

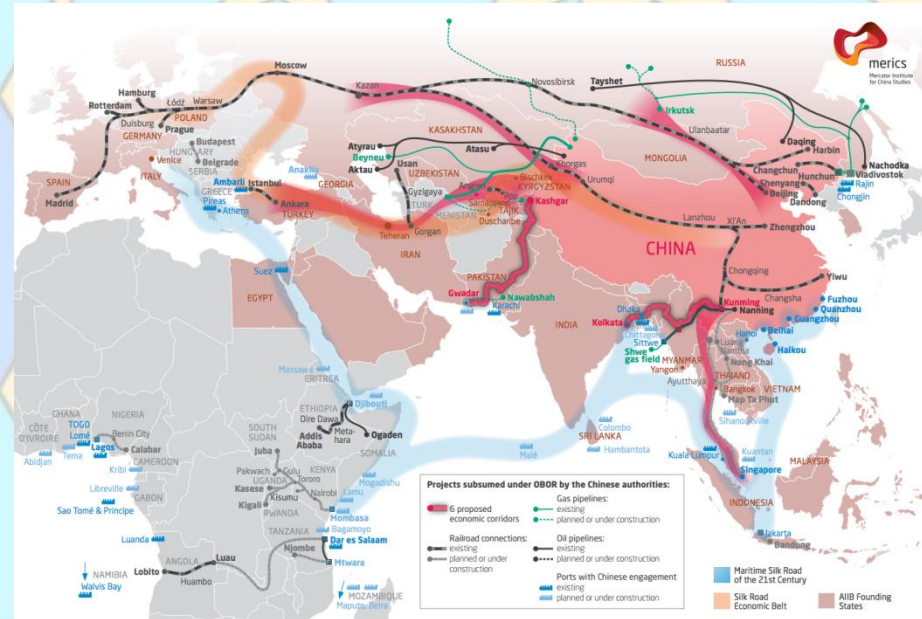
China's Belt and Road Initiative: Some Political and Security Implications for Kazakhstan and Central Asia



OBOR initiative

Main features

- In September 2013 Pres. Xi Jinping announces „New Silk Road Economic Belt” in Astana
- Following month he launches „Maritime Silk Road Plan” in Jakarta
- Since then 66 countries participating. In total 4-8 trillion US\$ projected to be invested till 2025.



- OBOR has very little organizational structure. Chinese ministries and agencies are carrying it forward (some projects are delegated to other organizations e.g. SCO).

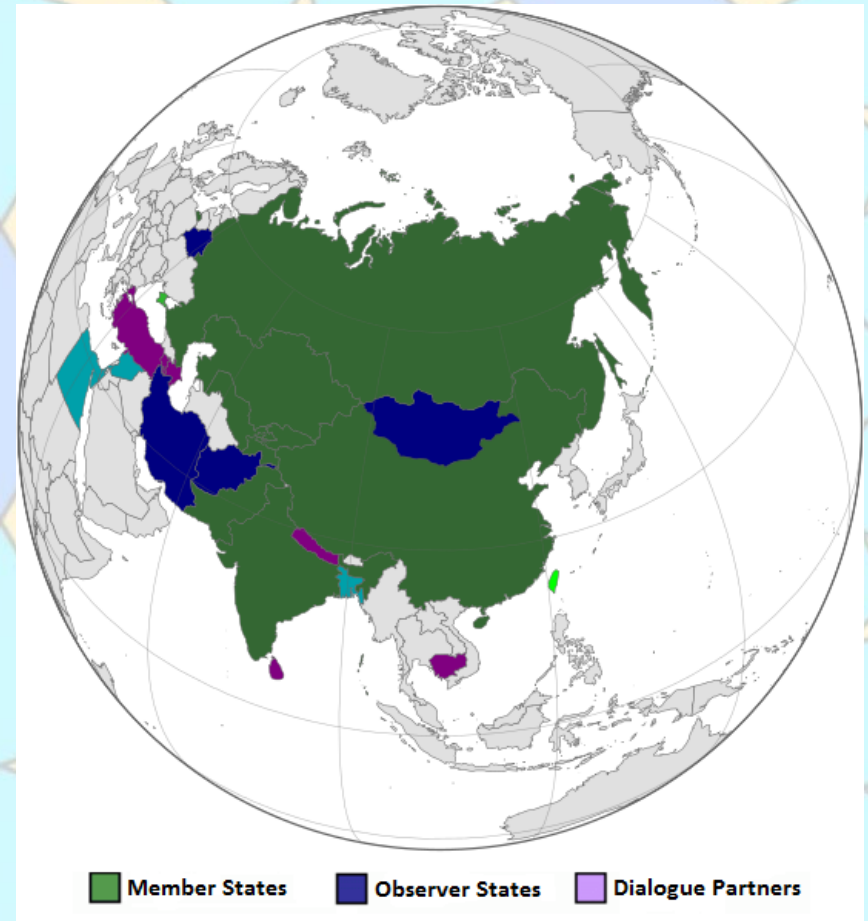
OBOR and Central Asia

- Easier access and extraction of CA's natural resources (primarily oil and gas)
- Securing markets for Chinese goods, soaking up excess capacities in Chinese industries (e.g. construction, steel etc.)
- Developing backward Xinjiang province



Differencing viewpoints between Central Asian states

- In June 2016 SCO presidents reaffirmed their support for „New Silk Road” improving regional infrastructure
- The three border countries have closer bilateral relations, significant private trade flows and experience migration from China (Laurelle – Peyrouse, 2009).
- In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the „Chinese question” has been on the political agenda for a decade (in Tajikistan the question is less politicized).



Economic concerns about chinese investments in kazakh and kyrgyz society

- More than 85 % of export from China to Central Asia are manufactured items, while more than 85 % of export from CA to China are natural resources.
- Chinese infrastructural investments are highly extractive and often environmentally damaging. They can accelerate rent-seeking behaviour of certain elite groups. Strong pro-China lobby groups in government and in energy industry circles.
- China's export to Central Asia threatens local manufacturing capabilities. New class cleavages may emerge between the ones who are welcoming Chinese investments and those working in capital and labour intensive sectors, who may come to resent it (Brown, 2015). However kazakh and kyrgyz bazaar traders benefit from the re-export of chinese goods.

Chinese migration

- Kazakhstan: in 2016 according to official statistics 35% of legally issued 36800 work permits went to Chinese citizens. But the actual number of Chinese workers without proper documentation is certainly higher. Despite low unemployment strong fears that Chinese are threatening job market. Since 2010 quota system for Chinese companies that want to hire migrant workers.
- In Kyrgyzstan official statistics are much more unreliable, but approx. 40-50.000 Chinese migrants (77% of the total migrant worker population). Since 2010 also quota. Many complaints about poor working conditions and mistreatment of local (Kyrgyz and Kazakh) workers.
- Fears about Chinese taking over agricultural lands. In 2016 Kazakh government announced changes to the country's Land Code (leasing of agricultural land to foreign citizens up to 25 years). Protests broke out in western Kazakhstan (government finally stepped back). Violent clashes between Chinese and locals also occurred several times in Kyrgyzstan (Burkhanov, 2018).
- General fears about China's demographic expansion: between 1990-2015 nearly 3,5 million inhabitants emigrated from Kazakhstan, the country lost 18% of its population.

Perception of China in Kazakh media and public

- Kazakh russian language media (e.g. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*) portray Kazakh-Chinese relations in positive tones
 - *Chinese car manufacturer opens new assembly line in Kostanay (Oct. 2014)*
 - *Chinese support for Kazakhstani CICA foreign policy initiative (Jun. 2017)*
 - *First Kazakhstani-chinese snow and ice festival (Dec.2014)*
- Kazakh language media's (e.g. nationalist *Zhas Alas*, *Turkestan kz.*) exhibit much more hostile tone:
 - *Threatening demographic trends (Jan. 2017)*
 - *Disputes over agricultural land (Febr. 2017)*
 - *Masses of Chinese men come to Kazakhstan to marry Kazakh woman (Jan. 2017)*
- According to public opinion surveys (e.g. Sadovskaia 2007) 70% of Kazakh respondents think that Chinese migration will have negative effect on the country. Kazakh people view Chinese as culturally more „distant” than russians or Europeans.

Xinjiang and the Uyghur question

- Linguistic, historical, cultural proximity with central asian nations. According to official statistics 1,53% of Kazakhstan's population are ethnic uyghurs (the real number can be double of it). They are concentrated in Almaty oblast.
- Uyghurs in Kazakhstan maintain various cultural association (e.g. Uyghur theater in Almaty), but their political organizations have been banned (People's Party of Uyghurstan, Voice of Eastern Turkestan).
- Fears in Central Asian societies of Chinese „neo-clonialism” and that their fate can be the same as Xinjiang's.



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Thank You for your attention!