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## **The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and Possible Repercussions to BRICS and Brazil: Facing Complexity under Uncertainty**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the study of the Belt and Road Initiative and its eventual impacts on the BRICS project, especially regarding the potential logistical integration it evokes. In this sense, the initiative is very open to the inclusion of several countries that are willing to adapt to the models of cooperation and financing means that China proposes. The objective is to estimate, observing the main routes of the initiative, possible impacts on the BRICS development and corresponding ties. The scope of the initiative and its effect in South America is also the subject of this article, although taking an off-the-land route.

At this point, we wish to observe the nature of this Chinese foreign policy and how much it affects China's expansion and its relations with BRICS partners. However, to understand the Chinese motivations of this initiative, a study of the origins of Chinese foreign policy tendencies and the search for a new international identity is essential. Mapping the initiative in light of the BRICS windows of opportunities in the main focus of the paper, that presents the hypothesis of the expansion of the Chinese influence, including within BRICS, based on the route project, but aligned with the historical path it represents.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road; Brazilian-Chinese Relations

### **Introduction**

Under formal agreements or less makeable frameworks, international organizations may be understood as entities with a proposal to maximize outcomes or objectives for the institutional structure of society—involving political, economic, social, and educational entities (North, 1991; 1995). While institutions are considered architectures of laws, regulations, codes of conduct and behaviors, it can be said that organizations are the actors, and for there to be institutional change, some elements are needed. For North (1991; 1995), there is change when there is the interaction between institutions and organizations once in competitive scenarios. So, competition is crucial for institutional transformation and pushes organizations to shape processes. What is very important to observe is that, for a change or an institutional paradigm break to occur, the economic progresses are incremental in this process because it is a reflection of the choices of organizations, executives and individuals.

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In addition, as the rules of behavior change, organizations will consequently also be changed. Institutions are being altered and a new matrix arises with different interests. Brazil and China are embedded in several relevant international organizations, and this fact challenges the geopolitical and geo-economic status quo of traditional global standards. In that sense, they had invariably chosen to create their own ways of engagement with other countries.

Governments, companies and organizations need diplomacy to manage the complexities and adversities of the globalized world, so that reducing political conflicts is necessary. The rise of a new governance structure impacts economic interdependence among countries and, according to Wang (2015), the New Silk Road initiative represents this transformation from rule-follower to rule-setter or "Norm-shaper" in China. In addition, in Zhang et al. (2011) we can find an important argument on the types of Chinese triangulation because of its political and trade options: "third-country effects that follow from the fact that China's relation with any two countries is affected by the relation between these countries themselves" (Zhang, Witteloostuijn, Elhorst, 2011).

Therefore, the Chinese movement for the reformulation of its diplomacy and in its institutional structures is impacting the new dimensions of global power in the international system. Once the rules have been met, competition is a factor that arises throughout the negotiation of transactions, especially when it concerns an element of great interest among the parties. Competition and cooperation are fundamental to economic development, being essential elements to innovation and change.

States rely on the commercial interdependence of their allies and if a trade policy is based on a climate of insecurity, it will impact trade reduction and even diplomatic tensions. According to Zhang et al. (2011) during the period 1950-2002, Chinese diplomatic relations and state visits were associated with significant bilateral trade, and this empirical evidence shows how trade diplomacy facilitates trade between nations.

Commercial diplomacy depends on certain factors that contribute to its success, such as: trade and investment promotion; stability in trade relations, influence on the formulation of foreign policy in multinational companies and maintenance of the international peace environment, including in the China case. But according to Moons (2017:8) there are three determinants that can hinder the success of this policy: diplomatic representation; the institutional and cultural distance between the trading partners, and characteristics of the traded product. The growing uncertainty associated with institutional and cultural differences between countries in bilateral transactions relates also to trust, because cooperation and commercial

transactions are linked to the way compromises are established.

Accordingly, economies usually work well when macro-level institutions are compatible with practices at the micro level, and firms can generate pressure on States to adjust national institutions to support institutional changes at the micro level.

The Brazilian-Chinese relations are shrouded by recent commercial bilateralisms and particular regime multilateralisms such as BRICS. Based on the premise, we propose here to gather elements from the Chinese Belt and Road policies to the Chinese-Brazilian relations, including those under BRICS in its possible frameworks. The main argument here proposed is that the look for opportunities for growth and the way the Chinese foreign policy is being designed to attend international pressures, such as those associated with blue growth and development, may reinforce the Chinese influence within a broader and crossed spectrum like BRICS and the various continents and oceans.

### **The Chinese Foreign Policy**

China has been leading institutional arrangements in an innovative way in international relations matters, *becoming* proactive in its foreign policy, and this indicates how the country has sought multilateral arrangements to consolidate its position as a new player in the game of "standards and rules"(Xing, 2017: 40) or, according to Nie (2016) market by its performance guidance. According to Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1988), interdependence refers to situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or actors in different countries (Keohane, 1988; Keohane, Nye, 2002). China has sought institutional balance in the international and national sphere in order to guarantee its favorable transactional costs (He, 2008).

China has conquered its economic growth in accordance with its national interests and the formulation of its foreign policy. These elements emphasize the position of Chinese status quo in the international system as a system of interdependencies through trade and international institutions. This non-zero-sum game, in international relations, is seen as an upholder of the Chinese influence in the international system, as an approach to inter-state interactions where cooperation may be fostered in these relations within the framework.

Thus, cooperation requires a process of policy coordination in which an actor promotes the compatibility of objectives with another actor and this process is facilitated by the principles, rules and procedures of decision-making into convergence in a given area. If States cooperate in pursuing their individual interests, and institutions are developed monitoring

individual conduct in the face of norms and rules, the Chinese approach to those complex interdependencies seems to be an active objective for their foreign policy paradigms.

In this same conceptual line, it is interesting to highlight the role of interdependent hegemony that is based on the expansion of the emerging powers, in order to counterbalance the power of the United States, while creating interdependence within the global order. In the case of China, as pointed out by Xing (2016), the emergence of new actors should not be seen as a result of the US decline, but rather as a result of the natural behavior of the international system. What the author means by this statement is how, within the scope of the BRICS, for example, its success is linked to the effect of economic interdependence and how the bloc set out to create its own norms and rules of engagement independently of the international order. Also, the author evokes the permanent component of conflict, because it is based on security problems and the constant duty to defend the territorial integrity of States. While China is vulnerable in the matter, as history shows, establishing a pattern of development based on cooperation reduces chances of direct conflict, which benefits the alignment of positions.

The conception of power by Keohane (1988) is interpreted as a potential control over the outcomes of the international system. In Complex Interdependence theory, transactional actors become mutually dependent and responsive to one another which makes co-operation a precondition for such outcomes to be transacted safely and effectively. International conflicts are of an economic, commercial and financial nature; negotiation and international mediation are the most commonly used arbitration practices for the settlement of disputes within this theory. Interdependence, therefore, refers to situations in which there are reciprocal effects between countries, even if not symmetrical, and where there are reciprocal costs. Within the system of interdependence, actors must be willing to cooperate and internal and external objectives are interlinked. By this logic, asymmetric interdependence is a reality that arises within authors' theory, in which actors who suffer with limitations have a greater degree of vulnerability and the States that are most effective in projecting power are considered more powerful.

According to Keohane and Nye (2002), global governance concerns the process and institutions that guide and restrict the collective activities of a group. One of the collective activities in which the characteristics of global governance, as defined by the authors, are presented in international trade. The New Silk Road achieves a relevant influence in terms of international trade governance due to its geopolitical and economic extension. In this sense, in addition to the initiative to create a new paradigm on global governance, it is also a reflection

of Chinese domestic and diplomatic policy of maintaining status in the international system.

According to the authors, in *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1971) and *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (1977), they argue that the international economy has evolved to a stage where power comes to be measured through the use of financial mechanisms and commercial purposes. This argument begins to be used, due to the emergence of non-state actors who played relevant roles in the States, such as decision-making about investments, technology, development, etc.

Therefore, the international actors, even with particular interests, do not annul the existence of having interests in common, in turn permitting cooperation to develop. China, while accumulating capital and international influence, does not leave aside multilateral or bilateral cooperative mechanisms in order to further strengthen ties with other countries—and one of its tools is the New Silk Road.

According to Zhang (2017), the "going out" policy established in the 2000s by China was one of the main steps for the country's international engagement. The author argues that this policy is seen as the result of the concerns of the Chinese State in securing access to natural resources other than in its regional environment, but Chinese and mainly energy companies were the forerunners of this state policy.

The largest Chinese energy company, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), began its oil exploration activities in Africa and Latin America seven years before the policy was formulated and officially announced by the Chinese State. In any case, this policy has helped expand and accumulate capital beyond the regions close to China and the country has become an exporter of liquid capital. Given this scenario of expansion, the New Silk Road brings with it the policy of "going out" to a new strategic level, becoming rapidly crucial to foreign policy and the strategy of the domestic economy (Zhang, 2017: 320). The policy of "open doors", deepened during Hu Jintao's rule, marked the country with regard to political and economic openness to the world, as well as developing the concept of "Pacific Development" as a fundamental pillar of Chinese society based on friendship and tolerance.

This peaceful positioning of internal development for/with its partners creates a narrative of acceptance of China's rampant growth without appearing to pose a threat to the international system. According to Wang (2008), Chinese diplomacy goes beyond the traditional molds, which is focused only on "government to government" relations, and the country has several factors in its favor, to make its diplomacy public, stronger and to its benefit. Wang (2008) states that China's rapid growth and political development draws the attention of the world and this

drives the country to attract more people to live there; also, it encourages more people to invest in the country as more are learning the language through the Confucius Institute. Second, due to the fact that China has a very large population, several Mandarin teachers have been sent to the rest of the world, and so the country has already participated in United Nations peace operation (thus sending people to be part of the troops). Third, the country has strong ties with developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. For the author, China has positive points in its public diplomacy towards the world and because it has a strong government, as well as political, economical and cultural abundance, the country can influence others (Wang, 2008: 264).

As cited by Devermont (2018), 63 percent of respondents in 36 African countries thought China's economic and political influence in their country was positive in a report published in 2016. China's foreign policy, therefore, is based on the pragmatism and grand strategy (the long-term goal, *yuanqi mubiao*) that is applied in the diplomatic, military, and economic fields by a State, in order to develop and protect its interests (Carriço, 2013:23), mainly being a point of rupture with the classic powers. Medeiros (2008) points out that China's goal is "to elevate international status as an economic and political power capable of influencing the international system" and for this the industrial, commercial, science & technology and defense spheres were articulated, thus gaining their autonomy and international influence.

Analyzing Chinese diplomacy, David Shambaugh advocates in his book "China goes Global," that the Chinese are more interested in protecting their own narrative of national interest than in fact establishing a position in common with other nations. What the author means, or criticizes, is that Chinese diplomacy meticulously negotiates international documents; for example, skipping the clauses it displeases in order to protect its own national interests (Shambaugh, 2013:47).

Chinese diplomacy is extremely confident and insecure at the same time, because its actions reflect a historically strong identity, however, some external circumstances generate insecurity to the country, such as anti-regime movements or terrorism in certain regions. It is important to note that, during the "open door policy" period, China reviewed its legal institutions, including regulations and arbitrariness, in order to strengthen its laws and make the country trustworthy in administrative and legal terms (Wilson, 2009:55). This differentiated international insertion, initiated by Deng Xiaoping and continued by his successors, was crucial to make China a well-consolidated power and different from the classical development of other powers. Since 2012, with the entry of Xi Jinping in power, China has reformulated its foreign

policy initiatives in order to change the world order, in order to be a political, economic and financial alternative to the traditional American model of world order. For the president, China takes on new responsibilities for global governance, while it sees opportunities for engagement with its regional and extra-regional neighbors.

In November 2014, the Chinese Communist Party held its first foreign policy conference since 2006, when more engaged lines of Chinese diplomacy are evident. Xi Jinping stressed that China should be aware of the long-term nature of the international order; the direction of the reform of the system remains unchanged and stressed the importance of the Chinese dream in building a new type of international relations marked by gains mutual funds. At that time, China's foreign policy focused more on the Asian region as a whole and the concept of "Asia for Asians" reflected in the new architecture of regional security programs, such as "community of common destiny" based on shared identities and norms (Chang-Liao, 2016: 84).

It is possible to see that, after the 18th Communist Party Congress, China has improved confidence in its foreign policy by being proactive and demonstrating new attitudes in its role in regional relations. Thus, according to David Shambaugh (2017), Chinese diplomacy has become more multilateral and, with regard to issues such as terrorism, environmental protection, energy security, food security, etc., its good diplomatic relations will vary according to the position on these sensitive issues. According to the author, Chinese diplomacy in the last thirty years has been defensive and passive in many respects: it has avoided confrontations, seeks consensus and respects differences among nations.

It is clear that China has sought to rely on discourses aimed at affirming its rise, first in the 2000s, with the arguments of peaceful ascent, and later, with the idea of Pacific Development and Harmonious World, then about of the Beijing Consensus based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and currently the Chinese Dream. According to Pautasso (2016: 126), this idea of revitalizing and renewing Chinese society, in order to transform and generate development, is linked to the "two centenary agenda", which is the creation of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 and Proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. As such, China is seeking a new format for the insertion of its international identity, which runs away from the standards already analyzed and reaffirms its particular foreign policy.

Chang-Liao (2016) points out that this new Chinese posture of "bringing benefits" to peripheral regions reinforces China's economic superiority and its commitment to economically assist its neighbors. Importantly, China's trade diplomacy gains space and leadership, embracing the idea of using foreign policy resources and prior to Xi Jinping, leaders used the

diplomatic strategy as a means of ensuring the country's prosperity. Nowadays prosperity must help diplomacy in terms of economic growth and the attainment of political goals (Chang-Liao, 2016: 85). As the Chinese economy influences and grows in the international system, it also ends up influencing other nations within multilateral organizations that delimit the rules of the international game.

### **The Belt-and-Road Project**

The history of the true Silk Road began more than two millennia ago when the civilization that inhabited ancient Eurasia began to explore new trade routes through its exits to Asia, Europe and Africa. According to the Chinese, the "spirit of the silk route" was one of peace, cooperation, openness, inclusion, learning and mutual benefit. The route meant the communication between the East and the West, bringing development to the civilizations along the same. President Xi Jinping has promoted his initiative as a new milestone for development and mutual cooperation in order to recover the global economy and overcome regional complexities. In 2013, when the President visited Central Asia and Southeast Asia, the Belt and Road initiative was jointly announced to its maritime links. The Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative was finally published under the "Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, to synchronize development plans and promote joint actions among countries along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (China, 2017).

The first is the land route that aims to connect China and Europe through Central Asia and Russia; China to the Middle East through Central Asia; and China to South East and South Asia and the Indian Ocean (Blanchard, 2017; 2018; Brewster, 2016; 2017). The second project is the sea route, permitting the Chinese ports to work with Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and connecting China to the Pacific Ocean through the South China Sea. These main routes are being taken advantage of by the existing infrastructure and also being expanded through massive investments in order to form corridors that will facilitate international trade and logistics, according to the Chinese perspective.

These five routes will form six major international economic corridors: (a) China-Mongolia-Russia (CMREC); (b) New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB); (c) China-Central-West Asia (CCWAEC); (d) Bangladesh- China- Myanmar (CICPEC); (e) China-Indochina Peninsula (CIPEC); (f) China-Pakistan (CPEC). The NELB corridor is a railway crossing of approximately 12,000km of connection between Yiwu (East China) to the countries of Western Europe, that is, it crosses by 30 countries in total. This corridor connects the Pacific and Atlantic



Oceans and represents the possibility of maritime extension of the New Silk Road to South Africa (WWF, 2016; Pautasso, 2016). The CMREC corridor connects countries via railroad and highway and runs through the international traffic arteries of Russia and Mongolia, where there are considerable coal and natural gas mines.

The CICPEC corridor connects China to Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Malaysia, and the corridor could represent a major shift to the region's economic development. The CPEC corridor, the most iconic project yet, connects the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The CCWAEAC connects China to the Arabian Peninsula, through 5 countries in Central Asia and 17 in Western Asia. It is a corridor of great importance, as it includes regions rich in oil, such as Afghanistan, which represents sources of energy supply for the Chinese. The Economic Corridor of the Indochinese Chinese Peninsula (CIPEC) is South Asia's "gateway to international trade", and it connects large trading centers of India and intends to provide output from the Bay of Bengal to the Chinese (Rahul, 2018: 180). The magnitude of the New Silk Road totals over 60% of the world's population, 30% of world GDP, and 35% of international trade.

What the Chinese intend to expand in the future through the initiative, in fact involves many international actors. According to the MERICS database, China invested more than \$25 billion in infrastructure projects and the map does not include projects still under construction or planning, otherwise the volume of investment would be much higher. The map, therefore, shows the projects of railways, pipelines and ports and visibly the New Silk Road is much more than gaining access to markets, ensuring trade routes and energy supply. The initiative is founded on the foreign policy of Xi Jinping in order to increase China's influence beyond its immediate vicinity and so it is a long-term project with no limited economic objectives.

Another element is the geographical scope of the New Silk Road being in constant expansion. The inclusion of the route through the Arctic to Europe represents this ambition even for Latin America (Abdenur & Muggah, 2017). The ambition of globalization of the initiative ends up becoming a vehicle for the structuring and commercialization of its foreign policy (MERICS, 2018). The initiative has become one of the largest Chinese political projects, occupying the hegemonic position in international trade, production and finance, while establishing the guidelines and norms to be followed. The initiative has the potential to be an alternative model in the implementation of rules to the international political and economic system (Wang, 2018:16).

The 78 countries (see table 1) of the five routes established by the Chinese initiative should, according to the action plan, work together to improve regional infrastructure and thereby facilitate trade and international investment. The official document issued by the National Development and Reform Commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of China aims to promote connectivity in between Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, as well as to establish and strengthen partnerships between countries along the route. It has, as one of its main objectives, to promote the best interpersonal and cultural interchange with the countries along the route, to deepen mutual political trust and to promote peace and friendship. The vision of the initiative commits itself to linking member countries through policies, infrastructure, trade, finance and people.

The financial aspects as if affects also BRICS was noted by de Seixas (2017), that observes the links between efforts such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the funds dedicated (Silk Road Funds), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the former BRICS Bank (New Development Bank).

**Table 1.** Countries included in the Initiative of the New Silk Road

Continents	Countries
America	Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago.
Africa	South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, Tunisia.
Europe	Austria, Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Serbia, Ukraine .
Asia	Armenia, Bahrain, Bahrain, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Qatar, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, Philippines, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Syria, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.
Oceania	New Zealand, Papua New Guinea.

Source: authors

One should note how the New Silk Road initiative is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in China and is aligned with the principles of the UN Charter: mutual

respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country; non-aggression; non-interference in the internal affairs of each country; equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence. These Chinese foreign policy principles are also allied with the five cooperative objectives of the initiative: (a) policy coordination; b) plant connectivity; c) unimpeded trade; d) financial integration; e) peoples to peoples link.

The initiative advocates the formulation of joint development measures in order to achieve transnational or regional cooperation. In specific terms about the facilities, it aims at the joint coordination of policies of the countries involved so that the construction of the infrastructure facilities is promoted. Infrastructure connectivity of railways, highways, air routes, pipelines, and ports are in the initiative as part of the strategy and efforts of member countries to comply. In order to facilitate unimpeded trade, the initiative focuses on investment and trade facilitation by reducing trade barriers, as well as lowering trade and investment costs.

The New Silk Road action plan advocates that efforts will be made to expand trade, develop cooperation in the industry chain with all countries involved. With regard to financial integration, it proposes to take measures to improve local monetary and exchange coordination in trade and investment between countries along the route, deepen multilateral and bilateral financial cooperation, strengthen financial risk monitoring and manage risks through regional agreements. In terms of links between people, the initiative will bring together efforts to promote dialogues among different cultures, strengthen friendly interactions among peoples and thereby advance regional cooperation.

Xi Jinping, in his speech at the 19th CPC National Congress, said that the initiative is a priority for the country, which is expected to make the development of both the Chinese "going global" and the countries that intend to enter the country market. As so, China can carry out its partnerships by land or sea. This speech marks how China has positioned itself strongly for the dissemination of the initiative as a new platform for trade, cooperation and investment. The New Silk Road is one of the most ambitious economic development programs in history and the maritime component of the route involves numerous infrastructure initiatives, such as airports, bridges, pipelines, highways, etc. involving the entire development of local industrial parks and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

In order to analyze the maritime route of the initiative, it is necessary to take into account that it is not only infrastructure development, but a way of integrating institutions, people, policies and culture. What is perceived is that this ambition of global integration is the result of a Chinese discourse based on its foreign policy and reflected in the official documents of the

initiative.

### **The Sea Route and the Repercussions for Brazil and BRICS**

In 2017, the government published a document on its vision of maritime cooperation: "Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative" proposing a blue-partner idea on the issues of exploration of marine resources, maritime industries, maritime safety. In this document there is a subchapter dedicated only to security issues as one of Beijing's priorities for cooperation. In this guideline, the Chinese government highlights the importance of the oceans in the process of regional economic integration, within the process of globalization, maritime cooperation and development.

This blue partnership, according to the document, will be based on efforts made for new cooperative platforms in terms of green development, maritime security and government collaboration. China proposes in this document that the countries that are part of the route have an engagement in the conservation of marine ecology by safeguarding services and global ecological safety of the seas. Another important factor taken into account in this document is the Chinese concern about climate change.

The country is responsible for providing support to "small island States" that suffer from the element of climate change, coastal erosion and sea level rise, etc. This environmental commitment will be established at the level of cooperation in scientific research with the coastal countries that make part of the project route, as well as the creation of regional protection and monitoring institutions. This Chinese environmental pledge within the Maritime Route is in line with the position taken as part of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. To a certain extent, these measures for the time being in the political sphere, regarding the preservation of the marine environment, is a way that the country has to guard against the criticisms pointed to the project that has enormous proportions and also the previous questions about the damages caused to the reefs of coral reefs in the South China Sea. The proposed program, "Blue Carbon Program of the Maritime Route of the 21st Century", arises from a demand also for Chinese internal policies to prioritize the development of their marine situational awareness and the same prepares detailed programs for the development of these networks.

The Chinese defend the idea that, for maritime security, the development of a blue economy is necessary. In this sense, the maritime implications for the New Silk Road have been developed in order to improve their capabilities, reduce risks and safeguard the marine environment. Five areas were highlighted for Chinese performance:

- "Ocean-based prosperity": cooperation on maritime safety issues to tackle issues such as crime at sea; cooperation between the Chinese marine industry and the countries along the route (such as economic and trade cooperation zone, industrial parks for the maritime sectors), etc.
- Green Development: through closer cooperation between countries' marine public services (such as a remote sensing satellite system in order to share results and information); promotion of the protection of the regional marine environment (ASEAN and its action plans with China), etc.
- Maritime Security: maritime search and rescue missions to enhance capabilities to deal with emergencies at sea and prevention of maritime disasters; participation in bilateral and multilateral forums in order to expand technical cooperation and joint exercises etc.
- Innovative Growth: tighten the implementation of laws on cooperation and dialogue with the countries that are part of the initiative; cooperation in marine scientific marine research and technological development; cooperation in scientific education etc.
- Collaborative governance: promoting ocean cooperation through mutual policies, providing a cooperative institutional framework, promoting high-level dialogues on marine issues (such as the Global Blue Economy Partnership Forum), exchanges between think tanks of countries along the route etc.

These five areas highlighted in the official Chinese document indicate the willingness to use their maritime power to protect their expanding maritime trade interests and routes, under the sign of regional initiative and cooperation, in order to combat maritime threats. Nowadays, China has a well-engineered, well-designed marine strategy not only to defend its coastline, but also for long-range operations. This need arose in the face of territorial maritime disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea—areas that are the scene of historical conflicts. The South China Sea is home to some of the world's major shipping communication lines and port infrastructure. In addition, the area is rich in natural resources (oil and natural gas deposits).

Therefore, to ensure today that this region has security and an environment without hostilities, it is fundamental for the initiative to be well implemented and generate economic gains for the countries involved. One must not forget the need for the country to protect its vital energy supply routes as the second largest importer of oil in the world (Duarte, 2012:507). The importance of the Strait of Malacca to the region should not be overlooked, as it is an area vulnerable to international terrorism and of extreme importance for China's energy security, as 20.3% of global oil routes.

In November 2012, China developed its maritime power strategy and was included in the report of the 18th CPC National Congress, with an emphasis on its maritime rights and interests. In 2013, the publication of the White Paper on its armed forces referred to PLAN as crucial for the country's maritime security operations; since 2008, it has been developing capabilities for "blue waters." Both cases demonstrate China's intentions to expand its long-range naval potential in order to respond to threats to maritime security as well as strengthen its naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

In order for China to become a nation of well-developed naval power, according to the Xiaoyan (2014), the country must continue to implement its three political principles of strategic power: a) insist on peaceful development, both internal and external, so that the concept of ocean harmonious manner is strong enough and exceeds any option of confrontation and conflict between countries as far as the sea is concerned; (b) scientific development is necessary if the marine economy is to be balanced between exploitation capacities and the resources available; and (c) sustainable development is necessary in order to avoid damage to the marine environment (Xiaoyan, 2014, p. .22-23). The author argues that the country should continue to formulate these guidelines, so that: it controls disputes in the marine environment (through cooperative mechanisms); to continue to monitor and prevent escalation of conflict (through dialogue and consensus between the parties); the exploitation of natural resources can benefit more than one country; and finally, that maritime cooperation between China and its neighbors continue in order to generate security and generate win-win results. These factors, listed by the author, contribute to political stability in the region and facilitate international trade.

China is a continental country, with its maritime borders lacking sources of hydrocarbons and natural resources such as those found in West Asia and Africa, which makes the access route costly, as well as there being "bottlenecks" in the Indian Ocean which may be harmful to maritime trade routes. Therefore, Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean routes are based on geopolitical and economic imperatives; gaining influence and status quo in the region goes against the domestic motivations of territorial consolidation and global governance. According to Khurana (2016; 2018), China has engaged its representativeness in two multilateral security fora in the Indian Ocean, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) its position as "dialogue partner" and in the second as "observer". No other major power has such an advantage in regional security relations within these forums as China, which benefits in regards to strengthening its maritime security

(Khurana, 2016; 2018).

At the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the guidelines on China's geopolitical-spatial development were based on growth for a maritime power and how the country should safeguard itself from its maritime rights. This marked, in 2012, a change of vision about its geopolitical axis; China no longer identified itself as a terrestrial and continental power, but as a maritime power. From this change of gravitational axis, China launched its Defense White Paper, stressing the importance of protecting its rights and interests in energy and natural resources (Len, 2017:54). In this sense, the New Silk Road expresses the diplomatic and military context of China in building a global community of common development, whether through peripheral diplomacy or the expansion of its "blue water" navy agenda that would bring a logistical facility in terms of missions for maritime safety and security.

The mentioned document about the five priority areas within the Maritime Route of the initiative points out the Chinese way of thinking and, through the New Silk Road, seeks to secure the Chinese interests and increase naval power. In addition to the modernization and action priorities of the Chinese in their strategy for the New Maritime Silk Road, the increase in trade volume by sea routes around the world and dependence on imported oil by the Chinese are relevant factors for understanding China's political strategy. Beijing identifies the straits of Malacca, Hormuz and Babelmândebe (which separates the Asian and African continents) as vulnerable and much of the international trade passes through these straits. China, therefore, is concerned about maritime security issues (such as terrorism and piracy) and how this could potentially destabilize trade.

But one needs critical attention to look at the Chinese discourse of international cooperation: are these official documents a safeguard against criticism of the growing expansion of the initiative? Questions are raised and the counter-narratives of other powers that somehow feel threatened by Chinese naval power resurface and echo in the international system. This is the case of QUAD and the Pearl Necklace.

Importantly, Chinese naval expansion has always been viewed with suspicion by other major powers, especially the United States and India; so much so, that the "Pearl Necklace" literature and the most current response to "QUAD", revived after an interval of ten years, may represent the strategic concerns of these countries in the face of the development of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). The term "Pearl Necklace" was used in 2005 in a report provided to the United States Secretary of Defense, entitled "Energy Futures in Asia", claiming that China was adopting this strategy from bases ranging from the Middle East to South China

Sea. These "pearls" were naval bases or Chinese spy posts in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in order to protect trade routes and oil shipments. This theory assumes that China is building maritime channels to access the Indian Ocean in order to become a dominant naval power, countering the US and UK. But what is concrete about this is only about the Chinese concern with economic gains and protection of the Maritime Communication Lines (SLOC), because at that time, no bases were found in any place in the Indian Ocean. But, in 2017, the Chinese installed their first military base abroad in Djibouti (Downs, Becker, Degategno, 2017).

However, the United States and India also want to guarantee their freedom of navigation across the Indian Ocean, considering that the US has the ability to control bottlenecks on commercial routes and interfere with SLOCs. According to Zhou Bo, an honorary member of the Chinese Academy of Military Science, "access rather than bases is what the Chinese navy is really interested in" (China Daily, 2016).

However, this type of Chinese speech is exactly what observers of the Pearls worry about; the fact that China actually wants to mitigate security concerns in the MSC through megaprojects in the Indian Ocean.

The New Silk Road raised suspicions about the Chinese global agenda and provoked counter-initiatives from other countries. The United States and regional powers in Asia and Europe, concerned about the increase of Chinese influence, launched multilateral arrangements as mechanisms to reach and harmonize interests in the region. In this sense, the QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) literature resurfaced with the geo-strategic term "Indo-Pacific" that stretches from the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, connecting two of the seven oceans of the world: Pacific and Indian. This security association between the United States, Japan, Australia and India has emerged since 2008 but has resumed its dialogues more recently after maritime disputes at the MSC (South China Sea).

This group of States have not yet established a formalization of the arrangement, so far they are only in the sphere of diplomatic synergy and drawing media attention, but the QUAD seems to be a geopolitical tool to counterbalance the advances of the New Silk Road (Fulton, 2018:175). According to de Castro (2018), the aim of the alliance is not only to focus on defense issues, but to ensure that the Asia-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean remain free in access and open to multilateral trade. Japan, for example, launched the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure in 2015 and India in 2017, the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, these political maneuvers are part of the Indian Ocean geopolitical game that has always been a region of great complexity and strategic interests, in addition to being historically dominated by



various maritime powers.

The Chinese foreign policy relationship with the United States on the Indo-Pacific axis has been to propose the idea of a "new model of relations between major powers" in order to create a sphere of trust, cooperation, political and economic security for the region. The smaller countries in the region still have some alignment in terms of security and leadership to the United States, and regional institutions are associated with their influences. This Chinese intention to create a model of collective cooperation in the region was the subterfuge necessary to equalize Chinese and US actions, giving them room to maneuver their interests. Despite these attempts and ideas to create a balance of power in the region, scholars and decision makers have innumerable theories to explain this American and Chinese clash.

### **Final Remarks**

The questions about the proposed effects of the Belt and Road routes and investments are still undermined. While some specialists believe that Beijing will not actually create any concrete alliance with any nation, since partnerships are forged by pure interest, others believe that the United States still remain, in fact, a threat to the Cold War mindset, but it is a fact that China has been able to build alliances with countless countries around the world but will struggle to change the cooperation models pre-established by global traditionalism. All strategic movements in the region create tension and concern, so the narratives mentioned above make sense in the face of Chinese expansion. In order to protect China's energy vulnerability, naval support points along major trade routes are part of its economic diplomacy, based on large international reserves.

The Silk Belt and Road project is the largest Chinese project in recent years in terms of expansion, influence and access to resources that touch its eventual economic vulnerability such as energy and supplies. Although the Belt and Road presents a political challenge to the other actors in the region affected by China's robustness in the seas with its globalized economy, the degree of investment and forecasting of the route through a long-term project is inevitable. Otherwise, in addition to signifying Chinese expansionism as opposed to Western influence in the Cold War, the Belt and Road Initiative also represents these non-competitive alternative local development investments, especially in a global investment-shrinking economy.

If a shift from protocol milestones to the investment destination of institutions such as the World Bank is noteworthy in the Chinese project, the participation of Chinese capital with the New Development Bank (former BRICS Bank) in this share modifies previous interdependent

relationships (Cau, 2018). Accordingly, the first regional center of the NDB is founded in Johannesburg, South Africa, holding a strategy for the 2017-2021 years which includes terms and conditions for the inclusion of new members. Particularly for the medium and small actors on the path of these various routes, the representativeness of the project is marked by disputes that, although endowed with political-military tensions, are economic in nature (Abdenur & Muggah, 2017). To this end, what we seem to be able to observe is that, with cheaper access to products and financing through the direct fomentation of the silk routes, China places the BRICS and other architectures in which it is in a strategic position for the purpose of alternatives to development.

At the same time, QUAD represents one of the most pressing challenges facing the Belt and Road, but also the deepening of the BRICS, as India is torn between QUAD and disputes with Pakistan (partner of the Initiative), and a fragile relationship within the BRICS. For this reason, the issue of political-military tensions seems, to us, to be sensitive; at the same time China has been successful in increasing its share in the International System.

In respect to the Brazilian case, China has occupied a prestigious position as its main commercial partner. With the possibility of having new funds and mechanisms through BRICS developments, Brazil, even during President Bolsonaro's mandate, is reinforcing its condition. Even with limited investment from and to the Oil and Gas sector and energy sector, the Brazilian-Chinese relations are of utmost importance to the BRICS way of consolidation, including the policies discussed during the last meeting in Brazil (November, 2019). Indeed, it is probable that the Belt and Road structured project will override the missing strategy Brazil should have.

Both through the foreign policy project under way and the option to avoid the escalation of international political crises, China is occupying unedited spaces and ways to integrate foreign partners, boosting less mature schemes such as BRICS in order to strategically evoke its own bilateralisms.

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