

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE:

IS IT REALLY INFLUENCING THE GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE?

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PREVIEW

Abstract

The implication of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on geopolitics is not fully understood. References to potential Chinese geopolitical influence from the BRI have been well explored. Academics, journalists, and government officials argue that China is able to influence the foreign policy decisions of other nations through debts incurred by participation in the BRI—debt trap diplomacy. The question that needs to be answered is, does quantifiable evidence show this correlation? My research addresses this question by studying UN resolutions representing the interests of China—as a metric of geopolitical influence—and how nations participating in the BRI voted on them. My thesis is that China's BRI-related geopolitical influence is derived from preexisting alignments in foreign policy interests with the participants, not because of its investment in those states. Quantitative analysis shows that there is no correlation between BRI investments and changes to the foreign relation stances of the participants. Case studies demonstrate how China appears to be leveraging this preexisting alignment through the BRI to promote and gain consensus for its foreign interests. While China's foreign agenda is broad, it is focused on areas of cooperation among nations and non-interference in domestic affairs. Finally, in assessing the BRI's geopolitical influence potential, my research used a limited data set representing the foreign policy stances of the participants—a point which is expounded upon in the counter argument that BRI-participating nations act in opposition to China's foreign relations interests if they do not align with their own.

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PREVIEW

Introduction

China will work to promote a new type of international relations of win-win cooperation and will always remain a staunch force for world peace and common development.

—President Xi Jinping, Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, 2015

China has announced its arrival as a power player on the international stage, and it is intent upon challenging the current norms of international relations.¹ A key part of this effort has been the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路)—allowing China to engage with nations within their vision of international relations. In 2015, President Xi Jinping gave the keynote speech at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. In it, he called for Asia “to build a community of common destiny” and to expand this concept to the whole world; the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a means to achieve this effect.² As part of his speech, President Xi argued for the value of the BRI as it relates to the future of international relations.

In 2013, during my visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, I put forward the initiatives of building a Silk Road economic belt and a 21st century maritime Silk Road. The “Belt and Road” initiative, meeting the development needs of China, countries along the routes and the region at large, will serve the common interests of relevant parties and answer the call of our time for regional and global cooperation.

In promoting this initiative, China will follow the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. The programs of development will be open and inclusive, not exclusive. They will be a real chorus comprising all countries along the routes, not a solo for China itself. To develop the Belt and Road is not to replace existing mechanisms or initiatives for regional cooperation. Much to the contrary, we will build

¹ State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China and the World in the New Era* (white paper, Beijing, China, September 2019), https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

² President Xi Jinping, “Towards a Community of Common Destiny and A New Future for Asia” (speech, Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, Hainan, China, March 28, 2015), http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-03/29/c_134106145.htm.

on the existing basis to help countries align their development strategies and form complementarity.³

The BRI has been China's effort to integrate trade along historic routes so as to link regional networks through a Chinese vision of global commerce. It is a conglomeration of infrastructure projects, commerce relations, and economic arrangements, all of which may have geopolitical implications, given the relationships between China and the nations taking part in it. Thus, it is valuable to study the relationship dynamics of the BRI, particularly at a time when China is challenging the norms of international relations. Understanding these relationships' implications contextualizes the evolving international relations fabric of the twenty-first century.

The BRI is often viewed as debt trap diplomacy—what Chris Alden describes as “the deliberative use of development finance to entrap economies with the aim of advancing foreign and economy policy objectives.”⁴ This claim has been cited by academics as well as media and government entities, because of the concerns the debts that developing nations incur through the BRI and how it leaves them vulnerable to increased Chinese influence.⁵ The nexus for my research was to understand if this claim is valid, in the context of China's foreign relations policy and engagement.

³ Xi, “Towards a Community of Common Destiny.”

⁴ Chris Alden, “Understanding Debt and Diplomacy: China, ‘Debt Traps’ and Development in the Global South” (SENACYT–FID–18–034 Working Paper, January 2020), 3, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110974/1/WorkingPaper01_FIN_04indd.pdf.

⁵ Brahma Chellaney, “China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy,” *Project Syndicate*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-one-belt-one-road-loans-debt-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-01>. This article is considered the source of associating the term “debt trap diplomacy” with China's BRI. It has since been argued for and against across academic, media, and government sources.

Given the number of nation-states that are involved, albeit to varying degrees, in addition to China's desire for a greater role and influence in geopolitics, it is important to determine whether the BRI has increased China's geopolitical influence, and if so how. My research seeks to address this question by studying UN resolutions representing the interests of China—as a metric of geopolitical influence—and how nations participating in the BRI voted on them. In the context of Chinese geopolitical influence, I define this as China's ability to pursue its foreign relations interests—namely those focused around territorial disputes on its periphery—with international support or at the least minimized opposition. My thesis is that China's BRI-related geopolitical influence is derived from preexisting alignments in foreign policy interests with the participants, not because of its investment and projects. The BRI represents China's vision for international relations and the breadth of nations participating and their existing UN voting alignment shows a degree of acceptance in this vision—the geopolitical influence.

The first three chapters of this dissertation establish the basis for my thesis. Chapter 1 provides the existing arguments for Chinese geopolitical influence as result of the BRI. Chapter 2 explains my research approach and methodology. Chapter 3 examines what Chinese officials says about its development, its model for international relations, and its criteria for engagement with other nations. Further, bilateral and multinational statements show how stances of other nations reflect the language from Chinese foreign policy documents. Finally, Parts I (Chapters 4–6) and II (Chapters 7–15) conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of Chinese geopolitical influence on BRI-participating nations. The quantitative analysis used linear regression tests of participants UN voting coincidence and various variables depicting degree of participation in the initiative to determine if there is any correlation. The qualitative analysis used cross-case

analysis to convey the existing alignment between China and participants through their joint statements, which reflect Chinese foreign policy stances and language.

A limitation of my research, is the data of UN voting records used to represent the foreign policy stances of nations participating in the BRI. A nation voting in alignment with China in the UN is not indicative of its overall foreign policy stance. National interests are complex, and a nation's words do not always match its actions. This point is expounded upon in Chapter 13. However, this research shows macro trends across the participants that there is concurrence among a large bloc of nations with Chinese foreign policy stances.

While the research results show little correlation between a nation's BRI involvement and UN voting pattern, it does show an alignment in UN voting patterns between China and participants that existed prior to the nations committing to joining it. This finding, while not the outcome initially expected from this analysis, nonetheless answered my question and refined my argument. I assess this to be because a majority are developing nations, not aligned wholly with a Western-led international system, which held many of them as colonies less than a century ago. Furthermore, they are seeking economic gain through the initiative. China derives geopolitical influence from the initiative because of preexisting alignment in foreign policy stances with the participants—many of which are focused on economic development. Understanding China's BRI influence on geopolitics contributes to a better understanding of its foreign policy process and goals as well as its impacts on international relations.

Chapter 1:

Literature Review

Extensive research seeks to define what exactly the BRI is. I have focused my review on what has been written about the initiative's geopolitical implications for China. I have grouped the literature into three focus areas: first, the overall impact of the BRI on international relations; second, how it has impacted China's position in the UN; and third, the implications of the BRI from a regional perspective. The second focus area is of particular importance, given the emphasis China has placed on the UN as the venue for arbitrating the world's problems and their promotion of multilateralism. This emphasis informed my decision to review UN voting records of BRI-participating nations.

Several of the authors I have reviewed argue that nations who have chosen to participate show a willingness to engage with the Chinese on areas they view as mutually beneficial—a “win-win,” as China has been apt to say.¹ My review attends to differing assessments as to whether the BRI has a positive or negative impact on international relations; however, scholars concur that there is geopolitical influence. Still, the evidence for this in the literature is limited to singular examples. This is where my research contributes to the greater knowledge of Chinese foreign policy and its BRI.²

¹ Ryan Haas, comment in Amar Bhattacharya et al., “China's Belt and Road: The New Geopolitics of Global Infrastructure Development,” *The Brookings Institute* (April 2019), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chinas-belt-and-road-the-new-geopolitics-of-global-infrastructure-development/>.

² Bhattacharya et al., “China's Belt and Road,” 14 and Katja Banik and Jan Lüdert, “Assessing Securitization: China's Belt and Road Initiative,” *E-International Relations*, October 2020, 5, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/10/04/assessing-securitization-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

Geopolitical Influence

Some authors claim that BRI foreign direct investment gives China disproportionate influence, despite Chinese messaging about “win-wins.”³ In particular, Katja Banik and Jan Lüdert argue that China gains from BRI because it infringes on the participating nations’ “economic autonomy.”⁴ They specifically draw on the idea of “unbundling of territory,” a concept from studies in international relations that argues the twenty-first century would see a shift to a more “fluid,” multilateral-engagement, geopolitical landscape.⁵ Through invoking this concept and China’s subsequent re-bundling of territory, their article speaks to a key observation from my research that there are foreign relations perspectives among BRI-participating nations that align with China outside of any influence from the BRI.⁶ Their analysis of this concept, as it relates to the BRI, highlights a dynamic in geopolitics in which nations express stances that favor a greater emphasis on sovereignty and a more level geopolitical field. This has been made evident in UN voting, which—among the votes I reviewed in my research—shows resistance primarily from developing nations against Western leadership of geopolitics in exchange for a more multilateral environment. This factor is not lost on China, and they have made great efforts

³ Thanasis Karli and Dionysios Polemis, “The Belt and Road Initiative: A Geopolitical Analysis” (IAME 2019 Conference, Athens, Greece, Paper ID 81, June 2019), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332350130_The_Belt_and_Road_initiative_A_geopolitical_analysis.

⁴ Banik and Lüdert, “Assessing Securitization.”

⁵ Banik and Lüdert, “Assessing Securitization.”

⁶ Banik and Lüdert, “Assessing Securitization.”

to tap into it through the BRI. Thus, as Banik and Lüder state, China has sought to “re-bundle territory along the BRI into a distinctive Chinese bouquet.”⁷

Zhang Haibing highlights researchers’ divergent views of the influence the BRI has, examining it as both a geopolitical challenge to an “existing US-dominated international order” and a “new approach” to “development cooperation”—two key phrases that are found throughout many Chinese government foreign policy stances.⁸ Her argument lays out the concerns of Western nations, as well as the means by which China is attempting to influence the geopolitical landscape through the BRI. Zhang’s stated realities of the BRI influence on geopolitics depict three considerations. First, the examples of BRI “debt crises” demonstrate the BRI’s potential to be a source of coercion for China in pursuit of security interests, namely in matters of energy security.⁹ Second, she implies that China will seek to create a “parallel international system” if the US does not engage with it on its terms of “equality,” which call for “mutual respect” in matters of sovereignty and domestic interests.¹⁰ Finally, she notes China’s focus on the developing world for BRI investment. In doing so, she asserts, China has found its target audience. While it is not likely her intent to present the BRI in such a zero-sum manner, Zhang’s article paints a picture in which US engagement or non-engagement will influence

⁷ Banik and Lüder, “Assessing Securitization.”

⁸ Zhang Haibing, “The Belt and Road Initiative: How China and the United States Could Avoid Conflict and Promote Cooperation,” in *Perspectives on the Global Economic Order in 2019: A US-China Essay Collection*, project directors Matthew P. Goodman and Chen Dongxiao, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019), 7, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/191008_perspectivesglobaleconomicorder2019.pdf.

⁹ Haibing, “The Belt and Road Initiative,” 10.

¹⁰ Haibing, “The Belt and Road Initiative,” 10.

whether China decides to challenge the current US-led international system by creating a “parallel” one. Whether US/China engagement over the BRI occurs or not, Zhang suggests, through the BRI, that China is challenging the current US-led international system.

James Reilly frames the BRI as a rather loose conglomeration of projects, investments, and partnerships, centered primarily on infrastructure development, which China has attempted to wrangle as a medium for promoting their views of foreign relations. He cautions against “alarmists” who see the initiative as a means for China to gain influence through debt exploitation of developing countries for whom the potential for infrastructure investment is appealing.¹¹ While Reilly seeks to minimize the BRI’s threat, particularly in the context of US-China relations, he does present indications of how China could derive geopolitical influence from the initiative. Namely, he highlights how it focuses primarily on developing nations and thus does not pose a threat to US interests.¹² Reilly undersells the value of influencing developing nations across Asian and African continents, as well as parts of the European continent. For China, finding a bloc of nations willing to support their foreign policy agenda is important for garnering support on issues, such as territorial claims (e.g., Taiwan) that are highly important to them. My research has provided evidence to this point.

¹¹ James Reilly, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” in *After Engagement: Dilemmas in US-China Security Relations*, eds. Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein (Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 2021), 347.

¹² Reilly, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” 349.

April Herlevi examines the “Shekou model” of port development that China has employed as part of the BRI.¹³ She shows how port development in locations like Djibouti, Tanzania, and Morocco have varying degrees of Chinese involvement, which bring with them varying levels of influence for China on domestic affairs pertaining to the port area. Herlevi’s article highlights an important avenue for Chinese geopolitical influence—namely, the potential security implications pertaining to Chinese control over port infrastructure in another country. One can create links between a country’s willingness to support Chinese foreign relations stances and its support of Chinese military forces abroad—for a nation participating in BRI, such a connection may be perceived as a mutual benefit with regards to China’s interests in its country. Her insights suggest how countries potentially can be susceptible to increased influence from China by virtue of their investments. Furthermore, Herlevi’s case study on Tanzania shows how a willingness to engage with China, on its terms in the BRI, can come with some regret.

Ely Ratner highlights a key dynamic at play in assessing the BRI’s geopolitical influence—a shift in the model of international relations from a liberal international order to that of illiberal order.¹⁴ This potential shift, as it relates to the BRI, comes from a Chinese-centric international order, which focuses on “economic growth and social stability” versus “democracy and individual rights”; Chinese foreign policy has advocated for such shifting focus.¹⁵ While the Chinese have espoused a sense of mutual benefit with regards to the BRI, the article highlights a

¹³ April A. Herlevi, “Competing or Colluding Commercial Interests? Ports and Free Zones along China’s Maritime Silk Road in Africa,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs Special Issue* (November 2021): 1, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/17/2002894849/-1/-1/1/JIPA%20-%20HERLEVI%20-%20AFRICA.PDF>.

¹⁴ Ely Ratner, “Geostrategic and Military Drivers and Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative” (Testimony at the Council on Foreign Relations, January 25, 2018).

¹⁵ Ratner, “Geostrategic and Military Drivers,” 3.

potential natural occurrence of China's increased interest in the domestic affairs of BRI-participating nations, if for no other reason than to simply ensure China's investments are not negatively impacted. Through this increase in influence across the BRI, she notes, China may begin to impede on interests of its two biggest neighbors, Russia and India, given that its projects are within their spheres of influence.¹⁶

Ratner then identifies several examples of China coercing other countries, using the BRI as an incentive to drive Chinese foreign relations ambitions—particularly, they note, on matters pertaining to South China Sea disputes.¹⁷ She argues that fear of Chinese economic retaliation against nations participating in the BRI may become a factor in how they decide whether to engage with the US on security matters.¹⁸ What her article does not take into account fully is a predilection of nations participating in the BRI to align with China on matters of geopolitics. China is very much a proponent of engaging nations bilaterally, even in instances where there are points of geopolitical contention (e.g., South China Sea disputes). The BRI provides China a means to minimize appearing coercive, even if there is an element of coercion in their engagement.

Mustafa Yagci shares the theme of Ratner's article in demonstrating how China has sought to leverage the BRI as a means to move into the perceived power vacuum that the US has created by moving back from its international leadership role. Yagci, like other authors, notes the initiative focuses on the developing regions of the world as its primary target audience, positioning China as the champion of these nations. When considering the BRI's potential

¹⁶ Ratner, "Geostrategic and Military Drivers," 5.

¹⁷ Ratner, "Geostrategic and Military Drivers," 4.

¹⁸ Ratner, "Geostrategic and Military Drivers," 4.

success as a source of geopolitical influence, Yagci states there are several criteria China needs to achieve. First, the program must have sustained financing to ensure influence remains. Second, China and participating countries will realize mutual gain only if participating nations realize the gains that the BRI promises. Finally, China would need to overcome any political or legal challenges to the initiative.¹⁹ Yagci argues, if China is successful in overcoming these hurdles associated with the BRI, they may in fact become the focal point for the international system—though this is not inevitable.²⁰

While the success rate of the projects in the BRI will likely impact the influence China derives from the initiative, geopolitical influence is not simply China's ability to fill the "power vacuum," as Yagci argues. Given the oft-cited term of multilateralism in the Chinese foreign policy lexicon, influence is China's ability to pursue foreign policy aims without impediment. In this sense, China can leverage the BRI to garner support for, or at least indifference to, its foreign policy agenda among nations participating in the program. Yagci argues that China's foreign policy aims do not necessarily seek to control the narrative of geopolitics, but rather to create one in which countries with power can exert their influence in multilateral engagement without adhering to current international norms that Western democracies—namely the US—dominate.

Zhexin Zhang argues that the BRI represents a means of creating cohesive international relations.²¹ As he writes, China's foreign policy espouses enhancing regional relationships

¹⁹ Mustafa Yagci, "Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Uluslararası İlişkiler International Relations* 15, no. 57 (2018): 60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26604994>.

²⁰ Yagci, "Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China's Belt and Road Initiative," 78.

²¹ Zhang Zhexin, "The Belt and Road Initiative: China's New Geopolitical Strategy?" *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4, no. 3 (2018): 331, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740018500240>.

derived from trade and economic ties, especially focusing on security ties among participants as a desired outcome.²²

Furthermore, Chinese foreign policy stances emphasize respect of sovereignty and cooperation in areas of common interests. What it does not emphasize is an international order based upon norms that most nations have accepted. Rather, it is a “shared future” that is more transactional in nature and calls for foreign nations to be less invasive in domestic affairs.²³

UN Influence

China values the UN as an institution that represents its foreign policy outlook. For this reason, my research has looked at UN voting as a means of understanding geopolitical influence. Kristine Lee connects the BRI and influence China is seeking to wield in the UN. She demonstrates how China has used the BRI to pressure participant nations to support Chinese diplomatic efforts in the UN in a manner that has been characterized as “debt trap diplomacy,” however with a more subtle approach.²⁴

Sarah Brook also emphasizes the UN’s importance for China, particularly how China is moving into a lead position on the UN Human Rights Council, given the US’s vacancy on it. In doing so, she demonstrates how China is seeking to shape the council’s mission and direction to align with China’s vision, which is less focused on individual human rights. In her example, she references how, because of BRI-related Chinese investment in the port of Piraeus, Greece

²² Zhang, “The Belt and Road Initiative,” 333.

²³ Zhang, “The Belt and Road Initiative,” 334.

²⁴ Kristine Lee, “The United Nations: An Emerging Battleground for Influence” (Testimony Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Center for a New American Security, June 24, 2020), 4, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Lee_Testimony.pdf.

blocked an EU statement condemning human rights concerns about China.²⁵ This is of particular relevance to assessing the viability of BRI influence on geopolitics for China, as it demonstrates a degree of influence over a foreign nation's decision making on a matter of interest to China. Brooks also refers to a “Likeminded Group” of nations, which she suggests have a predilection toward China’s outlook on international relation norms, in that they align with the Chinese tenets of multilateralism and non-interference in how international relations should be conducted.²⁶ Based upon the findings of my research, Brooks’ observation reaffirms the idea that among primarily developing nations the Chinese outlook on geopolitics is appealing because of its transactional nature.

Sophie Richardson reaffirms the argument that China is seeking increased influence in the UN on matters pertaining to human rights, namely through the BRI, and that Chinese foreign investment is a mechanism for influencing other nations’ views on human rights issues in the UN.²⁷ She points to Pakistan and Cameroon, both of whom are BRI participants, as examples of nations who have looked favorably on China in matters pertaining to the reported human rights violations against the Uyghur population of Xinjiang Province in western China.²⁸ Her limited sample size does not provide the means for applying this argument to all BRI participants. As my

²⁵ Sarah M. Brooks, “Will the Future of Human Rights Be ‘Made in China’?” in *Dog Days: Made in China Yearbook 2018*, ed. Ivan Franceschini et al. (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 172, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfrxqcz.35>.

²⁶ Brooks, “Will the Future of Human Rights Be ‘Made in China’?” 172.

²⁷ Sophie Richardson, “China's Influence on the Global Human Rights System Assessing China's Growing Role in the World,” *Brookings Institute* (September 14, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chinas-influence-on-the-global-human-rights-system/>.

²⁸ Richardson, “China's Influence on the Global Human Rights System.”

research question indicates, the correlation between the BRI investment across all participating nations and Chinese geopolitical influence is a gap in the literature.

Yong Deng uses very similar phrasing to that of Chinese foreign policy documents. Of particular note is his reference to “win-win cooperation,” a term that is ubiquitous in the BRI.²⁹ Yong demonstrates a trend among primarily developing governments responding favorably to the BRI because of China’s promises of investment and the potential economic gain that those countries could realize.³⁰ In exchange for this development potential, he provides tangible evidence of China’s ability to wield the BRI as a means of achieving geopolitical influence. He cites examples of UNCLOS disputes, BRI investment in South Asia, and China’s ability to join the BRI to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.³¹

Kirsten Cordell notes that the UN supported the BRI, and, for China, this demonstrates a move of their foreign policy outlook and rhetoric into the lexicon of UN development initiatives.³² Furthermore, support for China’s vision on development in the UN has provided it with a bloc of nations who share China’s outlook on international relations. Thus, despite public sentiments opposing the BRI in participating nations, governments in these nations may not be inclined to acquiesce to public pressure. While Cordell concludes her article by advocating for

²⁹ Yong Deng, “How China’s Belt and Road is Reordering Asia,” *International Review* 39, no. 4, Technology Across Borders: Solutions Provided by A New Digital Landscape (Fall 2018): 32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26617376>.

³⁰ Deng, “How China’s Belt and Road is Reordering Asia,” 32.

³¹ Deng, “How China’s Belt and Road is Reordering Asia,” 33.

³² Kristen Cordell, “The Evolving Relationship between the International Development Architecture and China’s Belt and Road,” *Brookings Institute* (October 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-evolving-relationship-between-the-international-development-architecture-and-chinas-belt-and-road/>.

greater transparency by China and participating nations in executing the BRI, it is the trend of BRI-participating nations to favor China's vision for international relations, which is the most telling aspect of BRI engagement.

Regional Perspectives

George Tzogopoulos argues that China's rise is creating a "new type of major powers relationship."³³ The BRI is a driving force behind this new relationship Tzogopoulos speaks of, with China tapping into a bloc of nations—mostly developing—whose views align on matters of foreign relations. When Tzogopoulos speaks of "western principles" still guiding geopolitical norms, one should look at the nations participating in the BRI and China's stated foreign policy stances and goals and see that China is seeking to change that very narrative.³⁴ This change is occurring not through the use of direct force or overt coercion, but rather through a Chinese version of cooperation and development that appears to resonate with a large portion of the world on how geopolitics should be conducted.

Gustaaf Geeraert discusses, through a focus on the European Union, the second order effect of China's BRI on geopolitics—that nations or groups of nations are developing strategies for engagement with China that protect their interests against increasing Chinese influence derived from the BRI. What Geeraerts's article demonstrates is that increasing geopolitical influence for China can come in various forms. First, China can use the initiative in a coercive manner, particularly among nations already aligned to their views on foreign relations. Second,

³³ George N. Tzogopoulos, "Greece, Israel, and China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative," *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 139 (2017): 31, <https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/139-Greece-Israel-and-Chinas-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-Tzogopoulos-Web.pdf>.

³⁴ Tzogopoulos, "Greece, Israel, and China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative," 31.