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# One belt one road initiative: a difficult way to the Chinese dream

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## Abstract

The purpose of the research is to identify the main internal and external problems that complicate China's global leadership. In the work, the methods of historical, political, comparative, system analysis were used to cover the interdisciplinary field of projecting a selected topic. As a result, in Central Asia, in particular, in Kazakhstan there may be a conflict between the strategic interests of China and Russia. It can be concluded that in the short term China will not become the only leader. There will be the difficulties on the path to China's global leadership, at least in the next decade.

**Key words:** China, global, leadership, security, project.

# Una iniciativa de un cinturón: una forma difícil para el sueño chino

## Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación es identificar los principales problemas internos y externos que complican el liderazgo global de China. En el trabajo, los métodos de análisis histórico, político, comparativo y de sistema se utilizaron para cubrir el campo interdisciplinario de proyectar un tema seleccionado. Como resultado, en Asia Central, en particular, en Kazajstán puede haber un conflicto entre los intereses estratégicos de China y Rusia. Se puede concluir que a corto plazo China no se convertirá en el único líder. Habrá dificultades en el camino hacia el liderazgo global de China, al menos en la próxima década.

**Palabras clave:** China, global, liderazgo, seguridad, proyecto.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"One belt one road initiative" is one of the main topics currently discussed by politicians, experts, political scientists and economists of different countries. The main purpose of the initiative is the creation of a global transport and investment infrastructure. It consists of two quite independent projects – Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR). More than 60 states and about 60% of the world's population can be involved in this project. As for the project timeframe, it can take up to three decades for the project to be realized. Needless to say that while solving global economic problems, the Chinese talk about restoring respect for their nation, that is, they want

to restore at least the nature of that confident old Chinese civilization that existed during the Tang Dynasty (Guogang, 2012). The large-scale China project "One belt one road" is a structured, comprehensive plan aimed at implementing ambitious plans of the Chinese economy, starting with the border areas and further afield. Chinese government reminds us daily that their plans coincide with the interests of partners<sup>3</sup>, in all likelihood, this is possible when it comes to China's huge investment potential. Undoubtedly, China seeks to provide its own growing economy with the raw materials and manufactured products with the market. It also seeks to solve the employment problems of numerous Chinese people. It should be noted that, due to this, in the current geopolitical situation, China considers stability in the vast space of Eurasia to be the most important buffer that can also act as a definite obstacle to the active American containing a strategy for China. Thus, from one hand the One Belt One Road concept is an international initiative of China aimed at improving existing and creating new and the longest trade routes, transport routes, and economic corridors, which will connect the countries of Central Asia, Europe and Africa. And on the other hand, "One belt one road" is estimated as a link between the "Chinese dream" and the "world dream". Perhaps, China is an alternative to the USA, but with quite different principles and manifestations. Henry Kissinger (2014) said: "China's goal was not to win and not win over the barbarians, but to put a free leash on them." It follows that China's advance towards the global leadership will be very different from the path taken by the United States.

It should be recalled that while coming up with a new international model of cooperation, Chinese President Xi Jinping (2016) noted that it is necessary “to convert the advantages of the political dialogue, geographical proximity and economic complementarity to the advantages of cooperation, sustainable growth, the creation of a community of interests based on mutual benefit and common winnings”. For the first time the idea of forming the “Silk Road Economic Belt” was announced at Nazarbayev University in Astana within the framework of Xi Jinping’s (2016) visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. In his speech, the Chinese leader declared Beijing’s readiness to actively consider the improvement of the cross-border transport infrastructure in order to gradually create a transport network, which will connect East, West and South Asia and create favorable conditions for the economic development of these regions. Enormous tasks have been set in the Chinese project, but problems of both internal and external nature should be highlighted towards the implementation of the ambitious projects of the PRC. On the one hand, the problem of Uyghur separatism in the XUAR, which has been haunting the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for more than half a century, and before them - the Kuomintang and the Qing Empire. And on the other hand, it is Xinjiang that has all chances to become a transport-logistical, foreign economics, and then a financial and economic center of the entire central part of Eurasia. Undoubtedly, in addition to internal problems related to Uyghur separatism, there are problems of XUAR backwardness in socio-economic relations from the central and eastern regions of the PRC. There are problems of Trans boundary Rivers, environmental issues,

and issues of an external nature which include disputed issues concerning the islands of the South China Sea. And yet, as the main issue, experts highlight the question of to what extent the United States is ready to give way to China to become the global leadership of the twentieth century. The purpose of the research is to identify main internal and external problems that complicate China's global leadership.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

In the work, the methods of historical, political, comparative, system analysis were used to cover the interdisciplinary field of projecting a selected topic that combines historical, political, international and regional economic aspects. In addition, in the research empirical approaches were used: the quantitative method and the predictive-prognostic method. In this research, we paid special attention to the socio-philosophical approach. This seems extremely important, because ideological paradigms often form the direction of foreign policy development of individual states. The research method also included the collection and study of statistical data, general scientific and specialized works. Practical implementation of the Chinese concept of "One belt one road" depends on the pace of various social, economic, political and ideological processes, primarily in the PRC and the US, as well as on the countries of Eurasia and the leading regional powers of the world. The subjective factor becomes crucial – the political will of individual leaders, the readiness of social forces for

unification to establish sustainable peace between the states participating in the implementation of the project and ensuring effective global security. System, quantitative, chronological, search (research prognosis) methods and the method of comparative analysis played an important role. A logical method was also applied. This helped to reconstruct the heterogeneous views of the representatives of the West and the East and to identify a number of internal and external key problems. In China there is a lack of all this, the only possibility can be found in the market of the neighboring states. It is concluded that with regard to this fact, the Silk Road is the main route of particular importance to the security of the Central Asian countries that are immediately adjacent to XUAR. At this stage, one of the most important tasks is to promote economic interests and ensure security in the region. It should be noted that the Chinese have their own perception of the world.

### **3. RESULTS**

The significance of XUAR for the implementation of "One belt one road" project the territory of Xinjiang is the base area for the whole "One belt one road" project. In earlier times and now, the territory of Kazakhstan is the place where the road to the West begins. The scholar of China Kissinger et al. (2013) writes: "After the proclamation of the New Silk Road Initiative in 2013, Urumqi and Xinjiang are becoming a strategic basic area of interconnection of the internal Chinese and external transport routes of Eurasia." Xi Jinping

(2016) announced the strategy of the project in one of the countries of the Central Asian region (CAR), not only because it is close to Kazakhstan, but because this Central Asian region is strategically important for China. The total length of the China-Kazakhstan border (including XUAR) is 1,782 km. It is the longest border in Central Asia. In addition, the states of the Central Asian region have significant natural and economic potential, have great geostrategic importance for the PRC and are considered by Beijing to be "close neighbors and important partners". According to the Kazakh scientist K. Syroezhkin (2016), this concept is based not on "the industrial potential development of the countries involved into Silk Road Economic Belt, but first of all, the intensive development of China's western regions and their transformation into transport-logistical, foreign economic and later into the financial hub of "Greater Central Asia". Thus, it becomes obvious that it is not a coincidence that this concept was voiced by Xi Jinping (2016) in Kazakhstan. Opening of new routes under "One belt one road" initiative in the long term can lead to great changes that will affect Russian interests in Central Asia. And in the future, the PRC can gradually dislodge Russia from the Central Asian region.

As a result, in Central Asia, in particular, in Kazakhstan there may be a conflict between the strategic interests of China and Russia. We cannot fail to agree with the opinion of the American political scientist Fareed Zakaria (2008), who in his book "The Post-American World" writes: "How peaceful the rise of China will be determine the combination of its actions and the reactions of other countries, as well as the systemic result of this interaction. Because of its size, China



can't hope to slip into the world stage unnoticed". Horowitz (2001), the Director of the Center for China in the World Economy (CCWE) at Tsinghua University's School of Economics and Management (SEM) in Beijing, says: "Forget about the last 500 years of Western philosophy and Western perception of the world. Forget the evaluation of international relations by categories of winners and losers. Instead, look at the world through the prism of traditional Chinese philosophers, Confucianism". It is interesting that in the conceptual Chinese document "Perspectives and Actions" there is no detailed description of threats and challenges. The document does not contain a list of the first measures to be taken in dealing with the difficulties of a terrorist nature. This is probably due to the fact that the Chinese leadership is trying to bypass this difficult issue in order to defend themselves against the accusations that China strives to establish itself not only economically, but it also has serious military and political plans in those regions which serve its national interests. Thus, one of the most important tasks of "One belt one road" project is the construction of the transcontinental transport corridor, from Urumqi, the capital of the XUAR. There are at least three factors that define Xinjiang as the most important link in the PRC: first, the XUAR occupies a middle position in Eurasia; secondly, in ancient times it was the main corridor on the Great Silk Road. It holds the same position in the new project "One Belt one road"; thirdly, according to the statistics, it has the largest national formations within the PRC.

#### **4. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The Uyghur Khaganate (empire) originated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It should be pointed out that the Uyghurs had their own written language from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. After the collapse of the unified Mongolian empire, in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Uyghurs joined the Chagatai Khanate and since then their life has been inextricably linked with Islam. Later the Uyghurs became a part of the Dzungar Khanate, created by the western Mongols (Oirats). The Dzungar khans tried to restore the former power of the Mongolian state, but as a result, in 1759 they were defeated by the Manchu dynasty of Qing and became their subjects. As D. Dubrovskaya (1998) notes:

Unlike previous dynasties, for which fragmentary control over the Western region was meant to "secure "the borders of the Celestial Empire ... and to find routes further to the west through the Great Silk Road, the Qing dynasty made it their final aim to subordinate the provinces and include them into the empire, which decided the fate of the Uyghurs (1998: 15).

Therefore, the Uyghurs are ancient people, who had their own statehood, often with a pretension to the empire. Moreover, the affiliated people and the Uyghurs as well, belonged to other cultural and historical types that radically differed from the metropolis. The Uyghurs traditionally consider it to be unfair that East Turkestan became a part of China and they fight for the independence of Xinjiang. Thus, from the historical overview, we see some root causes of the existing problems in the modern Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. First, the Celestial Empire was entered by a people with a rich

history and state traditions; secondly, it belongs to a different Islamic civilization, which in fact makes it impossible to incorporate it into a very peculiar Chinese society.

## **5. DENG XIAOPING'S REFORMS**

The cardinal steps were taken in the 1980s. They changed the situation in the XUAR and were linked directly to the name of the Chinese reforms patriarch – Deng Xiaoping. If in the middle of the 20th century, East Turkestan was not so dependent on the central authorities of China, and the Han share was only about 5%. But as a result of the "Four Modernizations", the XUAR became a part of the PRC in economic terms, and there was a demographic parity between the Chinese and non-Chinese population of the region. The personnel issue was also formally resolved. In fact, it was a reflection of the will of the PRC leadership and it did not contribute to the existing problems of the Uyghurs and other representatives of the Turkic population, who were national minorities. According to K. Syroezhkin (2015):

... One of the scenarios of the demographic situation in the XUAR of the PRC envisages the population growth up to 35 million people in 2030 and up to 53.5 million people until 2050. ... It can only be a large-scale migration of Han Chinese from domestic regions, which will fundamentally change not only the social, but also the ethnic structure of Xinjiang (2015: 11).

The migration of the ethnic Chinese (the Han Chinese) from the central and eastern regions of China began in the 1990s. This process

was supported by the government and was provoked by the development of the mining and related industries. In recent years, the active migration of the Han people has led to the erosion of the existing national balance, as well as a rapid increase in the share of the Han people. It also leads to a gradual displacement of the languages of national minorities and their replacement by the national Mandarin (the main dialectal group of the Chinese language).

## **6. LOCAL CHALLENGES**

The active progress of the Chinese economy brings water issues to the forefront. This is mainly about the Trans boundary Rivers of China, Kazakhstan, Russia, since every year China increases the water intake, which reduces the amount of water supplied to the neighboring countries. The Russian expert E.A. Borisova (2015) believes:

China's exploitation of water resources is conducted in all directions. By the number of large dams, China ranks first, significantly ahead of the USA. Its share in the global number of these facilities is 45%, about 25,000 dams (and if we count the small dams, then it is 45,000). But, not all dams are related to hydraulic power engineering (2015, 9).

The further growth of China's economy could exacerbate the complex problem of water resources use of Trans boundary Rivers, which could affect relations with Kazakhstan and Russia. Then, if the terrorist cells in Chinese Xinjiang become active, they may threaten stability in the Central Asian countries, which are an ideal springboard

for various counteraction forms to the very first segment of the Silk Road economic belt. Of special concern are the reports in various media about the presence in this terrorist organization of volunteers from Xinjiang and the countries of Central Asia, who have already begun to return home to continue fighting in familiar conditions. In a political system reforming China is experiencing significant difficulties, which are primarily related to the regulation of relations between the Communist Party of China and government authorities. Fareed Zakaria (2008) writes:

... We witnessed how the economic reform kept pace with the economic, but there was a derogation in the political reform. It becomes more difficult for China to maintain political control. What we do not see in China is the readiness for opening up to the outside world and attempts to consider a number of ambitious political reforms (2008, 17).

Thus, it appears from the above-mentioned information that the strategic vulnerability of at least one out of the five planned main routes of this project, which runs through the western provinces of the PRC and the autonomous region of Xinjiang, through Kazakhstan, and also through the territories of Russia and Belarus, is evident. And the delay of political reforms can also affect the pace of implementation of the large-scale Chinese project.

The Islamist threat. The most famous radical organization, the Turkistan Islamic Party was established in 1993 (TIP). It is recognized worldwide as an international terrorist organization and it has close ties with the international terrorist organizations, in particular with Al-

Qaeda. E. Krepinevich et al. (2012) believe that an important security problem is a threat posed by rising China. First of all Chinese leadership makes an effort to separate religion from the daily life of its citizens and especially from the education system. The situation may worsen if foreign Islamist and extremist organizations strive to shake it from within, inciting hatred because of ethnic and religious differences. In this connection, for example, a real thunderstorm is the merging of Uyghur separatists and Middle Eastern terrorist groups, as represented by ISIL and "Jabhat al-Nusra", etc. The potential danger is the activities of TIP in other regions of the world, which could be a threat to the China-Pakistan project – the construction of a transport corridor from the Chinese border to the Gwadar port. As for the border country of Kazakhstan, the situation is as follows: "The actual influence of religions on modern Kazakhs is limited to the fulfillment of the life cycle rituals, festivals and cultural traditions ..." (Syzdykova, 2017: 14). Therefore, the Chinese government can be calm and, moreover, the TIP activity in Kazakhstan is prohibited by law. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a force that reflects Beijing's desire to create "order in Central Asia" and is free of separatism, Islamism and pro-Western forces that could destabilize China. Realizing the complexity of the situation, the Chinese leadership adopted an anti-terrorist law in the summer of 2017, which toughens measures against the extremist group leaders; recruitment, participation in terrorist activities outside the country, and training in foreign training camps are equivalent to a terrorist act. For the dissemination of extremist information, prosecution under the Criminal Law was introduced. It means that the build-up of anti-terrorist units deployed in

Xinjiang is in progress. Near the XUAR cities such as Kashgar, Khotan, Aksu, military exercises are being held and new military equipment tests are conducted by the units of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. The cooperation with hot spots in the north of Afghanistan, where there are bases of Uyghur militants, is being intensified. Along with Pakistan and the United States, China joined the mediators in the preparation of negotiations between the Kabul officials and the Taliban. Cooperation with Pakistan is expanding in the military sphere, which was reflected, first of all, in the organization of China-Pakistan joint patrolling of the border section belonging to the XUAR. Beijing is also interested in what is happening in the Middle East countries. The Chinese government understands that it is better to fight terrorism on the far side and therefore they declared their readiness to render military assistance to the legitimate government of Syria. China sent military advisers and weapon to Bashar Assad (Allison, 2015).

## **7. RIVALRY BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES**

China will try to supersede the US from Asia just as it was in the nineteenth century, when the great European powers from the Western Hemisphere superseded the USA. As Michel Swan points out, the most powerful political, economic and military terms country – the United States is currently facing "a significant challenge represented by the growth of Chinese influence, especially in Asia." According to

the Chinese scientist Xu Hoi Phan: "From the point of view of the new geopolitics, success in foreign policy results from the right choice of national interests.". It is becoming increasingly obvious that the US was not prepared for such a sudden breakthrough of China, but that does not mean that America does not have an arsenal to contain the PRC. As the American scientist Niall Ferguson notes, "... China's economic challenges are also the challenges of the United States leadership" (The Geopolitics of China: A Great Power Enclosed, 2012: 28). It should be noted that the Chinese diplomacy traditionally emphasizes that China has no desire for leadership. Obviously, the United States pursues the goal of separating the Central Asia countries from China and Russia. Moreover, America has already tried to promote its interests in the Central Asian region with the help of the New Silk Road program" (Rosemont & Feffer, 2008). We cannot be sure that the supporters of Mackinder's theory will not try to prevent the creation of the "heartland", acting from the periphery and creating new strongholds and instability zones. It seems that the main forms of strategic competition between the two great powers may be, first of all, Afghanistan. It can be expressed in the further destabilization, as well as the expansion of IGIL to Central Asia and the attempts to organize color revolutions in a number of countries in this region. A specialist in ethnic conflicts Facon (2006) believes the problems of democracy and ethnic conflicts arise when the world map is re-ordered. As Francis Fukuyama (2005) points out:

... Economic development tends to eventually create equality of conditions because it generates a huge demand for mass and



educated workforce. It is alleged that such equality of conditions predisposes people to resist the political system that does not respect this equality and does not allow people to participate in politics on equal terms (2005: 23).

It follows that if internal problems are not resolved in a timely manner, they will go beyond the borders of the country and lead to the merging of internal and external problems. It is also worth mentioning that the increasing concentration of the population, business and industry in the east of the country puts China in a vulnerable position, especially in the context of difficult relations with Taiwan and suspicion expressed by the USA, which concerns the growth of Chinese political and economic power.

An important issue is how the situation in the Near and Middle East will develop, taking into account the role of Iran in combating international terrorism. Rosemont and Feffer (2008) assessment is quite accurate. They believe that militarily China clearly does not pose a threat to the US security, as the experts suppose that China will become a superpower only in the future. External actors. Undoubtedly, the country's power grows along with its attempts to increase control. According to the political scientist Gilpin (1981: 27): "To better ensure its own security, it will try to expand the boundaries of political, economic and territorial control and change the international system in accordance with its own interests". And any attempts to expand the boundaries of its influence can lead to certain oppositions from different states. Fareed Zakaria (2008: 12) believes: "... if China rises, there will be a very violent reaction in India, Japan, Indonesia,

Vietnam and South Korea. We can observe these signs now. China does not rise in the vacuum. It rises on the continent, where there are a lot of rivals". Therefore, we need to expect action from the world powers and the neighboring countries. According to Kissinger (2016: 14): "... many countries in the region are not interested in further strengthening of their neighbor". Thus, China's task is to limit India's ability to become a leader in Asia. There are also claims from India. New Delhi officially explains its demarche by saying that one of the key projects planned for implementation within the Silk Road Project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), threatens the sovereignty of India as it will go through the Kashmir region of Gilgit-Baltistan, which New Delhi is considered to be their own territory.

At present, problems have not been resolved with the South China Sea, which are of concern to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and other countries in the region. As for the Europeans, they note that the Chinese global project still contains a lot of uncertainty. Thus, the external problems are combined with the internal difficulties. Among the active external actors, who do not share China's position, it is possible to single out the United States, India and a number of other countries. It should be noted that it will take a long time to resolve the above-mentioned problems, that is, they are certainly of a long-term nature (Swaine, 2011).

## **8. CONCLUSION**

In the past thirty years, the PRC has managed to create its own development model, which made it one of the most influential states in the world. Xi Jinping's (2016) concept "One Belt One Road" is China's most important step in activating both Beijing's domestic and foreign policies on the world stage. The United States ranks first among the external forces that impede China's advancement to the global leadership. This country is a world power; it sees China as a rival and takes measures to contain the development of Beijing. China is paying close attention to the implementation of economic cooperation plans with the neighbors far and near. The problems of ensuring security in the region, especially in the light of the growing terrorist threat in the PRC (XUAR), should be highlighted separately. Actually, "One belt one road" project takes the indicator of the importance of XUAR to a new level, because the region becomes one of the most significant nodes in the new system of transport corridors in Eurasia. Regarding Uyghur separatism, much depends, primarily on the actions of the Chinese government. The Celestial Empire can change its policy towards such a troubled people, not to incorporate Uyghur into Chinese society, but to initiate a process of peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups which are so different from one another. It cannot be denied that it is the unstable situation which may be caused by the actions of terrorist organizations that can become a key problem for the implementation of the Chinese initiative, both in the region and in general. To be fair, it should be pointed out that the Chinese experts note, although without the necessary specifics, the presence of cross-

border challenges in the security sphere. These are "forces of three evils" (terrorism, separatism and extremism) and cross-border crime (mainly piracy and drug smuggling). To increase the security level in the country, the Chinese leadership is making a lot of effort, working on relations with its closest neighbors. Therefore, in the north of the XUAR, China calls on Russia and the countries of Central Asia to closer border cooperation. In this vast region that embraces the "One Belt One Road" project up to the borders of the Eastern and Western Europe countries, the US has no military allies and permanent bases. This fact does not allow America to create an alternative for the project. It seems that in the near future the US will make many steps to prevent China's domination in the region from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic. Thus, it can be concluded that in the short term China will not become the only leader. There will be the difficulties on the path to China's global leadership, at least in the next decade.

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