognition of its greatness); the lack of a perception of international threat; and leadership without the charisma or claim to legitimacy to chart a risky path. Most of the above have weakened, though not been removed, as factors. Xi Jinping's charisma and legitimacy are greater than that of the last several Chinese leaders, though they are not unchallenged; and the perception of international threat has been increased by the US pivot to Asia; the US remains relatively stronger than China, at least militarily; the country's domestic problems have quite possibly increased. Perhaps the most clear change, and the one that would allow for the creation of the BRI, is the effect of China's increase in relative strength on its ability to exert influence on its periphery.

That strategy, as Swaine and Tellis argue, results in an orientation toward convincing the US and other great powers that China's rise is inevitable, and perhaps even desirable, and will prove to be stabilizing regionally and globally, to prevent either the US or another power from making attempts at containment. Propagated, they says, is an idea of “'a kind of hegemonic stability theory' with Chinese characteristics.” Though the emphasis on the US may have diminished (as suggested by the discourse on periphery diplomacy and BRI rhetoric) the BRI provides a means by which to invest huge sums of money, and thus accrue huge amounts of diplomatic influence, “in as non-provocative a fashion as possible” - placing these investments in the context of a grand economic and cultural project and designating all participants as equal members; the advantage over carrying out said investments in an incoherent manner and waiting for them to be interpreted by the receiving countries is clear. The above-mentioned rhetoric, with its own emphasis on stability, also would function to attempt to demonstrate that the rise in international influence being accomplished through the BRI (intentionally or otherwise) does not call for any strong reaction. The BRI would thus, by Swaine and Tellis' logic, be the maximally assertive action that the Chinese leadership believes achievable without resulting in a backlash, in context of an international environment it still cannot hope to dominate. Presuming that the calculative strategy was and is a useful framework through which to view Chinese foreign policy, suggested is a rather non-aggressive policy on China's part, one focused on avoiding war before winning it and that views increasing its comprehensive national power – its relative power, rather than its dominance or its territory – as the main end. It would also seem to suggest that China's decision to avoid provoking Russia in Central Asia, and to avoid appearing as threatening to the Central Asian republics, is part of a coherent, calculated and long-term strategy, one unlikely to change until China's aspirations for greatness are achieved.

The University of Oxford's Rosemary Foot, writing in 2005, similarly sees the Chinese leadership making a concerted effort to improve bilateral relations with its neighbors, and perceives this to be for the purpose of preventing hostile reactions to its growing power – although she considers this to be something of a break with past policy and its long-running 'victim mentality.' She dates this change to 1997, and asserts it began with a recognition that there was a growing perception of a “China Threat” amongst Southeast Asian countries (Foot) It was in 1997 that China began to make active efforts to improve bilateral relations with many of the countries in its region, by means of trade and otherwise; it is also when the "New Security Concept" was introduced, with its emphasis, very strongly echoed in rhetoric surrounding the BRI, on mutual trust and cooperation and the end of an outmoded Cold War mentality. She points to a 1998 Ministry of Foreign Affairs report which articulated this strategy further: to evidence that China was a status quo power which "basically accepted extant regional rules of international and regional order while trying to moderate these rules and norms through existing international institutions and procedures" (Foot, 157)- an apt description of much of the discourse surrounding BRI, particularly its frequent attempts to rhetorically normalize its behavior in the South China Sea. Foot makes much the same point that Swaine and Tellis do – that it would be consistent with Chinese stated goals, and with observable fact, to posit that the intent of the program begun in 1997 is to prevent resistance to its 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi.*) She goes on to observe, however, that from a realist perspective the goal of this new program likely is to attain a level of influence whereat China can achieve its concrete international goals without using coercion, and that this too is supported by, for example, the government's many attempts to drastically expand on multilateral organizations of which it was a part (i.e. to expand the SCO's role into trade) and create huge new ones, such as a floated East Asian foreign trade agreement. Goals might include, in this vision: "the formation of an Asian FTA led by a dominant Chinese economy and capable of giving the region a powerful voice in bodies such as the WTO, and at a later stage the formation of an East Asian or even pan-Asian security organization that might replace or reduce the need for the US-led "hub-and-spokes" security architecture" (Foot, 163). In this latter, implicit would be a desire to increase Chinese relative power and influence in comparison to the US. This vision, in either interpretation, would suggest (as has been borne out already by the creation of the AIIB, BRICS organization, etc.) an increase in the country's participation in multilateral institutions; it diverges from Swaine and Tellis' analysis primarily in its lack of optimism that the country will not attempt to use its newfound influence to its advantage (or to make major changes to the international environment) until such time as it has completed its 'rise.' Unlike the "calculative strategy," Foot sees concrete moves against the US in the international community as likely, of the sort probably suggested by its creation of the AIIB, the BRIC and its rapprochement (with its zero-sum implications for the US) with the Philippines. However, as with much of the above, implied is that Central Asia will have only a minor part in all of this; the orientation is towards the US.

This is supported by Michael Clarke's reading of the Chinese discourse on hegemonism. He, writing on China's relations with its periphery to the West, concurs with Tellis and Swaine that China's steady deepening of relations with the Central Asian states can be traced back to its early-nineties reevaluation of its foreign policy in light of the end of the Cold War, and that the basic thrust of the goal of this new foreign policy was to facilitate the country's peaceful rise by creating a harmonious international environment. However, he observes that the deepening of relations with the SCO countries was accompanied by overt attempts to throw off "hegemonism" (that is, US-primacy) (Clarke 2010) Hegemonism, specifically, is a term used in the joint statement regarding Sino-Russian strategic partnership agreed upon at the sidelines of the first meeting of the Shanghai Five in 1996. Calls for respect for sovereignty and non-interference, among others, were also made in this statement, though the US is not directly criticized; it is asserted that it is not directed at "any third country" (Clarke 2010) In 2005, after cooperation with the Bush administration had lost its luster, that year's SCO summit was the site of a joint call for all SCO member-states to place a timeline on the temporary use by an outside power of their infrastructure, and the stationing of troops on their territory. The following year, Uzbekistan, an SCO member state, canceled its agreement to allow the US use of its Karshi-Khanabad air base. (That cooperation with the US lost its luster in the first place, Clarke attributes to the triumph of China's rhetoric/policy in favor of stability non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs after Kyrgyzstan's color revolution and the Andijan incident.) These attacks on the behavior of an unnamed, hegemonic and intervention-prone other country obviously also are present in large number in BRI discourse.

If BRI discourse is used in the same way as SCO anti-hegemony discourse, it potentially could point to future attempts to orchestrate other foreign policy reorientations in current US allies. The efficacy of this approach is evidenced by Thailand's military junta's strengthening of ties with China following US condemnation, and penalties, directed at its 2014 coup (Chachavalpongpun). This has implications for all undemocratic states on China's periphery – though perhaps less so for Central Asia, given the US's seeming disinterest in the region. It also suggests, again, that Beijing's foreign-policy priorities primarily concern the US.

Precursor Plans

The "March West" strategy, as articulated by Wang Jisi, Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, also discusses a US-oriented rationale for the creation of the SREB (he does not allude to anything resembling the Maritime Silk Road.) This March West strategy is notable for several reasons: the prominence of the personage putting it forth; the fact that it was first published, in the state newspaper the *Global Times (huanqiu shibao)*, in October 2012, not long before the announcement of the SREB strategy; and the fact that it is considered to contain significant points of overlap with the SREB (Dong). That strategy, which Wang characterizes as a re-balance rather than an American-style pivot, has at its rationale both domestic and international concerns. In fact he frames it as in part an elaboration on the Great Western Development (xibu da kaifa) policy – as a way to develop, and thereby pacify, impoverished Western China. It also focuses on such long-running issues as ensuring the free flow of energy and other important commodities throughout the region (which is to say, from Central Asia to China); improving economic ties with neighboring countries; and coordinating with them against religious extremism and separatism. It further advocates that Beijing try to improve people-to-people connections and attempt to convert its economic dominance to soft power (Wang) – a strong echo of much of the above.

His geopolitical justifications for the wisdom of the March West are several. He posits that there is a likelihood that certain governments in Eurasia (which he does not name) can be expected to face serious political instability in the near future, which would have serious consequences for China, and that concerted attempts to improve these countries' economies could prevent this outcome. More strikingly, he observes that these countries are not, and are highly unlikely to become, regional partners for the United States, and that the region does not have that power's attention, especially after the "pivot to Asia." By increasing its emphasis on Eurasia, Beijing could sidestep the strategic competition in East Asia that, he says, is beginning to look more and more like a "zero sum game" (*linghe geju*). In fact, the article envisions a rebalancing of objectives toward Eurasia as a way to increase cooperation and mutual trust (*huxin*) with the United States, as both countries' interests in the region lie in maintaining regional stability.

A second plan with obvious parallels to the BRI was presented in 2009, this time by a Chinese government official. That year, Xu Shanda, then deputy director of China's State Administration of Taxation, submitted to the Department of Commerce the "Chinese Marshall Plan," a plan that the Xi administration to a great extent has followed (Zhou). Advocating that China attempt to replicate the US's post-World War II Marshall plan, it was created with the intent of dealing with the post-financial crisis decrease in foreign demand and the Chinese production overcapacity associated with it. It advocated the use of foreign reserves to offer RMB-denominated loans (generally referred to as *yuanzhu*, assistance) to developing countries, which would then employ Chinese companies for infrastructure and construction projects (Fang). To do this it advocated the creation of a government fund not unlike the Silk Road Fund. The ends to be achieved by this plan included: the transformation of excess capacity to held debt (*zhaiquan*); assistance in the transformation of the RMB to a reserve currency; 'reform' to the global economic order and financial system; and an increase in foreign demand, which would give the country time and funds to complete its transition to a consumption-led economy (Fang).

This policy would suggest that the BRI is a vehicle for increasing China's comprehensive national power, in economic terms and by decreasing the leverage that the dollar's reserve currency status give the US in the world economy, though little other than economic policy is implied. (The use of the term Marshall Plan and the references to these low-interest loans as 'aid' do both suggests a soft power aspect, however.) The fact that the SREB and BRI can be justified by so many rationales, and plausibly be said to have so many goals in mind, suggests that despite its obvious role in foreign policy there are many more drivers in play than simple foreign policy considerations. Below, major drivers are explored.

Major Drivers

Geopolitical agenda aside, there clearly are other compelling drivers for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the entire Belt and Road Initiative. As discussed above, a quiescent Xinjiang is an extremely high priority for Beijing, a lodestar around which both domestic and foreign policy revolve, and the improvement of Xinjiang's economy remains, in decision-makers' minds, the most effective tool to do so. Given that violence in Xinjiang shows no signs of abating ("Eight Dead") this will probably exert at least as much influence on the SREB as geopolitical considerations vis a vis the United States.

As discussed above, controlling its periphery has been a long-running Chinese concern, and avoiding failed states to its West has been a major priority since the Central Asian republics declared their independence (and Wang Jisi confirms the relevance of these concerns to his proto-SREB when he worries about Eurasian states on the verge of collapse.) This, too, is unlikely to cease to be a major Chinese foreign policy consideration, as these states seemingly remain fragile –February 2017 saw protests over an opposition leader's arrest in Kyrgyzstan, the liquidation of two banks in Tajikistan and police cracking down on protesters protesting the arrest of a newspaper editor in Kazakhstan(“Kyrgyzstan: Politician's Arrest Sparks Protests Threatens Unrest”); (“Tajikistan: Bank Liquidation Shows Threat of Financial Weakness”); (Toleukanova).

The economic drivers, mentioned only tangentially above, are also clearly a major impetus for the Silk Road Economic Belt and Belt and Road Initiative (and in the minds of some scholars, such as. the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's Jiayi Zhou, the main impetus) (Zhou). Most simply, as the world's largest trading nation, the attraction of improving connectivity with other markets is obvious, and the Chinese focus on this issue is evidenced by the fact that projects that have secured funding as part of the BRI all provide data on the degree to which they decrease travel time and cost from China (Djankov). In addition to simplifying transit to markets in Eurasia and especially Europe, increased investment in the countries on the PRC's periphery has the potential to assist in the development of their economies and therefore their ability to function as markets for Chinese goods.

Overcapacity is another major issue. Overcapacity actually was an issue in the Chinese economy even prior to the 2008 global financial crisis; the Chinese reaction to that crisis, however – which involved massive stimulus into rail, housing, construction and other already-distorted sectors of the economy – significantly exacerbated the problem (Zhou). The Initiative – and increase in construction both internationally and domestically – is viewed as a means to address the pressing overcapacity in steel, iron, concrete and other related products that domestic demand cannot absorb (Fix). To an extent, it would be a sort of government-led stimulus whose purpose is to support loss-taking domestic companies and avoid major layoffs. (The government is already anticipating that state-owned enterprises will layoff approximately 1.8 million Chinese workers due to steel and coal overcapacity, most of that concentrated in the country's Northeast

("China Expects").) Echoing Wang Jisi's suggestion that the Initiative will buy time as the Chinese economy transitions from investment-led to consumption-led, some suggest that, as the multiplier effect of investment on the economy will recede more quickly than the investment effect of consumption will come into affect, it will function to diminish the likelihood of contraction (Lo).

Provinces also see the opportunity for benefit in the Initiative, and provide both forward motion for it and a force for entropy. Local governments, for example, have a tendency to seek cooperation with Central Asian governments on projects that serve their own narrow interests and are unrelated to any larger national strategy (Tang). The Initiative is also being used to justify local projects, with no clear eye toward profitability, and which already have resulted in massive waste – as exemplified by Lanzhou New Area in the far west province of Gansu, a near-unoccupied 315 square-mile city conceptualized as part of the SREB whose construction was spearheaded by provincial authorities (.Denyer). 22 provinces have expressed interest in taking part in the BRI (Tang) (and the Chinese public policy think tank Anbound has alleged that the Maritime Silk Road itself was introduced itself simply because of lobbying by southeastern Chinese provinces who saw the opportunity to benefit from it – and despite the fact that this initiative was a distraction from the initial goal of developing and connecting western China) (Anbound). Domestic stimulus, not in a well-coordinated, strategic way but as an engine for waste, not unlike post-financial crisis stimulus (Zhou), would seem to be a driver, then, as well – which likely has implications for the difficulty of discontinuing the policy.

Although only mentioned tangentially in Wang Jisi's March West idea, and essentially omitted from rhetoric, energy security is another major security objective for China, and has been since China became a net energy importer in the late 1990's (Clarke 2014). China is currently the world's largest consumer of energy and, as of 2014, the largest importer of oil. Further, its dependence on coal and electricity has contributed to the pollution which has become a major issue in Chinese cities (Djankov). It has ample reason to want to both secure and increase its hydrocarbon imports, which are generally very insecure: major sources such as Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East are notoriously prone to instability, and because of the requirement that maritime routes be used for both piracy became an issue (Brugier). These routes also are problematic because of the “Malacca Dilemma” - in 2015 80 percent of China's energy imports from Africa and the Middle East passed through the Straits of Malacca, a situation that, Chinese strategic planners believe, leave China's energy supply vulnerable to an American blockade (Rolland). Attempts have been made to lessen Chinese dependence on these sources: since the early 2000's China increased by thirty-fold its energy imports from Russia (Brugier). There are weaknesses to this approach as well, as Russia has a demonstrated tendency to use energy dependence as leverage over other countries, as it did to the Ukraine in 2015 after peace talks broke down (“Russia Halts"); further, limitations on foreign investment in key industries have made it difficult to secure long-term access to energy and to influence the price paid for it (Brugier) – though this is becoming less of an issue as West-imposed sanctions have encouraged Russia-China energy cooperation (Wang). This presents a compelling motivation for investments in pipelines and other infrastructure, and for steps aimed at maintaining stability in the energy-producing Central Asian states of the kind that have been major aspects of China's Central Asia policy even before the articulation of the SREB.

A final driver of note is the internationalization of the yuan. The BRI is expected to increase usage of the yuan in participant countries (Lo) – a process that Beijing has been actively accelerating since 2009, when it began a series of pilot programs with that intent and signed numerous currency swap agreements, including with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Zhang 2014). Renminbi internationalization would perform several useful functions, including serving as a point of pride for leadership, decreasing vulnerability to fluctuations in US currency (Zhang 2014) lowering transaction cost and increasing the integration of the Asia-Pacific region (“One

Belt One Road"). However, it is difficult to believe that currency internationalization is an overriding goal for China, given its reticence to allow capital to flow freely in and out of the country (Chen).

Implications for China Central Asia Policy

A survey of the historic, domestic and foreign policy drivers of China's Central Asia policy allows one to draw several conclusions about the motivations and likely trajectory of the BRI. The simplest but perhaps most important concerns the program's likely longevity: it seems unlikely that, even should China's economic situation deteriorate, the Initiative will be discontinued. This is true for several reasons. The first is that the Initiative is not only economic but geopolitical in intent, and is tied, in discourse both within the CCP and with the outside world, to China's vision for the future and to its ability to rise peacefully. It is also a program with extensive domestic buy-in: it is a program from which provinces are receiving funds, and in which they are actively participating, even internationally, and which directly benefits state-owned enterprises concerned about the ramifications of Chinese overcapacity. Thus, while there has been political pushback to the initiative (e.g. its use as an example of "Comrade Xi's" irresponsibility in an open letter asking him to resign, signed by "loyal party members" and posted on a website partly owned by the Xinjiang government (Rauhala)) it is unlikely that, barring truly drastic changes in China's governance, it will cease to be a major focus of Chinese foreign policy. Further, given the preexisting ties between China (through Xinjiang) and Central Asia, and the trends in those relations, it is hard to imagine that even a complete renunciation of the policy would result in a very significant pulling back from the region.

Another implication relates to the process by which policy specifically on Central Asia is made. It is quickly clear from the history of China-Central Asian relations that Chinese interest in Central Asia is typically viewed through the lens of China's domestic interests: much of the increase in economic integration with the region is explicitly related to the desire to create a more prosperous (and thus stable) Xinjiang. Its interest in hydrocarbons in the region can be tied to the fact that in the mid-1990s it ceased to be energy independent. A great deal of its foreign policy – carried out through the SCO – was focused on controlling the threat of Muslim and Uyghur extremists in Central Asia and in Afghanistan. Both of the precursor policies discussed confirm the large role of domestic concerns in Chinese foreign policy. Wang Jisi's March West plan, which called for a rebalancing of Chinese foreign policy to pay greater attention to its West, even explicitly discussed this in terms of the Great Western Development program, with its focus on stability and security in China's Western provinces, as well as in terms of energy security. Domestic economic growth (and escaping from the commodity glut post-financial crisis) was a primary concern of the "Chinese Marshall Plan" idea. Of these domestic drivers, it seems the most salient is maintaining stability in the region – a way of guaranteeing the stability of bordering Xinjiang and protecting the regimes that are coordinating against local Uyghur groups. This focus on stability on its periphery is also an outgrowth of long-running Chinese foreign policy concerns, so long-running in fact that they predate the creation of the Chinese nation-state, as evidenced by the jimi system and other such "periphery policies" aimed at maintaining peace on its borders (even sometimes accomplished by paying them to remain thus.)

Another pattern clear from recent history, one which has often been remarked upon, is that Beijing has shown a marked reluctance to do anything that might prove threatening to Russia. It has engaged in little military cooperation with the Central Asian republics. It has also not apparently made any attempts to gain political influence at Moscow's expense. Even during Russia's 2008 actions in Abkbazia and South Ossetia, when Moscow violated another country's sovereignty – anathema to Chinese foreign policy rhetoric, and also deeply disturbing to the Central Asian states, concerned as they were for their own sovereignty, China's reaction was lukewarm: it, with the rest of the SCO, declined to support Russia's actions. (At the same time, Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia does not seem to have been entirely dictated by fear of offending Moscow. This probably was most notably in its role in the creation of the CACGP pipeline which robbed Gazprom of its monopoly as buyer of Turkmen gas.)

The Belt and Road rhetoric surveyed also would not appear to imply any intention to shift Chinese Russian policy in a more adversarial direction in the near future. The possibility of tension is in fact built into China's rhetoric surrounding the BRI, but at the moment it is toward a very specific country and type of country: a neo-interventionist hegemon with a tendency to try to impose its values on other countries rather than respecting their choice of economic, social and political systems, and which has shown a tendency to try to build a consensus among its allies to oppose a third country, in the style of the Cold War. It would not be impossible to slot Russia into this position, if it were found desirable to justify tensions with that country, without undercutting China's claims to benevolence/forward-thinkingness/the future, but it would not be easy, either. Moscow does have a tendency to violate other countries' sovereignty, a flavor of interventionism. However, it has shown little interest in or ability to aggregate a non-trivial number of states to bandwagon against China (or anyone else) and thus does not exhibit a Cold War mentality. If abided by on China's part, then, BRI rhetoric leaves some room, but not terribly much, for China to slot Russia into the role of the country to which it is opposed. Its clear focus is the United States (an issue to be discussed below.)

A great deal about likely foreign policy behavior can also be inferred from the BRI rhetoric examined. It, for one, seems always to be directed at reassuring its audience that China poses no threat to those around it. At times, the frequent reassurance provided to other countries comes to resemble China's long campaign, in existence since, according to various observers, either the Deng Xiaoping era or the 1990s, to prevent the impression of a 'China Threat' and other countries banding together against it. In some respects the rhetoric involved resembles the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (which promise “mutual respect for the others' territory and sovereignty" (*huxiang zunzhong zhuquan he lingtu wanzheng*) mutual non-interference in each others' internal affairs (*hu bu ganshe neizheng*) and equality and cooperation for mutual benefit (*pingdenghuli*) There are also not a few similarities to the 10 Principles of the Bandung Conference (which, as we have seen Xi discussed in relation to the BRI at his speech in Indonesia.) Similarities include an emphasis on using the United Nations and international law to resolve problems (Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations; Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration or judicial settlement as well as other peaceful means of the parties' own choice, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations) and for sovereignty and non-interference (Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations; Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country; Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country) and calls to avoid forming camps with other powers (Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defense to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers, abstention by any country from exerting pressures on other countries.)

There is a large difference in emphasis, however; unlike these two sets of principles the possibility of aggression between China and the nations addressed is seldom if ever broached. In fact, the very idea of warfare is sometimes implied to be outdated. The current discourse presents a much more positive message than these principles, emphasizing not avoiding causing harm to another countries' interests, but the possibility of mutual benefit, and advocating friendship, respect for other cultures and most importantly China's desire to help these other countries. Further, unlike the rhetoric (and policy) described by Foot, Swaine and TTillis BRI discourse is of building a better order – and of enticing supporters to participate in a program that is beneficial to it – rather than preventing disaster.

(It is worth noting that neither the Five Peaceful nor Bandung Principles were retracted, and yet did nothing to prevent China's invasions of India and Vietnam or its questionable decisions regarding various islands in the Pacific Ocean. I do not believe it would be unreasonable to assert that there is greater reason to believe that Beijing will abide by the various principles it has enunciated than there was when the Five Principles were issued, though. The Belt and Road Initiative itself is premised on this rhetoric being true, or at least close to true. It requires acceptance of Chinese investment, sometimes cooperation with the Chinese. Even with the great efforts that are being made to reassure participants in the BRI, countries have been known to get skittish; in 2015 the incumbent president of Sri Lanka was defeated in an election that was heavily influenced by concerns about large-scale Chinese (BRI) investments into the country and their potential effects on that country's sovereignty (Smith). Similarly, in 2011 a pro-China Zambian president was voted out in an election in which concerns about the large Chinese economic presence in the country played a large part (French). Aware thus of its global audience, it seems more likely than not that in the near-term China will attempt to hew close to its stated principles wherever possible – aggression or overt violations of a state's sovereignty are highly unlikely.)

The rhetoric of building a new order is consistent with the emphasis placed on the anchor of the old order: the United States. Repeated attempts are made to isolate the US rhetorically from the BRI and its community of common destiny. Interventions into regional affairs are inappropriate and unsafe. Discussions of new historical circumstances and cold war, zero-sum mindsets serve a clear double purpose; they not only attempt to dissuade the countries who make up its audience from balancing against it, but also to regard those holding such a mindset (which, particularly after the pivot to Asia, must include the United States) as both dangerous and outdated, perhaps likely to drown in the epochal tide. One imagines the pairing of this rhetoric with the concrete economic benefits provided by the BRI as quite possibly very convincing. The rhetoric could be considered a precursor to to the concerted effort, now come into full flower with the election of Donald Trump (Tharoor), to present itself as a global leader and champion of globalization.

The "grand strategy" that would seem to most closely resemble the above is Bhattacharya's interpretation of changes in Chinese periphery policy, which saw economic motives for China's new policy, as well as intentions to "de-center" the US and create a new China-centric economic order. In short, what is described is 'periphery policy" plus: Beijing maintaining periphery policies that it has used for huge chunks of its existence, but intensifying them to modern geopolitical ends. This suggests that Yan Xuetong is correct when he suggests that, with the presence of a growing sense of 'China Threat' by both its neighbors and the US, Beijing has decided that more must be done to both allay the periphery's fears and weaken the US's potential to align its neighbors against it.

While the above suggests that active attempts are being made to create a new, more China-centric world order (to at least an extent) it does not suggest a break with the past to the extent that Yan Xuetong suggests (which would have much greater ramifications for both Central Asia and the world.) His idea of taking on allies and making security alliances, in addition to being unsupported by evidence and manifestly contrary to the actions suggested by Chinese foreign policy discourse, would be a very large break from the periphery behavior outlined above, stretching from its distant to its recent past. It is perhaps true that competing entities come to resemble one another, but this would be a rather exaggerated lurch.

The implication for peripheral states, including the Central Asian ones, is somewhat reassuring. There would not seem to be any motivation implied to make any threatening move towards neighbors; in fact, the opposite. Their assent to a world order in which the US is de-centered is desired. Their functioning as an example that China is not a responsible international actor is to be avoided at all costs.

At the same time, there is no reason to believe that the Central Asian republics will recognize this fact and act accordingly – or that the only threat posed to the Central Asian regimes by China is a direct one. As the University of Virginia's inestimable Brantly Womack observes in his book *Asymmetry in International Relationships*, a larger, more powerful state's (A) and smaller, weaker state's (B) perceptions of one another are very different in quality, the result of that disparity. There is a far greater sense of vulnerability on the part of the B power; there is also a large disparity of attention, as A is far more important to the B power than B is to A; B concentrates a great deal of attention on A, while A pays little attention to B. However, it is possible that a B power might presume that A is dedicating as much attention to their relationship as B is. "Hence," he observes, "uncoordinated actions by A can be interpreted as an inscrutable, malevolent plan." This effect is already clear among both elite and public in Central Asia. A survey of Central Asian think tank publications, for example, found that fear of "invasion" and "imperialism" play major parts in Central Asian policy discourse on China, a level of distrust that has affected the countries' abilities to cooperate militarily with China ("Report to Congress"). According to polls conducted in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, one-third of the populations of those countries view China as a threat (Romanowski).

The popular alarm that resulted from the settlement of the Tajik, Kyrgyz and Kazakh borders evidences the very great awareness of the vulnerability of the republics to their larger neighbor, and these are not the only actions on China's part (in concert with the republics' ruling regimes) that have resulted in popular anxiety. In Kazakhstan, protests in 2003 and in 2009-2010 forced the government to reconsider plans to lease land to China. Protests, in part motivated by sinophobia, also took place in 2016 in reaction to an amendment to a Kazakh land law that increased the amount of time that foreigners are allowed to rent Kazakh agricultural land from 10 to 25 years (Hashimova). In Tajikistan, public discontent resulted from the Tajik government's decision to lease 2,000 hectares of land to China in 2011 (Pannier 2011). The frequent recurrence of land-lease issues suggest a lack of awareness on Beijing's part of the reaction they are causing in the Central Asian republics. (As one might expect from a distant A power.) There also is reason to believe that Chinese behavior may from time to time present legitimate causes for alarm as its economic reach – and leverage over the republics – increases. Particularly notable is the case of Chinese purchases of Turkmen natural gas; by all appearances Chinese negotiators took advantage of Turkmenistan's deep indebtedness to China secure agreements to purchase natural gas at highly favorable prices. Turkmenistan in 2016 was selling natural gas to China at the rate of 185 dollars per 1,000 cubic meters, a full 35 dollars per cubic meter less than the average price China paid for gas that year; in fact, most of these sales are being used to service Turkmen debt to China ("China Figures"). This came at a time when there was reportedly widespread inflation and a growing scarcity of goods in Turkmenistan ("Turkmenistan"). A less dramatic -and less sinister – example, too, serves to illustrate that Beijing is not unaware of the potential to benefit from its economic ties to the Central Asian republics and the leverage it gives them. In 2013 the Indian oil company ONGC attempted to purchase ConocoPhillips' stake in Kazakhstan's Kashagan oil field. However, under Kazakh law the Kazakh government had the right to step in and preempt ONGC's purchase. It did so, and then quickly sold the Kashagar stake to the state-owned China National Petroleum Company without making a significant profit ("India Loses Kashagan"). As contact between China and the Central Asian republics increases, circumstances such as the above – in which China is perceived to utilize its superior size and economic strength to take advantage of the Central Asian states and, perhaps, where it in fact does take advantage of them – can be expected to increase, and, with it, in all likelihood, sinophobia.

This sinophobia could conceivably prove detrimental to Chinese interests. As Womack observes, one possible effect of the greater exposure of a B power than an A in a relationship (and potentially the paranoia it engenders) is that “B might align with another power simply to buffer its exposure to A.” The result clearly would be a move of the Central Asian states (further) toward Russia – which already is working to increase its influence in those states (as discussed below.) The effects of this on China's One Belt One Road could be small, or catastrophic, depending on Sino-Russian relations at that time. A second possibility, the result of the specific political structures of these specific B powers, is still more troubling for China. While the Central Asian elite do not appear entirely confident in China, they also clearly do not perceive the threat to their republics' sovereignties as intensely as do the people they are ruling (particularly in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.) Concerns about the impact of Chinese investment on a state's sovereignty are emotionally salient ones and, as discussed above (in the cases of Sri Lanka and Zaire) have contributed to the failure of pro-China politicians to be reelected. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the unrest that cooperation between China and Central Asian regimes generates – and the sense of disconnect between populace and elites – could, in concert with other sources of dissatisfaction with those governments, lead to serious political instability – and potentially even a color revolution or the failure of a state.

Beyond Sinophobia, problems for Central Asian states' regime stability may also arise from China's current foreign aid framework, which is often alleged to encourage corruption (Zhang 2016). (The Central Asian states are presently already among the world's most corrupt, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (Leshchinskiy).) There are some indications, though none conclusive, that the tendency to bring in Chinese workers for infrastructure projects – a major cause of dissatisfaction in local communities – may be changing (Van der Kley). Overall, however, there is little evidence that Beijing has recognized how large of an effect its behavior might have on the populations of BRI member states – or how negatively this might impact their governments. There is thus the potential that the BRI and Chinese Central Asia policy could unintentionally increase the risks of instability in the region.

Given this tendency to act in potentially regime-weakening ways, it is especially relevant to note that it is clear, given past behavior and its own stated preferences, that Beijing will continue to support the ruling regimes of these states regardless of their behavior – though not necessarily to take any concrete action to do so, as when the SCO declined to take action during the 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan in support either of the rebels or the embattled regime (Weitz). One of the more important questions regarding Chinese Central Asia policy, then, is whether China will maintain its stated policy of non-intervention, given the many reasons that these states' stability is of great importance to it. Myriad economic interests (including investments totaling roughly 18 billion dollars), concern that it might not be allowed to participate in reconstruction of the oil industry if it continued to support the failing Qaddafi regime (Erian) and the presence of some 35,000 Chinese in Libya ("China's Evolving Foreign Policy") motivated Beijing to involve itself in the conflict. It voted for sanctions, declined to veto the UN resolution imposing a no-fly zone on Libya and had extensive diplomatic contact with the Libyan rebels' National Transition Council (though it also stated that it regretted the UN airstrikes) ("China's Evolving Foreign Policy"). It does not seem certain that, with so much at stake, the country will continue to adhere to its non-interference policy if it perceives intervention as being in the interest of stability, and especially if it can be justified in some way – for example, by an invitation by the government in question or by its friendliness to the endangered civilian population. This, given Russia's emphasis on the region, could prove a major stress on the Russian-Chinese condominium. Below, I will discuss Russia's history with and its policy towards the Central Asian states in order to reach a conclusion about the likely interaction of Chinese and Russian foreign policies in Central Asia.

Russia's Role in Central Asia

Russia has maintained an extremely large role in Central Asia since the USSR's dissolution – the result both of the overhang of interdependence between Russia and its smaller neighbors in the post-Soviet era and of active efforts on Russia's part. Shortly after the USSR's collapse, in 1992, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan , along with several other post-Soviet States, and Russia, signed the Collective Security Treaty of the Commonwealth of Independent States (what would become the Collective Security Treaty Organization) – an agreement that legitimized the presence of Russian forces in the territories of members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and placed them under the Russian security umbrella. This treaty arose from legitimate security needs on the part of the Central Asian states (and on Russia, which saw the organization as a means to ensure stability on its southern border): at the time Tajikistan was embroiled in a civil war with ethnic dimensions; the entire region was experiencing an Islamic revival which was coming to take on a political dimension (e.g. the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which was banned by Uzbekistan in 1992 and relocated to Tajikistan, where it participated in the Tajik civil war ("Islamic Movement"); and a collapsing Afghanistan was providing inspiration (and, shortly, weapons and a home base) for Central Asian militant groups (Jonson). At the same time, the CSTO was (and remains) in itself an extremely unequal treaty. It legitimized the placement of Russian forces in other CIS states' territories, but it did not guarantee Russian intervention in the event of conflict; there was only a vague promise to do so. There was, further, no constraint on how Russian forces could be used in intervening (Bluth). The weakness of the treaty was made manifest in 2010, when Russia – which had and has troops in several Central Asian countries – declined to intervene, through the CSTO or otherwise, in Kyrgyzstan's 2010 color revolution (Sestanovich). Russia also did not always avoid using its military dominance to intervene in Central Asian politics; for example, in spite of its pledged neutrality (and support for national self-determination following the fall of the USSR) Russia in 1992 began transferring weapons to the Popular Front in the Tajik civil war (against its pro-democracy opposition.) In 1994 Moscow continued this support, while acting as a 'neutral party,' in negotiations between the two groups (Jonson).

Nonetheless, Russia still maintains forces in the three Central Asian countries that are presently members. (Uzbekistan left the CSTO in 2012.) Russia has a base in Tajikistan, its largest abroad, which in 2016 it reinforced with 100 armored vehicles (Gady); it maintains a large airbase in Kyrgyzstan, and in Kazakhstan has a regiment of Russian transport aviation and has leased, via its Ministry of Defense, the Baikonur Cosmodrome ("Russian Military Bases"). Military ties persist with non-CSTO members as well. While Uzbekistan does not currently, and has vowed never to, have Russian (or other foreign) military bases on its territory, it has of late begun increasing its military ties with Russia (Gizitdinov), as has Turkmenistan (Pannier 2016). The reason for this is simple: Russia is viewed as the sole security guarantor in the region (Delcour).

Russia's role in the region has also been guaranteed by its infrastructure links with the Central Asian republics. In the years immediately following the fall of the USSR, Russia controlled all of their major transportation routes out of the region (Alexandrov) – a problem that has been diminished, but far from destroyed, by pipelines built in the intervening time. Russia has not welcomed this diminution, and has actively opposed it. For example, in 2002 Moscow worked to defeat the US-backed Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline, designed to move oil from the Caspian to the Mediterranean (thus allowing Kazakhstan to export oil directly to Europe without transiting Russia.) It did acquiesce to the project after it became clear it could not prevent it, and Russian companies eventually moved to acquire shares in the project, though this attempt failed (Bluth).

The continued existence of large numbers of ethnic Russians and other minorities in Central Asia also facilitated (and continues to facilitate) Russia's efforts to maintain a role in the region. Already in 1993 Russia was threatening to intervene in Kazakhstan to protect minority communities living there. At first, that group was Cossacks, but by 1993 then-President Boris

Yeltsin was discussing Russia's right to 'protect' Russians living in Kazakhstan (in this case from reprisals due to a failure in negotiations between Kazakhstan and Russia regarding the formation of a ruble zone) (Bluth). The threats of such 'protection' clearly remain; in what has been called the Putin Doctrine, Russia in 2014 asserted that it has the right to intervene to protect ethnic Russians anywhere (Coalson). In Central Asia, Kazakhstan would be most vulnerable to such intervention – presently, approximately 3.5 million Russians live in the country – but all five of the Central Asian countries have significant Russian populations (Coalson). Census information is difficult to locate regarding the other republics; the population of Kyrgyzstan was reported by the CIA world factbook to be 7.7 percent ethnic Russian in 2009 ("World Factbook"); it is estimated that in 2002 Uzbekistan had approximately 1.2 million Russian citizens (Sadykov); Turkmen diplomats in 2015 asserted that Turkmenistan's population was 2.2 percent Russian, though unpublished census results presented to Chronicles of Turkmenistan by Russian government officials suggest that the real figures are closer to 5 percent (Goble). Only Tajikistan has a small enough ethnic Russian population (estimated at 68,000, 1.1 percent of the population in 2000) ("Country Profile: Tajikistan") that it seems unlikely – though not impossible – that Russia might use it as a pretext if so inclined.

Though Russian foreign policy went through long periods of downplaying the importance of Central Asia in favor of its relations with the West (Olimat) – and thus only inconsistently exerted its dominance – the Russia-led creation of agreements and organizations intended to increase integration between the former Soviet states began shortly after the fall of the USSR (Tarr). These attempts, prior to 2007, were woefully unsuccessful. That year saw the creation of the Eurasian Customs Union, an organization initially comprised of only Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, though one which has now expanded to include Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Tajikistan is widely expected to accede in the near future (Ramani 2015). The University of Exeter's Ksenia Kirkham describes the ensuing events thus:"In contrast to the manifold previous attempts at integration in the post-Soviet space, this initiative happened to be a fast-moving project that managed to make sufficient practical steps, such as the introduction of the common customs tariff, the adoption of the Customs Code in 2010, and the elimination of border controls in 2011. January 2015 witnessed an important step towards further integration of the CU members, with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) coming into operation" (Kirkham). The created organization is one that has had real world consequences, drastically altering the tariffs of several member countries, and diverting regional trade (Khitakunov). It has thus far negotiated one free trade agreement, with Vietnam.

The organization has frequently been dismissed by Western commentators, some of whom, such as *The Diplomat*'s Casey Michel, proclaimed it "dead on arrival: (Michel 2017) - and there is some reason to these dismissals; it does not seem to be of any great benefit to most members, and so it is not terribly attractive to outside countries. A study by the European Parliament presents a very mixed picture:

> *Trade between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia has grown by some 40 % since 2010. Yet some Belarusian and Kazakh companies have complained that the removal of tariffs has made it easier for Russian businesses to compete locally, while Russia has raised non-tariff barriers to imports of their goods. Others have claimed that the lower prices resulting from the removal of tariffs have made it possible for lower-quality Russian products to crowd out rival exporters, thus making it too expensive for local businesses to buy the components they need for their products. According to data released by the Eurasian Economic Commission on 25 August 2014, trade exchanges among EACU members declined in 2013-2014, after an initial boost in trade in 2010-2012.*

Accession to the EEU has also forced up Kazakh tariffs significantly (and is projected to do the same to Kyrgyz tariffs.) (Only 45 percent of Kazakhstan's original tariff regime remains unchanged; the number is 82 percent for Russia) (Khitakunov). Russia's behavior, also, in the short time that the EEU has been in existence, has been problematic: after the imposition of sanctions in 2014 by the European Union, it imposed 'counter-sanctions' without consulting other member states. Their refusal to abide by said counter-sanctions has led to accusations from Moscow that they are failing to meet their obligations under the EEU (Strzelecki). And the failure of the EEU to be of great benefit to its members should not be surprising. The economies of the member states are not complementary, and generally do not benefit from harmonization with one another. The member states are all capital-, and technology-, importing; they are all resource and energy exporters; they manufacture similar products (Li). There is little to be gained from facilitating cross-border cooperation and investment between them.

In response to this, and to other unappealing aspects, Kyrgyzstan only joined under duress, and if Tajikistan does join it will be under similar circumstances. Kyrgyzstan's situation was memorably described by its Prime Minister, Almazbek Atambayev, shortly after joining the EEU: “No offense, but we’re choosing the lesser of two evils. We have no other option” (Michel 2014). The Kyrgyz hesitance is understandable: joining the EEU significantly raised the country's tariffs, and thus had a huge impact on a major aspect of its economy: the reexport of cheap Chinese goods to other former Soviet states (Galdini). Tajikistan's tariffs are already in proximity to the EEU's, and thus this does not present an issue to its accession; however, issues remain that are cause for concern. Its elites are anxious about the decrease in control of its foreign policy that accession would entail, as well as the blow that Tajikistan's economic relations with the countries to its south would take (Olimova).

The countries joined (or likely will) because of several levers that Russia as at its disposal. First among them is the free movement of people: 52 percent of Tajikistan's GDP, and

31 percent of Kyrgyzstan's, comes from remittances from workers in Russia (Daly 2014). Imposing greater restrictions on cross-border movement between EEU and non-EEU countries (which Russia threatened to do) would have a profound effect on these countries' economies. A second is Russia's status as security guarantor for the region, particularly useful presently, as Tajikistan's government is experiencing serious and potentially regime-threatening instability (Ramani 2017). In the view of Roger McDermott, a senior analyst at the Danish Institute of International Studies and scholar at the Center for Research on Canadian-Russian Relations, the above-mentioned dispatch of armored vehicles to its base in that country, and the unusually large Tajik-Russian military exercises carried out there in March 2016, were done with the clear purpose of reaffirming Russian support and Russia's status as the region's sole security provider (McDermott).

A discussion of the EEU, and pressure brought to bear relating to it, would also be incomplete without mention of the unfortunate situation in Ukraine, wherein then-president Victor Yanukovych's decision, under Russian pressure, to reject a planned trade deal with the European Union and instead pursue membership in the EEU led directly to the Euromaidan protests. This in turn led to his removal from power and further unpleasantness – including the use of the Putin Doctrine to perpetually destabilize the government that rejected the EEU. It would seem reasonable to assume that the EEU thus has a rather large importance to Russian foreign policy.

There are several explanations for the great meaning accorded to the EEU by Moscow. Its history would suggest that it sees membership in the EEU as a way to ward off countries in its sphere of influence from leaving it. Though a crucial precursor to the EEU was signed in 2007, it was not until 2010 that real innovation occurred: a shift toward "hard law" characteristics: "a supranational institution, the Eurasian Economic Commission, with extensive powers in key areas such as trade policy, customs, and technical regulations, and whose decisions have direct effect" (Delcour 2015). The EEU is a further step in this direction, focused on "deepening integration by removing barriers to the movement of labor and capital and extending approximation to new policy areas (e.g., competition (Delcour 2015).) As the College of Europe's Laure Delcour observes, this change occurred in a very specific context: approximately a year after the European Union's Eastern Partnership program came into effect. That program's aim was to improve relations between the EU and the European Partnership program's six member states (the Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia) and it offered a series of Associated Agreements (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) to those states (accepted by Moldova and Georgia, and tentatively by Ukraine) which would have bound these states to the EU's rules, standards, and values (Delcour 2011). As Pasquale De Micco, a researcher in the policy department of the European Parliament, observes, the Eurasian Economic Union was designed in such a way that it would not be possible for any state to both join it and sign the aforementioned network of AA's and DCFTA's with the EU (De Micco). The situation in Ukraine nicely illustrates the degree to which Moscow sees the EEU and Eastern Partnership as being in zero-sum competition (as does this 2009 statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov: "Someone would not mind to put the invited [to the Eastern Partnership] countries before a choice: either you are with Russia, or with the European Union." (Delcour 2015).)

In that it faces no Eastern Partnership in Central Asia, the EEU thus far has not had as great an impact there. While clearly the EEU has not prevented a multitude of bilateral agreements between China and the Central Asian states, it has given Russia at least slightly greater control over Chinese economic behavior in what it considers its sphere of influence; it will have a large say in tariffs on China's borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and perhaps soon, Tajikistan. It has also made it functionally impossible for China to enlist member countries' participation in a trade association not including Russia (of relevance given its stated interest in a SCO FTA.) Perhaps most importantly, it has used its leverage to secure from China acknowledgment of the EEU's importance in world affairs: China has agreed to negotiate with the EEU on cooperation between the two regarding the SREB (Delcour 2015).

In addition to attempting to repel intrusions into what it views as its sphere of interest, the EEU also has a more positive meaning for Russia: a means to increase its geopolitical power. Putin himself in 2011 in an article on the creation of the Common Economic Space between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus (one of the precursors to the EEU) described the CES as “a model of a powerful supranational union that can become one of the poles of today’s world.” As Ksenia Kirkham observes, this can be viewed in terms of Kremlin concerns about unipolarity and US dominance. She points to the Kremlin's official Foreign Policy Concept (2008) which characterized geopolitical unipolarity, “US economic and military dominance” and the declining significance of the UN, as major threats to Russian national interests (Kirkham). Azimzhan Khitakhunov of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University further suggests the EEU has symbolic as well as practical implications: “Russia is more interested in preserving the EEU for its symbolic importance: the existence of the EEU is perceived by the Russian leadership as a sign of Russian importance in international relations and as an indication that the effort of the West to isolate Russia internationally [has not succeeded]” (Khitakunov).

There is some indication that the minor economic benefits and often symbolic geopolitical benefits attained from the EEU may be diminishing in their appeal. A poll by the Valdai Club, a prominent Russian think tank that was founded by, among others, the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (“Valdai”), suggests that more and more, the Russian elite are of the feeling that Russia has lost its great power status and should focus on domestic matters; it also found that the number of elite who view the CIS as within Russia's "sphere of national interest" had plummeted, from approximately 50 percent in the mid-2000s to 15 percent in 2012 ("Russian Elite – 2020"). The freedom of movement inherent to the EEU project also is not welcome by large swaths of the Russian population, as Russian nationalism turns against Central Asian immigration. A 2013 poll showed that for 50% of the Russian public, immigration is the most important issue of the day, and 80% would prefer to see the introduction of a visa requirement for immigrants from Central Asia (Popescu). Given Putin's close association with the project, and his sky high approval ratings (Birnbaum) – and the fact that, these facts notwithstanding, the EEU is charging ahead, it seems unlikely that it will simply be abandoned under political pressure. Still, the above may affect Moscow's willingness to take serious risks (e.g. challenging China in some way) in order to expand the EEU's power, or its own power, particularly in unloved Central Asia.

Regional Factors

Russia's dominance in the region has been facilitated by the many regional issues that have pushed the Central Asian regimes toward Russia. Concerns about regime stability currently are pushing Tajikistan toward Russia, and, as discussed in prior pages, concern about Western support for democratic revolution and its human rights agenda pushed Uzbekistan away from the US and toward Russia (and China) following the Andijan massacre. Regime security is an issue for all of the republics, and can be expected to remain one: as discussed above, all remain fragile and vulnerable to instability and disorder. As the region's sole security provider, regional threats can only increase Russia's power (or, rather, the need of it) as well, and these are not in short supply. In 2016, for example, concern about its border security – following the deaths of 17 Turkmen border guards at the hands of the Taliban – led to the signing of agreements to purchase arms, and accept military training, from Russia (moves it had long resisted) as well as the first-ever visit by a Russian Minister of Defense to neutral Turkmenistan, (Pannier 2016). The warming of Russian-Uzbek relations also bears some relation to security concerns; in December 2014 Russia was invited to provide military assistance to combat the spread of ISIS, and the presence of Russian troops in Tajikistan is also very welcome by the Uzbek government in order to avoid instability on its borders (Ramani 2017). The fact that many of the Central Asian republics remain in debt to Russia also is a factor that facilitates Russian dominance: Moscow, for example, in 2014 wrote off 500 million dollars in Kyrgyz debt in exchange for the right to lease its Manas air force base (freshly vacated by the US) Dzyubenko). The thaw in Russian-Uzbek relations resulted in 2016 in Moscow writing off 95% of that country's Soviet-era debt (Ramani 2017).

The large role that Russian-language media plays in the region functions to bind the region to Russia as well, and has had concrete effects on the public opinion of the region. The most dramatic of these occurred in 2010, when a combination of economic measures on Russia's part and what the Washington Post described as “scathing reports portraying President Kurmanbek Bakiyev as a repugnant dictator whose family was stealing billions of dollars from this impoverished nation” by Russian media sources lead within a month to Bakiyev's overthrow. In the analysis of one of the leaders of the opposition movement, "Even without Russia, this would have happened sooner or later, but...I think the Russian factor was decisive," (Pan). Less dramatically, Russian media influence is believed to have contributed to the increasingly negative views of the West in the region following the imposition of Western sanctions. A 2015 opinion poll suggests that in that year Kazakhstan experienced the greatest decline of any country in positive views of the West, with Tajikistan close behind (Pannier 2015). The strength of Russian media in Central Asia likely has contributed to Russia's surprising popularity in what could be considered its former colonies. A 2015 Gallup poll suggests that 96% of Tajiks, 79% of

Kyrgyz, 72% of Kazakhs and 62% of Uzbeks approve of Russia's global leadership (polling was not conducted in Turkmenistan). The median approval rating for Russian leadership worldwide is 22%. ("Rating World Leaders").

The effectiveness of media in moving public opinion can be attributed to the region's Soviet heritage. Older Central Asians grew up under the USSR, and surrounded by Russian-language media, and there is a general familiarity with Russian culture; further, Russian remains the lingua franca of the region (Rollberg). The scope of the media influence is no longer limited to traditional media, either: Moscow uses social networking sites as well to spread its agenda and increase its soft power (Pannier 2015). Given these cultural links to (as well as the very positive impression of) Russia in the region, both the Central Asian public and Central Asian elites then would seem to be drawn by necessity and by history and culture to Russia, regardless of their concerns.

It is not likely that Russia will be able to convert this into unproblematic dominance, however – or that China, should it successfully displace Russia as security provider as well as economic engine, will be able to do so. The countries of the region (and Kazakhstan in particular) are known for adopting a multi-vector foreign policy, maintaining good relations with all relevant powers without alienating any. The preceding pages have demonstrated that policy in action; even as the Central Asian republics were on many levels dependent on and vulnerable to Russia (and much more than today), they have continued to actively pursue links to China – improving economic ties dramatically, cooperating on security both in and out of a major regional organization – the SCO – and maintaining strong diplomatic ties.

At the same time, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were allowing the US to maintain air force bases on their soil. In the aftermath of the attacks on September 11 2001, Tajikistan joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which allows for participation in military, civil emergency planning, and science and technology programs (Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had been members since 1994) ("Tajikistan, NATO”). Kazakhstan's cooperation with the West was particularly robust. According to Michael Clarke, Kazakhstan pursued a pro-Western foreign policy (which is not to say an anti-Russian one) from independence until the late 1990s, “including cooperation with Washington on controlling and dismantling the Soviet-bequeathed nuclear arsenal, and active pursuit of foreign investment in the Kazakh economy, particularly the oil and gas sector.” while also cooperating with NATO on security issues. After September 11, and particularly after Uzbekistan pulled away from the US following the Andijan incident, Kazakhstan seized the opportunity to increase cooperation with the West in maintaining stability in Afghanistan (Clarke 2015). Turkmenistan for its part, which has declared (and enshrined in its constitution) a policy of 'positive neutrality,' has created for itself circumstances under which “the United States, the European Union, Russia, China, Iran, and Turkey are all vying for influence” (Miller) although as we have seen, concern for its border security has pulled the country toward Russia of late. In fact, a progressive intensification of relations with Russia, though not necessarily a voluntary one, has been evident for all five of the Central Asian republics in recent years, despite their ever-deepening economic relations with China, and the forays made beyond it (e.g. arms sales.) Given the republics' longstanding foreign policy concerns, it seems unlikely that – as some suspect – they will enter a Chinese sphere of influence, for the simple fact that they have worked so deftly and so assiduously to, against all odds, avoid becoming part of a Russian sphere of influence.

They endeavored thus despite the fact that Central Asian views of Russia are significantly more positive than Central Asian views of China. This, coupled with the popularity of (and cultural affinity with) Russia there makes it exceedingly unlikely that the Central Asian republics would alter their predilection for multi-vector diplomacy, even should China move quickly and seamlessly to become security guarantor there. It goes without saying that a sudden shift away from multi-vector diplomacy (increasingly oriented toward Russia) and to a China-centered policy would engender a response from Moscow, as well.

Implications

The key question for the future of Central Asia, then, is whether the Russian-Chinese condominium will persist – that is, whether a response from Moscow will be avoided – in spite of the ever-enlarging role of China in Central Asia. Based on the above, it would appear likely that it will, at least in the short- to medium-term. China's priorities in the region do not appear to conflict with Russia's. Beijing appears content to engage in "mutually beneficial business transactions" (even if some may be more beneficial to China than to its counterpart); it has not evinced any interest in dominating – rather than buying off or leveraging its advantage over – any Central Asian state. This, conversely, seems to be Moscow's highest priority: ensuring that the regimes of former Soviet states do not enter the spheres of influence of other states, for which purpose it seeks to maintain a good deal of influence over those states foreign and domestic policy; and increasing its integration with those states in hopes of in doing so increasing its relative power enough to consider itself a 'pole' in a multipolar global order. (It goes without saying that this is both a practical and symbolic concern.) Although Russia seems to demand allegiance, and broad influence, there is no indication that it desires such a great deal of control that it would be motivated to respond to China's mild exploitation of the countries under its aegis. If the advantages China accrues from its asymmetry of power over the republics is transactional and not symbolic of Chinese influence over the regime, this would not seem to present a threat to Russia's interests. China's willingness to negotiate with the EEU regarding the SREB represents an acknowledgment of that body's symbolic importance and willingness to continue interacting with the region on Moscow's terms.

Other aspects of China's Central Asia policy would also militate against trying to increase its influence at Russia's expense: the original and still most pressing concern for Chinese foreign policy in the region is the maintenance of stability, there and in neighboring Xinjiang. Though there may be advantages to taking on a larger role in Central Asia, it should be obvious to all observers that to gain excessive influence over a Central Asian regime (or even to install a new one) would quickly lead to destabilizing actions by Russia. As in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and Ukraine in 2014, it likely would employ its cultural and media influence, as well as economic policy, to mobilize a public already distrustful of China and dissatisfied with its regime. Given the stability focus of Chinese foreign policy, it seems impossible to imagine Beijing intentionally disrupting the current balance of power in the region, barring a catastrophic misreading of Russia's intentions or capabilities. While it would appear that China is intent on increasing its involvement in Central Asia, even outside of the economic sphere, there is no reason to believe it intends to do so while completely ignoring any warning signals which Russia may be inclined to send; in fact, Beijing's cautious behavior thus far implies the opposite. It is thus unlikely that China will intervene militarily, even for peacekeeping purposes, in the region, unless it is with Russia's approval: any attempt to maintain stability would be counterproductive to the maintenance of stability if it raised Russia's ire.

Therefore, ironically, if as mentioned above China's growing presence in Central Asia does prove to be destabilizing it may actually serve to improve Russia's standing in the region, given that it is the only state willing and able to act as security guarantor. In light of the great difference in public perceptions of Russia and China, it is also hard to imagine that any new regime that might come to power, should previous ones be overthrown, would tilt toward China over Russia unless that regime came into power as the result of active Chinese intervention, or of election rigging on China's part. Given the asymmetry of interest in the region, Beijing surely would recognize this as a foolhardy move, and the regime it supported as likely to be extremely short-lived.

The longevity of the China-Russia condominium probably will be dependent on two things: the progress of Russia's integration programs with former Soviet states, and the degree to which Russia remains isolated in the international community. Should its integration programs be wildly successful – for example, to the extent of creating a common currency, a possibility that has been suggested by Moscow and roundly rejected by the other EEU members (Khitakunov) – seemingly minor issues such as other EEU members' perception of threats from China (or China's ever-increasing influence in the region in general) could potentially come to be viewed as of relevance to Russian foreign policy. Should a regime come to power in one of the Central Asian republics that was sufficiently resigned to Russia's dominance that it was willing to appeal to Russia for help in the matter, the result would be the same: China's behavior, largely unchanged, could come to cause significant tension and perhaps a breakdown of the condominium.

A general decrease in the importance of Sino-Russian relations for Russia would also serve to decrease Russian tolerance for the progress of the SREB: any discomfort with Chinese behavior in Central Asia has surely been dampened by extra-regional concerns. There has been a clear improvement in the relations between the two powers in recent years, which sharply accelerated following the imposition of Western sanctions in 2014 (their improved relations post-2014 was described by Tao Wang in *The National Journal* as "one of the most important trends in global politics since 2014" (Wang 2016).) In fact, energy cooperation was already increasing after the signing of a 2009 contract to begin supplying Russian crude oil through the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline to Northeast China ("Russia to Increase"). The amount of cooperation increased dramatically in 2014, though, following the signing of a 'historic' 400 billion dollar deal that included agreements on the construction of a natural gas pipeline called the Power of Siberia between Siberia and Eastern China ("Russia and China Seal"). Moscow also agreed to remove “key restrictions” on energy investment in Russia by Chinese companies (Wang 2016).

Russia has begun actively participating in the SREB; China and Russia in 2015 signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in which China agreed to provide expertise and investment in the construction of a railway between Moscow and Kazan (in Russia's Tatarstan province) ("China Agrees”). Russia, too, will be participating in the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, an aspect of the SREB, which will entail those three states cooperating on roads and transportation projects, as well as on cross-border investment and, potentially, a plethora of other areas, including agriculture (Bittner). The Sino-Russian rapprochement has further included the Russian resumption of advanced arms sales to China – which had been discontinued in approximately 2004 after China was found to have reverse engineered advanced Russian weapons systems it had been sold and begun manufacturing similar systems themselves (Clover 2016a).

The threshold of interference in Central Asia that China would have to reach to draw a response from Russia likely is raised significantly by the marked improvement of Sino-Russian relations outside of the region and the many concrete agreements entailed by this, and that might be endangered by a worsening of relations. A significant decrease in Russia's international isolation would seem to be the necessary precondition for a worsening of Chinese-Russian relations, though that also would not insure it. Barring a rapprochement between Russia and the West, then, the continued existence of the Sino-Russian condominium in Central Asia is not assured (as we have seen in Crimea and Ukraine, Russia is clearly willing to make significant sacrifices to protect its sphere of influence) but it is made more likely.

Conclusion

As discussed in preceding sections, China's ever-increasing presence in Central Asia shows no signs of abating; at the same time, it shows no signs of transforming into the kind of geopolitical project that is likely to provoke a strong reaction from Russia. Rather, it is a project with many goals, including economic benefit, the expansion of Chinese soft power, and the achievement of stability in China's border regions – an issue of perpetual and great importance for Chinese foreign policy, and one that would certainly militate against inviting Russia-backed instability into a neighbor. The question for the future of the region is whether Russia will grow more, or less, sensitive to Chinese advances as China grows more active in Central Asia. This will depend to a large extent on the success or failure of Russia's foreign policy in escaping isolation and in increasing integration with (and power over) the Central Asian states. At present, Russia has not been particularly successful in this endeavor, and for that reason it has had neither incentive nor cause to concern itself with China's increased leverage over the Central Asia states, as it does not seem prone to use it for more than transactional matters.

Between the two giants are the Central Asian states, who in effect will be working to avoid a breakdown of Sino-Russian relations, as they struggle continually to prevent either power from attaining enough power over them to upset the current balance of power. Assuming their regime stability (and – given the amount of Russian power and support for Russia in their states it seems fair to assume that their fall will result in either a failed state or one that is closer to Russia) their success will depend partially on skill, but to a large degree on whether China and Russia continue to have the means and intention to move steadily into Central Asia.

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