



The relationality of geopolitical codes: the example of the Belt and Road Initiative

Colin Flint & Hassan Noorali

To cite this article: Colin Flint & Hassan Noorali (2023): The relationality of geopolitical codes: the example of the Belt and Road Initiative, Asian Geographer, DOI: [10.1080/10225706.2023.2227618](https://doi.org/10.1080/10225706.2023.2227618)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10225706.2023.2227618>



Published online: 26 Jun 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



The relationality of geopolitical codes: the example of the Belt and Road Initiative

Colin Flint^a and Hassan Noorali^b

^aPolitical Geography, Department of Political Science, Utah State University, Logan, UT, USA; ^bPolitical Geography, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

The concept of the geopolitical code is a useful tool to understand the multi-faceted nature of a country's foreign policy, the way in which global patterns of geopolitics are an aggregation of geopolitical codes, and moments of geopolitical transition from one pattern of codes to another. We address the nature of geopolitical codes through the lens of instrumental and associative power, and the geography of its modalities. Especially, we consider the combined logics of power expressed as economic networks and territorial sovereignty. To illustrate our argument, we briefly consider a number of regional responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The geopolitical codes of Russia, India, Japan, the European Union, and the United States are discussed. By considering the process of the relationality of geopolitical codes constructed in response to the BRI we see an intensification in relations and an increasing scope that suggests the BRI is driving an ongoing geopolitical transition that will usher in a new geopolitical world order.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 September 2022
Accepted 14 June 2023

KEYWORDS

Geopolitical codes;
geopolitical world orders;
geopolitical transition; China;
Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Introduction

It is evident that we are in a period of rising geopolitical tensions, and one driving force of that tendency is the tension between the United States (US) and China. We offer one way to think about the situation, without any claims to seeing it as the only valid approach. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the heuristic value of geopolitical codes for understanding the foreign policy decisions of states in terms of their relational position in the inter-state system and their evaluation of other countries (Taylor 1990, 13). Moreover, we posit the idea that exploring dynamics in the content and relations of geopolitical codes can serve to indicate the moment of geopolitical transition in the world-economy. A geopolitical transition is driven by the change in geopolitical codes of countries with regional and global reach. In the past, geopolitical transitions have involved global wars. Hence, exploring the value of geopolitical codes in relation to contemporary dynamics in world politics has conceptual and practical value. We conclude that the increasing complexity of the relationality of codes suggests we are in such a period of geopolitical transition.

The heuristic value of geopolitical codes is illustrated through a discussion of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and geopolitical projects in response to the BRI. The BRI has been the focus of global geopolitics since President Xi's announcement of what was then called the "One Belt One Road" in 2013 (NDRC 2015). Since this announcement, the project has passed through a number of geopolitical representations and has evolved through the construction of a set of transport corridors with specific local manifestations and implications (Carmody and Taylor 2010; Mayer and Zhang 2020). The BRI dominates academic and policy discussions in what are often separate but related conversations: one conversation focused on transport and trade and the other on the geopolitics of China's growing power and the response of the US and other countries. Without doubt, the BRI is a transformative geopolitical project (Schindler, Dicarolo, and Paudel 2022). The BRI has also provoked a number of responses, which is to be expected given the relational nature of geopolitical codes. It is this relationality, and associated geographic features, that we discuss in this paper. We argue that a framework for conceptualizing global change, such as ours, is necessary to interpret analytical approaches at the individual and local scale, while such analyses should allow us to reflect on the validity and efficacy of broader conceptual frameworks. This paper is the elucidation of a framework rather than an inductive or deductive analysis.

In sum, we can see that geopolitical codes involve entwined economic and political strategies that involve constructing territorial arrangements and spatialities of connectivity, are multi-scalar, are best thought of as a process, and involve orders of the relationality of power that extend beyond bilateral relations. The framework of geopolitical codes is useful in understanding how China and countries responding to the BRI combine actions of territorial control and connectivity through economic and political means. These actions require a multi-scalar and multi-spatial agency that transforms places and builds corridors of connectivity in order to re-order regional and global relations. In combination, the actions of many countries with regard to the BRI are a geopolitical process that is driving the current geopolitical transition to a new, yet to be defined, geopolitical world order (Schindler, Dicarolo, and Paudel 2022). Simply, the BRI is a driver of geopolitical change at multiple scales that alters the way places are connected, changes established economic and political relations, and will likely usher in a new global geopolitical order.

We first introduce the idea of geopolitical codes, transitions and orders and then interpret the BRI as the key factor of China's geopolitical code. We then introduce sets of geopolitical responses to the BRI before arguing that these responses are in a process of coalescing into a new geopolitical world order. Empirically we recognize that the relationality of geopolitics is becoming more intense and broader in scope – an observation that suggests the BRI is the focus of an increasingly antagonistic geopolitical context in which new alliances are emerging.

Geopolitical codes

A geopolitical code is the framework of policies and representations that a country constructs to evaluate its position in the world and design a strategy to maintain and enhance its security and prosperity (Flint and Taylor 2018, 51–52). The basic elements of a geopolitical code are the identification of existing and potential allies and enemies, the means

to address allies and enemies, and representations that justify these policy decisions (Flint and Taylor 2018, 51). Depending on their capabilities and needs, countries will attempt to construct their geopolitical code at neighborhood, regional, or global scales. Countries will also emphasize and balance economic, political, military, or cultural means to match their ability and goals.

Considering geopolitical codes is one way of looking at state policy. One of its strengths is its emphasis upon geographical calculations that contextualize the concerns and goals of a country. In other words, the calculations of state interest are “inevitably geographical because they use encompass variations in the valuation of foreign places” (Taylor 1990, 13). Using geopolitical codes as an organizing concept allows for a discussion of geopolitics that is both material and discursive. It is material in that the means are political, military, and economic capabilities. It is discursive in that representations must be mobilized to justify geopolitical codes, and that the content of a code is the outcome of viewing other places as security commodities. In addition, evaluating the actions of a state through its identification of threats and opportunities across the neighborhood, regional, or global scale requires a consideration of the geographic relationality of power (Allen 2003).

The means of a geopolitical code are a combination of economic, political, discursive, and military actions that are entwined, and hence make the terms geopolitics and geoeconomics unhelpful and unnecessary binaries (Moisio 2019). Instead, any geopolitical code is a combination of twin logics of power that simultaneously use economic resources to achieve territorial results and territorial arrangements to achieve economic advantage (Arrighi 1990). This specific understanding of the political economy nature of geopolitics is useful because it does not prioritize or artificially separate (geo)politics and (geo)economics but illuminates the intertwined nature of economic and political processes and the necessary spatialization of this entanglement. A state may enhance its power through gaining control of territory (annexing a neighbor’s territory, for example), but can only succeed in this goal if it has the economic ability to fund an invasion and sustain occupation. Similarly, a state may enhance its power by increasing its economic capacity through establishing new networks of trade and investment that are beneficial to its domestic economy; however, it is axiomatic that territorial arrangements, or spatial fixes (Harvey 1982), are necessary for rounds of economic investment and the realization of profits. In other words, and in a heuristic sense, a country may seek to advance its interests through a geopolitical code that favors economic or political means but one requires the other. Hence, a geopolitical code is always, to some degree, a geographic project with both territorial and network calculations.

The concept of geopolitical codes is deceptively simple. At first glance it appears to be a simplified listing of a country’s worldview and the means to accomplish its goals. In other words, it can be merely seen as “strategy.” However, strategy may be an inadequate notion when it is largely restricted to the actions of countries deemed to be “great powers” and usually refers to a global landscape de-spatialized as a Euclidian “chessboard” (for example, Brzezinski 1998). Alternatively, geopolitical codes enable a recursive sense of geopolitics in which actions by all countries (regardless of their capabilities) interact at the local, regional, and global scales to form an ever-shifting landscape of geopolitics that is simultaneously made by the actions of countries while also partially restriction the potential range of actions, or even closing the door some goals while

opening up new ones. A study through the lens of strategy, in a simple and classical sense, would focus on a bilateral competition between the US and China. The idea of geopolitical codes focuses on the formation of shifting geopolitical world orders that are the product of not just a handful of powerful countries, but the many relational (and often contradictory) decisions made by all countries in the world seeking advantage in an ever-changing nesting of local, regional, and global contexts.

The means of a code may also be considered through the way power is enacted through geographies of scale, networks, and territory. Heuristically, we can consider the mobilization of power in an instrumental or associational form (Allen 2003, 5). Instrumental power is “where power is something that is held over you and used to obtain leverage” (Allen 2003, 5). In other words, the use or threat of use of economic or political means to gain advantage. Associational power is “where power acts more like a collective medium enabling things to get done or facilitate some common aim” (Allen 2003, 5). The use of collaboration and connection to achieve a goal that benefits all, though it may benefit some more than others. For example, the combination of these two mobilizations of power by China in its relations with Zambia and Sudan has led to the description of China’s practices on the ground as “flexigemony” (Carmody and Taylor 2010).

A geopolitical code may operate at a number of interrelated geographic scales. The code of a few countries may focus on immediate neighbors. However, many countries make calculations at the regional scale. A few countries, those often labeled as “powers”, make calculations with global imperatives and goals in mind. The recent history of Chinese foreign policy has shown a progression towards a greater capacity to act at regional and global scales (Flint and Zhang 2019). The BRI has been the central geopolitical means in the ongoing construction of a global Chinese geopolitical code that fulfills the promises of global engagement that have existed since the period of Mao’s rule, but was never able to be fully enacted because of the relative lack of economic means (Flint and Zhang 2019).

The geopolitical codes of countries (and non-state actors) aggregate into a relatively stable pattern, called a geopolitical world order (Flint and Taylor 2018, 64–65; Taylor 1990). For example, the Cold War was a relatively stable pattern of geopolitical codes in which individual countries tended not to recalculate their codes; this relative stability was the product and outcome of a stable world order. But orders do not remain stable forever. There are historic moments of geopolitical transition in which countries fundamentally recalculate their codes and, as result and cause, the global pattern of geopolitical relations is fundamentally altered.

The context of a geopolitical world order or transition leads us to recognize that any geopolitical code is constructed in relation to the codes of other countries (Taylor 1990). A simple way to think of this is a bilateral relation between adversaries or allies, such as Israel-Iran relations in the case of the former and US-British relations in the case of the latter. But thinking in terms of these first-order relations is inadequate (Maoz 2010). Instead, a geopolitical code is formulated in a complex web of relationality in which the relations between two countries, the US and Britain for example, are made and remade in relation to the actions of another country, such as Russia. A further order of relational complexity is added when we recognize that the US-British response to Russia, to

continue the example, is likely to indirectly lead to other countries, such as those with interests in the Arctic region, having to consider their own codes.

In sum, we can see the following attributes of geopolitical codes:

- The combination of economic and political means through inseparable logics of network and territorial expressions of power
- Multi-scalar goals and capabilities
- Relationality
- The dynamism of countries' codes
- The aggregation of codes into a global pattern
- The dynamism of the global pattern in the form of a geopolitical transition
- The combination of instrumental and associational forms of power

Geopolitical world orders are periods in which we would expect relative stability in the geopolitical codes of separate countries, the balance of economic (network) and political (territorial) means and goals within a country's geopolitical code, little change in the scalar scope of geopolitical codes, the patterns of relationality, and the prevalence of instrumental or associational forms of power. In contrast, a period of geopolitical transition should see a drift towards changes in all these manifestations of codes, orders, and power. Our discussion of the BRI, and the responses to it, highlights the degree to which we see the attributes of geopolitical codes in operation and in motion in a way that suggests we are in the process of a geopolitical transition.

The geopolitics of the BRI: action and reaction

The BRI is a geopolitical infrastructure project that is the means of China's geopolitical code to challenge the existing global geopolitical world order. The project is a combination of economic, diplomatic, military, and cultural means. China's overall goal and approach as an emerging power has been to develop a set of economic relations with the potential to rearrange existing security arrangements. The BRI is the engine for creating new geopolitical relations by simultaneously developing maritime trade and access across Eurasia (Noorali, Flint, and Ahmadi 2022). In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled a plan which consisted of the twin-component "One Belt, One Road Initiative" consisting of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) (Sarker et al. 2018, 624). Subsequently, in March 2015, detailed plans for the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) or the "Belt and Road" Initiative were laid out in a White Paper (NDRC 2015). These maritime and continental strategies are combined within the BRI, projected to join approximately sixty countries in Asia, Europe and Africa through the "Go West" diplomatic agenda (Sarker et al. 2018, 631; Sum 2019, 13). The transformative potential of the BRI is part of a policy to engage existing powers in peaceful relations rather than challenging them directly (Noorali and Ahmadi 2022; Zhang, Zhang, and Xiao 2022, 424–429). The development of economic relations, driven by the needs to allay concerns about domestic overproduction, is a form of network geopolitics that necessarily requires the construction of new territorial arrangements. These new geographies are simultaneously local, regional (through the formation of corridors), and global. The combination of network and territorial

arrangements, and the related combination of economic and political means, within the BRI is a geopolitical expression of glocalization that blurs political and economic relations that span across localities in an ongoing fashion (Swyngedouw 1997). Hence, the BRI has proposed to strengthen regional and global economic integration (Mitchell 2021, 1400; Winter 2021, 1376).

The BRI is just one aspect of China's geopolitical code, but it is central to understanding how China is building a geopolitical code that moves beyond the scale of its immediate neighbors and the East Asian region to a global code. The construction of transportation infrastructure, especially in the form of the corridors that are the component parts of the BRI, are physical and discursive geopolitical constructs that make economic, political, and cultural linkages (Schindler, Dicarolo, and Paudel 2022). Through these linkages China can make connections at the neighborhood, regional, and global scales (Harvey, Jensen, and Morita 2017, 2; Sternberg, Ahearn, and McConnell 2017, 6).

Consequently, the geopolitical representations are of China's Peaceful Rise to make China's proposals to re-set global geopolitical relations appear unthreatening (Winter 2021). This representation has failed. Countries such as the US and Japan are skeptical and concerned about the unspoken yet conceivable geopolitical aims of the BRI (Tweed 2019, 2). Other countries are fully aware of the BRI's potential to re-configure global patterns of trade and investment (Summers 2020). Such transformation would also alter the current global geopolitical landscape (Blanchard and Flint 2017, 223; Medcalf 2020). Notably, the BRI would connect the Indian Ocean to the Eurasian continent. At the least, the BRI would increase China's influence in East and Southeast Asia, with implications for geopolitical competition with the US (Flint and Zhu 2018, 1).

Economic, political, and cultural means expressed in fused network and territorial spatialities are the conduits and outcomes of instrumental and associational forms of power operating in tandem. (Allen 2003, 5). Investment is, ostensibly, a form of associational power with the common goal of attaining profits through new spatial fixes. However, being in debt is simultaneously a form of instrumental power as it empowers China to have leverage over debtors. Though the instrumental nature of China's economic loans is overstated within Western commentaries, there is an unavoidable connection between the common aims of the lender and lendee, and the ability of the lender to extract concessions (DeBoom 2020). Though explicit military outcomes have yet to be seen through China's associational power relations of economic ties, the fear of future instrumental outcomes is central to the geopolitical codes of countries such as the US, Australia, and India (Medcalf 2020). Specifically, the current associational power of economic ties may result in military relations, especially the use of ports as bases, that increase China's instrumental power.

Unsurprisingly, the size and ambition of the BRI are shifting the established notions and logics of traditional geopolitical competitiveness (Zhang 2018). China sees the BRI as a form of international collaboration to reinforce global connectivity, communication and cooperation (Zhang 2018), or a form of associational power. The BRI has been identified as a plan of economic expansion into targeted regions, with the intention of constructing international trade routes for the benefit of the Chinese manufacturing sector (Cau 2018). This plan would not just benefit China but fundamentally reconstruct the global geopolitical world order by overturning the relationship between land and sea,

and placing Eurasia at the center of geopolitical calculations (Jiwoon 2019). In combination, the BRI is a “mega-project” that furthers China’s process of constructing a global geopolitical code through the intertwining of political and economic projects through a combination of connected trans-regional spatial fixes (Sum 2019). However, there is a big difference between the geographies of actual infrastructure projects and the way they are represented. Hence, planning the geographies of transportation networks and implementing them on the ground are important challenges for the BRI project (Harvey, Jensen, and Morita 2017, 42; Sarker et al. 2018, 624–626; Van Noort 2021, 18).

Transformations in global connectivity have catalyzed realist geopolitical responses (Kaplan 2018; Office of the Secretary of Defense 2020). An infrastructure project as ambitious as the BRI has, unsurprisingly, provoked alarm bells amongst policymakers. For example, Admiral Harry Harris, Chief of US Command in the Pacific, identified the BRI as part of the superpower rivalry between China and the US. Admiral Harris described the BRI as a maneuver to encircle key global shipping hubs and therefore marginalize US global influence (Lin 2019, 1). The geostrategic position of the US has been based on a blue water navy that can project power across the globe to maintain key maritime trade routes in nearly all geographical regions (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2020). The US is alarmed by China’s attempts, and growing ability, to utilize vital transportation corridors to widen its sphere of influence in many regions of the world as a reflection of China’s process of creating a global geopolitical code (Noorali and Ahmadi 2022). The emphasis we would like to make is that such a US response cannot be made alone. Instead, the emerging geopolitical world order will be an aggregation of the geopolitical codes of other countries as they also react to the BRI with their own particular concerns, abilities, and goals.

The relationality of responses to the BRI

Though it is important to briefly outline the BRI as an element of China’s geopolitical code, our focus is upon how China’s goals and actions create a relational wave of changes in the geopolitical codes of other countries. This relationality is a *process*; geopolitical reactions that have emerged in recent years are a relational suite of codes that originate as national concerns and first-order relations but are steadily becoming a dense web of relationality that is global in scope. We outline important sets of geopolitical codes to illustrate the three considerations of 1) the political economy understanding of geopolitical codes, 2) their relationality, and 3) the operation of codes at three related scales.

The Eurasian Economic Union

Russia is a partner with China in the development of the BRI. China has intentionally planned for segments of the BRI to be within Russia to gain the latter’s cooperation as an economic and strategic ally. To some degree, the BRI is of benefit to Russia, especially to maintain and enhance trade relations. However, Russia has simultaneously developed its own Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to restrict and curb China’s influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus Regions (Dragneva and Hartwell 2021, 200–203; Kazantsev, Medvedeva, and Safranchuk 2021).

The Russian-led EAEU can be seen as a political-economic combination of territorial power expressions that serve as a powerful image of what Putin envisions for the post-Soviet space (Sergi 2018, 52–53). The EAEU, which was formed, ostensibly, for the integration of its member states (i.e. Armenia, Belarus, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia), is a geopolitical and not just an economic project to counter the regional and global geopolitical codes of competitors through the intertwining of economic and political means of expressing territorial power. It should also be noted that each country in the EAEU has its own geopolitical code, and they have separately concluded trade agreements with trading partners (Dragneva and Hartwell 2021, 200–203). Hence, the dynamism of a collection of geopolitical codes may not inevitably lead to aggregation and coherence.

The EAEU is partly a Russian response to concerns about China's growing influence in the Central Asian region (International Crisis Group 2016, 18; Kazantsev, Medvedeva, and Safranchuk 2021). The "yellow danger", the fear of the Chinese occupying eastern Russia, has been a geopolitical trope since the 1880s and remains a motivation (either real or a justifying representation) behind Russia's response to China (Bennett 2016, 348). Russia is playing a relational game by simultaneously recognizing the needs and benefits of acting within the BRI, while building relations with Eurasian states that are themselves building relations within China (Kuteleva and Vasilev 2021, 585–586). Although Russia, through EAEU, forms a separate and competing code to China's BRI, it tries to represent the two initiatives as coordinated (International Crisis Group 2016, 18; Lukin 2019, 10–11). This relational practice consolidates the codes of Russia and its allies within the ongoing context of a geopolitical transition.

Russia's concern and response is a geopolitical code that recognizes and incorporates a political economy calculation. A territorial concern is China's growing influence in the breakaway countries of the former Soviet Union (Kazantsev, Medvedeva, and Safranchuk 2021; Pop 2016, 8–9). This concern is driven by economic concerns that have manifested in the rejection of China's initiative to establish a free trade zone among members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the subsequent Russian moves to establish a Eurasian Union Trade Organization in cooperation with Kazakhstan and Belarus. China saw this strategic diplomatic move as an attempt by Russia to prevent Chinese penetration of its traditional sphere of influence within the region (Kazantsev, Medvedeva, and Safranchuk 2021; Lukin 2019, 10–11; Sergi 2018, 55–59). The relational geopolitics catalyzed by the BRI extends beyond the region of Central Asia to the global scale through the dual connectivity of China and Russia with the European Union (EU), and the growing influence of China in the Arctic region, considered by the Russians as another traditional sphere of influence. These relationships are not only about creating territorial geopolitical spheres of influence, but also about creating networks of trade patterns and sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that will change the dynamic global patterns of political economies within geopolitical transitions.

Russia's response to the BRI shows how the traditional concerns at the neighborhood scale can only be understood by the growing global scale of another country's code – China and the BRI. Also, a time of geopolitical transition is one in which a country's geopolitical code contains contradictions in response to dilemmas; Russia must simultaneously accommodate and seek benefits from economic relations with China while being wary of territorial concerns, whether real or imagined.

Indian material and discursive relational codes

India, China's traditional rival, has taken a negative view of the BRI and has tried to challenge it by creating a suite of new codes. Project Mausam is a multi-scale and multi-faceted initiative that intertwines the instruments of territorial power and network connectivity and was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to increase India's links with countries impacted by the BRI (Ministry of Culture 2023; Singh 2019, 7). The means of Project Mausam, as a factor of India's geopolitical code, are primarily economic and cultural. Characterized in the Indian press as a "transnational initiative meant to revive [India's] ancient maritime routes and cultural linkages with countries in the region", the project is a direct response to China's BRI (Singh 2019, 71). The economic base of the project is India's goal to re-establish ties with ancient trading partners and the creation of an "Indian Ocean World Concept" which puts India in the center of commerce activities. China's presence in the Pakistani port of Gwadar as part of the MSRI has been represented as a "siege" and has raised concerns about India's geopolitical and geoeconomic situation. India and China have been longstanding rivals, and this bilateral tension has been expressed within the countries' regional geopolitical codes within Central Asia and the Indian Ocean region (Medcalf 2020). India has readily seized upon the geopolitical representation of China establishing a "String of Pearls" in generating India's port investments in the Indian Ocean Region as a response to China's growing presence (Ashraf 2017; Singh and Singh 2019, 171). India has classified the MSRI as a means for China to build a regional geopolitical code by building a network of naval bases in the ports of the countries of South Asia as a means of advancing the navy to the Indian Ocean and beyond to the Middle East (Marshall 2012, 1). Increased presence in the Indian Ocean would increase China's significant presence along SLOCs, anchoring its presence in the Middle East (Devonshire-Ellis 2009, 8) and besieging India (Pop 2016, 9).

In the process of building and developing its chain of ports in the Indian Ocean and to play a greater role in the field of energy, China has considered Sri Lanka as one of India's strategic port focus points to further challenge India's maritime geopolitical position (Theiventhran 2022). The dynamics of India's geopolitical codes place the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), another territorial expression of power in India's maritime doctrine to respond to China's MSRI, in relation to Project Mausam (Chalikyan and Tashjia 2021; Ranjan 2017, 152). The North-South Initiative is a multi-purpose project that connects the ports of India, Iran and Russia as a corridor network and shortens the transportation time of goods as an alternative route to the Suez Canal. The first train via INSTC departed from Helsinki on June 21, 2021 and reached its destination twice as fast as the traditional route through the Suez Canal, illustrating that the INSTC is a timely and competitive infrastructural project (Chalikyan and Tashjia 2021; Noorali and Ahmadi 2022).

India's network projects connect places and regions. They require the Indian Navy's capability for global operations and international connectivity, focusing on maintaining regional maritime superiority by integrating political, economic and cultural calculations about the strategic value of specific territories (Ashraf 2017, 1-3). To try and assuage those concerns, Beijing is now pushing for a linkage between Project Mausam and the MSRI (Tiezzi 2015). However, India's perception of the threat posed by the rise of China as a rival regional power has created a growing sense of geopolitical relationality

that has made it vital to code into a dynamic global pattern within geopolitical transitions.

A time of geopolitical transition disrupts established and seemingly immutable geopolitical calculations. For decades India has assumed that it was the dominant power in the Indian Ocean region. That this assumption is severely challenged is the result not of India's geopolitical or strategic failings, but the economic relations being developed by China with countries in Africa and the Middle East. The relationality of geopolitics is that the economic imperatives of other countries on other continents require a re-calculation of one's own local and regional codes.

The American silk road for Central Asia

The multi-scalar, multi-actor relationality of EU and Indian geopolitical codes created in response to the BRI has been significantly enhanced by growing US concerns and actions. (The EU's geopolitical code is discussed in more detail below.) Throughout modern history, Central Asia has been a region of interest to world powers because control of the territory has enabled regional and global connectivity through transportation networks (Högselius 2022). The so-called "Great Game" arose from the rivalry between two nineteenth-century superpowers, Britain and Russia, over Central Asia, with an eye upon British control of India (Mojtahed-Zadeh 2004, 8). From the end of World War Two, the Central Asia region has been a central concern within the US's geopolitical code. Energy resources, competition with China and Russia, and twenty-first-century concerns about "secure sources" for terrorism are a combination of economic, strategic, and territorial concerns that have driven the US' multi-scale objectives and capabilities in the region (Tacconi 2010, 3).

The dynamic political economy of Central Asia, which is based on energy resources and pipeline routes on the one hand, and territorial transportation networks on the other hand, has invigorated the consolidation of the codes of competing powers in the region as an element of global geopolitical transition. As Rustemova (2011) shows, the analysis of the political economy of Central Asia cannot continue to be based on the separation of economics and politics in the dynamics of the current world order. Therefore, it is not surprising that in response to China's BRI and its growing influence in the Central Asian region, the US has coordinated its geopolitical codes in territorial connectivity networks. These responses have been piecemeal and were based on the New Silk Road vision presented by the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011, a precursor to the sense of growing competition between the US and China in Central Asia (Noorali and Ahmadi 2022). The vision was a combination of economic and territorial concerns, including the security environment in Afghanistan, exploitation of oil and gas resources, economic relations between South and Central Asian countries to expand local markets for US allies (particularly India and Pakistan), and reduction of the regional influence of China, Russia, and Iran. Particularly, the US wanted its New Silk Road to act as a geopolitical wedge between China, and to a lesser extent Iran, and countries in the region, whether as established or potential US allies (Noorali and Ahmadi 2022).

The response of the US to the BRI illustrates the economic imperatives behind strategic actions. It also shows that even a hegemonic power does not act alone, especially in a period of relative decline. Instead, the US must increasingly consider the geopolitical codes of other countries that also respond to China's actions in a dynamic of coordinated

codes amongst allies. Some elements of the codes of other states will see benefits of developing ties with China, while others will be wary. A geopolitical transition is a period in which the declining hegemonic power must come to realize that its own code is no longer the one that defines the decisions of others, but is a context in which the relationality of codes (including the less powerful states) partially determines what is possible within a once dominant global geopolitical code.

Japan's changing geopolitical code

China's BRI, and its military implications in the Indo-Pacific region, have led to a re-calculation of Japan's multi-faceted and multi-scalar geopolitical code into an inextricably relational and dynamic logic (Jash 2019, 22). For decades, Japan has been a key source of economic investment in infrastructural territorial networks that interweave a combination of instrumental and associational forms of power (Ito 2019; Joe 2022; Murashkin 2018). Therefore, the BRI has been a threat to Japan as one of the largest traditional infrastructure exporters in Asia with multi-scale objectives and capabilities. In the new political economy of the region, due to increasing security tensions in the South China Sea, geopolitics and economics are increasingly intertwined (Joe 2022). The dynamics of Japan and China's separate codes within geopolitical transitions calls for infrastructure investment competition for greater economic influence in Southeast Asia.

Japan is concerned about maintaining access to Central Asian and Middle Eastern oil and gas resources. In October 2013, Shinzo Abe (then Japanese Prime Minister) expanded the geopolitical scope of Japan's geopolitical code by advocating for an Asian-European commercial partnership. Prime Minister Abe remarked that Tokyo was the starting point for a new Asia-Europe Silk Road. Japan's geopolitical code has had to emerge as political-economic in terms of its means because of the constitutional restrictions upon building offensive military capability. Hence, Japan has vigorously engaged Pacific and Indian Ocean coastal countries to strengthen its armed force attendance. These initiatives are to reinforce the "Defensive Line" policy to restrain China's penetration (Liu 2017, 136).

The catalyst for Japan's geopolitical code is relational: a set of trading relations with regional countries and energy exporters. At a time of geopolitical transition, Japan is recognizing the limits to its established geopolitical code, especially its defensive agenda within a local scale that was established by its relations with the US and its role as hegemonic power. In sum, Japan's new geopolitical code is responding to a new context of relationality that is being driven, largely, by China's agenda of creating a regional and global code. Emphasizing relationality forces us to consider that these dynamics have nudged Japan to build a code that must also reflect relations with the EU, a key market for Japan.

Dynamics of relationality codes of the EU

The EU geopolitical code has always combined economic and political instruments in a project whose very nature is the belief in the efficacy of associational power. However, its geopolitical code, especially when it prepares to respond to the geopolitical codes of others, sees power practices as inevitably territorial and at times instrumental to achieving its goals (Cianciara 2020; Rhinard and Sjöstedt 2019, 8). Associative forms of power are manifest in the construction of network corridors of transportation. At the moment,

the territorial aspects of the EU's code are largely separate. However, the twin challenges of forging an economic relationship with China while dealing with the Russia-Ukraine war on its doorstep mean a dynamic construction of codes. The EU is attempting to integrate a set of national codes within a changing global context while attempting to maintain the priority of its associational goals through the construction and maintenance of land and sea transportation networks. The moment of geopolitical transition is partially being formed by, and partially catalyzing, the EU's introduction of three network initiatives. These initiatives include the geopolitical imagination of reviving the Silk Road, the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), and the Global Gateway, whose main goal is to respond to China's initiative.

The BRI will have far-reaching implications for China-Europe relations (Zhao 2016, 1). China intends to use the BRI to engender greater political trust, expand shared interests, and seek closer cooperation with Europe, thus reducing the barriers to economic exchange between them. However, to date, a concrete mechanism of multilateral cooperation is still missing in the promotion of the BRI (Li and Schmerer 2017, 210), though the establishment of institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and a series of BRI summits, are steps in that direction. The security and economic implications of the BRI in Europe can be assessed in three general categories: 1) impact on European unification, 2) impact on European security, and 3) competition for trade, investments and access to European and Asian free markets (Mohan 2018, 2). EU member states developed concerns that the BRI will gradually eradicate the internal cohesion and political alliances of the Union. Hence, European stakeholders proposed an alternative project. In 2009, the EU proposed a new Silk Road Project to strengthen its affairs with Central Asia and neighboring countries in the fields of energy, trade, personal exchange, and information. The project included the Nabucco West Project, which was based upon the construction of a natural gas pipeline. As with the other geopolitical responses we have discussed, the means of the EU's geopolitical code combined economics, culture, and security. The EU intervention aims to balance US and Russian influence in Central Asia while accepting some level of economic relations with China while acknowledging that China's increasing role in Central Asia is not necessarily advantageous (Liu 2017, 135).

TRACECA, a multi-faceted project of networks connecting multiple territories, is part of the geopolitical imagination of the new European Silk Road. This corridor was developed in order to integrate the continents of Europe and Asia by connecting them through the Black Sea and the Caucasus. This transport network includes the EU and 15 member countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, facilitating the connection of Central Asian republics to European ports (Keser 2015, 163; Noorali and Ahmadi 2022). This geopolitical project, a potential competitor to BRI's land route, will be complemented by a new project in 2021. Hence, the EU recently launched the Global Gateway, a multi-faceted network of connectivity (Lau and Cokelaere 2021). In another expression of associational power, the Global Gateway is portrayed as a sustainable project through a commitment to the highest environmental and labor standards, and sound financial management to help reduce the global investment gap around the world (European Commission 2021).

The rationale behind this project is to counter China's influence in the Global South through the BRI (Lau and Cokelaere 2021; Tagliapietra 2021). The project represents the

latest set of actions, policies and declarations in the EU policy framework designed to reflect and produce a clean and viable alternative to the BRI (Kuo 2021). The Global Gateway is a further illustration that development assistance is an element of the EU's geopolitical code; and that it is seen as being necessary in relation to China's role in the Global South.

Each member state of the EU has constructed a local and regional geopolitical code with the means and ends of the economic and political integration of the continent. However, these codes, and the overarching EU code, have been forced to adjust to China's goal of developing stronger ties to the EU in general, and to particular countries. Hence, we see the tension between separate geopolitical codes that are entwined in the relational projects of the EU. For example, the benefits for Greece through China's role in the development of the port of Piraeus; at the same time, there are security concerns across EU countries regarding the use of Chinese internet technology and possible transfer of user data to Chinese government agencies. The current period of geopolitical transition will test the established code of regional integration, and whether the economic benefits of interacting with China's global economic agenda will produce internal EU tensions that create friction between member states: In other words, whether global economic relations put a strain on a decades-long tradition of geopolitical codes of European cooperation.

Towards a coordinated response

The initial responses of India, Japan, the EU, and the US have developed with a growing concern about the influence of China's BRI. Though the responses of each country or bloc have been relational in the sense that they involved calculations and actions beyond bilateral actions, the initial pattern of relationality has quickly merged into new sets of aggregated relationality. In other words, the already tangled web of geopolitical relationships has become denser and its geographical scope become more coherent. The process has involved a fusion of instrumental and associative power using a blend of territorial and network approaches.

One manifestation of the process of deeper and wider relationality is the resumption of the quartet security dialogue, or Quad, after ten years between 2007 and 2017. The aim of the dialogue between the US, Japan, Australia, and India is to confront China in the Indo-Pacific region (Khurana 2019, 20; Medcalf 2020; Smith 2021; Zhu 2018). Some believe that although this alliance has a direct appearance as a security alliance, its genesis was a joint regional infrastructure plan to counter the BRI (Zhu 2018). Several economies in South, Southeast, and East Asia, and Pacific Islands (including Vietnam, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and others) have expressed interest in joining the Indo-Pacific Group in the Quad (Khurana 2019, xxiii). This has expanded the relationality of opposition to the development of the BRI. Quad members have represented the dialogue as a form of economic cooperation to reduce tensions with China, a discursive technique that recognizes the web of economic relations with China within which all member states are embedded (Khurana 2018, 28). Although China has represented the initiative as an Asian NATO, it has also tried to downplay its potential impact by ignoring the Quad (Sarkar 2020, 110).

The political economy, and associational, nature of the new relationality of geopolitical codes is evident in the Quad's concept of an "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP). This concept encompasses US-aligned powers in the region (Weisbrode 2021). In fact, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe believed in the Quad's power to guarantee this idea and sought to convince the Trump administration of the value of the coalition (Smith 2021). In a geopolitical mirror to the BRI, the Quad has developed cooperation between the countries of the Indo-pacific region to create and maintain linkages from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of the Pacific (Khurana 2019, 12). Hence, freedom of navigation and support for FOIP communities have been common in Quad 2.0 meetings, the term used to refer to the 2017 revival of Quad. These goals reflect the region's important SLOCs and its richness of natural resources, such as oil and natural gas in underwater reserves (Sarkar 2020, 116).

Another recent reaction to the BRI is the Blue Dot Network (BDN). The BDN was announced by the US, Japan and Australia in late 2019 at the India-Pacific Business Association in Thailand (Kuo 2020). The initiative, which, like other recent US initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, has been launched with its regional allies, is an infrastructure project at heart, with the added appeal of claiming to foster environmental sustainability, another expression of associational power. It seeks to add new members in the future, including the EU and India (Kuo 2020). A new response to China is the creation of a new military-security alliance known as "AUKUS" between the three countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia in the Indo-Pacific region (Rajagopalan 2021; Saikia 2021). This security pact, primarily an expression of instrumental power, is aimed at further restraining China and clearly links the BRI with the potential for China's military expansion through the development of a blue water navy.

The BRI has initiated a process of change in the geopolitical codes of many countries. This process of change is multi-faceted and relational. In combination, the Quad, BDN, AUKUS and Global Gateway illustrate that the newly forming geopolitical codes are best understood as political-economic in nature, as their means and goals are entwined economic and political actions utilizing a mix of instrumental and associational power. This combination is not surprising given the political-economic nature of the BRI. Furthermore, the webs of relationality have deepened through the formation of the Quad, BDN, AUKUS and Global Gateway, as has the scope of the geopolitical response. The process of deepening and widening geopolitical relationality amongst countries in response to China's BRI is evident in a new geopolitical representation: "China Containment" (Larson 2021). Although these initiatives to contain China have not yet become universal and become a major alternative or competitor to the BRI, the process is ongoing and likely to entwine ever more countries in a relational geopolitical order that is centered upon the BRI.

Conclusion

From the beginning of the present century, China has proclaimed a doctrine of a peaceful yet gradual emergence to eliminate the perception of the country as a threat by the US and other countries. The BRI has been the central feature of China's geopolitical code as it moves through a process of constructing a code global in scope. If China was to succeed in that goal, the result would be the construction of a new geopolitical world

order. Many countries have reacted to the BRI and formed new sets of geopolitical relations that have intensified their commitments to each other and, as a result, led to an aggregation of codes that has broadened the geographical scope of each country's calculations and actions. It is this process of intensification and increased scope of relational codes that is driving contemporary geopolitics that has been labeled a "new Cold War" (Schindler, Dicarolo, and Paudel 2022). Our contribution to this discussion is a focus on the process driving geopolitical change within a period of transition that can only be understood by focusing on the nature of the relationality of geopolitical codes.

The theoretical contribution of the paper is to reinforce current analyses that emphasize the entwined political economy nature of geopolitical change (Mayer and Zhang 2020; Moisio 2019) that marks a return to understandings of political geography that emerged in the 1980s, namely, a political economy approach to geopolitics (Taylor 1982). Our approach brings focus to the dual entwinement of instrumental and associative forms of power through the construction of network and territorial spatialities operating at multiple scales (Lin, Sidaway, and Woon 2019). Local, and perhaps contingent, manifestations of political economy are situated within, and help create, a global geopolitical context. In turn, this changing global picture is the overarching context within which actions that restructure places take place. The local scale cannot be understood without considering the global scale, and vice versa (Taylor 1981).

Despite these theoretical developments, the state of the art is not predictive. Our approach is able to identify the moment and processes of a geopolitical transition, but predicting a particular outcome would be inappropriately deterministic. Nor is our approach normative. Hence, we cannot conclude what a new geopolitical world order will and should look like. We leave such things to the classic geopoliticians. But perhaps it is enough to say that, unlike classic geopolitics, our framework does not simply identify a threat that must be countered. Instead, we see geopolitics as a process of relational interaction. In sum, "our" actions are as essential in creating war and peace as "theirs".

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Allen, J. 2003. *Lost Geographies of Power*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.
- Arrighi, G. 1990. "The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 13 (3): 365–408. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40241160>.
- Ashraf, J. 2017. "String of Pearls and China's Emerging Strategic Culture." *Strategic Studies* 37 (4): 166–181. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.037.04.00204>
- Bennett, M. M. 2016. "The Silk Road Goes North: Russia's Role within China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Area Development and Policy* 1 (3): 341–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1239508>
- Blanchard, J., and C. Flint. 2017. "The Geopolitics of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative." *Geopolitics* 22 (2): 223–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1291503>
- Brzezinski, Z. 1998. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books.

- Carmody, P., and I. Taylor. 2010. "Flexigemony and Force in China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa: Sudan and Zambia Compared." *Geopolitics* 15 (3): 496–515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040903501047>
- Cau, E. 2018. "Geopolitical Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative: The Backbone for a New World Order?" *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations* 4 (1): 39–105. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2059604979?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>.
- Chalikyan, N., and Y. Tashjia. 2021. Geopolitics of the North-South Transport Corridor. *South Asian Voices*. July 9. Accessed 24 November 2022. <https://southasianvoices.org/geopolitics-of-the-north-south-transport-corridor>.
- Cianciara, A. K. 2020. *The Politics of the European Neighbourhood Policy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- DeBoom, M. 2020. "Who is Afraid of 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy'? Geopolitical Narratives, Agency, and the Multiscalar Distribution of Risk." *Area Development and Policy* 5 (1): 15–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2019.1703556>
- Devonshire-Ellis, C. 2009. China's String of Pearls Strategy. *China Briefing*, March 18. Accessed 1 June 2021. <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china%E2%80%99s-string-of-pearls-strategy>.
- Dragneva, R., and C. A. Hartwell. 2021. "The Eurasian Economic Union: Integration Without Liberalisation?" *Post-Communist Economies* 33 (2–3): 200–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2020.1793586>
- European Commission. 2021. Global Gateway. December 1. Accessed 24 November 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en#principles-of-the-global-gateway.
- Flint, C., and P. J. Taylor. 2018. *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality, Seventh Edition*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Flint, C., and X. Zhang. 2019. "Defining Geopolitical Context: China's Dynamic Foreign Policy within Global Economic and Hegemonic Cycles." *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12 (3): 295–331. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poz011>
- Flint, C., and C. Zhu. 2018. "The Geopolitics of Connectivity, Cooperation, and Hegemonic Competition: The Belt and Road Initiative." *Geoforum; Journal of Physical, Human, and Regional Geosciences* 99: 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.12.008>
- Harvey, D. 1982. *The Limits to Capital*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, P., C. Jensen, and A. Morita. 2017. *Infrastructure and Social Complexity: A Companion*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Högselius, P. 2022. "The Hidden Integration of Central Asia: The Making of a Region Through Technical Infrastructures." *Central Asian Survey* 41 (2): 223–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1953963>
- International Crisis Group. 2016. The Eurasian Economic Union: Power, Politics and Trade, July 20. Accessed 30 March 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/eurasian-economic-union-power-politics-and-trade>.
- Ito, A. 2019. "China's Belt and Road Initiative and Japan's Response: From Non-participation to Conditional Engagement." *East Asia* 36 (2): 115–128. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-019-09311-z>
- Jash, A. 2019. "China's Japan Challenge: Regional Ambitions and Geopolitics of East Asia." In *East Asia Strategic Review: China's Rising Strategic Ambitions in Asia*, edited by M. S. Prathibha, 22–35. New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.
- Jiwoon, B. 2019. "'One Belt One Road' and the Geopolitics of Empire." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 20 (3): 358–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2019.1649013>
- Joe, T. C. 2022. Balancing Rivalry and Cooperation: Japan's Response to the BRI in Southeast Asia. *E-International Relations*. June 20. Accessed 8 July 2022. <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/06/20/balancing-rivalry-and-cooperation-japans-response-to-the-bri-in-southeast-asia/>.
- Kaplan, R. D. 2018. *The Return of Marco Polo's World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Random House.

- Kazantsev, A., S. Medvedeva, and I. Safranchuk. 2021. "Between Russia and China: Central Asia in Greater Eurasia." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 12 (1): 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366521998242>
- Keser, H. Y. 2015. "Importance of Transport Corridors in Regional Development: The Case of TRACECA." *Sosyoekonomi* 24 (24): 163–182. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/sos/sosjrn/150210.html>.
- Khurana, G. 2018. *Maritime Perspectives 2018*. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation.
- Khurana, G. 2019. *Maritime Perspectives 2018*. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation.
- Kuo, M. A. 2020. Blue Dot Network: The Belt and Road Alternative. Insights from Matthew P. Goodman. *The Diplomat*. April 7. Accessed 1 May 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/blue-dot-network-the-belt-and-road-alternative>.
- Kuo, M. 2021. Global Gateway: The EU Alternative to China's BRI: Insights from Benjamin Barton. *The Diplomat*. September 28. Accessed March 27, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/global-gateway-the-eu-alternative-to-chinas-bri>.
- Kuteleva, A., and D. Vasilev. 2021. "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Russian Media: Politics of Narratives, Images, and Metaphors." *Journal of Eurasian Geography and Economics* 62 (5–6): 582–606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1833228>
- Larson, D. W. 2021. The Return of Containment: What the Cold War Policy Means for our Current Moment. *Foreign Policy*, January 15. Accessed November 11, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/15/containment-russia-china-kennan-today>.
- Lau, S., and H. Cokelaere. 2021. EU launches 'Global Gateway' to counter China's Belt and Road. *Politico*, September 15. Accessed 27 March 2021. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-launches-global-gateway-to-counter-chinas-belt-and-road>.
- Li, Y., and H. Schmerer. 2017. "Trade and the New Silk Road: Opportunities, Challenges, and Solutions." *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies* 15 (3): 205–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14765284.2017.1347473>
- Lin, W. 2019. "Transport Geography and Geopolitics: Visions, Rules and Militarism in China's Belt and Road Initiative and Beyond." *Journal of Transport Geography* 81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2019.05.001>.
- Lin, S., J. D. Sidaway, and C. Y. Woon. 2019. "Reordering China, Respacing the World: Belt and Road Initiative (一帶一路) as an Emergent Geopolitical Culture." *The Professional Geographer* 71 (3): 507–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2018.1547979>
- Liu, H. 2017. "The Security Challenges of the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative and China's Choices." *Croatian International Relations Review* 23 (78): 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cirr-2017-0010>
- Lukin, A. 2019. "Russian–Chinese Cooperation in Central Asia and the Idea of Greater Eurasia." *India Quarterly* 75 (1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928418821477>
- Maoz, Z. 2010. *Networks of Nations: The Evolution, Structure and Impact of International Networks 1816–2001*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Marshall, R., Jr 2012. *The String of Pearls: Chinese Maritime Presence in the Indian Ocean and its Effect on Indian Naval Doctrine*. Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School.
- Mayer, M., and X. Zhang. 2020. "Theorizing China-World Integration: Sociospatial Reconfigurations and the Modern Silk Roads." *Review of International Political Economy* 28 (4): 974–1003. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1741424>
- Medcalf, R. 2020. *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America, and the Contest for the World's Pivotal Region*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.
- Ministry of Culture. 2023. Project Mausam. Ministry of Culture, Government of India. March 29. Accessed 29 March 2023. <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/project-mausam>.
- Mitchell, D. 2021. "Making or Breaking Regions: China's Belt Road Initiative and the Meaning for Regional Dynamics." *Geopolitics* 26 (5): 1400–1420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1716738>
- Mohan, G. 2018. Europe's Response to the Belt and Road Initiative. German Marshal Fund, March 30. Accessed 2 November 2019. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europes-response-belt-and-road-initiative>.

- Moisio, S. 2019. "Re-Thinking Geoeconomics: Towards a Political Geography of Economic Geographies." *Geography Compass* 13 (10), <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12466>.
- Mojtahed-Zadeh, P. 2004. *Small Players of the Great Game: The Settlement of Iran's Eastern Borderlands and the Creation of Afghanistan*. London: Routledge.
- Murashkin, N. 2018. "Not-so-new Silk Roads: Japan's Foreign Policies on Asian Connectivity Infrastructure Under the Radar." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72 (5): 455–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2018.1510896>
- NDRC. 2015. Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Beijing. http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html. Accessed March 26, 2023.
- Noorali, H., and S. A. Ahmadi. 2022. "Iran's New Geopolitics: Heartland of the World's Corridors." *GeoJournal*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-022-10727-z>.
- Noorali, H., C. Flint, and S. A. Ahmadi. 2022. "Port Power: Toward a New Geopolitical World Order." *Journal of Transport Geography* 105), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2022.103483>.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense. 2020. *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2020: Annual Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense. <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.
- Pop, I. I. 2016. Strengths and Challenges of China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative. Centre for Geopolitics & Security in Realism Studies. February 9. Accessed April 8 2021. <http://cgsrs.org/publications/46>.
- Rajagopalan, R. P. 2021. Does AUKUS Augment or Diminish the Quad? *The Diplomat*, September 23. Accessed 30 September 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/does-aukus-augment-or-diminish-the-quad>.
- Ranjan, R. 2017. "Cultural Aspect of Belt and Road Initiative and Project Mausam: Strategy for Engagement." *Contemporary International Relations* 27 (6): 151–165. <https://igse.shu.edu.cn/info/1034/1413.htm>.
- Rhinard, M., and G. Sjöstedt. 2019. The EU as a Global Actor: A New Conceptualization Four Decades after 'Actorness.' UI Paper No. 6 Swedish Institute of International Affairs.
- Rustemova, A. 2011. "Political Economy of Central Asia: Initial Reflections on the Need for a New Approach." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2 (1): 30–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2010.10.002>
- Saikia, M. 2021. AUKUS: A New Cold War Against China. *The Pioneer*, November 14. Accessed 30 March 2023. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/columnists/aukus-a-new-cold-war-against-china.html>.
- Sarkar, M. G. 2020. "CHINA and QUAD 2.0: Between Response and Regional Construct." *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 16 (1): 110–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2020.1794526>
- Sarker, M. N. I., M. A. Hossin, X. Yin, and M. K. Sarkar. 2018. "One Belt One Road Initiative of China: Implication for Future of Global Development." *Modern Economy* 9 (04): 623–638. <https://doi.org/10.4236/me.2018.94040>
- Schindler, S., J. Dicarolo, and D. Paudel. 2022. "The New Cold War and the Rise of the 21st Century Infrastructure State." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 47 (2): 331–346. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12480>
- Sergi, B. S. 2018. "Putin's and Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union: A Hybrid Half-Economics and Half-Political "Janus Bifrons."." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 9 (1): 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2017.12.005>
- Singh, K. D. P. 2019. "Strength and Challenges of OBOR Initiative: Indian Perspective." *Journal of National Law University Delhi* 6 (1): 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277401719857865>
- Singh, S., and B. Singh. 2019. "Geopolitics of Ports: Factoring Iran in India's Counterbalancing Strategy for "Sino-Pak Axis."." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 10 (2): 169–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366519850712>
- Smith, S. A. 2021. The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know. Council on Foreign Relations, 27 May. Accessed November 24 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know>.

- Sternberg, T., A. Ahearn, and F. McConnell. 2017. "Central Asia's Characteristics on Chinas New Silk Road: The Role of Landscape and the Politics of Infrastructure." *Land* 6 (55), <https://doi.org/10.3390/land6030055>.
- Sum, N.-L. 2019. "The Intertwined Geopolitics and Geoeconomics of Hopes/Fears: China's Triple Economic Bubbles and the 'One Belt One Road' Imaginary." *Territory, Politics, Governance* 7 (4): 528–552. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2018.1523746>
- Summers, T. 2020. "Negotiating the Boundaries of China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 38 (5): 809–813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420911410b>
- Swyngedouw, E. 1997. "Neither Global nor Local: 'Glocalisation' and the Politics of Scale." In *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*, edited by K. Cox, 137–166. London and New York: Guilford Press.
- Tacconi, M. 2010. The New Great Game. *Reset Dialogues*, 9 June. Accessed November 4, 2021. <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-new-great-game>.
- Tagliapietra, S. 2021. The Global Gateway: a real step towards a stronger Europe in the world?, *Bruegel*, December 7. Accessed 24 November 2022. <https://www.bruegel.org/blog-post/global-gateway-real-step-towards-stronger-europe-world>.
- Taylor, P. J. 1981. "Geographical Scales Within the World-Economy Approach." *Review* 5: 3–11. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Geographical-Scales-within-the-World-Economy-Taylor/94e050ebcfdc8b7fec4b846f0b8e670bfae0d9da>.
- Taylor, P. J. 1982. "A Materialist Framework for Political Geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 7 (1): 15–34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/621909>
- Taylor, P. J. 1990. *Britain and the Cold War: 1945 as Geopolitical Transition*. London: Pinter.
- Theiventhran, G. M. 2022. Energy as a Geopolitical Battleground in Sri Lanka. *Asian Geographer* Published online: 08 Jul 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10225706.2022.2098507>.
- Tiezzi, S. 2015. Can China Woo India to the Maritime Silk Road? *The Diplomat* April 7. Accessed 10 November 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/04/can-china-woo-india-to-the-maritime-silk-road>.
- Tweed, D. 2019. China's New Silk Road. *Bloomberg*, April 15. Accessed 30 November 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/china-s-silk-road>.
- Van Noort, C. 2021. *China's Communication of the Belt and Road Initiative: Silk Road and Infrastructure Narratives*. London: Routledge.
- Weisbrode, K. 2021. What Does 'Free and Open' Really Mean for the Indo-Pacific? *The Diplomat*, March 30. Accessed 13 September 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/what-does-free-and-open-really-mean-for-the-indo-pacific>.
- Winter, T. 2021. "Geocultural Power: China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Geopolitics* 26 (5): 1376–1399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1718656>
- Zhang, Z. 2018. "The Belt and Road Initiative: China's New Geopolitical Strategy?" *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4 (03): 327–343. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740018500240>
- Zhang, C., M. Zhang, and C. Xiao. 2022. "From Traditional Infrastructure to New Infrastructure: A New Focus of China's Belt and Road Initiative Diplomacy?" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 63 (3): 424–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2022.2039740>
- Zhao, M. 2016. "The Belt and Road Initiative and its Implications for China-Europe Relations." *The International Spectator* 51 (4): 109–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2016.1235819>
- Zhu, Z. 2018. Can the Quad Counter China's Belt and Road Initiative? *The Diplomat*, March 14. Accessed 1 September 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/can-the-quad-counter-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>.