

By bringing together various continuing infrastructure projects invested in by the Chinese government, the initiative is intended to achieve mutual economic growth among the New Silk Road countries and beyond. There are two key parts of the BRI: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB); and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century [5]. In this initiative, the role of Central Asian countries is significant. This applies to Kazakhstan as a neighbour of China. The major SREB routes radiate from Kazakhstan. China's SREB will serve as a conduit of globalization and connection to the larger world by strengthening the bonds between the Central Asian countries [22, 1p]. According to the Chinese media, BRI's scope comprises 80 countries and several international organizations who have agreed to cooperate under the BRI framework [7]. If Chinese ambitions are fully realized, this will engage nearly 70% of the world's population, 60% of GDP, and 75% of the world's energy reserves [19]. This statement has already shown China's intentions in terms of evidence for the theory of hegemonic strategy.

This paper will attempt to answer the following research questions. First, how is China seeking to advance its position by implementing this initiative?

Second, how is Kazakhstan seeking to benefit from the convergence of the two programs?

This case study will argue that, while China intends to expand its power on a worldwide scale, Kazakhstan will gain an advantage by cementing links between its national program, Nurly Zhol, and BRI.

### **Analysis**

The role and vitality of the BRI's proposed strategies worldwide are considered as about the theory of hegemonic stability. This ambitious international initiative and China's leadership will be analyzed based on the published literature and to project likely future scenarios. In addition, this study also focuses on the convergence of the Chinese and Kazakhstani strategic initiatives as a means for comparative analysis to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relating to the BRI and Nurly Zhol.

### **Hegemonic Stability Theory**

Hegemonic stability theory arose in the middle of the 19th century. Much of the research in international relations has used the notions of a hegemon and hegemony to scrutinize dynamics, strategies, attitudes, entities, or properties that concentrate on, refute, or surpass the conventional three phenomena of world politics, namely the individual, the state, and the international system [18, 56 p.]. Under hegemony strategic theory, there is no direct ruling over the international system, behavior, or countries; but it implies the strength to influence with a high ability to coerce [3]. Four approaches within hegemony studies were identified: 1) the conventional approach, where the dominance of one state over the international system can be exercised. It is often considered a hegemon, hegemonic power, or imperial power. 2) The neoliberal approach states that the roles of international institutional regimes have independent causal effects on global power, and they will function even if the hegemon collapses. In terms of the neoliberal approach, therefore, the nature of hegemony itself can be shifted to operational mechanisms and conditions. 3) The Gramscian approach is based on two types of political control: coercion-based dominance and consent-based hegemony. This means hegemony equals the establishment within the sphere of the international of universally accepted values – a commonsense. 4) The radical approach is a different approach to hegemony, where the notion of hegemony does not apply to any state or group of states, but rather at the individual level.

In terms of China's influence on the world, the BRI has been a topic of dispute since this initiative was implemented. Overall, China's increasing impact on the development of its neighboring states is usually related to its geopolitical connections, cultural closeness, and economic profits between China and other Asian countries. Some commentators think that the role of the BRI is positive in terms of lessening certain geopolitical tensions, while others consider it as imposing asymmetric economic interdependency among the Asian countries [29]. China's enhancement of

its economic stance towards others can be seen as political hegemony [26]. There are two ways that the stability of hegemony can be practised: by intelligent application or by force, depending on the size of the countries exercising it. The main idea of the theory of hegemonic stability is that of a nation-state being dominant enough to influence the world's economy.

It appears that China's position is one of maintaining the stability of generous hegemony. This is an example of the neoliberal approach as described above. Through the BRI project, China is encouraging peaceful cooperation rather than sending a threat to the region. It is commonly acknowledged that China is trying to become the main power in the world; but given hegemonic stability, it will be rewarding for some developing countries to establish cooperation with China for the achievement of short- and long-term goals. One of these is Kazakhstan.

### **The convergence of the BRI and Nurly Zhol programs**

In 2014, the then-president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, announced the government's ambitious strategic plan, Nurly Zhol, ("the bright path"). This has many points in common with the Silk Road economic plans. The detailed program of Nurly Zhol is entitled "100 Concrete Steps"; and has the aim of putting Kazakhstan by 2050 in the top thirty of developed countries [24]. A few years earlier, in 2012, Nazarbayev's far-reaching vision was outlined in his speech to the 25th Foreign Investors Council meeting in Astana. This dealt with the synergies between the New Silk Road and the Nurly Zhol program, and emphasized Kazakhstan's historical role in becoming the largest business and transit hub in the Central Asian region, and as a bridge between Europe and Asia. He also predicted that because of the implementation of this huge project the volume of transit cargo through Kazakhstan would by 2020 almost have doubled, with an increase to at least fifty million tons [8]. This new start will undoubtedly lead the country towards modernization and innovation [1]. Economic growth and improved living standards among

the country's population will be promoted by facilitating an effective and competitive transport infrastructure; the development of transit and transportation services; and the improvement of the technological and institutional environment.

The BRI model is based on five principles: political convergence; communication infrastructure; free trade; circulation of capital; and harmony among people's interactions [11]. These are entitled 'The Five Ways of Connectivity'.

The economic cooperation and interrelationship arising from the plans of the two states will make Kazakhstan's economic development to the next level. The diplomatic relationship between China and Central Asian countries began in December 1991. In 1996, the Shanghai Five, consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, was established in China to resolve regional issues, including border matters. Kazakhstan signed major oil deals [25]. This cooperation was continued within the areas of convergence between the BRI and Nurly Zhol. Investment agreements with an overall value of 54 billion USD have been signed. As Kazakhstan is the key transit corridor through Central Asia to Europe, as well as a major supporter of a China which intends to take forward financially secure development, this is mutually beneficial for both Kazakhstan and China.

After the announcement of Nurly Zhol, several documents were signed which set out further collaboration with China. These show the convergence of the same five principles of connectivity. 1) In 2015, during Nazarbayev's visit to Beijing, the Kazakh Chinese Joint Declaration was signed. Existing treaties from 2002 and 2011 were reinforced. These dealt with strengthening political trust; continuous cooperation with mutual benefits; and the development of a sustainable future. These were all complementary to the joint work of Nurly Zhol and SREB [15]. 2) The presidents of the two states declared the need for collaborative work and a joint planning process between the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan and China's National Development and Reform Commission (CNDRC). 3) In September 2016, the G-20 Summit was held in Hangzhou, China,

where other bilateral agreements for trade, road infrastructure and industrial development were signed.

### **Initial outcomes of cooperation**

The following work has been completed in the last five years since the announcement of the Nurly Zhol project [29]. 5.59 million tons of crude oil was delivered to China in the first half of 2019 via a cross-border China-Kazakhstan pipeline, which is operated by Petrochain Corporation [14].

The China-Kazakhstan oil pipeline is China's first onshore cross-border pipeline, which connects the Kazakhstani city Atyrau and Alashankou, Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region, and Northwest China. Its total length is more than 2800 km. According to the company, after putting the pipeline into operation in May 2006, it has been operating normally for more than 4700 days. By June 30, 2019, a total of 126 million tonnes of oil will have been delivered to China through this pipeline. This pipeline not only provides a stable energy supply to the western regions of China but has also contributed to the further deepening of energy cooperation between China and countries along the Belt and Road.

Four railway routes have been prioritized among the New Silk Road countries. The first is the Silk Road Northern Corridor. This starts from the Chinese port of Lianyungang on the Yellow Sea and passes through the territories of China (Urumqi) and Kazakhstan (Astana). It continues through Kurgan, Transsib, Russia and on to Europe. The Southern Silk Road corridor also starts in Lianyungang and separates from the Northern Corridor in Kazakhstan. It then passes through Turkey, Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, and several European countries before terminating at the Dutch ports. The Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia (TRACECA) separates from the Southern Silk Road Corridor in Turkmenistan; crosses the Caspian Sea by ferry; continues through Azerbaijan and Georgia and arrives at the Black Sea (Poti – Burgas, Varna, Constanta, or Odesa and Illichivsk).

June 2017 was marked by the signing of a memorandum providing for the organization of high-speed cross-border railway freight traffic on the China-Russia-Europe link. This agreed to the construction of a high-speed freight and passenger corridor, entitled Eurasia [17]. It is planned to build 6.7 thousand kilometres of new lines, and highways with a total length of 9 thousand kilometers. According to experts, by 2030 the volume of passenger traffic on the Eurasia high-speed rail might well reach 58 million people, and by 2050, 90 million. By 2050, freight traffic is expected to reach 15 million tonnes.

In May 2018, President Nazarbayev tabled the question of the development of the Eurasia Channel at the Supreme Eurasian Council. This waterway will connect the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. As noted by the Kazakh leader, it will provide access to the sea via Russia to all the countries of Central Asia. The channel's route is 300 km shorter than the route through the Volga-Don Canal [16].

In 2017, the "One Belt, One Way" forum was held, because of which the Chinese authorities directed all their efforts at liberalization of the economy. At the same time, the US trade war against China began, which makes it virtually impossible to predict the prospects for transport and transit for the next five to ten years.

Analysis of the annual maximum volume of cargo traffic in the port of Aktau in the 2000s shows that each year about 12 million tons of cargo passed through the port, most of which was in oil transshipment. However, because of the influence of various factors on the crossings in Aktau, oil cargo then declined rapidly by approximately one million tonnes of cargo annually. The National Company, Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, working in the Caspian multimodal hub, consisting of the ports of Kuryk and Aktau, processed 5.5 million tons of cargo, 1.5 million of which amounted to cargo turnover in ports such as Kuryk [17].

Kazakhstan, being a small country in terms of population and having built its infrastructure, should focus on reducing the costs associated with the maintenance of its infrastructure. The share held by Kazakhstan of these transit routes

is as follows. The country is already building infrastructure for SREBs: more than 1300 km of roads have been built; the construction of the Zhetygen-Khorgos railway has been completed, and the Altynkol-Khorgos railway-crossing on the border with China with a throughput capacity of up to 20 million has been put into operation. The Kazakh authorities are working on a programme to expedite the passage of goods through customs posts and remove administrative barriers [12]. Of great importance in the context of the implementation of the SREB and its interface with the EAEU is the fact that the Aktau International Sea Trade Port is not subject to freezing. Some export-import operations of the Ural and Siberian regions are carried out through this port [13]. In addition, there is TRACECA, a transport corridor that takes freight in Western and Central Europe on the one hand, and in Central and Southeast Asia on the other. TRACECA is the only route that connects the countries of Europe and the Asia-Pacific region without passing through the territory of Russia. With the creation of the EAEU, the problem of "by-passing" Russia from the south was partially resolved since freight traffic now follows the customs territory common to Russia. However, a question now arises regarding the "East Beam" - the international transport corridor, which in Kazakhstan is called the "Great Bridge" [9].

As part of this project, railway lines were laid in the Zhezkazgan-Saksaulskaya and Shalkar-Beineu sections, which significantly reduced the distance from the Dostyk station to the port of Aktau. Through the branch «D-joint-Aktogay-Atasu-Zhezkazgan-Saksaul-Aktobe-Saratov» there is access to the infrastructure of the International Transport Corridor «North-South», which will very likely become the «Great Bridge» on the way from China to Europe. The North-South transport corridor is a "multimodal" route for transporting passengers and goods. It has a total length of 7200 km, running from St. Petersburg to the port of Mumbai (Bombay). It was created to attract transit freight flow from India, Iran, and other countries of the Persian Gulf to Russian territory (through the Caspian Sea), and further onward to Northern and Western Europe. The corridor has several branches. Initially, it runs

along the route «Buslovskaya- St. Petersburg-Moscow-Ryazan-Kochetovka-Rtishchevo-Saratov-Volgograd-Astrakhan». It then divides into three branches: the Trans-Caspian (through the ports of Astrakhan, Olya, and Makhachkala); the Eastern (the railways of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan with access to Iran at the border crossing "Tedzhen-Serakhs"); and the Western ("Astrakhan-Makhachkala-Samur", with further access to Azerbaijan and Iran). An intergovernmental agreement on the creation of the North-South corridor between Russia, Iran and India was signed in 2000 in St. Petersburg [10].

The project of building the international-transit automobile corridor "Western Europe-Western China" is no less relevant. In 2017, it was planned to open it to traffic along its entire route through the cities Lianyungang, Zhengzhou, Lanzhou, Urumqi, Khorgos, Almaty, Kyzylorda, Aktobe, Orenburg, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, Moscow, and St. Petersburg with access to the ports of the Baltic Sea. The total length of the corridor will be almost 8500 km. Of these, 2493 km will pass through the territory of Russia, 2787 km through Kazakhstan and 3425 km through China.

As it can be seen, from its preliminary stage until the present the BRI project is a continuing process of negotiating and making deals favorable to the interests of those countries participating in the initiative. Kazakhstan has actively engaged in the project to realise its own goals as outlined above.

### Chinese experts' evaluation of the BRI

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - previously known as 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) - is China's megaproject with an anticipated long-term impact on the economies of more than 65 countries of the world, encompassing all continents. It will improve liaison from both regional and global perspectives. BRI is an assessable platform for mutual partnership, directed by consultation, and it is not aimed to impose any geopolitical agenda where every country's collaboration will be gained to equal benefit [28]. BRI joins countries with the clear goals of improved infrastructure;

connectivity routes; an effective policy; a chance to cultivate other strategies; and mainly to profit from the plans within the overall initiative. This ambitious initiative is China's vision for the world according to the principles of dominance. Although various agreements have been signed, there are still areas where there is a blurred picture and a lack of clarity in the related actions.

Many scholars are enthusiastic about the potential achievements of this initiative and its future. However, some hold negative views. The question is a complex one and there are no clear answers. For instance, this initiative is a "blind investment" and there is no sense in investing in the middle- and poor-income countries [21, 27]. This view is supported by other scholars as well [20]. They focussed on several fundamental problems. These are the difficult-to-control global economy with multilateral institutional recourses; cross-border cost reduction remaining high, which results in agricultural product costs; and the lack of a fully descriptive database. BRI certainly will help to globalize the world, but it will be difficult to evaluate its effects.

Fung et al. argue that the idea of a convergence of strategies is not new - it also happened historically with the Silk Road. This study thus provides interesting "travelling knowledge along with it and more exciting ideas of cross-border interactions [6].

### **Findings and discussion**

The findings of the current research are based on the current scholarly publications on the Belt and Road Initiative from the perspective of Kazakhstan.

The five years during which this state program has been implemented have demonstrated its success and role in the economic well-being of Kazakhstan. However, in the context of the dynamic changes and globalization that are taking place in world politics, careful monitoring of the situation is required, which will allow Kazakhstan to preserve its national interests. The close convergence of the Nurly Zhol and Chinese SREB initiatives considers the existing factors which create uncertainty; the possible challenges; and the threats.

The first and main factor which creates uncertainty is the lack of clear goal-setting by SREB China from the outset. This leads to many questions from experts. First, it is not clear that the SREB is a geopolitical concept of the leaders or a project of economic integration for money and under the sponsorship of China.

Second, regarding the implementation of this project whether will determine the dominance of China in the region from the standpoint of politics and economy.

Third, the question arises regarding the responsibilities in terms of funding this megaproject.

In this regard, China, as the initiator of a new project, should direct its efforts towards modernizing these relations, as well as contradictions. The possibility of the practical implementation of this project will remain a matter of time.

Another factor of uncertainty is the need to answer the question of decoding the principle of «common benefit» declared by China in the framework of trade and economic relations. The drastic changes in trade, infrastructure and industry modernization remain vague.

The basis of the SREB project is not of concern for the development of the state industrial potential of the countries that it will cross but consists in the intensive development of the western Chinese regions and their transformation into the Greater Central Asia foreign economic, transport and logistics hub.

At the same time, the main element of uncertainty is the unwillingness of the countries of the region to develop a real sector of their economies along with China; alongside the dilemma of China: namely whether to invest in regional reindustrialization having received a competitor to export their industrial goods.

The third direction of the road map is not agreed upon. In every interconnection of SREB and Nurly Zhol, there is no first-hand information on them. The sources can be retrieved from the media only. Challenges were encountered during this study regarding receiving statistical and exact data from the online sources of the official bodies of both countries.

## SWOT analysis of convergence points of the BRI and Nurly Zhol programmes

### Strengths

- It has the potential to boost the country's economy: diversification via the transport infrastructure.
- Export of agricultural products across the BRI countries.
- Transportation links to Kazakhstan's main cities and other neighbouring countries.
- New job opportunities.

### Weaknesses

- Weak regional and interregional cooperation for solving cross-border questions on trading costs.
- High costs behind the borders might affect small businesses.
- Often changes on tariff costs on the borders.
- Unclear funding sources.

### Threats

- The lack of transparency in investment plans and actions: some deals remain myths that will never be implemented.
- Widespread corruption at a high level will impede the processes.
- Lack of transparency regarding how actions are being taken and done.
- As Kazakhstan, reliance on oil, price fluctuations of oil may influence the shortening of natural resources.
- Dependency on Chinese investments

### Opportunities

- For businesses will open more trade opportunities with lower transit costs, shorter time for China to deliver goods, as well as for Central Asian countries to Europe [24].
- Opportunities for modernization and industrialization.
- New changes in infrastructure in a short period.

### Conclusion

This case study has attempted to shed light on the complex phenomena of the Chinese

Belt and Road Initiative; and the engagement of Kazakhstan in this project with its response strategies regarding the convergence of the BRI and Nurly Zhol strategic plans. Various scholarly works on this matter have been studied and the results of convergence have been examined preliminarily. The analysis set out above has provided evidence that supports the theory of hegemony. The first research question above directed us towards how China may be seeking to advance its position by implementing the BRI initiative. Using the theory-building method, it has been shown that the BRI initiative is an example of the neoliberal variation of hegemonic stability theory, that is where there is no direct rule over the international system. However, it can be argued that China is trying ultimately to impose its dominance as a hegemon by generous investment agreements that will last for many years and create a dependency on China.

The second research question asked how Kazakhstan may be seeking to benefit from the convergence of two programs. The convergence of the two countries' projects within the five areas of connectivity is indeed lucrative as it accelerates the development of Kazakhstan's infrastructure and manufacturing sector and offers more business and employment opportunities. There do, however, remain crucial questions in terms of the allocation of the funding of the BRI. Kazakhstan has started to see the development of the five areas of connectivity.

The hypothesis which this paper set out to prove is that, while China intends to expand its power on a worldwide scale, Kazakhstan will gain an advantage by cementing links between its national program, Nurly Zhol, and BRI. As has been shown above, the links between the two programs have indeed proved beneficial for Kazakhstan as far as the achievements to date are concerned. The convergence of the Nurly Zhol and Belt and Road initiatives is becoming clear. However, there are still several areas within this developing topic that require to be examined in future research. These include studying further soft power diplomacy and other impacts on the development of Kazakhstan's economy.

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#### **«Бір белдеу - бір жол» бастамасының Қазақстан мен Қытай үшін ұтымды тұстары**

**Аңдатпа.** Қытайдың «Бір Белдеу Бір Жол» бастамасы - бұл халықаралық саладағы Қытайдың ықпалын кеңейтуге және нығайтуға бағытталған ұзақмерзімді саясат. Ол әлемнің көптеген елдерін қамтиды және өзара экономикалық өсуге қол жеткізуге ниеттенеді. «Бір Белдеу Бір Жол» бастамасы арқылы Қытай инфрақұрылымды дамыту арқылы шағын және үлкен елдермен көптеген стратегиялық серіктестік орнатуда: Жаңа Жібек жолы бойымен Азиядан Еуропаға дейінгі бағыттар; Орталық Азия мен Қытай арасындағы мұнай-газ құбырларын салу; және жаңартылған теңіз порттары. Бұл мақала қытайдың бастаманың ұзақ мерзімді әсері бар гегемониялық тұрақтылық теориясының дәлелі ретінде талдайды; «Бір Белдеу Бір Жол» және «Нұрлы жол» бағдарламаларының сәйкескен тұстарын Қазақстанның қысқа мерзімде дамуына әсер етуімен байланыстыру. Қолданылатын әдістер: теория қалыптастыру және Қытай мен Қазақстан арасындағы стратегиялық серіктестікті орнату мақсатындағы екі бағдарламаның сәйкескен тұстарын салыстырмалы түрде талдау.

**Түйін сөздер:** «Белдеу және жол» бастамасы, Қытай, Қазақстан, Нұрлы Жол, бағдарламаларды жақындастыру.

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#### **Прогнозы беспроигрышного проекта «Один пояс, один путь» для Казахстана и Китая**

**Аннотация.** Китайская инициатива «Пояс и Путь» является далеко идущей программой направленной на расширение и укрепление влияния Китая в международной сфере. Она охватывает большое количество стран по всему миру и намерен достичь взаимного экономического роста. Через Инициативу Пояс и Путь Китай устанавливает многочисленные стратегические партнерские отношения как с малыми, так и с крупными странами посредством развития инфраструктуры: маршрутов по Новому шелковому пути из Азии в Европу; строительство нефте- и газопроводов между Центральной Азией и Ки-

таем; и модернизированные морские порты. В этом исследовании будет проанализирована китайская инициатива в качестве доказательства теории гегемонистской стабильности в отношении долгосрочного воздействия; и сопряжение программ Пояс и Путь и Нурлы Жол в отношении краткосрочного воздействия на развитие Казахстана. Используемые методы: построение теории; и сравнительный анализ сопряжение двух программ с точки зрения установления стратегического партнерства между Китаем и Казахстаном.

**Ключевые слова:** Инициатива «Пояс и путь», Китай, Казахстан, Нурлы Жол, соприкосновение программ.

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